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Is Generation Z All that Different? Steven Berman



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A favorite conversation of educators is on the ways in which students have changed over their years of teaching, but these declarations typically rely on anecdotal and unscientific personal observations complete with all the biases that are inherent in this sort of methodology. When I hear a fellow professor saying, "Kids nowadays," my eyes roll in skepticism, as I'm rarely convinced that they have really changed much at all. However, I recently realized that I had in my own possession the tools by which I could actually test out some of these ideas. I have been collecting data on the psychological characteristics of students from 2010 through 2019 (with the exception of 2014 when I changed up the curriculum and did not collect data), which covers the transition from Millennials to Generation Z. The data is from a personal growth psychology course, which I teach every spring semester. In this course, students complete various exercises over the length of the course to work on their identity issues. It is part of my program of research, so I have been pre and post testing them on a number of psychological variables in order to assess if and how participation in the course is creating change in the individuals. The class enrollment averages around 100 students per year, with gender distribution usually around 85% female. It is a 3000-level course, so it is typically comprised of around 95% juniors and seniors.

Based on a comparison of the pretest results from each year, statistically significant reductions in scores in recent years were found in Self Esteem and Purpose in Life. On a more positive note, there was also a significant drop in Identity Distress scores in recent years (see figure 1). This would indicate that although recent students are reporting feeling less purpose in life than previous cohorts, they are less distressed about this lack of direction. In particular, identity domains that showed significant reductions in distress in recent times included issues related to religious beliefs, values, friendships, group memberships, and sexuality. Typically, identity distress tends to be positively correlated with identity exploration and negatively with identity commitment. In other words, when one is focused on, and trying to answer, questions such as Who am I, Where am I going, and What do I want out of life (identity exploration), anxiety and distress tend to increase; however, when one finally decides and feels like the issues have been resolved (identity commitment), anxiety and distress tend to dissipate. However, among this sample of students, despite decreases in distress, there were increases in exploration, especially in the area of sex roles. There were also significant decreases in identity commitment, especially in the areas of values and friendships. In summary, it appears that these Generation Z students, as compared to Millennials, are exploring their identity more (their roles, goals, and values), while simultaneously feeling less identity commitment and purpose in life. Surprisingly though, they are feeling less distress over not yet knowing where they are going and what they believe in. As previously stated, this finding is contrary to a consistent finding in the literature that as identity exploration goes up, so too does identity distress, whereas when identity commitment goes up, identity distress goes down. More simply stated, not knowing where you are going in life naturally causes a degree of worry and anxiety, whereas having a strong sense of who you are and where you are going tends to give people

a sense of comfort—or at least that has been a consistent finding in the literature. However, in the case of this study, my students have not been anxious and distressed over not knowing where they are going in life; they seem to be enjoying the journey without being overly concerned about the destination.

Whether I can generalize from my classes over the last ten years to what has been going on with Gen Z kids overall remains unanswered, but these students appear more open than their predecessors to new experiences and ideas. In today's political climate, it gives me some comfort to know that the kids of today may value taking many different courses and finding themselves. Perhaps a liberal arts education still holds some value in the coming generation! On the other hand, the drop in self-esteem suggests possible increased vulnerability that warrants further study. Taken together, this data gives me hope, even if it generates more questions than it answers.

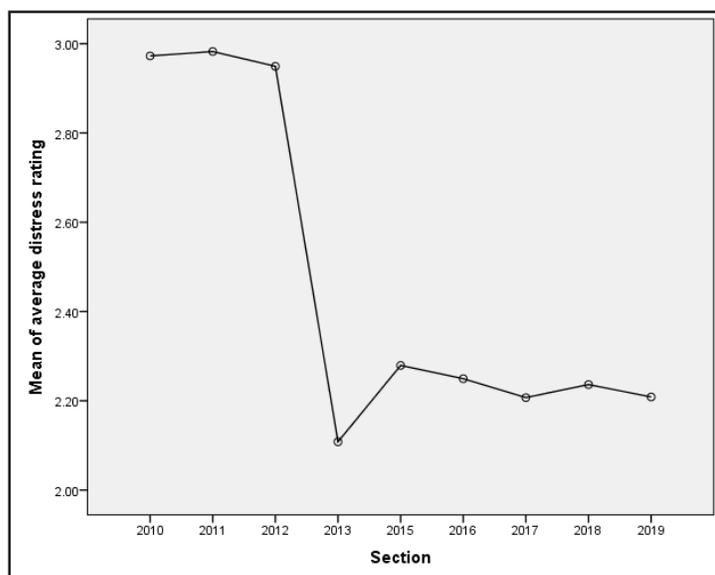


Figure 1. Average identity distress ratings by class year.

Technology in the Classroom: Engaging with Generation Z Students in New Ways

DeLaine Priest



DeLaine Priest is Associate Vice President for Student Success at UCF. With over 25 years of experience in higher education and five years of experience in business and industry, she currently provides leadership and administration to 12 units that focus on student transition, advising on career services, learning support services, the first year experience, orientation, and student success.

In recent years, the usage of technology has become more and more widespread. With the rise of technology, the num-

bers of people using it have increased as well. Growing up surrounded by this new and evolving technology, Generation Z, commonly referred to as Gen Z, is quickly becoming the most technologically-savvy generation. The ways that students engage and learn are changing. Innovative new approaches to teaching must be made to accommodate this new generation.

Because Gen Z has been shaped by technology, it plays an important role in how they interact with the world around them. It is important for higher education to adapt to the changing needs of students. It is pertinent that higher education keeps pace with the evolution of technology.

With billions of Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook users daily, social media is becoming the primary means of communication across multiple generations. Because of the expediency of communication through social media, Gen Z students expect immediate results. This makes it even more important that information is readily available and that there are open lines of communication between students, faculty, and staff.

Another way to engage with Gen Z is by blending the use of technology with face-to-face lecture. This creates different levels of interaction with academic learning. With the rising popularity of YouTube, integration of videos is another approach to engage students through technology in the classroom. Many professors also utilize podcasts to supplement lectures.

By incorporating technology into the classroom in nontraditional ways, higher education can evolve with the students it serves and engage with them in ways that keep them interested and invested in the classroom. As independent learners, utilizing technology for Gen Z students can provide easier access to resources and communication and can keep students engaged in the learning process. Technology is not something to be afraid of, but rather should be harnessed to improve the classroom and campus experience for university students.

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Sharing Proficiencies: From Early Modern Symbolism to Contemporary Image-Making

Martha García and Julia Listengarten



Dr. Martha García is Professor, Coordinator/Director of the Bachelor of Arts in Spanish Program & the Minor in Spanish. Her research concentrates on the aesthetic aspects of the literature and culture of Medieval Spain as well as early Modern and Enlightenment periods. She has presented her research at regional, national, and international conferences and is the author of academic books, chapters, reviews, interviews, and encyclopedia entries. She is active in NEH programs, and she has been the recipient of teaching and research awards and recognitions.



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Background and Context

In the fall semester of 2018, universities welcomed the first generation of the new millennium. The project *Sharing Proficiencies* offered faculty members a curricular space to guide this new generation of students through a rigorous learning and creative process toward producing a shared product. This project evolved in a collaborative, co-curricular initiative rooted in the concept of sharing competencies among two faculty members, from the department of Modern Languages and Literatures and the School of Performing Arts, and undergraduate and graduate students from both disciplines. During the spring semester of 2019, undergraduate students from the Modern Languages research intensive course (RI) in classical Spanish literature and graduate students from the contemporary theatre seminar, under faculty guidance, collaborated on developing a shared vocabulary that resulted in a final product which consisted of a written creative piece by the undergraduate cohort and a performative component generated and produced by the graduate group. This project offered undergraduate students an effective collaborative space to activate their understanding of classical literature in the original language and recontextualize it in a different cultural landscape (Craig Batty and Jennifer Sinclair, 2014). Undergraduate students were presented with the challenge of understanding classical symbolism and reframing it in a different cultural and performative context. Graduate students came to this project with a previous interdisciplinary and theoretical knowledge, which enhanced their ability to guide undergraduate students through the process of *translating* a classical text from the original language on the page to a performative language on the *stage* while recontextualizing and contemporizing its meaning.

Innovation in High Impact Teaching & Learning Practice

Existing scholarship in teaching and learning has demonstrated that sharing competency among faculty members, graduate, and undergraduate students is beneficial for furthering effective student-teacher interactions (Jan Edwards Dormer, 2012). The uniqueness of our initiative was in its collabora-

tive and co-curricular focus that required students in the undergraduate literature RI course and graduate theatre seminar to work together in the process of intercultural and interdisciplinary transfer; together, they had the opportunity to generate new creative visions, reflect on the process, and co-create a final product. We believe that this project aligned exceptionally well with the three QEP interventions: Guidance & Information; High-Impact Learning Experiences; and Metacognition & Self-Advocacy. We also believe that, as a result of this project, we took a significant step forward to prepare undergraduate students to become more active participants in their education and creative practice and inspired them to build a strong collective aesthetic that incorporates multiple voices and cultural perspectives. The co-curricular component, which was embedded in the syllabi of the undergraduate upper-division classical literature course and graduate contemporary theatre class, guided various structured activities (such as collaborative creative practice and class meetings where both groups were able to interact following a set of guidelines offered by both faculty members). The project's research methodologies focused on critical thinking and created an interdisciplinary dialogue resulting in high-impact integrative learning experiences by both groups (John C. Bean and Maryellen Weimer, 2001). Furthermore, within the project's structure, our undergraduate students were required to become active and equal participants in a creative dialogue with graduate students.

Implementing Shared Proficiencies and Measuring Tangible Outcomes

The main goal of the project was to guide students through the process of rising transferable knowledge and building cross-cultural skills, which would prepare them for success in education and professional development. During the project, the results were assessed, disseminated, and recorded on Webcourses; creative pieces written by the undergraduate students were archived and a final performative product was presented by the graduate students during the last week of classes.

The final capstone presented by the graduate students brought this project to the phase of completion. As a collection of performative pieces which offered a physical, visual, and vocal embodiment of the written text, it served as a representation and reflection of the shared language that was built during the process. It reflected the purpose of the project and served as evidence of purposeful collaboration among faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students. This capstone also reflected the development of effective creative vocabularies and pathways that undergraduate students will continue to apply in their learning journey—a necessary groundwork for developing metacognition and self-advocacy (Jonatha Jones, 1997).

Participating in this *Quality Enhancement Plan* project benefited students in several ways. Undergraduate students, for instance, collaborated with graduate students in small groups. This collaboration was based on a multi-layered form of mentorship: graduate students mentored undergraduate students under the guidance of both faculty members (Regina Jucks and Benjamin Brummernhenrich, 2016). The co-curricular project served to inform undergraduate students about new interdisciplinary research resources and methodologies, and guided them through a multilingual (*text and image*) creative participatory engagement. The project encouraged graduate students to apply various theoretical lenses to their creative practice and employ a dialogic methodology in the process of cultural transfer. The final presentations by undergraduate and graduate students demonstrated language fluency, clarity of purpose, evidence of acquired skills, and self-learning motivation, which will continue to impact the students in their future postgraduate or professional endeavors (Christina Wielgolawski, 2011).

Benefits of Sharing Proficiencies Among Faculty Members in Multiple Disciplines

The logistics of the project required students to share their abilities and talents, but the faculty members also had the valuable opportunity to collaborate and meet on a regular basis to assess and modify any necessary elements of these teaching and learning efforts. The experience provided us, faculty mentors, with the opportunity to continue to develop this high-impact practice by adjusting or introducing new strategies to enhance the process. As we overcame various tensions that emerged from this transdisciplinary collaborative process, we identified several areas in which the students may have benefited further, such as the need for initially assessing their previous background and knowledge of the subject, considering their previous research skills and artistic methodologies, and actively creating shared space to work more effectively in team-oriented environments that include both undergraduate and graduate student populations (Holly Ryan et al., 2008). Despite a few drawbacks, this initiative provided us with a set of tools to explore a correlation between student learning and

inter/transdisciplinary collaboration. Over the course of this QEP project, we continued to revise course objectives, adjust class activities, and re-envision student learning outcomes in order to devote more attention to the collaborative interaction that nurtures agency, open-mindedness, and independent thinking.

Further Thoughts and Reflections

Creating space to share proficiencies between faculty members and extending this opportunity to graduate and undergraduate students is indeed a productive task that has proven to be extremely rewarding. The project combined research and artistic practice in a transdisciplinary setting that included both undergraduate and graduate students. It offered undergraduate students the unique opportunity to work with graduate students in research and creative activities in order to develop skills and knowledge that constitute an asset and foundation for their future endeavors. The project encouraged graduate students to experience the role of both mentors and peers in the shared creative space and expand their cultural frames of reference. Furthermore, it revealed the need for these kinds of collaborations, which enhance our undergraduate and graduate programs, support the mission of a Hispanic-Serving Institution, and prepare students to succeed during their college years and beyond in multiple cultural and disciplinary contexts.

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Is Your Mentor Really a Mentor?

Fall 2019 STEM Women Faculty Mentoring & Networking Community



Marisa Macy, Talea Mayo, Lixia Wang, Linda J. Walters, Amy Reckdenwald, Lorraine Leon, Alaa Hashim Kristy A. Lewis, Helen J. Huang, Azadeh Vosoughi, and Karin Chumbimuni-Torres

To monitor faculty satisfaction, UCF uses the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey designed and administered by Harvard University. This faculty job satisfaction survey is used by hundreds of institutions of higher learning in North America to gather faculty perceptions on workplace experience relative to peers (UCF selects five), all similar institutions participating in the survey (109), and our previous results (available on the UCF Faculty Excellence website). UCF has twice used this survey instrument—first in 2015 and again in 2018, following Harvard’s recommended participation schedule of repeating the survey every three years. UCF had a 47% faculty response rate in 2018. UCF was mostly “red” (area of concern) for “mentoring of pre-tenure faculty within department” and “effectiveness of mentoring within department” in this most recent administration of the survey. This case was especially true when pre-tenure faculty were asked these questions. There was additionally no obvious change from the 2015 UCF results in spite of administrative requests to Chairs to improve departmental mentoring.

Why is there a disconnect between chairs and deans encouraging departmental mentoring, but faculty continue to feel they are not being mentored? One unlikely possibility is that Chairs are not encouraging mentoring. An alternative is simply that when taking the survey the chairs and the faculty are using different definitions of mentoring. Experts use a narrow definition of mentoring when it is focused on careers, while department chairs may also include advocates, coaches, and buddies under the umbrella of mentoring (Figure 1). Academic definitions (Dean & Koser 2014) for each term are:

Advocate: Someone who helps promote you and your career to others. Hopefully, all Chairs and Deans are advocates, so this term is generally reserved for advocating individuals outside of a supervisory capacity. Often a faculty member does not directly know they have advocates, and there is no start-stop date for advocacy.

Buddy: Someone who helps you get settled when you are new to a position. Buddies show you where things are located, who to speak with about a topic such as travel documentation, etc. When assigned by a Chair, buddies typically have a start and end date for their service.

Coach: Someone who helps you learn specific skills to improve your likelihood of success. Skills can range from “how to submit a grant” to “how to get promoted” or “how to maximize likelihood of receiving a teaching award.” Efforts that involve coaches have a definite start and end date.

Mentor: Mentoring consists of a long-term relationship focused on supporting the growth and development of the mentee. The mentor is a source of wisdom and support, but not someone who observes and advises on specific actions or behavioral changes in daily work.

The Importance of Mentoring in the Academy

Relationships shape the trajectory of our careers. Academics face unique challenges that can be ameliorated by having a strong support system within the institution. Traditional mentoring is a caring, supportive, non-judgmental personal relationship between a less experienced individual (mentee) and a more experienced individual (mentor), in which the mentee receives career-related and personal benefits. Community or small group mentoring can have similar benefits, especially for empowering early-career faculty (Koontz et al. 2018). Whether the Chair or the mentee is creating this relationship, it is important to strategize for best fit; this can include matching personalities, having similar scholarly interests, expectations, and timelines.

Once matching has occurred, providing effective mentoring is likewise challenging. Mentorship is a skill that can be learned and improved using evidence-based approaches and formal training. Ineffective mentoring relationships have negative impacts on early-career faculty members and often lower their productivity. On the other hand, effective mentoring relationships magnify productivity, creativity, and effectiveness; facilitate professional growth and development; enhance the perception of inclusion and equity, and uplift mental health. It can also increase retention of promising early-career faculty (Koontz et al. 2018). Thus, providing effective mentoring to early-career faculty should be a central goal of all departments and institutions.

Understanding UCF Departmental Mentoring by Surveying our Own Experiences

To document this disconnect between mentors vs. buddies, advocates, and coaches, the Fall 2019 Women Faculty in STEM Community examined our own “mentoring” experiences in our first year as faculty members at UCF.

We asked ourselves (n = 11):

1. Were you assigned formal “mentor(s)” by your Chair for your first year at UCF?
2. At the end of the first year, would you call this assigned person a mentor, coach, buddy, advocate, or any combination of this list?
3. Were you required to attend formal “group mentoring” in your first year at UCF?
4. Would you consider this group experience to fit under the category of mentoring, coaching, buddying, or advocating, or any combination of this list?
5. Regardless of your formal mentoring experience, did you seek out your own mentors, buddies, coaches, and/or advocates, including campus-wide group experiences (e.g., Office of Research, Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning)?
6. Were the assigned/required experiences positive, negative, or neutral? Were the self-initiated experiences positive, negative, or neutral?

Clear patterns emerged once questions were asked regarding specific experiences with buddies, mentors, advocates, and coaches during the first year at UCF (Figure 2). Four of 11 women had one or more Chair-assigned mentors in year one. Only one of these four respondents reported that her assigned mentor fit the true definition of a mentor. She also reported being assigned a second mentor and listed this individual as a buddy, but this individual never actually performed any of the described roles. The remaining three women reported that their “mentors” were actually either buddies or advocates. Sadly, only one of the four faculty members with an assigned “mentor” reported a positive experience in year 1, and that was with the person who took the time to mentor her on a regular basis (monthly) and made her feel as if she was part of the UCF community. Equally disappointing was that 7 of the 11 women (64%) received no formal support from their department as they launched their careers at UCF.

Interestingly, 10 of 11 of our women faculty STEM community members reported they sought out their own assistance if none was provided, and many found multiple individuals to assist them with their careers in this new environment. In this category of unassigned, found “mentors,” by the end of their first year our respondents described themselves as having a mentor (7 of 11), buddy (7 of 11), advocate (2 of 11),

and coach (1 of 11). These numbers total more than 11 women and include a combination of faculty working with more than one person, or one person acting in more than one role (e.g., mentor and advocate). While the assigned “mentoring” was limited in its success based on the perception of the mentee, all participants in our survey reported positive experiences with the “unassigned” people who supported them. Very few of these individuals were within the woman’s primary department; most were, however, in related fields either at UCF or at another institution of higher learning.

“Group mentoring” is practiced across campus at UCF at the college level, and over 50% of our community participated in these activities when new to UCF. All agreed in retrospect that the mentoring aspects of these meetings were limited, but the buddy and especially the coaching aspects of these meetings were very useful. Discussions on grant proposal preparation, handling of annual report and promotion dossiers, and networking with college-level administrators were good uses of participants’ time. When and if more true mentoring topics were discussed in these large settings, women faculty were less inclined to positively perceive this group experience.

UCF is fortunate to have a variety of campus-wide opportunities for faculty to learn new skills, network with like-minded individuals, and experience group mentoring/coaching. The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning is a national model for supporting faculty throughout their careers in improving their teaching. They always have opportunities available for faculty, and mostly these community leaders would fall under the category of coach or buddy. Likewise, the Office of Research releases regular calls to coach faculty to be successful with federal grant proposals. On a slightly different trajectory, Faculty Excellence has held Mentoring Communities for Associate Professors during the academic year and during the Summer Faculty Development Conference. The latter combine a mix of mentoring (e.g., career mapping) and intensive coaching (e.g., group critiquing your summary statement for promotion folder) that leaves leaders and participants exhausted and satisfied with the support UCF has provided them at the end of the sessions.

Our Suggestions for Improving Faculty Mentoring at UCF

True mentoring helps retain and promote faculty in the academy. However, our data suggests that assigned mentoring is rarely successful, and while college-level group efforts can coach new faculty to be successful in certain areas, they do not replace the need for thoughtful, career-driven mentoring. So what should be done?

Some universities have set up launch committees. Instead of one-on-one mentoring, small groups of senior faculty work with individual or small groups of new faculty. The ideal

launch committee includes interchangeable buddies, advocates, and coaches, without the expectation that one person should fill all roles, and a recognition that there is more than one way for faculty to help their new peers.

Notably absent from this ideal launch committee is a formal mentor. New faculty are often overwhelmed with executing the day-to-day logistics of their new roles, and are not necessarily ready to concentrate on the long-term goals of their careers, which is key to an effective mentor/mentee relationship. However, the launch committee can help new faculty learn strategies for later selecting an effective mentor. For example, before beginning the process of mentor selection, new faculty should perform a self-evaluation and develop long-term goals in order to identify potential mentors. The mentee should then set up meetings with various potential mentors to evaluate fit in personality, working, and communication styles (Sosa 2012). The launch committee can also help new faculty learn strategies for maintaining a good relationship with a selected mentor, as the role of the mentor can and should evolve with time and transition with the mentee as they advance in their career (Gallacher 2002).

Academic careers are incredibly challenging, and while departmental mentoring cannot directly reduce the demands placed on new faculty, it can greatly aid in their long-term success. Effective mentoring requires substantial time and attention of both new faculty members and those who have agreed to support them. However, expending the necessary time and effort to support faculty in this capacity offers promising returns on investments in the form of successful departmental programs. These efforts should also aid UCF in achieving more positive outcomes on the COACHE faculty satisfaction survey for mentoring pre-tenure faculty.

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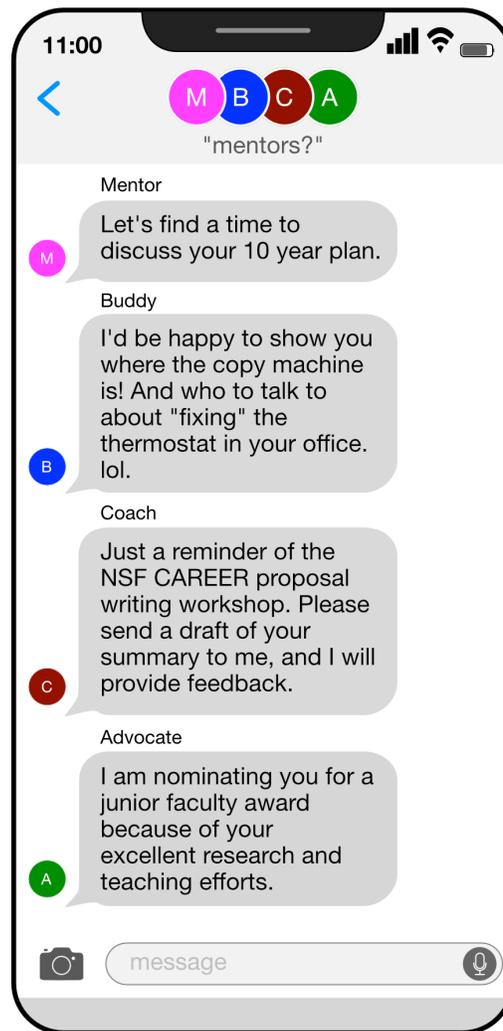


Figure 1: The term “mentor” is often used incorrectly to describe all the ways that faculty assist their colleagues. Faculty more often help each other as buddies, coaches and advocates, than as mentors. See text for more detailed description of what true mentoring is and what it is not.

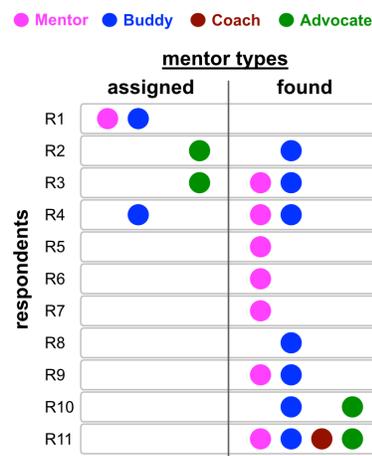


Figure 2: Summary of results of authors’ experiences in their first year at UCF. Assigned = assigned by supervisor. Found = faculty member sought out their own help.

What are Learning Guides and Why Do We Need Them in Humanities and Social Science Courses?

Martha Brenckle, Annabelle Conroy, Patricia Farless, and Amanda Snyder



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The Problem—How to Use Active Learning in Large Humanities and Social Science Courses?

Like many other universities and colleges, UCF has grown exponentially, including its increased distance-learning offerings. This has translated into larger class sizes that sit at odds with evolving pedagogies that emphasize more hands-on approaches to learning through high-impact practices in the classroom like active learning. As noted in “Active Learning” by Cynthia Brame, “The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) provides a very simple definition: active learning involves ‘students’ efforts to actively construct their knowledge” (2016). The Learning Assistant model emerged in the STEM disciplines to address this problem. It is a program that has proven overwhelmingly successful, demonstrating increased learning and critical thinking in math and science classes and resulting in reduced D/F/W grades and improved retention rates. Despite *their* critical role in many General Education Programs and *their* increased class sizes, the Humanities and Social Sciences have yet to substantially invest in this type of initiative. Indeed, Humanities and Social Science courses require a significant commitment to writing, reflection, and critical thinking about historical and global challenges and solutions. These practices require more instructor time and feedback, especially when the classes are large (and even more so when they are entirely online). Our Learning Guide Initiative establishes these “Ambassadors of Learning” within the classrooms and online sites to ensure students have the strongest possible support in our classes. This support leads to college, career, and civic success. Thanks to a grant from the University of Central Florida Office of Research and the College of Arts and Humanities, we will launch our Learning Guide pilot program in American History, Political Science, and first-year writing during the 2020–2021 academic year.

The Solution—Why Learning Guide and Not Learning Assistant?

We chose the title of “Learning Guide” rather than “Learning Assistant” to effectively reflect the learning process and outcomes of the Humanities and Social Science courses. These outcomes equate student success with the ability to decipher and analyze competing historical narratives; explore and solve modern national and global challenges; and fashion the effective rhetorical strategies to communicate these problems and solutions. The emphasis in these disciplines is not a single correct answer, but a process of ongoing reflection, communication, and guided interpretation. While the Learning Assistant (LA) model situates the LA student as one in relationship to the instructor and curriculum, we envision our Learning Guide model as resituating this role to that of a guide to student learning and a student’s relationship to conflicting evidence, arguments, and interpretations. In addition, LGs serve as mentors and model appropriate behaviors and strategies that will lead to future professional and academic success. To this point, Learning Guides are recruited from both our individual department majors and from non-majors who have done well in our GEP courses. While the Learning Assistant model is the inspiration for this project, the different student outcomes and, especially, the different disciplinary methodologies and training make the title of Learning Guide more appropriate to distinguish this new model from those currently existing in science and math. Indeed, the Learning Guides become ambassadors of civic literacy and the skills and knowledge of Humanities and Social Sciences.

A Transdisciplinary Assignment Example with Learning Guides—Drawing from three departments (History, Writing and Rhetoric, and Political Science), we are redesigning our existing courses to promote integrative learning by empowering our students to serve as “subject experts” for students in

complementary classes. Students in each of our classes will work on components of semester-long projects, such as researching the need for a museum (American History), lobbying for that museum (American Government), writing funding proposals (Composition), and virtually building exhibits. As a result, this type of assignment promotes a cross-pollination of ideas and skills, revolving around civic engagement. We connect our classes through a shared Webcourse shell (a “meta-portal”) that enables students to seek out peers across our courses to ask questions, share their skills, and become collaborators and peer mentors for each other. The “meta-portal” connects the students across modalities and our three courses and serves as a market exchange of ideas and skills. Also, the “meta-portal” is where Learning Guides play a crucial role in guiding student inquiry as they navigate this bustling learning environment. The semester-long project contains scaffolded assignments that emphasize

- reflection and metacognitive learning
- integrative learning
- student professionalization
- transdisciplinary collaboration.

We believe this Learning Guide Program and accompanying integrative civic-learning projects will ensure the success of students within these disciplines by encouraging transdisciplinary connections and conversations. Most importantly, while this initial pilot takes place in an online space only, we believe it will foster a sense of student community by closing the gap that can often exist between the online-only and on-campus student groups. A sense of community is vital to the success of our FTIC students—especially first-generation students—at UCF.

Story of How It Came To Be--Our group first met during our year-long participation in the GEP Refresh. During our group work discerning best practices and interdisciplinary connections, and our attendance at a Learning Assistant Conference at Florida International University, we realized the lack of and need for a version of the Learning Assistant model in our Humanities and Social Science disciplines (or our respective non-STEM disciplines). With the help of the College of Arts and Humanities, first through a dedicated Summer Conference track, we began researching and developing a plan to create a transdisciplinary Learning Guides program. For the last year, we have committed ourselves to meeting every week or two to research, write, and submit grant proposals. We often meet off campus and cook meals while researching and writing together. This formula has created a connected bond that allows us to listen, share, and collaborate on this and other initiatives. Now that we have received a seed-funding grant—the first of many—we are putting those plans into action while seeking additional grants to sustain and expand the initiative.

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Using Multimedia as a Tool to Promote Student Engagement

Shahram Ghiasinejad



Shahram Ghiasinejad is Associate Lecturer in the Psychology Department. He holds a B.A. in Computer Science from the University of Texas at Austin, and an M.S. and a Ph.D. in Cognition and Neuroscience from the University of Texas at Dallas. His research interests are broadly concerned with understanding human language comprehension through a combination of experimental and computational modeling methodologies.

I teach an online elective course called Basic Learning Processes that is designed to introduce students to historical and contemporary studies of learning and behavior theory, including classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning, and comparative cognition, and animal models of human behavior. This course also presents methodological aspects of the study of learning. The topics covered in this course get fairly technical and nuanced. Put simply, from the students’ perspective, I teach a boring course for which there is very little enthusiasm and excitement. I struggle to promote lively discussions and meaningful interactions among students. Specifically, one challenge I face is to motivate students to participate on the discussion board and to encourage their engagement in class.

Because this course is not widely offered nationally, textbook publishers offer limited online resources on the topic. A few resources that are available are offered at additional cost to students. Given that students increasingly ask for visual and interactive content, I began to develop a library of multimedia content for various topics covered in the course. The multimedia content included online video clips, online interactive experiments, online simulations, journal articles, news items, and examples that show the application of the topics in everyday life.

As an example of items I added to my multimedia library is a site called PsyToolKit. PsyToolKit (available through www.psychtoolkit.org) is a free resource for demonstrating, programming, and running psychological experiments and surveys, including personality tests. It allows students to design and run experiments or questionnaire surveys online or offline.

The tool allows for online data collection, storage, analysis, and download. It also provides an extensive online documentation and YouTube channel with tutorial videos. The website allows students to run complex psychological surveys using more than 100 surveys available in their survey library. Students will also be able to run psychological experiments by simply copying them from their experiment library.

I have found resources similar to PsyToolKit that are free to use. I use these resources also to provide hands on experience and lab activities for students. My goal is to provide additional material to reinforce and to supplement the abstract theoretical concepts of the course.

In my Fall 2019 class of 125 students, I added a multimedia link to the weekly modules for the course. Through that link, students get access to the multimedia content related to the topics covered in that week. In order to encourage students to engage with the multimedia content, I asked them to discuss those contents on the discussion board. I also stated in the syllabus that they can earn up to 5% toward their final grade by participating on the discussion board.

At the end of the semester, I used the anonymous survey tool in Canvas to ask students a series of questions to get their opinion on the value and the effectiveness of the multimedia content. To illustrate the students' perception of the multimedia content, I have included a few of the survey questions and students' responses below:

- *"Multimedia contents encouraged more meaningful posts on the discussion board."* 77% responded somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree.
- *"Multimedia contents helped to clarify the topics discussed in this course."* 85% responded somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree.
- *"Multimedia contents facilitated the learning of the materials in this course."* 86% responded somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree.
- *"Multimedia contents provided examples that demonstrate the relevance of the course topics to the everyday life."* 80% responded somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree.
- *"Multimedia contents made the course more enjoyable."* 83% responded somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree.
- *"Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the multimedia contents provided in this class?"* 76% responded somewhat satisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied.
- *"I prefer the multimedia contents that are provided by my professor at no additional cost."* 92% responded somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree.

The survey results provided me insight into the students' perception of different aspects of the use of multimedia in the

weekly modules. One interesting result was the high agreement response (92%) to the last question regarding the cost of multimedia. The cost of course material is always a concern for students. It was informative to see while students find the multimedia content helpful for their learning, they prefer not to have to pay extra for that content.

In my survey, I also asked the following open-ended question: *"Please share your thoughts about the usefulness and the effectiveness of the multimedia contents that were provided for this class."*

Below are a few typical responses to illustrate the students' reactions to the multimedia content:

- *"I loved being able to find a video or multimedia that helped explain a topic I was confused on. It helped break down difficult concepts and topics."*
- *"Multimedia helped get a better grasp of the subject in the course. Multimedia was useful I would prefer an assignment personally than a discussion board grade then I know exactly what I have to do and there is no confusion."*
- *"They were helpful. I think textbooks are way overpriced and there should not be such a heavy reliance on them. Thanks for an interesting course."*

In addition to the survey results, at the end of the semester, there were a total of 1,382 posts on the various topics on the discussion board, which is almost a 10-fold increase as compared to the number of posts in the previous semesters. The significant increase in students' participation on the discussion board is promising toward the goal of enhancing student engagement and participation in class.

The overall favorable opinion I received from students regarding the effectiveness of the multimedia content and the significant increase in the amount of posts on the discussion board were reassuring to me. Observing the positive impact of this practice motivated me to implement the same strategy in my other courses. Presently, I am in the process of creating a multimedia library not only for my online courses, but also for my face-to-face and mixed-mode classes.

Student Engagement in the Online World: My Road Towards Enlightenment

Abdul-Akeem Sadiq



Abdul-Akeem Sadiq is Associate Professor and Director of the Master of Public Administration and Master of Public Policy programs in UCF's School of Public Administration. He teaches Foundations of Emergency Management and Homeland Security and Public Administrators in the Gov-

ernance Process.

Engaging students in online courses is a difficult endeavor. In a face-to-face class, an instructor can facilitate and promote student engagement through various means like role playing, exchanging ideas, working on in-class group projects, debating important issues, etc. In these situations, the instructor can and should be an active participant. However, in the online environment, these engagement-stimulating activities may not be easily replicated. So, *how do we engage students in online courses so they can stay connected, excited, motivated, have fun, and at the same time learn?*

This article discusses my experience with meeting the engagement needs of my online students, the challenges experienced in replicating engagement activities from face-to-face courses to online courses, the institutional teaching support that enabled me to improve student engagement in my online courses, and my recommendations for improving student engagement in the online world.

I was a graduate student when I taught my first course. This course, which was face-to-face, gave me the opportunity to evaluate my teaching style and determine my strengths and weaknesses. Here, I will focus on one of my strengths—engaging students. I love to engage with my students by creating thought-provoking group exercises, debates, discussion forums, etc. I also move around constantly when teaching, making eye contact with all my students, and moving closer to them when they speak. Honestly, I love to see the moment when the light bulb in their heads lights up and they say, “Now I get it.” My students expressed on the instructor evaluations that they love my engagement strategies and passion for teaching. This made me respond with more engagement and passion in subsequent classes.

Seven years after my first course, I was faced with the possibility of teaching my first online course. My main concern was how to replicate my successful engagement strategies in an online world where I do not get to look into my students' eyes, move closer to them when they speak, show my passion for teaching, etc. With the help of online instructional design-

ers, I explored ways to engage my online students, with no success. The level of engagement among my online students dropped; they wanted more engagement, but I could not provide it for them in this new learning environment.

Two years after my first online course, I was hired by UCF. At UCF, I was asked to initially teach face-to-face classes. In those classes, I introduced a specific engagement activity, which focused on student-led discussions on topical and real issues in the news. Part of the requirements for the topics discussed by my students are that they must be relevant to the course, provocative, and approved by me. These student-led forum discussions were done at the beginning of class. My observation was that after the forum discussions, students were energized, focused, excited, and ready to learn. Then, I delivered the lecture. This engagement activity was a huge success according to students' comments on the instructor evaluations.

One year later, I was required to teach an online course again. This time, I was ready. I had taken an online training course, IDL6543, and was assigned a wonderful instructional designer. During the IDL6543 course, I started to build my online course. With the help of my instructional designer, I was able to replicate the student-led discussion forums in my online course. As the online course progressed, I could see the level of engagement burgeoning. At the end of the semester, students expressed their admiration for the level of engagement, and some identified the discussion forum as their best part of the course.

Here are my recommendations for improving engagement among online students based on my experience:

1. *Allow students to work in groups.* Group work is essential for improving engagement. What I have noticed is that when my students are in groups, they tend to establish ways to engage and communicate outside of the class environment. For instance, they might use social media platforms to exchange contact information, come up with their discussion topics, and divvy up the assignment. In short, the group work can enhance student engagement outside of the online space. This is particularly important since students are not physically present in a classroom. In addition, having students in groups can foster professional development and networking opportunities during the course and long after the course is over.
2. *Let students be in the driver seat.* It is very important to let students own the assignment. For example, in my course, my students come up with their topic for discussion, I approve the topic, and they moderate the discussion forum by themselves. Their tasks typically include

posting the topic, responding to the viewpoints of other students, and providing a summary of the discussion and each group member's contributions to me at the end of the forum discussion.

3. *Use engagement assignments that strike a chord with students.* I find this particularly important. For example, topics for my student-led discussion forums must be about current issues in society that are relevant to the course and students' experiences. The more students can relate to the topic, the more they are likely to be engaged in its discourse. For example, the word limit for each student's response to the discussion topic is 100 words, but many of my students exceed this number significantly.
4. *Establish a conducive atmosphere that fosters engagement.* It is crucial to provide a good and safe online environment for students so they can freely express their opinions without the expectation of being attacked by other students. For example, in the student-led discussion forums, I require all students ensure their viewpoints are respectful of others. I also inform my students that points will be deducted if a post is offensive or inappropriate.

Self-Directed Integrative Learning Experiences on Intersecting Social Justice Issues

Gail Humiston



Gail Sears Humiston is Associate Lecturer in the Department of Criminal Justice. She teaches the CJ Ethics capstone course, Research Methods in CJ, Prosecution & Adjudication, Criminal Justice System, and Criminal Justice Organizations. In 2018, she was awarded a two-year teaching program innovation grant from UCF's *What's Next* Quality Enhancement Plan.

As students approach graduation, it becomes increasingly important to facilitate learning beyond the classroom and create opportunities for real-world experiences in preparation for life after UCF. With funding and support from UCF's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and the Department of Criminal Justice, I planned, implemented, and assessed an integrative learning experience for criminal justice undergraduates. With a relatively large program of nearly 1,400 majors and robust online program, the goal was to create a scalable, high-impact experience designed to facilitate student learning across modalities and class sizes as part of their capstone ethics course.

Creating an integrative learning experience required clear definitions of *integration* and *experience*. Integrative learning is designed to prepare students for professional and civic life by connecting classroom learning across the curriculum, disciplines, and beyond campus (AACU, 2009). Experiential learning is a complex form of active learning, which includes service learning and community-based learning (AACU, 2008; CEI, n.d.). Together, these concepts create the high-impact educational practice of *integrative experiential learning*.

Integrative experiential learning (IE) gives students direct experience with the issues they are studying. Students set goals and plan their education. They develop self-awareness and reflect on their experiences to connect what they are learning in the classroom to real-world contexts. They are tasked with exploring and analyzing complex issues, adapting discipline specific theories and abilities, and analyzing and evaluating possible solutions to solve community problems. At UCF, courses seeking an IE course designation must meet specific criteria (What's Next, n.d.).

In the criminal justice (CJ) discipline, we examine social issues, such as poverty and education, which are related to criminal behavior. This includes the system's response to criminal behavior and other social problems. Criminal behaviors and the system's response are framed by the laws meant to reflect society's moral beliefs. These major themes are brought together in this IE learning project on ethics in CJ.

The integrative learning goal for students in this project was scaffolded. First, they identified and described a social justice issue (i.e., behavioral health, education, environmental justice, gender justice, or hunger and homelessness) and its intersection with criminal justice.¹ Second, students identified, described, applied, and evaluated an ethical theory as a lens through which to examine their chosen societal problem and CJ's response. These two main frameworks provided the bases for two group discussions and students' final papers.

While integrative learning is achievable though traditional literature reviews, the purpose of this QEP project was 1) to create an integrative learning *experience* and 2) to assess its outcomes. The experiential part of this course was modeled after service learning and required students to perform 15 hours of service in their communities as part of their exploration of a social justice issue. For example, if a student served their 15 hours at Second Harvest Food Bank, they would focus on the topic of hunger and homelessness and its relation to criminal justice. However, unlike service learning, which requires

¹ The entire class addressed the issue of racial justice in a separate module.

faculty to partner with organization(s), this IE project tasked students with finding their own service positions.

To facilitate experiential learning, a Canvas module was created which consisted of Webcourse pages, discussions, and assignments. Several pages collectively informed students of the goals and steps of integrating their knowledge of a social justice issue that intersects with CJ and application of an ethical theory. The discussions and assignments detailed their respective learning requirements.

An Experiential Learning Handbook was also created to facilitate IE learning. The Handbook was designed to walk students through the metacognition and reflective processes of IE learning. It consisted of four sections that 1) described the purpose of integrative experiential learning; 2) addressed workplace ethical issues and dilemmas; 3) educated students on the four learning steps of clarifying learning objectives, selecting activities and experiences, finding resources, and methods of assessing learning; and 4) instructed them on keeping a journal for reflective learning. It included several organizational web links for students to seek and secure service positions in the community, as well as instructions for submitting their learning plan for instructor approval.

The second purpose of this QEP project was to learn whether there was a difference in integrative learning outcomes when comparing students assigned to a learning experience to those assigned to a traditional literature review. Data was collected in Fall 2018 and Spring 2019. The sample consisted of upper-level CJ undergraduates (N=252). A quasi-experimental design was used, with six course sections being randomly assigned to either the experiential learning group (n=120) or literature review group (n=132).

To answer the question of differences in learning outcomes, a modified version of the AACU Integrative Learning VALUE Rubric was used to measure integrative learning (AACU, 2009). Three levels of integration were used to assess students' final papers assigned to both groups. The three levels were synthesized by combining = 3; describes with connections = 2; and describes, but does not connect = 1.

When comparing integrative learning outcomes on students' final papers, those in the experiential learning group were less likely to score at the poorest level, as compared to students in the literature review group.

- Synthesized by combining:
 - Literature Review 33% (n=43) – Experiential Learning 33% (n=40)
- Described with connections
 - Literature Review 42% (n=56) – Experiential Learning 53% (n=64)

- Described, but did not connect
 - Literature Review 25% (n=33) – Experiential Learning 13% (n=16)

This result suggests that using experiential teaching methods in conjunction with metacognitive and reflective learning processes improves integrative learning outcomes. This finding is particularly important for our CJ students who reported in an accompanying survey (n=178) that they enrolled as transfer students (78%), have received a Pell Grant in the past (58%), work 31 or more hours each week (43%), and attend UCF full time (86%).

Students' perceptions of the IE capstone project were mostly positive. Students generally commented that they felt the experiential learning was interactive and useful. They appreciated connecting ethics beyond the classroom. A few stated they would continue volunteering.

Those students who viewed experiential learning negatively had difficulty fitting in the volunteer hours due to conflicting demands on their time. To better accommodate students' schedules, they are now offered their choice between an integrative learning experience or traditional literature review project. In the future, I hope to have the course designated as an IE course with students immersed in integrative experiential learning.

Hopefully, others will see that this type of project is generalizable to their disciplines. With final approval of the QEP, this project's teaching materials will be made available in 2020 on UCF's *What's Next* website for faculty and staff resources (See <<https://undergrad.ucf.edu/whatsnext/faculty-staff/resources/>>).

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Teaching and Learning: Where to Go from Here?

Gregg Buckingham



Gregg Buckingham is Lecturer in the College of Community Innovation and Education. He regularly teaches a mix of undergraduate and graduate courses, both face-to-face and online, in the School of Public Administration. He comes to UCF following a full career in the federal government

with NASA.

Reflection is an important component of learning and, now in my fourth year of teaching, this article reflects on my teaching experience to date. Perhaps these experiences may be useful to new faculty. For reference, I teach four classes each semester, two graduate and two undergraduate; two online and two face-to-face. Also, teaching is a second career for me after retiring from a career at NASA.

Just a few words about my background might be helpful to calibrate the writer. One of the ideas I brought to teaching came from my experiences at NASA. I worked with many interns, and at the end of their time with NASA students often stated, “Now I know how to connect what I am learning in classes to the real world I will work in.” I’ve not forgotten that and hence try to develop professionally relevant, authentic classroom activities. In addition, in earning a doctorate in education my dissertation focused on authentic learning and the importance of contextual learning. From that I learned exposure to professionals in the field and their practices are meaningful to students. Finally, to be honest, as a first-generation undergraduate student I was not a very good student, and I certainly didn’t spend enough time connecting what I was doing academically with my extra-curricular activities and other life experiences to form a personal philosophy and plan for my post-graduation life. When I can help students with this, I do.

Teaching the first year was a hoot! Teaching four classes, learning Canvas, acquainting myself with my new colleagues and environment as well as gauging student capabilities was quite a challenge. Year two was fantastic as routines came into place and I reached out for support and growth from various organizations. The third year was challenging, but only because the good foundation laid during the first two years opened new opportunities. The following organizations have all been essential in opening doors to expand my skills:

- The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL)
- The Center for Distributed Learning (CDL)
- The UCF Writing Center
- UCF Libraries

- Institutional Review Board
- UCF Quality Enhancement Program
- The School of Public Administration

There is not enough space to mention their individual contributions, but each played a critical role in my toolkit. Below are a few representative activities I’ve participated in, with some concluding thoughts.

FCTL’s conferences as well as course improvement projects are the foundation of new ideas for me. As an example, at one of the Winter Conferences, I attended each faculty talk on building groups online and collected many good ideas. I assembled the top five or so ideas and upgraded how I assign and prepare groups in my online classes. Since that time, I have had far fewer student complaints about group work. In one class, this comment was very common on the value of groups: “The group assignments were a great guide in helping me understand this class... [they] were perfect for creating friendships between us and helping us learn from each other.”

I also utilized the Student Consultants on Teaching (SCoT) program. In the SCoT program an FCTL-trained student consultant will analyze your courses, tailored to your needs. Having someone sit in a class and observe is a bit nerve-racking. The student observed one face-to-face graduate class and one online undergraduate class. Some observations were comforting—they confirmed my initial intentions and others provided areas for reflection and growth. That neutral eye turned out to be very rewarding.

UCF’s Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) is involved in ensuring every student has a high-impact experience during their college career and attracted my attention since it matched my philosophy. The initiative encourages students to connect their classroom and extra-curricular knowledge and skills to real-world contexts and, thereby, to develop the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from one context to another. Two of my classes are now UCF designated high-impact classes, and qualifying for certification strengthened my teaching philosophy.

Two of our School programs were recently accredited. This process created a map in my mind linking everything from professional competencies to curriculum mapping to institutional effectiveness.

Other important techniques I’ve used but do not have space to fully discuss are student peer-coaching, personalized learning through CDL, metacognitive activities, and role playing assignments. Each has its advantages, and the folks listed above can assist with utilizing them.

Where to go from here? Obviously connecting with other faculty is of prime importance. In addition, here are three focus areas for the next couple of years. First, continue to combine theory and practice to develop new class activities relating to the profession. A deeper dive into my career activities is needed. Second, perhaps paradoxically, refine and consolidate work done to date to avoid too frenetic a pace. Finally, my focus to date centered on the triad competencies-assessment-activities. I have not spent enough time thinking about the students themselves—the challenges they face, the questions they have, and how to better meet their individual needs.

Here's Your TOPR-tunity! Sue Bauer and Aimee deNoyelles



Sue joined the Instructional Design team at the Center for Distributed Learning in 2001 and is a member of the TOPR Editorial team. Her research interests include quality in online courses, professional development for online teaching, and mobile technologies in education.

Aimee joined the Instructional Design team at the Center for Distributed Learning in 2011 and is the Managing Editor of TOPR. Her research interests include textbook affordability, online discussion strategies, and technology and gender.



What is TOPR?

Interested in spicing up your online or blended courses? Hosted by UCF's Center for Distributed Learning, the Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository (TOPR—pronounced “Topper”) is an online compendium which features 100+ online/blended teaching practices, submitted by educators from around the globe. Each TOPR entry describes a strategy drawn from the pedagogical practice of online/blended teaching faculty, depicts this strategy with artifacts from actual courses, and is aligned with findings from research literature.

TOPR provides the ability to discover new ways to use common online tools. For instance, head to TOPR and search for “online discussions.” You will find entries that describe active strategies that incorporate elements such as role play, photo-voice, pop culture, and debates, among many others. Entries are designed to be replicable, with the intention that you can adopt a similar approach if desired.

All entries are openly licensed, and recent submissions are peer-reviewed. In the last 12 months, TOPR has been visited by over 42,000 unique users from countries such as the United States, Canada, and India.

Call for Submissions

Perhaps you have a fabulous online teaching strategy that you'd like to submit as a TOPR entry and share with the masses. An entry in TOPR certainly makes visible your commitment to quality teaching and can be useful evidence when applying for awards or other promotional opportunities.

Each year, we have at least one Call for Submissions for this purpose. The TOPR editorial board typically announce a call for submissions for new entries beginning in July and proposals will typically be accepted until mid-September. Authors receive peer-reviewed feedback on their submissions by the end of October. Some entries will be accepted, while others may be asked to make minor or major revisions. Those that require revisions will be provided a month to make the requested adjustments to their proposals. Accepted entries are typically announced in December and a press release with accepted entries will be publicized in the new year.

We are excited to announce that we are utilizing UCF's Showcase of Text, Archives, Research, & Scholarship (STARS) system to accept TOPR proposals, facilitate the peer review process, and provide feedback and acceptance notifications to proposal submissions. This new addition to the process allows a more efficient and scholarly format to process and accept TOPR proposals.

Themes from New Press Release

Each year, the TOPR Editorial Board publishes a press release which curates the newest entries. A theme common to the latest batch of entries is student collaboration and formation of class community. Technologies that have facilitated this include adaptive learning courseware, digital badges, course announcements, hashtags, discussion boards, and Google Docs.

To peruse these entries in more detail, visit TOPR (<<http://topr.online.ucf.edu>>) and visit the *News* area on the home page.

Be in the Loop

So are you ready for this TOPR-tunity? Join our mailing list to receive press release updates and calls for submission for TOPR: <<https://topr.online.ucf.edu/>> (Form located right below “News”)

Adaptive Learning: Not for STEM Only!

Anne Prucha and Kacie Tartt



Anne Prucha is Senior Instructor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures (MLL), where she teaches Spanish and TESOL. She is co-faculty director of the Journey Cuba study abroad program and has also directed study abroad programs for UCF in Spain and Nicaragua. She co-founded and currently co-directs the UCF-Hillcrest Foreign Language Club, is a frequent participant in the Faculty Center's Summer Conference, and is currently involved in the CDL Pegasus iLab Course Redesign Initiative, working with colleagues in MLL and CDL to incorporate Adaptive Learning and OER content into the first-year Spanish course sequence.



Kacie Tartt is Associate Instructor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, where she teaches Spanish. She is co-faculty leader of the Journey Cuba study abroad program and faculty leader of Cuba: History, Culture, and Society during Summer A. At UCF she helped co-found and currently co-directs the UCF-Hillcrest Foreign Language Club in addition to organizing the weekly MLL Game Day. She also works hand-in-hand with CDL to further distance learning initiatives within the Spanish lower division at the university, most recently exploring Adaptive Learning methods and technology within her discipline.

In Fall 2018 we had the privilege of redesigning our LSPN1120C & SPN1121C online Elementary Spanish Language & Civilization courses incorporating Personalized Adaptive Learning as part of the Pegasus iLab Course Redesign Initiative (CRI). The redesigned courses piloted in Spring and Fall 2019 and continue this semester, Spring 2020.

What is Personalized Adaptive Learning, or PAL?

Personalized or adaptive learning is a software platform approach to provide each student with an individualized learning experience by allowing them to progress along their unique learning path through the course content based on learners' needs. Adaptive learning systems will customize the presentation of the content or present new concepts to the student based on their individual activities and responses. (<www.cdl.ucf.edu>)

Our translation: Students spend more time on concepts they do not know and less time—or none at all—on concepts they have already mastered.

Students frequently have varying levels of knowledge, but course content and practice activities are frequently “one size fits all.” PAL addresses this challenge as it creates an individualized learning path for each student.

We used the PAL application *Realizeit* and Open Educational Resources (OER) plus our own content to redesign our course, doing away with the textbook and publisher LMS. We worked closely with our instructional designer at CDL, Jessica Tojo, on the redesign. After creating a scope and sequence for the courses and procuring OER content, choosing our own previously authored content, and creating new content, we met each week with Jessica to work on the design.

The relationship between an instructional designer and faculty is vital to the successful design and development of an adaptive course. Kacie, Anne, and I worked closely on the planning, design, and development of their two courses. They served as subject matter experts providing the content and assessment questions and I worked on providing pedagogical support. Even after the course was built, we still work closely on making updates to the course.

~Jessica Tojo, Instructional Designer, CDL

Is this a lot of work? YES! But it is so worth it, as we discovered during the Fall 2019 semester... keep reading for details!

Not only do the redesigned courses allow students to progress through the material at a pace and level that are comfortable for them and that reflects their actual prior knowledge, the use of OER resources allows us to curate and incorporate appropriate, relevant, and engaging content, and create and deliver meaningful practice and assessment. In the past, our students have not been stimulated or motivated by “canned” publisher content. PAL and OER content have allowed us to design the courses to be more personal, more appealing, and more meaningful to our students.

Although the first course in the sequence, SPN1120C, assumes no knowledge of Spanish, many students have some prior knowledge of the language because they took Spanish in school at some point before entering UCF, or they live in an area where Spanish is spoken (Miami, for example), or they have family members who speak Spanish. Since PAL provides an individual learning path, students can focus on the concepts for which they need a stronger foundation.

Using *Realizeit* has also allowed us to monitor student progress more closely and supplement when necessary. We can

more successfully guide students based on the results generated by *Realizeit*, and help them with strategies for success, whereas with publisher content this was possible, but limited, and challenging to determine students' need for individualized attention.

Our students interacted with PAL content, frequently repeating modules and doing extra practice, and they reported how intuitive and helpful they found it; for example:

It was definitely better than staring at a textbook hoping it would make sense somehow. I was really worried about doing a language course online but this program made me feel better about it.

Many students in language classes face challenges with the online delivery mode because it is new to them or because publisher content and LMS platforms are not user friendly or have frustrating technical problems and glitches. These obstacles negatively impact student DWF rates and student success and overall satisfaction. They also make it challenging for us to encourage our students to continue in Spanish—to pursue a major or minor. Another factor that impacts students' attitudes toward these required courses is the cost of textbooks and LMS access which, for SPN1120C and SPN1121C, is almost \$300! And not every student has to take both classes, which means that they might spend this amount of money on just one class! So an added bonus of our project is that students do not need to buy anything—that's right—*¡NADA!*

Connecting with our students in online courses, even when we incorporate online teaching and learning best practices, can be a challenge. *Realizeit* helps with this since it assists in identifying pockets of need early on, allowing us to attend to our students much more effectively due to the robust data it provides, not least of which is a fun method that uses sad/happy face icons for students to indicate how they are feeling about their performance, for example if they are feeling like they understand the material, if they are feeling successful—or not. Having access to the data generated allows us to closely monitor student progress and intervene when appropriate. For example, after examining the data analytics that *Realizeit* generates, we can contact students who may need intervention (for any reason) and give them guidance, contributing to their overall success in the course, and creating and maintaining personal connections with them.

Preliminary data gathered from our redesigned courses from Spring 2019 when we started using PAL and OER content illustrate increased student mastery, decreased DWF rates, and resulted in more positive Student Perception of Instruction surveys. Student success rates (A, B, C grades) increased 23%, and withdrawal rates went down 10%. We continued

with the redesign in Fall 2019, and we will gather data for that semester soon.

Anecdotal student feedback on Personalized Adaptive Learning is overwhelmingly positive and indicates that students feel more empowered with their learning. We asked students what they liked about PAL and *Realizeit*; here are some of their responses:

I like that I always got immediate feedback on questions. It made reviewing and understanding better.

[Realizeit] knew when I didn't know something and it made sure I understood it before letting me pass.

I like the [learning] pathway the most, it was easy to follow and understand and gave a sense of order and direction rather than a disorganized lesson plan.

[PAL] shapes itself to my knowledge as best as it can. I'm able to learn my mistakes a lot faster and more effectively than I would without it. It needs some tweaks but it's still a really helpful program. It's also really wonderful that I can access it whenever and wherever as long as I have a laptop. This made scheduling for me a lot easier.

There are other PAL applications besides *Realizeit* on the market, and courses that incorporate PAL do not have to include OER content. PAL can be used in any modality, too. Using Personalized Adaptive Learning has produced positive results and been very “freeing” for us in the design and the teaching of our courses. We encourage you to explore the possibilities!

What Do the Online Course Reviews Tell Us?

Aimee deNoyelles and Charlotte Jones-Roberts



Aimee joined the Instructional Design team at CDL in 2011, and oversees the “Quality” and “High Quality” online course review process which aligns with the state’s strategic plan for online education. Aimee graduated with a Doctorate of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in Instructional Design and Technology from the University of Cincinnati in 2011. Her research interests include textbook affordability, online discussion strategies, and technology and gender.

Charlotte joined the Instructional Design team in August 2017. She holds an M.A. in Instructional Design and Technology – Instructional Systems and an M.A. in TESOL from the University of Central Florida, as well as a B.A. in Psychology from the University of North Florida. Charlotte’s research interests include social presence in online courses, hybrid learning, and synchronous learning environments.



Do you ever get the feeling that the design of your online or mixed-mode course could be enhanced, but you’re not quite sure where to start? The Instructional Design team from the Center for Distributed Learning offers two levels of course reviews for eligible faculty teaching in online course modalities: Quality and High Quality. These reviews explore course components proven to be best practices in online course design. Faculty who have participated in the reviews have cited improved navigation, heightened accessibility, and stronger assignments as just a few benefits experienced. As of this publication, 141 faculty members have earned over 250 online course designations at UCF.

Hundreds of course reviews yield some interesting trends. In this article, we highlight three items from the course reviews that are most often present and offer three items that are commonly absent or could be improved. Throughout, tools and resources will be highlighted that can guide the enhancement of your online courses.

Present Items

1. *The syllabus includes the Provost-required course information.*

The syllabus is considered the heart of a course, guiding students through the course policies, expectations, schedule, and required texts. Luckily, this was a very highly met item in

the online course reviews. Nevertheless, it can be a challenge to stay current with University-level policies and statements. Thankfully, up-to-date verbiage with all [Provost-required elements](#) can be found in the Webcourses Templater Tool. We offer a Syllabus as well as an Interactive Syllabus Template, among others. Check out how to use this on our [Webcourses@UCF Guide](#).

2. *Multiple methods and opportunities for students to demonstrate learning are offered.*

Since every student is unique and learns in their own way, offering a variety of assignment types can give each student the best possible chance to showcase what they have learned. Thankfully, another component that online courses incorporated was multiple methods and opportunities for students to demonstrate learning. This means that in addition to commonly used assessments such as quizzes, exams, and written assignments, faculty also asked students to participate in online discussions, presentations, gamified practice like [Materia](#), and authentic assessments that exhibit what students may do in their future careers. Others employ flexible options, which may, for example, allow students to choose to submit an assignment either as a podcast, video, or a webpage to demonstrate what they have learned. Curious about what this may look like in your discipline? Check out the [FCTL Assignment Design](#) page for examples.

3. *The course offers opportunities for students to interact with other students to enhance learning (e.g., discussions, group work).*

Given that learning is ultimately rooted in social interaction, it is important to offer some interactive opportunities within the course. It was encouraging to see that the vast majority of reviewed online courses included students having the opportunity to interact with other students. The most commonly used tool to support this interaction was the online discussion. However, just because students are posting in the discussion does not guarantee that they are interacting in a meaningful way. Creating a prompt that encourages students to solve problems, debate, and interpret tends to encourage critical thinking and engagement. Group work is another approach to facilitate meaningful interaction, as long as the tasks are clearly articulated and roles clearly defined. For more details, visit our entry [Create Opportunities for Online Students to Interact](#).

Absent Items or Items to be Improved

The next three items represent elements of online course design in the course reviews which were commonly absent or could be improved.

1. *Expectations for instructor response time and feedback are clearly stated.*

When a student sends you a message, do they know when to expect a response? Do students know how and when they will receive feedback about their submitted work? Clearly stating when and how students should expect to hear from you sets clear expectations and reduces confusion from day one. In the syllabus or another area which addresses course expectations, let students know when and how they can expect to hear from you. For instance, “I will typically respond to emails within a 24-48-hour time period, excluding weekends,” and “Feedback about written assignments will be provided within a week after the due date, and can be found in the assignment” clearly state response time and feedback.

2. *Grading criteria for each learning activity is described (e.g., rubrics). Module objectives and/or goals are measurable and clearly stated.*

We decided to group the above two items since they are related. When there is no upfront explanation, it can be difficult for students to understand the link between what they are being graded on and what they are expected to learn. Stating clear objectives at the beginning of a module or unit orients students to the overall learning goals. Not sure how to create objectives that are measurable? We have a handy [Objective Builder](#) tool that can help get you started. Once those are fleshed out, check out the Module Introduction page template available in the [Templater tool](#) (accessed through any page in [Webcourses@UCF](#)), which provides a framework for connecting objectives, content, and activities.

Rubrics are of crucial importance because they promote objectivity in grading, alleviate uncertainty for students, and reduce the amount of time you spend grading. When designing a rubric, it is important to keep in mind 1) the objectives being assessed (what do you expect students to learn?); 2) observable demonstration of learning (how can a student exhibit that they have learned?); 3) how to divide those criteria (what core elements are inherent in an outstanding performance?); and 4) observable differentiation of performance level (what would an “Outstanding” performance look like? How about “Needs Improvement”?) (Van Leusen, 2013). Examples of excellent discussion rubrics can be found in the [Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository](#), and additional real-life examples in the [Grading Online Activities](#) page on the CDL site.

3. *Alternative means of access to course materials is provided.*

This item means that students have the ability to access course materials in more than one way. For instance, if a student has

low vision, will they be able to fully engage with the images in your course? Providing alternative text to images can help. If a student cannot hear, will they be able to fully engage with the video clips you have recorded or the video feedback you left? Providing transcripts and/or captions can help. Providing alternative means of access does not only benefit students who require accommodations—a student who may speak English as a second language may prefer to read captions while they watch a video, for instance.

“Accessibility” is a nebulous term that is often misunderstood or feared. The excellent [UDOIT tool](#) enables you to identify specific accessibility issues in your online courses. It will scan a course, generate a report, and provide resources on how to address common accessibility issues. Some of the issues can be immediately fixed. Consult with your instructional designer or [Webcourses@UCF Support](#) for additional help with UDOIT.

Next Steps

Are you interested to learn more about the course components included in the Quality and High Quality course reviews? Explore the [Quality Initiative page](#) on the CDL website, which features not only all of the items, but also offers resources that showcases each item. Details about the review process are included there as well. Please note that reviews for mixed-mode courses are coming soon.

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F2F or Online? A Pilot Study of Preservice Teachers' Learning Preferences and Outcomes

Michelle Kelley and Courtney Lopas



Michelle is a Professor serving as the Reading Education Program Coordinator and Co-Director of the UCF Reading Clinic. Her research has focused on: (a) increasing reading engagement of school-aged students through metacognition, and (b) increasing preservice and in-service teacher efficacy in reading instruction and assessment. Her work appears in journals such as *The Reading Teacher*, *The Reading Professor*, and *Reading Psychology*. She has published several chapters and professional development books for in-service teachers.



Courtney is a second-year reading education doctoral student in the College of Community Innovation and Education. Her research focuses on increasing in-service teachers' use of differentiated writing accommodations for English Language Learners during writing instruction and analyzing preservice teachers' attempts at eliciting and responding to student thinking.

Introduction

Over the last several years, universities have begun to offer more mixed-mode (M) and fully online courses in response to students' needs and demands. Although online courses may be desirable to college students, as instructors in the School of Teacher Education, we are concerned about the effectiveness of these course modalities in terms of student learning. Specifically, in a course we teach on reading assessment and instruction to preservice teachers (PSTs), we believe it may be challenging to create an M or online class for this course due to the interactions and activities we integrate within each class session. The purpose of this pilot study was to compare the phonics content knowledge of PSTs based on their decision to engage in a face-to-face (F2F) class or an online module developed by the authors. This pilot study was designed to explore the instruction delivery preferences of our PSTs and determine their self-efficacy and content knowledge related to assessing and instructing phonics.

Our Study

In the fall of 2019, we began to think more deeply on how to effectively shift our F2F course content into an online environment. For one class period, we gave PSTs the option to attend F2F or online based on their learning preference. PSTs were informed that the content would be on phonics. We developed a phonics module (in Webcourses) that contained content on phonics and assessing phonics, activities for the PSTs to complete, videos on phonics strategies, and an article on teaching phonics. The same content, activities, and videos were used during instruction of the F2F class session. Every PST, regardless of the modality they chose (M or online), had to complete a post quiz.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included the modality selected, the PSTs' self-efficacy on assessing phonics before and after the module or class, and each PST's post quiz score. Thirteen PSTs attended the F2F class and 22 PSTs completed the online phonics mod-

ule. As part of the pilot study, we asked our PSTs the following questions:

1. 1. Why did you pick F2F or online for the phonics content?
2. 2. Rate yourself from 1–5 (5 being the highest) on your level of comfort in assessing phonics prior to the module/class.
3. 3. Rate yourself from 1–5 (5 being the highest) on your level of comfort in assessing phonics after the module/class.

F2F vs. Online

Analyzing the PSTs' responses to question one regarding why they selected F2F, we found two major themes: having the ability to ask questions and personally struggling with phonics content. We were surprised that students favored F2F due to the ability to ask questions, since students can use email and discussion boards to ask questions online. From this finding, one potential modification to enhance student's abilities to ask questions during an online module would be to have scheduled times for synchronous question asking. This would allow students to log in to Webcourses and interact with the instructor in the moment without having the delay of waiting for the instructor to respond to an email. The instructor could also use a video camera so the students could see him/her as they discuss their questions in real time.

Three major themes emerged from the PSTs who selected the online format: having the ability to complete the content on their own time, being able to sleep in (our course meets in the morning), and their confidence in phonics content. We were not surprised by these themes as we know our PSTs have full schedules which include full course loads, completing service-learning hours in schools, and working. The theme of being confident in phonics content and assessment also seemed to be logical since that would seem to be a rationale for not attending F2F.

Self-Efficacy

The PSTs who attended the F2F class session rated themselves lower on their level of comfort with assessing phonics prior to the F2F than the PSTs who completed the online module (F2F Average Rating: 2.308; O Average Rating: 2.705), and they were slightly lower in rating after the F2F or module (F2F Average Rating: 3.808; O Average Rating: 3.977). Although their efficacy was lower, the F2F PSTs had the most growth in their self-efficacy (F2F Average Rating: +1.5; O Average Rating: +1.272), and the difference between the two groups narrowed significantly (before 0.397; after 0.169).

Module Quiz

In regard to the phonics quiz score, the PSTs who attended F2F scored higher than the PSTs who chose online (F2F Average Module Score: 36.308; O Average Module Score: 35.181). This finding was interesting as the PSTs who attended F2F had less self-efficacy in assessing phonics, but scored higher on the quiz than the PSTs who completed the online module.

Reflections and Next Steps

During our next pilot study, we would like to investigate if any of the F2F PSTs completed the online module in addition to the F2F class. This would be important as it could have influenced their scores on the phonics quiz. We also think the phonics quiz could be taken as a pre/post measure and determine growth due to either F2F or online participation. We would also like to investigate why the PSTs prefer to ask questions in person rather than virtually as this was the most prevalent reason for PSTs to select the F2F class.

We plan to expand this pilot study to other topics covered in the course, such as fluency and phonemic awareness. This could lead to important information on the number of students who choose to come to the F2F class session, as well as their performance and self-efficacy in these areas. From this information, an M course could be developed with online modules for the topics where a majority of the PSTs selected the online module, reported a high self-efficacy, and performed well on the module assignments. The topics that many of the PSTs attended F2F, reported a low self-efficacy, and performed lower on the module quizzes may be topics that would be beneficial to teach F2F.

Using GroupMe to Enhance the Classroom

Chrysalis L. Wright



Chrysalis Wright is Associate Lecturer in the department of psychology. She teaches general psychology, social and developmental psychology, as well as statistical and research methods in psychology. She is also the Honors Undergraduate Thesis Faculty Liaison for the psychology department.

Outside of UCF, she is Secretary of Division 46 (Society for Media Psychology & Technology) and the Membership and Governance Outreach Representative for the Committee on Early Career Psychologists (CECP) of the American Psychological Association.

Have you seen the GroupMe invites posted in the Webcourses for your classes? I began seeing these pop up rather frequently in 2017. GroupMe is a free group messaging service that does not require the installation of an app to use. Once an account has been created and you have joined a group chat, you can then participate in the chat via text message or online.

At first, I would delete student posts in my Webcourses that included a GroupMe invite. I would then send a message to the student asking them not to use GroupMe in my class. I was hesitant to allow the use of GroupMe considering the reports that had been published in news related to higher education. For instance, in the fall of 2017, 83 students were accused of cheating for sharing course information via GroupMe at Ohio State University (Roll, 2017). In the spring of 2018, Louisiana State University revised their code of student conduct to include the use of GroupMe by students as cheating (Jeanfreau, 2018). Many faculty, some who have been vocal about their concerns, are convinced that the intent behind using GroupMe by students is solely cheating and that their students are using GroupMe in this manner in their classes (YouTube). More recently, in the fall of 2019, it was reported that another 70 students had been accused of cheating via GroupMe at the University of Texas at Austin (Johnson, 2019).

About a year before the accusations at the University of Texas at Austin, I used GroupMe in my classes for the first time. Students repeatedly posted the links to the GroupMe chat and seemed persistent, in class after class, about using it. Before trying it for the first time, I spent some time in the summer of 2018 learning about GroupMe and modifying my course syllabi. I wanted to make sure I knew how to use GroupMe and hoped to prevent the use of GroupMe by students for cheating-related purposes in my classes. The modification to my syllabi included adding a new section specifically addressing GroupMe and other online chat tools. This section states that all online chat tools used by students in the course will be

monitored to ensure that UCF's Golden Rule is followed and that failure to provide an accessible link to any online chat tool for the course would be reported to the Office of Student Conduct.

In the fall of 2018, I created my own GroupMe account so I could join any chat students posted in my Webcourses and then waited. Shortly after the semester started, GroupMe links were provided by students in my developmental psychology and social psychology courses. I quickly joined, as did my teaching assistants for the courses. But we didn't just jump in the conversation. We observed for a few weeks and waited. The students began posting in the chat and asking questions about the course. Questions centered around the textbook, course requirements, and what took place during lecture. Weeks went by and there were no posts that could be considered academic misconduct, so I decided to start replying to students.

I had set up GroupMe to send me text messages when students posted in the chat. I began answering questions related to what students missed in class, what was required for an assignment in the course, as well as clarifying course content. And, I could reply to students whenever I wanted and wherever I was. I didn't have to be at my desk logged in to Webcourses from my computer. This aspect of GroupMe was something that really appealed to me. I was able to respond to students faster than ever before, and doing so did not take any longer than replying to a text message from a friend.

While my main concern about using GroupMe was related to potential academic misconduct, I have never had to report an instance of cheating using GroupMe to the Office of Student Conduct. That does not mean that there have not been instances of open doors for cheating. There have. I remember each one because there have been only two! Both instances took place in the first few weeks of the semester and in the same freshman level course, but different classes. In the first instance, a student posted a question during the first week of class about the assigned chapter quiz. Another student replied and stated that answers could be found online. In the second instance, which happened this semester, a student posted that they should get together to take the quiz as a group and also posted that answers to quiz questions could be found online. In both instances, I immediately replied in the chat. My response informed students that the chat was monitored, as stated in their syllabi, to maintain UCF's Golden Rule and that such statements were a possible violation of academic misconduct. I then emailed the students who posted comments that encouraged cheating and scheduled in-person meetings with them. In both instances, the students were new students at UCF and overwhelmed by the university experience. In both instances, the students were scared about how to

do well in online and large lecture classes and were surprised that using online websites such as Quizlet could be considered cheating. In both instances, this was a teachable moment and learning experience for the students. Both students were given a warning in my class. Since I caught cheating before it actually happened, I did not believe there was anything to report to the Office of Student Conduct. Had the chat not been monitored, it is possible that both instances could have led to actual cheating.

I continue to use GroupMe in my classes. In addition to answering student questions related to the class, I am also able to get to know my students in a way that I had not since transferring from UCF's regional campuses to the main campus. I have to admit that moving from teaching smaller classes to teaching hundreds of students was sort of a culture shock for me. That first year was definitely an eye-opening experience, and I entered the large lecture setting with the goal of getting to know my students, having them interact with the class and course content, and aiming to make a large class feel small. While I use a polling app during lectures to help keep students engaged with the material and interact during lecture, using GroupMe helps continue that level of interaction outside of the classroom. Students have shared their personal experiences, feelings about being in college, and life events. Students have identified new ways of looking at the course material and have been great at identifying real life examples of what we are covering in class. My favorite part of using GroupMe is definitely the emojis, memes, jokes, and shared pictures of favorite pets. With four large dogs, a cat, a freshwater fish tank, and a darkling beetle farm, I believe I am the winner!

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Using Deliberate Reading Practices to Help Students Survive the Threat of Distraction

Jeanine E. Viau



Jeanine Viau is Lecturer in the Philosophy Department, where she teaches courses in religion, humanities, and cultural studies. Her research areas include contemporary Catholicism, gender and sexual ethics, feminist theology, and queer studies in religion.

I was recently appalled although unsurprised by the Pew Research Center's finding that roughly a quarter of American adults have not read a book in the past year. Pew analyst Andrew Perrin notes disparities in wealth and education as indicators for whether a person reads or not and draws a correlation between not reading and not owning a Smartphone or e-reading device (September 26, 2019). While accessibility is always an important consideration when examining wealth and structural inequity, I am not sure that this explains the significant decline in long-form reading practices among American adults. The number of non-book-reading Americans has risen over the last decade, up from 19% in 2011. However, it is unclear if the disparities across income and education demographics have also increased. Pew statistics show that over 96% of adults 18–29 and 92% of adults 30–49 own a smartphone (June 12, 2019), but for this combined age group, still 22% report not having read a book in the last year. If anything, wouldn't the increase in smartphone usage over the last decade show an overall increase in book reading if these devices are so important to access?

America's diminishing commitment to reading is also reflected in recent benchmark testing of fourth and eighth graders by the National Center for Education Statistics, the research arm of the Education Department. As Erica Green and Dana Goldstein of the *New York Times* report, the National Assessment of Educational Progress results show, "Only 35 percent of fourth graders were proficient in reading in 2019, down from 37 percent in 2017; 34 percent of eighth graders were proficient in reading, down from 36 percent" (December 5, 2019). Also troubling is that The Nation's Report Card shows progress in reading has stalled over the last decade, "with the highest performers stagnating and the lowest-achieving students falling further behind" (Green and Goldstein, December 5, 2019). Interestingly, while reading proficiency for these age groups has flat-lined or diminished since 2009, smartphone ownership, according to the Pew Research Center, has increased by 46% since 2011 (June 12, 2019). I do not mean to suggest a direct relationship of causation here, but I think it is worth considering whether there might be a correlation,

especially if, as Perrin suggests, there is a correlation between being a reader and owning a smartphone or e-reading device.

What I observe among my students is that declines in deliberate reading practices are often connected to the immediacy and proliferation of new media and technology. For example, I assign a technology fast in my online course Philosophy, Religion, and the Environment. Students must eliminate all technology use for one week except what is required for class and work. They also keep a daily log about their experience. In Fall 2019, students reported higher levels of concentration and productivity in their academic work during the fast. One student reported writing music for the first time in 4+ years. Another student reflected,

Today I decided to stop starring the walls wondering what everyone was up to on social media and decided to do something I haven't done in awhile which is leisure read. I remember how much I enjoyed reading as a child/ pre-teen and I remember why, I didn't have a cell phone! To my surprise I fell back into my old patterns rather quickly and read 3 chapters in one sitting.

While it is important to meet students where they are through the adaptation and creative use of social media and technology in the classroom, it is also important to teach students deliberate learning methods in a media culture that traffics in distracted engagement.

Our students are negotiating learning terrains saturated with distractions. The anxieties resulting from this milieu diminish their capacities for concentration, interpersonal connection, memory, and deep, integrative learning (Becker et al, 2013; Rix, 2015). Building on tech abstention exercises like the fast described above, I also offer my students reading strategies that combine Geoffrey Colvin's method of deliberate practice with contemplative pedagogy. Colvin suggests that becoming great at something isn't so much about talent as it is about practice. By this he means painstakingly identifying skills that need improvement, focusing intently on those areas, setting process-oriented goals, putting forth high effort and repetition, experiencing pain and difficulty, and continuously self-reflecting and receiving feedback (2008). As Colvin points out, it is easy to see how this process corresponds to activities such as music and sports, but not necessarily other areas of learning, especially not reading, which for many students seems like a passive consumption of words on a page and tangential to other learning activities. My aim is to show them that reading is a complex skill, one that requires deliberate practice to master.

For example, in face-to-face courses, I set aside class time for silent, tech-free directed reading. These reading periods are

inspired by the contemplative approach of Justin McDaniel at UPenn. McDaniel runs a weekly 7-hour course where students are required to turn in their tech devices and read silently together for most of class time (HuffPost, 05/04/2017). One of the first deliberate reading practices I teach students is to establish highly focused time and space for this activity, going back to Colvin's principles. Next, I create concrete, process-oriented rubrics for deciphering different types of reading. I provide worksheets for my students that can be adapted to similar types of source material, and my exam questions test reading engagement according to these rubrics. At the close of these reading sessions, students are required to seek feedback from their fellow students in small groups, and then we combine our findings on the white board. Students often struggle to settle into a tech-free environment, but frequently they discover the benefits of just reading, with intent, of reading assigned materials more than once, as our time often allows, and they become more mindful of and deliberate in their own learning processes.

Defining Interdisciplinary Studies

Sharon Woodill



Sharon Woodill is an interdisciplinary scholar with an eclectic academic background. She holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies (philosophy and religious studies) from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, an M.A. in Gender and Women's Studies, and a B.A. in Music (jazz piano).

Her research focuses on interdisciplinary methodologies, feminist science studies, and religion, gender, and sexualities. She teaches in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program in the College of Undergraduate Studies.

Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) is all the rage these days as it saturates virtually all academic domains promising the creation of a new knowledge interstate within the modern academe. Yet, what interdisciplinarity is remains elusive. Definitions of interdisciplinarity usually describe it as the bringing together of multiple disciplines to address real-world complex problems. In the metaphorical mapping of disciplines as fruit, a fruit salad is said to depict multidisciplinary, with the disciplines remaining more or less discernable, and this is contrasted with a smoothie to describe interdisciplinarity, where the fruit is integrated into largely indiscernible bits. While this metaphor indeed represents a good deal of what happens under the interdisciplinary banner, it arguably produces a rather impoverished understanding of interdisciplinarity with the

only difference between the salad and the smoothie being the size of the chunks.

A richer understanding of interdisciplinarity moves beyond mixology. "Interdisciplinary" literally means "between the disciplines," and so another way to conceptualize interdisciplinarity is as the negative space of the disciplines. Interdisciplinarians often wander in spaces not yet claimed by a discipline, though they often draw on disciplinary tools to render their insights intelligible to others within the more traditional knowledge enterprise. Academic work in this space requires a shift of attention from objects to relationships and posits knowing as engagement rather than abstracted dissection. From the negative-space vantage point one can often see a bigger picture and shift focus between the background and foreground to discover/create new and innovative approaches to real-world complex problems.

Interdisciplinarity as such is not exactly easy to do, and it is even harder to teach, particularly in a traditional academic context that often eschews the crossing of boundaries and the blurring of lines that interdisciplinarity work demands. Yet, the demand for such approaches is steadily rising as the complexity of the contemporary world grows at an increasingly rapid pace. Academia is responding with the development of more and more IDS programs.

Typically, IDS programs are developed to accommodate the goals and objectives of individual students, and so students within an IDS program often have diverse personal and disciplinary backgrounds and expectations. This is quite different from students in traditional disciplines where they learn content and methodologies specific to their field of study. An interdisciplinary approach is content-agnostic, meaning the focus is not on acquiring a specific bundle of information; rather, the focus is on developing an interdisciplinary mindset that equips students with the requisite cognitive toolkit necessary for creativity, intellectual agility, and adaptability. In IDS, however, the objective is to introduce a way of doing knowledge grounded in an epistemology of complexity. This is an epistemic shift that espouses knowledge as an emergent property or pattern(s) resulting from non-linear open engagement with diverse forms of information and experiences. There are three core competencies of IDS: perspective taking, critical thinking, and integration, and these roughly translate into how one sees, how one thinks, and how one does. The binding feature of competencies for interdisciplinarians is openness and attunement to context.

The IDS cognitive toolkit includes such things as open-mindedness, empathy, intellectual courage, tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, and appreciation of diversity, and there are a number of helpful pedagogical approaches available. I of-

ten draw on methods from the performing arts (among other sources), well-known for its capacity to cultivate these tools. I incorporate improvisation-like activities, for example. In one exercise students divided into groups and were given thirty minutes to prepare and deliver a skit that conveys the key concepts of the section of the text that they have been assigned. This activity cultivates attunement and intellectual courage. I also employ role-play and immersive learning exercises. In one exercise, I provide a news article, and students are asked to build a hypothetical profile of each person represented in the story including those persons who are only tacitly represented. They are then required to adopt that persona as I pose a series of questions that require the students to explore the host variables surrounding their decisions and the obvious and hidden impact(s) thereof. Empathy and perspective-taking are the main objectives of this activity. In another exercise that I call “generative discourse,” students are paired off and required to debate a controversial topic, but the “winner” is the pair that identifies the most points of common ground.

Throughout the course students are required to engage in exercises and assignments in which they must transfer these skills into their academic work. For example, in one assignment they are given several academic articles about a real-world complex issue. Together we unpack the issue from different points of view, including disciplinary points of view, and students must produce a critical analysis that synthesizes their experiences and insights into a tangible deliverable such as a formal essay or short video presentation.

My approach to teaching is a work in progress. I have adopted a three-stage approach to cultivating the cognitive toolkit: experience, reflection, and application. I seek activities that introduce students to new experiences. Then students are required to reflect on these experiences with the objective being to facilitate metacognitive engagement with their own beliefs and backgrounds to develop an awareness as to how their own perspectives impact how they see and operate in the world. The third stage asks students to apply these skills both in the classroom and beyond. Trial and error has been a productive, if sometimes painful, mentor as I seek to iterate and improve my teaching.

The contemporary world is inherently interdisciplinary as our increasingly complex lives demand a sophisticated integration of what we know, what we see, and what we do. Incidentally, or not, the economy is now demanding adept interdisciplinarians capable of skillfully navigating the dynamic uncertainties of this increasingly complex world, and a culture of conformity in education is no longer sufficient to prepare our students to meet these challenges. Unsurprisingly, IDS is emerging as a foundational educational framework due to its capacity to foster a culture of intellectual agility and creativity. The cog-

nitive toolkit of IDS is indeed essential for doing good academic work, but more importantly, I believe, it is essential for doing good in the world.

Using Name Tents to Improve Engagement

Katelyn Cooper



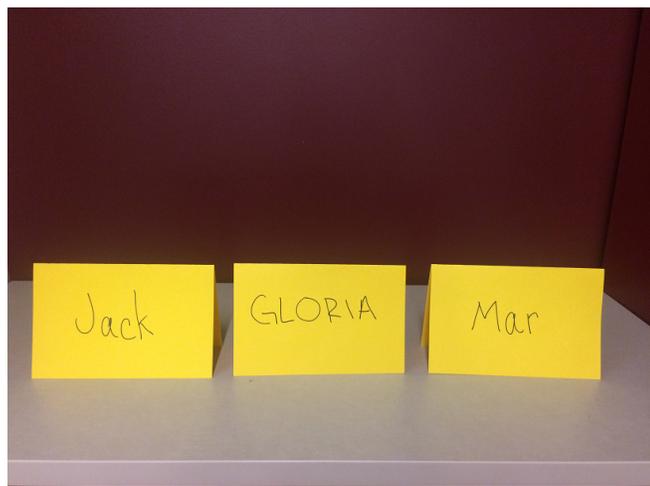
Katelyn Cooper is Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology. She is a discipline-based education researcher (DBER) whose research focuses on how to improve the learning experiences of undergraduates in biology. Specifically, she studies how to create equitable and inclusive active learning classrooms and undergraduate research experiences. Katelyn teaches small-enrollment DBER course-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs) where students engage in authentic biology education research projects in the classroom as well as large-enrollment physiology courses.

Problem: Staring into a sea of nearly 200 faces in my physiology course, I realized how much I wanted to know my students, but what an uphill battle that was going to be. I myself had sat in plenty of large-enrollment classrooms where I felt like just another number, and I figured many of my students felt the same way. I wanted to learn their names. However, whether you’re good with names or not, I find that learning 200 names is just too difficult, especially when you’re developing new curriculum, implementing evidence-based teaching strategies, and managing classroom technology.

Innovation: I read an article, [“Structure Matters: Twenty-One Teaching Strategies to Promote Student Engagement and Cultivate Classroom Equity,”](#) which highlighted the importance of using student names and suggested instructors have students make name tents by folding a brightly colored piece of cardstock in half and writing their name in large letters on the front and back. Students could bring the name tents to class and the instructor could use them to call students by name during class.

Implementation: I decided to use name tents in my 200-person classroom. On the first day of class, I placed a ream of cardstock and Sharpies at the back of the class and instructed students to make a name tent. They were told to bring their name tent to class with them every day. If you’re thinking, “But my students would never bring them back every week,” or, “They’ll just lose them,” I had these concerns too. Each day, my first slide reminded students to put out their name

tent, and if they forgot to bring their name tent, they were invited to make a new one. After the first couple weeks, name tents were a classroom norm and students regularly put them out as soon as they sat down.



My teaching-assistants (TAs) and I made an effort to use the name tents as often as possible. Instructors could use them to call on students in front of the whole class, but I prefer not to do that in large-enrollment classes because it can cause students anxiety (See “The influence of active learning practices on student anxiety in large-enrollment college science classrooms”). However, I teach in an active learning way, meaning that I lecture for a short period of time (e.g., 5 minutes) and then ask students to talk with their neighbors, work on a worksheet, or answer a clicker question. Therefore, there are many instances in each class period for me to walk around the classroom and interact with students one-on-one. During each interaction, I used students’ names. For example, “Juana, tell me what you’re thinking about this problem,” or, “Darian, tell me why you don’t think ‘C’ is the answer.” Using their names makes the interaction far more personal.

Assessment: I surveyed students on the final day of class about their experience in physiology. I found that over 75% of students perceived that I knew their name. As I can personally attest, I could not name 75% of my students. As such, I was excited that using student names was enough; I didn’t have to actually learn student names in order for them to perceive that I knew their names! Students also reported an array of ways in which having their name known by an instructor positively affected them, including making them feel more valued, more invested in the course, more comfortable getting help, and they perceived that it built classroom community. You can read more about what I found in the article [“What’s in a name? The importance of students perceiving that an instructor knows their name in a high-enrollment biology classroom.”](#)

Other ways to use name tents: I’ve fielded many interesting suggestions about how to leverage name tents further. For example, you can ask students to write their pronouns (e.g., she/hers, they/them, him/his) on their name tents. This can help members of the LGBTQ+ community feel more included in class and normalize the practice of sharing one’s pronouns. Further, if instructors use name tents to call on students when they do not volunteer in front of the whole class, a practice that can induce anxiety in students, Cynthia Brame at the Associate Director of the Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching suggests having students put a black box on one side of their name tent. On days when students do not feel as though they can participate, they can put their black box forward as a way to ask the instructor not to call on them. I’m sure there are many more creative ways that instructors are implementing name tents, and I am always excited to learn from them!

Submissions

The *Faculty Focus* is a publication for all instructors at the University of Central Florida. This includes full-time and part-time faculty and teaching assistants at all UCF campuses. Its purpose is to provide an exchange of ideas on teaching and learning for the university's community of teachers and scholars. It is envisioned that this publication will inspire more dialogue among faculty whether in hallway discussions, departmental meetings, or in written articles. This represents an opportunity for faculty members to reach their peers throughout the growing UCF community. The *Faculty Focus* invites you to contribute your ideas on teaching and learning in a short essay. See the guidelines for submission online at <<https://fctl.ucf.edu/teaching-resources/faculty-focus/>>. Please send your submissions to fctl@ucf.edu.

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