



Contains articles by:

- Linda Walters
- Amanda Koontz
- Kasi Jackson
- Amanda Main
- Sean Robb
- Mel Stanfill
- Anastasia Salter
- Martha García
- Jacquelin Flores-Otero
- Matthew Rex
- Julie Donnelly
- Sandra Sousa
- Steve Haberlin
- Estrella Rodriguez
- Quynh Dang
- Xiaoxiao Fu
- Taoues Hadour Myers
- Carissa Baker
- Juliana Tkatch
- Rachid Ait Maalem Lahcen
- Katia Ferdowsi
- Laurie Uttich
- Houman Sadri
- Richard Plate

Listserv

Sign up to receive our monthly e-mail newsletter. Please visit [the Faculty Center website](https://fctl.ucf.edu) for instructions.

How Often Do You Hear, “I Can’t Wait for my Next Departmental Faculty Meeting!”?



Pictured from left to right:

- Linda Walters, Professor of Biology,
- Amanda Koontz, Associate Professor of Sociology,
- J. Kasi Jackson, Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at West Virginia University and Director of the ADVANCE Center.

UCF faculty have spoken, and many would value stronger connections with their colleagues. One unexpected vehicle is the oft-dreaded departmental faculty meeting. Common frustrations include: “it is a waste of time;” “nothing ever changes;” or “only the loudest voices are ever heard.” Moreover, some departments don’t gather their faculty regularly, only hosting departmental meetings once each semester or not at all. Whether frequent or infrequent, faculty meetings often focus on “problem-solving.” Due to this practice, faculty are likely to leave with a sense of negativity due to the emphasis on difficulties. If enough faculty share this view, a negative departmental climate results.

As part of a UCF NSF ADVANCE grant focused on positive departmental cultures, we brought Dr. J. Kasi Jackson (Director, West Virginia University ADVANCE Center; Professor, Women’s and Gender Studies) to campus in late 2023. Dr. Jackson has over a decade’s worth of experience helping departments build collaborative cultures via being a Co-PI on WVU’s NSF ADVANCE

IT funding (2009-2017), and subsequently leading the WVU ADVANCE Center (2017-current). We asked her to provide insights into ways that departments at UCF could enhance departmental culture.

The goal of the remainder of this article is to share her team’s ideas to help departments build collective group energy. Before reading any further, take a moment, and think of a recent meeting that you left shaking your head, wondering what just happened, and how that time could have been better spent...

Dr. Jackson started our UCF workshop emphasizing that our first task for improving departmental culture is to build trust among group members. She started with a connection exercise in which participants selected slogans on buttons representing what brought them to the workshop. After each person articulated their purpose in attending, the group began a visioning exercise in which each person described their “ideal meeting” (“no meeting” was excluded as an option). Then participants answered two questions: a) “What does it feel like when a group works together?” and b) “What does it look like when group members support each other?” Everyone in the workshop shared positive meeting experiences and agreed that “ideal” meetings have an indescribable energy when there is a shared goal that all folks in the room understand and want to support. Rather than remain focused on a pre-defined problem and unknowns, the “problem” should be reframed as a goal, creating an opening for creative, new, and untested ideas. After helping to synthesize our thoughts, Dr. Jackson shared information from the WVU ADVANCE Center’s research on concrete steps to improve meeting culture from their recent book, *Engaging Faculty in Group-Level Change for Institutional Transformation* (Routledge 2023).

Focus the group's energy by defining the ground rules and what is within our scope: Meetings often go “off the rails” for two reasons. One is that ground rules are often taken-for-granted, rather than being explicitly set. This can lead to incidental conflict, such as if some participants adopt the approach of majority rules vs. passage requires unanimous agreement, or differences in the importance or meaning of a “safe space.” The second reason is that “off-topic” agendas enter the conversation. By building consensus and prioritizing the goal(s) at the outset of the meeting, the meeting experience can be improved for all. Likewise, meeting participants must be able to disentangle personal conflicts from the meeting goal. Going even further toward success, if the group identifies consensus practices that will help them meet their goal, then the energy stays in the room. Dr. Jackson suggests the process to reach consensus has the following stages:

1. Designate a “Parking Lot” to capture items that the group cannot change.
2. “Connect-Vision” in which individual needs/values/motivations are collected and similarities/differences are recognized.
3. “Prioritize-Action” that links shared values and recognizes individual needs. In their book, Jackson and her WVU ADVANCE teammates explain that “Consensus is not an indication of groupthink or complete agreement; rather it is a process during which all group members feel their concerns are heard, even if they do not fully agree with the result. Needs are met to the extent that participants support forward movement. Ideally, building connections among the group during the work process builds a sense of caring for the others' well-being.”

Generate collective energy for decision making by differentiating meeting strategies: Dr. Jackson and colleagues at WVU ADVANCE recommend understanding the difference between two meeting strategies: Dialogue vs. Debate. As few faculty want to attend meetings that they characterize as combative or in which they feel excluded or unheard, defining and focusing on dialogue can keep a meeting moving toward the stated objective.

Dialogue	Debate
Finding common ground is the goal	Winning is the goal
Participants listen to increase understanding and find meaning	Participants are determined to be right
Participant's point of view is enlarged and possibly changed	Participant's point of view is affirmed
The group atmosphere created is safe; facilitators get agreement on and enforce working agreements to enhance safety and promote respectful exchange	The atmosphere is threatening; attacks and interruptions are expected by participants and are usually permitted by moderators
Assumptions are revealed for reevaluation	Assumptions are defended as truths
There is the possibility of reaching a better solution than any existing solutions	One's own positions are defended as the best solution; other solutions are excluded, and the new solutions are not considered
Holds that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them back into a workable solution	Holds that there is a right answer and that someone has it

Table from Chapter 7, “Dialogue and Deliberation Processes” (Heierbacher 2008, Berrett-Koehler Publishers).

Identify next actions and build accountability: In reaching consensus during meetings, Dr. Jackson suggests participants identify next actions based on assets (strengths) and build systems of accountability. This includes making a list of concrete tasks needed to accomplish the prioritized goal(s) and distributing the tasks equitably, taking into consideration such traits as standing in the department. As faculty notoriously push back against being told what to do, meeting leaders should encourage people to choose their tasks, rather than assigning them. That said, it is critical that each task has a name or names assigned, with a deadline, at the end of the meeting.

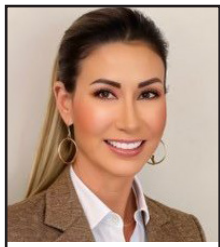
Taking an active approach to improving departmental meetings through these steps will improve departmental climates (a primary goal of UCF ADVANCE). In the long run, benefits to this include: (1) improving faculty satisfaction, retention, and success; (2) addressing perceptual

gaps between the chair and faculty; and (3) knowing that all faculty are negatively affected by a hostile climate while a harmonious climate benefits everyone. Departmental leaders (formal or informal) do make a difference, and faculty morale is highest with collective input and influence in departmental decisions.

Faculty Ownership of Programmatic Assessment:

A Call to Action

Amanda Main & Sean Robb



Amanda M. Main is Associate Chair and Lecturer of Management and the Assurance of Learning Coordinator for the College of Business Administration. She is an Industrial and Organizational Psychologist focused on Conflict Resolution and Negotiation, and Mistreatment in the Workplace.



Sean W.G. Robb is the Chief Learning Officer and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs in the College of Business Administration. He is an ICAO Doctoral Fellow and Chartered Professional Accountant, with research interests in financial accounting, auditing, and international accounting.

Assurance of learning, or program assessment as it is often labelled, is ideally a process by which faculty perform informal but structured classroom research to determine the extent to which students are mastering the learning competencies, and developing the requisite soft skills that are needed by academic programs. It is an ongoing process designed to facilitate the continuous improvement of academic programs, and by extension, the higher education institutions offering those programs. Ideally, data collected through this process is carefully analyzed by program committees composed of faculty members. This analysis is then used to fuel conversations about continuous improvement.

Unfortunately, at many institutions there are serious impediments to faculty ownership of assurance of learning, including misaligned and inadequate resources to support the goals of program assessment. Often these resource problems result in program assessment that is driven by administrators and assessment professionals rather than by faculty themselves.

Programmatic assessment is a universal need in higher education. Pressure from accreditors and public demands for

accountability mean that colleges and universities must invest substantial resources in assessing student learning outcomes and documenting the results. For instance, the College of Business' accreditor is the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). AACSB accreditation represents the highest standard of achievement for business schools worldwide. Under five percent of business schools worldwide have earned this accreditation, which requires strict adherence to evolving rigorous standards. Accreditation must be reestablished every five years. AACSB standards for assurance of learning have two foundational goals: accountability and continuous improvement. These standards require that faculty have "ownership of, and a deep involvement in" the process of assuring that students are learning. Of course, other constituents influence any assurance of learning process, including students, alumni, employers and department and college advisory boards. Nonetheless, faculty participation in, and control of, the assurance of learning process is critical for maintaining accreditation.

Faculty reluctance around assessment is understandable. Professors, lecturers, and instructors are passionate about their disciplines and devoted to their students. Time devoted to service in the form of program assessment is viewed as time taken away from core interests in teaching and research. Administrative responsibilities in the form of program assessment can feel burdensome rather than a valuable use of time. There are also legitimate concerns about how assessment data could be misused, such as linking it narrowly to instructor performance rather than to systemic outcomes such as program improvement. If data collected from assurance of learning programs is to be used correctly, it is time for faculty to step up and take ownership of programmatic assessment.

Faculty ownership of assessment provides important benefits that outweigh the above challenges. Faculty-driven assessment processes more accurately reflect disciplinary goals and standards than those handed down from units far removed from the curricular content. Faculty also have the most interaction with students and are closest to the point of production and thus best understand gaps in learning that assessment can help uncover and address. Stepping up as assessment leaders allows faculty to shape the direction of program assessment toward improvement-focused accountability rather than strictly performative metrics.

So how can institutions encourage more faculty engagement and leadership in assessment?

First, messaging at every level, from provost to dean to chair, should highlight assessment as an opportunity for faculty to actively advance their priorities—strengthening programs, supporting student successes, and upholding

disciplinary quality. An attempt should be made to connect program assessment to values faculty already hold rather than positioning it as an administrative mandate. In line with this messaging, institutions must properly recognize and reward faculty engagement in assessment activities. Service dedicated to program assessment should be explicitly valued with research and teaching in promotion criteria and annual evaluations. Faculty who agree to accept leadership roles in program assessment initiatives should receive additional compensation in the form of course releases and/or stipends for their extra work. Administrators should make it clear that effort expended on program assessment advances faculty careers rather than stalling them.

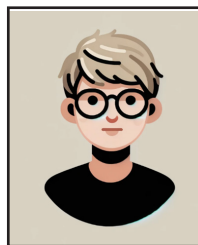
Second, structural support should be provided to ensure faculty ownership. Institutions need more faculty development around assessment so that faculty completely understand key concepts, best practices, and the technical rules and requirements of accreditation related to all aspects of assurance of learning. Workshops or communities of practice led by faculty assessment leaders can establish assessment as a scholarly endeavor. Administrators can help to network faculty doing exemplary assessment work within colleges, so that others on campus can learn from them. Colleges and departments should also provide faculty with tangible support to reduce the often heavy burden of taking on assessment ownership. This could include providing access to assessment software, data analytics assistance, graduate assistant support, or workload reductions for faculty leading major assessment projects. Even small stipends in recognition of time spent on assessment leadership would go a long way towards showing institutional commitment.

Finally, institutions should meaningfully involve faculty in every level of assessment planning, implementation, and use. If assessment processes are done “to” faculty rather than empowering faculty leadership of assessment, buy-in will always be limited. Faculty representation on committees, input-gathering on policies, and transparency in data use and decision-making are key.

Programmatic assessment presents challenges but also dramatic opportunities to enhance student learning, strengthen institutional effectiveness, uphold academic standards, and advance our mission as educators. Fulfilling this promise requires faculty to step up as owners and leaders in assessment. By providing motivation, development, support and shared governance, our institutions can help overcome faculty reluctance to participate. Working together, we can shape assessment processes that generate meaningful improvements for students and programs we deeply care about. The time for faculty leadership in assessment is now.

Remix Culture Approaches to AI

Mel Stanfill



Mel Stanfill is Associate Professor in the Texts & Technology doctoral program, the Literary, Cultural, and Textual Studies MA program, and Faculty Affiliate in Womens' and Gender Studies. In addition to teaching and mentoring, Stanfill's research focuses on how people interact with media, particularly fans.

If you've spent much time playing with ChatGPT or other generative AI tools in the context of teaching, you've probably found that these tools can easily do things like generate summaries of or find themes in existing works, identify scholars who have written about particular topics, and more—producing some of the same assignments that we give to students, and doing so with pretty decent accuracy. That is, understandably, a bit unsettling, but it's worth interrogating why it is that it's unsettling. I'd posit that the reason it bothers us is that a student who turned something like that in would be cheating (and we probably couldn't catch them at it). But I think we also need to interrogate why cheating bothers us, and fundamentally that's because they're getting credit for work they didn't do. It's a labor question: They're not doing the work when other students are, and they're devaluing our work of teaching them.

However, this isn't the first time a new technology has come along and unsettled how we think about the labor of making things, and I think there are some valuable insights to be gleaned from those earlier moments. Way back in 1991, rapper Biz Markie's song “Alone again” sampled Gilbert O'Sullivan's “Alone Again (Naturally)” (1972). There was a lawsuit, and the judge's ruling declared, “Thou shalt not steal.” Markie was using somebody else's music to make new music, but he was seen as stealing rather than creatively reworking something that already existed, and I argue that this is the same kind of knee-jerk reaction we are having to generative AI: You're not doing work in a way that I recognize. You're drawing on something you didn't create. You're cheating. Or stealing. In much the same way that in music we have come to recognize samples, mashups, and other kinds of remix as creative work in their own right even though they build on someone else's work, we have to question the immediate negative reaction to AI and think differently about what it is that we're all doing. We need the politics of remix to understand AI.

At root, we have a gut feeling that using AI to do coursework is about fairness. Is it fair for students to earn grades without actually doing the work? Is it fair to the other students who aren't using those tools? Is it respectful of the labor we put

in to teach and evaluate students for them to not be doing the labor of assignments? Those are all key questions that are what we are ultimately grappling with in the current contestation over AI.

To the question of whether it is fair for students to earn grades without actually doing the work, this raises another question: When students generate assignments with AI rather than writing them themselves, are they actually being educated (and about what)? We assign work for two reasons: Students need to practice the things they're supposed to be learning, and we need to assess whether they've learned those things. They need to actually do the work to serve both of those purposes: otherwise, they can't learn and we can't assess. It has always been true that we have quite limited options when students just don't do the work, and if we want students to succeed those limits bother us—and now we can't even catch them when they don't really do the work, which is worse.

But the AI shift pushes us to ask different questions. Are we assigning work because students need to practice and we need to assess? Or are we assigning things out of habit or because that's how we were taught? And if we're not really helping students practice, what are we actually teaching them to do? If we're assigning work just to assign it, then what we're teaching students to do is follow directions and produce formulaic text. In such a case, we ourselves have already devalued thinking and writing. Why would they not use a text generator? Trying to stamp out use of generative AI thus becomes an endless game of whac-a-mole.

But what if we think about generative AI more like sampling? What can the politics of remix tell us about AI? In my recent book, I analyzed 10 years of cultural responses to musical remix, finding that to make sense of them, I needed rather different questions than have been raised in moral panics about plagiarism: When is reworking someone else's creation doing work, and when is it free-riding? How skillful and transformative is the addition to the existing work? Is it respectful of the source? Through this research, I developed a model of ethical reuse with three components: attribution (giving credit for what you're using from somebody else), compensation (paying people for their labor), and control (letting people have control over what is done with their creative work). At the end of the day, compensation and control are determined by the actions of OpenAI and other companies who have built products on other people's backs, and I don't have space to get into the ways thinking and writing have been devalued by being reduced to training data. But attribution we can do on the end-user side, combined with those key questions about labor, transformation, and respect. Students need to be transparent not only that they are using AI, but also of the prompts and what modifications

were made to the outputs. The use of these tools needs to also be transformative. That's how we can strike a better balance between protection and reuse in AI and not repeat the mistakes of earlier media forms.

Stanfill, Mel. 2023. *Rock This Way: Cultural Constructions of Musical Legitimacy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.press.umich.edu/12405073>.

Generative AI and Electronic Literature

Anastasia Salter



Anastasia Salter is Professor of English and Director of Graduate Programs and the Texts and Technologies doctoral program. Their research interests include electronic literature, adventure games, digital humanities, media studies, and digital culture.

In classrooms around the world, educators are debating the role of AI and its potential to “disrupt” norms. In the arts and humanities, generative AI is particularly of interest because of the ways it both reflects and appears to produce objects in conversation with human cultural production. When I refer to generative AI, I'm using the MLA and CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI Working Group's definition referring to “computer systems that can produce, or generate, various forms of traditionally human expression, in the form of digital content including language, images, video, and music.” What that means is that if you are teaching anything that involves text, images, code, or the combination thereof, or teaching with any modern software package, you can expect to see the interventions of generative AI in your classroom.

That same MLA-CCCC task force is calling for “critical AI literacy” (2023) as an essential focus for humanities educators. I want to offer some perspectives on approaching this challenge as someone who's been teaching with a lot of these tools for a long time, before they attracted significant attention thanks to ChatGPT. As part of my work in this area, I recently led a team in developing our new graduate certificate (approved by the university committee for fall 2024), Digital Humanities in the Age of AI, and an intensive graduate course exploring the impact of generative AI on textual, visual, and code-driven creativity and research.

My approach to generative AI in the humanities classroom centers computational creativity and digital humanities methods for both understanding the relationship of large-language models to existing cultural production and exploring their future potential. Computational creativity has historically been framed as a means of exploring the potential

of computational systems to make things that resemble the outputs of human creativity, although that framework can be limiting and the term risks erasing the significant role of humans in every part of that “computation”—including the vast histories of cultural production that are now serving as input for the generative AI tools you might have tried.

Rather than start by teaching these concepts using current tools, I build toward critical AI literacy through understanding ChatGPT as a new interface on a type of work with a much longer history: the current hype-cycle risks making generative AI synonymous with corporate chat-bots, which is a very narrow lens through which to understand this work. In my field of electronic literature, this type of creativity and play with text generation particularly is an established form. Building from that history and interrogating previous attempts to cast computers as authors, artists, and therapists, my courses start students with “small” language models through to current practices using both commercial and open-source generative AI tools.

Here, I use small language models somewhat in jest, in the spirit of another electronic literature and digital humanities practitioner Mark Sample’s usage: models “handcrafted by humans.” I am referring to practices of text generation that are more intentionally human-authored. An example that captures a lot of the popular imaginary and is often cited in the history of this field is the 1984 book, *The Policeman’s Beard is Half Constructed* attributed to a computer system called Racter, programmed by William Chamberlain and Thomas Etter. As Leah Henrickson notes, this wasn’t “the first book ever written by a computer” despite its advertisements, but it was one of the first marketed towards a mass audience. The underlying system is not so dissimilar from some of the methods of text generation I teach as part of exploring literary programming.

A common entry point into this practice in my classroom starts with Nick Montfort’s generative poem “Taroko Gorge.” Originally programmed in Python and rewritten in JavaScript for the web, Nick Montfort’s poem is powered by a set of variables that can easily be redefined by the user—so, selecting new verbs and nouns can fundamentally retheme an endless poem that is initially about an experience of nature. We collected a set of compelling remixes of this poem in the “Taroko Gorge Remixes” subsection of the Electronic Literature Volume 3, with themes addressing everything from cooking to the life of George Takei. Exploring these texts (which share the same underlying code) offers perspective on how even simple models of text generation can appear to craft meaning, both in ways that the author may have anticipated and through unusual moments that emerge from juxtapositions.

From those beginnings, there are many worlds of generative literature and textual imaginaries to explore—some powered by generative AI, and others using grammars (with language substitutions, like “Taroko Gorge”) while others use Markov chains and other methods of combining language based on existing syntax. For an introduction to that experimental space, I recommend playing with Tracery, a tool created by Kate Compton that allows for experimentation with grammar-based generation for everything from poetry to podcast scripts. More ambitious projects are released yearly as part of NanoGenMo, or National Novel Generation Month, which hosts an archive of over a decade of different experiments with computer authored novels and graphic novels, such as Zach Whalen’s fantastic experiments with using an earlier generative AI tool (StyleGan2) to create comics.

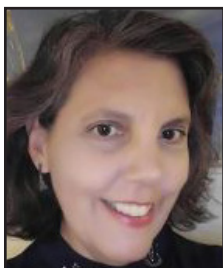
By understanding this history, we can better introduce students to the idea that ChatGPT and its many well-marketed competitors are offering new interfaces for an evolving set of practices. This can help alleviate some of the novelty shock and hype factors surrounding the way we discuss ChatGPT currently and make visible both the strengths and weaknesses of generative AI tools. Most critically, these approaches make visible the role of human labor in the apparently algorithmic, bringing into focus the reality that this next generation of “computer-authored” novels is still written by people.

1. See their working paper at: <https://aiandwriting.hcommons.org/working-paper-1/>
2. Per Mark Sample’s workshop: <https://web.sas.upenn.edu/dream-lab/creative-coding-2024/>
3. Henrickson, Leah. “Constructing the Other Half of The Policeman’s Beard”, Electronic Book Review, April 4, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.7273/2bt7-pw23>.
4. Available at: <https://collection.eliterature.org/3/collection-taroko.html>
5. Available at: <http://www.crystalcodepalace.com/tracery.html>
6. Available at: <https://nanogenmo.github.io/>
7. See it in action generating: <http://code.zachwhalen.net/projects/ai-generates-comic-panels>



Nature Conservation in Writing and Literature Courses

Martha García



Martha García is Professor of Modern Languages & Literatures and Faculty Liaison of the Honors Undergraduate Thesis Programs in the College of Arts & Humanities. She coordinates and advises for the Spanish BA Program and the Minor in Spanish. Her research and teaching, concentrate on Medieval, Early Modern, and the Enlightenment

of Spain.

Preliminary Considerations, Views, and Context:

As faculty, part of our mission is to position undergraduate and graduate students well for their professional, academic, and/or postgraduate endeavors. Our courses offer means through which we can provide the space to keep cultivating awareness about practices that allow them to contribute to their future professions and communities. The word sustainability, epistemologically, encompasses the ability to sustain, maintain, and conserve the resources that have been entrusted to the care of communities. Jessica Ostrow Michel invites us to reflect on the need of preserving the resources that are already in use and better understand the ability to sustain a shared heritage towards a shared vision (24-26). Carol Scarff Seatter and Kim Ceulemans have explained the difficulties of locating these premises within a specific subject or discipline (48-49). How and when would it be viable and appropriate for educators and learners to integrate the conservation of natural resources into a subject of study without overlooking the intended objectives for each course?

To this aim, I have pondered when and how to incorporate vertices of the stewardship of natural resources represented across the textuality of world languages, specifically, in Spanish composition and literature. This praxis would contribute not only to enhancing language acquisition and literary knowledge, but also in providing a space for learners to discover applicable topics through reading, writing, research, literary analysis, and creative work. To teach and align with the intended subject of study, the emphasis concentrates, for example, on selecting a specific chapter in the middle of the semester and design a module, which will offer several questions or activities for the students to choose and explore one of them while, at the same time, students practice the Spanish language or analyze the texts in literature courses. This module scheduled in the middle of the term when learners are already immersed in the intended subject, constitutes an effective praxis for students across disciplines

to foment and encourage analytical skills and, by extension, an applicable tool of assessment and evaluation of language and writing composition for the faculty.

In Fall of 2022, I joined the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning with a community of colleagues interested in sustainability across disciplines. In Spring of 2023, I integrated a module in the Advanced Spanish Writing and Composition course for the assignments designated to the study and practice of formal communication in writing through literary analysis and narrative. The module provided guidelines for the students to author a formal essay with one of these examples of possibilities:

1. How would you define sustainability?
2. When would be the best time for you to spend time in nature and write your reflections in a journal?
3. What aspects related to natural resources could you identify in the readings of the assignments in this course up to now? Provide one or two examples to support the thesis of your essay.
4. Write a creative piece inspired by nature.
5. Visit a website of a botanical garden or national park of your choice and author a narrative essay about your virtual tour.
6. How would you apply viable solutions towards the conservation of natural resources based on your area of specialization?
7. Think about the feasibility of a project of your own to demonstrate your interest in the ability to sustain, conserve, and respect shared natural resources.

Students selected one of these questions or prompts that may reflect their level of comfort and knowledge about sustainability in relation to natural resources. Learners counted on the opportunity to explore their place in their communities to contribute to viable solutions taking into consideration their major(s) programs or minor(s) studies. They were able to apply the skills in language acquisition communicating at the formal level of composition while, at the same time, considered a topic that could be novel for some of them and deemed about how to interrelate their professional path into dialogues intended to reach out to a wider audience. This module assists students in understanding the practicality of languages and guides them to a comprehensive discernment of the complexities of concepts and terminology. Throughout this trajectory, students could grasp a post-concept shaped

by their own experience of exploring concepts and notions from the lens of their professional goals and/or postgraduate programs of study.

For the faculty, this module became the most appropriate approach to provide effective feedback regarding the level of knowledge about the subject shared by each of the students. It was rewarding to validate the practicality of the language for professional and postgraduate purposes. This module represents a pragmatic method to evaluate language skills while students embrace and communicate their perspectives or points of view about nature conservation as the starting point of a preconcept. From the position of teaching, assessing, and providing feedback, the integration of this module and the outcomes represented by itself an efficient practice to sustainable teaching and learning. For the faculty, a realm of pedagogical and academic results was successfully achieved while the course objectives were fully accomplished.

Language, Literature, Interdisciplinarity, and Further Considerations:

This integration in Spanish courses suggests the possibility of incorporating an equivalent module into applicable subjects to relate, juxtapose, and continue analyzing the implementation and results of this methodology. The findings will inform this pedagogical structure according to the needs of the students and will, at the same time, enhance the students' skills for research and/or creative activities in their subject area. This teaching and learning constituent, in sum, has been efficacious because of the contextualization of the applicable aspects of sustainability focused on the principles of the conservation of natural resources and within the course objective(s) of language acquisition, with the specific purpose of practicing reading, writing, and literary analysis for college education and professional goals. The results surpass the expectations and unleash the potential for unlimited opportunities for the students, for interdisciplinarity projects, and for teaching and learning as well.

Michel, Jessica Ostrow. "Toward Conceptualizing Education for Sustainability in Higher Education." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 2020.161 (2020): 23-33.

Seatter, Carol Scarff and Kim Ceulemans. "Teaching Sustainability in Higher Education: Pedagogical Styles that Make a Difference." *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*. 47.2 (2017): 47-70.

Targeted Education as a Tool to Reach Neurodiversity Pathways in Student Learning

Jacqueline Flores-Otero



Jacqueline Flores-Otero is Clinical Associate Professor of Anatomy and Director of the Division of Physical Therapy-Human Gross Anatomy Lab. She teaches neuroplasticity and human gross anatomy courses to graduate and undergraduate students. She also mentors graduate and undergraduate students and serves as chair in undergraduate students' thesis research projects. Her extensive experience in the fields of neuroscience and human anatomy provides a solid foundation to understand and help students maintain their well-being and stable mental health.

Successful education of a diverse spectrum of students requires more than just experience and a professional degree. Current challenges that we as educators face include identifying innovative ways in which we can reach our students' individual needs when it comes to facilitating effective and long-lasting learning. In a course like Human Gross Anatomy, I find students sharing how they've previously been spooked by the level of complexity of the course and, whether because it is a requirement of their degree, or because taking the course is a step that would get them closer to attending graduate school, they enroll after long days of procrastination. Recognizing this has encouraged me to wonder, as educators of a complex course, how can we best prepare to reach students' interest and engagement to the point that we expand their attention span? Ultimately, what we aim for is for them to learn and discover their capacity to break the barriers that limit them from reaching their best potential. But how can we achieve that?

As a neuroscientist, it's impossible not to consider the role that the brain plays in these processes. If we consider the "multistore memory model" proposed by Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin in 1968, we know that the more sensory inputs (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) are received in the brain, the more effectively the probability the primary sensory cortex (S1) will receive that information to send it to the secondary sensory cortex (S2) where it will be processed. In other words, while in S1 sensory inputs are received and identified or decoded, in S2 they are further processed and retained. Before this information reaches short-term memory brain areas, it must be stored as sensory memory in the occipital and temporal lobes. If a focused attention span is sustained for a prolonged time, which is not the case in humans (8.25 seconds) sensory memory information is transferred to short-term memory brain areas, like the pre-frontal cortex and the

medial temporal lobes. If the learned information (7 ± 2 items) endures for 30 seconds or more, it will move to long-term brain centers, such as the hippocampus (located in the temporal lobe, which consolidates new memories) and amygdala (which forms and retains new memories of emotionally arousing experiences). Other long-term brain regions include the cerebellum, the motor cortex, and the frontal lobe.

In this linear process of learning and memory, the challenge that I often see in students who are struggling in a course is the inability to pay the attention that is required for the learned information to be transferred to short-term memory centers of the brain. Even when they try to rehearse the material over and over, it becomes impossible because, in the first place, the material presented was never learned, hence it can never reach long-term brain centers. Whether this is due to stress and anxiety, lack of sleep and food deprivation, personal problems or worries, lack of purpose, health problems, or poor study skills, many of our students cannot separate these things from their professional lives. They need to be intentional in funneling out the noise, but when they don't have an effective mechanism to do so, what can we do to help them?

I would like to share some steps that I have taken to better understand, direct, and mentor my students and I self-evaluate my teaching modalities.

Step #1 - Survey before first class: This will inform us about our students' background in the topics that will be discussed. We aim to provide our students with high-quality education and therefore, examining how we approach that aim for every course, based on their needs, would help us tailor what we teach to ensure effective appraisal courses.

Step #2 - Bring awareness of what can be controlled: One practice that I will be formally conducting this Summer is starting my first class teaching graduate students precisely about what I am writing here, how the brain works in learning and memory. From day one, we need to help students feel confident that they have what it takes to succeed in our courses. If they become aware of how their brain processes the information that it receives throughout their education, they will be more intentional in giving meaning to the information being presented. This will encourage sustained attention which will lead to the formation of short-term memories.

Step #3: Emphasize "neuroplasticity": Remind students that the brain is not static, it's plastic. It can rewire as it adapts to changes in its environment; the more students rehearse the learned information, using different sensory stimuli, the more and the stronger the neuronal pathways they create when the information moves from short-term to long-term memory regions of the brain.

Step #4: Know when and how to hook your students: If we include a question on the survey that helps us delineate the different types of learners that we have in every cohort, we can be more strategic in crafting our lectures and delivering information when teaching. Because our goal is for students to connect with us, whatever we teach must reach their emotions and/or curiosity. This can be achieved through a personal experience, a clinical scenario, a challenging concept that would lead to educational discussions, or a revealing scientific finding that goes against common beliefs or assumptions. Whatever the teaching modality, the hook aims to engage until long-lasting impressions are created.

Step #5: Create a multisensory approach to reach neurodiverse student populations: We can create different assignments that align with the diverse spectrum of students that enroll in our courses to meet them right where they are. Learning at their own pace and using approaches that align with their learning style will give students a sense of freedom, which will lead to their engagement.

If we think about it, these ideas did not just arise, these are steps that we may hear about in workshops, readings, or seminars. However, we've underestimated the connection between them and as a result, we continue to be challenged in our mission to provide students with high-quality education and long-lasting learning experiences. As an educator, I have learned to value the fact that to play a role in shaping the formation of excellent professionals that serve our community, we must significantly invest in elucidating innovative ways to reach students by offering group as well as individualized educational tools that make learning and memory approachable. By bringing students awareness of the tools that they already have and how they can take advantage of what they can control, we will not only empower them but we will also steer their optimal academic performance.



The Department of Chemistry Undergraduate Learning Assistants Program

Matthew Rex & Julie Donnelly



Matthew Rex is a Senior Lecturer and the Undergraduate Program Coordinator for the Chemistry Department. He also handles maintenance and training of spectroscopy and materials characterization instrumentation for the department.



Julie Donnelly is a Lecturer in the Chemistry Department. She is the Chemistry Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Assistant Coordinator and does some SoTL work in faculty adoption of effective instructional practices.

Undergraduate learning assistants (ULAs) are students who provide support to students enrolled in courses the ULA has successfully completed. As near-peers, ULAs can provide unique support to students struggling with difficult material. While the way that ULAs are implemented varies widely between institutions and departments, a common goal of a ULA program is to support course transformation efforts to facilitate more research-based instructional practices. Three main elements of the ULA experience support this goal: pedagogy training, content prep meetings, and interactions with students. In this article, we would like to share how these three elements of the ULA program in the Chemistry department started, how they developed, and what they look like now.

How it started (Matt)

I remember going to my first teaching conference that required actual travel. I was excited, I got to drive outside Orlando and stay in a charming hotel room! At the conference I attended a talk about utilizing Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULA) in the classroom. As someone that routinely teaches large courses, I was intrigued with extra assistance in the classroom for student learning. I had tried to implement small group work and other in-class exercises but was hampered by an instructor to student ratio of 385:1. With half a dozen ULAs in the classroom, I could get this ratio down to 55:1 and some of my ideas might now be feasible.

I was inspired! My mind was racing as I travelled back to Orlando and UCF. The following week I proposed the idea of Learning Assistants to the chair of the department. I knew I would have to start small and grow the program slowly. I proposed a one-time single credit pedagogy course for the

ULAs with additional hours helping students paid by the department or college. The goal of this course is for new ULAs to develop strategies for interacting with students to support their learning. We cover topics including learning theories, questioning techniques that help elicit student ideas, and how to facilitate group discourse. The proposal floated up through administration and after much deliberation a three credit ULA training/pedagogy course was settled upon.

I taught the course for the first time ever in the summer of 2019 to just four ULAs. As is typical of other ULA courses, we met one day a week to cover pedagogy topics, one day a week to discuss material in the CHM1020 course they would assist in, and then one day a week they were in my classroom helping students. I personally recruited those ULAs. They had all previously taken classes with me and I knew firsthand they would excel assisting with student learning, and they would also find the process enjoyable. The four ULAs learned a lot that semester about teaching, learning, and a lot about themselves as well. This was also a big learning experience for me. I never expected such positive results from the students in CHM1020 and how much the course enriched the four ULAs.

How it grew

That first version of CHM4942, Instructional Experiences in Undergraduate Chemistry, was rough. It was Frankensteined together from ULA syllabi at other institutions and topics I thought I should cover in this type of course. The grading rubric was sparse and not as clear as it should have been. Yet every semester I took in feedback from the students and other instructors that taught similar courses in physics and psychology and have improved radically upon the material covered in class, the grading rubrics, and additional resources available to the ULAs.

In addition to improvements in the ULA course I was fortunate to get buy in from several faculty in the semesters to come. My enrollment in CHM 4942 increased and I was able to place ULAs not only in introductory chemistry courses, but also in organic chemistry, biochemistry, and lab courses. Five years in, our ULA program is now much more robust and I have been fortunate to have Dr. Donnelly assist me with the program and instructing CHM 4942.

Where we are now (Julie)

Thirty-nine ULAs are supporting the Chemistry instructional team this semester. Many Chemistry faculty have done some kind of course transformation to include ULAs so that they are present in courses across all levels, modalities, and types. They are assisting students during class meetings in flipped classrooms in General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, and Biochemistry. They are hosting office hours in upper-level courses like Analytical and Physical Chemistry. ULAs

are interacting with students in online Chemistry courses like Geology, and as a supplement to the graduate teaching assistants in labs. These are only a few examples; their role is versatile and has proven valuable to the students who recognize the impact the ULAs have on their learning as well as on their sense of belonging in their courses. Many ULAs also find the experience valuable in developing their own content knowledge and feel personally fulfilled by helping other students learn difficult material.

ULAs are held to a high standard as part of the Chemistry instructional team and are required to complete CHM4942 to be hired for their role. Seventeen students are enrolled in this course this semester, which is the largest enrollment in our program's short history, but the goal and content of the course has remained consistent. In Spring 2023, I taught CHM4942 for the first time as a Service Learning course. ULAs serve our local UCF community in their support of students and now they are recognized for that even while they are still "training." Look for their presentations at the High Impact Showcase each semester—one of Matt's ULAs won a scholarship for Outstanding Service-Learning at the showcase in the Fall 2023 semester!

The Chemistry ULA program is continuing to grow. We are now meeting 2-3 times per semester for "Bring Your Own Lunch and Learns." While our first meeting addressed the ULA framework broadly, upcoming meetings will be more focused on topics like how to make the most of the weekly prep session.

As our program grows, we are interested to learn more about what other departments and programs are doing on campus. For example, we've connected with FCTL about the pilot ULA program they are using this semester. Laurie Uttich is teaching a pedagogical training course (0 credit) that may be an option for departments that don't have an existing program. By connecting, we've found that their course is very similar to ours and we may be able to share ideas to develop both!

I Need to Learn How to Live and Die. Where do I Go?

Sandra Sousa



Sandra Sousa is Associate Professor in the Modern Languages and Literatures Department, where she teaches Portuguese language, Lusophone and Latin American Studies. Her research interests include colonialism and post-colonialism; Portuguese colonial literature; race relations in Mozambique; war, dictatorship and violence in contemporary Portuguese and Luso-African literature; and feminine writing in Portuguese, Brazilian and African literature.

Upon beginning my reflection on the recently concluded academic year, I was certain that I was going to write about ChatGPT, since it is the "hot topic" of the moment and a major challenge that we, as educators, are facing now or will be facing in the future. However, I began to question whether this is truly a problem. Bear with me, skeptical or anxious minds out there. This is just an insight and might not be right, nonetheless I believe we should take a moment to entertain this idea. While I acknowledge that ChatGPT presents challenges, I believe it is part of a larger issue that I won't be able to talk about in the confines of 1,000 words. I will then touch on this topic as a whole. It is a problem, but the problem lies in the fact that students are resorting to ChatGPT as a survival tool, and this happens because something else is lacking at our universities. Students' desperation comes from a deeper issue: we are not and have not been doing our jobs right as educators.

Universities in general, and Humanities in particular, are failing students' needs. We are failing them. Why? Because we care more about the content of our disciplines and giving them job market skills than actually looking at them as human beings who are lost in life and needing guidance. Perhaps they are as lost as us. And maybe that is one of the dilemmas created by modern society...because we fail to admit that reality, we fail at what is most important in education: the provision of connection, sharing, moral guidance, ethical framework, and understanding. The statistics are there to prove it: a growing number of students are either abandoning higher education altogether or failing to perceive its worth. Classrooms are empty because we teach our subjects with emptiness, without purpose and meaning. We inverted the values and are placing more importance on the "I" than on the "You", i.e., we care more about money, success, being known in the entire world, and so do the students that we teach who are in the habit of following their role-models. We have lost perspective and so have those, by our influence, that we are educating.

Ever since I embarked upon my teaching journey, I have

firmly believed that a classroom serves as a microcosm of life and, as a consequence, I was always more interested in what I could teach a student from that holistic perspective than from the formal aspect of being able to conjugate a verb flawlessly. *What can a student gain from mastering the perfect conjugation of a verb?* was a permanent question in my mind. The answer was consistently the same: verbs didn't really matter much to me if that student was crying in my office about life issues. With this particular mindset, I believed that it was feasible to merge the formal subject matter that I was teaching with the broader topic of life. Having taught for 22 years, it is only now, possibly due to greater maturity and experience, that I am able to make sense of this approach and articulate it in a more coherent and comprehensible manner. My enhanced understanding has been aided by concepts introduced by contemporary philosophers and psychotherapists who delve into the intricacies of human relationships within the broader context of literature, religion, and culture. This has brought me closer to defining what I have always referred to as "my crazy teaching style." It might sound crazy, obviously, because our institutions don't think they are in the business of providing students with moral guidance, ethical frameworks, or help navigating the hurdles of life. That is the business of mental institutions, the therapeutic and psychological services which have their own designated buildings within the campuses, and most are afraid to be seen going inside. I suspect, as others from whom I borrow some of these insights, that if we don't change our curriculum and teach it in ways that make it more relevant, we will be doomed.

I would like to revisit an assignment that I previously wrote about in one of the *Faculty Focus* issues. I called this activity "Time to celebrate yourselves & be positive," a title I'm not completely confident about. Many times, it's everything *but* positivity, but there's also a positive side to that because this activity creates a space that serves as a reminder to reflect on life and, yes, also death (people actually still die!), and to learn how to navigate learning and other life challenges as a community teaches how to live more fully. An exercise that initially appeared simple to me when I first implemented it, but over the past two years has revealed its complexity, much like the intricacies of all the individuals who participate in it. It has taught me the true value of community and the importance of sharing life experiences. It has also demonstrated that one can never learn in a vacuum and how university education cannot be separated from life; how disciplines are interconnected; and how the expertise that we possess comes from the examples in our lives, which are then supported by the subject matter that we teach, or vice versa depending on one's perspective.

I will share some comments from my students on this assignment that highlight the impact we can make if we are open to change and willing to consider their suggestions:

"It did help me in more than one way going through the semester. It allowed me to take a moment to think about the things in my life. It also left me feeling more connected with my colleagues. I even think about adding a problem solving discussion a few times during the semester would help too. A place to solve issues personal and academic from different perspectives."

- "...my therapist is probably super grateful to you to remind me to do this every week."
- "As a future teacher, I have been interested in this activity from a physiological perspective."
- "This has been a great journey with so many ups and downs! I can confirm that I took my rough start in this class and turned it around to make my grade an A; learned life lessons specifically due to our course's professor; and overall started to actually live life."

It is not the easiest of tasks because you have to be invested, but I have repeatedly witnessed that it is in that tiny space between life and death where humane and meaningful education can happen. EQ and AI are still not the same.

How to Embed Meditation into the Higher Education Classroom: A Five-Step Framework

Steve Haberlin



Steve Haberlin is Assistant Professor of Learning Sciences and Educational Research. He is the author of *Meditation in the College Classroom: A Pedagogical Tool to Help Students De-Stress, Focus, and Connect*.

I vividly recall the undergraduate students' faces when I began teaching courses in higher education about five years ago. When they came into the classroom (and looked up from their cell phones), students often looked tense, stressed, and just plain unhappy. They also looked scattered and far from mentally ready to engage in learning content and higher-level thinking. By the next semester, I realized I needed to try something different. When they entered the classroom, I needed to immediately help them transition and reset their minds, so I began asking them to practice a brief "meditation."

I had practiced meditation since my twenties, finding it helpful, and completed some research on mindfulness and meditation in K-12 settings. In all honesty, a few students gave me strange looks and discretely looked to a classmate as if to say, "What is up with this guy?"

The first meditation technique was simple: I held up a meditation bowl, a small container made of copper that you strike with a wooden mallet, and encouraged them to listen to the sound of the bowl as it vibrated and “faded away.” After a few weeks, I graduated to teaching them what is commonly known as mindfulness meditation or breath awareness. After listening to the bowl, I instructed them to follow or sense their natural breathing as it entered and exited the nostril area. I explained it was natural to get distracted or have thoughts but to easily bring attention back to their breathing as a focal point.

I stuck with the routine and decided to conduct research with some of my classes to see how students perceived meditation in the classroom. I later collaborated with colleagues, expanding our efforts across campus. Other researchers have been doing similar work, studying different outcomes as they relate to student mental health, cognition, and academic performance. Since 2013, there have been about 50 studies conducted on meditation interventions in higher education, with the majority demonstrating positive outcomes.

Mindfulness meditation, for example, has been shown to have a promising positive impact on stress, including among college students. The increased interest in meditation in higher education comes at a time when college students have been reporting historically high stress, anxiety, and depression rates. Unmanaged stress has been connected to a range of negative health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and heart disease. For students, stress has been cited as the largest impediment to academic performance, resulting in a lower grade point average (GPA), disrupted memory of knowledge, and negatively impacting self-regulation.

Five-Step Framework for Meditation Facilitation

The challenge, I found, is there is relatively little literature on how to facilitate meditation in higher education classrooms. There are few trainings as well. The Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults (formerly known as Koru Mindfulness) is geared towards teaching mindfulness to college-aged students and offers a year-long certification. I couldn't find any books that served as a guide for teaching meditation in college classrooms, so I wrote one based on my research and experience. I also devised a Five-Step Meditation Facilitation Framework to serve as a roadmap in the journey of classroom meditation. What follows is a summary of that framework.

Step 1: Establish a Personal Meditation Practice. The general consensus is that anyone teaching meditation practice, including faculty, “need to have a well-established personal practice before beginning to teach” (Burrows, 2017, p. 26). Personally, I agree with this assertion. Meditation is intensely personal and a first-person experience. To guide students

and help them navigate their meditation experiences, you need to have experienced meditation—at least at some level. While this might work with some academic disciplines or subjects, studying meditation from a theoretical viewpoint, is “not enough” as it is a “whole-person experience” involving the mind, body, and heart (Williams et al., 2015, p. 45). As Barbezat and Bush (2013) explain, “There is no effective way to teach contemplative practices without practicing them yourself. You need a deep familiarity with the practices before introducing them so you can guide students through them,” (p. 67–68). Additionally, Kotanski and Hassed (2008) found that teacher experience was a factor in whether participants experienced adverse effects during meditation (more on this later). Establishing a personal meditation practice requires an investment of time, cited as the largest barrier to learning to meditate (Anderson et al., 2019). A positive is that there is currently a plethora of resources available, including books, videos, apps, and online courses to learn meditation. However, it might be best to connect with an experienced meditation teacher as an entry point, as this approach is most associated with sustaining long-term practice (Lam et al., 2023).

Step 2: Familiarize Oneself with Students. After starting your own meditation practice, the next step is to become familiar with students, as it relates to meditation. It is essential that you take time to know students, their temperaments, interests, and backgrounds. Have they studied meditation before? Do they have an interest in learning? Are they experiencing excessive stress or anxiety? Faculty must work to understand potential “student vulnerabilities” (Burrows, 2017, p. 38), which can impact meditation practice. Vulnerabilities can include suicidal tendencies, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, social anxiety, physical disabilities, physical illness, or major depression. While adverse effects from brief classroom meditation may be uncommon, meditation in general can produce negative experiences (Taylor et al., 2022). One strategy is to collect information on students (of course, keeping it confidential) that might indicate a history of anxiety or severe depression, physical disabilities, or recent difficult life events such as bereavement, divorce, job loss, or other stressful changes. Of course, this approach will be more challenging for faculty with larger class sizes. In such situations, perhaps faculty might administer anonymous online surveys that do not ask highly personal or medical-related questions but gauge students' general stress or anxiety levels (e.g., using a Likert Scale, “rate how much stress are you currently feeling on a scale of one to five”).

Step 3: Select a Meditation Method. The third step involves determining an appropriate meditation technique for the classroom. While there are at least 309 different meditation techniques (Matko et al, 2021), don't despair or feel overwhelmed. Best to stick with the commonly practiced

methods and those studied most within higher education environments. One such technique is mindfulness meditation commonly known as breath meditation. To practice, sit in a comfortable position with the back straight but not stiff, hands relaxed on the lap, and eyes closed or looking downward. Bring your awareness to the movement of the breath as it flows into the nostril area and observe it as it leaves that area. Whenever you have a thought or get distracted (and you will), gently bring your awareness to the movement of the breath. Students can engage in this form of meditation prior to starting classroom instruction. Of course, part of this framework is contemplating how you will “fit in” meditation considering the time demands of teaching content and other course-related instruction, such as discussions, group work, and practicing skills. This is a trade-off you must be willing to make. Perhaps think of the meditation activity as an investment in time, one that will pay you back in the form of increased student attention and engagement along with a more positive learning environment. I have found that just a few minutes of mindfulness meditation can make a difference with students.

Step 4: Prepare the Environment. With a meditation technique selected, think of how the classroom environment could be more conducive to meditation. Reflect on the configuration of the room. Could the desks in the classroom be arranged so students have enough room to feel comfortable yet connected and inclusive (e.g., a circle or horseshoe)? Could you eliminate possible distractions (e.g., close the door, hang a “Meditation in Progress” sign, turn off overhead screens, ask students to put cell phones on silent mode). Perhaps pulling the shades or turning down the lights support practice? Part of creating a supportive environment also involves creating a plan for students not wanting to meditate. For example, faculty might offer students a list of alternatives, ranging from reading, or doodling, to engage during the meditation session. Think about how you can incorporate meditation while maintaining an inclusive learning community.

Step 5: Introducing Meditation to Students and Sustaining Practice. The final steps involve introducing meditation to students and keeping them engaged with practice as the semester progresses. Be intentional about how you define meditation and handle misconceptions college students commonly have regarding meditation (e.g., too esoteric, too difficult, no time). Openly discuss how meditation has benefited you and share empirical research demonstrating the psychological and psychological benefits of meditation. Also, consider the students’ developmental stage when teaching meditation. Rogers (2013) co-founder of the Center of Koru Mindfulness emphasizes that “traditional methods of teaching mindfulness and meditation are not always effective for this age group” (p. 78). College-aged students may lack the patience needed to stick with meditation or lose interest

quickly. To combat this, Rogers (2013) recommends using an active teaching style that involves telling stories, giving personal examples of how meditation helped someone you know, and connecting practice to the pressures of daily life and academics. I have also found that changing meditation techniques as the semester advances can help fight boredom. For example, weather permitting, meet students outside the classroom building and invite them to practice walking meditation for a few minutes. Other ideas include varying the meditation method so perhaps students incorporate a body awareness technique or add visualization to the end of their meditation. Embedding meditation into the higher education classroom can feel like a risk and cause some uneasiness—but don’t let this stop you. Approach the process step-by-step by first establishing your own meditation practice, taking time to know your students, and being intentional about what meditation technique to share and how to best support students in the long term.

For a complete list of citations mentioned here, please email the author at steve.haberlin@ucf.edu.

Experiential Learning and Career Advancement through International Internships: Study Abroad for All

Estrella Rodriguez & Quynh Dang



Estrella Roriguez is an Instructional Specialist with Experiential Learning. She oversees the Global Learning course designations and coordinates international internships for the UCF barcelona Study Abroad Center.



Quynh Dang is the Director of Experiential Learning where she supports student success by advancing high-impact learning experiences such as cooperative learning, internships, and service-learning. She oversees the Knights of Distinction program.

Did you know that study abroad courses hold a permanent High Impact Practice (HIP) distinction? They are one deliberate effort to encourage students to develop intercultural awareness while also permitting them to advance in their programs of study (Quan, Diao & Trentman, 2023). The knowledge that students will acquire (and retain!) while studying abroad will have a life-long impact in their lives. UCF is committed to have 100% of its undergraduate student population have at least one meaningful HIP experience before graduation. Students can indeed take many HIP

courses here on campus before venturing abroad. The Student Success and Well-Being division has four possible course designations students can opt for in the fall, spring, and summer semesters: the global learning (GL), integrative-learning experience (IL), research-intensive (RI) and service-learning (SL) designations. Faculty can learn more about these designations at <https://academicsuccess.ucf.edu/hip/policies/> and connect with HIP@ucf.edu with general questions.

We are also advocates that all UCF students should have the possibility of benefiting from a HIP study abroad experience prior to graduation. It is 2024 and you may be wondering: How is this possible when only a small percentage of students across national campuses (10-15%) is able to finance international education opportunities? The truth is there are obstacles, but there are also possibilities and financial aid here at UCF available to students. First, let us say that studying abroad takes many forms. Signing on an international internship facilitated and recognized by the institution is one way. By interning abroad, students may be able to advance in their studies as internships usually lead to course credit recognition.

Did you know that UCF students can now intern every summer at our Study Center in Barcelona, Spain? An international internship experience course (IDS 3947, IDS 4947, IDS 5947) was offered to undergraduate and graduate students this summer of 2023. It was taught by Dr. Quynh Dang, Director of Experiential Learning, and the course lasted four weeks (May-June). Students enjoyed working with Any Time Fitness Barcelona and collaborated on many projects. They had to reflect on the experience and submit a final project for internship credit. What do we know about the cost of this internship, and the opportunities available to UCF students to pursue this study abroad opportunity? For once, we can say that the cost of the program is less at UCF when compared to other Florida schools. UCF Abroad also offers many internal and external scholarships that students can apply to before signing on an international experience of this kind. Faculty and students can visit their page at <https://studyabroad.ucf.edu/>

The key element is to apply early. Students should be applying for different sources of financial aid no later than February 15th prior to the summer semester in which they are planning to intern. By working in Barcelona for a month, they will gain valuable hands-on experience for their future careers. Taking this step should also help them to secure employment after graduation (Baert et al., 2021). They will have a chance to expand on their language skills, develop camaraderie with other interns and UCF students, and visit multiple sites near the place of employment. The learning possibilities are endless. This internship experience in Barcelona is open to all UCF majors at the undergraduate and graduate level. It is non-remunerated, and we encourage

applicants to seek financial aid through multiple venues.

Once students completed the internship this past summer, we surveyed all Barcelona interns via Qualtrics to find out how they had financed the international experience. The surveys were anonymized. We wanted to gather their suggestions and future recommendations before the next cohort returns to the study center in 2024. The surveys revealed that students had used a mix of different sources to foot the cost of the Barcelona internship. They mentioned personal savings and federal grants, as well as UCF financial aid and the Gilman scholarship. One student commented, "I was able to receive funding from both UCF and the Gilman scholarship which allowed me to cover both program fees and tuition. I would recommend other students to research all available opportunities because there is definitely funding out there for study abroad." An important suggestion they gave to future applicants is not to write the same essay in the applications, even when the scholarship prompt remains identical. Another student mentioned the importance of financial aid for first-generation college students, "Promote scholarships outside of UCF Global. For example, First-Generation of Hispanic Heritage Students."

By making students reflect on their international internship experience at the UCF Barcelona Study Center, we brought the most important informants of this process to the forefront. This is crucial, as study abroad programs were paused for about two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and new efforts are being implemented in many institutions. As global educators, we believe in the importance of advising students early enough in the academic year so that they are aware of the many financial resources the university offers. Starting with the first week of class, we need to reach out to all interested students so that they have information at their disposal. This includes all details about HIP courses they can take on campus prior to committing to study abroad and to the international internships. Gathering student feedback on an ongoing basis and continuing this conversation with them is also indispensable to review due process and attempt to refine the path to make study abroad a reality for all students. We are confident that in 2023-2024 students will be better prepared with additional details to make a sound decision about this study abroad opportunity.

References

1. Baert, S., Neyt, B., Siedler, T., Tobback, I., & Verhaest, D. (2021). Student internships and employment opportunities after graduation: A field experiment. *Economics of Education Review*, 83, 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2021.102141>
2. Quan, T., Diao, W., & Trentman, E. (2023). Returning to normal?: Reimagining study abroad and language learning for a sustainable and equitable future. *L2 Journal*, 15(2), 145-159, <https://doi.org/10.5070/L215260152>

Unlocking Potential: Effective Strategies for Mentoring International Doctoral Students

Xiaoxiao Fu



Xiaoxiao Fu is Associate Professor with Rosen College of Hospitality Management where she teaches a range of courses in tourism, travel, marketing, and management. Her research addresses how destinations and service firms can effectively market experiential products to improve consumer experience.

International doctoral students face unique challenges and needs that can significantly impact their academic journey. Some may experience the lack of cultural awareness leading to difficulties in building relationships with peers and faculty members, some may encounter challenges in navigating the social dynamics within their host institution, and others often experience various emotional challenges, including homesickness, isolation, and stress. To effectively address these challenges and develop cultural awareness, cross-cultural competence, and emotional resilience, it is important for mentors and institutions to provide appropriate support systems and resources to help international doctoral students overcome these obstacles and thrive in their academic pursuits.

Effective mentoring of international doctoral students requires patience, cultural sensitivity, and genuine interest in their success. Informed by such a belief, I always strive to provide practical scholarly and managerial directions and guide them to develop their potential in both personal and professional life. As an approachable mentor and instructor, I have maintained close interactions with international doctoral students. Some of the effective engagements include guiding research projects and presentations, suggesting career choices, writing recommendations, advising scholarly publishing strategies, organizing workshops, and promoting organizational memberships. Since I joined the faculty at Rosen College of Hospitality Management, I have been advising many international doctoral students in their dissertations, research assignments, and teaching duties. My service has been recognized by awards like UCF Excellence in Graduate Teaching (2021), Teaching Incentive Program (TIP) Award (2021), and nomination for the Faculty Excellence in Mentoring Doctoral Students Award (2023). My mentoring, well-organized with clearly stated learning expectations, has helped international doctoral students prosper academically and even solve challenging industry problems.

Mentoring international doctoral students requires a thoughtful and culturally sensitive approach. The following

paragraphs provide some key considerations and tips. Some technical tools are also discussed below that help us effectively work with international doctoral researchers.

Cultural awareness forms the foundation of effective mentoring for international doctoral students. I prioritize the recognition and respect of cultural differences as a key strategy in my mentorship approach. I understand that international students bring diverse educational backgrounds, communication styles, and expectations to the table. As a mentor, I am highly sensitive to these cultural nuances and adapt my mentoring approach accordingly. By recognizing and respecting cultural differences, I strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment for international doctoral students. This involves being attentive to differences in communication styles, non-verbal cues, and social norms, as these factors can significantly influence the mentoring relationship.

Moreover, I understand that cultural awareness extends beyond individual interactions. I actively foster a culturally sensitive environment by promoting diversity and inclusivity. This includes organizing cultural events, encouraging participation in multicultural activities, and providing resources that celebrate the diverse backgrounds of international doctoral students. By incorporating cultural awareness into the broader academic community, I strive to create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for all.

Cross-cultural competence is another vital element in effectively mentoring international doctoral students. In my role as a mentor, I actively promote interactions between international and domestic students, fostering cultural exchange and mutual learning. One strategy I employ is organizing events that celebrate diversity and promote cross-cultural understanding. These activities provide a platform for students from different backgrounds to share their experiences, traditions, and perspectives. By facilitating meaningful interactions, I encourage dialogue and the appreciation of different cultural viewpoints. Furthermore, I make a concerted effort to create opportunities for collaboration and teamwork among international and domestic students. This collaborative approach not only encourages cross-cultural engagement but also enhances the learning experience for all involved.

In addition to formal events, I also emphasize informal interactions in and outside the campus to foster cross-cultural competence. Encouraging students to engage in casual conversations, group activities, or study sessions allows for natural cultural exchange. These organic interactions provide a rich environment for students to learn from one another, challenge assumptions, and build meaningful connections.

Emotional support is a crucial aspect of mentoring international

doctoral students. Recognizing that these students may face various challenges such as homesickness, cultural adjustment issues, or academic pressure, it is important to provide them with empathy and the necessary support to navigate these challenges successfully.

As an attentive mentor, I understand that being far from home and adjusting to a new culture can be overwhelming. I commit to listen actively and offer a supportive ear for them. By demonstrating empathy, I create a safe space where they feel comfortable sharing their challenges and seeking guidance. I also ensure that international doctoral students are aware of the support services available to them, such as counseling services, support groups, and mentorship programs specifically designed to address their unique needs. These resources offer specialized assistance and guidance, helping students cope with their unique emotional needs.

Additionally, it is also imperative for international students to integrate into the local community. This may involve introducing them to cultural clubs or networks, organizing social events, or facilitating interactions with domestic students. By fostering a sense of belonging and community, I help international doctoral students overcome cultural or language barriers they may encounter during their studies.

In addition to these strategies, leveraging collaborative platforms and communication tools can enhance the mentorship experience for both faculty mentors and students. These tools facilitate seamless communication, streamline the research process, and ensure a productive and organized mentorship experience. By implementing these effective technologies, faculty mentors can empower and transform international doctoral students into confident and skilled researchers.

Lastly, I would like to highlight that effective mentorship plays a vital role in supporting international doctoral students as they develop and implement their research ideas. It is mutually beneficial, fostering collaboration and promoting the growth of both mentors and students. Mentoring international doctoral students not only empowers them individually but also enriches the academic community as a whole. By nurturing a culture of mentorship and providing robust support, faculty mentors unlock the potential of their students, leading to impactful scholarly achievements and personal growth for both mentors and international doctoral students.

French Language Learning: Empowering Students with Real-World Skills and Career Opportunities

Taoues Hadour Myers



Taoues Hadour Myers is Assistant Professor of French Linguistics. She has been teaching for more than twelve years and her research interests are in French sociolinguistics, digital humanities, computer-mediated communication, and teaching pedagogy.

French is undeniably a beneficial language to learn. It is spoken by more than 300 million people on the five continents and is the second most widely learned foreign language after English. A study conducted by Ossipov (2000) showed that 50% of students studying French believed that knowing this language would allow them to have an employment advantage. However, foreign languages are an underrepresented discipline, with a number of enrollments going down every year. There are a lot of benefits in learning a foreign language, but many students do not view it as a marketable field of study. Students want practical reasons to study a foreign language, something to put on their resume which could open career opportunities. With the cost of college increasing every year, students and parents are examining more closely the courses offered and making their decisions based on economics. Creating activities with real applications is a great opportunity to help students expand career opportunities:

Shark Tank à la Française is a successful activity with extensive service-learning components which is used in my Business French class. For this activity, students create a startup and sell a product, similarly to the American show Shark Tank. For instance, in 2019, a group of students created a startup which would sell scooters on campus. The following semester, UCF had scooters all over campus which proves the relevancy and success of this activity. The French version of Shark Tank was also launched at the same period in French television and is called *Affaire Conclue*.

As an educator, I am always eager to learn about current trends in foreign language pedagogy and develop new activities that would benefit and interest students. A positive and inclusive environment is important for students' participation and retention. Therefore, I would like to share a few other successful activities used in my courses:

Talk Abroad is a platform where students have the incredible opportunity to talk with a native French speaker anywhere in the world. By speaking with different francophone people from all around the world, students improve their oral

proficiency level and confidence as well as getting exposure to the culture of another country. Talk abroad was used in various classes I taught at UCF. For this activity, a topic is given to the partners and at the end of the conversation, students write a reflexive paper regarding their experience.

Debate is a great activity which helps develop critical thinking skills, share informed arguments, and improve speaking skills in French. For this activity the class is randomly divided into two groups and students gather arguments on a given topic. The day of the debate, the two groups face each other, present their arguments while impersonating a character previously chosen in class. The professor is the moderator and ensures every student participates. This activity helps students to improve their speaking skills in French and increase their confidence.

These various activities and courses have enriched my teaching career. I am fortunate to be able to pursue a profession about which I am so passionate and sharing this passion with students is a pure joy. I have learned so much from my students, and each course that I teach allows me to learn and to grow as an educator.

A Fantastic Roller Coaster Ride: Learning from the First Theme Park and Attraction Management Major Course

Carissa Baker & Juliana Tkatch



Carissa Baker is Assistant Professor of Tourism, Events & Attractions. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses related to theme parks and entertainment. She researches creative, technological, and business aspects of the themed entertainment industry.



Juliana Tkatch is a Ph.D. Candidate at Rosen. Her dissertation focuses on transformative experiences. She researches tourist experiences in different contexts. She is involved in multidisciplinary projects on accessibility, destination stewardship, events, theme parks, gastronomy, and wine tourism.

In Fall 2023, we experienced a wild but rewarding ride. We were tasked with teaching the first introductory course to the first cohort in the first semester of the new Bachelor of Science in Theme Park and Attraction Management. Based on the syllabus created by Carissa Baker and Ady Milman during the degree development, we created a semester's worth of content and discovered a lot in the process. The following are ten things we learned during this journey.

Creating a community: This group of students was diverse in background and work experience. It was varied by degree background, as the class ranged from first-time college to students getting a second degree. By the end of the term, we were a community that felt closer because of our shared experiences in this new course and because of the way we structured it with students sharing their experiences frequently.

Student contributions to augment content: We took their contributions seriously and incorporated them into the course. For example, instead of just saying that food or entertainment offerings are known to be powerful for guests, we had students post images and detail their own memories. On the day discussing merchandising, every student was asked to bring in an item to discuss, which helped them learn other perspectives and understand the diversity of interests that will be reflected in theme park guests. These personal discussions augmented the core concepts and lent to the fabric of the course's learning.

A variety of techniques: Like in any class, we found that a variety of teaching methods and assessments worked well. In class, we used lectures, group activities, guest speakers, and student presentations. At home, students turned in discussion posts, analysis activities, and research-based, applied, and reflective writing assignments. Variation prevents fatigue in grading and maintains student interest.

Poster sessions for undergraduates: One of the most successful assignments in the class was when students were asked to propose a solution to a current problem or need in a theme park. We asked them to describe the problem and solution in detail and create a PowerPoint to summarize. However, due to time constraints, it was decided that instead of individual presentations they would do a poster session, where they affixed the slides to the wall and then presented them to individual classmates. Each student was required to listen to other ideas as well as provide a written critique. Students were so fascinated that they insisted on reading all the other entries once the presentations were complete. For fun, we invited a doctoral candidate with theme park knowledge but who did not know the students to evaluate the submissions and select the top five ideas.

New formats for presentation: We learned more about presentations in general from the poster session. Presenting a new idea can be scary for some students, especially if it is their first semester in college. The poster format of the presentation is a great way for the students to experience the presenter role without being in front of the whole class. Students found this gallery walk-like format less intimidating. This format is valuable for providing oral communication opportunities to the students in a fast and informal way. Similar formats

such as the elevator pitch can also be applied in the classroom preparing the student for professional interaction in their future workplace.

Not everything is going to work: Though this was designed from the ground up with two minds at work, not every assignment was equally effective. Specifically, an analysis of a social media post from a theme park operator was not as well received. Part of the issue was that the instructions could have had more clarity, and another was that it did not connect with the course content. Teaching is always a learning process, so the good news is that this semester's class will benefit from knowing what worked and what did not.

Let them tell you how it went: At the end of the term, there was a required reflection assignment where students had to describe which topics could use more or less coverage as well as which assignments were valuable or needed improvement. A temperature check like this is beneficial for new courses. Of course, not all students will agree, with some students' favorite assignments being other students' least favorite and so on. There is always a chance that a student will find something not useful to the discussion. However, we found the reflection papers provided both praise and constructive criticism in a much more detailed way than the Student Perception of Instruction survey. Beyond another course assessment tool, reflective writing is an exercise where the student can review the content covered in the class and self-evaluate their involvement with each topic.

The value of passion: UCF students are a great bunch, but what we were not expecting was just how passionate this group of students would be. They loved the theme park industry, were committed to learning more about it, and had so many questions that nearly every class had to be extended to the next session. Students often came to class in theme park paraphernalia and an absolute majority of them were in class a good twenty minutes early. Their involvement could be perceived in the quality of the discussions and examples they brought to class, which also showcased their connection as a group. Instructors generally cannot control who is in their classes, especially in an introductory class like this, but we sure were lucky!

The benefits of collaborative teaching: This class was also a fun experience because it was a collaboration between Dr. Baker, who has been teaching in higher education for 16 years, and Juliana, who worked in industry for more than 20 years but only started officially teaching during several weeks in this class. The structure was created in advance, and both made sure they were on track with the course objectives and pacing. Juliana learned from Dr. Baker's preparation process, teaching experience, and content knowledge, while Dr. Baker

learned from Juliana's international perspective, industry expertise, and visual presentation skills. Coming from different personal backgrounds and complementary research topics, the instructors had two perspectives, which made the class diverse and more entertaining. Multiple students commented that they enjoyed the different teaching styles.

Course content development: More than the interaction in class, collaborative teaching can be a tool to build a strong course structure that combines different points of view on the same topic. It is not unusual, and even expected, that the same course taught by different educators will be different, even though they follow the same structure and course objectives. Having more than one professor developing an introductory course was a great exercise for creating course content with a broad perspective in a way that contributes to the multiplicity of perspectives that the students will encounter during their undergraduate years.

When Will I Use Math?

Rachid Ait Maalem Lahcen



Rachid Ait Maalem Lahcen. is Associate Lecturer in Mathematics. He earned the Doctor of Philosophy in Modeling and Simulation (2020) from the University of Central Florida. He teaches a range of mathematics courses. His research interests are learning strategies, cybersecurity, and computational methods.

When I started teaching math, I was asked the question: "When will I use math?" more often instead of the ordinary question: "How do I solve math problems?" Thus, I felt the obligation to have satisfactory answers for my students. Talking to other math instructors, I learned that they all agreed that there is no direct and concise answer to this question. However, attempts were made to show practical applications. Nevertheless, they often noticed mixed responses when assessing students' reactions. I started to believe that the answer could be found in a path that enables the students as learners to find it themselves. In fact, this belief corresponds with the teacher's role that goes beyond mere transmission of knowledge and encourages students to explore the subject.

The essay titled "[When Will I Ever Use This?](#)" by Douglas Corey explores this persistent question. The author examines the challenges teachers face in responding to this question. The author employed a thoughtful approach and concluded by emphasizing the importance of learning and the unpredictable ways in which the acquired knowledge shapes future

understanding and decision-making. The essay emphasizes the known reality of facing the challenge to pinpoint specific instances where a particular mathematical skill is directly applied. I like that Douglas Corey encourages students to have faith in the learning process and emphasizes the importance of continuous learning. I'd like to couple this article with one of the three life stories that Steve Jobs recounted reflecting his values in his [2005 Stanford University commencement speech](#). He highlighted the importance of following curiosity and intuition. Jobs shared how this choice led him to explore calligraphy which influenced the design of the Macintosh computer with aesthetically pleasing typography. He said, "You cannot connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you must trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." While Jobs emphasized that he could not connect the dots looking forward but could only do so in retrospect, and similarly, Corey argues that the utility of math is often realized retrospectively. Hence, both narratives highlight the unpredictable yet profound ways in which varied knowledge and experiences contribute to future careers. That guided me to the trail that includes a set of strategies to cultivate a mindset for continuous learning:

Fostering curiosity through student engagement in discussions about potential math applications. It can cultivate a proactive approach to understand math's utility.

Sharing relevant applications, such as graph theory in networks, math in architecture, math in criminal justice, and math in various other professions. It can provide tangible connections between math concepts and students' interests.

Highlighting professionals who discovered unexpected applications of math. It can expand students' perspectives on the versatility of math.

Illustrating how math concepts sometimes are learned, initially in isolation, and eventually converged to solve complex life problems. It can emphasize the interconnectedness of math and their problem-solving abilities.

Promoting retrospective understanding encourages students to embrace the idea that the full significance of math may become evident only in reflection. As discussed in both narratives.

Stressing the long-term impact of math skills on problem-solving and critical thinking makes math as a cognitive tool essential for navigating varied challenges in academic and professional journeys. It is obvious that individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to view math skills as versatile tools applicable in various contexts. This adaptability prepares them to navigate unforeseen situations and apply their problem-solving skills to new and unexpected

challenges. Let us expand this idea with a touching example from aviation, and emphasize the critical role of human knowledge, awareness, training, and decision-making in averting disasters caused by human error. On July 23, 1983, Air Canada flight 143 known as Gimli Glider had an emergency crash landing at Gimli Industrial Park, Manitoba, Canada. The aircraft was a Boeing 767-200. Luckily, that crash landing had no fatalities. The cause was fuel exhaustion due to a miscalculation in converting between metric and imperial units, leading to inadequate fueling. Meaning, human error. Both engines failed mid-flight. On the other hand, almost ten and half years before it, Eastern Airlines flight 401 on December 29, 1972, crashed into the Florida Everglades. Aircraft involved was Lockheed L-1011-1 Tristar. The fatal crash resulted in the deaths of 101 out of 176 occupants. The cause was the crew preoccupied with a landing gear indicator or a light bulb, leading to the autopilot being unintentionally disengaged. The aircraft gradually descended while the crew focused on the simple malfunction. Also human error. Almost 26 years after the Gimli Glider incident, on June 1, 2009, Airbus A330-203 of Air France flight 447 fell from the sky, which is unthinkable, due to a crew mismanagement to a technical malfunction. Their unbelievable loss of situational awareness and inadequate coordination caused a disaster. The outcomes differed significantly due to the critical role of crew preparation and decision-making. The necessary technology to avert those accidents was available to them but they happened anyway. Such tragedies are not limited to aviation. We find them in healthcare, transportation, construction, chemical industries, engineering, computer science, business, etc.

We should ask then, will the need for precision, awareness of each step, and the potential for errors in math help in terms of cognitive development that avert a disaster? Will attention to details until an acceptable solution is found be transferable to various aspects of life and work? Is the process of tackling various scenarios and attempts a form of resilience in the face of difficulty? Does tracing a mathematical mistake to its origin teach us something about dealing with setbacks? etc. Finally, whether the question, "When Will I Use Math?" is asked or not, we know it is like a cloud hanging over students' minds and the key to address it is a set of proactive strategies that emphasize the critical role of human knowledge, awareness, training, and decision-making. Letting students walk on a trail that helps them build a mindset to navigate the expected and the unexpected. Life is inherently unpredictable, and we, confidently, must trust that the acquired knowledge can shape our future decision-making and the dots will somehow connect in the future.

Tell Me and I Forget, Teach Me and I Remember, Involve Me and I Learn!

Katia Ferdowsi



Katia Ferdowsi is Lecturer of Health Sciences. She teaches human disease and pathophysiology. Although she initially trained and practiced as a physician, Ferdowsi is very passionate about teaching. She enjoys having the opportunity to share her medical knowledge with students and to show them how their learning in the classroom relates to their lives and future careers.

As someone who has been a professor across different countries, I find that there always seems to be a commonality among students, no matter the background: students learn better when they are involved. Ever since I started teaching as an adjunct at UCF in Spring 2016, I have been searching for new innovative ways to make the classroom more engaging for students.

Given that I teach pathophysiology, which could possibly be tedious or difficult subject matter to learn for students, using technology in this course has been massively helpful for student involvement.

The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) workshops and seminars always provide me with dozens of tools and technology in this regard. One of those tools that I became familiar with through FCTL workshops is Materia. Materia has lots of interesting and fun widgets/games that are supported by webcourses and can easily be used by students.

I started to adapt different games from Materia for my pathophysiology courses as a supplement to the lecture slides on Webcourses in order for my students to better understand the concepts and reinforce important vocabulary through these kinds of fun activities. Then, I realized that even though I received lots of good feedback regarding these games, not all students took advantage of these supplemental materials. When I further investigated, I figured out that many students did not even pay attention to the existence of these types of fun activities on Webcourses because of many different reasons: not popping up on the first page of their Webcourses since these are just supplements, not actual class activities, or because of daily busy lives as full-time students with at least one part-time job or many other reasons that don't allow them to explore supplemental material on Webcourses. Therefore, I thought students need some sort of motivation to actively involve themselves in the learning process through these fun activities. I started to offer these games after the first exam as class participation with points counting toward their final

grades, not just solely as ungraded supplements, to see how it affected their learning outcomes. At the end of the semester, through a Qualtrics survey, 81% of students responded that these games were useful and fun activities to do, and 70% liked these games provided to them as class participation/activities with points.

Overall, being a professor has been an incredibly rewarding experience. It's exciting to watch students be engaged and excited to be active in class, instead of being passive participants. I'm always thinking about new ways to present concepts to students in my courses, and ultimately help prepare them for a successful future in the medical field. By getting to know students and sharing my past medical experiences with them, I can see over the course of a semester how they can fall in love with medicine, just like I did many years ago when I was a student.

Distracted or Not So Distracted? How Technology is Affecting our Students

Sandra Sousa



Sandra Sousa is Associate Professor in the Modern Languages and Literatures Department, where she teaches Portuguese language, Lusophone and Latin American Studies. Her research interests include colonialism and post-colonialism; Portuguese colonial literature; race relations in Mozambique; war, dictatorship and violence in contemporary Portuguese and Luso-African literature; and feminine writing in Portuguese, Brazilian and African literature.

A decade ago, I would step into my classroom every morning at 8 am and be greeted by a room filled with lively, talkative students. They chatted, laughed, and even playfully complained about the early hour. It was a challenge to quiet them down and refocus their attention. I was eager to start the class promptly, but their distractions were a constant hurdle. Throughout my teaching career, a recurring nightmare haunted me. At the beginning of each semester, it would visit like clockwork, a specter from my past. In this dream, I stood before a classroom where no one paid attention to my teachings. I would resort to yelling and pounding the table to grab their attention. While I recognize that this nightmare has various interpretations, today, I wish to address the topic of classroom distractions. My recent participation in one of FCTL's book clubs, James M. Lang's *Distracted: Why Students Can't Focus and What You Can Do About It*, brought me back to my face-to-face teaching days and my ongoing frustration with students' ability to concentrate.

I continue to grapple with that same anxiety, and it may be even more pronounced now. In an online teaching environment, I don't have the visual cues of the students in front of me. Instead, I rely on their online posts and submissions, which often reflect their fast-paced lives. It leaves me questioning how much they are truly absorbing the content I aim to convey. This concern is particularly poignant because I have always considered myself a highly focused individual, or at least I like to imagine that I am. Nonetheless, more recently, I have observed a significant decline in my own ability to concentrate. I have often attributed this decline to the natural process of aging, acknowledging that I might be losing some of my skills. While that is undoubtedly a reality, I also believe that technology plays a significant role in this diminishing ability. Even though I don't use social media, the constant juggling of emails, phone calls, and text messages throughout the day leaves my brain feeling like mush. As a result, even simple tasks like reading a few pages of a novel before bedtime have become increasingly challenging.

I believe that certain books come into your life at just the right moment, and Lang's *Distracted* was certainly one of those for me. I devoured it in nearly one sitting, captivated by a topic that had always troubled me but that I hadn't previously taken the time to analyze. When I learned that "... we have always been distracted" and that "the difference between us and our nineteenth-century cousins is not that our attentional capacity have somehow been permanently diminished..., but that the people and devices who seek our attention have become better at soliciting it from us" (Lang 37), a sense of peace washed over me. I decided to delve deeper and inquire about the role that technology plays in my students' lives, particularly in terms of their ability to focus on their studies. I posted the following questions in a discussion forum to spark a conversation with my students: 1) How do you think that our constant use of digital technologies is affecting our brain health? 2) Do you feel that you get more distracted with technology? 3) If so, what can you do to focus more on what you consider important? and 4) Does your phone distract you from the pursuit of your goals? Their answers not only surprised me but also contributed to a better understanding of the new generations before me, even if through a screen.

I would like to share three answers that reflect their general feelings toward the use of technology and their growing awareness of the detrimental role it can play, not only in their studies but also in their lives in general:

"I think that the constant use of digital technologies negatively affects our brain health from components like social media, cyberbullying, and even the lights our phone emit that makes it hard for us to sleep. I feel more distracted with technology."

"Constant use of technologies has overexposed our animal minds to vast amounts of stimulation for which evolution cannot keep up. I feel distracted by having a phone, which will give me some sort of gratification, by scrolling through social media for entertainment. Suddenly 30 minutes have passed, and I have less time to complete a task and have lost track of what I was doing before my phone got the best of me."

"While I am consciously aware that the overuse of my phone is something that has overwhelmingly negative effects, it is undeniably difficult to do something about that, especially in this generation where the use of technology is so integrated into our daily lives that it can be paralyzing. The instant gratification that technology gives us is an addiction in every sense, yet because we all to some degree experience it, we have become desensitized to its effects. Something I have discussed with my friends at length that I think is relevant here is that because of our overuse of phones, many people no longer have hobbies or pastimes, technology alone has become society's main pastime. Free time that could be allocated to reading, painting, knitting, playing an instrument, etc. often is overshadowed, or completely driven out by our use of technology. Putting effort into any of these things, while they would prove rewarding in the end, is not as attractive to the brain as simply scrolling away on our phones. In recognizing that I too have struggled with that, I have been more intentional in how I spend my time to do the things that make my brain actually feel good, not the things that merely provide the illusion of feeling good like the overuse of and reliance on technology."

The sense of peace instilled by *Distracted* was further reinforced by this discussion with my students. I came to realize that comprehending how our students perceive something that affects us all can help us reconsider our teaching methods. Instead of resorting to desperate measures like yelling and frustration and placing blame on the learners in front of us, we can focus on creating "opportunities for students to achieve their goals, think creatively, and engage with one another in meaningful ways" (Lang 59). In this way, "we are providing them with experiences that can enhance their learning and improve their lives" (Lang 59). Even a simple discussion like this serves as an example of how it can be achieved, as, at the end of the day, we all come together, acknowledging that we share the same challenges and can find solace in our shared humanity, setting aside our exasperation. After all, we can't escape our distractibility.

Introducing Laurie Uttich, FCTL Instructional Specialist



Laurie Uttich is the newest member of the Faculty Center. She joins the team as an Instructional Specialist and brings with her 14 years of experience teaching in the UCF College of Arts and Humanities where she was recipient of the TIP award twice (2014 and 2019) and the Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching award (2020) and promoted to Senior Lecturer (2022).

My mom used to say that I started to read at three and write at four... but she was also from a long line of Irish storytellers who weren't shy about exaggerating. But it is fair to say I don't remember a day in my life when I haven't reached for a pen and a book.

I left my small, rural town in the Midwest, landed in a college full of Chicago kids, stumbled into a Women's Lit course, and found my people (Plath, Piercy, Walker, Atwood...). I stumbled out and landed in a series of marketing and "edutainment" writing positions and, after 15 years, joined the UCF MFA creative writing program to work on my art. While there, I decided to embrace the "graduate experience" and became a GTA for first-year composition courses, even though I never considered teaching as a career previously. (Fun fact: I was a student in the Faculty Center's "Preparing Tomorrow's Faculty" grad course and was taught by both Kevin Yee and Eric Main, our leadership team here now.)

I fell in love with teaching and, in 2009, when I graduated, I convinced UCF to let me stay. I began in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric and, after two years, I joined the English Department where I taught for 12 years. Over the years, I've taught multiple student-centered, active learning courses to undergraduate and graduate students. Last spring, I taught Digital Storytelling for the first time and enjoyed immersing myself more fully in that art form and learning about some of the AI tools that can help writers turn their ideas into interactive experiences.

During my time here at UCF, I served as the director of the Literary Arts Partnership where I recruited, trained, and supported UCF students to facilitate poetry and storytelling workshops in community settings, including Title One schools, residential treatment facilities, juvenile delinquency centers, and memory care facilities. I'm also part of the Florida Prison Education Project and taught several creative writing courses at a correctional center for men in Orlando. These men were among some of my most talented and engaged students (and writers) and it's one of the most fulfilling experiences I've

had.

In June 2023, I became an Instructional Specialist for the Faculty Center and I'm excited to share my passion for teaching while providing support for faculty members. I'm committed to student engagement, reflective practices, service learning, high impact practices, and professionalization opportunities for students, and plan to create programs, materials, and workshops that focus on those initiatives as well as other faculty challenges, like the emergence of GenAI tools. My goal is to offer functional, easy-to-implement ideas or strategies that faculty members can apply in their courses.

I look forward to collaborating in new ways with faculty members, expanding my own knowledge, and being a part of the Faculty Center team.

The Impact of Positive Comments on Student Learning

Houman Sadri



Houman Sadri is Associate Professor of Political Science where he's been since 1995. He earned a PhD from the University of Virginia and completed a fellowship at the Hoover Institute of Stanford University. His area of specialization is international affairs focused on the politics of the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf states.

Conventional wisdom suggests that "you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." Recently, I read a very interesting article with a similar title by Li Robin who employed positive comments and utilized Chinese and American proverbs for teaching in the *International Journal of Management Education* (2011, Vol 9, Issue 2).

In comparison to other teaching topics covered by a variety of educators, there are relatively few works that examine the impact of positive comments and feedback on the student learning process. A few samples of the literature about the impact of positive comments and feedback include the following fine scholarly works:

1. Hattie & Timperley (2007, 81-112) argued about the significance of quality feedback on assignments and assessments on student learning.
2. Gallien & Oomen, (2008, 3-436) claimed that personalized feedback is significant for quality teaching and improved student learning.
3. Lizzio & Wilson's (2008, 263-275) work concentrated on the relationship between student learning with performance-gap reports as well as positive feedback.
4. Faulconer, Griffith, & Gruss (2021, 1-27) conducted an

impressive study of the impact of positive feedback on student outcomes and perceptions focusing on repeatable assessments to improve their learning.

This piece is not a comprehensive, systematic, and extensive study of the impact of positive comments or feedback on student learning. My three main purposes are

1. To share my personal observations of the impact of positive oral and written feedback as well as comments on student written assignments.
2. To learn from other UCF faculty members about their experience in this regard.
3. To find other faculty who are interested in a collaborative work focused on such subjects.

Of course, it is always vital to provide students with the traditional performance-gap evaluations. The latter guides them to improve the quality of their research, analytical skills, and writing. Effective feedback for students is particularly important because the major task of any instructor involves helping students to improve their oral and written communication skills in addition to assisting them to engage in effective critical thinking and problem solving.

Main Written Assignments

In the last three decades of teaching, I have gradually moved away from requiring the traditional long term papers from undergraduate students. For the graduate students, however, I still ask for term papers. Nowadays, the main writing requirements of my undergrad classes involve shorter, structured, and frequent writing assignments called “Researched Discussion Postings” or Postings for short.

Each term, there are 12 posting opportunities, each of which are linked to a separate reading module. For a maximum of 30% of their final grades, students are required to complete at least 6 of 12 postings (each worth 5 points). However, I encourage them to complete as many postings as they can until they secure 6 perfect scores of 5 (on a 0-5 scale) for a total of 30 points toward their final course grade.

Following the new standards of the international relations (IR) field, the postings have a clear structure of a mini-research-paper. They must address 3 main questions that any IR scholar or policymaker must eventually answer:

1. The “What” question, whose answer is the description of the behavior or phenomenon under study.
2. The “Why” question that is associated with the causal relationship. Here students must explain the factors (or causes) of a particular behavior or event. Thus, their answer would be considered an explanation of the

behavior or phenomenon under investigation.

3. The “How” question is related to forecasting future occurrences of similar behavior or phenomenon under comparable circumstances. This process is considered a prediction.

Associated with each reading module, there is a posting which is structured into 5 separate but interrelated parts:

1. Introduction: At the beginning, students present their own take on the module analytical discussion question based on their impression of the required module readings as well as outside sources that they find online. Moreover, they also state how they would proceed to address their challenging research question in a systematic way.
2. Required Readings (Literature) Review: Students read all required module readings which are a combination of different textbook chapters in addition to a few periodical and scientific articles about the main topic of the reading Module. Besides providing and citing their own summary of each required reading, they also include their analysis of how each reading addresses (or fails to address) the module topics.
3. New Internet Search: Beyond understanding how to bridge the theory and practice according to our required readings, each student must find at least two recent articles from diverse perspectives about the weekly module topic. They aim to examine the findings of each article with their own analysis and our discussion questions. This way, they feel empowered and up-to-date concerning the most recent developments in our field.
4. Conclusion: In this section, students initially summarize the main points of their postings. Next, they compare and contrast the required readings with their own news articles to see if they can observe any behavioral causes or detectable policy trend(s). Finally, they address the pros and cons of the topic and make predictions about how such a topic could or would appear again in the future.
5. Works Cited is the final part. Here they fully document or cite the periodical and academic articles from diverse perspectives that they have found from reputable internet sources.

Features & Process

As the descriptions of the five sections indicate, the student discussion postings go beyond typical Class Discussion Forums where many students simply agree or disagree with their peers or the instructor about the module topics, readings, or their findings. With a minimum required word count in each section, students write on average of about 1,500 words for each posting. Since the course requires a minimum of 6 postings from each student, they write a total of 9,000 words on average. It is important to highlight that this exceeds the length of the average undergraduate term paper in our field,

which is about 6,000 to 8,500 words. In my experience at UCF, I noticed on the whole that the quality of the Postings has been much better than that of the traditional term paper.

To assist students for completing an effective posting, I have established clear and easy to follow discussion guidelines in bullet format, grading rubric, and a sample posting which are linked inside each one-stop shop module before they can access the hyperlink for the weekly Class Discussion postings.

While grading the Postings, I provide a detailed report of the errors and missing information in each Posting for each student. In the posting evaluation, I use the grading rubric which provides an effective and efficient performance-gap report. Many students, especially face-to-face students, appreciate that I noticed that the impersonal nature of the online classes requires more effort to guide and empower the students.

Evaluation Method & Feedback

I use the Sandwich Feedback Method (Praise-Criticism-Praise) to provide written comments to students on their posting. For students who need extra assistance for the postings, I ask them to visit me during regular office hours. For online students, we agree upon a day and time to conduct a Zoom office hour for instructing them individually. I have noticed that the classes for which I employed my extra positive oral and written feedback method did much better on the following discussion posting as opposed to the ones that simply provided the students with their “performance-gap” standard comments based on our grading rubric which provides only a factual report.

Results

I am not a psychologist aiming to evaluate the personal challenges of the Post-COVID generation students. Nevertheless, my experience of teaching relatively large classes suggests that the positive comments beyond “performance-gap” reports increase students’ sense of confidence to research, analyze, and write better quality discussion postings. Moreover, they improve the learning outcomes based on my pre-test and post-test class records over the last four years.

If students repeat the same error(s) in another posting, I require them to visit my office hour or chat with me via a Zoom session. It is vital to emphasize that there are major improvements in students’ performance as the result of the positive oral feedback that I provide to each student. They learn how to effectively use the resources of our class to their own benefit. This is especially vital for online student learning.

Future Plan

I would like to find UCF colleagues who have an interest in similar teaching methods. That will enable me to conduct a more precise and extensive method of evaluating the effect on learning outcomes when professors provide both performance-gap reports and positive oral and written feedback to students. My hope is to share the results of our comprehensive study with our UCF colleagues and community in addition to those outside our academic village.

Service-Learning as a Tool for Career Preparedness (NACE Skills)

Richard Plate



Richard Plate is Associate Lecturer in Environmental Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies. He teaches courses in environmental science, environmental ethics and politics, marine resource management, and writing. His research focuses on how people learn and make decisions about complex social-ecological systems.

Service-learning—defined as field-based experiential learning with community partners—is a valuable educational tool promoted by UCF’s Office of Experiential Learning, which states, “Students who participate in service-learning acquire a deeper understanding of course content, develop a broader appreciation of the discipline, and gain an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.”

Many faculty associate service-learning primarily with that latter impact—civic responsibility. While this is indeed an important benefit of service-learning, I want to use this space to describe a different, but complementary, approach to service-learning with a focus on building students’ NACE competencies and improving their career readiness.

The National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE) have identified eight Career Readiness Competencies—skills and habits that are valued by employers and useful in building one’s career, regardless of field or academic discipline. Each competency comes with a list of “sample behaviors.” A few of the behaviors listed for the Professionalism competency are listed here as an example.

Competency: Professionalism

- Act equitably with integrity and accountability to self, others, and the organization.
- Be present and prepared.
- Demonstrate dependability (e.g., report consistently for work or meetings).

- Prioritize and complete tasks to accomplish organizational goals.
- Consistently meet or exceed goals and expectations.
- Have an attention to detail, resulting in few if any errors in their work.
- Show a high level of dedication toward doing a good job.

When I incorporate service-learning into my courses, I do so with these competencies in mind. My students are primarily environmental studies majors who come to me with an already well-developed sense of civic responsibility. They want to make the world a better place.

What they often lack is a clear sense of how to turn that general desire to address environmental challenges into a career or what such a career would look like.

Within this context, one of the learning objectives for a service-learning project in my 3000-level Foundations of Environmental Studies course is to develop a more nuanced sense of what work addressing environmental challenges looks like.

This is a somewhat loosely structured project in which students propose their own community partner to work with. They are welcome to pick from a list of relevant community partners that I provide or to find their own partner that better fits their career goals. (A formal proposal from students is essential to ensure that projects align with course objectives.) The primary focus here is engaging with professionals, experiencing a workplace, and reflecting on what they see, hear, and think during their service work.

These reflections help students develop a more nuanced view of their career goals and perhaps a to-do list. As part of their reflection, students identify what they would need to do prior to their graduation to make themselves more competitive for jobs related to their career goals. Students may identify specific electives they will take or specific experiences (e.g., fieldwork, working with kids) they need to pursue.

Sometimes, the more nuanced view involves simply identifying something they definitely do NOT want to do long-term. Even that insight has value. The idea is to invite students to become active participants in their own development to improve their chances of career success.

It is not uncommon for students to continue to work with the community partner after the course has closed, either in a volunteer, intern, or employee capacity. Even when this doesn't happen, the students have real-world experience that they can add to their resumé.

I focus on a more structured project for the capstone class. I run this course a bit like a consulting agency, working with community partners (i.e., clients) prior to the semester start date to set up real-world projects that the students apply to work on during the first week of class.

Working in small teams, students meet with their client and perform background research necessary to produce a workplan, which is submitted to the client for approval. This plan includes a set of deliverables due at the end of the semester as well as a weekly schedule, set check-in dates with the client, and intermediate deliverables or milestones with due dates unique to that group.

The different structure here corresponds to a different set of learning objectives. These students are only months away from graduating and beginning their professional careers, so the learning objectives are more directly focused on skills such as professional communication, breaking up large tasks into smaller steps, and balancing team responsibilities.

More generally, these projects organically come with all the messiness found in the workplace. Perhaps the number-one skill students work on during these projects is becoming adaptable—identifying an unforeseen barrier to the project objectives and adjusting accordingly. They develop a growth mindset, responding to clients' critical (and sometimes blunt) feedback to produce a higher quality deliverable. These skills are at the heart of NACE competencies such as Critical Thinking and Leadership competencies.

Finally, students learn to calibrate their expectations. I call this course, only half-facetiously, the dream-killer course. Students often begin a project with grand plans. As they become more familiar with the constraints of the client and as they set up their weekly workplan, students develop a more realistic set of objectives.

I find this lesson to be quite valuable. While I do not want to curb the passion of my students to effect change, I also do not want them to become disillusioned if, after 18 months at their first job, they have not revolutionized their employer's approach.

To summarize, my argument here is not that civic responsibility is unimportant. Rather, I'm suggesting that service-learning may be worth exploring, even for faculty who do not view civic responsibility as a primary objective of their course.



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.

The ideas and opinions expressed in the articles featured in the *Faculty Focus* belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Faculty Center or of UCF.



**Faculty Center for
Teaching and Learning**

Karen L. Smith Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning
P.O. Box 160066 CB1-207
Orlando, FL 32816-0066
407-823-3544

Check us out online:
<https://fctl.ucf.edu>