

CTL's Monthly Newsletter keeps you updated on research-informed teaching strategies, events, and support available to everyone in the UMSL teaching community.



Photo by August Jennewein

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The Art of Gathering Online

The article below, written by Assistant Director Jenna Alexander, explores the ways in which Priya Parker's framework on "gathering" applies to teaching and learning online. The article builds upon Assistant Director Erin Whitteck's article [here](#), which focused on in-person classes.

With the rise in online education and the COVID-19 pandemic, UMSL faculty, staff, and students have increasingly relied on video conferencing platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams to gather in virtual spaces. Even now, faculty who do not teach online may still use Zoom or Teams for office hours, department meetings, events, conferences, and more. Video conferencing continues to be essential to our work, especially when we need to pivot online at the last minute (due to illness, inclement weather, and so on). Yet these tools also prompt us to think about what counts as "meeting" online. What does it mean to be "present" in an online class? What does "gathering" look like when virtual meetings often involve muted microphones, cameras off, and grids of tiny boxes?

Priya Parker's book [The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters](#) provides a useful framework for addressing those questions. She argues that each gathering should focus on a shared need. She encourages us to think about WHY we're gathering. What needs can be met by bringing this group of people together? As she says, "Let purpose be your bouncer." Using purpose to inform the decisions we make about who, what, where, when, and how to meet can make the experience more meaningful. With that framework in mind, we might consider the purpose(s) of our virtual meetings. Is meeting on Zoom or Teams the best way to achieve that purpose? Or would other formats (in-person, email, phone calls, or chat) be better?

Virtual meetings present unique challenges and opportunities. The experience of meeting online can be intimidating for faculty and students alike. Yet Parker reminds us that it is always risky to participate in a gathering, both as a host and as a guest. She imagines every gathering as a social contract, an agreement between a host (about what will be provided) and the guests. So, although teaching online can induce anxiety for many reasons, Parker's framework ensures that

the risks will be worth taking. Then we can realize the beauty in constructing knowledge together, innovating, and fulfilling the need for human connection that we all share.

For further information about how to apply Parker's framework to the classroom, see the "Three Teaching Intentions" section below. You can also find a 6-minute interview about her book [here](#).

Three Teaching Intentions - The Gathering Online Edition

This section highlights activities, practices, or elements of course design to be implemented intentionally. Every suggestion will not be appropriate for every context. Please see our contact information at the bottom of the newsletter to set up an individual consultation if you would like to discuss these ideas in more detail.



Welcome Your Guests

It may be tempting to begin each meeting with logistics and announcements, especially online. After all, students need to know how to sign in and join the meeting in order to fully engage with the course. So [getting students started](#) is important, as well as [making sure that students can access](#) the meeting and feel comfortable with the tool. But Parker recommends that we find more meaningful ways to begin our meetings, since helping students feel comfortable with the tool also involves helping students feel comfortable with the learning environment.

What, then, would be a more effective way to begin a meeting online? One idea would be to start the class by sharing your screen and displaying a welcome message when students enter the room. Play music. Greet your guests. Say "hi" when students enter the room. You could even address individuals by name, giving each student an opportunity to respond. (Think, too, about the plethora of ways in which students can respond online: via chat, using a reaction, using their microphones to speak, or through body/facial expressions on camera. Virtual meetings offer rich opportunities for connection.) You might ask students to respond to an ice-breaker question in the chat, so that all students can contribute to the conversation right away. Or you might create a poll to prompt reflection at the beginning ("How confident do you feel about this topic so far, on a scale of 1 to 10?"). That would give you a sense of how the students feel about the content before you proceed. The possibilities are endless. But the important point is to invite the students into your world, and then the students will be more willing to take the necessary steps to enter.

2

Establish Routines

As universities become increasingly multicultural, we recognize that everyone has different ways of gathering. We “show up” to online meetings in different ways. For instance, as [this Forbes article](#) explains, Zoom fatigue impacts some groups (women, people of color, young people, and introverts) more than others. So, we can be more inclusive by recognizing those differences and avoiding vague language. Clarifying expectations up front – and explaining how those expectations connect to the larger purpose of the meeting – will make students feel more prepared.

Consider the following:

- If you want students to complete certain tasks while in breakout rooms, make that clear in advance. Perhaps the students will need to save the whiteboard, contribute to a shared document, or “report out” to the larger group. Those expectations should be clear before opening the rooms.
- If you have preferences about how the students use the audio, video, and chat features online, make those clear to the students. For example, you may want to prompt students to [raise their hands](#) to avoid interruptions.
- If you struggle to keep up with the chat conversations while meeting online, consider saving the chat to review later. Or [request an Active Learning Assistant](#) who can monitor the chat and bring important issues/questions to your attention.

Establishing routines from the get-go will reduce anxiety for students and make facilitation much easier. In other words, Parker’s framework is not about being rigid, but about making students feel calm and focused so that learning can happen. (For more information, check out [these Zoom guides](#) from Missouri Online and [these Teams guides](#) from ITS.)

3

Anticipate the Ending

The ending of virtual meetings has been the subject of much [Internet humor](#), including articles about [ways of saying goodbye on Zoom that impress professors](#). But the ending of the meeting can be meaningful, if done with intention. [Erin Whitteck’s article](#) explored the idea of using exit tickets to prompt reflection at the end of class. Exit tickets could be done online as well, by

having students post comments in the chat. Or the teacher could invite students to turn off their cameras, mute their microphones, and sit in silence for a few moments of reflective writing. That activity would provide a much-needed respite for students experiencing fatigue, as well as a chance to stretch their bodies and minds. By giving permission for students to turn off cameras at specific times, we can inspire students to turn on their cameras at other times when more interaction is required. Again, with Parker's advice in mind, we can be intentional about ending the meeting in meaningful ways.

GIS Essentials Faculty Workshops

The UMSL Geospatial Collaborative will be hosting biweekly workshops for faculty from Friday, March 24th through Friday, June 9th. The workshops will cover a wide range of GIS mapping techniques that are essential for professionals who deal with geospatial data, including business analysts, urban planners, environmental scientists, and geographers.

During these workshops, faculty will learn how to:

- Create high-quality maps and analyze geospatial data.
- Use GIS software to manage and manipulate data.
- Visualize data using advanced mapping techniques.
- Conduct spatial analysis and generate reports.

The training is perfect for anyone who wants to take their GIS skills to the next level. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced GIS user, these workshops will provide you with invaluable insights and techniques that can apply to your work. For additional information, visit the website [here](#).

[Register for the GIS Workshops](#)

Reminder to Submit Midterm Grades

Midterm grades help students understand how they're doing in the course, as well as how to prepare for the remainder of the semester. Faculty have until **April 10** to submit midterm grades. Please consult this [Grade Entry Guide](#) for further information.

FOCUS on TEACHING & TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

a St. Louis Regional Conference

VIRTUAL September 29th & IN-PERSON October 6th, 2023

Focus on Teaching and Technology Conference - Call for Proposals

The Focus on Teaching and Technology Conference offers an ensemble of keynote addresses, faculty innovations during concurrent sessions, technology workshops, and vendor exhibits. The conference program has evolved over the years to reflect emerging trends in technology applications in higher education and shared expertise in online teaching experiences and strategies.

Calling all innovators! Are you trying something new in your class or program? The FTTC planning committee invites you to submit a proposal for our 2023 conference which will be a hybrid format this year, VIRTUAL September 29, and IN-PERSON on October 6, 2023 here on the UMSL campus! We are seeking presenters who can offer attendees both a vision of the impact and importance of their topic and concrete, practical examples of real-world implementation.

The deadline for proposal submissions is **April 30, 11:59 PM, 2023**. The proposal selection committee will review proposals throughout May and early June. We will reach out to you as soon as decisions have been made about the program. We highly recommend that presenting candidates take care to specifically address the questions asked and follow the guidelines listed for those questions. A careful review of the Evaluation Criteria below will also benefit proposals. Thank you for your interest in being a part of this amazing, dynamic and engaging conference. Our presenters are such a big part of what makes this a great event, year after year!

Interested, but unsure what to submit or how to frame it? Jen McKanry would be glad to talk with you to help brainstorm ideas and if interested, help build connections on campus with potential co-presenters. Reach out at mckanryj@umsl.edu.

[Submit a Proposal for FTTC](#)



2023

CTL Summer CAMP

Join the UMSL Center for Teaching and Learning Summer CAMP (Collaborating to Advance Meaningful Partnerships). The CTL is offering faculty the opportunity to refine and hone skills in a selected area to support their teaching goals for Fall 2023 and beyond. Faculty participants agree to provide peer feedback to fellow participants and to share what they learn within their departments/colleges. (Note if you are teaching fully online asynchronously you might also consider the [UM-System Missouri Online programs](#)).

In Summer CAMP you will work with faculty colleagues, student partners, and CTL camp leaders collaboratively within a faculty cohort. You'll receive student and peer feedback as you focus on specific aspects of your course.

Cohorts will meet via Zoom on **Tuesdays from 1pm-3pm, June 6, 13, 20 & 27th**. For the month of July you will work on building your materials in collaboration with your accountability groups and student partners. Then the program will conclude with a VIRTUAL showcase workshop on **July 25th from 1pm-3pm**. Facilitators and student partners will also be available throughout June and July to help faculty with questions, course design, and implementation.

We will have a maximum capacity of 25 faculty accepted into the program. Registration deadline is **May 8th**. You will be notified shortly after if you have been accepted into the program (as capacity allows) or added to the waitlist. Email Jen McKanry mckanryj@umsl.edu with questions.

Register for Summer CAMP

Summer 2023 Opportunity
Culturally Responsive Teaching Certification
CASEPS Workshop

[Register Now](#)

June 13-14, 2023: 8:30AM - 4:00PM

Cost: \$695/attendee

Culture and diversity influence educational, social, psychological, and social experiences. To that end, the [Council for At-risk Student Education and Professional Standards \(CASEPS\)](#) provides professional development and accreditation for institutions and individual materials that apply a cultural lens approach (CLA).

The UMSL community looks forward to a unique opportunity to attend the culturally responsive teaching certification program through the Council for At Risk Student Education and Professional Standards (CASEPS). These standards are used in accreditation for course materials (e.g., syllabi), courses, programs, and departments. Post-session support will support you throughout this process, which will also be facilitated by a premiere scholar of leadership and education, [Dr. Courtney Plotts, National Chair](#).

Outcomes | What you will achieve

This certification is being designed to address the following institutional outcomes:

- Increased cultural competence and responsiveness of faculty and staff
- Evidence of cultural competence and cultural responsiveness in course design and teaching

These outcomes will be achieved upon completion of the following:

- **Certification** in Culturally Responsive Teaching
- **National Accreditation** of course materials by submitting evidence for 13 standard domains

Questions? Contact Keeta Holmes (holmeskm@umsystem.edu) or Erin Whitteck (erin.l.whitteck@umsystem.edu).

[Register for the CASEPS Workshop](#)

Meet New Colleagues

Each newsletter will feature faculty who are new to UMSL. Please reach out and welcome them to campus.

Laika Satish, Department of Computer Science



Laika Satish is an accomplished professional with over nine years of experience at prominent industry and educational organizations. She has worked at various corporations across the globe, including in the Middle East, Asia, South Africa, the United States of America, Canada and France (remote operations). Her areas of expertise are data science, machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, Python, artificial intelligence and Asp.net. She is an IBM-certified Data Scientist.

Laika has mentored thousands of students and professionals in the areas of computer science, data science, data mining, big data, artificial intelligence and more. Laika has also won gold and silver medals at various hackathons throughout her career. During her tenure in the Middle East, her students ranked first among the 58 universities participating in the ACMICPC Programming Competition.

At the research level, Laika has published papers in *Science Direct*, *Elsevier*, *CiteseerX*, and *Procedia*. One of her latest papers, which provides a system for paralyzed people to interact with computers using artificial intelligence and deep learning, is registered as a patent in Indian Government Patents (2022). She was also a member of ABET Accreditation Committee.

Laika started her career as a software engineer

in the banking and finance industry. Since she maintains a heavy balance between industry and academia, she continues to work on international and national projects in financial technology and retail. Over the years, she has proven to be a skilled mentor who can motivate, educate, and manage people from diverse cultural backgrounds to further the institution's success.

Sara Miller, Department of Biology



Sara E. Miller, PhD is a faculty member in the Biology Department. Dr. Miller is a St. Louis City native who previously completed a MS degree in Biology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She received a PhD from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada where she studied adaptation in fish. During her postdoc at Cornell University, she switched taxonomic groups from fish to the world of social insects. Worldwide, insect species are experiencing declines in biodiversity and abundance, while social insects are responding to the changing climate by shifting their natural ranges and becoming common invasive pest species.

Dr. Miller's current research focuses on the causes of variation and speciation in paper wasps using a wide variety of methods from next generation sequencing to working with natural history museum collections. Understanding more about the basic biology of social insects can help scientists predict how insect biodiversity will be affected by climate change and other environmental stressors. Sara is excited to be back in St. Louis and spends much of her spare time convincing people to appreciate wasps.

Student Voice: Making a Difference in Students' Lives

Throughout the year, we will be incorporating student voices into the newsletter. The Center for Teaching and Learning greatly values student voices in all aspects of teaching, from design to delivery. Students chosen are current [Active Learning Assistants or Supplemental Instructors](#). Trey Roettering is an elementary education major and an Active Learning Assistant for Math 1030: College Algebra.

When I was young, school was difficult for me and I had to work hard to succeed. But I had an experience in middle school that would change my views of education forever. We were learning about American history and had our first test of the year. I ended up failing the test with a fifty percent. That was very disappointing for me; I was upset with my performance, but I didn't know what else to do. I was stuck. My parents had high expectations for me and always emphasized the importance of school, so they were concerned as well. I went to a private, Catholic school so the standards were high and the teachers wanted every student to succeed.

Later that week my teacher, Mrs. Schweissguth, asked to meet with me after class to discuss the test. That made me nervous because I was already disappointed about the test and didn't want to think about it anymore, let alone talk with my teacher about it. So, after class my teacher sat down with me to ask how I studied for the test and found some study strategies that would work for me. During the meeting I told my teacher about my reading comprehension difficulties and how that affected my ability to study effectively and recall information when taking tests. Because of this she spent a lot of time trying to find study strategies that would work for me. She helped me find the important ideas in the readings and write those down in my notes so that I can review them later. She also helped me discover that if I listen to the readings I can better comprehend it, so she gave me some CDs to accompany the textbook. She taught me how to study more effectively by spacing out my study sessions across multiple days, as well as self assessing by taking practice quizzes to figure out what I knew and what I needed to focus on more. I have used these strategies throughout my educational career, and they have helped me become a better student. She made me feel like I can overcome any obstacle in my way by working hard and figuring out which strategies work for me. I will never forget her dedication and will forever be grateful for how much she cared about my success and helped me overcome this obstacle. She could have easily just given me a failing grade and then moved on, but instead she went above and beyond to help me succeed. This experience inspired me to become a teacher because I want to have the same impact on my students that my teachers had on me.

Because of the help I received from my teacher, I knew how to help other students when I became an Active Learning Assistant (ALA). I have been an ALA for three semesters for Math

1030: College Algebra, which can be a difficult course for many students. At the beginning of each semester, many students feel nervous because they don't consider themselves to be good at math. By the end of the semester, students seem to have gained confidence and changed their mindsets about math. I help students by providing them with strategies that have been effective for me and for others. I enjoy watching the students grow throughout the course. My experience as an ALA has been a very positive experience that made me realize that I want to become a teacher who can make a difference in students' lives. All teachers can have the same impact on their student's lives, just like my teacher had on mine. It starts with showing your students that you believe in them and that you are available to help.

About the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), a division of the Office of Academic Affairs, supports the professional development of those who teach and learn at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Our goals - to promote engagement in courses, on campus, and in the community - enhance the University as we align our activities, services, and consultations with the campus goals to promote excellence in teaching, research, and service.

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