

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



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# Welcoming Students during the First Week

*The article below, written by Assistant Director Jenna Alexander, explores the importance of welcoming students during the first week of the semester.*

With the fall semester approaching quickly, you may be feeling excited and eager to return to the classroom. But you also feel pressured to make a positive first impression during the first week of classes. Your mind may run wild with questions and anxieties. Will you be ready? What will you wear? What will the classroom be like? What if you have trouble with the technology? What will the students be like?

In the article below, I suggest that we can channel those energies into three guiding principles: building community, building curiosity, and building trust. By keeping these guiding principles in mind over the next few weeks, we feel calmer and more confident as educators, knowing that we've done our best to lay the groundwork for a successful semester. We can also create more welcoming environments for students.

## *Introducing Ourselves – Building Community*

To build community at the beginning of the semester, make time for introductions. Those introductions can happen in a variety of formats (in class, in a Zoom chat, on discussion boards, on note cards, through VoiceThread videos, or through a combination of ways). Regardless, introductions allow you to form multiple, overlapping relationships in the classroom as you (1) introduce yourself to the students, (2) allow the students to introduce themselves to you, and (3) let the students introduce themselves to one another. In other words, you construct a web of relationships in the classroom, providing a foundation for a community that you can build upon throughout the rest of the semester.

For more information about how to build community in the first few weeks, see the “Three Teaching Intentions” below.

## *Introducing the Subject Matter - Building Curiosity*

As [James Lang explains](#) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, we often start the first day with an overview of what topics will be covered in the course, even though students may have no interest in or knowledge of that subject matter. He offers the following advice: “Do not begin the first day of the semester by immediately handing out the syllabus. Instead, spark their curiosity about the content first, and then demonstrate — with a review of the syllabus — how the course content can help satisfy that curiosity.”

How, then, can we spark curiosity on that first day? For starters, we can hint at the kinds of questions, ideas, and issues that will be explored in more depth throughout the course. In her graduate-level writing courses, for instance, Associate Professor and Department Chair Suellynn Duffey often opens with a broad prompt: “why write?” As students brainstorm together, she generates a list of answers on the board (such as “to connect with other people” or “to advertise” or “to learn”). Each response gives a glimpse into why the students should study language and move forward in the class. The activity invites students into larger conversations about writing, as well as provides the instructor with initial “data” about how the students will behave in class, interact as a group, and grasp the material.

## *Introducing the Course – Building Trust*

Students will come to the first day of class with questions about what to expect. What topics will be covered in the class? What books or other materials do they need to buy? What tests, projects, or other assignments will they need to complete? To address these questions, reserve time during the first week to cover the practical aspects of the course: policies, requirements, expectations, schedules, assessments, materials, resources, and accommodations. That information will be included in the syllabus, of course, but do not take up too much time reading over the syllabus on the first day. Instead, point out the main elements on the syllabus, highlighting key information and providing additional details as needed.

Some professors record virtual “tours” of their Canvas courses to give students an overview of how to navigate the course. Others invite students for input on the community norms, class rules, and/or participation rubrics. Others initiate discussions about the physical environment of the classroom (the lighting, the acoustics, the seating arrangement, and so forth), so that adjustments can be made. Overall, our goal should be to welcome students into the class, earn their trust, and look ahead to the future together. The first day is often very hopeful in nature. Or, in the words of blogger [Maryellen Weimer](#), “It’s a new course and, for most, the beginning of a new academic year. Optimism prevails. Teachers and students want the same things on the first day—a good course, a positive constructive learning environment, the chance to succeed—and at this point everyone still believes these things are possible.”

For additional resources on how to prepare for the first week of classes, check out [this article](#) from the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University and [this article](#) from the Eberly Center at Carnegie Mellon University.

*For further information about how to welcome students into the class, see the "Three Teaching Intentions" section below.*

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## **Three Teaching Intentions - The Welcoming 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.*



### **Introduce Yourself**

You have many options in terms of how to introduce yourself to students: make a statement in class, include a brief bio in the syllabus, post an introductory video on Canvas, etc. Regardless of which approach you take, be clear about how you would like to be addressed. (Think, too, about how [our identities can influence the way people perceive our titles and credentials](#).) Give some information about your background, your research interests,

and your teaching experience. Tell students about what motivated you to pursue a career in your field. In addition, explain how and when students should contact you (as well as when you will not be available, so as to establish clear boundaries from the beginning). Invite students to your office hours. The content and tone of your introduction will give the students an initial vibe about you as a teacher. (Are you laid back, strict, silly, serious, optimistic, organized, and so on?)

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## Let Students Introduce Themselves to You

At the beginning of the semester, take a look at your roster. Learn names, majors, and photos for each student. Note their year in school (freshman, sophomore, etc.). Then, in class, ask about their preferred names and pronouns, interests, career goals, and more. Take notes on the roster. Allow students to share information about themselves both verbally and in writing. In my writing courses, for example, I like to pass around notecards and ask students to put their names, majors, hometowns, and anything else they want me to know on the cards. I have received many fun answers to that last question (“I have a chinchilla”) as well as serious ones (“I have failed this course before”). A similar activity could be done online using a Canvas assignment or Google form.

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## Introduce Students to Each Other

Faculty and students alike complain about [ice-breaker activities](#), often because the icebreakers feel forced, like “busy work” that does not pertain to the content of the course. One way to address those concerns would be to link the icebreakers to the learning objectives for the course explicitly. For instance, you could have students pair up and interview one another by asking a series of low-stakes questions about the subject matter. Students in an art class could ask each other about their favorite colors, students in an education course could ask about an influential teacher, and so on. While introductory activities like this can be challenging, especially when the room fills with noisy conversations, these activities can empower students to connect with one another. By using informal interviews as ice-breakers, you also create an “buddy system” so that each student has at least one person in the class who they can contact besides the instructor. That connection may end up being a lifeline for students who struggle at some point throughout the semester.

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## Part-Time (Adjunct) Faculty Teaching Circle

We are thrilled to be moving into our third year of offering our part-time faculty teaching circle. The goal of this group is to enhance teaching effectiveness on the UMSL campus, specifically aimed at the needs of part-time faculty (sometimes referred to as adjuncts). While part-time faculty can also join many of the professional development opportunities on campus, these offerings are not always ideal for participation, nor do they target the specific questions

or issues part-time faculty face. Thus, the Part-time Faculty Teaching Circle was developed to specifically meet the needs of part-time faculty.

Join to:

- Connect with other UMSL part-time faculty across disciplines.
- Get focused updates specifically relevant to part-time faculty.
- Share teaching tips, resources and advice across disciplines.

Consider joining us this year for our cohort meetings via Zoom on Fridays from 12:30pm to 1:30pm.

For questions, contact Jen McKanry [mckanryj@umsl.edu](mailto:mckanryj@umsl.edu) in the CTL.

[Register for the Part-Time Faculty Teaching Circle](#)

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## Certificate in University Teaching

Are you working with graduate students who are interested in a career in teaching? Consider encouraging them to register for this non-credit Certificate which includes six (6) components, typically completed over a 2-year period, although it can be done in as little as a year. Units meet via Zoom on Fridays during the semester. Graduate students and part-time faculty who are new to teaching can register for individual units or the entire program.

Program Components:

- Unit F – Foundations of Higher Education (Fall)
- Unit D – Professional Development (Spring)
- Unit T – Teaching with Technology (Spring)
- Unit C – Capstone Teaching Practicum (Fall or Spring)
- Culminating Project - Teaching Portfolio

For questions, contact Jamie Martin [jmptr@umsl.edu](mailto:jmptr@umsl.edu) in the CTL.

[Learn More about the CUT Program Here](#)

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## Focus on Teaching and Technology Conference (FTTC) Returns to the UMSL Campus

After three years of virtual offerings, we are excited to have FTTC returning to Campus in 2023! The 2023 FTTC takes advantage of the best of an online and in-person conference. This

two-day conference will house virtual sessions on Friday, September 29th building on the flexibility and accessibility allowed by that format. And on Friday, October 6th we will house in-person workshops, interactive and engaging sessions, and lots of reflective and fun opportunities including the return of our in-person Exhibit Hall!

We will take full advantage of having everyone back together again in St. Louis! Each format offers an amazing opportunity for higher education faculty, administrators, staff, and students. Whether the roles of attendees involve course and curriculum development or academic technology support, FTTC provides a place to share and learn collaboratively. In addition, the conference offers a dynamic keynote speaker, faculty innovation idea-sharing, technology workshops, and vendor presentations. Our program evolves each year to reflect emerging trends in technology applications in higher education and shared expertise in online teaching experiences and strategies. As UMSL is one of the conference's Institutional Sponsors, our faculty and staff are able to attend for FREE. Won't you come join us?

[Register Here](#)

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## Testing Center Relocation and Policies

As a reminder, as part of the renovation of the JC Penney Conference Center to the Richter Welcome and Alumni Center, the Testing Center has moved to a temporary location as of January 2023. The temporary Testing Center location is on UMSL South Campus in the **South Campus Computer Building (SCB) Room 200**. The physical address for the temporary location is 2961 South Dr. if your students are using Google Maps GPS to find the new location. The South Campus Computer Building is located behind Marillac Hall and Provincial House near the former Child Development Center. We expect this temporary location to be the Testing Center home for at least the full Fall 2023 semester.

### Testing Center Fall 2023 Hours of Operation:

Monday - Thursday 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Friday: 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. \*

\*Tentative Open Fridays: Sep 29, Oct 6, Nov 10, Dec 8, Dec 15. All other Fridays closed. Note that the schedule is subject to change.

### Testing Center Policy Reminders:

- **Testing is by appointment only.** All students are required to schedule a testing appointment a minimum of 24 hours in advance of the desired date and time. Walk-ins are not accepted. Please encourage your students who may need to utilize Testing Center Services this semester to consult the final exam schedule to book a time slot in advance.
- **No whole-class testing.** The Testing Center does not have the capacity to support whole-class testing or large groups of students from the same class. Testing Center Services are intended for individual students who have a disability accommodation or miss exams given during class time due to illness, university-sanctioned event, or other unforeseen circumstance that prevents the exam from being proctored in the classroom

or with SmarterProctoring online proctoring. See [sample syllabus statement](#) if using SmarterProctoring or review the [training materials](#) by Missouri Online.

- **24-Hour Requirement for Faculty to Send Test Instructions.** Faculty are responsible for providing the Testing Center with exam administration directions for each exam that a student is scheduled to take in the Center at least 24 hours in advance of the scheduled appointment.

Review more online for [additional policies and procedures](#) for using this campus resource.

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## UMSL 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Challenge: Tracking your Service Hours

The UMSL 60th anniversary subcommittee on service has set a goal of 60,000 hours of volunteerism and service this year. Help achieve this goal by logging your hours after each act of service.

### Who Can Participate?

Anyone who loves University of Missouri-St. Louis is eligible to participate. It doesn't matter who you are; all that matters is that you have a desire to give back to your community.

### How to Participate

Find an individual, an organization, or a cause that needs help and give them your most precious gift – your time and talents. You can mentor a student, coach a youth basketball team, teach a Sunday school class, or work a shift at your local food bank. Any act of service and volunteerism counts.

As you accumulate your hours, submit them! You can log hours as often as you like, and there is no limit on the number of submissions. You can also record hours on behalf of a group or organization. The entire process will take less than one minute to complete. To track your hours, go to <https://www.umsl.edu/60/umsl-serves.html>.

Many of you are already volunteering and serving your communities, so keep up the excellent work and make sure to submit your hours as you complete them.

### Time Period

Please submit hours that you worked from August 21, 2023, until May 11, 2023.

### Share Your Photos & Videos

If you have photos/video of your volunteer efforts, please share them with the committee via email at [60@umsl.edu](mailto:60@umsl.edu).

### St. Louis Area Individual Opportunities

There are many volunteer opportunities throughout the St. Louis community for individuals to get involved. If you would like to learn more about ways to volunteer today, please visit the [United Way of Greater St. Louis website](#) to get connected.

## Reminder from UMSL Tutoring Center

NetTutor is an external tutorial service that provides 24/7 access to tutorial support through individual Canvas Pages, which must be opted-in to.

If you haven't already done so, please be sure to OPT-IN in Canvas by clicking "Settings > Navigation > Net Tutor > Enable" and moving it to your course sidebar.

Questions? Reach out to Megan Gregory, Director of the University Tutoring Center at [mhpn6@umsl.edu](mailto:mhpn6@umsl.edu)

Drag items here to hide them from students.  
Disabling most pages will cause students who visit those pages to be redirected to the course home page.

NetTutor <i>Page disabled, won't appear in navigation</i>	<b>+ Enable</b> ↕ Move
SCORM <i>Page disabled, won't appear in navigation</i>	
Grades <i>This page can't be disabled, only hidden</i>	
Discussions <i>This page can't be disabled, only hidden</i>	

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## Meet New Colleagues

*Each newsletter will feature full-time faculty who have recently joined us at UMSL. Please welcome our new colleagues to campus.*

### Rebecca Lennox, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice



Rebecca Lennox is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Her research draws on ethnographic methods to examine how race, social class, and gender intersect to shape women's vulnerability to violent stranger crime, attitudes toward police, and emotional responses to the threat of victimization. In addition to her central focus on gender and crime, Rebecca writes about the creation of social scientific knowledge. Prior to joining the CCJ faculty at UMSL, she completed a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Toronto.

Rebecca loves to walk, cycle, and read fiction in her spare time. She is currently reading *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* and *Girl, Woman, Other*.



## **Azim Ahmadzadeh, Department of Computer Science**



Dr. Azim Ahmadzadeh will be joining the Computer Science department at UMSL in Fall 2023, as an Assistant Professor. He holds a Ph.D. and M.S. degrees in Computer Science from Georgia State University, along with a B.S. degree in the same field and an A.S. degree in Mathematics. Dr. Ahmadzadeh has an extensive background in academia, having taught several courses, advised graduate students, and served as an editor and reviewer for various esteemed journals and conferences.

Before becoming part of UMSL, Dr. Ahmadzadeh held the position of Research Professor at Georgia State University, where his primary focus was on machine learning and its applications in interdisciplinary fields. Since then, he has been collaborating with prominent Astrophysicists and Heliophysicists to advance Space Weather Forecasting using machine learning and data science.

At present, Dr. Ahmadzadeh is leading a multi-institutional project called MLEcoFi, funded by the National Science Foundation. The project's primary objective is to create a machine learning ecosystem for the classification, localization, and segmentation of solar filaments. By providing researchers with an exceptionally vast collection of data describing solar filaments, this three-year project aims to overcome significant obstacles in utilizing machine learning to advance Heliophysics and Space Weather research. For more information about Dr. Ahmadzadeh, please visit his website at [www.azim-a.com](http://www.azim-a.com).

## **Tyson Holder, Department of Psychological Sciences**



Tyson Holder has joined the Psychological Sciences Faculty as an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) program. Tyson is a Nationally Certified and licensed School Psychologist. He obtained his Ed.D. (Educational Leadership and Administration & Educational Psychology) from the University of Missouri-St. Louis and his Ed.S. (School Psychology) and M.S. (Counseling and College Student Affairs) from Eastern Illinois University.

As a School Psychologist, Dr. Holder specializes in working with children who have autism, severe cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disorders, as well as those who have experienced a variety of trauma(s). Before joining UMSL he also served as an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Applied Psychology at New York University (NYU) and the Chicago School of Professional Psychology (TCSPP).

Dr. Holder has over 15 years of higher education experience, working in a variety of student/academic support roles (i.e., tutoring, Student Support Services-TRiO programs, and multicultural enrichment programming).

In his position, Dr. Holder will assist with providing faculty advising for students in the CAST Program as well as teach: CAST 1000: Introduction to Child Advocacy Studies; CAST 3295: Service-Learning Projects in Child Advocacy; CAST 4698: Internship in Child Advocacy Studies; and CAST 4700: Field Education Seminar in Child Advocacy Studies. Tyson is ecstatic for the opportunity to utilize his experience/expertise to educate and inspire future advocates and change agents.

In his spare time, Tyson enjoys playing guitar, spending time with his nephews and Furry Babies, and doing volunteer work.

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## 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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