UMSL | Center for Teaching and Learning

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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Facilitating Productive Conversations

The article below, written by CTL Assistant Director Jenna Alexander, explores the importance of facilitating discussions in the classroom.

As we settle into the rhythm of the fall semester, many of us have established routines in the classroom by now. Most students have learned where to sit, how the class will be structured, and how their work will be graded. However, some of those routines may still be in flux, so the time may be right for thinking about how we engage in conversation with students. Why should we incorporate discussion into our classes? How can students and faculty benefit from having vibrant and inclusive discussions in class? What challenges might we face when facilitating conversations? In the article below, I share strategies for facilitating discussions in the classroom, regardless of the format, size, or discipline.

Participating in college-level conversations can be daunting for students, especially when asked to consider controversial topics that trigger strong emotions. Facilitating these conversations can be tricky for faculty as well, especially for those of us who teach larger courses with a lot of students from diverse backgrounds. Yet I propose that the benefits of having class discussions outweigh the risks.

Discussions create space for students to contribute their own ideas to the class, deepening their knowledge of the content and developing their critical thinking skills. We can use discussions to model conflict resolution, help students gain social skills, and identify biases. Additionally, class discussions promote more inclusive learning environments where a variety of perspectives can be heard and respected. Whether you're teaching in person, on Zoom, on Canvas, or on VoiceThread, discussions can enhance the teaching and learning experience for everyone.

Perhaps the most important factor in preparing for class discussions is deciding which questions to ask (and in which order). You can start by crafting thought-provoking questions that generate a variety of responses. Open-ended questions invite exploration, so avoid yes/no questions as much as possible. Follow-up questions (like "Can you give an example?" or "Why would that be the case?") can prompt deeper thinking as well.

To prepare for class discussions, I often generate a list of questions that I can ask, starting with the most basic ("What do you know about this topic already?") and moving into the more complex questions that require higher-order thinking ("How does this concept relate to other concepts that we've discussed so far?"). As a result, my lesson plans contain lists of questions that I've crafted carefully over time. Then, when students pose questions, I often redirect those questions back to the group, rather than answering right away. This strategy encourages students to collaborate and solve problems together.

For further information about how to facilitate discussions, see the "Three Teaching Intentions" section below.

Three Teaching Intentions - The Facilitation 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.

1

Establish Expectations

When you articulate the expectations of the discussion, students will feel more confident and at ease. You may want to explain how the students can contribute to the discussion, how often they should contribute, how to disagree with one another, and how participation will be evaluated. For example, some faculty create community agreements, which could include statements like "listen with respect to the experiences of others" or "provide evidence to support your point of view." Ideally, the students will develop the agreement as a class, but you can also work individually with students who require additional support. These agreements can come in handy later; if and when students violate the agreement or behave inappropriately, you can refer back to the agreement in dealing with the situation. It is never too late in the semester to establish expectations for students.

For more information, check out Let's Talk: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students, a guide by Learning for Justice.

2

Share Strategies for Discussing Sensitive Topics

Students often have strong emotional reactions to the content we teach, but we can show them how to express those emotions in healthy ways. For example, in her social work courses, Teaching Professor Linda Wells-Glover uses an "oops" and "ouch" method to encourage civility and respect. Students say "oops" when someone in the class says something offensive or harmful to others. Students say "ouch" when they feel personally attacked or hurt by someone else's comment. This gives students an easy and socially acceptable way to acknowledge and cope with their emotions during class discussions.

3

Embrace Silence

Many of us feel awkward and uncomfortable in silence, especially on Zoom. Yet the research on "wait time" suggests that silence can be productive and beneficial for learning. After posing a question, allow 15-20 seconds of time for students to contemplate the question and formulate meaningful responses. Using wait time can also increase the quantity and quality of student responses. In other words, silence can be a powerful motivator. If you find yourself

tensing up during these silent moments, try sipping a glass of water, holding a pen, looking through your notes, or taking deep breaths. Soon students will realize that you welcome quiet reflection and productive silences in the classroom.

For more information, see [The Sound of Silence: The Value of Quiet Contemplation in the Classroom](#) by Rocky Dailey.

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 by 9/26](#)

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.

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.

Mid-Semester Feedback
Register yourself and/or your TA by September 23

The CTL offers the opportunity for faculty to get early, confidential feedback on their course(s) or those sections taught by TAs. Faculty and TAs can use feedback immediately to adjust or improve courses while the semester is still in progress. This process empowers students to feel involved in shaping their educational experience, and it signals to students that you value their learning and feedback. End-of-semester feedback improves when mid-semester feedback is solicited and addressed.

About the Mid-semester Feedback System

What is it? A confidential online questionnaire administered to students to obtain early feedback on the course. See the questions in the survey before you register.

Who can see the results? Only the instructor has access to the feedback. The instructor of record is able to see the results for any TAs they've requested feedback on. Otherwise, no one else can see the results.

What are the benefits? Confidential feedback is gathered for you to consider or possibly implement as the course is in progress and before final course evaluations.

When can you register? Faculty can register for the mid-semester feedback system as soon as the semester begins and continue until registration closes at end of day on September 23, 2023. Faculty can also register their TAs.

When is the survey available for students? The survey is available for students to complete

between September 24 through end of day October 8, 2023.

Need help or want to explore the FAQ about the mid-semester feedback survey system? Check out this resource for more information.

If you have any questions about mid-semester feedback, please contact us at ctl@umsl.edu.

Register Here by 9/23

UMSL Service-Learning Community of Practice

A community of practice is designed so that participants can share their practice experiences, develop and discuss areas of interests and build a sense of community. In this peer-to-peer learning format, participants decide the content of sessions and guide the discussions.

Participants in this group will explore the many ways to approach service-learning as a high-impact teaching and learning tool. Faculty will use readings and resources to understand how service-learning projects and curricula can enhance the UMSL experience for students, and create bridges to community partners.
The cohort will work together to develop sustainable programming for the campus on service-learning practices, and will explore and design models for best practices that will be used for their own courses and serve to expand faculty commitment to community-engaged courses.

Applications are being accepted through the beginning of October and selected participants will be notified by October 5th to confirm participation in this group. If you have questions, please contact Patricia Zahn at zahnp@umsl.edu.

Apply Here by 10/1

Meet New Colleagues

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

Emily Gum, College of Optometry

Dr. Emily Gum is joining the faculty at the University of Missouri-St. Louis College of Optometry. She is a native St. Louisan who completed her undergraduate degree at Truman State University with a major in Exercise Science and a minor in Biology. She received her Doctor of Optometry degree at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She then completed a residency in Ocular Disease and Low Vision Rehabilitation at the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center. She worked at a private optometry/ophthalmology practice in Kansas City and then returned to St. Louis where she worked as a staff optometrist in the John F. Hardesty, MD Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the Washington University School of Medicine.

Emily is excited to return to her alma mater as faculty! Outside of work she enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with her husband and two adorable sons (2 years old and 5 months old).

Lei Xu, College of Business Administration
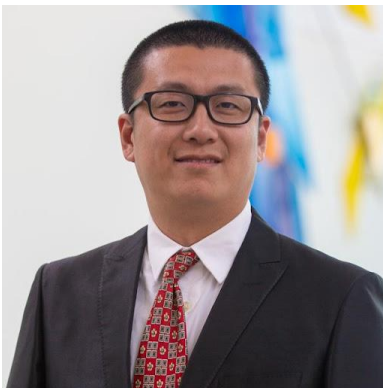
Lei Xu is an Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship of the College of Business and Administration at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He obtained his PhD degree in Business Administration at Rawls College of Business of Texas Tech University. His research area covers entrepreneurial ecosystems, entrepreneurial finance, and social network analysis.

Agata Freedle, College of Education

Agata Freedle is a board certified, Licensed Professional Counselor. She received her B.S. in Psychology from the University of Stirling, Scotland and her M.A in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Valparaiso University. In 2020, she earned her doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision from UMSL and she is excited to be returning to the UMSL community. Since graduating she has worked as an assistant professor at Lindenwood University. Her research focuses on reproductive trauma and perinatal mental health. Her goal is to develop evidence-based practices to support families with challenging reproductive narrative and to reduce disparities in care. She is passionate about engaging students in research and collaborating on student projects in the area of trauma, grief and loss.

Agata grew up in Poland and moved to the U.S. in 2011 to join her husband. Together they have been living in St. Louis since 2014. They have two daughters, a very lively two-year-old and a five-year-old who is excited to be starting kindergarten this fall. Agata enjoys ice-skating or rollerblading - depending on the weather.

Upcoming Dates, Deadlines and Reminders for Faculty

Monday, Sept 18: Last day a student in a 16-week course may drop a course or withdraw without receiving a grade; last day a student may place a course on Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory basis (Semester Calendars)

Monday, Sept 18: Window to submit annual conflict of interest disclosure opens (Information and Instructions; see email notifications for more information.) Deadline for submissions is Monday, October 16.

Sunday, Sept 24: Deadline to opt into mid-semester student feedback surveys (Information and link to opt-in)

Friday, Sept 29: Faculty Sabbatical Applications due to College Sabbatical Leave Committees (Tenured Associate and full Professors with 6 years of service eligible to apply)

Monday, Oct 2: Due date for tenure-track/tneured faculty to apply for scholarships to the 2024 sessions of NCFDD Faculty Success Program (Tenure-track Assistant and Associate Professors eligible to apply; Faculty Success Program Application)

Friday, October 6: Deadline to complete pre-Midterm Early Alert survey - flagging students who are showing signs of issues and sending kudos to students who are doing well - for all undergraduate courses through MyConnect (Information and Instructions)

Monday, October 9: Registration begins for Spring 2024 for returning students

Friday, October 13: Applications for NTT Teaching Leaves due (Non-tenure Track Associate and full Professors with 6 years of service and teaching responsibilities eligible to apply; NTT Teaching Leaves Application)

Monday, October 16: Last day a student in a 16-week session can drop a course or withdraw without instructor approval - an EX is assigned

Monday, October 16: Deadline to submit annual conflict of interest disclosures

Thursday, October 19 - Sunday, October 22: Fall Break for Students

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.

Director, CTL and
Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Innovation
Keeta Holmes
holmeskm@umsystem.edu

Assistant Director
Jenna Alexander
alexanderjm@umsystem.edu

Assistant Director
Jen McKanry
mckanryj@umsystem.edu

Learning Analytics Coordinator
Emily Litle
elmmw@umsystem.edu

Testing Center Coordinator
Sarah Butler
butlersr@umsystem.edu

Testing Specialist
Joel Erickson
ericksonjw@umsl.edu

Testing Specialist
Eric Grumke
egrumke@umsl.edu