



Alliant International University

Center for Teaching and Excellence - Newsletter

September 12, 2022

The [Center for Teaching Excellence](#) monthly newsletter provides information about events sponsored by the CTE as well as around the university and beyond. We also highlight resources available to Alliant faculty on the CTE site and elsewhere.

Dalia Ducker

Center for Teaching Excellence Events



Upcoming

On **Friday, September 23, 2022, 12:00-1:30 pm PT**, **Dr. Sharon Foster** will present a free webinar: **A Practical Guide to Mentoring Doctoral Dissertations and Doctoral Projects**.

Licensed Psychologists will be able to earn 1.5 CE units at no charge.

This presentation will draw from available empirical research and will focus on a) common issues that faculty encounter with students in doctoral process, including topic selection, weak student skills, and difficulties with time/project management, and b) ways to prevent and address roadblocks to success. Attendees will be encouraged to share their own experiences, particularly practical strategies they find useful in assisting students and in balancing their own workloads with the demands of individual mentoring.

Dr. Foster is a Professor Emerita at Alliant International University. In addition to teaching Research Design and Psychometrics, she chaired over 50 dissertations and served as a committee member on numerous other Ph.D. and Psy.D. dissertations and doctoral projects as a faculty member of the San Diego Ph.D. Clinical Program. She also served as the San Diego Ph.D. Program Director and as the Associate Provost for Research and Scholarship at Alliant. She is the coauthor of four books, including the APA best seller, *Dissertations and Theses from Start to Finish*, a guide to help students navigate the research process, now in its third edition.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Other Events



Upcoming

On **Friday, October 7, 10:00-11:30am PT**, **Dr. Oliva M. Espin** will present a webinar sponsored by the One Alliant, One Book series in collaboration with the California School of Professional Psychology and Alliant's Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity. She will discuss her memoir about her childhood in Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s: **My Native Land is Memory: Stories of a Cuban Childhood**

Oliva M. Espin, PhD is professor emerita at CSPP and the Department of Women's Studies at San Diego State University and a pioneer in the practice and theory of feminist therapy with women from different cultural backgrounds. The book is a narrative of her struggle for identity and independence against the backdrop of a country in turmoil and the experience of migration, loss, and perseverance.

Licensed Psychologists will be able to earn 1.5 CE units at no charge.



Cognitive Load Theory and Course Design: Support for Clarity and Consistency

Jeremy Bond and Meredith Villa

Simply put, cognitive load theory is “a theory about learning built on the premise that since the brain can only do so many things at once, we should be intentional about what we ask it to do” (Heick, 2017). If you have heard the tongue-in-cheek advice to ‘turn down the radio, to see better’ while driving in unfamiliar locations, or done this yourself, you were metaphorically face to face with cognitive load. By reducing one stimulus (the car stereo), more capacity is made for another input, the unfamiliar landscape or street signs. Turning down the volume, to concentrate more on one’s surroundings, is a deliberate act to reduce cognitive load and prioritize the brain’s focus in that moment.

Amusing example aside, it is fair to ask how this relates to the design of course materials and courses overall, especially since many students are self-proclaimed “multi-taskers”. Despite well-established research which refutes the perceived productivity benefit of multi-tasking, and in fact finds the impact on one’s intellectual performance is akin to staying up all night (Janssen, et al., 2015), some students still undertake course work while listening to music, streaming the latest Netflix series, keeping an eye on their children, or even chatting on WhatsApp. So, what’s an educator to do?

While we probably cannot do much to eliminate what’s described above, we can discourage it, inform our students, and take more active steps to streamline course design, considering the advice offered in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Community of Inquiry literature, and leveraging options in Canvas, such as Modules. In fact, all elements of an online course’s design, or the design of a face-to-face class’s supplemental online materials can be considered, and the structure and presentation thereof improved to lessen cognitive load on students.

Are you accounting for your students’ cognitive load? Answer the Following Questions to Find Out.

- Have you deliberately considered the format, organization, and sequence of course materials made available online?
- Are materials presented as logically and intuitively as possible, utilizing the built-in features of Canvas? (e.g., modules, folders, files, etc.)?

Have you made yourself socially and pedagogically present? Answer the Following Questions to Find Out.

- Have you added information about study time and advisable strategies for your course in a prominent location?
- Do you provide a ‘read me first’ or ‘how to’ guide/video/announcement which walks students through the layout of your class?
- Are materials presented in a consistent fashion from week to week or module to module such that the overview suggested above is possible and concise, with few (if any) caveats?

References

Heick, T. (2017). What is the cognitive load theory? A definition for teachers. TeachThought.

Janssen, C. P., Gould, S. J., Li, S. Y., Brumby, D. P., & Cox, A. L. (2015). Integrating

Teaching Tips



Creating a Sense of Belonging for Students

A sense of belonging in educational environments is defined as “students’ sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual” (Goodenow, 1993, p.25). Students’ sense of belonging has been found to be related to positive outcomes such as engagement, persistence, well-being, feelings of self-worth and social acceptance, motivation, and academic success. Belonging is especially crucial for first-generation and underrepresented students who may not feel comfortable in an academic setting.

Strategies to increase students’ sense of belonging are of two types: those intended to mitigate students’ fixed mindset about their intellectual ability and those aimed at decreasing their uncertainty about belonging. Cultivating a growth mindset that allows students to see poor performance as a temporary setback that can be remedied may include the following instructional strategies:

1. Communicate high expectation and the belief that all students can succeed
2. Provide clear and specific information/instructions on what it takes to be successful in the course and how students can achieve that success
3. Allow for productive trial and error (e.g., through low-stakes practice quizzes, drafting opportunities, or modeling correct responses)
4. Specify course policies on what happens if students are absent, turn in work late, leave class early, etc.
5. Emphasize that risk, struggle, and failure can be important parts of any learning process
6. Give constructive feedback and reach out to students who are struggling
7. Normalize challenges and provide strategies to overcome them by explicitly acknowledging student worries and struggles.
8. Give specific examples that frame mistakes as opportunities to learn (rather than something to be avoided)

Helping students feel they belong in a course may involve developing connections to the instructor and other students as well as reducing feelings of marginalization in the following ways:

1. Build connections to instructors
 - a. Create and disseminate a welcome message before classes begins that tells students about the instructor as well as the course
 - b. Prepare an introductory message
 - c. Learn and use students’ names and pronouns regularly
 - d. Create opportunities for students to provide feedback on the course and share ideas for improving it (e.g., short anonymous polls, check-ins at the beginning of a class meeting, or written feedback)
 - e. Check in with students regularly, asking them how things are going, not only with the course, but also more generally
 - f. Communicate concern for students’ well-being and provide information on campus resources if needed
 - g. Encourage or require students to visit student (office) hours early in the term

h. Make sure office hours are convenient for students by (a) making some are Zoom-based, (b) setting some immediately before or after class time, and (c) taking into account students' time zones

2. Build connections to peers

- a. Create peer learning opportunities by incorporating activities that enable students to interact and learn together (e.g., small group discussions, collaborative projects, and active learning exercises)
- b. Use icebreakers to build rapport
- c. Provide peer mentoring opportunities that allow students to learn from each other
- d. Develop guidelines and community agreements about interactions during class
- e. Encourage Informal interactions outside of class (e.g., study and review groups)
- f. Encourage students to share with their classmates their experiences and the tips/strategies that are working for them

3. Mitigate feelings of marginalization

- a. Highlight the diversity of contributors to your discipline (e.g., through the authors assigned, the material included, and the guests invited to meet with your students)
- b. Avoid generalizations that may exclude students who are already experiencing marginalization at the university (e.g., phrases that make implicit assumptions about students' physical ability, family structure, social identities, citizenship status, or economic means)
- c. When possible, assign student groups or provide criteria for student-formed groups/teams that help reflect diversity and avoid isolating students from underrepresented identities
- d. Model inclusive behavior (e.g., gender inclusive teaching, facilitating difficult dialogues, and confronting microaggressions)

Additional information on this topic will be available on the CTE site.

, nonbinary, genderqueer, etc.) a person uses to describe themselves.

Other Resources



Articles

[Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies](#)

The Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation at Clemson University developed a list of the top ten evidence-based strategies for college teaching. These include: (a) state clear learning objectives; (b) share and model how students will do a task; (c) check for student understanding; (d) give regular feedback; (e) record information graphically; (f) allow repeat and spaced practice; (g) create peer-to-peer learning; (h) build in time to succeed; (i) teach strategies for learning; and (j) nurture metacognition.

Podcasts

[Inclusive Teaching](#)

In this episode of the *Teaching in Higher Education*, Drs. Viji Sathy and Kelly Hogan, faculty members at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, talk about their new book: **Inclusive Teaching – Strategies for Promoting Equity in the College Classroom**.

Videos

[Two Minute Mentor](#)

The University of Kansas Center for Teaching Excellence site includes a series of short videos by faculty about topics related to teaching. Each is accompanied by a short narrative. Topics include Evaluating Learning, Optimizing Class Time, Responding to Plagiarism, Graduate Seminars, Time Management, and Using Course Evaluation Data.

Blogs

[Balancing Flexibility Accountability](#)

This post from the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching addresses the question “How can you articulate policies that promote student success and make room for the unexpected to happen, while maintaining accountability?” It addresses issues related to transparency, making up missed work, handling requests for extensions, and attendance and advocates for compassion, while providing clarity and boundaries.

Shared Resources



[Warm syllabi](#)

A syllabus serves four major functions: contract, permanent record, communication device, and learning tool/cognitive map. Schools often have templates for syllabi content, but it is also important to pay attention to tone. Pedagogical research suggests a warm, learner-centered syllabus can help students learn. This document from the Oregon State University Center for Teaching and Learning provides examples of information and terms to be included in a warm syllabus.

[Setting Community Guidelines](#)

The Claremont Colleges Center for Teaching and Learning developed a handout that suggests five steps for working with students to set community guidelines for a class: (a) conducting a self-assessment of goals for the class process/climate; (b) taking time to work out the guidelines and creating a structure for future interactions; (c) developing a shared understanding of definitions of key terms; (d) building in structures for stopping, reframing, and interrupting when things don't go as planned; and (e) reviewing and reposting agreements regularly.

Faculty Success and Well-Being



[Faculty Research Success on a Shoestring](#)

The authors of this article in *Inside Higher Education* suggest ways faculty members can create “a community of scholars” at institutions with limited research support. Their ideas include (a) co-writing, the practice of writing synchronously with others at a fixed time, whether virtually or in a set place, to provide accountability, social motivation, and support; (b) writing groups of 3 to 5 faculty that meet regularly to discuss one another's writing and provide deadlines and constructive feedback; (c) faculty flash talks, informal talks during a one-hour session that features 3 to 4 presenters who each have 5 to 10 minutes to share their work and then take questions from the audience; (d) writing retreats that involve intense immersion for a protected time (3-5 days) at an off campus; and (e) faculty success summit, a full day devoted to faculty scholarship, creative work, and development at the end of the academic year, which can help faculty members set goals for the summer.

[Civil Discourse in the Classroom](#)

This is a report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about the “Teaching Civil Discourse in the College Classroom” summer seminar at Duke University. The course was developed in response to the finding that students are often reluctant to voice their opinions in class and therefore self-censor their contributions. The goal was to discover how instructors can create an environment in which students can productively disagree. Attendees, who represented a range of colleges and disciplines, discussed “what it means to have civil discourse, what professors should expect from their students, and what the boundaries of speech in classroom discussion should be.” Participants expressed a range of views about the key issues, some of which are reported in this article.

Dalia Ducker

Alliant International University

dducker@alliant.edu

