



Alliant
International
University

Center for Teaching Excellence – Newsletter

Connect with us - CTE@alliant.edu

January 2026

CTE News You Can Use

Searching the CTE Site



The CTE website is searchable. A small magnifying glass icon appears at the top right-hand corner of every page. It allows users to enter a word or phrase to search for a topic of interest. For example, a search for the word **Transparency** yielded the following results:

- [First Generation Students](#)
- [Writing Teaching Statements](#)
- [Academic Rigor](#)
- [Course Ground Rules](#)
- [Faculty Use](#)
- [Teaching with Generative Artificial Intelligence](#)
- [Authentic Assessment](#)
- [Creating an Inclusive Syllabus](#)

Future Events



Chairing Dissertations: How to Successfully Guide Students through the Dissertation Process

By Dr. Rebecca Bokoch

February 13, 2026, 12:00 – 1:00 pm PT

[REGISTER](#)

This workshop will focus on how to guide students through the dissertation process and lead them to successful and prompt dissertation completion. The workshop will discuss approaches to different stages of the dissertation, as well as overall strategies. It will cover areas such as choosing dissertation topics, common roadblocks and challenges, dissertation assignments, supervisory approach, and use of timelines and rubrics, as well as other tools and tips. There will be time to ask questions and to share ideas to add to the list of effective dissertation chairing strategies.

Grading for Competence in Online and On Ground Classrooms

By Dr. Rhoda Olkin and Dr. Cynthia Pancer

March 19, 2026, 12 :00 – 1:00 pm PT

[REGISTER](#)

What are grades and homework feedback for? This essential question guides instructors' classroom practices. Two recent books have challenged usual methods of grading: *Grading for Equity* (Flanagan, 2023, 2nd ed.) and *Grading for Growth* (Clark & Talbot, 2023) and sparked a national conversation about best practices. With a focus on graduate education that is competence based, two accomplished instructors present how they apply the principles of growth-focused grading and feedback methods to online classes (Cindy Pancer, School of Education) and on ground courses (Rhoda Olkin, CSPP). They give brief examples of why changes are necessary, provide concrete examples of changes they have made, and discuss students' reactions to these changes. Time for questions and discussion will be allotted.

GenAI in Practice: Real-World Integration by Alliant Faculty

April 16, 2026, 12:00 – 1:00pm PT
TBA

Explore how Alliant faculty integrate Generative AI into courses and assignments. Gain insights from their successes and challenges, along with practical ideas to engage students and prepare them for future careers. Leave with clear, manageable strategies you can apply to begin integrating AI into your teaching practice.

Past Events Available On Demand

Visit the [Webinars on Demand](#) area of the CTE website for recorded sessions led by faculty, staff, and guest experts covering a variety of topics, including:



- Generative AI
- Canvas Features
- Digital Accessibility
- Creating Engaging and Inclusive Learning Environments
- RISE Model/Discussion Forums
- Effective Feedback Strategies and Student Support
- Universal Design for Learning
- Library Resources and Academic Support
- Faculty Development and Mentoring Practices

Resources from the Online Teaching Team



Monitor and Engage: Strategic Outreach Utilizing **People & Course Analytics** in Canvas

By Melissa Vervinck, D.E.T.

When a new term begins, knowing who is in your course and is actively participating is important. Canvas offers two tools: **People** and **Course Analytics**. By using these embedded features starting in Week 1, you can identify students who need support by reaching out to them proactively. This sets them up for success before small gaps in learning or accessing course materials become big challenges.

Step 1: Check Enrollment with the People Page

The link to the **People** page is found in the Course Navigation Menu. This page provides a quick snapshot of enrollment information including Names, Email Addresses, Roles, Last Activity and Total Activity. This is also where you can access Groups if used for your course. Click on a student's name to reveal a side panel with additional information. Here, you can send a message via the Canvas Inbox to the student as well as find a link to grading information and Course Analytics.

Why start here?

The People page is the fastest way to confirm enrollment and identify students who have not logged in yet. If a student shows no login activity, that's your cue to send a message, no need to investigate further. Once you've addressed those cases, move to Course Analytics to uncover engagement patterns, allowing you to take proactive steps with students who may need additional support.

Step 2: Move to Course Analytics for Engagement Insights

Switch to Course Analytics for a more detailed view of student activity. One way to access this section is to go to your Course Navigation menu and select Course Analytics. At the top of the page, you'll find

several tabs that let you view key information about your students and course activity. These include:

- **Needs Attention:** Shows students who may require extra support based on their engagement or performance.
- **Course Grade:** Displays grading information for all students with filters to dig deeper into grading data
- **Weekly Online Activity:** Tracks students' participation and activity in the course and provides data about resources in the course
- **Students:** Lists all enrolled students and lets you access individual details, including page views and participation information.
- **Reports:** Provides downloadable summaries of student activity and performance for further analysis, including missing assignments, course activity, and more.

These options help you easily monitor student progress, identify those who may need assistance, and keep track of overall course engagement.

Step 3: Apply Filters and Reach Out

To make the most of this area, you will need to choose specific filters to help you target students who need support. Common criteria:

- No Page Views or Participations in the first specified number of days
- Fewer discussion posts compared to class average
- Course Score

Messaging Ideas

Choose the appropriate filters for activity or participation and then save your selection. This action will generate a list of students who meet the specified criteria. From the **Needs Attention** tab, you can message students individually through the Canvas Inbox, even if you are sending the same message to multiple students. When students satisfy your chosen standards in Course Analytics, use these messages to either recognize achievement or provide necessary support.

Student Outreach Using the Needs Attention Tab

From the **Needs Attention** tab, you can message students individually through the Canvas Inbox, even if you are sending the same message to multiple students. This targeted outreach is especially useful for responding to students who meet specific criteria you have chosen to analyze. These messages can be used to acknowledge achievements or offer necessary assistance so that all students receive timely feedback and support tailored to their needs.

- Positive Outreach
 - **High Performance** - "Great job on your early work! Your strong start sets the tone for success!"
 - **Active Participation** - "Your contributions in discussions are making a real impact. Thank you for engaging so thoughtfully!"
 - **Encourage Leadership** - "Your engagement is outstanding! Would you consider sharing a quick tip for success with your classmates?"
- Supportive Outreach
 - **Inactivity Detected** - "I noticed you haven't been active recently. Do you need help accessing materials or getting started?"
 - **Missing or Late Submissions** - "Several assignments appear missing. Let's work together on a plan to get back on track."
 - **Low Engagement Compared to Class Average** - "Your voice matters; jump into the discussion and share your perspective!"
 - **Early Warning for Low Scores** - "Your current score suggests you might need extra support. Here are some resources to help you succeed."

Keep Engagement Going

To maximize student engagement and success, it is important to incorporate regular outreach into your course management, starting in week one and continuing throughout the course. This involves using tools such as People and Course Analytics and continuously refining your filters and messages as the term progresses. Consistent outreach not only helps you recognize achievements and provide support where needed but also maintains ongoing communication with your students.

For assistance with Course Analytics, please contact [Online Learning](#). Our team is available to offer further training and support as needed.

Teaching Tips



Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT)

Transparency in teaching is about providing clarity and structure that supports student learning. Specifically, transparent assignment design aims to make the learning processes more explicit for students. It demystifies academic processes and helps students understand what is required of them, leading to enhanced engagement and success among all students. The Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TLT) framework, developed by Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes and colleagues, focuses on three components for designing and introducing assignments:

1. **Purpose:** Clearly articulating the learning objectives and the relevance of the assignment to skills students will learn and knowledge they will gain to perform beyond the course. Knowing why an assignment has been included in a course helps students understand both the short and long-term importance of the task and how it fits into their overall learning goals and plans, increasing their engagement and motivation. Issues to address:
 - Skills practiced
 - Knowledge gained
 - Relevance to students' future
 - Relevance to course learning objections
2. **Task:** Providing explicit instructions on what students are expected to do. This information includes detailing the activities, steps, and processes required to complete the assignment. This knowledge gives students an idea of how to approach the task and helps them focus by reducing their confusion, anxiety, and frustration. Issues to address:
 - Steps to follow
 - Order in which to follow them
 - Possible problems
 - Resources available
3. **Criteria:** Specifying the characteristics of the finished product and the standards by which the work will be evaluated. This step includes providing rubrics, checklists, examples of successful work, or explanations of what constitutes excellence on the assignment. The purpose is to clarify both the expectations and common pitfalls of the assignment. This specificity also increases consistency and fairness in grading and allows students to evaluate their own work more accurately. Issues to address:
 - What excellence looks like
 - How best to evaluate student work
 - Opportunities for feedback
 - Criteria students can use for self-evaluation

Resources for Using TILT from *TILT Higher Ed*

- [Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education](#)
- [Checklist for Designing Transparent Assignments](#)
- [Transparent Assignment Template](#)

Other Resources



[If You Care About It, Do It in Class](#)

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, James Lang argued for faculty members changing how they use class time, shifting from “first exposure to skills practice.” His three major points are “(a) Whatever you care most about students learning in your course, do it in class; (b) If you don’t use class time for skills practice, start doing so now; and (c) If you already do, do it more”. He stressed the need to break down assignments into their component skills, which should be practiced in class, and provided examples of how this could be done. He concluded that in order for students to learn to fulfill assignments and meet course learning objectives, “the classroom has to become the laboratory for practicing the skills.”

Shared Resources



AI Resources for Instructors

Lance Eaton’s year-end post on his Substack, *AI + Education = Simplified*, is titled [A Few of My Favorite Things](#). In it, he provided resources related to AI that he thinks are useful for instructors. They include lists of (a) writing to follow; (b) video channels to watch; (c) conversations on social media and LinkedIn, and (d) some of his own writings, such as (1) [AI Plagiarism Considerations Part 1](#), with [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#); (2) [AI Syllabi Policies: A Look at the Collection](#); (2) [AI Plagiarism Considerations Part 1](#): Along with [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#); and (3) [On Not Using GenAI](#).

In this edition of his Substack, *Wonder Tools*, Jeremy Caplan provided an annotated list of [10 AI Tools I Actually Use](#). They include

1. [NotebookLM](#): Explore Your Own Notes
2. [Claude](#): Tackle Projects and Make Your Own Apps
3. [Granola](#): Summarize any Meeting or Live Event
4. [Perplexity](#): Find Relevant Info
5. [Gemini](#): Learn About Anything
6. [Ideogram](#): Design Engaging Images
7. [Superhuman](#): Process Email Efficiently
8. [Craft](#): Design Attractive Documents
9. [Gamma](#): Make Compelling Slides
10. [ChatGPT](#): Keeps Getting Better

Faculty Well-Being and Success



[Academic Publishing Tips](#)

This site, sponsored by the *Times Higher Education*, contains a series of presentations with advice on academic publishing to help academics understand and navigate this world. It includes guidance on how to pitch academic publishers, write book proposals, work with editors, understand peer reviews, and learn about open access and copyright. The purpose is to help academic get their work published in journals or as books. Specific examples of topics include

- How to figure out your book
- The unexpected benefits of academic blogging
- How to write even when the words won’t come

- Anatomy of an academic book proposal
- Subtle steps to protect your authorship
- How to promote your book with confidence



Dalia Ducker
dducker@alliant.edu