TEACHING AND LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

Newsletter of Eastern's Center for Teaching, Learning, & Assessment
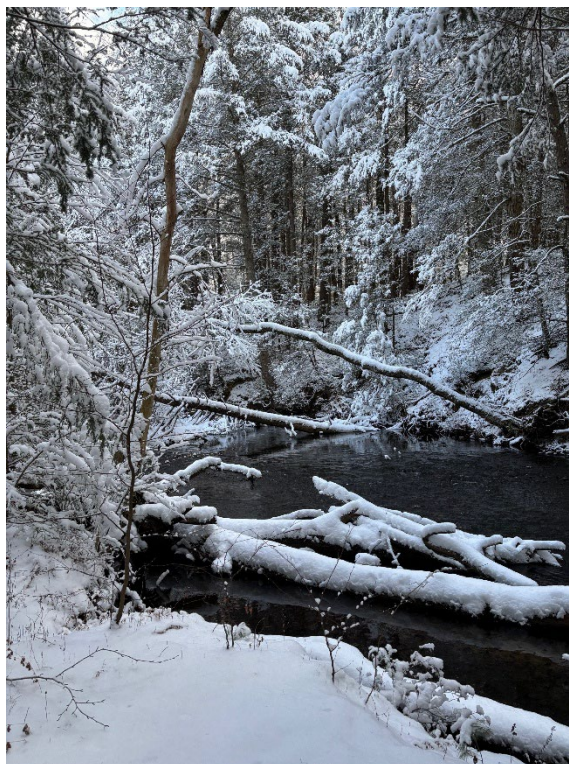Issue 19 • January 2026

Welcome back to campus! Whether you spent the last couple of days staying cozy inside or enjoying the new snow outside, I hope you were able to take a few moments to view the breathtaking winter scene. (The picture to the right is of Fenton River, taken Monday morning from the Nipmuck Trail in Mansfield.)

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Upcoming Workshops and Events

Microlearning as a Tool to Enhance Student Learning and Engagement
(A Teaching Scholars session)

Monday, February 2, 12:00 – 1:00 pm
President's Dining Room in Hurley Hall (Lunch provided by the CTLA)
Led by Barbara Murdoch, Professor of Biology

Microlearning is an educational strategy that delivers focused content in short bursts that is ideal for tackling complex subjects. This model is thought to enhance student learning, in part because it's a more flexible and engaging learning environment and provides just-in-time training for timely skill acquisition.

In this session, Barbara Murdoch will provide information about the focus of her 2024-2025 Teaching Scholars project, where she tested the effects of microlearning modules on student learning and engagement in a biology course for non-majors. She will provide an overview of microlearning and describe the two types of microlearning content she developed during her project: 1) Just-in-time training and 2) Short lesson. She will also share the results of her study and

her guidance for other faculty thinking about incorporating microlearning in their classes. Participants will have an opportunity to reflect on content in their own courses that might benefit from targeted microlearning opportunities.

This session is open to all educators on campus. No registration is required.

Changing the AI Conversation

Monday, February 2, 3:00 – 4:30 pm (virtual)
Led by Jon Rice from EAB

Generative AI is becoming part of the professional and academic environments students will enter after graduation, raising important questions about teaching, learning, and academic expectations across disciplines. This session invites faculty to engage with AI in a more productive and less polarized way. Participants will explore how AI is shaping the world of work, examine common assumptions that influence how faculty approach AI, and consider a range of instructional responses from limiting use to integrating it intentionally. The emphasis is on informed engagement, disciplinary judgment, and practical decision-making, helping faculty clarify where AI fits in their courses and where it does not, while preserving the core values of higher education.

This session is made possible by support from the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system office and their ongoing partnership with EAB.

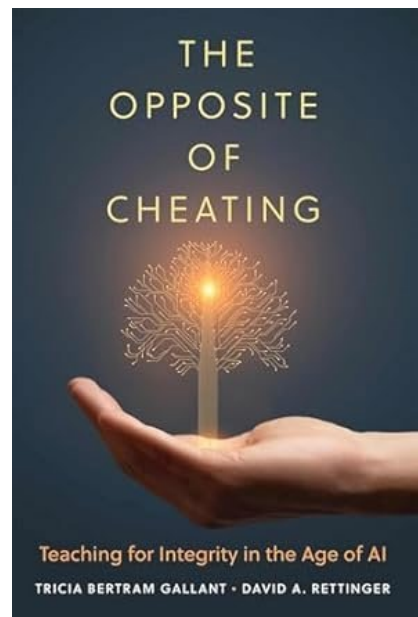The session is open to all and will be recorded. Join the session on Zoom.

Book Discussion on *The Opposite of Cheating: Teaching for Integrity in the Age of AI*

Wednesday, February 11, 12 - 1 pm
Facilitated by T. Caitlin Vasquez-O'Brien, Psychological Science

Thirty-five faculty have signed up to participate in the February 11th "guilt-free" book discussion of *The Opposite of Cheating*. While the CTLA no longer has any free copies of the book to hand out, we can still accommodate a few more people in the book discussion for those who are able to obtain the book on their own.

Many faculty have been grappling with how to respond and adapt to increasing student reliance on AI for completing assignments. Faculty have questions about how to adjust assignments to make AI use less likely, how to talk with students about acceptable and not acceptable AI use, and how to respond when they suspect students have violated AI policies. The authors of *The Opposite of Cheating* propose a variety of strategies—both small and large—to assist faculty in adjusting to this new reality.

If you are interested in participating in the discussion, please email Julia DeLapp at delappj@easternct.edu. If you aren't able to finish the entire book by February 11th, you can still participate in the discussions—with no guilt! This opportunity is open to all educators on campus.

Open Education Week

March 2 – March 6
Multiple events and locations

Open Education Week 2026 will be celebrated on campus the week of March 2nd. The week will provide opportunities for students and faculty to learn more about Open Education, Open Pedagogy, and Open Educational Resources (OER), which are teaching and learning materials that are in the public domain or licensed to permit no-cost access, reuse, revision, and re-distribution. Organized by Dr. Nicolas Simon, Open Education Week will feature a variety of events, including an exhibition showcasing OER currently used by Eastern faculty in their courses, a panel discussion in Hurley by faculty utilizing OER, a keynote presentation by OER expert Kevin Corcoran, and several student-facing events and activities.

Keep an eye out for more details to come by email. If you'd like to participate or help plan Open Education week activities, contact Nicolas Simon at simonn@easternct.edu. To read more about OER and open pedagogy, view resources on the CTLA website.

Colloquium: Liberal Arts in the Age of AI

Tuesday, March 24

Eastern will host a colloquium called "**Liberal Arts Education in the Age of AI**" on Tuesday, March 24th in the Student Center. This colloquium will help faculty navigate the challenges and opportunities in teaching, creative activity, and research that have arisen from artificial intelligence. The colloquium will feature presentations, roundtable discussions, and panels based on feedback from a recent Faculty Survey on Generative AI Use and from a Faculty Roundtable Discussion on Generative AI. The event will include opportunities relevant for both faculty and students.

The event is being planned by a committee of faculty and staff led by Garrett Dancik and Emily Todd. More information about the colloquium, as well as a call for presenters and panelists, will be coming by email soon.

Update From the Assessment Coordinator

Spring Assessment of Ethical Reasoning (ER) and Quantitative Literacy (QL)

Thank you to all faculty who submitted their Fall QL or ER assignment prompts and student artifacts. We received assessment materials for 96% of the QL courses and 65% of the ER courses, and we will be reaching out to faculty for courses with missing materials.

This spring, we have identified 26 ER course sections and 47 QL sections. Faculty who are teaching these courses recently received an email from Suki Grandhi with information about the assessment process this semester. We are pleased to report that we continue to streamline the submission process, and we have a much improved Sharepoint site with clearer instructions. You can visit the site at any time to access:

- Instructions and links for submitting assignments and artifacts
- Materials from and recordings of previous workshops related to assessment
- Frequently Asked Questions about the assessment process, how to identify which assignment to use for assessment purposes, and where to get help when needed
- Materials that may be useful in planning for assessment, including links to ELAC rubrics, worksheets to check for assignment alignment, and other resources
- Recent and historical assessment reports

You must be logged into your Eastern email to access the site.

Questions? Contact Suki Grandhi at grandhis@easternct.edu.

Tech Tip (A periodic column from the Center for Instructional Technology)

Early Adopter program for Blackboard Ultra

Eastern will fully transition from Blackboard Learn to Blackboard Ultra in Fall 2026. This migration is in preparation for the expected end-of-life of Blackboard Learn Original in December 2026.

Many faculty have signed up for the **Early Adopters opt-in group** to begin using the Ultra platform for the Spring 2026 semester ahead of the mandatory transition in Fall 2026. While the deadline for participating this spring has passed, faculty may still sign up to join the Early Adopters Group to transition to Blackboard Ultra for summer courses.

If you would like to learn more about Blackboard Ultra, you can watch a recording of CIT staff introducing Blackboard Ultra. If you have any questions, please reach out to CIT at cit@easternct.edu.

External Faculty Development Opportunities

Free (or very low cost) opportunities

- January 22, 11 am – 12 pm: Harvard Business School is hosting **Working Smarter with AI: Applying Skills to Strengthen Learning Through Human-AI Collaboration**. Led by Dr. Julie Schell at the University of Texas at Austin, the free webinar will "explore how educators and students can work alongside AI to deepen learning and drive pedagogical innovation." All registrants get access to the recording.
- January 27, 2-3 pm: ACUE is hosting **AI in the Classroom: Practical Strategies to Enhance Learning and Protect Academic Integrity**. The webinar will cover how to set clear AI policies, communicate expectations to students, and apply AI "in ways that strengthen rigor, engagement, and academic integrity."

- January 30 – 31: The California Outcomes Assessment Coordinators Hub is hosting the 13th annual **Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Symposium**, a free virtual conference. This year's theme is "Assessment of What Students Can Do: Making Learning Observable."

Other opportunities

- February 4 – 6: Virginia Tech is hosting the 18th annual **Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy (CHEP)** in Blacksburg, VA. The conference is designed to showcase the best current pedagogical practices and research in higher education.
- February 3 – March 27: CAST is offering an 8-week online course on **Introduction to Universal Design for Learning** (UDL). The course is designed to help faculty address the challenges of teaching students with different abilities and from different backgrounds. It includes some synchronous (but recorded) sessions as well as asynchronous, self-paced learning. Participants who successfully complete the course and submit a portfolio will earn a Postsecondary UDL Credential.
- February 25 – 27: Georgia Southern University is hosting the **SoTL Commons Conference** in Savannah, GA. The conference focuses on the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- February 26 – 28: The Winter **Red Rock Great Teaching Retreat** will be held in Bryce Canyon, UT.
- March 5 – 8: The **International Center for Academic Integrity's Annual Conference** will be held in Denver, CO.

Opportunities to Share Your Teaching and Learning Expertise

- Due January 23: The proposal deadline has been extended for **Reimagining the Liberal Arts in the Age of AI**. The conference is sponsored by Mary Washington University, a COPLAC institution just outside of Washington, D.C. The conference will be held July 21-23 in Fredericksburg, Virginia.
- Due January 23: Proposals are currently being accepted for the **2026 Midwest SoTL Conference**, to be held April 10 in South Bend, IN. This year's conference theme is "The Human Element of Education." Conference organizers are seeking proposals that describe empirical studies of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), theoretical discussions of SoTL, descriptions of best practices of teaching, and interactive workshops on implementing best practices.
- Due January 26: Kent State University is accepting proposals for the **8th Annual Education Elevated Conference**, to be held virtually on February 27th from 9am-3pm. This year's theme is "Human-Centered Education: Accessibility, AI and Innovative Instruction."
- Due January 30: The University of Central Florida is accepting proposals for their annual **Teaching and Learning with AI Conference**, to be held June 11 – 13 in Orlando, FL.
- Due February 2: Applications for presentations and posters are currently being accepted for **Gwynedd Mercy University's 6th Annual Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Education conference**, a free, virtual conference to be held April 13 & 14.
- Due February 13: Proposals are currently being accepted for the **Grading Conference**, to be held online June 16 – 18 by the Center for Grading Reform.
- Due March 1: The **Interdisciplinary Journal for Research on Pedagogy and Learning Design** is accepting manuscripts for its inaugural issue, which will focus on AI in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Submissions may include empirical research, conceptual or theoretical papers, case studies, practice-based reflections, and book reviews.