



TEACHING AND LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

Newsletter of Eastern's Center for Teaching, Learning, & Assessment

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In This Issue

- Upcoming workshops and events
 - [2nd annual Swift Waters Workshop: Sustainability Across the Curriculum](#) (5/21)
 - [Teaching LAC 100 and 101](#) (5/21 evening)
 - [Designing Assessable Creativity Assignments](#) for ELAC Courses (5/26 AM)
 - [Designing Assessable Communication Assignments](#) for ELAC Courses (5/26 PM)
 - [Team Projects They Won't Hate: Evidence-Based Design for Collaborative Learning](#) (5/28)
- Materials and slides from [presentations by faculty learning communities](#)
- [Digital Accessibility Deadline Extended to 2027](#)
- Tech Tips from CIT
 - Faculty feedback on [automated proctoring solutions](#)
 - Support and training for fall [transition to Blackboard Ultra](#)
- Book spotlight: [What Can I Get Out of This? Teaching and Learning in a Classroom Full of Skeptics](#)
- Assessment Update:
 - [May 22 deadline to submit Ethical Reasoning and Quantitative Literacy assignment prompts](#) and student artifacts
 - [LAC 101 assessment report](#)
- [Video recording of introduction to ACUE Commons](#) for individual faculty development
- [External faculty development opportunities](#)
- [Opportunities to share your teaching and learning expertise](#)



Upcoming Workshops and Events

2nd Annual Swift Waters Workshop: Sustainability Across the Curriculum

Thursday, May 21, 10 am – 3 pm

CECE room 167 (Lunch provided by the Center for Sustainability Studies)

Speakers include Julia Flagg, Associate Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies at Connecticut College; others TBD

"Sustainability" encompasses a bold framework of goals aimed at ending poverty and hunger, fostering peace and equity, and ensuring that all people can lead fulfilling, prosperous lives. It prioritizes a healthy planet, safeguarded from degradation, requires us to address climate change, and honor the needs of future generations.

The [Swift Waters Workshop](#) prepares faculty to design new assignments or courses that incorporate sustainability through the lens of their primary academic discipline. The workshop welcomes faculty from all colleges and universities, supporting a community of practice beyond the boundaries of one institution that expands student access to sustainability concepts and skills in their coursework.

This workshop promotes curricular innovation through exposure to the interdisciplinary themes inherent to sustainability. Hear from faculty how they have integrated sustainability into their courses, and why they feel this work is important. “Wicked Problems” are highly relevant to Eastern’s liberal arts core curriculum and align with high impact practices including Collaborative Assignments, Community-based Learning, Diversity/Global Learning, and Research.

The workshop is free for Eastern faculty. Eastern faculty are also eligible to receive a stipend for curriculum development.

Please [apply for Swift Waters](#) by May 1 (priority deadline).

Teaching LAC 100 and LAC 101 (Save the date)

Thursday, May 21, 4:30 – 7:30 pm (dinner included)

This workshop is designed for faculty who will be teaching LAC 100 and 101 for the first time next year—or for those who have taught these courses but have not attended any ELAC trainings.

More information will be coming soon by email.

Designing Assessable Creativity Assignments for ELAC Courses

Tuesday, May 26, 9:30 am – 12 pm (followed by optional lunch)

David G. Carter building 301

Presented by Suki Grandhi (Business Administration) and Tim Cochran (Music)



creativity

This interactive working session will focus on designing meaningful assignments that help students develop and demonstrate their creativity skills. After hearing a brief overview of the ELAC assessment process from Assessment Coordinator Suki Grandhi, participants will:

- Explore the ELAC Creativity rubric as they review a sample assignment
- Hear how a Music faculty member approached designing a creativity assignment to meet course objectives and align with the ELAC rubric
- Identify expected performance levels for students in their own ELAC course
- Work on their own Creativity assignment and get feedback from peers

The goal is for each participant to leave the workshop with a draft of an improved assignment.

Please [register for Creativity Assignments](#) by May 19.

Designing Assessable Communication Assignments for ELAC Courses

Tuesday, May 26, 12:30 – 3 pm (with optional lunch at 12)

David G. Carter building 301

Presented by Suki Grandhi (Business Administration) and Mark Fabrizi (Education)



communication

This interactive working session will focus on designing meaningful assignments that help students develop and demonstrate their communication skills. After hearing a brief overview of the ELAC assessment process from Assessment Coordinator Suki Grandhi, participants will:

- Explore the ELAC Communication rubric as they review a sample assignment
- Hear how an Education faculty member approached designing a communication assignment to meet course objectives and align with the ELAC rubric
- Identify expected performance levels for students in their own ELAC course
- Work on their own Communication assignment and get feedback from peers

The goal is for each participant to leave the workshop with a draft of an improved assignment.

Please [register for Communication Assignments](#) by May 19.

Team Projects They Won't Hate: Evidence-Based Design for Collaborative Learning

Thursday, May 28, 9:30 – 12:30 pm (followed by an optional lunch)

David G. Carter building 301

Presented by Kristi Salters-Pedneault and Peter Bachiochi (Psychological Science)

Collaborative learning is a high-impact practice with significant educational benefits for students, but its effectiveness is sensitive to design. Poorly implemented group work is associated with predictable failures that erode the value of teams (e.g., communication failures, unequal effort, decision-making difficulties, and interpersonal conflict). Drawing on psychological science, we will examine how specific design choices (group structures, role assignment, monitoring processes, and evaluation practices) can enhance both learning outcomes and student satisfaction with the group experience. The session includes case analysis and dedicated work time for participants to diagnose breakdowns in existing assignments and redesign a collaborative project using these design principles. (This session is the product of the [Teaching Scholars](#) program.)

Please [register for Team Projects](#) by May 21.

Did You Miss A Faculty Learning Community Presentation?

Over the past two weeks, members of three [faculty learning communities](#) shared what they learned over the academic year. Below are brief summaries of what each group shared, as well as links to materials developed for their presentations.

Best Practices for Teaching and Supporting Neurodivergent Students Session

This session opened by noting that 786 Eastern students had OAS accommodations in spring 2025—and there are also students who have an undiagnosed condition that affects their ability to succeed in college. Participants discussed changes they could make to their course design and teaching strategies that would help ALL students be successful. The session concluded with a menu of suggestions that faculty can consider to support students with diverse needs, including providing a detailed course schedule with due dates, providing a “late pass” for one assignment, or implementing [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) guidelines.

Interested in Learning More?

- Visit the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#) for materials from this session, including:

- Presentation slides (see slides 10 and 11 for simple teaching strategies that can have a big impact)
- Symptoms of different conditions
- Impacts of different conditions on learning
- Tips for helping neurodivergent students
- Read [Neurodiversity and education](#), one of the books that members of the learning community members read. You can request to borrow it from the [CTLA lending library](#) (ask for CTLA book #182).

Social Justice Pedagogy Incubator Session

In this session, faculty members described how they each incubated an idea for implementing social justice pedagogies into a course and got feedback from their peers in the learning community. Group members shared strategies such as:

- Changing their thinking about their role, moving from “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side” and recognizing that faculty can learn some things from students.
- Working to make course content relevant for all students.
- Taking risks to try new things in the classroom, even if they might fail.
- Bringing more play into the classroom through ice breakers, responses to daily quotations, or fun activities where students can demonstrate content knowledge (one faculty member had students act out or write a song or poem about a specific infection—their classmates then had to guess which infection it was).
- Creating an Op-Ed assignment that reinforces the value of students’ voices and their potential to influence public discourse.
- Designing a new course that connects cultural differences and art forms to course content.

Interested in Learning More?

- Visit the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#) for slides from this session.
- Read [Liberating the classroom: Healing and justice in higher education](#), which the learning community used to guide their discussion. You can request to borrow it from the [CTLA lending library](#) (ask for CTLA book #181).
- For faculty interested in incorporating more play into the classroom, consider [borrowing](#) the book [Professors at play playbook: Real-world techniques from a more playful higher education classroom](#) (ask for CTLA book #137).

Sustainability Across the Curriculum Session

In this session, faculty members shared how they incorporated [Sustainable Development Goals](#) into their courses, including Environmental Earth Science courses, an Art class, and an LAC 200 class on toys and children’s play. Course activities included:

- Having students measure the flow rate of their shower and then calculate the amount of energy their typical shower consumed—and then asking them to try shortening their shower slightly and calculating their annual energy savings.

- Asking students to research the history of their favorite childhood toy and examining how well the toy aligned with SDG goals related to gender equality and sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Having students design web-based augmented reality (AR) experiences connected to sustainability themes, with QR codes leading to the AR experiences placed at sites around campus.
- Exploring how food systems drive climate change and perpetuate inequality.

Interested in Learning More?

- Visit the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#) for slides from each presenter, samples of the shower assignment, and additional teaching resources.
- Read two books recommended by learning community members: [What if we get it right? Visions of climate futures](#) and [Here comes the sun: A last chance for the climate and a fresh chance for civilization](#).

Digital Accessibility Deadline Extended by One Year

On April 20th, the Department of Justice updated the compliance deadline for [Title II of the American with Disabilities Act](#). The deadline for public universities to achieve full compliance of digital content on websites, social media accounts, and course management systems is now **April 26, 2027**. This provides faculty more time to ensure the accessibility of their course content on Blackboard.

For resources to help make course content accessible:

- Visit the [CSCU training website on digital accessibility](#).
- Sign up for one of Dr. Lauren Tucker's [virtual training sessions through the CT Tech Act Project](#). The 2-session training provides accessibility tips for Windows, Apple, Microsoft Word, Powerpoint, and PDFs.

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

Contributed by Mauricio Calpa and Katie Rasimas, CIT



Faculty Feedback Requested: Gauging Interest in Automated Proctoring Solutions

The Center for Instructional Technology is conducting a survey for faculty to gauge interest in pursuing a monitoring tool integrated with Blackboard. Currently, Impero is our lab monitoring software that can be used in labs across campus to monitor student activity while in class. This tool can monitor all activity on lab machines, add keywords, and set flagged behaviors.

We are looking for feedback as to whether this solution (Impero) is meeting the needs of the campus, or if a supplementary tool built into Blackboard would help fill some gaps. For example, a lockdown browser integration with Blackboard could limit what a student can do on their own machine while taking an exam in Blackboard outside of an on-campus lab.

If you'd like to share your thoughts, please complete the [Monitoring Tool Interest on Campus survey](#). If you have any other feedback that does not fit the survey, please contact us at CIT@easternct.edu.

Support for Transition to Blackboard Ultra

Blackboard Ultra will officially launch campus-wide in Fall 2026, marking the university's full transition to a modern, streamlined learning environment. Following successful Beta and Early Adopter phases, all courses will move to the Ultra course view, offering an intuitive interface, improved workflows, and enhanced tools to support teaching and student engagement.

Faculty are encouraged to explore the available resources below, which include a self-paced Blackboard training course, video guides, documentation, and one-on-one support sessions with CIT.

- **Blackboard Ultra's self-paced online training:** [Blackboard Teaching Essentials](#) (Note: Faculty have access to the course for one year after starting.)
- **Blackboard's video training guides:** [Blackboard - YouTube](#)
- **Learn more about Blackboard Ultra:** [Blackboard Help](#)
- **Blackboard LMS Original and Ultra terminology:** [Highlights between Blackboard LMS and Blackboard Ultra](#)
- **Book a one-on-one virtual training with CIT:** [Blackboard Ultra Training](#)

Ongoing assistance will be available from CIT to ensure a smooth and successful transition.

Spotlight on a Book in the CTLA Lending Library

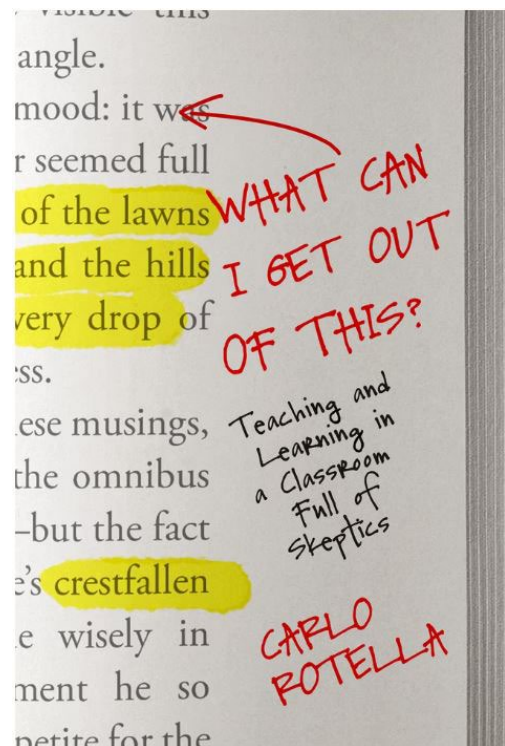
What Can I Get Out of This? Teaching and Learning in a Classroom Full of Skeptics

By Carlo Rotella

© 2025 by University of California Press (see [publisher's description](#))

In *What Can I Get Out of This?*, English professor Carlo Rotella describes his efforts to help students see the value and relevance of the introductory literature course required for all first-year students at his institution. The book is structured somewhat like a memoir, following a class of 33 students from the beginning of spring semester 2020 through the transition to online learning. Rotella's stories from the classroom are supported by hour-long interviews he conducted two years later with 29 of the 33 students. In these interviews, former students shared with him how they viewed the content, format, and policies of the course—and what was happening in their personal lives that affected their performance and contributions in class.

The book includes descriptions of strategies Rotella still uses to get students to speak regularly in class (a course requirement). Students who aren't meeting this requirement are asked to come to his office, where he provides encouragement and support. One strategy that has proved useful is telling a student the first question he plans to ask in the next class meeting so that they can think in advance of what they will say. He then promises to call on them first when they raise their hand in class. For students who need additional support, he offers them a chance to practice this routine in his office—he will literally ask a question, have the student raise their hand,



call on them, and acknowledge their response, all in the safety of his office. When such students muster up the courage to speak in class, he acknowledges their participation, saying something like, “Barbara has given us a great start by pointing out...” He notes that, “Trying to help silent students find a way into the conversation and thus into full citizenship in the classroom turns out to be no big effort for a teacher, and the results can be life-changing for the student” (p.114).

Rotella teaches at Boston College, and he openly acknowledges that his students are well-prepared and driven to succeed academically. While his teaching experiences will not fully resonate with everyone, faculty may find it interesting to read how Rotella builds student capacity over the semester, how he reflects on his approach, how he connects with his students, and especially how his students describe the challenges they faced and the teaching approaches that made a difference for them.

Interested in reading *What Can I Get Out of This?* Stop by the CTLA Lending Library in room 425 of the J. Eugene Smith Library, or [fill out a book request](#) to have the book sent to you via interoffice mail (enter #198 in response to question 1).

Hear From This Author

Don't have time to read the book? Listen to the author on one of the following podcasts, where he discusses not only the content from his book but also how he has changed his approach to writing assignments due to generative AI:

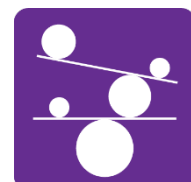
- [The Main Event: Promoting Engagement in a Gen Ed Course](#) – interview with James Lang on the Designed for Learning podcast
- [Unplugged Learning in the Age of AI](#) – interview with Kate Robertson and Rob Balza on the CELT-Cast podcast
- [The Secret to Teaching Gen Z: Less Lecturing, More “Rhythm Guitar”](#) – interview with Mike Palmer on *Trending in Education*

Assessment Update

Spring Assessment of Ethical Reasoning and Quantitative Literacy Courses

As the end of the spring semester approaches, please note that all faculty teaching an ELAC course with either ethical reasoning or quantitative literacy as a primary learning outcome need to submit an assignment prompt and the associated student artifacts for their course. (Faculty teaching these courses recently received a reminder email from Suki Grandhi with information about the assessment process.)

The deadline to submit assignment prompts and student artifacts is May 22. Access the [instructions and links for submitting](#) assignments and artifacts on the assessment Sharepoint site. (The site also includes [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the assessment process, how to identify which assignment to use for assessment purposes, and where to get help when needed.)



ethical reasoning



quantitative literacy

Teaching an ELAC Creativity or Communication Course Next Year?

2026-2027 is the final year of the 3-year assessment cycle of ELAC. Next year faculty teaching ELAC courses focused on creativity or communication will be asked to submit an assignment prompt and associated student artifacts at the end of the semester. The CTLA will be sponsoring [workshops](#) to help

prepare faculty who will be teaching these courses next year. See pages 2 and 3 for descriptions of these sessions.

Assessment Report on LAC 101 Available

Results of the Fall 2025 assessment of LAC 101 are available on the [ELAC Assessment Sharepoint site](#). Students taking LAC 101 last fall were given a brief survey at the beginning and end of the semester. The report summarizes students' understanding of each of the 5 ELAC learning outcomes, as well as changes from the beginning to the end of the semester.

Questions? Contact Suki Grandhi at grandhis@easternct.edu

Recording of Introduction to ACUE Commons

In March, ACUE hosted a demonstration of ACUE Commons, a free tool for individual faculty development. If you weren't able to attend, you can [watch a recording of the ACUE demo](#). ACUE Commons includes a library of one-hour "Quick Study" courses on topics such as teaching neurodivergent students, developing students' teamwork skills, and teaching in the age of AI. For more information about this resource, contact Julia DeLapp.

External Faculty Development Opportunities

Free (or very low cost) opportunities

- April 28, 11 am – 12 pm: AAC&U is hosting [Academic Integrity in Higher Education](#). This free webinar is part of AAC&U's free "[AI Week](#)."
- April 30, 1 – 2 pm: The CSCU system office is sponsoring [AI and Assessment Strategy: Designing for Authentic Assessment in Online and Hybrid Courses](#). This free webinar will highlight "practical ways to reimagine existing assessments by drawing on context, judgment, and course-specific relevance."
- April 30, 2 – 3:30 pm: The University of Massachusetts Amherst is hosting [Group Work: How to Balance Collaboration and Accountability](#). This free, virtual seminar will share research-informed and practical approaches to strengthening group work across different course contexts.
- May 7, 1 – 2 pm: The CSCU system office is sponsoring [Innovative Uses of AI to Enhance Student Engagement in Online and Hybrid Courses](#). The session highlights strategies that align with course goals while keeping instructor presence and student thinking at the center. Participants will leave with a draft plan for applying one AI-supported strategy to a specific course activity.
- May 13, 2 – 3 pm: Goodwin University is hosting [Teaching Smarter with UDL: Turning Research into Everyday Practice](#). This free webinar will examine key findings from recent studies about how UDL-aligned strategies—such as offering learner choice, using multimodal materials, and scaffolding practice—support autonomy, comprehension, and confidence.
- May 19, 8:30 am – 3 pm: Springfield College is offering a [summer conference focused on course design](#) in Springfield, MA. The conference will feature faculty presenting on course flow, aligning learning objectives, and creating authentic assignments. Keynote speaker Carol Hurney will describe how she reinvented an introductory biology course for non-science majors to be more learner-centered. Registration is \$25.

- May 20 – 21: The [Florida OER Summit](#) will be held virtually. The free conference aims to “explore existing trends, look towards innovative directions, and discover how OER positively impacts students, faculty, and institutions.”
- May 29, 2 – 3:30 pm: Evergreen State College is hosting [Advancing Equity Work with Generative AI](#). In this free webinar, Jeremy Winn from Grays Harbor College will explore how generative AI can take practical steps toward more equitable institutions.
- June 5 and 12, 1 – 3 pm: [Digital Accessibility Training Series](#). This two-part series offered by Dr. Lauren Tucker, Associate Professor of Special Education at Southern, will provide guidance on ensuring the accessibility of Microsoft Word, Powerpoint, PDFs, and other documents.
- June 24, 2 – 3:30 pm: Evergreen State College is hosting [Pause and Seek the Miracle](#). This free webinar will consider the difficulty of learning or teaching when we are afraid and explore questions such as, “When students look to us for assurance, what truths can we offer? What assurances or comfort can we offer ourselves, or to each other?”

Other opportunities

- June 2 – August 4 (Tuesdays, 1 – 2:30): University of California Irvine’s Digital Learning Lab is offering [AI in Higher Education](#), an online, synchronous course. Designed for faculty and those who support them, the course will teach “key concepts and practical strategies for using AI thoughtfully, effectively, and responsibly in real educational settings.” The course will be repeated quarterly.
- June 11 – 13: The University of Central Florida is hosting the 4th annual [Teaching and Learning with AI conference](#) in Kissimmee, FL. Keynote speakers include C. Edward Watson and Bryan Alexander.
- June 22 – 26: The University of Delaware is hosting [Integrating Problem-Based Learning and Artificial Intelligence](#). This virtual workshop will help faculty learn how to design discipline-specific problem-based learning (PBL) problems, integrate them into courses, and explore how to leverage AI tools in PBL.
- July 22 – 23: Mary Washington University (a COPLAC institution) is offering [Reimagining the Liberal Arts in the Age of AI](#) in Fredericksburg, VA. The conference grew out of Mary Washington’s participation in the NEH “Humanities in Age of AI” collaborative grant of 5 COPLAC institution (including Eastern).
- July 31: [Pedagogical Wellness Day](#) will be held at the University of California Irvine. The professional development opportunity is designed for faculty and staff to “gain familiarity with an actionable pedagogical wellness framework” and develop a pedagogical wellness plan on their own campus.

Opportunities to Share Your Teaching and Learning Expertise

- Due by April 30: Proposals are being accepted for the [Lilly Conference Asheville](#), to be held August 10 – 12 in Asheville, NC. This year’s theme is “Innovative Strategies to Advance Student Learning.”
- Due April 30: Proposals are currently being accepted for the 33rd annual [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning \(SoTL\) Summit](#), to be held virtually September 16 – 18.
- Due June 15: The [Original Lilly Conference on College Teaching](#) is currently accepting proposals for its 45th annual conference, to be held November 19-21 at Miami University in Oxford, OH.