



# TEACHING AND LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

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

Issue 23 • August 2026

Welcome back! I hope everyone had a restorative summer. The CTLA has a lot planned for fall, including several workshops and three faculty learning communities for those who want a more sustained development opportunity. In addition, the CTLA is seeking applications for a new Teaching & Learning Faculty Fellow position (to begin Spring 2027). See more below.

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## Welcome New Faculty!

This fall, Eastern is welcoming 24 new full-time and over 60 new part-time faculty. Over the summer, the CTLA hosted multiple orientation sessions on different topics in partnership with the academic deans, the Center for Instructional Technology, Academic Affairs, and the Library. New faculty who missed the virtual sessions can find recordings and materials on the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#).



## New Location for Lunchtime Workshops

Due to a new dining option for students, the President's Dining Room in Hurley Hall is no longer available for workshops. As a result, the CTLA will be experimenting a bit this year on locations for lunchtime workshops. Some workshops will be held in room 223 of the Student Center—faculty will be able to come to room 223 to obtain a voucher to purchase lunch starting 15 minutes before the workshop is scheduled to begin. We will be asking all faculty to register in advance to ensure we don't exceed the capacity of the room and to prepare enough vouchers for all participants.

We may also host a few workshops in other locations, either asking faculty to bring their own lunch or, as budget allows, providing a catered lunch. Instructions will be provided for each workshop, with registration links (and deadlines to register) when required. Thanks in advance for your flexibility!

## Upcoming Information Sessions, Workshops, and Events

### Info Session: Designing Assessable Creativity Assignments for ELAC Courses

**Friday, August 28, 10:00 – 11:15 am** (virtual)

*Led by Suki Grandhi, Assessment Coordinator and Professor of Business Administration*

This information and Q&A session will focus on designing meaningful assignments that help students develop and demonstrate their creativity skills. It will include:

- A brief overview of the ELAC assessment process
- An introduction to the ELAC Creativity rubric
- Review of a sample Creativity assignment
- Q&A on your own Creativity assignments

The information session is recommended for faculty who will be teaching a course this year where Creativity is the primary learning outcome (and who didn't attend the May workshop on this topic).

[Register for the Creativity session](#) by August 27.



### Info Session: Designing Assessable Communication Assignments for ELAC Courses

**Friday, August 28, 11:30 – 12:45 pm** (virtual)

*Led by Suki Grandhi, Assessment Coordinator and Professor of Business Administration*

This information and Q&A session will focus on designing meaningful assignments that help students develop and demonstrate their communication skills. It will include:

- A brief overview of the ELAC assessment process
- An introduction to the ELAC Communication rubric
- Review of a sample Communication assignment
- Q&A on your own Communication assignments

The session is recommended for faculty who will be teaching a course this year where Communication is the primary learning outcome (and who didn't attend the May workshop on this topic).

[Register for Communication session](#) by August 27.



## **When a Student Tells You: What to Say, What to Do, and Where to Turn**

**Wednesday, September 23, 12 – 1:30 pm**

Student Center room 223 (Lunch covered by the CTLA)

*Presented by Racheal Pesta, Associate Professor of Criminology, and Sara Judge, Director of Institutional Equity/Title IX Coordinator*

This session will provide faculty and staff with an opportunity to review their roles and responsibilities when a student discloses an experience of interpersonal violence. Participants will have space to discuss their experiences responding to disclosures, including their comfort level, questions about what to do next, and strategies for navigating difficult conversations. Finally, we will gather feedback about the information, guidance, and resources faculty and staff would find most helpful, with the goal of using this feedback to develop a practical toolkit that supports faculty and staff in responding to student disclosures.

Please [register for When a Student Tells You](#) by **September 21st**. Space is limited to 24 participants.

## **From Story to Scholarship: Moving Students from Experience to Disciplinary Analysis**

*Lessons from a Scaffolded Autoethnography Assignment*

**Wednesday, October 21, 12 – 1 pm**

Student Center Room 223 (Lunch covered by the CTLA)

*Led by Sara Carroll, Associate Professor of Public Health*

Reflective assignments can be powerful tools for student engagement, but only when they do more than ask students to “connect personally” with course material. Drawing from a scaffolded autoethnography assignment in public health, this workshop explores how faculty can design reflective assignments that move students from meaningful experience toward scholarship, disciplinary lenses, and larger analysis. The central premise is that the self is the starting point, not the endpoint: when students use course concepts to interpret lived, observed, community, or public experiences, reflection becomes a pathway into disciplinary content rather than a pause from it.

Participants will consider how this approach can work across liberal arts disciplines and will identify a course concept, question, or assignment they might adapt into an experience-to-analysis sequence.

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to 1) Explain how meaningful experience can deepen student engagement with disciplinary content; 2) Distinguish reflective writing from disciplinary analysis; 3) Describe a scaffold for moving students from experience to scholarship to larger interpretation; and 4) Identify a course concept/assignment for possible future adaptation.

(This session is the product of the [Teaching Scholars](#) program.)

[Register for From Story to Scholarship](#) by **October 19th**. Space is limited to 24 participants.

## **Join a Faculty Learning Community**

This year, the CTLA is sponsoring three [Faculty Learning Communities](#). As originally conceived by Milton Cox (2004), Faculty Learning Communities are designed for small, interdisciplinary groups of teaching faculty to come together on a regular basis over a sustained period of time, with a focus on investigating and implementing new teaching and learning approaches. Faculty who participate in these communities

often report a number of benefits, including developing lasting relationships with faculty in other departments, thinking deeply about their own pedagogical approaches, and developing new expertise.

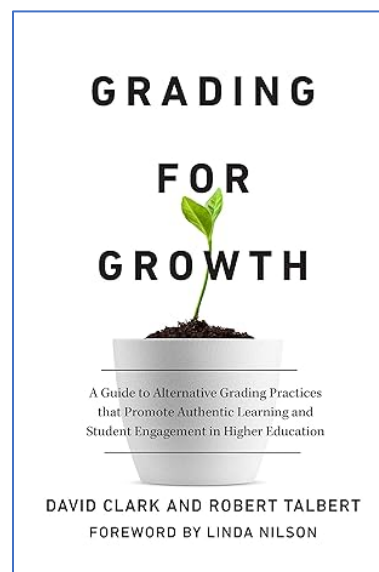
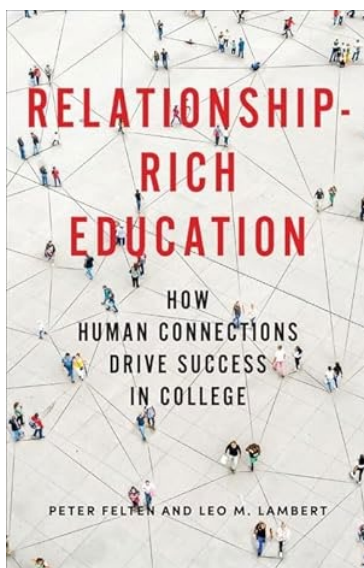
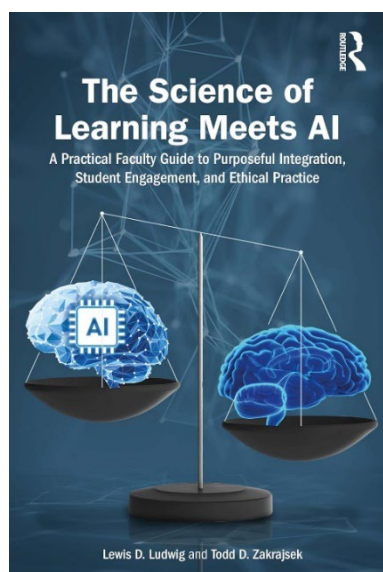
Each Faculty Learning Community is guided by a faculty facilitator who coordinates meetings and ensures that all members have equal opportunity to share ideas. Each community will meet every 3 weeks over the coming year and explore their topic together, guided by a foundational text (see covers of selected texts below). Community members will individually reflect on how they will incorporate what they've learned into their own teaching. At the end of the year, each group will share what they've learned with other faculty at Eastern.

For the 2026-2027 academic year, the CTLA will support the following Faculty Learning Communities (see descriptions and meeting dates for each group on the following page):

- **AI and the Science of Learning** (*Facilitated by Okon Hwang, Music*) – meeting Mondays at 4
- **Relationship-Rich Education** (*Facilitated by Tanya Moorehead, Education*) – meeting Wednesdays at 12
- **Alternative Grading: Rethinking Assessment to Promote Learning** (*Facilitated by Ricardo Pérez, Anthropology*) – meeting Thursdays at 11

Groups will be meeting in person.

Faculty members who actively participate in a learning community for the entire academic year are eligible to receive a \$400 stipend (to be paid in May 2027). To read more about this year's learning communities and apply to participate, visit the full description on the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#). Faculty learning communities are open to full-time and part-time faculty.



## Get Up-to-Date Syllabus Statements

Did you know that the CTLA maintains a [web page with current syllabus statements](#)? Every summer, the CTLA reaches out to the relevant offices to update language for required and recommended syllabus statements, including language on accommodations for students with disabilities (required for ALL syllabi); policies on class meetings during inclement weather, academic integrity, and student sexual misconduct; and supports available for students. Newly added this year is a recommended **Class**

**Absence Verification statement** outlining the role of the Dean of Students office when students have an emergency that requires missing class. Each statement includes the date that the language was last reviewed.

## Apply to be a CTLA Teaching & Learning Faculty Fellow

The CTLA is seeking a tenured faculty member for a new position as a Teaching & Learning Faculty Fellow. The Faculty Fellow will contribute to the planning, implementation, and assessment of faculty development and take leadership in advancing one critical CTLA service area (such as providing one-on-one consultation on teaching, supporting faculty in designing and implementing SoTL projects, developing a voluntary faculty peer observation program, etc.). This is anticipated to be a three-year position with course release each semester.

Read the job description, qualifications, and application process on the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#). The application deadline is **September 30**, with an anticipated start date of Spring semester 2027.

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

### Support for Transition to Blackboard Ultra

Over the summer, Blackboard provided multiple trainings for faculty on Blackboard Ultra. Faculty can [watch a recording of one of these trainings](#) on the CIT Sharepoint site.



The Center for Instructional Technology has identified a set of resources from Blackboard to support faculty in navigating different features of Ultra. Below are links to support the transition to Blackboard Ultra.

- [Getting Started with Blackboard Ultra](#)
- [Navigate and Manage the Gradebook](#)
- [Create and Organize Course Content](#)
- [Send and Manage Messages](#)
- [Create and Manage Announcements](#)
- [Interact with Students – Blackboard Help](#)
- [Highlights between Blackboard LMS and Blackboard Ultra](#)

In addition, faculty can take advantage of [Blackboard Ultra's self-paced online training](#), a 4- to 6-hour Teaching Essentials course offered by Blackboard. (Note: Faculty have access to the course for one year after starting.)

Faculty needing one-on-one support with their course can [book a virtual training with CIT](#).

## Assessment Update

### Assessing Communication and Creativity

This academic year we will be assessing student learning in **Communication** and **Creativity**. There are at least 59 ELAC classes this fall that have Creativity as the primary learning outcome, and at least 24 that have Communication as the primary learning outcome. All faculty teaching one of these courses should have received an email on August 6th from Assessment Coordinator Suki Grandhi with information

about assessment of ELAC courses this fall. (If you are teaching a Creativity or Communication course and you did not receive the email, please contact Julia DeLapp.)

Faculty teaching an ELAC course with Communication or Creativity as a primary learning outcome will be asked to submit an assignment prompt and student artifacts associated with the course's primary learning outcome at the end of the semester. All faculty can access [Frequently Asked Questions about ELAC assessment](#) on the ELAC Assessment Sharepoint site to learn more about the purpose of and process for ELAC assessment.

Faculty who are teaching an ELAC course with Communication or Creativity as a primary learning outcome are invited to a virtual information session on **Friday, August 28th**. The sessions are also open to faculty who plan to teach a Communication or Creativity class in the spring. See [page 2](#) of this newsletter for a description of and registration links for the information sessions.

Questions? Contact Suki Grandhi at [grandhis@easternct.edu](mailto:grandhis@easternct.edu).

### Assessment of Ethical Reasoning and Quantitative Literacy

Last year, we collected assignment prompts and student artifacts for Ethical Reasoning and Quantitative Literacy. Thank you to all faculty who submitted materials – we received prompts and artifacts for 107 course sections.



Faculty evaluators reviewed all submitted assignment prompts (anonymized) in June for alignment with the ELAC rubrics. If you submitted an assignment prompt and would like general feedback on your prompt, please contact Suki Grandhi.

After a randomization process completed over the summer by Institutional Research, faculty evaluators will be scoring 200 anonymized student artifacts this fall. Scores will be analyzed in the Spring of 2027 and shared with the university community in Fall 2027.



### External Faculty Development Opportunities

The following opportunities are not affiliated with Eastern or the CTLA. Please visit the links for further information.

#### Free opportunities

- Beginning September 8: The University of Central Oklahoma is hosting multiple [virtual pedagogy-focused book groups](#) this fall, including book groups on *An Educator's Guide to ADHD: Designing and Teaching for Student Success*; *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*; and *A Pedagogy of Kindness*. Each group meets 4 times for 1 hour.
- August 20, September 17, October 8, and November 19, 11:30 am – 12 pm (Eastern time): The University of Central Oklahoma is hosting the [Neuroeducation Huddle](#), a weekly open discussion for faculty to discuss and respond to a brief video or reading on neurodiversity sent the previous week.

#### Other opportunities

- August 31, September 14, 21, and 28, 2 – 3 pm: AAC&U is hosting a [Teaching with AI Workshop Series](#), led by Jose Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson (authors of *Teaching with AI: A*

*Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning*). The first session in the series is “AI for Research, Work, and Thinking.” Eastern faculty are eligible for AAC&U member rates.

- October 2: Goodwin University is hosting the 5<sup>th</sup> annual [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Conference for Higher Education](#) in East Hartford, CT. This year’s theme is “Rethink. Redesign. Renew: Transforming Tomorrow’s Learning.”
- October 16: The [New England Faculty Development Consortium](#) is hosting their annual conference in Worcester, MA. This year’s theme is “Neurodiversity: Broadening Our Lens.” Eastern faculty are eligible for the NEFDC member registration rate.
- October 18 – 20: IUPUI is hosting its annual [Assessment Institute](#) in Indianapolis, billed as the “the oldest and largest U.S. event focused on assessing and improving higher education.”
- November 6: The New England Assessment Network is holding its annual [NEean Fall Forum](#) in Worcester, MA. This year’s theme is “Beyond Data: The Power of Assessment as Relational Presence
- November 13: The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is hosting the [STLHE virtual conference](#). The conference will “feature keynotes, multiple concurrent sessions, and opportunities to connect with colleagues from across the higher education and scholarship of teaching and learning communities.”
- November 19 – 21: The [Original Lilly Conference on College Teaching](#) will be held at Miami University in Oxford, OH. Conference organizers describe the annual conference as “one of the nation’s most renowned conferences presenting the scholarship of teaching and learning” with an emphasis on sharing innovative pedagogies and discussing “questions, challenges, and insights about teaching and learning.”

## Opportunities to Share Your Teaching and Learning Expertise

- Due September 14: The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Virginia Tech is accepting proposals for their [2027 Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy](#), to be held February 3-5 in Blacksburg, VA. The conference will include practice sessions, research sessions, roundtable discussions, and poster sessions.
- Due October 23: Proposals are currently being accepted for the [SoTL Commons Conference](#), be held March 3-5 in Savannah, GA, at Georgia Southern University. Conference organizers are seeking research proposals presenting data from systematic inquiries into student learning, as well as proposals that demonstrate or teach specific pedagogical techniques.
- Due October 25: Proposals are being accepted for the [National Student Learning Outcomes Symposium](#), to be held virtually January 29-30. This year’s theme is “Learning on Display: Assessing Skills, Competencies, and Performance.”
- The journal *New Directions for Teaching and Learning (NDTL)* is now accepting [individual manuscripts that are focused on teaching and learning in higher education](#). The journal seeks manuscripts that will “inform readers about current and future directions in teaching and learning in postsecondary education, to illuminate the context that shapes these new directions, to illustrate these new directions through examples from real settings, and to propose ways in which these new directions can be incorporated into still other settings.”