



TEACHING AND LEARNING SPOTLIGHT

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

Issue 24 • September 2026

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Reminder: Call for a CTLA Teaching & Learning Faculty Fellow

As noted in last month's newsletter, 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.

Upcoming Workshops and Events

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.

Making Learning Personal: Building Narrative Identities to Increase Student Engagement and Resilience

Friday, October 16, 9:30 – 12:30 pm (followed by optional lunch) - *There are no classes on October 16th*
David G. Carter Science building room 301

Led by T. Caitlin Vasquez-O'Brien, Associate Professor of Psychological Science

Students are more likely to engage deeply with course material when they can connect it to their own experiences, values, goals, and sense of self. At the same time, students' beliefs about their academic journeys can shape how they respond to challenges, setbacks, and opportunities for growth. This workshop introduces the concept of *narrative identity* and explores its role in student development, motivation, and resilience.

Participants will examine how students construct stories about who they are and who they are becoming—and how those stories influence learning. Faculty will explore possible strategies for helping students make meaningful personal connections to course content and develop more resilient academic narratives. Participants will also consider ways to design assignments, learning activities, and course structures that support students in viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than evidence of failure.

As a result of this workshop, participants should be able to 1) Explain the concept of narrative identity and its relevance to student learning and development; 2) Identify opportunities within their courses for helping students connect disciplinary content to their own experiences, interests, and goals; 3) Apply strategies that encourage students to develop resilient narratives about learning, challenge, and academic success; and 4) Design or revise assignments and learning activities that foster both engagement and academic resilience.

Please [register for Making Learning Personal](#) by **October 9**. (This session is a product of the [Teaching Scholars](#) program.)

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.

[Register for From Story to Scholarship](#) by **October 19th**. Space is limited to 24 participants. (This session is the product of the [Teaching Scholars](#) program.)

See Sharepoint for Materials/Recordings from Previous Workshops

If you weren't able to attend the first few CTLA workshops of the fall, materials (and in some cases, recordings) are available on the [CTLA Sharepoint site](#) (see screen shot below). Recent sessions include:

- [Designing Assessable Creativity Assignments for ELAC Courses](#) (recorded)
- [Designing Assessable Communication Assignments for ELAC Courses](#) (recorded)
- [The Call to Curiosity: Designing Moments for Discovery in the College Classroom](#)

The screenshot displays the CTLA (Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment) SharePoint site. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Presentations, Materials, and Resources. The main heading is "Documents > Workshop materials and videos". Below this, there are buttons for "Share", "Copy link", and "Add shortcuts". A filter bar shows "All Documents" and an "Add view" button. The main content area is a table listing various workshop materials and videos.

Name	Modified	Modified By	+ Add column
Accessibility workshops and links	October 6, 2025	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	
AI - Changing the AI Conversation - February 2026	February 3	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	
AI - Designing AI-Resistant Assignments (May 2024)	September 29, ...	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	
AI - Language Models in Research Applications - Beyond ...	September 29, ...	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	
AI - Liberal Arts Education in the Age of AI Colloquium - M...	March 25	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	
Call to Curiosity - August 2026	August 21	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	
Cultivating Classroom Belonging (January 2026)	January 15	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	
Department chairs - Conflict resolution	June 3	DeLapp, Julia A. (Ac	

Tech Tip from the Center for Instructional Technology

Setting Up the Overall Grade in Blackboard Ultra

One of the most common requests for assistance from CIT this fall has been setting up the overall grade within Gradebook in Blackboard Ultra. The Blackboard LMS Help Center offers an [instructor guide](#) on the Overall Grade column, how to set up the overall grade, and how to add a points or weighted grades calculation for the overall grade.



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

Spotlight on a Book in the CTLA Lending Library

A Practical Guide to Teaching Neurodivergent College Students

By Jennifer L. Pusateri

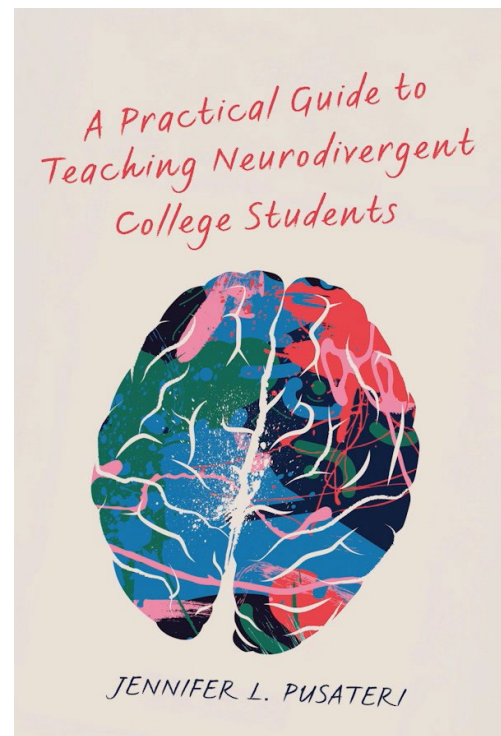
© 2026 by Harvard University Press (see [publisher's description](#))

In the opening pages of *A Practical Guide*, author Jennifer Pusateri explains that she has written the book she wished her own undergraduate professors had read. As someone who was diagnosed with ADHD in college, taught at a school for students with specific learning disabilities, and eventually earned a Ph.D. and moved into higher education, her goal in writing the book was to help “professors know that a few simple changes to their instruction can make a huge difference for their neurodivergent (and nonneurodivergent) students.”

The book is divided into three sections. Part 1 provides an overview of neurodivergence, including both the strengths that neurodivergent students bring and the challenges they encounter in the classroom. Part 2 introduces Universal Design for Learning (UDL), explains why incorporating these practices can support all students, and provides instructional planning approaches for gradually implementing UDL in a course. Part 3 includes chapters on 6 six different challenges faced by neurodivergent students in the classrooms:

- Focus, attention, and memory
- Organization and structure
- Unclear expectations and social interactions
- Time management and prioritization
- Sensory and emotional regulation
- Working memory and processing

For each of the six challenges, Pusateri provides five strategies instructors can implement in their teaching to better support neurodivergent students—for a total of 30 strategies.



Don't have time to read the book right now?

Listen to the author discuss supportive strategies on the [Think UDL podcast](#) with Dr. Lillian Nave.

To borrow *A Practical Guide to Teaching Neurodivergent College Students*, 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 #206 in response to question 1).

News on Generative AI and Teaching & Learning

Eastern's Participation in the AAC&U Institute on AI, Pedagogy, and the Curriculum

Last week, a 7-member team from Eastern participated in a 2-day kickoff event as part of a year-long Institute on AI, Pedagogy, and the Curriculum. The institute is an initiative of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). All institutions participating in the institute will be developing and implementing their own action plans to respond to the challenges and opportunities of AI in teaching and learning. AAC&U is providing workshops, support, and personalized mentoring by faculty and experts at other institutions.

When applying for the institute, Eastern identified 4 goals for our participation, which was based on feedback received over last year at events such as the Liberal Arts Education in the Age of AI colloquium and a faculty survey on AI. The goals are:

1. To ensure that our students graduate with the skills needed to succeed in this new era of AI—and an understanding of the ethical issues and societal implications of AI
2. To establish an external AI advisory group to inform possible curricular changes
3. To support curricular changes (as determined by individual departments)
4. To establish Eastern as a central hub for AI education in the community and launch a public AI forum

Eastern's team is led by Garrett Dancik (Computer Science) and Kwangwon Lee (Education) and also includes Suki Grandhi (Business Administration), Steve Ferruci (English), Dean Emily Todd, Dean Niti Pandey, and Julia DeLapp (CTLA). Members of the team will be reaching out to departments and other units on campus related to these efforts.

Opportunities to Learn More about AI and Teaching

As part of this work, there will be opportunities on campus for faculty to talk and learn more about generative AI and teaching and learning. In the meantime, here are a few upcoming opportunities to engage with faculty at other institutions on the challenges and opportunities of AI:

- September 22, 3 – 4 pm: [Student Voices on AI: Designing Assessments That Spark Engagement](#) – a free, virtual workshop by the University of Arizona.
- October 16 – 17: [AI and the Liberal Arts Symposium](#) at Connecticut College.
- October 8, 7 – 8:30 pm: [Critical AI Literacy and the Humanities](#), a free webinar by the National Humanities Center.
- October 14, 2 – 3 pm: [AI Basics for Teaching and Learning: A Crash Course for Faculty and Staff](#), a free, virtual workshop by Stony Brook University.
- October 21, 11 am – 12 pm: [Redesigning Assessment Through Authentic and Active Learning](#), a free, virtual workshop by Stony Brook University.
- October 28 – 30: [Conference on AI and Higher Education](#) by AAC&U (in Atlanta, GA or virtually).

Assessment Update

Status Update on Assessing Ethical Reasoning and Quantitative Literacy

Eastern's focus in the 2025-2026 academic year was assessing the Ethical Reasoning (ER) and Quantitative Literacy (QL) learning outcomes. In June, faculty evaluators reviewed anonymized assignment prompts submitted for these two learning outcomes to gauge their overall alignment with the ELAC rubrics. Evaluators are now scoring a sample of anonymized student artifacts using the ELAC rubrics. Faculty who submitted ER or QL assignment prompts last year and are interested in the results of alignment review can contact Suki Grandhi at grandhis@easternct.edu.

External Faculty Development Opportunities

(The following opportunities are not affiliated with Eastern or the CTLA.)

Free (or very low cost) opportunities

- September 22, 3 – 4 pm: The University of Arizona is offering [Student Voices on AI: Designing Assessments That Spark Engagement](#). In the free, virtual workshop, two faculty will share how they used student data about AI use to transform their assessment design, “moving from anxiety to energized, purposeful teaching.”
- September 24, 2 – 3 pm: AAC&U is offering [OER as a High-Impact Practice: From Research to Action](#). The free webinar will cover recent research about the power of OER.
- October 8, 7 – 8:30 pm: The National Humanities Center is hosting [Critical AI Literacy and the Humanities](#), a free webinar focused on encouraging thoughtful classroom conversations that help students examine how AI technologies operate within larger social, cultural, and political systems.
- October 14, 2 – 3 pm: Stony Brook University is offering [AI Basics for Teaching and Learning: A Crash Course for Faculty and Staff](#). This free workshop will provide an introduction to common generative AI tools and explore potential instructional uses.
- October 14, 5 pm: Dr. Pooja Agarwal, author of *Powerful Teaching* and *Smart Teaching, Stronger Learning*, is offering [How to Help Students Study Smarter \(not Harder\) with Research-Based Study Strategies](#). Her webinars and resources are designed to be relevant for educators in K-12 and higher education. Register to watch recordings at a later date.
- October 20, 12 – 2 pm: Sarah Silverman, author of a forthcoming [book](#) on neurodiversity in education, is offering [Low-Tech Teaching and Accessibility](#). The virtual workshop will explore how to balance the needs of students whose participation is more and less enabled by technology. The presenter requests a contribution of \$20.
- October 21, 11 am – 12 pm: Stony Brook University is offering [Redesigning Assessment Through Authentic and Active Learning](#). This free, virtual workshop will discuss strategies for “future-proofing” assessments in the age of AI. The session will cover 1) leveraging AI as a co-pilot for developing effective exam questions; 2) designing authentic assessments; and 3) “exploring how AI can strategically support active learning structures like Team-Based Learning (TBL), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and Scenario-Based Learning (SBL).”
- October 29, November 5, and November 12, 3 – 4 pm: The University of Central Oklahoma is hosting a [book discussion of the Norton Guide to Equity-Minded Teaching](#) (free as an [e-book](#)).
- November 17, 11 am – 12 pm: Stony Brook University is offering [Writing AI Use Statements That Support Student Learning](#), a free, virtual workshop.

Other opportunities

- October 2: Goodwin University is hosting the 5th 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 16 – 17: Connecticut College is hosting their second [AI and the Liberal Arts Symposium](#) in New London, CT.
- 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."
- October 28 – 30: AAC&U is sponsoring the [Conference on AI and Higher Education](#) in Atlanta, GA (or virtually).
- 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 offers "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.
- March 10 – 12: AAC&U is sponsoring the 2027 [Conference of Learning and Student Success \(CLASS\)](#) at the Mohegan Sun Resort in Connecticut. This year's theme is "Together by Design."

Opportunities to Share Your Teaching and Learning Expertise

- Due October 5: Temple University is accepting proposals for their [Faculty Conference on Teaching Excellence](#), to be held January 6-7 in Philadelphia, PA. This year's theme is "Joyful Practice: Nurturing Curiosity and Connection in Teaching."
- Due October 23: Proposals are currently being accepted for the [SoTL Commons Conference](#), to 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."
- Due November 5: Proposals are being accepted for the 11th Annual [Teaching for Learning \(T4L\) Conference](#), to be held February 25-26 in Provo, UT. This year's theme is "Empowering Student Success in a Digital Age."
- Due December 28: The call for proposals is now open for the 2027 [Teaching Professor Conference](#), to be held June 11-13 in Atlanta, GA.