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Insights for educators from the Center for Teaching and Learning

January 2023

Welcome!

I am pleased to share the first issue of 1-8-2-5, Centenary's Center for Teaching and Learning monthly newsletter. Named for the year of the College's founding, each issue will have four main sections corresponding to a number. In this publication, you'll find resources, practical advice, highlights from current events and conversations, links to further reading, and more! We'll feature guest writers, campus resources, and cool collaborations. We invite readers to submit their ideas and queries for future issues.

Thanks for reading and best wishes for a great Spring 2023 semester!

Sincerely,

[Rachel E. Johnson](#)

Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning

In this issue...

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Recommendation: Upcoming Professional Development Opportunity |
| 8 | Ways to Improve Class Discussions |
| 2 | Tools for Promoting Access and Inclusion |
| 5 | Perspectives on AI and Higher Education |

1 – Recommendation: Professional Development Opportunity

[The Teaching Professor Annual Conference](#)

June 9-11, 2023

New Orleans, LA

Only an afternoon's drive away to the Big Easy, this peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary conference focuses on teaching excellence and is a great opportunity to gather a few colleagues for a fun and enlightening weekend road trip. The two plenary sessions for this year's conference focus on intentional teaching practices (Dr. Bridget Arend) and fostering free expression and democratic engagement (Dr. Leila Brammer). Lower registration rates are available through March 10 for small groups from the same institution. There's also an online option to attend portions of the conference virtually.

8 – Ways to Improve Class Discussions

Discussion is a great pedagogical tool, but it can sometimes present challenges. You might be concerned that students will get off-track and sideline your learning objectives. Will students feel empowered to appropriately challenge each other's insights to further the intellectual value of the conversation? Will social pressures and anxiety yield more silence than engagement? Here are eight concrete strategies to build a positive classroom culture of generative dialogue where all students feel included.

Build community and trust.

Engage your students in the creation of a [shared agreement](#) about [community standards](#) for class discussion. You can give your students examples to adapt or ask them to [start from a prompt](#) through which you offer guidance for considerations they must make (e.g., "I will..." statements; connections to Centenary's mission and values; create an easy to remember acronym).

Discuss discussion.

Help students understand why they are being asked to participate in a discussion. Sharing the learning benefits of discussion is key to promoting student engagement and buy-in. Also, consider and acknowledge students' identities and possible previous experiences with this pedagogy. As [Jay Howard writes](#), some students may "feel you are out to 'catch' them unprepared for class and embarrass them publicly." Others may be first generation college students, multilingual learners, or from historically marginalized groups and reticent to draw attention to themselves.

Use discussion for both high and low stakes topics.

Intersections between our courses and current events can inspire high stakes discussions that take us by surprise. However, we can generally predict within certain courses when a discussion of a controversial topic will occur. To ensure that both planned and unplanned discussions are respectful and inclusive, [commit to regularly using discussion](#) throughout your class for the controversial as well as the relatively mundane. This develops students' comfort with self-expression and investment in their own learning.

Establish mutual purpose.

Invite students to be co-creators of learning objectives for a discussion. While it's certainly important to plan key questions and emphasize specific concepts, leave space to develop a shared purpose with your students. Perhaps your students are interested in developing their

public speaking, leadership, or information literacy skills. Engage students in inventing a fun way to practice and receive feedback on these skills while also working toward other course goals (see [bell hooks' Teaching Community](#)).

Use multiple formats.

[Design for diversity](#) in your classroom by providing multiple avenues for students to participate and prepare for discussions. Some simple strategies are to provide your planned questions and topics ahead of time and/or to display them during the discussion. Use [small groups](#) to give students more opportunities to test ideas and gain confidence. You can also use technology to allow students to contribute in real time to the discussion in writing. Think of the way a Zoom chat is often active during a meeting while others are sharing or presenting. Participants offer relevant links, amplify points, or connect to related ideas. A tool like [Mentimeter](#) or even a simple shared document (e.g., Google Doc, Microsoft Word OneDrive) can be used in real time in class to allow students to add nonverbal contributions.

Ask good questions.

Focus students' attention on what matters by pushing them beyond simple recall toward [higher-order thinking](#). Give students opportunities to apply readings or other course materials to actual scenarios or cases and their own lives. Build in [structure](#) that forces students to assemble evidence for their assertions.

Make time.

Plan for discussions to take up significant class time. The path to a crucial concept or nuance is not always straightforward and you may need to review previous learning while guiding students through thorny topics. Some strategies to reserve class time are having students participate in an [asynchronous discussion on Canvas](#) prior to the class meeting or requiring some initial in class writing to allow students to gather their thoughts. Consider social annotation tools like [Hypothesis](#) to have students identify key points, quotations, or artifacts from course materials.

Don't ignore problems.

When tensions run high, [provide clear leadership](#). Remind students of their commitment to your shared agreements. If participants have violated those agreements, address those issues openly. In their book, [Crucial Conversations](#), Patterson et al. suggest doing so by creating a space for participants to apologize (if appropriate), address misunderstandings (e.g., write contrast statements "I **don't** want to suggest that... I **do** want to work toward..."), and rediscover their mutual purpose. These strategies can help rebuild trust and model actions necessary beyond the classroom to build and sustain community.

2 – Tools for Promoting Access and Inclusion

“Inclusion describes a culture in which all learners feel welcome, valued, and safe, and it requires intentional and deliberate strategies.”

Inclusive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Equity in the College Classroom
Kelly Hogan and Viji Sathy

Student Technology Survey

[In a 2022 study of 820 college students](#), more than three quarters of respondents reported having experienced technology issues (e.g., unstable internet, device malfunction, lack of access to software or applications). Learning more about your students’ access to and use of technology can help you make decisions about content delivery, assignment collection, referral to campus resources, and more! Here’s a link to a [pre-made technology survey](#) you can copy and adapt to your individual context and here’s a link to a more extensive tool for learning about students’ backgrounds developed by [Addy et al. called “Who’s in Class.”](#)

Accessibility Checkers and Document Converters

Many of our classes incorporate digital content, and it’s important to ensure that all students can access and learn from that content. By adopting principles of [Universal Design for Learning](#), you can create materials without barriers rather than work to retroactively address them when a student experiences a problem. Microsoft Office has a great feature called the [accessibility checker](#) that you can use to scan a document or slideshow to flag potential issues. You’ll also see quick tips and explanations for how to address them. Another great tool is this [free document converter](#), which allows you to upload a file, choose a new desired format (e.g., mp3, .docx), and receive a copy you can download and share with others.

5 – Perspectives on AI and Higher Education

Over the past few weeks and months, you may have heard some chatter about [OpenAI's Chat-GPT3](#) bot that can produce impressively coherent (albeit generic) writing. Some observers are wondering what the implications of this new technology are for teaching and learning in higher education. Check out these five perspectives to learn more. Stay tuned for information on a CTL-sponsored brown bag later this semester for a chance to add your voice to the discussion.

[Ghostwriter from This American Life](#)

Listen or read the transcript: "Vauhini Vara lost her sister when she was in college. Even though Vauhini's a writer now, she'd never really been able to write about her sister. It's hard to figure out what to say about something like that. Somehow, it was a computer program that helped her find the words."

[I Interview Chat-GPT by Cynthia Alby](#)

Educator and author of *Learning that Matters*, Cynthia Alby, "interviews" Chat-GPT.

[AI Will Augment, Not Replace by Marc Watkins \(Inside Higher Ed\)](#)

Watkins discusses the limitations of language models and their implications for the future of higher education.

[The College Essay is Dead by Stephen Marche \(The Atlantic\)](#)

Marche argues that nobody is prepared for how AI will transform academia.

[Is A.I. the Problem? Or Are We? Ezra Klein interviews Brian Christian, author of The Alignment Problem.](#)

Listen or read the transcript: "The problems and the possibilities of AI are in a very deep way the problems and possibilities of humanity. They are generated by us. The fear is that it will learn the worst of us. And it will take our mistakes and our dark impulses and reorder society around them. And it will do so for the profits of a few."