



18th Annual Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference

Relevant Teaching

Thursday, September 24, 2026 | Virtual Sessions

Friday, September 25, 2026 | In-Person Sessions

Session Proposal Guide

How to Use This Guide. This guide provides step-by-step instructions to help you prepare your proposal for submission. We recommend that you use this guide to prepare your proposal in a separate Word document. Once you complete your proposal, you can copy/paste the information from your Word document into the [online submission form](#) while saving a record for yourself at the same time. You may submit only one proposal per session type.

Conference Theme. This year's theme is **Relevant Teaching**. In recent years, pedagogy has been rocked with seismic changes through the introduction of AI, the arrival of Gen Z students, the long-term impact of Covid's disruption to learning, and questions around the value of higher education. Now more than ever, it is important for educators to articulate the value of what they do in the classroom. This year's theme provides an opportunity for all instructors to share their experiences with making instruction relevant beyond the classroom. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Project-Based/Inquiry-Based Learning
- Real-World Problem Solving
- Media and/or Digital Literacy
- Civic Engagement and Experiential Learning
- Active Learning
- Assignment/Course Design
- Blended and Hybrid Learning
- Technology Integration in Education
- Collaborative Learning

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Conference Overview

Conference Purpose. The Innovations in Teaching and Learning (ITL) conference provides an opportunity for instructors at George Mason University to share their teaching experience and learn about developments in teaching. As a result, the conference has the following goals:

- Bring instructors from different disciplines and statuses together around their teaching.
- Provide opportunities for instructors to share knowledge and experiences around teaching with their colleagues.
- Helps faculty develop skills in sharing their teaching with a broad audience.

Conference Information. The 18th Annual Innovations in Teaching and Learning conference will take place **September 24 and 25, 2026**. All Teaching Talks sessions will be virtual **via Zoom on September 24, 2026** (session times will be determined later). All Interactive Sessions will take place on campus in **Dewberry Hall at the Johnson Center located on our Fairfax campus on September 25, 2026, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

The deadline for proposals is March 30, 2026, at 11:59 p.m.

Section 1. Session Types

Session Types. The conference features three types of sessions.

- **Individual Teaching Talk (10 minutes, via Zoom).** Ideal for an **individual** graduate student, new instructor, and any instructor trying something new in a class or sharing strategies used in class. The planning team will organize three Individual Teaching Talks into a Teaching Talk Session. The presentation:
 - Is an individual presentation no more than 10 minutes in length
 - Has a maximum of **one** presenter
 - Will be grouped together by the planning committee with two additional Individual Teaching Talks on a similar theme to form one Teaching Talk Session
 - May include a slide deck with no more than 3 slides
- **Teaching Talk Session (50 minutes, via Zoom) (NEW).** Ideal for a **group** of graduate students, new instructors, and instructors trying something new around a similar theme and who are presenting on a related topic. The session:
 - Is a **panel** presentation of three individual, 10-minute teaching talks (three presenters @ 10 min each equals 30 minutes of talking time total plus 20 minutes for Q&A)
 - Has a maximum of **three** presenters
 - Features a 20-minute question-and-answer session facilitated by a moderator that will be assigned by the planning committee
 - Each individual presenter may have a slide deck with no more than 3 slides for each individual presenter

- **Interactive Sessions (50 minutes, in-person at Johnson Center).** Ideal for an individual or a group to present on advanced topics, curriculum development, advanced research on teaching and learning, or demonstrations of advanced teaching strategies and techniques.

The presentation:

- Is an individual presentation OR **group** presentation where individuals **collectively** present on a single topic (three presenters = 30 minutes of total talking time plus 20 minutes for an interactive activity)
- Has a maximum of **three** presenters
- Features a 20-minute interactive activity involving the audience
- May include a slide deck with no more than 8 slides

If you have questions about presenters for any of the sessions, please contact the Stearns Center (stearns@gmu.edu) with the subject line "ITL 2026".

Proposal Limitations. Lead Presenters may submit only **one** Interactive Session proposal. Interactive Sessions are limited in number (16) and represent the most rigorously evaluated presentation for the conference. Lead Presenters may submit more than one Individual Teaching Talk or Teaching Talk Session. Lead Presenters can submit an Interactive Session and an Individual Teaching Talk or Teaching Talk Session. To include as many unique presenters as possible and create a well-rounded program, the planning committee may limit the number of times a presenter appears on the program.

Select your proposal session type.

- Individual Teaching Talk. You do not have any additional presenters. [Go to Section 2]
- Teaching Talk Session. You have 1-2 additional presenters. [Go to Section 3]
- Interactive Session. You have 1-2 additional presenters. [Go to Section 4]

Section 2. Individual Teaching Talk Proposal

An **Individual Teaching Talk** is a lightning talk of no more than 10 minutes via Zoom where **one presenter** shares a teaching strategy, innovation, technique or tool used in a course, insights on curriculum development for a program or initiative, or SoTL research. The ITL Planning Committee will group three individual Teaching Talks around the same theme together in a single 50-minute Teaching Talk Session. The presentation:

- Is an individual presentation no more than 10 minutes in length
- Has a maximum of **one** presenter
- Will be grouped together by the planning committee with two additional Individual Teaching Talks on a similar theme to form one Teaching Talk Session
- May include a slide deck with no more than 3 slides

Lead Presenter Information. The Lead Presenter will be sent all correspondence regarding the proposal. Provide the following information for Lead Presenter:

- Last Name
- First Name
- George Mason Email (netid@gmu.edu)
- Primary School/College/Unit/Organization
- Employee Status
- Years of Teaching
- Are you submitting this proposal as part of a SC CTL Funds requirement or as a SC Partner?
- Additional Information: Add any additional information you would like us to know about your submission.

Proposal Information

- **Session Title (10 words max):** This title will appear in the Conference Program and Conference Proceedings.
- **Short Session Title (5 words max):** This title will appear in the At-A-Glance Schedule.
- **Abstract (150 words or less):** The abstract will appear in the online program. It should summarize the key elements of the presentation in a way that captures the interest of conference attendees. Please avoid jargon or explain terms unfamiliar to individuals beyond your discipline.
- **Teaching and learning strategies:** 1-2 sentences that describe the specific teaching strategies or methods that will be included in your presentation. These may include a specific teaching strategy, innovation, technique, tool, research question (SOTL), or curricular initiative.
- **Impact.** 1-2 sentences that explain how these teaching strategies or methods from your presentations help students learn. Examples of impact include increasing student participation or increasing student motivation.
- **Takeaway:** 1-2 sentences that explain how conference attendees can use the information gleaned from the presentation to benefit their teaching or enhance their own knowledge and skills. Examples of takeaways include expanding the kinds of feedback strategies they use in class or types of assignments they give.

- **Copyright.** The author is responsible for ensuring that their proposal information follows copyright rules. If your proposal is selected, your materials submitted here may be posted online and in print under the Creative Commons-BY Attribute 4.0 license. More information will be provided with presenter notifications. If you have questions related to copyright, please contact Mason Publishing Group at publish@gmu.edu.
- **Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).** If you are presenting Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) work, we want to be sure that appropriate measures have been taken to protect human subjects, as this work will be shared at the conference and published in the conference proceedings. More information can be found on the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) [website](#). You should always confirm with IRB that you are permitted to share the results of this project in a public forum.
- **ITL Tags.** Please identify up to 5 tags for your proposals, separated by a comma. These tags help us organize the conference program.

Sample Individual Teaching Talk Proposal

Long Title: Why Did I Get This Grade? Making Feedback Relevant for Students

Short Title: Making Feedback Relevant for Students

Abstract: This presentation will share a strategy that increases student engagement with the feedback provided on assignments. With this strategy, students incorporate a summarization of the feedback and an explanation of the acceptance (or rejection) of the suggestions provided in the feedback into the next assignment. This becomes part of the next assignment's grading criteria. This presentation will share how students react to the inclusion of this provision into assignments as well as the impact of this provision on their performance on subsequent assignments.

Teaching and learning strategies: This presentation will share a rubric that includes the student's response to feedback from the previous assignment.

Impact. This strategy helps students learn how to apply the comments they receive on assignments. When students learn how to understand and use feedback, it helps them to develop the skill of making informed decisions about changes they make to their work.

Takeaway. Conference attendees can use this strategy to get students to apply feedback and improve their performance on scaffolded assignments.

ITL Tags: Grading, feedback, engagement, assessment

Section 3: Teaching Talk Session Proposal

Teaching Talk Session (50 minutes, via Zoom). Ideal for a **group** of graduate students, new instructors, and instructors trying something new in a class who want to present together, a grant team, or a group of instructors working on a collaborative project. The session:

- Is a **panel** presentation of three individual, 10-minute teaching talks (three presenters @ 10 min each equals 30 minutes of talking time total plus 20 minutes for Q&A)
- Has a maximum of **three** presenters
- Features a 20-minute question-and-answer session facilitated by a moderator that will be assigned by the planning committee
- Each individual presenter may have a slide deck with no more than 3 slides for each individual presenter

Lead Presenter Information. The Lead Presenter will be sent all correspondence regarding the proposal. Provide the following information for Lead Presenter:

- Last Name
- First Name
- George Mason Email (netid@gmu.edu)
- Primary School/College/Unit/Organization
- Employee Status
- Years of Teaching
- Are you submitting this proposal as part of a SC grant program requirement?
- Additional Information: Add any additional information you would like us to know about your submission.

Second Presenter. Provide the following information for your Second Presenter:

- Last Name
- First Name
- Mason Email (netid@gmu.edu)
- Primary School/College/Unit/Organization
- Primary Employee Status
- Years of Teaching
- Are you submitting this proposal as part of a SC grant program requirement?
- Additional Information: Add any additional information you would like us to know about your submission.

Third Presenter. Provide the following information for your Third Presenter, if applicable:

- Last Name
- First Name
- Mason Email (netid@gmu.edu)
- Primary School/College/Unit/Organization
- Primary Employee Status
- Years of Teaching

- Are you submitting this proposal as part of a SC grant program requirement?
- Additional Information: Add any additional information you would like us to know about your submission.

Session Proposal Information

- **Session Title (10 words max):** This title will appear in the online program.
- **Short Session Title (5 words max):** This title will appear in the At-A-Glance Schedule.
- **Abstract (500 words max (150 words max for session abstract *plus* 150 words max for each individual abstract)):** The abstract will appear in the online program. It should state the common theme and include an individual abstract for each presenter that summarizes the key elements in a way that captures the interest of conference attendees. Please avoid jargon and explain terms unfamiliar to individuals beyond your discipline.
- **Teaching and learning strategies:** 1-2 sentences that describe the specific teaching strategies or methods that will be included in the session. These may include a specific teaching strategy, innovation, technique, tool, research question (SOTL), or curricular initiative.
- **Impact.** 1-2 sentences that explain how these teaching strategies or methods from the session help students learn. Examples of impact may include increasing student participation or increasing student motivation.
- **Takeaway:** 1-2 sentences that explain how conference attendees can use the information gleaned from the session to benefit their teaching or enhance their own knowledge and skills. Examples of takeaways include expanding the kinds of feedback strategies they use in class or types of assignments they give.
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- **Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).** If you are presenting Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) work, we want to be sure that appropriate measures have been taken to protect human subjects, as this work will be shared at the conference and published in the conference proceedings. More information can be found on the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) [website](#). You should always confirm with IRB that you are permitted to share the results of this project in a public forum.
- **ITL Tags.** Please identify up to 5 tags for your proposals, separated by a comma. These tags help us organize the conference program. In the final ITL program, participants can use these tags to identify sessions of interest.

Sample Teaching Talk Session Proposal

Session Title: Reimagining Student-Centered Learning in the 21st Century Classroom

Short Title: Reimagining Student-Centered Learning

Abstract: As higher education adapts to changing student needs and technological shifts, faculty must foster environments that enhance student engagement. This panel highlights student-centered approaches to teaching that cultivate agency, belonging, and critical thinking across disciplines. Panelists will explore three innovative strategies. Each presentation shares research and classroom examples of how these strategies increase student empowerment and deepen learning, offering attendees actionable insights for diverse teaching contexts. Attendees will leave with practical tools to implement in both face-to-face and online learning environments.

1. Co-Creating the Course: Collaborative Syllabus Design for Student Ownership

This presentation explores how involving students in the co-creation of course policies and learning outcomes can enhance motivation and transparency. Drawing on classroom research in a first-year writing course, the presenter demonstrates how collaborative syllabus design promotes dialogue around expectations, equity, and accountability. Participants will see examples of co-created course documents and learn facilitation techniques to balance structure and flexibility.

2. Designing for Authentic Engagement: Project-Based Learning in Hybrid Spaces

This presentation shares insights from a study on project-based learning (PBL) in hybrid undergraduate science courses. By emphasizing real-world problems and iterative collaboration, the presenter bridges the gap between content mastery and applied skills. The presentation will address challenges in scaffolding, feedback, and equitable participation in mixed-modality environments, offering adaptable design principles for any discipline.

3. Beyond Grades: Reflective Portfolios as Tools for Empowerment

This presentation discusses how digital portfolios can shift assessment from performance to reflection. Through qualitative analysis of student reflections in upper-level design courses, the presenter argues that portfolios help learners articulate growth, connect coursework to identity, and develop a language for self-assessment. The session will include sample prompts and showcase low-barrier digital tools for implementation.

Teaching and learning strategies: Panelists will explore three innovative strategies: collaborative syllabus design to enhance transparency and student ownership; project-based learning in hybrid courses to promote authentic engagement; and reflective digital portfolios that connect academic work to students' identities and future careers.

Impact. These strategies increase student engagement and participation in their own learning.

Takeaway: Conference attendees will see how student engagement can look in different disciplines and modalities.

Section 4: Interactive Session Proposal

Interactive Session. (50 minutes, in-person). Ideal for an individual or a group to present on advanced topics, curriculum development, advanced research on teaching and learning, or demonstrations of advanced teaching strategies and techniques. The presentation:

- Is an individual OR **group** presentation where individuals **collectively** present on a single topic (three presenters = 30 minutes of total talking time plus 20 minutes for an interactive activity)
- Has a maximum of **three** presenters
- Features a 20-minute interactive activity involving the audience
- May include a slide deck with no more than 8 slides

Lead Presenter Information. The Lead Presenter will be sent all correspondence regarding the proposal. Provide the following information for Lead Presenter:

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- Years of Teaching
- Are you submitting this proposal as part of a SC grant program requirement?
- Additional Information: Add any additional information you would like us to know about your submission.

Second Presenter. Provide the following information for your Second Presenter, if applicable:

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- First Name
- Mason Email (netid@gmu.edu)
- Primary School/College/Unit/Organization
- Primary Employee Status
- Years of Teaching
- Are you submitting this proposal as part of a SC grant program requirement?
- Additional Information: Add any additional information you would like us to know about your submission.

Third Presenter. Provide the following information for your Third Presenter, if applicable:

- Last Name
- First Name
- Mason Email (netid@gmu.edu)
- Primary School/College/Unit/Organization
- Primary Employee Status
- Years of Teaching
- Are you submitting this proposal as part of a SC grant program requirement?

- **Additional Information:** Add any additional information you would like us to know about your submission.

Interactive Session Proposal

- **Session Title (10 words max):** This title will appear in the online program.
- **Short Session Title (5 words max):** This title will appear in the At-A-Glance Schedule.
- **Abstract (150 words or less):** The abstract will appear in the online program. It should summarize the key elements of the presentation in a way that captures the interest of conference attendees. The session's topic could include a featured teaching strategy, innovation, technique, tool, research question (SOTL), or curricular initiative included in the presentation in a way that will be understood by individuals outside of your discipline. Please avoid jargon and explain terms unfamiliar to individuals beyond your discipline.
- **Innovation and Interactive Activity:** 1-2 sentences that describe how the presentation challenges existing models or approaches or introduces new perspectives. 1-2 sentences that describe the interactive activity for the session. Examples of innovation include the incorporation of new educational technology tools or the use of alternative grading strategies. An example of an interactive activity is a Think-Pair-Share, where attendees think about a question posed, pair with a partner, and share their combined thoughts.
- **Impact:** 1-2 sentences that explain how the innovation from the session affects student learning. Examples of impact include increasing retention or meeting program outcomes.
- **Takeaway:** 1-2 sentences that explain how conference attendees can use the information from the session to benefit their teaching or enhance their own knowledge and skills. Examples of takeaways may include showing how attendees can develop AI policy in the classroom or leverage Canvas to enhance asynchronous student engagement.
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Sample Interactive Session Proposal

Session Title: Making an Impact for All Students: Student Learning Outcomes for Undergraduate Research in Mason Core Courses

Short Session Title: Undergraduate Research in Mason Core Courses

Abstract: This session reveals how instructors can incorporate undergraduate research into lower-level courses of Mason Core while meeting the student learning outcomes of the program. Undergraduate research is a high-impact practice, allowing students to actively engage with inquiry and share their results. The presentation will explain how instructors can focus on the unique needs of the first- and second-year students that populate these courses. It will explain how instructors can adapt their current cumulative assignments to feature opportunities for students to create research questions and gain skills in the processing of knowledge.

Innovation and interactive Activity: This presentation will help instructors introduce high impact practices early in a student's college career. High impact practices are often suggested for upper-level courses. The presentation will include a brief written activity where attendees describe a current cumulative assignment, reconceptualize its purpose using the TILT framework, and receive feedback from other attendees.

Impact: This presentation will help students benefit from high impact practices at the beginning of their collegiate career. This will prepare them for hands-on learning in later courses.

Takeaway: Instructors teaching Mason Core courses can enhance student learning to meet outcomes for Mason Core.

Tags: General education, undergraduate research, high-impact practices, project-based learning

Section 5: Proposal Selection Criteria

Proposal criteria will be rated on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest). Each proposal will be reviewed by three reviewers. The proposal score is the sum of the points awarded by all reviewers. In addition, the reviewer will provide an overall recommendation for acceptance as well as comments.

Individual Teaching Talks and Teaching Talk Sessions will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- **Clear abstract:** The abstract clearly describes the purpose of the presentation without jargon or explains terms unfamiliar to readers beyond the presenter's discipline.
- **Teaching and learning strategies:** The answer describes instructional strategies or methods that form the basis of the presentation.
- **Impact:** The answer explains how the strategies and methods in the presentation impact student learning.
- **Takeaway.** This answer explains how a broad audience beyond the presenter's discipline will benefit from the presentation or use the information in their teaching practice.
- **Time Management.** This criterion applies to how well the proposal can be successfully presented in the allotted time.

Interactive Sessions will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- **Clear abstract:** The abstract clearly describes the purpose of the presentation without jargon or explains terms unfamiliar to readers beyond the presenter's discipline.
- **Innovation and Interactive Activity:** The answer explains how the presentation offers a new approach or method or uses existing practices or strategies in a new way. It also describes the proposed interactive activity beyond a question-and-answer period that will be used to engage the audience. Both must be present to gain full points.
- **Impact:** The answer explains how the strategies and methods in the presentation impact student learning.
- **Takeaway:** This answer explains how a broad audience beyond the presenter's discipline will benefit from the presentation or use the information in their teaching practice.
- **Time Management:** This criterion applies to how well the proposal can be successfully presented during the allotted time.