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Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning

Digital Learning | Teaching Excellence

From Our Directors

Greetings, Friends, and Welcome to Fall 2021!

The Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning is taking a step forward: This year, our monthly email newsletter will be sent to all faculty at Mason.

We're excited to have this increased outreach: If nothing else, the experiences of the past 17 months have made clear how much we are *all* continuing to learn and adapt as faculty members, and as others who support teaching and learning at the university. Our Stearns Center team is looking forward to keeping you up-to-date on good resources, advice, and events that can enhance your teaching. (If you prefer, of course, you can use the link at the end of this email to unsubscribe).

We hope you were able to find opportunities for relaxation, connection, reflection, and rejuvenation over the summer, and that you're excited about your upcoming classes and events in Fall 2021.

We are looking forward to reconnecting with **you** this fall. For instance,

- We've **announced** our start-of-semester [syllabus policies announcement](#) to a webpage for ease of access. Even if you have taught many semesters before, please take a few minutes to check for new policy language, resources, and guidelines.
- Our website has all the great information you're used to: You might return to the [Classroom Guide](#) for information about and teaching strategies for your physical classrooms, brush up on your [strategies for teaching online](#), or explore our other [Fall 2021 resources](#).
- Our [Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference](#) is back in September for another virtual week of Mason faculty and staff helping one another improve our teaching, with our newly confirmed keynote speaker Tia Brown McNair, author of *From Equity Walk to Equity Talk*.
- Most of our Stearns Center Team is already familiar to you, but in this newsletter, we want to introduce some of our new team members.
- Our other regular supporters and opportunities—consultations, webinars, Teaching Squares, Write-Ins, faculty communities, workshops, academies, and newsletters—are continually updated, so keep checking our calendar and website to see how we can best help you have a Fabulous Fall!

Along with our partners (including the Office of the Provost, Faculty Affairs and Development, Writing Across the Curriculum, Mason Impact/Undergraduate Education, Graduate Education, GradLife, University Libraries, and Information Technology Services) we wish you an excellent conclusion to your summer and an energizing start to your Fall 2021 semester.

Shelley & Faisal

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Events & Deadlines

INNOVATIONS in Teaching & Learning conference

Save the Date! Innovations in Teaching & Learning conference

September 20-24, 2021 | Online

Join us for the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning's annual **Innovations in Teaching & Learning (ITL) conference** Sept. 20-24, which brings together Mason's instructors from across disciplines to share teaching strategies through lively virtual interactive workshops and panels. From the comfort of your home, brew a cup of coffee and enjoy 100+ Synchronous and On Demand sessions in which Mason instructors share their best teaching strategies. You will walk away with something to use in your class the next day, week or semester.

On Monday September 20, 9:30-11:00 a.m., keynote speaker Dr. Tia Brown McNair, Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success and Executive Director for the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Campus Centers at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, will share her insights and expertise on fostering equity and inclusive excellence in higher education. Her book is [From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education](#) (click link for FREE Mason access to her e-book thanks to University Libraries).

Whether you're full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, graduate student, or support office staff, we hope that you can join us for an inspiring week filled with conversation, fellowship, and fun! [Register](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/itl) and find out more at <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/itl>.

Faculty Development Workshops

Stearns Center Online Teaching & Learning Webinar: How to Check the Quality of Your Online Courses & Online Teaching

August 20, 2021 1:30- 2:30 PM | Zoom

Do your online course and online teaching show quality indicators? In this webinar, the Stearns Digital Learning Quality Assurance Team will share essentials for online course quality and provide you with tips for how to work with the Online Quality Checklist. We will highlight the Digital Learning's Quality Assurance resources now available on our website. You will learn:

- How the Checklist can help you reflect on the quality of your online courses and teaching practices;
- To apply the Checklist to make sure that your online course is ready for the Fall 2021 semester, checking for essential elements that foster student engagement and active learning;
- From examples of Mason courses to demonstrate the essential online course quality indicators.

Facilitators: Darlene Smucny and Monisha Tripathy (Stearns Digital Learning QA Team); Dr. Jessie Matthews (ENGH, CHSS) and Dr. Erin Murdoch (PSYC, CHSS)

[Register for this Webinar](#)

Online Teaching and Learning (OTL) Webinar Series

Stearns Center Digital Learning team will be facilitating online teaching and learning (OTL) series webinars in the fall. If you are a new or a returning faculty teaching an online course for the first time or revising the online course contents for the future semesters, these webinar series are a must-to-attend. We will cover various topics on six primary areas: (i) quality assurance (QA), (ii) interactions and engagement, (iii) tools, media, and technology, (iv) accessibility, (v) assessments, and (vi) open educational resources (OER)/collaboration. Our experienced QA team and instructional designers will share examples from designed courses with tips and strategies to make an online course highly effective. These webinars are open to all faculty regardless of the teaching modalities. Previously, faculty attending these webinars found it very effective for their F2F and hybrid teaching.

Here is the information to register for the events:

August 20, 2021, 1:30 - 2:30 pm | How to Check the Quality of Your Online Courses & Online Teaching?

- Facilitators: Darlene Smucny and Monisha Tripathy
- [Register for this webinar](#)

September 10, 2021, 1:00 - 2:30 pm | Rethinking Assessments

- Facilitators: Larisa Olesova and Ala Showers
- [Register for this webinar](#)

September 14, 2021, 1:00 - 2:30 pm | Basic Questions about Accessibility and Usability in Online Courses

- Facilitators: Darlene Smucny and Korey Singleton
- [Register for this webinar](#)

October 1, 2021, 1:00 - 2:30 pm | Engaging Asynchronous Students

- Facilitators: Ala Showers and Larisa Olesova
- [Register for this webinar](#)

October 7, 2021, 1:00 - 2:30 pm | Utilizing Multimedia for Course Design

- Facilitator: Katrina Johnson
- [Register for this webinar](#)

November 1, 2021, 1:00 - 2:30 pm | Exploring OER

- Facilitator: Jade Geary
- [Register for this webinar](#)

November 17, 2021, 1:00 - 2:30 pm | Inclusive Course Design and Teaching

- Facilitators: Laura Todd and Darlene Smucny
- [Register for this webinar](#)

Continuing Professional Development Workshops for Fall 2021

Do you want to improve your assignments, your grading, or your online discussions this fall, but don't have time for a lengthy redesign? Are you completing an evaluation portfolio and want to document your commitment to improving your teaching? Our one-hour, interactive CPD workshops might be just the thing!

The Stearns Center is offering a series of [Continuing Professional Development workshops](#) throughout Fall 2021. These workshops cover topics including efficient grading, engaging students, and providing feedback for written assignments. Please register via links on our [Webinars & Trainings](#) page; workshops will be virtual or have a virtual option throughout Fall 2021.

Faculty who complete three CPD workshops and upload a revised course document during one calendar year will receive the Stearns Center Level One Faculty Development Credential.

Teaching Squares Return in September

Application Deadline: Friday, September 3, 2021

What do other faculty actually do in their courses? How are they adapting to new opportunities, engaging their students, providing feedback, managing their time, and supporting long-term learning? If you joined a Teaching Square, you could find out!

Stearns Center Teaching Squares are a kind of professional "pot-luck dinner": a quick way to build your teaching network and learn strategies that will support your teaching. For Fall 2021, we will match interested faculty with a Square of colleagues from across the university (usually four people, but sometimes a little larger or smaller) and guide you through a quick four-part approach in September and October:

- Each Square meets once near the middle of September for introductions and planning
- Each member of the Square shares some element of a course they're currently teaching
- Each member provides reflective feedback to the others by late September
- The whole Square meets in early October for a conversation about what they've learned and how they can support one another further

See additional information [on our website](#). To indicate your interest for Fall 2021, [please complete our two-minute form](#) by Friday, September 3, 2021.

Horizon Hall Workshops

August 18 and 20

Faculty who are teaching in Mason's newest classroom building, Horizon Hall, this semester, or just interested in learning more about these active-learning technologies and learning spaces, are invited to join one of our workshops (virtual or in-person). Classrooms and Lab Technologies (CaLT) and Stearns Center staff will be facilitating these brief overviews. Please [register in advance](#): 30-minute workshops will be offered Wednesday August 18, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. and Friday August 20, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

New Applications Help Students Engage Online: VoiceThread, Harmonize, MS Teams

In an effort to continuously improve opportunities for engagement and collaboration in Mason's online and hybrid courses, we are introducing two new tools within Blackboard: VoiceThread and Harmonize. Learn more about these tools, and watch the recorded demonstrations on the Stearns Center's [Webinar & Training page](#). To receive access to either application for your Fall 2021 course(s), please complete the [License Request Form](#). Licenses are limited during this pilot year and will be distributed on a first-come-first-served basis. Faculty are encouraged to describe a plan as to how they would like to use either tool in the upcoming year.

In addition, the conversion of all student email addresses over the summer enables students to join faculty in [Microsoft Teams spaces](#), which provide threaded discussion, chat, web-conferencing, file-sharing, calendaring, and more. Access to MS Teams is automatic, but faculty who wish to build classroom communities will need to create and invite students to specific "teams."

ITS Blackboard Webinars/Workshops

Are you looking to learn Blackboard basics, beyond basics, grade center, Kaltura media, Collaborate Ultra, using rubrics in Bb, or anything relevant to Bb? Consider attending any or all of these Blackboard training sessions/webinars facilitated by Mason's Bb team. The date, time, and registration links are here: [Blackboard Online Webinars/Workshops](#).

Writing Across the Curriculum

Fall Faculty Writing Sprints

Our virtual Faculty Writing Sprints return this fall, and all faculty are invited to participate. Every Friday morning, you can join colleagues from across campus to build some community around your writing and to set the pace for a productive academic year. After a few minutes of check-ins and goal-setting, we spend our time quietly working together.

To participate in the sprints, simply connect to our [Faculty Writers Community](#) workspace in MS Teams (make sure to sign in with your Mason credentials) and look for the meeting in the [General channel](#).

Time: 9:00am to 11:00am

Fall 2021 dates: every Friday of the semester

Questions: email us at wac@gmu.edu

For more information about this and related programming, please [visit our website](#).

Stearns Center News

Stearns Center Consultations

Stearns Center staff will be glad to assist you with any questions related to teaching, managing, and developing your face-to-face, hybrid or online courses; we can respond via email or Zoom. Please submit your questions by [clicking here](#). We work to answer your questions as quickly as possible; however, response times may vary.

TEA nominations

First Nomination Deadline: Friday, October 8, 2021

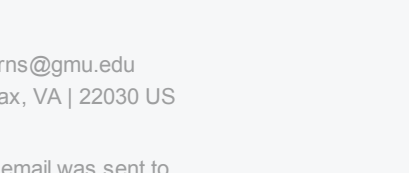
The 2022 George Mason University Teaching Excellence Awards are open to faculty with significant teaching experience at George Mason. See [more information online](#), and watch for further updates in our newsletter next month. In the meantime, please be thinking of great colleagues you can nominate!

Architecture of Learning Open-Access Journal

This fall, Stearns Center is launching AOLL, our open-access journal featuring Mason faculty examples of successful teaching practices. If you've developed a peer-reviewed assignment, exam, tool, or approach that you would like to publish in this peer-reviewed repository, please [review our guidelines](#) and watch for updates about deadlines for our Spring 2022 first issue. Contact [Crystal Anderson](#) with any questions.

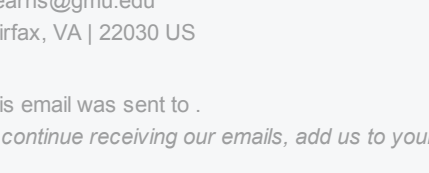
Stearns Center Staffing Updates

We are pleased to announce some new additions -- and one departure -- in the Stearns Center Team!



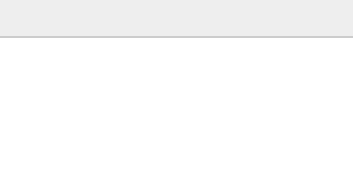
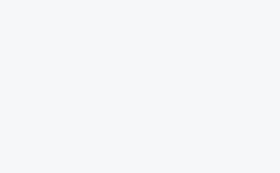
Jade Geary

Jade Geary joined us as an Instructional Designer. Jade's focus includes critical pedagogy, educational technology, adult learning theory, online learning, OER, and information literacy.



Catesby Porfirenko

Catesby Porfirenko also joined us as an Instructional Designer. Catesby has a background in Teaching English as a Second language and in e-Learning, and uses those to create content focused on student-centered learning.



Katie Skipper

Katie Skipper is our Interim Conference Director. Katie has a background in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and Global Affairs. She is in charge of our Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference this coming September.

Sylvia Graham

Sylvia Graham is our new Office Manager. Sylvia has 16 years of experience in higher education administration, making her perfectly suited to support our office and all of its programs.



Fond Farewell

This month, we bid farewell after six years to Assistant Director and ITL Conference Director Laura Lukes. Laura writes, "I will be joining the Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences faculty at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) in a tenure-track Discipline-Based Education Research (DBER) position. I will be building on and expanding my prior DBER work in the geosciences and STEM more broadly. While I shall miss the energizing conversations and idea exchanges with faculty at Mason, I know that the ITL team and the Stearns Center will continue to support the next iterations of innovation in the Mason community."

From Our Partners

Faculty Affairs

Guidelines for Evaluation of Teaching

If you are evaluating or being evaluated on teaching this fall, please consider checking the resource page [Supporting Efforts to Document and Assess Teaching and Learning](#). As evaluation policies at Mason evolve to include a multi-factor or portfolio-based approach to evaluating teaching, we hope that these resources can help faculty identify ways to document the work and achievements of their teaching, and help departments and evaluators review the work of their colleagues.

New Faculty Orientation and New Adjunct Faculty Orientation

Faculty Affairs and Development, Human Resources, and Stearns Center are collaborating again to support new faculty. Full-time (term and tenure-line) faculty are invited to attend our virtual New Faculty Orientation Monday August 16 – Tuesday August 17. See [this page](#) for NFO schedules and registration. Adjunct faculty are invited to attend our virtual New Adjunct Faculty Success Workshops on Saturday August 14. See [this page](#) for NAFSW schedules and registration. (If you were new faculty in the past year or so and were not able to attend these workshops, we welcome your participation this year!)

Innovation and Economic Development

The MIX Reopens in Horizon Hall

The Mason Innovation Exchange (MIX) will reopen on August 23rd in its new location, Horizon Hall on Fairfax Campus. The MIX includes a maker space, a media lab, and facilities designed to support collaborative work, including meeting rooms, workstations, and a multi-purpose classroom. For more information about The MIX, contact [Gisele Stolz](#), Director of Entrepreneurship Programs.

Department of Communications

Survey: Building Resources to Help Student Communication Skills

Do your students give presentations, conduct interviews, work with groups, engage in discussion, or communicate in other ways in your courses and in their subsequent careers? Are there resources that you would like to have available to help your students further refine their communication skills?

Faculty from George Mason University, James Madison University, Virginia Tech and the University of North Carolina-Charlotte received a 4-VA grant to identify and build resources (website and workshops) that will support faculty in helping build students' communication skills in courses across the curriculum. Currently these faculty are conducting a needs analysis to identify what additional tools faculty might find useful. Please tell us more about what your students do and need by completing [this 10-minute survey](#). Email questions to [Melissa Broeckelman-Post](#).

OSCAR

Research Assistant Positions

OSCAR is expanding opportunities for students to learn research, creative, or scholarly methods in their field and giving faculty free support on their projects at the same time. [Learn how you can hire a research assistant](#).

Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

Spring 2022 Application Deadline: October 27, 2021

URSP supports undergraduate students collaborating on a research, creative, or scholarly project with a faculty mentor. [Find more information on our website](#).

Undergraduate Student Travel Fund

The Undergraduate Student Travel Fund (USTF) supports research and scholarly related travel for undergraduates who are presenting their projects via poster, talk, screening, round table, performance, etc. USTF can support costs associated with presentations at virtual conferences. Students must apply 30 days before the start of the event. [Learn more here](#).

University Libraries

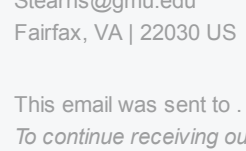
Reminder about the Libraries' new course reserve system

Course Reserves, both print and electronic, are now managed through the Leganto platform, which integrates with both the library catalog and Blackboard to streamline Course Reserves for faculty and students. If you are not yet set up with this platform or wish to learn more, the Libraries is offering training sessions prior to the start of the Fall 2021 semester – you may [select a date and register here](#). The Libraries has also created a guide to help instructors get started with Leganto. Within the resource guide are links to a Quick Guide, video tutorials, and library staff contact information. [Learn more here](#).

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