

From our Directors

Greetings, Friends,

We hope this final newsletter of 2020—thank goodness!—finds you still afloat amidst the storm, ticking a few more items off your to-do list, and appreciating how much success you, your colleagues, and your students are achieving despite all odds. Your Stearns Center crew wants to remind you to give yourself the same grace that you are giving those around you: accept Good Enough as entirely good enough; celebrate the small victories and even just the slightly-less-insane-than-usual-for-2020 moments; take time to breathe, go for a walk, engage with good art or good food or good friends; and give yourself a big heap of 2020 Bonus Points for making it this far!

Please see our updated [Stearns Center website](#) for resources for online teaching, including teaching tips for Blackboard, webinars, and workshops. We will be updating our webpages regularly, so check back for new information and resources. Check “Teaching in Spring 2021”, “Teaching Online” and “Webinars & Trainings” from the buttons on our [home page](#).

We have a new workshop series to announce and a couple of deadlines this week to remind you about:

- **NEW!** Please check out our [Continuing Development Programming](#) workshop options for Spring 2021: We’re taking the best of our long-form workshops and presenting just-enough, just-in-time information to support your spring teaching. Join a single workshop, or complete three and earn our new CDP Level 1 Credential to list on your cv or annual report
- **Writing Retreat Deadline Extended to December 17:** Apply for the January 12-14 Winter Writing Retreat; we can’t feed you lunch this year, but we promise good writing mojo and a strong community spirit to kick off your 2021 projects
- **Teaching Squares** begin again in February: [Take our quick survey](#) by January to be matched with an informal teaching-exchange group

The Newsletter will take January off, but we’ll be back in February! In the meantime, you might mark some dates on your spring calendar:

- **CDP Workshops:** [Register now before you forget](#), or write yourself a note: Our all-virtual 90-minute CDP workshops launch in January:
 - **January 13 or 14:** Designing Your Syllabus for Student Success and Engagement
 - **January 19:** Teaching with Active Learning in Horizon Hall (and elsewhere!)
 - **January 21 or 22:** First Day/First Weeks: Motivating Students and Managing Expectations
 - **January 22:** Is Your Online Course Ready for Spring 2021?
- **Consultations January 11-22:** Need some support as you’re finishing up your course? [Watch for our pre-semester consultations](#) and office hours coming in January 2021
- **Thinking about a pivot?:** If the university shifts to remote teaching in January, we’ll be there to help! Keep an eye out for resources and workshops linked to our [F2F/Hybrid Teaching Page](#)
- **Would you like to improve your writing assignments (and save time grading)?** Join one of our writing-related Faculty Learning Communities for Spring
- **Write On!** More Virtual Faculty Writing Sprints will start January 29, to help with those New Year’s Resolutions
- **Important Blackboard Changes:** Starting January 4, 2021, there will be a new MyMason/Blackboard Navigation. Please note that the basic look and functionality of Blackboard courses and organization is not changing; but there are some changes. You may see the list of the Blackboard changes on ITS website.

See more details below.

Along with our partners (including the Office of the Provost, Faculty Affairs and Development, Mason Impact/Undergraduate Education, Writing Across the Curriculum, University Libraries, Graduate Education, GradLife, and Information Technology Services) we wish you health, rest, joy, peace, and optimism about 2021 as you head into a totally, seriously, completely well-deserved winter break.

Shelley & Faisal

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Faculty Development Events & Workshops

NEW for Spring 2020: Stearns Center *Continuing Development Program & CDP Credential*

Join us for one or more virtual workshops, or complete three workshops and earn our new “Level One” Professional Development credential to document your commitment to improving your teaching.

All workshops are open to faculty, staff, and graduate instructors across disciplines and ranks, at all levels of experience. Workshops are interactive and focused on just-in-time strategies you can apply directly to your own course materials during the meetings. This year has shown us how much we are all still learning about teaching; CDP workshops are designed to help you improve strategically, build your network, and demonstrate your progress.

Our ***Teaching Essentials CDP Series*** includes workshops to help you plan or upgrade your syllabus, first week, activities, assignments, and/or grading strategies using face-to-face, web-conferencing, and asynchronous modalities.

Our ***Online Course Essentials CDP Series*** includes workshops to help you create high-quality course design, improve your course accessibility, design engaging assignments and activities, create effective videos, and/or plan for a range of authentic assessments in your online course.

Our ***Teaching Explorations CDP Series*** includes workshops to help you blend learning across Zoom and Blackboard, create active learning in our new (socially distanced) Horizon Hall rooms, design and assess the impact of clearer assignment prompts, and explore the new collaboration software coming for Summer 2021.

For more information, [please check our website](#)

OPPORTUNITY: Seeking Special Session Conveners for Next Year’s ITL Conference

DEADLINE: December 17th

It wouldn’t be the Innovations in Teaching & Learning (ITL) conference if we didn’t mix things up a little bit each year. Some of our most successful and popular sessions at this year’s online ITL conference opened with a series of short lightning talks (2-5 mins) by instructor presenters followed by a roundtable discussion or breakout group activity. With no end to the pandemic in sight, we’re exploring including a featured collection of showcase sessions like this (on our most requested and popular topics) as part of the conference program next year. We are looking for people interested in leading a group of conference attendees to learn more about the topic from the session speakers (that we will help you recruit) and each other. Special session conveners are also eligible to be one of the speakers in the session.

We ask that you attend a 1-hour session organizer orientation meeting via Zoom this spring (date TBD), organize the lightning talk presenters and session activity before the conference (we will help you recruit speakers and provide templates to help you design the session), and lead the session live via Zoom (serve as emcee/session host) during the conference. These 90-minute special sessions will run either 10-11:30am or 1-2:30pm on one of the breakout session conference days (Tuesday, September 21st through Friday, September 24th). Stipend up to \$150.

If interested, please complete [this 60-second interest form](#) by **Thursday, December 17th**. The survey asks for your contact information and your session topic preferences from our list (includes option to suggest a topic). Thank you for considering and please send any questions to the 2021 ITL Conference Director, [Dr. Laura Lukes](#).

Teaching Squares Return in February

Application Deadline: Tuesday, January 26, 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 Spring 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 February:

- Each Square meets once at the start of the month 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
- The whole Square meets 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 Spring 2021, [please complete our two-minute form](#) by Tuesday January 26, 2021.

CDP Teaching Essentials: Designing Your Syllabus for Student Success and Engagement

January 13, 2021 | 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)

January 14, 2021 | 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)

Want students to use your syllabus? In this workshop, you will redesign your syllabus to make connections between learning outcomes, course content and assignment descriptions clear. You will also learn how to prioritize your course content and use the advantages of multiple teaching modalities (asynchronous, web conferencing or face-to-face).

Register for **one of the two available sessions** using the [Zoom registration form](#). Contact [Crystal Anderson](#) with questions.

CDP Teaching Explorations: Teaching in Large Active Learning Classrooms: Horizon Hall

January 19, 2021 | 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. | [Zoom](#)

Are you scheduled in Horizon Hall and want to know how to design your course for the room? In this workshop, you will learn how use the room to support your learning goals and student engagement. You will also learn how to incorporate active learning strategies that can be leveraged in multiple teaching modalities (asynchronous, web conferencing or face-to-face).

Register using the [Zoom registration form](#). Contact [Crystal Anderson](#) with questions.

CDP Teaching Essentials: First Day/First Weeks: Motivating Students and Managing Expectations

January 21, 2021 | 10:00-11:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)

January 22, 2021 | 10:00-11:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)

Do you want your students to make better decisions about their preparation and participation in your course? Do you want to increase the sense of community and build rapport in your course? In this workshop, you will redesign a set of lesson plans or a set of modules to teach students how to engage with you, your course material and each other. You will also learn strategies for classroom management that leverage the benefits of multiple teaching modalities (asynchronous, web conferencing or face-to-face).

Register for one of the two available sessions using the [Zoom registration form](#). Contact [Crystal Anderson](#) with questions.

CDP Online Course Essentials: Is Your Online Course Ready for Spring 2021?

January 22, 2021 | 1:30 - 2:30 pm | [Zoom](#)

Is your online course ready to go? How can you check your online course for quality prior to the start of the semester, throughout the semester, and beyond? Stearns Center's Digital Learning team is offering this zoom session to review our Quality Assurance Checklist & Guidelines for Online Courses. The checklist provides guidance to instructors in designing, building, and teaching quality online courses. You can use the checklist to make sure that your online course is ready for the semester, checking for important elements that foster student engagement and active learning. We will also present examples of Mason online courses which showcase quality indicators.

Register using the [Zoom Registration form](#). Contact the [Stearns Center](#) if you have any questions.

CDP Teaching Essentials: Redesigning Activities to Maximize Student Success and Engagement

February 10, 2021 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)

February 11, 2021 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. | [Zoom](#)

Do you want students to do the reading, participate in discussions or engage in learning activities? Do you want your lectures to be more effective? In this workshop, you will redesign low-stakes activities, activities which give students an opportunity to learn basic knowledge and develop basic skills that they will use in more complex assignments. You will also learn about active learning

strategies that leverage the benefits of multiple teaching modalities (asynchronous, web conferencing or face-to-face).

Register for **one of the two available sessions** using the [Zoom registration form](#). Contact [Crystal Anderson](#) with questions.

CDP Online Course Essentials: Engaging Online Learners: Building Interactive Content

February 12, 2021 | 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm | Zoom

This webinar will introduce you to a variety of tools that will help you make your learning content interactive, engaging and fun for students. The tools will range from less-known Blackboard options to commercial authoring software, and include free and easy to adopt web tools.

Register using the [Zoom Registration form](#). Contact the [Stearns Center](#) if you have any questions.

CDP Online Course Essentials: Basic Questions about Accessibility and Usability in Online Courses

February 17, 2021 | 1:00 – 2:00 pm | Zoom

All learning begins with access. By making your online courses accessible, you provide educational opportunities to all students, including students with disabilities. Quality online courses focus on accessibility and usability, including clear and logical navigation, readability, and alternative access to materials. In our webinar, we will answer basic questions about accessibility – what it is; why it's important; and how can you make sure that your online course is accessible. Our webinar also highlights resources and services for accessibility available to Mason faculty from [Assistive Technology Initiative](#). We also will demonstrate how to use Blackboard Ally, an accessibility tool available in all Mason Blackboard courses.

By the end of this webinar, participants will be able to: (a) Reflect on how accessibility and online course design relate to Universal Design for Learning (the why, what, and how of learning); (b) Explain how accessibility involves compliance with relevant disability laws and guidelines; (c) Apply methods to build and check for accessible content, e.g. using Ally; and (d) Develop a plan to incorporate accessibility as you design, build, and teach your online course at Mason.

Register using the [Zoom Registration form](#). Contact the [Stearns Center](#) if you have any questions.

CDP Teaching Essentials: Redesigning Assignments to Maximize Student Success and Engagement

February 24, 2021 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. | Zoom

February 25, 2021 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. | Zoom

Do you want students to perform better on major assignments in your class? Are you interested in developing creative and/or collaborative assignments for your course? In this workshop, you will redesign high-stakes assignments that utilize higher-order thinking skills. You will learn to scaffold them with low-stakes assignments and leverage the benefits of multiple teaching modalities (asynchronous, web conferencing or face-to-face).

Register for **one of the two available sessions** using the [Zoom registration form](#). Contact [Crystal Anderson](#) with questions.

Online Teaching Opportunities and Resources

Stearns Center's Office Hours and Consultation

Stearns Center staff are teleworking and 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.

Teaching Online in Spring 2021

Transitioning a course to an online format can be a complex process that holds tremendous teaching and learning potential. Selecting online learning activities and assessments that effectively support the course learning outcomes requires a great deal of planning. Review Stearns Center's resources to assist you with planning for your online course.

Please see our updated [Stearns Center website](#) for resources for online teaching, including teaching tips for Blackboard, webinars, and workshops. We will be updating our webpages regularly, so check back for new information and resources. Check "Teaching in Spring 2021", "Teaching Online" and "Webinars & Trainings" from the buttons on our [home page](#).

Self-Paced Courses to Improve Your Course Design Skills

Stearns Center is currently offering two self-paced courses, open to all faculty and instructors. Once you enroll, you can work through the modules in order, or you can skip to specific sections that will help you with your current course design. Each course has an “Ask a Question” discussion forum staffed by Stearns Center and is supported by office hours (see above) and by ITS Courses support through courses@gmu.edu.

For more information or to enroll in a course, see our [Consultations, Webinars and Trainings page](#).

Subscribe to our Online Teaching Newsletter

If you are new to teaching online, or you'd just like a little more support, we invite you to subscribe to our Biweekly Online Teaching newsletter. In each newsletter, you will receive tips, guidance and resources concerning a specific online teaching topic. By subscribing to the Stearns Center Online Teaching Newsletter, you will receive a newsletter issue about every 2 weeks.. Occasionally you may receive a special issue of the newsletter (i.e., outside of the biweekly sequence) or a two-part issue. The Newsletter will be available as a downloadable PDF so that you may save and refer to the online teaching topics when you need the information. [Subscribe here.](#)

If you have a special request for online teaching information that you'd like to receive in a future issue, please contact stearns@gmu.edu. We will add your requested topic to the Newsletter list, create a special issue of the Online Teaching Newsletter, and send it out to all subscribers. You can view previous editions of the Online Teaching newsletter in [Our Newsroom](#).

From Our Partners

Faculty Affairs

Registration Open for New Adjunct Faculty Success Workshop

Saturday, January 16th 2021 | 10am - 5pm | Zoom

New Adjunct Faculty Success Workshop will be held virtually this January from 10:00-5:00pm on Saturday, January 16th, 2021, due to ongoing concerns regarding COVID-19. [Registration is open](#) online. Please encourage your adjunct faculty to register, to ensure they receive communications and schedule updates from Faculty Affairs and Development.

Please reach out to [Faculty Affairs and Development](#) with any questions.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Register now for the Winter 2021 Faculty Writing Retreat!

January 12-14 | MS Teams

Hoping to start Spring semester with a blast of writing productivity? This three-day event—co-sponsored by Writing Across the Curriculum, the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, and the Office of Faculty Affairs and Development—offers an active approach to uninterrupted writing time, a chance to learn from our guest speakers, and a supportive and collegial community of peers to boost your writing productivity. Participants work on a variety of research and creative projects at all stages of completion.

Registration is open now through December 17. For more information and to sign up, [please visit our website](#).

Spring 2021 Faculty Learning Community: Teaching with Writing in the Mason Core

Spring 2021

This learning community is designed to support faculty who teach with writing in the Mason Core. It combines five self-directed online modules with development workshops and peer collaboration. Modules will focus broadly on using writing to enhance reading and promote critical thinking while also discussing practical strategies for concerns like how to provide effective and efficient feedback. By the end of the community, participants should have new activities and strategies ready to support their course's learning goals. Each module runs over a two week period, and participants will meet five times for approximately 1.5 hours during each module.

[Fill out our survey](#) to sign up! Visit the [WAC website](#) for more information on workshops, consultations and events.

Spring 2021 Faculty Learning Community: Teaching Research Writing

This learning community is designed to help faculty think through the conventions of effective

research and synthesis writing in their courses. Participants will first identify language moves in an exemplar student project from their course and will then work backwards to build activities that target each of these moves. By the end of the community, participants will have a scaffolded research project ready to integrate into their courses. The FLC will meet five times for 1.5 hours each and will be facilitated by Anna Habib, Associate Director of Composition for Multilingual Writers and Spring 2020 Teaching Excellence Award Winner. To register, please [fill out our survey](#). registration and more information, please [visit our website](#).

New Resources for Teaching with Writing

Thinking of new ways to bring writing into your courses? The WAC Program has developed [new resources](#) designed to support faculty who teach with writing. Visit our site to learn more about designing effective assignments, facilitating peer review groups, and providing effective and efficient feedback. If you have questions about teaching with writing, please email the program directly at wac@gmu.edu.

Faculty Writing Sprints

Fridays 9:00-11:00am | MS Teams

This fall, the [WAC program](#) is hosting weekly writing sprints for faculty who would like to write with a community of peers who will encourage you and help keep you on track! Join us at 9:00 (or whenever you can), set a goal, and marvel at your productivity! All faculty, at all levels, with any kind of writing projects, are invited. If you are interested in joining us, please use the link below to request access to the MS Teams workspace or email us at wac@gmu.edu.

[Click here to access the MS Team's workspace](#)

University Libraries

Update from the Libraries: Elsevier Journal Access

As previously announced, Virginia's seven public academic research libraries are in negotiations with Elsevier, a leading publisher in STEM and Social Sciences. Our shared Elsevier contract represents a collective yearly expenditure of \$10 million, and over \$1 million for Mason. Given substantial budget cuts and ongoing fiscal uncertainty, Virginia universities are seeking a substantial cost reduction for 2021. If we cannot reach a more affordable and sustainable arrangement through negotiations, we will be forced to reduce our Elsevier journal subscriptions (potentially as early as January 1, 2021). We want to assure all faculty that they will still have access to Elsevier articles. In some cases, the mode of access will change, but the Libraries will ensure that faculty continue to get the articles needed for their instruction or their research.

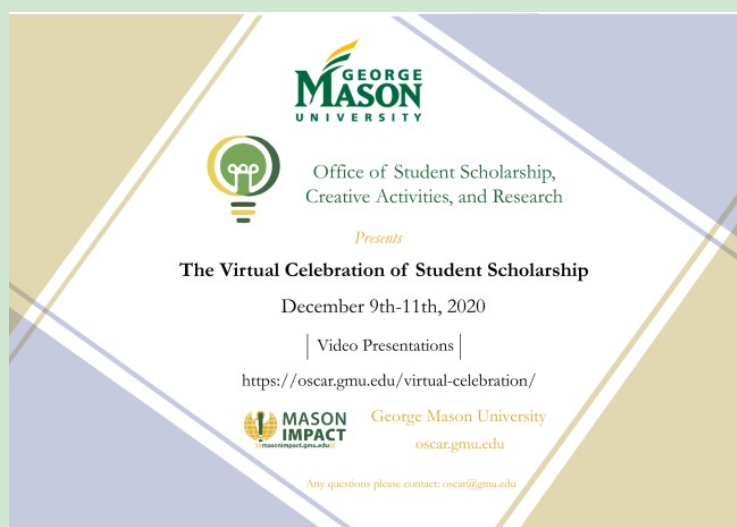
For more information on Elsevier, alternative access, and (coming soon) FAQs for instructional faculty, visit the [Libraries' Sustainable Collections site](#). If you have questions or comments regarding the Libraries' Elsevier negotiations and journal subscriptions, we welcome them [here](#).

OSCAR

The Virtual Celebration of Student Scholarship

December 9-11, 2020

The Mason community is invited join the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research (OSCAR) for the [Fall Virtual Celebration of Student Scholarship](#). Support the student scholars who worked hard all semester by viewing their pre-recorded presentations and asking them questions. Students represent colleges and programs across the university community. Registration is not required.



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. During COVID-19 restrictions, USTF can support costs associated with presentations at virtual conferences. Students must apply 30 days before the start of the event. For more information go to the USTF page.

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

Look for information for URSP Summer 2021 in December.

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

Share something for next month's newsletter

Add someone to our mailing list