

## From our Directors

Greetings, Friends,

We made it to 2021—congratulations to all of us!

Welcome back, and welcome to spring semester. We have a lot of great information to share with you about opportunities for Mason faculty this term. We have a few special opportunities this month:

- Proposals for the 2021 Still Virtual Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference are due February 24, 2021. Watch your email for full details next week!
- Applications to join the joint Stearns Center/QEP Anti-Racist and Inclusive Teaching Resource Development Team are due February 7
- Sign up now so you don't miss out on a single issue of our Online Teaching Newsletter
- Attend our webinars specifically designed for teaching online focusing on course design, student engagement, and alternative/authentic assessment

We also have some new opportunities happening this spring that we hope you'll join us for. We know your time is valuable, and so we're focused this spring on piloting or expanding our options to fit your needs and your schedule—so even though it's not a "teaching emergency," you can keep learning and connecting with peers!

*If you don't see our list of events here, be sure to download the image into your email!*

If you have...	You might plan to...	This could help you...
20-30 minutes once this semester	Schedule a 1:1 <b>consultation</b> to talk with Stearns staff about an activity or assignment for your course	Engage your students, organize your course content, and/or manage your grading, F2F or online
60 minutes once this month	Propose a five-minute "lightning talk" for <b>ITL 2021</b> about a current teaching strategy you're using	Connect with colleagues and document your teaching
90 minutes once this semester	Join one of our new <b>Continuing Professional Development</b> virtual workshops	Learn or improve a teaching strategy relevant to your spring course(s)
2 hours one Friday morning	Participate in a virtual <b>Faculty Writing Sprint</b>	Keep up with your writing goals and see what colleagues are working on
3-4 hours this semester	Request to be matched with a <b>Teaching Square</b> with 3-4 colleagues for three virtual meetings	Exchange teaching ideas with enthusiastic colleagues, and build your campus network
4-6 hours this calendar year	Complete three CPD workshops in a series and a short reflective exercise to earn a Stearns Center Level 1 <b>Professional Development Credential</b>	Connect with colleagues, complete a mini-course redesign project, and document your professional development

See more details on these and other programs below. (We have it on good authority that if you sign up for an event with a friend, you'll learn more and have more fun!)

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 hope you are feeling renewed and hopeful as the days gain more light, and we wish you pleasant Zooms!

Shelley & Faisal

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## Events & Deadlines

### Nominate a Colleague for the David J. King Award

**Nomination Deadline: February 12, 2021**

We are currently accepting nominations for the 2021 David J. King Teaching Award, Mason's award that honors an individual for their career contributions to the overall educational excellence of the university. Nominations of faculty who have served at least 20 years at Mason are due Friday February 12, 2021.

For more information, [please visit the awards page.](#)

**Anti-Racist and Inclusive Pedagogy Teams**  
Co-Sponsored by Stearns Center and the QEP Committee

**Statement of Interest Deadline: Monday, February 7, 2021**

For Spring 2021, the Stearns Center and the QEP Committee will provide stipends for 8-10 instructional faculty from across schools and colleges to participate in our Anti-Racist and Inclusive Teaching Resource Development Team, and for additional faculty to serve as Consultants to provide feedback on the Team's work. The Team will help create and adapt resources to meet the needs of Mason faculty as they improve their anti-racist teaching approaches, with particular focus on creating a syllabus audit checklist; a collection of accessible resources applicable to a range of faculty experiences, disciplines, and course levels; and a design for a pilot workshop series to be offered starting Summer 2021. For more information and links, please see [our full description online](#). Statements of interest are due Monday, February 7, 2021.

**Innovations in Teaching & Learning Conference, September 20-24, 2021, Online**

Get ready! This month, the ITL Committee is seeking Mason faculty, graduate instructors, and staff to propose sessions and reviewer proposals; our proposal deadline is February 24, 2021. Keep an eye on your email next week for a special announcement and links to the details and submission form.

## Faculty Development Workshops

**NEW for Spring 2021: Stearns Center *Continuing Development Program & CPD 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; CPD workshops are designed to help you improve strategically, build your network, and demonstrate your progress.

Our **Teaching Essentials CPD 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 CPD 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 CPD 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](#).

**Teaching Squares Return in February**

**Application Deadline: Friday, February 5, 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 and early March:

- Each Square meets once near 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 Friday February 5, 2021.

**CPD: Designing Writing Assignments**

**Wednesday February 3rd | 11:00am-12:30pm | Zoom**  
**Thursday February 4th | 11:00am-12:30pm | Zoom**

This webinar is designed to introduce foundational practices for teaching with writing and designing writing assignments. Participants will learn about what research shows contributes to both meaningful and impactful writing assignments.

Register for **one of the two available sessions** [here](#).

**CPD: Alternative Assessments: Design Challenges and Options**

**Thursday, February 4th, 1:00-2:30pm**

Are you struggling to consider alternative assessments for your online course? Join our interactive webinar on Alternative Assessments where facilitators will demonstrate and explain how to use an instructional design framework to design or redesign different types of assessments for your course. In addition to the theoretical foundation, this webinar will share examples of various

types, such as enhancing quiz items with effective discussion questions, scaffolding students from low-stake assessment to the final major assessment, and aligning the types of instructional feedback with assessment. Furthermore, we will share alternatives to papers, presentations, reports, and projects.

[Register for this Zoom meeting.](#)

### CPD 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.

### CPD 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.

### CPD 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.

### CPD: Using Writing to Support Content Learning

Monday February 22nd | 11:00am-12:30pm | [Zoom](#)  
Tuesday February 23rd | 11:00am-12:30pm | [Zoom](#)

Writing-to-learn (WTL) assignments are low-stakes approaches to teaching course content through writing. These short and informal writing tasks offer students an opportunity to explore and consolidate their understanding of concepts. This webinar will provide some foundational information about WTL, offer sample designs, and give participants some time work on a design of their own.

Register for one of the two available sessions [here](#).

### CPD 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.

### CPD: Providing Feedback to Support Student Revision

Wednesday March 10th | 11:00am-12:30pm | [Zoom](#)  
Thursday March 11th | 11:00am-12:30pm | [Zoom](#)

Participants in this webinar will learn more about how students revise and gain some strategies for providing feedback to support more substantive student revision.

Register for **one of the two available sessions** [here](#).

# Save the Dates

## Summer Course ReDesign Academy

**Application deadline: April 19, 2021**

**Workshop Dates: June 8-9, 2021**

Are you already dreaming about what you'll do differently as we meet the "new new normal" in Fall 2021? Maybe you're looking ahead to teaching in person in an active learning classroom—like one of the brilliant new classrooms in Horizon Hall—or thinking about how to combine online and in-person modalities in a productive blend? Consider bringing a current course syllabus—or a plan for a new course—to June's Course ReDesign Academy.

For more information or to submit an application, [see our website](#).

## Stearns Center Faculty Learning Communities Reboot for Fall 2021

**Indication of Interest Deadline: April 5, 2021**

Stearns Center and our partners will sponsor four FLCs in Fall 2021; you can indicate your interest between now and April 5 by filling out our two-minute survey:

- The New "Blended" Learning: Strategies for Engaging Students Across Modalities
- Exploring Anti-Racist and Inclusive Teaching Across the Curriculum
- Teaching with Writing Across Disciplines
- SoTL and DBER for Everyone: Strategies for Inquiring into Your Own Teaching

Faculty who complete a yearlong FLC—participating in 4-5 meetings each semester—earn a Level 2 Professional Development Credential from Stearns Center.

If you have another idea for an FLC, you can propose to lead your own Faculty Learning Community to start in Fall 2021, and engage in thoughtful conversations with your peers. Up to \$3500 in funding (for facilitators and supplies) is available per year-long group. For more information about FLCs or to send a proposal, [see our website](#), or [drop us an email](#) with questions or ideas!

## CPD: Creating Equitable Learning Opportunities Through Transparent Assignment Design

**April 9, 2021 | 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. | Online**

Transparent instruction is a technique that promotes student success on several dimensions and is easy to apply in both online and face-to-face settings. This event is brought to you by the Virginia Educational Development Network and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), with generous financial support from the Lumina Foundation. Spaces are limited.

Please contact [Crystal Anderson](#), Stearns Center, for more information about this workshop and the TILT Higher Ed Project.

# Online Teaching Opportunities and Resources

## Don't miss our webinars focused on online teaching this month!

- **CPD: Alternative Assessments: Design Challenges and Options**, Thursday, February 4th, 1:00-2:30pm
- **CPD Online Course Essentials: Engaging Online Learners: Building Interactive Content**, February 12, 2021 | 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm | Zoom
- **CPD Online Course Essentials: Basic Questions about Accessibility and Usability in Online Courses**, February 17, 2021 | 1:00 – 2:00 pm | Zoom

Visit our [Consultations, Webinars, and Other Training Opportunities page](#) for more information and to register for the workshops.

## 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](mailto:courses@gmu.edu).



### 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](mailto: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](#).

## Stearns Center News

### The Stearns Center is hiring two student worker positions!

#### Media Specialist

The Office of Digital Learning within the Office of the Provost seeks a student intern Media Specialist to aid in the production and support of online learning materials including short videos, infographics, animations, and presentations. Students will gain first-hand experience working with instructional designers and faculty on media-based projects ideal for creating a compelling portfolio of work for future job searches.

This position is telework only, intended for around 10-15 hours per week. This position is open to undergraduate and graduate students.

[View the full position description and log-in to Handshake to apply](#)

#### Program Assistant

The Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning is seeking a Mason graduate student to assist our office with program support and development. Join a community dedicated to improving faculty support and engaged learning at Mason. Primary responsibilities will include event support for Stearns Center conferences and workshops (tracking/data entry, scheduling, email communications, creating participation reports, virtual event support via Zoom or WebEx, note-taking) and support for our faculty and student clients (emailing, website updates, and calendar management).

The position is a semesterly student wage position intended for 5-10 hours per week, regular virtual meeting times scheduled between 12:00pm and 5:00pm; other work hours can be completed anytime; this position is remote work only; priority given to candidates who can work through the summer and/or fall 2021 semester.

[View the full position description and log-in to Handshake to apply](#)

## From Our Partners

### Writing Across the Curriculum

#### Friday Faculty Writing Sprints

Every Friday 9:00-11:00am | MS Teams

Our Faculty Writing Sprints are underway, and all faculty 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.

Questions? Visit our [website](#) or email us at [wac@gmu.edu](mailto:wac@gmu.edu).

### University Libraries

#### Getting Gif-y wit it!

Friday, February 26th, 2021 | 1:30-2:30pm | Zoom

Join Christopher and Valerie from the University Libraries Teaching & Learning Team to explore the instructional world of gifs. In this workshop we'll discuss how to create and use gifs in synchronous and asynchronous instruction, and explore some of gifs' legal, social, and accessibility implications.

Learning Outcomes:

- By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:
- Describe the legal, social, and instruction implications of gifs
- Analyze the accessibility of using gifs in instruction
- Create gifs to use for asynchronous and synchronous instruction
- Locate free resources for gif usage and creation

[Access the Zoom meeting](#)

### Important updates regarding the Libraries' contract negotiations with Elsevier

In 2020, the Virginia Research Libraries (VRL) group entered negotiations with Elsevier in an effort to reduce our shared access costs to the Freedom Collection, Elsevier's flagship academic journal bundle. Through a new, one-year agreement for 2021, six members of the VRL – including George Mason University – addressed their priorities for affordability, accessibility, and equity by withdrawing from the Freedom Collection bundle and subscribing to a selection of essential titles instead. While withdrawing from this bundle reduces the number of immediately accessible journals, it does not entail total loss of access.

Through the search box on the [Library website](#), Mason researchers will have instant access to our current subscriptions, Open Access articles, and many pre-2021 articles in our subscription backfiles. When instant access is not available, researchers may request articles through [InterLibrary loan](#). Mason Libraries remains committed to providing our community with the published research and resources they need to pursue their scholarship and instructional activities. For more information about the negotiation outcomes and affected titles, see the [full announcement](#). To discover alternate methods for locating articles in journals we no longer subscribe to, visit our [Alternative Access site](#).

### **New Course Reserves system (Leganto)**

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. The previous course reserves system will be retired at the close of the Spring 2021 semester, and beginning in Summer 2021, all course reserves requests will need to be submitted through Leganto. The Libraries has created a [new 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.

### **New streaming media content resources available**

Virginia's Academic Library Consortium – VIVA – has acquired three new streaming media products: Academic Video Online (AVON), three Sage Video Collections, and Docuseek2. These recent acquisitions are thanks to one-time CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds provided by the Governor for streaming media content, in support of online and remote education at public institutions. As a member of VIVA, the Libraries is pleased to share that access for these resources is now available to our Mason community. The Libraries' prior subscription to Docuseek will continue, enhanced by the acquisition of AVON and SAGE. For more information on these resources and how to access them, see the [full announcement](#).

## **OSCAR**

### **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**

**Summer 2021 Application Deadline: February 24, 2021**

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

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Share something for next month's newsletter

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