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Stearns Center
for Teaching and Learning
Digital Learning | Teaching Excellence

From Our Director

Greetings, Friends,

Welcome back, and welcome to spring semester! Your colleagues at the Stearns Center are excited to connect with you this spring and continue to provide opportunities for Mason faculty to strengthen their teaching and connect with colleagues. We're kicking off February with a strong line-up of information-packed webinars and interactive workshops to help you enhance your current courses.

If you have an hour free, we invite you to join us via Zoom:

- **Feb. 4, noon: *Build or improve your online course*** with support from our instructional designers
- **Feb. 7, 11am: *Explore open educational resources*** you can bring to your students
- **Feb. 9, 11am: *Refine an upcoming writing assignment*** with support from the Writing Across the Curriculum program
- **Feb. 11, 11am: *Create more accessible courses*** by exploring universal design and new technologies
- **Feb. 23, noon: *Design inclusive and engaging student activities*** to strengthen community and learning in your course
- **March 2, 11am: *Create quick writing activities*** to foster student learning and engagement across disciplines

If you have a little more time and are hoping to build out your network of faculty colleagues, we invite you to participate in some of our community-building opportunities:

- It's still not too late to join WAC's faculty learning community on Teaching with Writing, which kicks off this week!
- **Feb. 7-25:** Sign up for our **new** 6-hour mini-course on Designing Transparent Assignments
- **Feb. 11:** Sign up to be matched with a Stearns Center Teaching Square to meet new colleagues
- **Coming soon: TIL Proposals!** Watch your inbox for our invitation to submit your ideas to present at our September *in-person-and-online* Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference

And don't forget to nominate a colleague for the David J. King Award, recognizing exceptional service by faculty over 20+ years at Mason (deadline February 18).

See more details and registration links below or on our [Events Calendar](#).

As a final note, we want to let you know that Faisal Mahmud is moving on from his position as the Director for Digital Learning. We appreciate Faisal's work with the University these past two years and wish him the best in his future endeavors. (A search for a new Director of Digital Learning will get underway later this semester, and we'll keep you informed about the process and the outcome.)

Along with our partners (including the Office of the Provost, Faculty Affairs and Development, Writing Across the Curriculum, Undergraduate Education/Mason Impact/OSCAR/CECIL, Graduate Education, GradLife, University Libraries, and Information Technology Services) we look forward to supporting you and hearing about how you support your students in Spring 2022!

Shelley

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Events & Deadlines

Teaching Squares Return this Spring

Application Deadline: February 11, 2022

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—an informal group of cross-disciplinary Mason colleagues—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 2022, 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 March:

- Each Square meets once in February 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 2022, please [complete our two-minute form](#) by Friday, February 11, 2022.

Nominate a Colleague for the David J. King Award

Deadline: February 18

We are currently accepting nominations for the 2022 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 18, 2022. Send a 1-paragraph nomination to stearns@gmu.edu. For more information, please [visit the awards page](#).

Faculty Development Workshops

Mini-Course: Creating Transparent Assignments

February 7 - 25 | Online | Facilitator: Crystal Anderson

In this six-to-ten-hour mini-course, faculty will create/redesign an assignment that positions all students for their best learning. Studies have shown that increasing transparency in just any two assignments can enhance the performance of all students, with historically underserved students showing the greatest gains. Using the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework, faculty will learn the elements of transparent assignment design, compare assignments before and after “tilting,” and design an assignment for one of their courses. [Register here](#).

Workshop: How to Build an Online Course

February 4 | 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. | Zoom | Facilitators: Larisa Olesova and Ala Showers

This workshop will guide the faculty through the online course-building process. The participants will get access to the online course template, review the examples from real online courses, and will get help to create their own online course shells. By the end of this workshop, the participants will be able to modify and adjust items in their own online course shell. [Register here](#).

Webinar: Exploring Open Educational Resources (OER)

February 7 | 11:00 am – 12:00 pm | Zoom | Facilitator: Jade Geary

Open Educational Resources (OER) are becoming an increasingly popular option to use for your course materials. This webinar is an introductory webinar for those who are interested in learning the basics of OER. In this webinar, we will be exploring what OER are, why you might elect to use OER, and how you can implement them for your course. [Register here](#).

Workshop: Designing High Impact Writing Assignments

February 9 | 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. | Online | Facilitator: Thomas Polk

Participants in this workshop will learn the design principles that contribute to engaging and meaningful writing experiences for their students. The workshop will begin with a discussion of the research that informs these principles and will quickly move into some strategies for implementing them into courses across the curriculum. The workshop will close by offering faculty some time to implement one of the strategies into their courses. [Register here](#).

Webinar: Basic Questions about Accessibility and Usability in Online Courses

February 11 | 11:00 am – 12:00 pm | Zoom | Facilitator: Cateby Porfrenko

Participants in this webinar will learn more about accessibility – what it is; why it's important; and how they can be sure their online course materials are accessible. Our webinar also highlights resources and services for accessibility available to Mason faculty from [Assistive Technology Initiative](#). We will demonstrate how to use Blackboard Ally, an accessibility tool available in all Mason Blackboard courses. Participants will develop a plan to incorporate accessibility as they design, build, and teach their courses at Mason. [Register here](#).

Workshop: Engaging Students in Inclusive Hybrid Learning Environments

February 23 | 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. | Online | Facilitator: Crystal Anderson

Do you want to increase the sense of community and build rapport with all students in your course? Do you want students to engage your diverse course material and each other? Do you want to learn to leverage technology to increase student engagement? In this workshop, you will learn how to apply the principles of inclusive teaching across teaching modalities, deploy three modes of student engagement and practice incorporating inclusive engagement strategies in your course. [Register here](#).

Webinar: Small Teaching in the Writing-enriched Classroom

March 2 | 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. | Online | Facilitator: Tom Polk

Inspired by James Lang's popular book, *Small Teaching*, this workshop will introduce participants to some quick writing activities that can take as few as five minutes to effectively foster student learning in classrooms across the curriculum. The workshop will include a brief introduction to the writing-to-learn scholarship that informs these activities and will provide a sampling of model designs that participants can implement and build into their own teaching. [Register here](#).

Workshop: How to Use Grade Center in Online Courses

March 4, 2022 | Zoom | 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. | Facilitators: Larisa Olesova and Joe Balducci

During the workshop, the participants will walk through the Blackboard grade center organization process. They will get basic understanding of how grade center works and how to align the grade book to the course grading schema. By the end of this workshop, the participants will have an opportunity to practice building their own grade center. [Register here](#).

Stearns Center Events Calendar

Never miss an event! See our [Events Calendar](#) for full descriptions, to check out our March workshops, and generally to stay up to date on all Stearns Center trainings, workshops, webinars, and deadlines.

- March 9, Inclusive Course Design
- March 11, Using Multimedia for Mini-Lectures
- March 23, Inclusive Assignment Design using TILT
- March 30, Providing Feedback to Support Revision

New Applications Help Students Engage Online: VoiceThread and Harmonize

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 Spring 2022 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.

Writing Across the Curriculum

FLC on Teaching with Writing: Registration now open!

Every Tuesday | February 1 - March 8 | 2:00 - 3:30 pm | Facilitator: Emily Staudt

Are you revising your writing-intensive course or looking for new ways to strengthen your assignments and incorporate more active learning into your writing-enriched course? In spring 2022, the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program will be leading an online faculty learning community (FLC) focused on teaching with writing. This FLC is designed to help faculty align learning tasks with course outcomes and incorporate more active learning opportunities for students.

By the end of the community, participants will have a scaffolded sequence of writing tasks to support the learning outcomes for writing in their course and a drafted WI course application (if applicable).

Interested in this FLC opportunity? Please [complete this survey](#) to let us know. Have any questions about the FLC? Please [visit our website](#) or email us at wac@gmu.edu.

Our Friday Writing Sprints have returned!

Every Friday of the semester | 9:00 - 11:00 am | MS Teams

Our Friday Writing Sprints are in full swing. All faculty members with any kind of writing project are invited to participate. Add them to your calendar, tell your friends, and prepare to marvel at just how much you can accomplish in two-hours alongside your fellow Mason writers. [Visit our website](#) for more information and to register.

Resources for Teaching with Writing

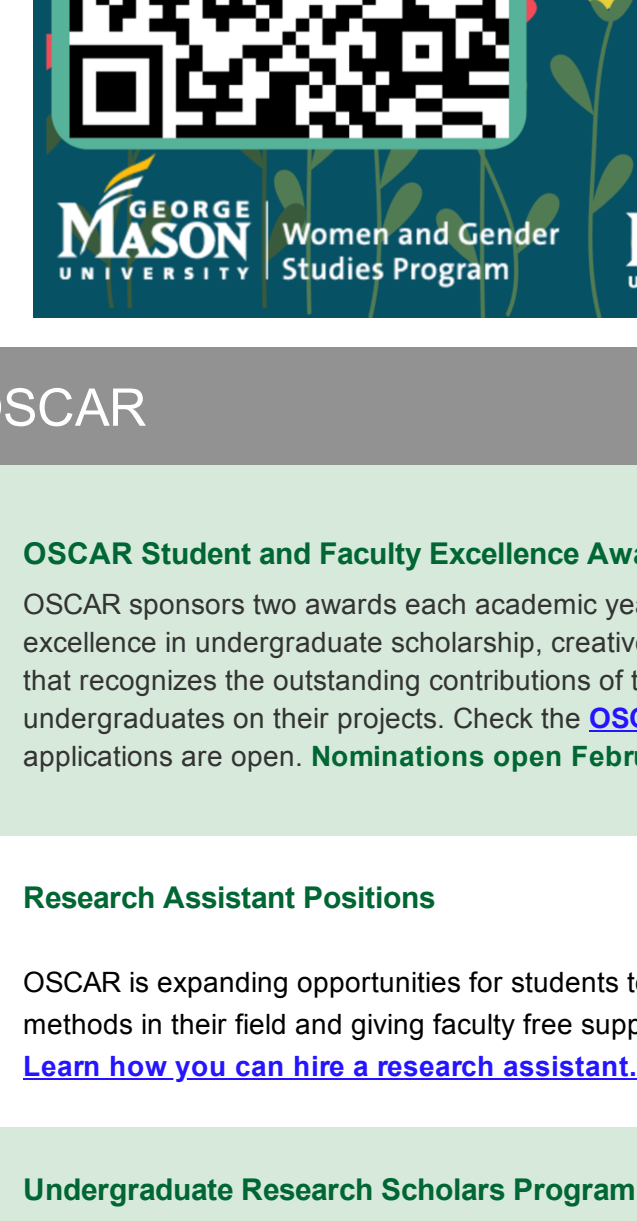
The WAC Program continues to add new resources for teaching with writing to [our website](#). As the semester continues, you might find our brief guides on assignment design, low-stakes writing assignments, and feedback helpful. You might also want to consider joining us for one of our [upcoming workshops](#). Our Faculty staff are available to talk with individuals, groups, or departments about writing instruction and curriculum design. To arrange a consultation, please email us at wac@gmu.edu.

Stearns Center News

Stearns Center is hiring! | Educational Developer with Inclusion & Equity focus

Review begins January 28, 2022

We invite applications for an Educational Developer with a specialization in inclusive and equitable pedagogies and faculty development. This is a full-time, administrative professional position; applicants should have a PhD/EdD, experience leading inclusion and equity programming, and at least two years' college-level teaching experience. For more information, see the [GMU Jobs Board](#), and please share this information with colleagues who may be interested.

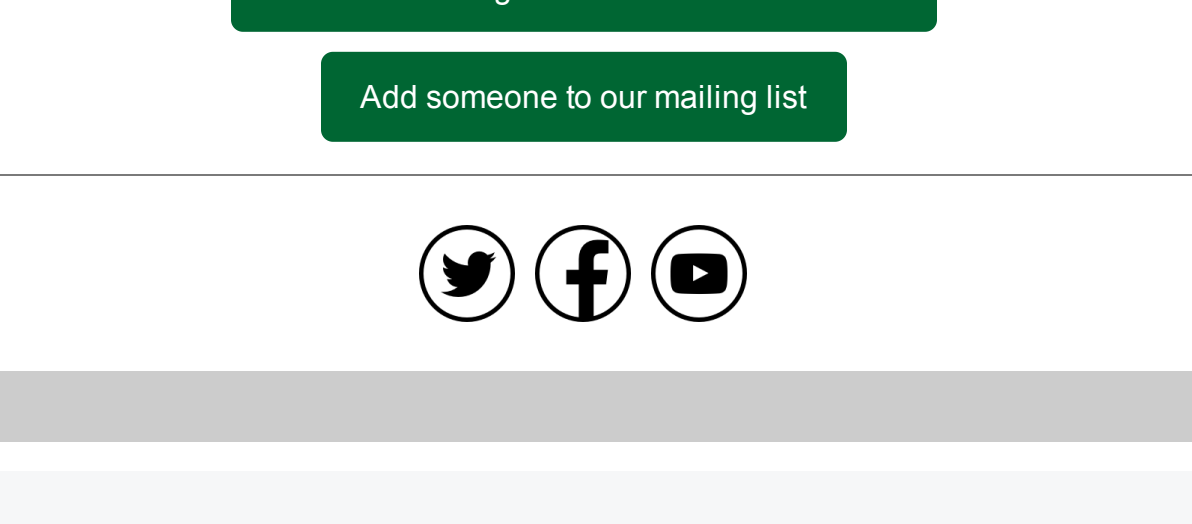


Check out our Quality Assurance resources for online courses!

- **Faculty Self-Checklist:** Use the Faculty Self-Checklist to review your online course and online teaching.
- **Online Course Quality: Essential Elements:** Review our infographic on Online Course Quality: Essential Elements to get the most out of your course.
- **Want to learn even more?** Our Quality Assurance Checklist and Guidelines contains both a faculty self-checklist and essential quality indicators for each domain with examples of how they can be demonstrated in an online course.

This is an *extensive* document, and we encourage you to schedule an appointment with our QA team if you have any questions regarding writing in their course and a drafted WI course application (if applicable).

Contact QA Team: For any questions regarding Online Quality Assurance, please contact: gateam@gmu.edu



Subscribe to Spring 2022 Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter: Does Your Online Teaching Show Quality?

In the Spring 2022 Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter series, we will focus on tips for quality online teaching and facilitation using the Stearns Center Quality Assurance Checklist & Guidelines for Online Courses. Our Checklist will introduce you to the indicators, and help guide your online teaching to foster student engagement and active learning. We'll share practical tips and examples to enhance your students' learning experience. Throughout the semester, our newsletter will highlight specific quality indicators for online teaching. You'll explore how to incorporate quality indicators for the teaching & facilitation areas from the Stearns Center Quality Checklist. You will receive an Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter issue about every two weeks during the Spring 2022 semester. The Newsletter will be available to you as a downloadable PDF, so that you may save and refer to these teaching strategies just when you need them. [Subscribe today](#).

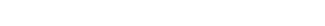
Questions? Contact the Stearns Center at stearns@gmu.edu.

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.

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