

FDC HAPPENINGS

November 14, 2022



CONNECT 2023

CONNECT Conference: February 9 and 10, 2023

Proposals due Tuesday, January 17, 4:00 pm

Keynote: Thursday, February 9, 5:00 pm, 300 Halle

Panels and Sessions: February 10, Halle Library

Our CONNECT Conference will be back in February of 2023! The CONNECT Conference serves as an opportunity for educators to come together to learn about, discuss, and reflect on effective and innovative teaching practices. Join us on Thursday, February 9, for a keynote address by Dr. Alison Cook-Sather, where she will introduce the background and importance of pedagogical partnerships, including how this work has begun at Eastern and how it can expand on our campus. The next day will feature sessions from EMU faculty, lecturers, and staff on a wide range of teaching and learning topics.

We invite program proposals for presentations or workshops on effective teaching practices, supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom, supporting student wellness, strengthening student-faculty partnerships, and more! Submit a program proposal [here](#). Click [here](#) to learn more about the CONNECT Conference.

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CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS:

Democracy Fellows

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Starting in the Winter 2023, this year's Morris Co-Chairs, Brigid Beaubien and Amanda Maher, will be leading a group of Democracy Fellows focused on answering the question, "How can Eastern Michigan University better prepare our students to be citizens?" through conversations together and with national experts.

From the Morris
Co-Chairs

This group of fellows is open to all faculty and lecturers, across all disciplines, and participants will receive a \$300 stipend for their involvement with the group. Participants will build their pedagogical capacities and support our collective vision around civics and democracy.

The Democracy Fellows will attend two monthly workshops on Fridays from 9:30 to 11:30. These meetings will be a collaborative exchange of ideas centered around readings, discussions, and national experts in the field, to assist participants in integrating civics ideas into their courses. If you are interested in applying, click [here](#) to go to the registration form. Applications are due December 9, 2022, and space is limited. Dates for the meetings are: January 13th, January 27th, February 10th, February 24th, March 10th, March 24th, April 7th, and April 21st. A \$300 stipend will be provided upon completion.

During the Winter semester, the group will also be hosting a series of speakers on campus. The dates and topics are in the process of being finalized and will be announced soon. All speakers will be leading, experts in the fields of engaging students as democratic citizens and supporting faculty as they develop techniques to center their classroom around engaging students in democracy. The first of these speakers will be Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, the Newhouse Director of CIRCLE. Kei's background is in Community Psychology and Social-Emotional Learning. Her talk will explore how faculty can set up their own classrooms around issues of democracy and citizenship and will take place in mid-January.

It is the shared hope of the co-chairs and the FDC that this initiative will transform our classrooms and our institution to become more civically informed and engaged and that this change will be the rebirth that we need to sustain democracy.

Interested in attending these lectures or being part of the group of democracy fellows? Please contact this year's Morris Co-Chairs, Brigid Beaubien and Amanda Maher, to learn more.



UPCOMING EVENTS

READING IN
PRINT?
scan the QR code to
access the links in
this issue



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Call for Program Proposals

*Applications due
November 21 at
12:00pm*

The FDC is accepting program proposals to fund for the Winter 2023 semester. Programs can include significant initiatives like prominent speakers, learning communities, workshops, etc. Proposals can be awarded up to \$5000, which can be used for an honorarium for a facilitator, speaker, or participants, supplies, travel expenses, etc. You are strongly invited to contact us at faculty_development@emich.edu with questions or ideas. Click [here](#) to learn more.

The FDC, Faculty Senate, and the Division of IT are accepting proposals for the eFellows program. The eFellows program supports faculty and full-time lecturers in obtaining the resources needed to successfully pilot innovative technology-based projects that enhance student-focused instruction in courses and curriculum. The overall outcome of this program is to improve and enhance student learning and the scholarship of teaching through the integration of appropriate technology. Learn more [here](#).

eFellows Grant Proposals

*Applications due
November 21 at
5:00pm*

SoTL Learning Community

*Meetings monthly
starting January 2023
and going through
April 2024*

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) movement aims to enhance the value of teaching in higher education by focusing on the role of rigorous, scholarly inquiry in developing best practices. Faculty will spend the Winter 2023 term engaged in seminar-style discussions of the SoTL literature and about how their own work may fit into this area. Projects will be implemented in Fall 2023 and participants should evaluate and write up their results in Winter 2024. Participants will receive a \$600 honorarium upon meeting identified targets, with \$200 being distributed at the end of each semester. For more information click [here](#).

Are you a member of the Fulbright family? Did you receive a Fulbright either at the student or faculty level? Let's identify *all* of EMU's Fulbrighters and then come together to share our stories and discuss how we can best support and promote Fulbright among our faculty colleagues, and students.

Call for Fulbright Alumni

*If you are a Fulbright Alumni,
contact [Carla Damiano](#) to work on
promoting Fulbright on campus.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

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Racial Microaggressions Workshop

Second session rescheduled for Friday, November 18, 2:00 pm
109 Halle or [Zoom](#)

Research Writer's Collaborative

Every Thursday, 1:30pm
via [Zoom](#)

Come join us to "Shut Up and Write" in a supportive group.

Hy-Flex Classrooms

November 16 3:30pm-4:45pm
217 Pray Harrold or via [Zoom](#)

Please join this session with Ashley Johnson Bavery, Ron Flowers, and Alankrita Pandey. They will offer guidance on how to maximize the possibilities available in this exciting setup. Learn more [here](#).

Secondary Teacher Preparation Program

November 18 & December 9
109 Halle
(See [website](#) for times)

Join us for our next session on November 18 when we do Core Teaching Practices Planning. Faculty and lecturers will receive an honorarium for participation in each session.

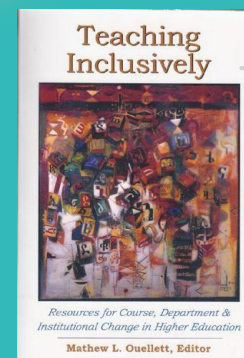
Planning Your Scholarly Agenda for the Winter Semester

December 8, 3:30pm-4:45pm
109 Halle or [Zoom](#)

Join Sarah Walsh to find effective ways to set and achieve our writing goals, even with the pressures we all face. Click [here](#) to learn more.

SPOTLIGHTS

This week's book spotlight is *Teaching Inclusively: Resources for Course, Department & Institutional Change in Higher Education*. This book is part of the News Forum Faculty Development Series and brings together a collection of best practices for creating inclusive change on college campuses through course design, instruction, and initiatives that can be used on both department and campus levels. This book pieces together works of many contributors all focused on more inclusive teaching. Click [here](#) to read the full spotlight or to see other books in our library.



This week we are spotlighting Dr. Christopher Robbins. In his teaching spotlight,

Dr. Robbins reflected on the experiences he has had as a student, how those experiences have shaped him into the educator he is, and how he uses that to connect with the students here at EMU. To read the full spotlight, click [here](#).

Dr. Christopher Robbins
Professor
Teacher Education

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“If a syllabus is written for a student audience, shouldn’t we first ask ourselves what students look for in these very documents?”

I asked myself this question when collecting resources on building effective course syllabi for the Faculty Development Center’s resources page. While on this search, I found a plethora of articles which spoke to the technical, logistical, and legal aspects of building a syllabus - all of which were both authored by and for faculty members and administrators. I wanted to find sources about making a syllabus approachable and comprehensible for student audiences, preferably one that was driven by a student voice - but I was left empty handed. Wanting to know more, I hosted a focus group at the FDC with the goal of asking Eastern Michigan University undergraduate students what they looked for in a course syllabus. When discussing ways to make a syllabus student-friendly, this focus group found that students most often spoke on the topics of welcoming language, organized formatting, and consistency.

Students made it clear that they “get a read” of their professors from their syllabi alone. For example, students spoke about how they often looked to the language used by a professor around topics such as extenuating circumstances, accommodations, and pronouns to gauge how approachable they are. Further, this language proved to act as either a bridge or a barrier for students in regards to communicating with their professors.

The focus group also emphasized the importance of using accessible language in a syllabus - more specifically, making sure that students can fully understand the syllabus and therefore can fully understand what is expected

of them in the course. Jargon can be frustrating for students and the focus group made it clear that it makes them feel unwelcome in the classroom. To counteract this problem, students suggested keeping the language simple and, if technical language and/or jargon is used in a syllabus (particularly if it is relevant to course objectives), to define it in the same document.

Another element that students identified as raising their comfort level was a professor including an introduction of themselves in a course syllabus. Moreover, students explained that a faculty member can break down social barriers and “make themselves seem more human” in a syllabus by including a summary of who they are, their research interests, their professional experiences, and silly fun facts about themselves. The group reported that intro-

By Hannah Bollin



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hannah Bollin is a Ph.D. student in the Educational Studies program here at EMU, a Graduate Assistant at the FDC, and a member of leadership in the Project BIG Mentoring Program. Her research interests include intersectional mentorship and queer theory in the curriculum. Being a first generation high school graduate from rural Appalachia, Hannah's research is very personal to her and her passion for education stems from the many great educators who supported her along the way.

ductions such as these make students feel more secure and more inclined to build connections with that professor. As one student pointed out, it is often expected for students to introduce themselves to the class - but it isn't nearly as commonplace for faculty to introduce themselves beyond being the instructor of the course itself.

The focus group consisted of some students who reported reading and then referring to the syllabus often throughout the semester, some who only skimmed the document for due dates, and everything in between. Despite these different levels of engagement with a course's syllabus, the focus group consistently emphasized the importance of format and organization in the document. More specifically, the group pointed out the importance of using emphasized headers, highlighting important information (while being mindful of color blindness) and indexes to make the document easier to navigate. Similarly, there was a resounding agreement that the legal and university-mandated information should be included at the *back* of a syllabus to make course-related information easier to find - one student even suggested the possibility of making clearly titled sections in the document divided up by "course content" and "university content." In all, organization and accessibility in a syllabus appear to make students feel both supported in the classroom and confident in their own ability to succeed in the course.

SUBMIT A BLOG POST

We welcome blog posts from faculty, lecturers, staff, and students on teaching and learning topics. Email us at faculty_development@emich.edu with your blog post idea for the opportunity to be featured in future newsletters!

Students also pointed out the need for consistency in these documents on various levels. The group sought consistency when it came to a syllabus setting clear expectations, with one student using the example of "if a professor wants work turned in by hand, it needs to be the syllabus." Consistency is also important to students in regards to keeping the syllabus up-to-date.

Understanding that plans and deadlines shift over time, students suggested that the document should unfailingly reflect those changes to avoid any confusions or misunderstandings. Moreover, students want a consistent and open line of communication with their professors in regards to the syllabus and course content. This means going further than just talking about the syllabus on the first day of class, but also welcoming questions and announcing updates to this document throughout the rest of the semester as well.

The academy has historically viewed faculty and administrators as the experts on all things syllabi and, perhaps not coincidentally, these documents are often read as dull and unwelcoming to their student audience. When asked how to make a syllabus more student-friendly, the student panel expressed a desire for welcoming language, clear formatting, and consistency. Further, students reported that these qualities in a syllabus benefit them in a plethora of ways, such as breaking down social barriers, forming connections with their professors, making them feel supported in the classroom, and giving them confidence in their own ability to move forward in the course. Understanding that these changes to one's syllabus may require some change in routine for some, as they are not necessarily the "norm," be assured that students will certainly benefit from them.