

The UAGC Chronicle

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The image shows a magazine cover for 'The Science and Soul of a Learning Organization'. At the top left is the University of Arizona Global Campus logo, which includes a stylized 'A' and the text 'THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA GLOBAL CAMPUS Teaching & Learning Conference'. The main title 'The Science and Soul of a Learning Organization' is prominently displayed in red and blue. Below the title are four colorful origami birds: a yellow one, a green one, a blue one, and a purple one. To the right, the text 'Register Now' is written in large red letters, followed by 'FREE, 3-DAY VIRTUAL EVENT' and 'NOV. 4-6, 2025'. At the bottom right, it says 'Register Now!' and provides the URL 'uagc.edu/teaching-learning-conference'. The entire cover is set against a white background with a dark blue vertical bar on the right edge.

[Register Now and Build your Agenda!](https://uagc.edu/teaching-learning-conference)

How do organizations ignite a culture of continuous learning—one that empowers every member to grow, thrive, and actively shape the organization's future? Senge (2006) challenges us to think bigger, introducing five powerful disciplines that advance an organization's potential to create its future. Guided by this framework, the TLC learning community will discover how these dynamic principles come to life through real-world practices and perspectives of students, faculty, and staff at all levels and across every discipline. Together, we're not just learning—we're unfolding new ways of thinking, collaborating, and leading to shape a future in motion. Spots are limited, so don't miss your chance to join!

THE UAGC CHRONICLE: A FACULTY–FOCUSED PUBLICATION

The UAGC Chronicle supports the entire academic community's contribution to the UAGC mission of providing a community of caring and guidance for adult online learners. Therefore, our publication promotes content that addresses the theoretical underpinnings and practical execution of this mission: academic research on instructional best practices, curricular innovation, and student support strategies; examples and resources that foster a community of practice; news of the progress of institutional student success initiatives; professional development opportunities; and – most importantly – the stories and successes of the people who shape our university. Please check the Call for Submissions section for more information on submitting an article for consideration.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



This fall, the university achieved an important step forward when the [US Department of Education recognized UAGC as a public institution within the University of Arizona](#). The milestone introduces new opportunities, challenges, and expectations, setting the course for a brighter future.

That is why it has been especially inspiring to see how many exciting developments are happening within our institution and how many innovative thinkers make up our community.

This issue explores those contributions, highlighting some of the collaborative work UAGC faculty are leading. For example, UAGC Faculty Fellow for AI pedagogical strategy, Nathan Pritts, considers our opportunity to lead AI-related conversations with openness and curiosity; faculty member, Holly Ourso, explores how the use of avatars in math classrooms can support student understanding of challenging concepts; and Department Head, Susan Gould, strategizes how faculty can incorporate accessibility into online learning by providing tools and new outlooks. As you can see, our community is finding meaningful ways to lead during this time of change and pushing new ways to work towards the goal of student success.

As you read through these articles, I encourage you to reflect on your own work and passions. How can you be innovative in your role? What new subjects or ideas are you excited to explore this year? Have you started researching a new topic or pursuing a passion project? One of the most energizing aspects of The UAGC Chronicle is the opportunity to share creative and forward-thinking ideas in your field. Learning more about your work is especially important as UAGC continues to define its contributions within the University of Arizona system, with a workforce-focused land-grant mission. [Learn more about submitting an article to the UAGC Chronicle](#).

Let us continue to move forward together and never stop learning. As we embrace these changes, let us also remember that with change comes progress. And that is exactly what UAGC is aiming to achieve.

Sincerely,

Jackie Bullis

Lead Faculty Support and Classroom Consultant, The UAGC Chronicle Editor

UNIVERSITY, PROGRAM, CURRICULUM, AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

MEET THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-2026 UAGC FACULTY FELLOWS

As a learning organization, UAGC continuously asks how we might grow, evolve, innovate, and solve problems toward creating opportunities for our students' success. In that spirit, the inaugural UAGC Faculty Fellows Program asks:

How might we augment a year of learning by deliberately focusing and connecting faculty and staff on shared aims?

The Faculty Fellows program is designed to support full-time faculty who are interested in developing administrative leadership skills while contributing to strategic institutional initiatives aligned with their expertise and professional interests. To that end, this one-year appointment embeds Faculty Fellows in relevant Academic Affairs staff units to lead the design and implementation of a cross-departmental project or program. In July, a team of Academic Affairs support unit leaders, the deans of the College of Integrative Learning and College of Professional Advancement, and our Vice Provost reviewed a strong set of proposals and selected seven that both promised institution-wide impact and signaled concrete plans for completion.

UAGC is excited to announce the AY 25-26 Faculty Fellows:



Dr. Nikola Prendergast Lucas, Assistant Professor in the Department of Health and Human Services Professions, is the Faculty Fellow for Institutional Assessment Strategy. Nikola proposes a method of mapping instructional practices to student learning outcomes, an approach to structuring and leveraging student learning outcomes assessment data that is novel to UAGC. Nikola's project suggests a data analysis workflow that could have implications for how the institution defines standard instructional expectations, how faculty define instructional strategies that optimize the curriculum they've developed, and beyond.



Dr. James Meetze, Professor in the Department of Communication and Humanities Studies and Program Chair of the UAGC Honors Program, is the Faculty Fellow for Interdisciplinary Curricular Innovation. James proposes a transdisciplinary modular course experience in which students choose learning activities according to their fields, passions, or personal-professional experiences. The transdisciplinary approach combines UAGC students' lived experiences with their academic learning toward solutions to issues in their communities. And, as tested in the Honors Program, the modular approach could serve as a model for creating super-customized stackability through learning activities, versus credits alone.



James Bond, Instructor in the Department of Learning and Information Studies, proposes an interactive curriculum that infuses instructional practice with evidence-based conflict management strategies. Informed by literature review, stakeholder interviews, and James' years of experience in conflict resolution, counseling, and student affairs, this curriculum has implications for both faculty and staff development strategies and for faculty-advising relationships, which is a critical academic affairs-student success and engagement shared aim.



Dr. Nate Pritts, Professor and Program Chair for First-Year Writing in the College of Integrative Learning, is the Faculty Fellow for AI Strategy and Pedagogy. Dr. Pritts will help guide our exploration of meaningful, ethical, and innovative uses of AI in teaching and learning. Please see Nate's article in this edition, which includes information on how you can get involved.



Bill Davis, Assistant Professor and Program Chair in the College of Professional Advancement, is the Faculty Fellow for User Experience (UX) Design. Bill will work with a UX researcher we are partnering with and UAGC stakeholders to improve student and faculty experience within key platforms (Canvas, Library, Writing Center).



Dr. Teresa Handy, Assistant Professor and Program Chair in the College of Integrative Learning, is the Faculty Fellow for Open Educational Resources (OER). Teresa will partner with the faculty, librarians, as well as the Learning Support, Learning Resources, and Products teams to advocate for adopting, adapting, and creating high-quality OER. She will also collaborate with other Faculty Fellows. Teresa will further the work started with the university-wide UAGC Open Educational Resources Day and UAGC OER Create Day held last spring. Furthermore, this initiative will benefit students because the use of OER supports affordable, inclusive learning by reducing student barriers to course materials created or adopted by our esteemed faculty.



Dr. Ted Ellis, Assistant Professor and Program Chair, College of Professional Advancement, is the Faculty Fellow for Accessibility Design. In this role, Ted supports accessibility as a guiding principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in course delivery. Ted is proposing two initiatives in collaboration with members of the UAGC curriculum and assessment teams, and with leadership and members of UA Online, which include construction of an accessibility rubric and tool with a corresponding pilot study, and a webinar on standards and practices. These initiatives will support faculty and advance proactive, collective innovation on the provision of flexible and accessible online higher educational experiences for all learners.

The AY 25-26 Faculty Fellows will be communicating with the UAGC community throughout the year on the status of their work and about how you can be involved. You can stay engaged by visiting the Faculty Fellows section of each quarterly UAGC Chronicle edition and by attending monthly CASA roundtable meetings.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT CONSULTATION VISION

Haley Sampson, Associate Director of Faculty Support, Faculty Affairs



Faculty Affairs serves as a trusted collaborator with faculty, shaping an academic culture where faculty voice drives innovation, data-informed decision-making, and continuous improvement. At UAGC, instructional consultation is a valuable form of instructional support, specifically designed with collaboration in mind, for educator practitioners—faculty who both teach and actively apply their expertise in real-world practice. Faculty Affairs' collaborative consultation model not only honors the expertise and experiences of educator practitioners but also helps them integrate those experiences into their teaching practices in ways that support student success. Instructional consultation provides a space for formative development, encouraging reflection on current teaching practices and modeling discourse that leads to practical, student-centered change. It is not evaluative, but rather a confidential and constructive environment co-created by the faculty member and consultant to support instructional growth.

Through instructional support consultation, led by collaborative inquiry and reflection, Faculty Affairs provides a structure that supports actively listening to faculty needs and ensuring they feel valued. Instructional support consultation empowers faculty to critically reflect on and evolve their teaching perspectives and practices, thereby enhancing student learning and aligning with institutional goals.

Reflection and Collaborative Inquiry

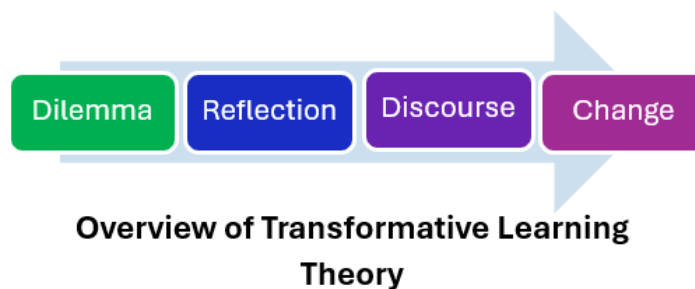
While there are several consultation models, an intentionally designed collaborative model in which the consultant facilitates change while recognizing the instructor's role as a content expert supports a synergistic partnership that creates a unique instructional support experience. Integral to this collaborative model is honoring the content expertise of UAGC educator practitioners, which creates

learning experiences rooted in real-world practice and tailored to students' unique needs, while offering developmental support grounded in diverse teaching practices. The result of the partnership is better than what each individual may produce alone.

Theoretical Framework

Transformative learning theory (TLT) was developed by Mezirow, an adult education theorist whose work focused on explaining how adult learners can change their perspectives through reflection when faced with what he identified as a dilemma. When used as a framework for evolving teaching practices, TLT sparks critical reflection

on assumptions and experiences, leading to a fundamental shift in perspective. It posits that learners, in this case, educator practitioners, who receive new information, also reevaluate their past ideas and understanding, emphasizing the importance of critical discourse with trusted others as essential to transformation. Grounded in the principles of TLT, instructional support consultation fosters collaboration between peers and faculty by acknowledging that their field expertise is informed by real-world experiences that shape their teaching practices. When instructional consultation is non-evaluative, space is created for open-ended inquiry, perspective-sharing, and meaning-making with a peer or "thought partner."



What Does the Literature Tell Us?

Drawing on his extensive experience as a college math instructor and director of academic support, Huston's (2020) study explored faculty experiences related to teaching and learning professional development. The study yielded key results that, when shaping development, approaches grounded in TLT include influencing the following faculty beliefs, which were identified as dilemmas.

- Misaligned Expectations: Faculty entered the profession with assumptions that were challenged by real classroom experiences, prompting self-reflection.
- Heuristic Nature of Learning to Teach: Faculty essentially learned to teach through experience rather than formal training.
- Developing Authenticity and Mastery: Over time, faculty developed personal teaching philosophies grounded in authenticity.
- Evolving Perspectives: Faculty shifted from teacher-centered to more student-centered beliefs as they confronted challenges and reflected on their practices.

Faculty moved away from traditional lecture-driven models toward student-centric approaches, incorporating flexibility, active learning, and differentiated instruction.

Furthermore, Huston (2020) notes that these findings reveal a potentially productive structure for supporting conversations about instructional effectiveness. Using TLT to guide consultation can create an experience that fosters awareness of educator practitioners' beliefs related to teaching and learning and can prompt critical assessment and reconstruction of their roles—from content deliverers to facilitators of learning communities. In alignment with Mezirow's theory, instructional consultation helps frame these challenges as invitations to reexamine beliefs and practices in a supportive context. As beliefs evolved, faculty began trying new instructional strategies—such as increasing interaction, employing collaborative tools, and emphasizing student-centered exercises. This behavioral change is a hallmark of TLT. Dhilia (2016), whose research focuses on online pedagogy, faculty development, and TLT, noted that institutional support is often inadequate, leaving online instructors feeling abandoned and unsupported, and emphasizes the role of peer discourse and mentorship in supporting the evolution of teaching practices. Dhilia (2016) notes that faculty who engaged in professional dialogues or mentoring were more likely to develop new instructional approaches. Overall, Dhilia's (2016) research demonstrates how online teaching environments, framed by TLT, profoundly influence faculty instructional beliefs and practices, promoting reflective, student-centered, and adaptive teaching approaches.

Creating Productive Partnerships

When engaging in instructional consultation, faculty can expect a supportive and partnership-based experience focused on the evolution of their teaching practices. Each consultation invites faculty to clarify their focus—exploring questions such as, "What aspect of my teaching am I most curious about?" or "What feedback has most influenced my thinking?" Guided by mutual respect and recognition of one another's roles as experts, and through shared inquiry, a space is fostered where faculty and the partner co-construct actionable plans, monitor progress, and celebrate meaningful instructional improvements.

Faculty can expect consultants to utilize relationship-building techniques and communication approaches to listen, build trust, encourage, and emphasize their consultative role as one intended to help faculty achieve their identified goals. From there, the consultant's role is to explain research-based teaching practices and support faculty in selecting a practice that will effectively achieve the identified goal. Finally, the consultant serves as a support to the faculty while the teaching practices are employed. Instructional consultation is designed to cultivate confidence, deepen alignment with pedagogical values, and strengthen student-centered teaching practice.

Shared Governance Collaboration

Faculty Affairs has shared the instructional consultation framework with the Faculty Council and is actively collaborating to launch this evolution of instructional support programming. Please look forward to future communications and the opportunity to participate in instructional consultation.

Questions or ideas? Please contact FacultyAffairs@uagc.edu.

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CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT – TIPS AND RESOURCES

ACCESSIBILITY IN ONLINE LEARNING – FACULTY TOOLS & STRATEGIES FOR COMMON CHALLENGES

Susan E. Gould, Department Head, Department of Financial Operations Professions



According to the CDC (2025), over 70 million US adults (over 1 in 4) have a disability. In the online learning environment, numerous challenges can impact a student's ability to participate, including visual or hearing difficulties, cognitive differences, and physical conditions. For these students, the online environment presents unique challenges and obstacles that can be overcome using assistive technology and a well-constructed online classroom. It is important for faculty to be aware of common accessibility challenges in online learning and ensure their online classroom is fully accessible so all students can fully participate.

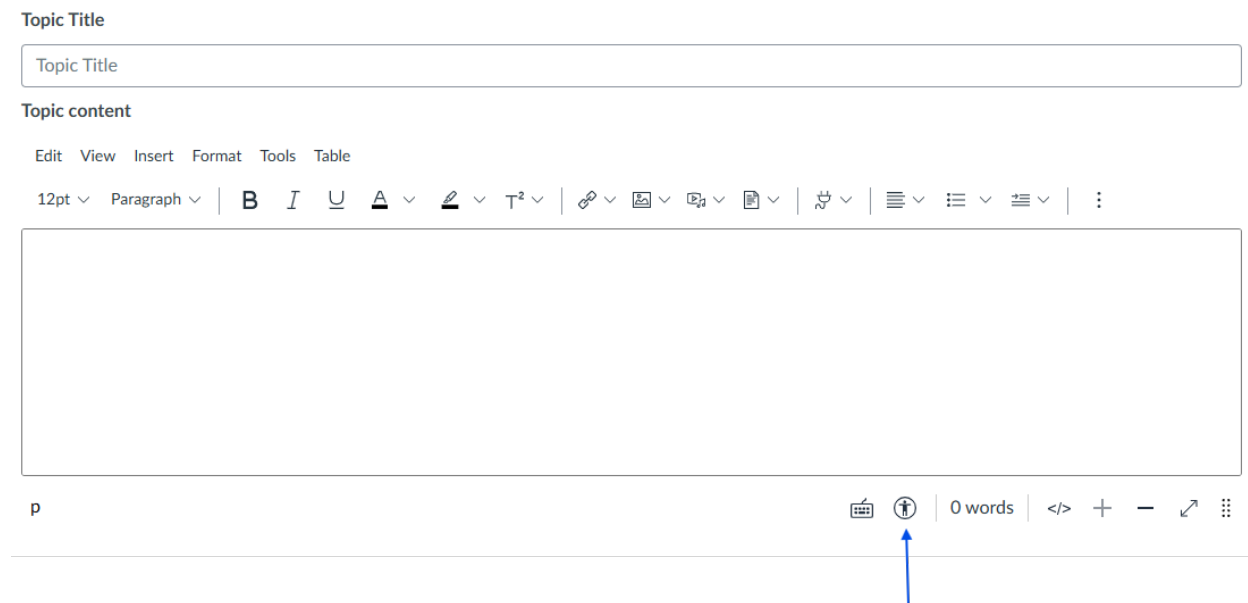
Many strategies and tools exist to help faculty ensure their content is fully accessible. This article will explain the built-in tools faculty can use to ensure accessibility and will highlight common online accessibility problems with strategies to solve those problems.

Canvas Accessibility Checker

The most valuable tool to enhance online accessibility is the built-in Canvas Accessibility Checker. In Announcements or Discussion Posts, in the rich content editor, the Accessibility Checker is an icon located beneath the text box, resembling a person in a circle. Figure 1 below identifies the Accessibility Checker icon in Canvas, which is located next to the word count. Once you have composed your announcement or discussion reply, but before you post it, you can click on the Accessibility Checker icon, and Canvas will check your work for accessibility issues. For each issue identified, Canvas will highlight the issue and provide guidance on how to resolve it. Once all issues are fixed, you can post the content. Instructure provides a clear explanation of this feature on its community site, under "[How do I use the Accessibility Checker in the Rich Content Editor?](#)"

Figure 1

Canvas Accessibility Checker



Microsoft Accessibility assistant

Word, Excel, and PowerPoint have built-in accessibility checkers. In all three applications, you can use the Check Accessibility feature from the Review tab. The accessibility assistant identifies accessibility issues and provides suggestions to fix the issues. Microsoft provides guidance on how to check accessibility in its application support under [Check accessibility while you work in Office apps](#).

URLs

One common problem in online environments is the widespread use of URLs to provide resources. However, screen readers have a specific method of identifying online content. For a URL, the screen reader will state the URL letter by letter, which is both ineffective and inefficient - not to mention, frustratingly boring. Instead, faculty should provide wording that describes the resource and includes a

hyperlink to the resource. The screen reader announces that a link is available and reads the descriptive words to the student, which is much more effective.

Images

Images are another popular feature in online classrooms as they can impart important information. Images that convey information should have alternative text (alt text) so students using assistive technology do not miss important information. The alt text should convey the image information in a short sentence or phrase. Images can also be designated "decorative only" to remove the necessity of alt text.

Tables

Many faculty create and use tables to provide information in the online environment. Once again, screen readers have specific ways of reading tables, so tables require a specific format to properly represent the information to students using assistive technology. Tables should include headers and avoid using merged cells.

Color

Whether it is in an announcement, a discussion post, or grading feedback, faculty often use color to draw attention to specific words or points. However, for accessibility purposes, color alone should not be used. Screen readers do not announce text color as a point of emphasis. Color can be used in conjunction with other font formats, such as bold, italic, or underlined content.

In addition, color contrast is important so that text is distinguishable to everyone, including those with color blindness or low vision. There are technical guidelines for acceptable color contrast ratios, or you can simply use high-contrast colors. Microsoft Office applications allow you to choose from high contrast colors. Additionally, accessibility checkers in Canvas and Microsoft Office applications will identify low contrast colors and provide a recommended alternative.

Table 1

Accessible Formats of Common Online Features

Feature	Accessible Format	Reason
URLs	Use descriptive words with a hyperlink. Example: Best Practices for an Accessible Online Classroom	Screen readers read the descriptive words and announce that a hyperlink is present, rather than reading the URL letter by letter.

Images	Include alternative text to convey important information in the image.	Students may miss out on important information if there is no alternative text. Screen readers will read the name of the image file unless alternative text is provided.
Tables	Tables should include accurate headers and avoid using merged cells.	Assistive technology may not accurately convey the table information without these components.
Color	Use high-contrast colors and only use color in conjunction with another font feature, such as bold, italic, or underline, for emphasis. Example: Use color in combination with other font features, such as bold , <i>italic</i> , or <u>underline</u> .	Low-contrast colors can be difficult to read for individuals with color blindness or vision impairment. Color alone, with no other feature, is not identified by screen readers for emphasis.

Faculty have numerous responsibilities and limited time. Fortunately, the Canvas Accessibility Checker and Microsoft Accessibility Assistant provide effective tools to quickly and accurately ensure online content is accessible. Faculty can also focus on addressing these four common accessibility problems in online environments, thereby greatly enhancing their online classroom experience for the benefit of all students. When over 1 in 4 adults have disabilities, many UAGC students are likely to be in this population (CDC, 2025). With awareness and efficient use of technology tools, UAGC faculty can provide a learning experience that is accessible to all.

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BRINGING REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES AND HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP SKILLS INTO THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP ROLES

Jason Wheeler, Associate Faculty, Department of Health and Human Services Professions



Healthcare systems today require not only well-trained clinicians but also effective leaders capable of managing complexity, inspiring multidisciplinary teams, and driving quality improvement (Johnson et al, 2023; Adamu et al., 2023). Real-world examples and explicit leadership training in undergraduate and graduate healthcare curricula can bridge the gap between academic instruction and practice, equipping students for future management roles in healthcare.

My goal is to bring real-world scenarios and situations into the classroom, which prepare students for their desired career path while creating an engaging learning environment. My former students have a desire to not only expand their educational portfolio but enter a career of leadership, whether it be as a manager, director, or even a C-suite executive. The focus on integrating realistic examples into the Master of Health Administration (MHA) curriculum, paired with engagement and learner evaluation, provides a solid framework along with the tools needed to become effective, forward-thinking leaders.

Rationale for Integrating Real-World Leadership in MHA Education

MHA programs prepare graduates for leadership in hospital systems, consulting firms, policy agencies, and healthcare technology organizations. Stakeholder analyses during program design highlight the need for competencies such as emotional intelligence, strategic planning, finance, and change leadership (Khalil & Liu, 2021). An educational innovation in Australia indicated that integrating case-based, experiential, and problem-based scenarios significantly enhanced graduates' readiness for leadership roles (Khalil & Liu, 2021). Direct engagement with real healthcare management scenarios promotes confidence, insight into organizational dynamics, and clarity around leadership identity. Having students apply scenarios of leadership can make their work more realistic and encourage them to think outside the box, a skill many organizations are looking for.

Real-World Examples as Pedagogical Anchors

Using real-life healthcare cases and partnerships with active leaders enriches the learning experience. For example, many universities employ faculty with a variety of backgrounds in academics, previous leadership, and healthcare experience, along with those who are currently employed in the industry, as a way of placing student learning into a symbiotic relationship between classroom and realistic scenarios

they may encounter. Similarly, Duke University's LEAD curriculum blends team-based learning, workshops, and experiential electives with real healthcare contexts (Duke University School of Medicine, n.d.). Such examples demonstrate to students the complexity of leadership roles in environments shaped by financial, policy, and operational forces. As educators, we can bring our experiences directly to students in discussion boards, along with feedback on written work, or even hold Q&A sessions in addition to other coursework.

Teaching Strategies: Simulations, Projects, Feedback, Reflection

Core leadership skills, along with emotional intelligence, team dynamics, negotiation, systems thinking, ethical decision-making, and crisis management, have all been noted as aspects to include within the MHA curriculum. Programs can adopt case-based learning, interprofessional teamwork, simulation, and reflective practice to reinforce these skills (Khalil & Liu, 2021; University of Minnesota, 2023). Interactive methodologies, including simulation, roleplay, group projects, and reflection or mentoring, help students practice leadership in a low-stakes environment.

In health sciences education, role-playing has been shown to significantly improve students' communication and teamwork skills (Abdul-Rahim et al., 2025). Simulation of hiring decisions, organizational mergers, and stakeholder conflict resolution fosters authentic leadership rehearsal (Seton Hall University, 2024). Many of these concepts are present in our own MHA curriculum at UAGC, as we encourage students to take on these leadership roles and decision-making activities.

An example is the "CEO for a Day" and business plan assignment in the capstone course. We also ask that students create an ePortfolio to highlight their skill set and reflect on the work they have completed throughout the course. I generally advise that students think of this as their "brag" board and utilize this as something they would want to show their organization to gain a promotion or seek out a new role.

I have found that surveying local health systems leaders is a valuable way to enhance the understanding of classroom concepts. Faculty members, course content creators, and even students themselves can perform this task. Since many of our students are already working professionals, they likely have access to learning within their own organization. An example may be asking health system human resources managers and leaders what skill set is most important in a hire or for career advancement, or inquiring about shadowing opportunities. Often, these experiences can enhance a student's learning and allow them to bring relevant examples back into the discussion posts each week to share with their peers. As a healthcare leader, I have been approached by local colleges that are restructuring their curriculum to align with the knowledge and expectations of employers, ensuring their students have a solid understanding of how to apply classroom didactics to real-world situations. I found that this was crucial to prepare students for the expectations of healthcare institutions.

Reflection and mentoring are also important to consider. When students leave your course, it is imperative to review your course surveys to see what areas students enjoyed and or did not enjoy and ways in which you may need to improve instruction or clarity. At UAGC, we have a journal activity as an assignment at the end of the capstone course. This is a time for students to reflect on their coursework

and share what they enjoyed and what they did not throughout the course. I have found this very useful, and it has led to ways in which to change my approach to certain topics. During and after students leave your course, they may reach out with questions, a need for guidance/advice, or to ask for letters of reference. Former students have asked for advice on which jobs to apply for and which organizations to join to enhance their resume and understanding of healthcare leadership. I find this opportunity very rewarding as we work to continue a student's success.

Evaluating Outcomes

Program outcomes should be evaluated via mixed methods: pre/post self-ratings of leadership confidence, exposure to organizations such as the American College of Health Care Executives (ACHE), faculty and executive mentor assessments, and long-term tracking of graduates' roles in administration or other leader-based positions. Research from graduate education programs has shown that structured leadership modules yield measurable gains across domains of communication, collaboration, and systems thinking (Khalil & Liu, 2021). Other assessment tools, such as mock board and scenario-based simulation, have been known to enhance engagement and understanding of course content. These may include sharing challenges that leaders face in their roles and discussing best practices to resolve them. This allows you to elicit feedback loops and further promote accountability and skill acquisition (Griswold & Koss, 2022).

Challenges and Implementation Considerations

Significant challenges include aligning experiential activities with classroom schedules, securing organizational partnerships, training faculty for facilitative simulations, and balancing curriculum volume, while ensuring that faculty are comfortable sharing their experiences —either positive or negative. Furthermore, because MHA cohorts may vary in clinical and professional background, it is important to be cognizant by noting the background and experiences students share and build on those strengths. (Khalil & Liu, 2021). This is often available in the first week's introductions as students share not only their academic background, but their current job titles and responsibilities. Students are also often asked which concepts they are most eager to learn about throughout the course, giving instructors the ability to foster specific areas that students may have interest in via discussion posts or follow-up dialogue. I feel that UACG does a great job of acquiring a diverse group of students, which enhances the experience for all, students and faculty alike. Overcoming these challenges requires institutional investment, alumni engagement, flexible course design, and a cadre of diverse faculty and instructors.

Conclusion

For MHA students poised to become future healthcare leaders, embedding real-world examples and intentional leadership skill development within academic programming is transformative. Through integration of case-based projects, executive residency experiences, simulations, interprofessional teamwork, and reflective practice, MHA curricula can cultivate graduates who are not only analytically adept but also capable of leading change. By embracing experiential pedagogies, close collaboration with healthcare organizations, and instructors who share real-world examples and experiences,

institutions can prepare MHA students to step confidently into management and leadership roles in the evolving healthcare landscape.

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BUILDING ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

AI IN HIGHER ED: A MOMENT OF CHANGE, AND A CHANCE TO LEAD

Nathan Pritts, Program Chair, Division of Foundational Studies



You've probably noticed that AI is everywhere—on your newsfeed, in your classroom, maybe even in your inbox. In higher education, it's more than just a trend. It's a conversation we have to engage in, a shifting landscape we have to navigate. How do we prepare students for an AI-shaped future while ensuring their learning is meaningful, ethical, and human-centered? How do we support faculty and staff as they try new things, ask hard questions, and build new practices? What does an AI-ready institution look like—and how do we move from simply being ready to leading the conversation?

What makes this moment different isn't just the arrival of new tools. It's the way those tools are pressing on long-standing questions we all wrestle with in higher ed every day. About what counts as learning. About what support really looks like. About how we build trust in systems that are still taking shape. At UAGC, we are already having those conversations, in curriculum teams, in policy discussions, in faculty learning communities, and on Zoom calls. And, from my perspective, that's the work. Not just chasing the next big integration, but in making sense of what matters. Together.

There's a lot happening. A lot to track and consider. A lot to learn.

And here at UAGC, we're not just watching this transformation unfold; we're actively shaping it. As Faculty Fellow for AI Strategy, I've been invited to help guide our institution through this moment not by offering quick fixes or one-size-fits-all solutions, but by listening, connecting, and building alongside you. My role is rooted in real questions: How do we integrate these technologies in ways that are meaningful, ethical, and human-first? How do we support the innovators *and* the skeptics? How do we ensure students are empowered, not overwhelmed?

That work is already underway. Across our community, faculty and staff are experimenting with AI tools in their daily practice, reimagining workflows and assignments, and designing for creativity and care. We're building frameworks to support intentional use, piloting new approaches to curriculum design, and investing in scalable systems to help us learn as we go.

One example? We've [launched a suite of AI-assisted course development tools through the Course Design Hub](#). These resources are designed to support instructional designers and faculty at every stage of the course revision process—from writing outcomes and scaffolding weekly learning to building assignments and checking alignment. And we're actively road-testing this pipeline right now in partnership with several departments, helping unlock time, creativity, and deeper coherence in course design.

How Do We Keep Up? Together.

This moment isn't static. It's evolving quickly. But keeping up doesn't just mean staying informed. It means staying connected to each other, to evolving practices, and to the values that guide our decisions. It means noticing what's working, surfacing lessons learned, and sharing ideas early and often, so no one feels like they have to figure this out alone.

We don't need all the answers right away. But we do need places to ask better questions, reflect on our journeys, and build smarter, more sustainable approaches to AI adoption. That's where two new communication efforts come in.

Two Ways to Stay Connected

To help support this ongoing conversation, we're launching two new communication efforts—each designed to keep you informed, inspired, and in the loop.

First up: A new **AI Edge Newsletter**. Each issue will offer a snapshot of what's happening in the world of AI, both in higher ed in general and right here at UAGC. Expect short updates, curated news links, examples from your colleagues, and low-lift ideas you can try in your own work. The goal is to keep it relevant, human, and useful - something you'll actually want to read (and contribute to!).

The Newsletter will be one way to track our learning in real time. To surface what's emerging, what's messy, what's showing promise. We'll highlight different voices and different entry points because no one's starting from the same place, and no one should have to figure this out alone. [Sign up to receive *The AI Edge* newsletter.](#)

Second: We're kicking off a new **AI Corner** right here in *The Chronicle*. This recurring series will highlight how faculty and staff across UAGC are engaging with AI through experimentation, exploration, and critical reflection. Some stories might focus on tools or hacks. Others may ask tough questions or share lessons learned. All of them will help surface the practices, tensions, and opportunities shaping our institutional journey with AI.

Think of the AI Corner as a space to pause and reflect on the bigger picture, removed from the triage of day-to-day tasks and instructional labor. Here, we'll share not just what we're doing, but how we're thinking and what we're noticing along the way. It's where the human side of this work can breathe.

Have something you're trying? Curious about? Wrestling with? Let us know. These spaces are for you, and it all works best when it reflects the diversity of experience across our community.

Head over to [AI @ UAGC](#) for AI Events, *The AI Edge*, and AI Resources.

[Contribute to *The AI Edge* Newsletter.](#)

[Contribute to the AI Corner of *The Chronicle*.](#)

THE BENEFITS OF STANDARDS-BASED GRADING IN ONLINE HIGHER EDUCATION

April Larsen, Associate Faculty, Department of Learning & Information Studies



Traditional letter grades have been used for decades to communicate learning and achievement in education. However, letter grades often underrepresent student mastery. This grading method can overemphasize assignment deadlines or participation metrics that favor certain learning styles. Letter grades may also provide a narrow view of student learning, often relying on easily graded tasks that assess recall rather than deeper understanding or higher-order thinking. Critics have questioned whether the traditional letter grade system truly serves the purpose of measuring and communicating learning outcomes (Guskey, 2019; Knight & Cooper, 2019; Peters et al., 2017; Scarlett, 2018; Townsley & Buckmiller, 2020).

Standards-based grading (SBG) may offer a more precise and student-centered approach to overcome the limitations of letter grades. SBG is a system of assessing student learning that focuses on what students actually know and can do in relation to specific learning goals, rather than just giving points for assignments or averaging scores. With SBG, students receive feedback that clearly shows their progress toward specific learning goals, highlighting what they have mastered and what skills or concepts they still need to develop. This type of feedback is more descriptive and actionable than a single letter grade, helping students understand their strengths and focus on areas for improvement.

Many secondary education schools have transitioned to using SBG in recent years, and there may be value in implementing this system in higher education online environments as well. By adopting SBG, colleges and universities like UAGC may more accurately represent student achievement, foster engagement in online learning, and prepare graduates with verifiable competencies that are meaningful to employers and graduate programs. The following six points illustrate how standards-based grading can strengthen online learning and may offer valuable benefits for UAGC and other institutions like it:

1. Focusing on Mastery Rather than Compliance

SBG emphasizes whether students have achieved specific learning outcomes, rather than simply completing tasks or earning points (Dempsey & Huber, 2020). In online courses, this allows faculty to assess understanding through multiple methods, including projects, simulations, open-ended assignments, or iterative submissions, without penalizing students for logistical challenges like time zone differences or temporary connectivity issues. This creates a fairer representation of actual learning.

2. Providing Multiple Opportunities to Demonstrate Learning

Unlike letter grades, which often aggregate performance into a single score, SBG allows students to demonstrate mastery across multiple attempts. Online platforms facilitate this well through resubmissions, interactive quizzes, and discussion reflections. For example, a student struggling on an early assignment can receive feedback and revise their work until they meet the learning standard, ensuring the final assessment accurately reflects their competency.

3. Facilitating Clear, Outcome-Oriented Feedback

SBG aligns assessments with clearly defined learning targets, making the standards that students must achieve transparent. Online learners can track their progress against each standard through dashboards or learning management system (LMS) tools, providing immediate insight into areas that need improvement. This approach supports self-regulated learning and metacognitive growth, which are critical for success in asynchronous or hybrid courses.

4. Reducing Anxiety and Improving Engagement

In online higher education, students may feel isolated and pressured by high-stakes exams or participation requirements. SBG shifts attention from point accumulation to skill acquisition, reducing anxiety (Dempsey & Huber, 2020). Students can engage more deeply with course content, knowing that mastery, rather than punctuality or frequency of posts, is the primary goal (Boesdorfer & Daugherty, 2020).

5. Enhancing Reporting for Stakeholders

For instructors, administrators, and employers, SBG provides a more nuanced picture of student abilities than a single letter grade (Arsyad Arrafii, 2020). In both traditional and online learning environments, mastery reports can indicate which competencies students have achieved, partially achieved, or not yet met. In professional programs such as nursing, engineering, or business, this level of detail aligns well with accreditation standards and workforce expectations, offering actionable insight into skill development.

6. Leveraging Online Tools for Implementation

Online learning platforms make it feasible to implement SBG at scale. LMS features allow tracking of individual standards, automated reminders for incomplete competencies, and integration of peer or instructor feedback. This digital infrastructure supports transparency and continuous assessment, making SBG both practical and effective for higher education settings.

Conclusion

In online higher education, letter grades sometimes fail to fully capture student learning due to logistical barriers, rigid assessment formats, and overemphasis on compliance. As an associate faculty member, I often struggle when, per the course rubrics, I have to deduct a significant number of points when students submit work slightly late or miss a minor discussion requirement, even though their work clearly demonstrates mastery of the content. SBG addresses these and other shortcomings by prioritizing mastery, offering multiple opportunities for assessment, providing clear feedback, and reducing anxiety (Guskey, 2019; Knight & Cooper, 2019). While I don't believe SBG is a cure-all for grading challenges, I do see merit in many of its principles and believe the system is worth thoughtful evaluation for potential implementation.

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BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MATH AVATAR/MATH HERO TWO-PART ACTIVITY

Holly Ourso, Faculty, Department of Sciences & Mathematics Studies



When I heard Professor Michael Dorff's 2021 [MAA keynote address](#), in which a culturally diverse group of math heroes who have changed people's lives using mathematics was presented as the Frodos and Celies of mathematics, the experience sparked this thought: shining a spotlight on these impactful individuals and their accomplishments might lead students to realize that a diverse group has made their mark in the world with mathematics and using mathematics in service of science and then believe him or herself eligible to be counted among that group.

I know many students don't do well in math or even believe they can. But what if my students could look into the accomplishments of these unsung heroes, using math to change people's lives, and find one to relate to. Then each student could go through the class with a little avatar of a math hero, a smart angel hovering over a shoulder who whispers in their ear. There are people in the class who don't even want to throw their hat in the ring. Advisors tell me many students delay taking math, thinking it will be too tough. What would happen to success rates, I wondered, if every student could relate to a successful math hero and start with the belief that they could succeed. [The American activist Marian Wright Edelman](#) famously said, "You can't be what you can't see." She believed that children are less likely to be inspired for their future, if they don't have visible role models. "Inequitable access to quality mathematics-learning experiences has been a long-standing, immensely pressing, occasionally infamous, yet gradually growing concern in mathematics education research (Lubienski & Bowen)." [It's a problem.](#)

In the 1980s, Bob Moses started the [Algebra Project](#), meant to expand access to math education into traditionally underserved communities. In 2001, he said, "I believe that the absence of math literacy in urban and rural communities throughout this country is an issue—as urgent as the lack of registered Black voters in Mississippi was in 1961." All these years later, the STEM success gap still exists.

The *Math Avatar/Math Hero* two-part activity is an intervention predicted to increase student success for every enrolled student. This intervention spotlights individuals who used mathematics to change lives. It's simple to explain. On day one, each student selects a math hero and explains why they selected that person as part of their introduction. In the final week of class, each student submits a journal that describes how their math hero would approach a real-life problem they face.

Grit matters most for course material considered especially tough; for university mathematics courses, many students need to internally commit that they will find a way to complete the work and succeed, or it won't happen. And, adult learners won't always apply themselves fully when learning ideas they believe have no practical application. When students become familiar with the achievements of a group of diverse math heroes, they may upgrade their ideas about whether mathematics is useful in the real world. When a student selects a math hero, possibly changing their classroom avatar to the one they

selected (further identifying with the math hero), they may upgrade their prediction of their capacity to succeed in the class.

This powerful intervention has a broad appeal.

*When I presented on the Math Avatar/Math Hero Activity at the 2023 UAGC TLC conference on a panel with non-math professors, more than one *panelist* expressed interest in doing something similar using English heroes or the like with their students.

*When presented with the math avatar activity, professors predicted students in a math class that includes this activity would do better. The data shows the professors' hunches were correct.

Session Type	Session Start Dates	MAT 222 Enrollment	Pass	Fail	Drop
Control	7/23/24 to 1/07/2025	1349	92.9%	4.5%	2.5%
Intervention	1/28/2025 to 7/1/2025	1235	95.1%	2.8%	1.9%

Outcomes so far: Academic performance improved. In our study of over 2,500 students, students who enrolled in an online learning space that included the *Math Avatar/Math Hero* two-part activity were slightly less likely to drop. Of those who stuck with the class, pass rates improved by 2.2%, and students were less likely to fail (4.5% vs. 2.8% with the intervention).

If the intervention group had succeeded at the same rate as the control, then of 1235 students, an estimated 28 students would not have succeeded in their required math course. With the intervention, they succeeded and got one step closer to graduating.

This successful intervention has broad appeal and may be adapted for other classes. It will be added to Introductory Statistics in late 2025.

I will report further at the [2025 UAGC TLC](#), so stay tuned. This could become the gold standard for STEM education.

Math Hero Trivia:

Who can be selected as a math hero? Some examples are provided in the classroom, but as long as the person has used math to change other people's lives, a student can choose their favorite math hero.

Who is the most selected math hero?

In my last four intermediate algebra classes, 15% of students selected Katherine Johnson, a NASA mathematician whose Washington D.C. headquarters bears her name. In the Ethnomathematics lecture, I describe how she did trajectory analysis for Alan Shepard's mission in 1961 and John Glenn's mission in 1962. (John Glenn would not take off until she signed off on the calculations.) If you've seen the film *Hidden Figures*, Taraji P. Henson plays Katherine Johnson, who was awarded the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) by President Obama. [Photo of Katherine Johnson](#)

I'm curious about the Ethnomathematics lecture that appears in a couple of UAGC math classes. What is one takeaway from that?

One takeaway: "Mathematical explorers have been part of every civilization in every corner of the earth. [Professor Furuto \(Chair of first Ethnomathematics department\)](#) sees the importance of drawing a straight line from the mathematical explorers in her students' cultural history to the mathematical identity she'd like her students to embrace (Su, 2020)." The study of ethnomathematics reminds students of their mathematical history, including that those who were able to do math and science in favor of their relatives and friends supported their group's survival." (ethnomathematics lecture transcript)

What are some common problems students apply the math hero's strategies to solve?

Juggling competing priorities at work and time management are two that come to mind.

Student quotes: "When I think about how Galois would help me today, I imagine he'd look at a life problem; like juggling school, work and stress; and do what he did best: restructure it. He would find patterns in the chaos, break things into smaller groups and apply order. More than anything, he'd remind me not to wait for permission to believe in my ideas." -- UAGC student

"One challenge I currently face in both my work and home life is completing my bachelor's degree. As a working single parent, pursuing a degree has been incredibly difficult, and there are moments when it feels impossible to continue, especially when life throws unexpected obstacles my way. But when I think of Mary Jackson and her ability to solve problems as both an engineer and a mother, I imagine she would approach a challenge like this by creating a precise schedule and organizing her routine to ensure her success." -- UAGC student

For information on adapting the Math Avatar/Math Hero Activity to your in-person classroom or to a K-12 audience, write to holly.ourso@uagc.edu or on [LinkedIn](#).

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FACULTY VOICES

This section of the Chronicle is dedicated to recognizing the contributions of UAGC faculty to their respective fields. Please share your accomplishments via the [Faculty Recognition Form](#). In addition, please remember to enter your accomplishments in your profile on the [Faculty Portal](#).

Pamela Murphy, Department of Human Behavior & Performance Professions



Associate Faculty member Pamela Murphy was recently published in the *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* journal for her article, "Academic Delay of Gratification Among Mature Adult Online Learners." In her piece, Murphy explores how mature adult learners navigate the online college landscape, facing unique opportunities and challenges that differ from those of traditional students.

Murphy, P. F. (2025). Academic delay of gratification among mature adult online learners. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.70003>

Mahalia Bowman Campbell, Department of Human Behavior & Performance Professions



Dr. Mahalia Bowman Campbell has been awarded the prestigious UNCF's Henry C. McBay Fellowship Research Grant, named in honor of the renowned chemist Henry C. McBay. Additionally, her student research fellow has been selected as a recipient for Summer 2025. This fellowship will support their collaborative research focusing on Imposter Syndrome among college-aged students and young professional adults.

Susan Luck, Department of Communication & Humanities Studies



Susan Luck recently published an article, "Terms of Endearment and Their Impact on the Workplace: How Personal Should Interpersonal Communication Be?" in *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*.

This study explores how familiar communication habits—like using terms of endearment—affect professional relationships. Drawing on responses from 154 participants, the research highlights how perceptions of such language vary across age, ethnicity, region, and sexual orientation, while also examining the legal and ethical implications in workplace settings. [Read the full article here](#).

NEW FACULTY INTRODUCTIONS

Jennifer Myers, Department of Justice, Security, & Public Safety Professions



I spent seven years as a Crime Scene Investigator with the Odessa Police Department's Crime Scene Unit. Then I spent another two years working with the US Attorney's Office, the FBI, the DEA, TABC, and the Secret Service to assist with the prosecution of federal crimes. I began my career in higher education in January 2012, where I served as a Department Chair of Criminal Justice. In August 2015, I became an associate dean for career, technical, and workforce education. In June 2018, I was promoted to the position of dean. I oversaw the School of Business & Industry, which included oversight of a technical early college high school, a law enforcement training academy, criminal justice, business professions, computer and information science, engineering, physics, instrumentation, culinary arts, energy technology, office administration, paralegal, welding, cosmetology, automotive and diesel technology, and three Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences programs. I hold a Doctor of Psychology degree with an emphasis in criminology and justice studies from the University of the Rockies, a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice Administration from the University of Texas at Permian Basin, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Telecommunications from Texas Tech University. I am passionate about workforce education and the opportunities it provides for all individuals. I most recently served as the Associate Vice President for Workforce Education at Midland College, where I oversaw the college's Adult Basic Education and Literacy programming, all Continuing Education programs, the Division of Public Service, Health Science Dual Credit, and the Cosmetology program. I am thrilled and honored to be working at the University of Arizona Global Campus.

John Adelman, Department of Communication & Humanities Studies



I am an artist living and working in Houston, Texas. I was born in a small town in northwest Ohio. I earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting, drawing, and printmaking from The Ohio State University. After graduating, I took on various jobs. I began by working at a newspaper print shop, followed by an 11-year stint at a t-shirt printing manufacturer, where I produced an estimated 12 million images. I went on to earn my Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of North Texas. During my graduate studies, I had the opportunity to exhibit with a prestigious gallery in Dallas, which helped launch my professional career. I have exhibited in numerous galleries, both regionally and internationally, with 126 exhibitions, including 26 solo shows, from Beverly Hills, California, to Istanbul, Türkiye. Currently, I'm represented by two galleries in Texas. In addition to my artistic pursuits, I have taught 244 classes since 2007, with a focus on art appreciation courses, which comprise 158 of those classes. I have also taught courses in drawing, painting, and art history. Through my diverse experiences as an artist and educator, I continue to grow creatively while inspiring others to do so.

Alexandra Fussell, Department of Communication & Humanities Studies



I'm excited to be joining UAGC and will be teaching Art Appreciation. I have been teaching art history and humanities courses for the past 8 years. I hold a bachelor's degree in History and Religious Studies, and a master's degree in Art History, with a specialization in Ancient Bronze Age Art. As a native of Buffalo, New York, I'm a huge fan of the Buffalo Bills and any season when it's not snowing. (Really, we do have those here and they are beautiful!) In my free time, I can usually be found reading in a coffeehouse with my husband, Rob, or chasing after my perpetually busy teenage daughter, Maddie.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We want to hear from you!

The UAGC Chronicle supports the entire academic community's contribution to the UAGC mission of providing a community of caring and guidance for adult online learners. Therefore, our publication promotes content that addresses the theoretical underpinnings and practical execution of this mission: academic research on instructional best practices, curricular innovation, and student support strategies; examples and resources that foster a community of practice; news of the progress of institutional student success initiatives; professional development opportunities; and – most importantly – the stories and successes of the people who shape our university.

To make this publication an authentic representation of our diverse faculty body, we encourage submissions from associate faculty and UAGC staff. Please consider the questions below as you craft your submission.

- What is your purpose in writing?
- What are you trying to accomplish?
- How does this information tie into university initiatives?
- Why should UAGC Constituents care about the information you are providing?
- What are the next steps, or what is your call to action?
- Who is your audience?
- How do you want to present your information? Would graphics or other visuals supplement your submission?

For more details and submission guidelines, [please visit the UAGC Chronicle page.](#)

Thank you for reading! We hope you enjoyed this issue.



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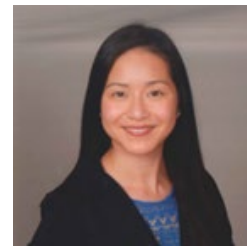
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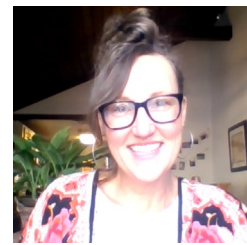
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