THE UAGC
CHRONICLE

SPRING 24/25

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GLOBAL CAMPUS

Cover image Butler, K (2024). Reveal [Acrylic on Canvas]. Used with permission

This piece featured on the cover was my first exploration of water reflection, and I am very happy with the result. It was also my first time painting on a large canvas (3'x4'), and I fell in love with the effect. *Reveal* is one of my current favorites that I have done.

It is currently on display at the Doss Heritage and Cultural Center in Weatherford, Texas until April 28. Then it will hang on my sister's living room wall; it was painted as a Christmas gift for her.

Share your artistic contributions to support the UAGC Chronicle's mission to involve the UAGC community in our publication. We seek to feature original art that highlights the creativity, vision, and talent of our learning community. Entrants are encouraged to reflect on their involvement with faculty, students, and various learning elements within their submissions. **Learn more here.**

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) challenged 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.

Learn More About Conference Tracks and Submit Your Proposal.

Together, we're not just learning—we're unfolding new ways of thinking, collaborating, and leading to shape a future in motion. Submit your proposal by **July 30**.

Join the following sessions to learn more about opportunities to engage with the annual UAGC Teaching and Learning Conference:

May 15 at 1 p.m. PT - TLC Volunteer Session. Register to attend here.

Think Tank Sessions | Register here to attend any or all of the following sessions!

May 21 at 2 p.m. PT | June 18 at 4 p.m. PT |July 8 at 10 a.m. PT
Attend to discuss, ideate about, and get feedback on your conference proposal. TLC Think Tank session reflects the TLC mission by supporting our community and empowering them to engage– it's a unique opportunity to engage with scholars and practitioners, foster personal, professional, and intellectual growth, and expand one's network, no matter your background or experience. The Teaching and Learning Conference is a developmental opportunity designed to support all levels of conference presentation experience. If you have an idea or thought, or even a thought about an idea, attend a think tank session to take those thoughts to the next level!

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

As we inch toward the end of the academic year, we find ourselves in a time of transformation—not only within our university but across society as a whole. Right now, the only constant seems to be change. And yet, we continue to push forward.

Policy, presidents, and public opinion are everywhere we look. In an era of uncertainty, one thing remains clear: there is still much to be done, and the work ahead is ours to shape.

This issue encourages us to persevere and continue, not by waiting for direction but by reminding ourselves of what is still within our control. We don't have to stop learning, moving, or growing as we navigate the unknown. Let's combine our expertise, curiosity, and shared commitment to student success to choose a path and move forward together.

This spring issue expands on actions and ideas that encourage us to make the change we want to see. For example, associate faculty member, Savannah Thomas, writes about how educators can embrace culturally responsive pedagogy as a transformative tool for higher education to bridge the gap between systemic barriers and student success. Likewise, faculty member Naimah Qwuarels offers ways to support students who are currently navigating uncertainty and how instructors play an essential role in fostering a supportive learning environment, providing access to reliable information, and encouraging civic engagement. While the higher education landscape is deciding what to do and how to incorporate AI into the future of education, associate faculty member, Latonya Dennis, explores how individuals can develop an "AI attitude" by acknowledging biases, fears, or inexperience with AI and what using AI may mean for you personally and professionally.

As you read this issue of The UAGC Chronicle, I invite you to reflect on how you can still decide your path in this ever-changing environment. Together, we will shape this next chapter in higher education and continue to improve the experience for our students and ourselves.

The UAGC Chronicle has a new home!

We are excited to announce the next evolution of the UAGC Chronicle. Our community can engage with this publication via the University of Arizona Library's open-access journal site. Readers and authors benefit from easy viewing, downloading, and sharing options, along with a streamlined submission process that makes contributing simpler than ever.

Please take a tour of our new home!

Jackie Bullis

Lead Faculty Support and Classroom Consultant, The UAGC Chronicle Editor

UNIVERSITY, PROGRAM, CURRICULUM, AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

EMPOWERING INNOVATION: THE LAUNCH OF THE ONLINE STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE FUND

Cole McFarren, Associate Director, Academic Technology and Innovation

In Fall 2024, the University of Arizona Global Campus (UAGC) transitioned its former University Fellows Program (UFP) to a new and improved format, the Online Student Success Initiative Fund (OSSIF). The OSSIF is a program dedicated to supporting innovative research and projects that advance student success in online higher education. This fund empowers stakeholders to fully own an initiative from ideation to execution with the goal of measuring the impact on student success and potential for scalability. The OSSIF is available to faculty and full-time staff at UAGC and Arizona Online. The program also encourages collaboration among faculty, departments, and the two entities.

The UFP existed prior to the university's partnership with The University of Arizona and focused on providing faculty funding to conduct research and present findings at external conferences. As UAGC continues to evolve, the OSSIF now aims to focus on the modality most relevant to the specific expertise of our university faculty and staff: online teaching and learning. All project submissions are required to focus on at least one of the following areas: retention (students continue through their first year), completion (students completing degrees and certificates), and value (students earn high-value credentials that enhance workforce outcomes). The OSSIF projects are aligned with Boyer's Model of Scholarship, particularly those focused on applied initiatives.

A few additional highlights of the new Online Student Success Initiative Fund include:

- Funding will be determined annually. $100,000 has been allocated during this first academic year to the OSSIF.
- Faculty and staff who receive funding for proposals will be required to report and present findings to the OSSIF Committee and university stakeholders, and to demonstrate an effort to publish their findings externally.
- The Call for Proposals will remain open throughout the academic year. New proposals will be awarded in January and July each year, moving forward, to allow more opportunities for submission. If a proposal is not accepted on the first submission, revision and resubmission for further consideration are encouraged.
- The OSSIF committee has facilitated multiple support sessions with individuals seeking guidance on research methodology and how to improve their proposals, and will continue to do so as the program matures.

A committee of Deans, Faculty, Student Affairs, and Academic Affairs stakeholders has already awarded the first round of OSSIF funds. Out of sixteen proposals submitted, the following five initiatives have received funding:

Project Name	Primary Investigator	Collaborators
Impact of Regular and Substantive Interaction on Student Success and Learning Experience in Online General Education Courses	Mingzhen Bao	Justin Harrison, Jennifer Robinson, Nathan Pritts
Instructor Practices and Progression Examining the Impact of Instructional Techniques on Student Progression in First-Year Courses	Hazar Shehadeh	Nathan Pritts
The Impact of Synchronous Sessions on Course Learning Outcomes in Foundational Online Courses	Hazar Shehadeh	Nathan Pritts
Project PASS (Plan for Academic Student Success)	Teresa Handy	Connie Lower, Jennifer Dunn, Cheryl Casey (UA), Kira Heske
Virtual Excellence: Bridging NAEYC Standards with Interactive Training for Early Childhood Educators	Stephanie Heald	Michelle Otstot, Melissa Smith

By focusing funds on the publication of findings and sharing our research, the OSSIF represents a significant step forward in online teaching and learning scholarship at the University of Arizona Global Campus. By fostering innovative research and projects, OSSIF empowers faculty and staff to drive meaningful improvements in retention, completion, and value for students. The selected initiatives for funding in the first round highlight the diverse and promising approaches being taken to achieve these goals. Projects approved for OSSIF funding will be presented at this year's annual Teaching and Learning conference.

The OSSIF committee is currently in the process of revising and improving the proposal form and process for the upcoming call for proposals in Spring 2025, with more funded projects anticipated to be announced starting July 2025. For additional information, please refer to the OSSIF Frequently Asked Questions document. Continue to read emails, Faculty Digest, and The Chronicle for updates on the OSSIF program.

REFLECTIONS ON STUDENT SUCCESS: GROWTH, CHALLENGES, AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Stephani Kilby, Director, Student Success

When I stepped into the role of Director of Student Success two years ago, I knew I was stepping into a space filled with opportunity, complexity, and unlimited potential. Supporting adult learners in an online environment comes with unique challenges – balancing work, life, education, and other competing priorities is no small feat for any of us, including our students. We know that, along with academic resources and ongoing support, student success is about fostering a culture of care, innovation, and continuous improvement.
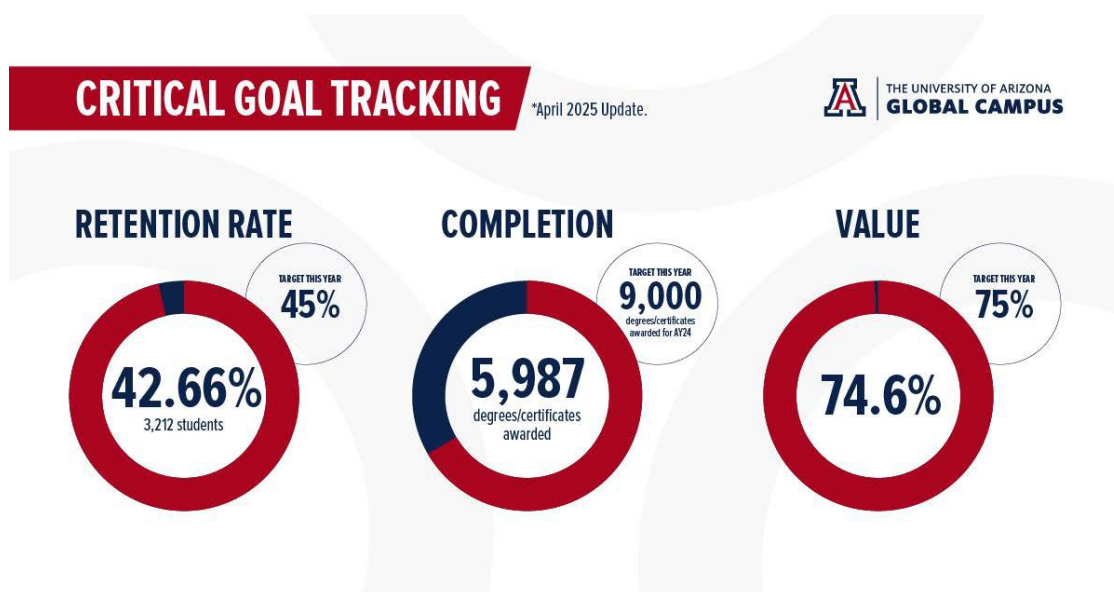
Over the past two years, I've had the privilege of working alongside passionate colleagues, looking at our practices through a variety of lenses, partnering in the testing of new initiatives, and learning from both successes and setbacks. As I reflect on this journey, a few key lessons stand out – lessons about resilience, collaboration, and the ever-evolving nature of student support in higher education. Today, I share with you what I have learned, celebrate the progress we've made, and look ahead to the future of student success at UAGC.

Key Lessons and Insights

- **The Power of a Culture of Care –** The UAGC Culture of Care is foundational to the work of student success. Students do not just need academic support; they need to feel valued, understood, and supported as whole individuals. It can be easy to get lost in the volumes of data we have at our disposal, but each data point represents the contribution, in part or in whole, of an individual student, their journey, and their experience. A Culture of Care isn't just about kindness. When students feel connected to their institution, they are more likely to persist and to graduate. We saw evidence of this at the 2025 Culture of Care Summit, where presenters included UAGC faculty, staff, students, and alumni sharing strategies, best practices, and the impact of the Culture of Care on their experience. In fostering a Culture of Care, we create a ripple effect – one that not only enhances student success but also strengthens our entire UAGC community.
- **Embracing Innovation** – If you've attended a meeting, workshop, or strategy session with our Vice Provost, Dr. Blake Naughton, you've likely heard him ask a simple yet powerful question: "How might we?" This mindset has become central to our approach to student success. In a rapidly evolving higher education landscape, sticking to the status quo is not an option. By embracing innovation and experimentation, we continuously test new strategies, learn from failures, and refine what works – all in pursuit of better supporting our students. Instead of saying, "I don't think we can…," we reframe challenges through the lens of possibility. By asking, "How might we?" we shift from closing doors to opening new opportunities.
- **Success is Everyone's Responsibility** – Student success isn't the work of a single department or role; it's an institution-wide commitment. Every faculty member, staff member, and leader

contributes to creating an environment where students can thrive. Whether it's through flexible learning approaches, meaningful feedback, timely support resources, or accessible, user-friendly systems, UAGC integrates student success into every aspect of the student experience. Recently, an Academic Support Alliance was created to connect the School of General Studies faculty with advising, student affairs, and registrar staff. This cross-departmental collaboration is just one example of an intentional effort to break down silos, share knowledge, and build relationships that contribute to improved student success. When we all take ownership, we create a stronger, more supportive learning environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed.

- **Impact in Action –** Our focused and collective efforts to support student success are making a difference. From increasing retention rates to a growing number of degrees awarded, we see the results of our commitment every day. For the past three months, we have seen our monthly retention rate exceed 45%, with March measuring at 46.14% for the month, and our cumulative retention rate for the year reach 42.22%! In this academic year, we have awarded 5,987 degrees and counting! However, success isn't static – we must remain vigilant in keeping students at the center of everything we do. By continuously refining our strategies and listening to student needs, we ensure UAGC remains a place where more students can achieve their academic and professional goals.

CRITICAL GOAL TRACKING *April 2025 Update.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA GLOBAL CAMPUS

RETENTION RATE
TARGET THIS YEAR 45%
42.66%
3,212 students

COMPLETION
TARGET THIS YEAR 9,000 degrees/certificates awarded for AY24
5,987 degrees/certificates awarded

VALUE
TARGET THIS YEAR 75%
74.6%

The Road Ahead

As I reflect on our progress over the past two years, it is clear that student success is an ongoing journey, not a destination. We have made changes to course sequencing for early general education courses, reimagined our enrollment and advising strategies, and tested new ways of connecting students with resources such as CHAMPS, Live Learning, and tutoring. We have revised our technology policy for clarity and continue to explore new technologies in and out of the

classroom, such as Yellowdig and EdSights. This is evidence of our willingness and ability to continue learning, evolving, and adapting to meet the individual and collective needs of our students.

The road ahead requires us to stay agile, student-centered, and proactive in removing barriers to success. We must remain committed to fostering a Culture of Care, embracing collaboration and continuous improvement, and refining our approaches based on data and student feedback. By continuing to collaborate across departments, experimenting with new ideas, and holding ourselves accountable, we can ensure that every student - no matter their background or circumstances- has the opportunity to succeed and thrive. The future of student success at UAGC isn't just something we work toward; it's something we actively build together.

Opportunities to Engage with Student Success

- **Attend a Student Success Spotlight**. Each month, Stephani Kilby and Matt Phillips host a Spotlight session to highlight student success initiatives, progress, and achievements. Join us to learn more about success efforts, ask questions about ongoing or upcoming initiatives, and engage in dialog with other thought leaders across UAGC.
- **Submit a proposal for an Online Student Success Initiative Fund (OSSIF) project**. The OSSIF is dedicated to internally funding high-impact, innovative, and aspirational projects that align with student success goals. Cross-departmental collaboration is encouraged!
- **Engage with Students on UAGC Connect**. UAGC Connect is a space for students, alumni, faculty, and staff to foster connections, share resources, and engage in professional growth. If you are interested in expanding your knowledge of the student experience and learning straight from students about what is important to them, this is a place you will want to become familiar with. It is a great platform for staying connected to our students and each other in a meaningful way.
- **Share your success stories**. Sharing best practices is essential for fostering continuous improvement and creating a culture of collaboration. Consider sharing your successful strategies and insights so we can collectively raise the standard of support and instruction across the university. Send your success stories to SuccessTogether@uagc.edu so we can learn from and celebrate with each other.

The research corner is a space in the *UAGC Chronicle* dedicated to exploring innovative ideas related to teaching and learning. In this space, we want instructors to share their research interests and pursuits. In addition to fostering a community of educators eager to exchange insights, the research corner serves as a platform for showcasing different methodologies and pedagogical approaches. Whether delving into emerging trends or reimagining traditional practices, this space encourages collaboration and the advancement of educational scholarship.

BRIDGING THE GAP: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Savannah Thomas, Associate Faculty, Department of Education and Liberal Arts

As a Black female professor, my advocacy for social justice is deeply rooted in the classroom, a space where knowledge is shared, identities are affirmed, and futures are shaped. Every interaction, from a syllabus to a discussion board response, offers an opportunity to disrupt inequities and create an environment where Black and Brown students not only survive but thrive. However, efforts to foster inclusion often collide with entrenched systems that prioritize uniformity over equity (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). To bridge the gap between systemic barriers and student success, educators must embrace culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as a transformative tool for higher education. CRP, as defined by Gay (2018), is an educational approach that uses students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference as assets for meaningful learning. This method demands that educators integrate students' identities into the learning process to ensure that they see themselves reflected in the curriculum, classroom practices, and institutional values.

A Call for Equity and Empowerment

Higher education institutions often present themselves as centers of opportunity and enlightenment. Yet, many Black and Brown students encounter environments that fail to acknowledge their lived experiences. Several scholarly sources substantiate the claim that higher education institutions present environments where Black and Brown students feel their lived experiences are overlooked (Centers for Biomedical Education, 2019; Strayhorn, 2018; Whitcomb & Singh, 2020). One specific study indicated that exclusionary educational settings can hinder the sense of belonging, achievement, and persistence among marginalized students, which contributes to their disproportionate attrition from higher education, particularly in STEM fields (Whitcomb & Singh, 2020). Culturally responsive pedagogy offers a counter-narrative. It provides an opportunity that values and centers students' cultural identities as strengths rather than deficits. This approach creates a reciprocal relationship between educators and learners and fosters a sense of belonging essential for academic and personal growth (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). Strayhorn (2018) emphasizes that a sense of belonging is essential for students'

academic success and personal growth. He also argues that when educators build reciprocal relationships with learners, it fosters trust, engagement, and motivation, ultimately enhancing both academic and social outcomes (Strayhorn, 2018).

Asset-Based Mindset: Valuing Cultural Wealth
Culturally responsive pedagogy begins with an asset-based mindset, a concept rooted in Yosso's (2005) *Community Cultural Wealth* framework. This perspective recognizes the diverse forms of capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant) that Black and Brown students bring to educational spaces. Rather than viewing students through a deficit lens, educators should intentionally validate and build upon these strengths. An example of validating and building upon students' strengths is implementing culturally relevant storytelling in a literacy course. Instead of assuming students from diverse backgrounds lack academic language skills, an educator might invite them to share oral histories or family narratives as part of a writing assignment. Similarly, Pickett (2013) highlights that when faculty invite student stories into the classroom, it enhances cultural competence and creates a collaborative learning environment where diverse perspectives are central to learning. This approach recognizes and honors the rich linguistic and cultural assets students bring and transforms them into valuable learning tools.

Culturally responsive pedagogy becomes most impactful when students' voices are not only welcomed but also centered as part of the curriculum (Pickett, 2013). This shift fosters inclusive dialogue, disrupts deficit thinking, and deepens critical engagement across content areas (Pickett, 2013). For example, in a course on educational policy, a Latina student can share their family's experience navigating language barriers in public schools. Their story may prompt a broader class discussion on how policies often overlook multilingual families. This is an insight that would have been missed without their voice. By affirming and integrating students' cultural contributions, educators empower them to see their identities as integral to their academic success. Sánchez et al. (2012) emphasize that acknowledging and valuing students' cultural knowledge empowers minority students, allowing cultural dynamics to be explored, respected, and valued within the classroom.

Inclusive Curriculum Design
One of the most profound ways to enact culturally responsive pedagogy is through curriculum design. Ginsberg and Wlodkowski's (2009) work emphasizes that curriculum design should reflect diverse perspectives and allow students to draw from their cultural backgrounds to deepen engagement and learning. An inclusive curriculum incorporates diverse authors, perspectives, and experiences, to ensure that all students see themselves reflected in the material. This representation fosters both intellectual growth and a sense of belonging. Ladson-Billings (1995) supports this in her research on culturally relevant pedagogy and highlights how inclusive content validates students' identities and enhances learning outcomes.

Inclusive curriculum design also demands flexibility. Assignments should allow students to connect their cultural contexts to the material. Banks and Banks (2019) discuss how multicultural education frameworks provide opportunities for students to connect their personal experiences with course

content. When teaching a course on leadership theory, invite students to examine leaders from their own cultural backgrounds, rather than limiting them to Eurocentric examples. This not only validates their identities but also expands the collective understanding of leadership by including historically marginalized voices.

Equitable Classroom Practices: Building Trust and Respect
Equity in the classroom requires more than diverse reading lists. It demands intentional practices that validate students' lived experiences. Research by Hammond (2015) highlights the importance of creating learning environments that actively affirm students' cultural identities through instructional strategies, classroom norms, and meaningful dialogue. Affirming students' cultural identities also means giving them agency in shaping their learning environments. Equity-centered teaching invites educators to move beyond top-down approaches and instead co-construct classroom experiences with students (Bovill, 2019). This shift is reflected in research that emphasizes the value of collaborative norm-setting and directly addressing classroom dynamics that may marginalize students (University of Washington's Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

Research supports the practice of co-creating classroom norms with students and directly addressing microaggressions to foster inclusive learning environments. Bovill (2019) explores the potential of co-creating learning and teaching with a whole class of students and suggests that this approach may be inherently more inclusive, relies upon building positive relationships between staff and students. Additionally, the University of Washington's Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d.) provides strategies for responding to microaggressions in the classroom and emphasizes that addressing these incidents directly is crucial for maintaining an inclusive environment. Implementing these types of practices can empower students, promote equity, and enhance the overall educational experience (Bovill, 2019).

Feedback Loops: The Power of Listening
Feedback is an essential component of culturally responsive pedagogy because it creates a dialogue between educators and students, allowing instruction to evolve in response to students' needs. Caruthers et al. (2022) emphasize that ongoing feedback strengthens student engagement and promotes more equitable learning outcomes.

Feedback loops in education refer to the continuous, two-way exchange of information between students and educators, to enable ongoing adjustments to teaching practices and learning experiences. Rather than a one-time evaluation, feedback loops create a cyclical process of communication, reflection, and improvement. Regular feedback loops demonstrate to students that their voices influence the learning process, fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Feedback loops can include student-led course reflections or co-created classroom norms. If students express that certain readings feel disconnected from their lived experiences, the instructor might incorporate more diverse authors or culturally relevant case studies. This iterative process not only enhances student agency but also signals that their voices hold value in shaping their educational journey (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Another strategy, known as the Asset-Based Feedback Protocol, involves affirming students' abilities, acknowledging the challenges of tasks, and

collaboratively analyzing assignments (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports of Vermont, 2017). This method aims to build trust and empower students by validating their potential and providing actionable guidance (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports of Vermont, 2017). Educators are encouraged to understand their students' cultural contexts and provide feedback that is both specific and culturally sensitive (Hyland, 2013).

Culturally Responsive Teaching Is Rigorous and Transformative
Culturally responsive pedagogy is often misunderstood as lowering academic standards. In reality, it demands a higher level of rigor from both students and educators. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Hammond (2015) argues that CRP promotes cognitive development by engaging students in complex problem-solving and critical thinking, ultimately fostering deeper learning. At its core, CRP challenges educators to move beyond surface-level diversity efforts and embrace transformative practices that foster critical thinking, empathy, and self-reflection. This requires educators to design curricula that promote complex problem-solving, interdisciplinary inquiry, and real-world application, ensuring that students develop the skills necessary for lifelong learning.

At UAGC, educators can effectively implement culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) by building strong connections with students and using flexible, inclusive teaching strategies. This might include adding personal narrative prompts to discussion boards, offering optional questions, highlighting student stories in announcements, and posing questions that encourage critical reflection rooted in students' lived experiences. Faculty can also create affinity-based learning groups to support shared dialogue among underrepresented students. These approaches promote deeper engagement and can make learning personally meaningful and intellectually challenging.

When students see their identities and experiences valued in the classroom, they are more likely to persist, engage, and excel (Hammond, 2015). Culturally responsive teaching fosters critical consciousness, empowering students to become advocates and changemakers beyond the classroom (Hammond, 2015). This not only enhances individual success but also contributes to a more just and equitable society (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Conclusion: A Collective Responsibility
Culturally responsive pedagogy is not a fleeting trend or a box to check; it is a moral and professional responsibility. It challenges educators to move beyond performative diversity efforts and cultivate learning environments where all students can flourish. At UAGC and beyond, embracing CRP means amplifying marginalized voices, dismantling systemic inequities, and fostering inclusive learning communities. The classroom is a microcosm of the society we aspire to build; one where justice, equity, and belonging are not just ideals but daily practices.

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DEVELOPING AN AI ATTITUDE: A PREREQUISITE FOR TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Latonya Dennis, Associate Faculty, Department of Technology Studies

In recent news and higher education circles, there have been consistent efforts to motivate faculty to use artificial intelligence (AI) tools for efficiency and productivity. Some universities have incorporated AI teaching assistants trained to converse and explain complex concepts to students, theoretically saving instructors time and engaging students who might otherwise avoid asking for help (Wright, 2024). Other institutions have taken a more measured approach, encouraging AI-assisted editing tools for students and faculty while still requiring students to demonstrate original thought.

Regardless of how the technology is used, before AI is introduced, we must first develop an "AI attitude" in ourselves and those we are asking to adopt AI.

What Is an AI Attitude, and Why Is It Needed?

An AI attitude is a posture or mindset toward AI in which the individual is open to learning to use AI tools that are fundamental to career advancement and job security (Dennis, 2024). It is premature to encourage or require people to use specific innovations without ensuring that they are ready for the changes that may result.

According to Davis's seminal Technology Acceptance Model (1989), users' attitudes and behaviors toward new technology are driven by the technology's perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the case of AI, if users do not perceive that using AI is beneficial and simple to use, they may not adopt it. My phenomenological dissertation research documented this need for AI acceptance before actual use and adoption. Despite various backgrounds among the employees and hiring managers I interviewed, the prevailing sentiment was apprehension about incorporating AI into one's workspace, even when a tool was perceived as helpful (Dennis, 2024).

If a person has a negative perception of AI, their attitude while using the tool may range from apathy to sabotage. Imagine a university investing millions in a tool that is then barely or wrongly used for its

intended purpose. While there is limited longitudinal research on the business value of AI, higher education institutions are unlikely to see the benefits of AI upgrades if many faculty and staff are not prepared to engage AI at the level required to justify the investment.

At the individual level, fears of job loss and unwillingness to seek training can destabilize a person's job prospects and contribute to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Dennis, 2024).

Developing an AI attitude is essential before AI adoption.

How Do You Develop an AI Attitude?

Developing an AI attitude requires acknowledging your own biases, fears about, or inexperience with AI, and what using AI may mean for you personally and professionally. The following suggestions are based on research and my decades of experience as a hiring manager and technology leader.

First, having a growth mindset is fundamental. Obtaining an AI attitude begins with taking a personal assessment of your approach to change. There is an app for that! The Rocky.AI application uses AI to provide mindset coaching, goal tracking, and tips for personal development and the self-awareness necessary for growth.

Second, consider evaluating the training landscape for practical insights about long-term sustainable work, thereby addressing any concerns about the stability and sustainability of your work if AI is introduced. Ultimately, workers seeking viable employment in the marketplace cannot rely solely on corporate training programs to provide them with the expertise to remain employed (Dennis, 2024). We must take a moment to be honest with ourselves regarding any worries about the current state of the economy and job market so that we can make lasting changes.

Finally, after addressing personal development and assessing the industry landscape, proactively seek training on AI and identify relevant tools to evaluate. I recommend diving into one of the online learning platforms that may be available through your institution or learn on your own. Platforms like Coursera or LinkedIn Learning provide various supplemental training options for AI. Understanding where to start is dependent on your current comfort and knowledge level. If AI does result in displacement, the work that you have done developing a growth mindset and obtaining training will be critical to approaching a job search in the age of AI.

How Do We Cultivate an AI Attitude in Others?

If you are a leader, it is critical that you take a human-centered approach when implementing technology in the workplace. Leaders cannot deny the impact of marketplace shifts due to AI tools that are perceived as replacing work previously performed by humans. New technology is especially disruptive if employees have no buy-in or involvement.

It is crucial to include employees through every step of a digital transformation to help them acclimate to change. Conducting internal research that includes focus groups, collaborating with teams and stakeholders, and directly addressing concerns can help employees feel valued during a transition to AI tools. It is also key to provide training for everyone affected.

Unfortunately, there will be circumstances where employees' positions are eliminated, and leaders who provide training and resources that allow workers to match skills to new roles will experience lasting outcomes in employee loyalty (Dennis, 2024).

Regardless of your position in the organization, before downloading another tool or taking any additional steps in implementing AI, first address your AI attitude—and potentially seek to cultivate an AI attitude in those around you. Once concerns and knowledge gaps are addressed or at least acknowledged, you can begin the process of identifying the right tools and discerning the appropriate, ethical, and responsible applications for you, your team, or your organization. Let us explore the age of AI with clear and complete confidence.

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CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT – TIPS AND RESOURCES

UNLOCKING BELONGING AT THE ONSET OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Tobenna Attah, Associate Faculty, School of General Studies

In higher education, a sense of belonging is essential for student success, yet online learners often encounter unique barriers that impede their ability to feel connected to their academic community. Research by Gleave et al. (2024) highlighted the critical adjustment period students experience when transitioning to remote learning, where the absence of in-person interactions with peers, faculty, and tutors can contribute to feelings of isolation. Without structured support systems, students may struggle to acclimate to their new academic environment, leading to self-doubt that negatively affects their educational trajectory.

In my 2024 UAGC Teaching and Learning Conference presentation, I identified three key challenges online students frequently face when entering college: literacy proficiency gaps, impostor syndrome,

and limited awareness of institutional support systems. If May–June 2023 data on 136 ENG 121 students (Territorium E-Proficiency Profile, 2023) is any indication, many incoming students are still developing the foundational literacy skills needed for academic success in areas such as reading and writing. While some demonstrate emerging strengths, the data reveals an opportunity to provide meaningful support in critical areas like interpreting meaning, drawing inferences, and understanding grammatical structure (Figure 1).

These academic barriers, compounded by the psychological effects of imposter syndrome, may undermine students' confidence in their ability to succeed (Sheveleva et al., 2023). Additionally, many students are unaware of the full scope of academic resources available to them. These gaps can be bridged through proactive engagement from faculty, helping students have a stronger sense of belonging.

Figure 1: ETS Performance Results, May–June 2023

Skill Dimension	Not Proficient	Marginal	Proficient
Reading, Level 1	57%	16%	26%
Reading, Level 2	79%	12%	9%
Reading, Critical Thinking	97%	3%	0%
Writing, Level 1	52%	25%	23%
Writing, Level 2	81%	13%	6%
Writing, Level 3	90%	9%	1%
Mathematics, Level 1	62%	21%	17%
Mathematics, Level 2	82%	14%	4%
Mathematics, Level 3	94%	5%	1%

Source: Data from Territorium E-Proficiency Profile, 2023.

The Importance of Instructor Proactivity

Faculty must adopt a proactive instructional approach, ensuring students receive early and personalized support. Dabbang et al. (2024) emphasized that an instructor's effectiveness in an online setting is closely tied to their strategic use of communication technologies to foster engagement. This principle is particularly evident when students hesitate to seek assistance, whether due to literacy struggles,

impostor syndrome, or unfamiliarity with academic platforms. For instance, in my experience as an online adjunct faculty member, I have frequently encountered students facing technical difficulties with grading management systems such as Waypoint. One student, for example, repeatedly submitted corrupted assignments without seeking help. By taking the initiative to contact both the student and the UAGC Technical Support Hotline, I facilitated a resolution that ultimately improved the student's ability to engage with the course tools successfully. When students are less inclined to reach out for support, the instructor can make a meaningful difference in their academic experience by taking a proactive approach.

Emphasizing Personalized Feedback

Beyond troubleshooting technical issues, instructor proactivity extends to personalized feedback and mentorship. Almarzuqi et al. (2024) underscored the benefits of student-centered approaches, which encourage meaningful interactions between faculty and students. One effective method I have implemented is the use of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analyses (Figure 2).

Figure 2: SWOT Questions
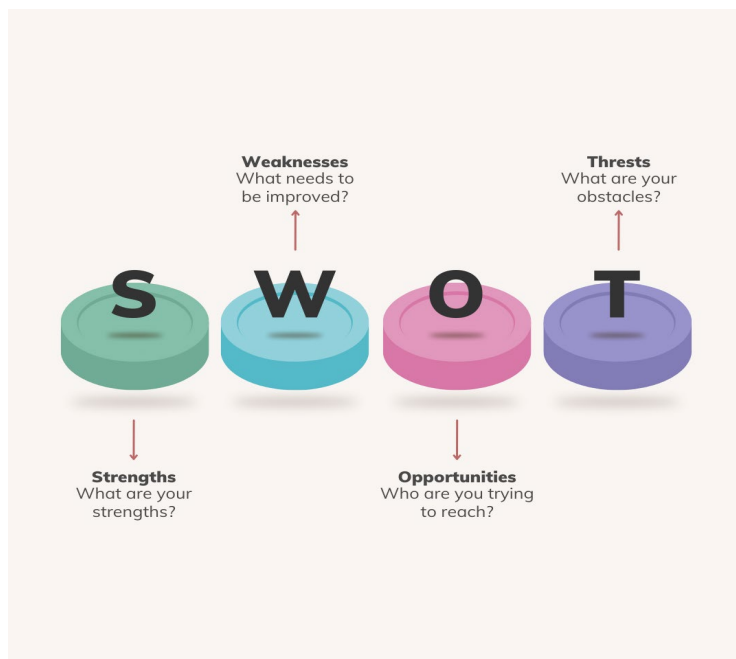
Instructors can tailor their support strategies to meet individual student needs by guiding students to identify their academic strengths and areas for improvement. For example, one of my students struggled with reading English text but found spoken English more accessible. In response, I incorporated audio and video feedback into my discussion posts and grading feedback, which significantly enhanced the student's comprehension and engagement with course materials. This approach was highly appreciated by my student, and I was happy to be able to make their experience

more meaningful and accommodating at the onset of their journey in higher education. Strategies such as these ultimately help students feel a sense of connection and belonging.

Encouraging Useful University Resources

Institutional support resources also play a crucial role in student success, yet their impact depends on students' awareness and utilization. Research suggests that students' academic outcomes are influenced by their perceptions of the online learning environment and the effectiveness of engagement strategies (Dabbang et al., 2024). As such, faculty should make a concerted effort to familiarize themselves with at least three to five key institutional resources and integrate them into their instructional approach. At UAGC, for instance, I regularly recommend tools such as Grammarly for writing support and the 24/7 Writing Center for individualized coaching. By strategically introducing these resources within assignment feedback and discussion posts, faculty can encourage greater student participation and academic confidence from the outset.

Conclusion

To enhance a sense of belonging among students in online higher education, faculty must acknowledge and address the challenges of impostor syndrome, literacy gaps, and limited resource awareness. Proactive instructional strategies—such as early outreach, personalized feedback, and strategic promotion of university resources—may foster a stronger sense of belonging and academic confidence among students. Moving forward, I encourage faculty to develop a "Top 5" list of university resources that can be effectively incorporated into their teaching. Educators can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive online learning environment by taking an active role in student engagement, ensuring that students have the tools and confidence needed to thrive.

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WHAT IS THE STORY YOU WANT TO TELL? | ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH NARRATIVES

Joe Cappa, Project Manager, Office of Academic Innovation, Operations & Technology / Associate Faculty, Department of Organizational Studies

Storytelling as a Teaching Method

I started my adjunct teaching career in the classroom, teaching operations management courses that were heavy with formulas and calculations. After a few less-than-successful terms, I learned from student feedback that I had to change my approach or remain inaccessible, disengaging, and wondering why I was not connecting with my students. I remembered a technique that one of my graduate instructors used – storytelling through scenario-based examples. What I learned from my own classroom experiences and what I know now from years of teaching is that sharing your own authenticity and vulnerability with your students matters. As I see it, my role is to share real and current stories that allow my students to connect with me, the course, and the learning materials.

I started a podcast series for my students for two reasons: to have autonomy over how supplemental course materials are delivered in my course and to use a digital tool within the online classroom to tell current stories about real businesses. I needed a way to talk to my students and wanted them to hear my viewpoints and perspectives. I look at using a podcast as a teaching method as a way to pass on what was passed on to me by my graduate instructor. Through this article, I hope to now pass along to other faculty the value of sharing a true story as a teaching method and highlight how I engage with my students beyond course announcements and assignment feedback.

Brief Review of the Literature

In distance learning, a sense of belonging can be cultivated between learners through frequent positive interaction between course participants, including students and faculty (Rovai, 2007; Garrison, 2011; Yuan & Kim, 2014). In asynchronous learning settings, the instructor should actively participate; teaching presence was viewed favorably when the instructor was available and perceived by students to be encouraging and positive (Ling & Luan, 2024). Teacher presence in online learning classrooms influences students' perception of the course design and their level of learning satisfaction (Caskurlu et al., 2020).

Digital storytelling is regarded as a pedagogical tool that can engage students in meaningful learning (Barber, 2016). Our thoughts, feelings, actions, and even our personal identity can be understood through story (Ketelle, 2017). Digital storytelling can be exploited as a new dynamic tool in building communities of learning and practice both for teachers and for students (Lambert & Hessler, 2018).

Podcasting can enhance student learning by helping to reinforce the use of storytelling techniques (Vandenberg, 2018). Incorporating either audio or video podcasts allows students to personalize the learning experience (O'Bannon et al., 2011). Podcasts offer students opportunities to revisit classroom content and instruction while providing greater critical thinking opportunities (Shumack & Gilchrist, 2009). The use of podcasting is an effective way to assimilate the learning at the course as well as individual assignment level (Fietze, 2010).

Overview of My Podcast

Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series is a four-series podcast delivered over the five-week term. All podcast sessions are recorded using the Spotify for Podcasters platform. A course announcement is posted each week, introducing the weekly podcast and letting students know where to locate the podcast link.

The podcast series is non-scripted and uses storytelling through scenario-based examples to expand on the topics of the course and connect those to real-world businesses and events. For example, I have shared the story of the 2024 Dunkin Super Bowl commercial with Ben Affleck and Matt Damon (Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series Episode #2 – "The External Environment & The Organization") and the story of viral videos about the McDonald's Big Mac Meal price of $28 (Dr. Cappa's Podcast Series Week #3 – "The Mission Statement Myth").

Each podcast session focuses on one or more of the course topics. The intent is not to re-use the material that the students already have, but rather, it is to tell the story of a business and its current activities while relating those activities to the weekly course concepts. Because the podcast shared in any given course is regularly remade to stay current with real-time world events, it provides students with a stronger sense of community than what they often feel in a static course with abstract content and scenarios. In business courses, students cannot solely rely on static content. After all, the often-changing real-world context is critical to understanding why and how businesses adapt, whether it is a changing financial climate, political climate, or, as we saw with COVID-19, a changing healthcare climate.

In each podcast, my students listen to Dr. Cappa providing his version of the story with no script, no notes, and no retakes. I take a conversational approach and liken it to a small classroom discussion or chatting with a small group of students in my office. Students see me as accessible and authentic, and I work to create a sense of belonging and connection.

Looking Ahead

I track the number of plays for each podcast, ranging from a 22% student participation rate to a 43% student participation rate, with the highest rate aligning with the podcast covering the topic for the final course assignment, which carries the most weight in the course. These participation rates tell me that students are willing to take the time on supplemental course materials and welcome this podcast

modality. Looking ahead, I would like to see an increase in engagement for the podcasts featured in the earlier weeks of the course and an overall increase in student participation, perhaps even scaling these podcasts to additional sections of BUS 402.

As I reflect on this method of engaging students, I realize that the student voice is a missing piece and a piece that I would like to hear. Looking ahead, I plan to experiment with different ways to give my students a voice. I am particularly interested in learning answers to the following questions: Did they find the podcast helped them to better connect with and understand the course concepts? Did they feel the podcast created more of a connection for them to the course and the instructor? Would they like to see more content like this in their UAGC courses? What did they not like about the podcasts? I welcome any suggestions or ideas on collecting this direct student feedback at the course level. If you would like to share any ideas or discuss podcasts as a teaching method, contact me at joseph.cappa@uagc.edu.

The hardest part of a marathon is the last mile; while on the last mile, nothing matters at that moment other than the story you tell yourself that gets you across that finish line. Here at UAGC, our students are trying to complete their marathon with the goal of walking across the stage with diploma in hand. Our job as faculty is to be a part of their story and help them to reach the happy ending of their academic success story.

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UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNCERTAINTY DURING A NEW PRESIDENTIAL TERM: FACULTY STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT

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The transition into a new presidential administration often brings a mix of optimism and anxiety, particularly among university students. The intersection of political shifts, policy changes, and economic concerns influences students' academic experiences, mental health, and overall sense of stability. Faculty members play an important role in helping students navigate this period of uncertainty by fostering a supportive learning environment, providing access to reliable information, and encouraging civic engagement. This article explores the various challenges students face during a new presidential term and outlines actionable strategies for faculty to mitigate anxiety and promote resilience.

Understanding Student Uncertainty

Political transitions can create widespread uncertainty, particularly for university students who are often at a pivotal stage in their academic and professional journeys. Several factors contribute to this sense of instability, including:

- **Policy Shifts in Higher Education**: Changes in federal policies related to student loans, financial aid, and research funding can directly impact students' ability to continue their education. Proposals to increase or decrease tuition assistance programs, modify loan forgiveness plans, or alter research grant allocations create anxiety about financial security. Several concerning proposals have emerged, including steep tax increases on university endowments, new taxes on

college scholarships, and the elimination of critical student loan repayment options like SAVE. (American Council on Education, 2025).

- **Social and Cultural Implications**: Policies regarding immigration, diversity, equity, and inclusion affect students from diverse backgrounds. International students, in particular, may face concerns about visa regulations, work authorization, and potential changes to residency requirements. Minority students may worry about shifts in policies that impact their civil rights or access to resources. Bennett (2020) argues that political uncertainty surrounding immigration and equity policies exacerbates anxiety among marginalized student populations. For instance, abrupt changes to visa regulations or residency requirements can destabilize international students' academic trajectories, while shifts in civil rights protections may disproportionately harm minority students' access to institutional resources. "The State Department has used as justification for some student deportation proceedings an immigration provision that dates to the Cold War and gives Rubio the authority to deport noncitizens if their activities pose 'potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences.' And U.S. officials can revoke a student visa if they deem the student a threat" (NBC News, 2025).

- **Economic Uncertainty and Employment Prospects**: University students are highly attuned to economic policies that affect job markets, minimum wage laws, and labor protections. Economic downturns or shifts in industry regulations can lead to apprehension about securing internships, post-graduate employment, and long-term career stability. Collins and Palomares (2022) suggest that economic policies and labor market shifts significantly influence university students' career prospects. They argue that economic downturns and changing industry regulations create apprehension about securing internships and post-graduate employment, impacting students perceived long-term career stability (Collins and Palomares, 2022).

- **Mental Health and Emotional Well-being**: Uncertainty breeds anxiety, and political discourse can often become polarizing and distressing. Watson and Chen (2021) highlight that political transitions can significantly impact the mental health of university students. They contend that the uncertainty and polarizing nature of political discourse can exacerbate anxiety and mental health challenges, leading to increased demand for university counseling services and support networks (Watson and Chen, 2021).

Given these factors, faculty members have a unique opportunity to serve as stabilizing forces during this period of transition. By implementing targeted strategies, faculty can support students in maintaining focus, developing resilience, and engaging constructively with the socio-political landscape.

Faculty Strategies for Supporting Students

1. Foster Open and Respectful Dialogue

Faculty should encourage an academic environment where students feel comfortable discussing current events and policy changes without fear of judgment or hostility. Faculty can model respectful dialogue

through the use of pertinent announcements and referenced discussion comments. Strategies for fostering respectful discourse include:

- Establishing clear guidelines for constructive discussions in classrooms, emphasizing mutual respect and fact-based reasoning.
- Encouraging students to explore diverse perspectives through structured debates, research projects, and guest speaker engagements.
- Providing historical and policy contexts for contemporary issues, helping students critically analyze developments rather than react emotionally.

2. Provide Access to Reliable Information

Misinformation and sensationalized narratives can exacerbate student anxiety. Faculty can serve as reliable sources of information by:

- Directing students to reputable news sources and governmental policy websites for updates on education, immigration, and economic policies.
- Collaborating with university librarians to provide research resources on legislative changes and political developments.
- Encouraging media literacy by integrating discussions on bias, misinformation, and credible fact-checking methods into the discussion forums.

3. Address Financial Concerns Proactively

Understanding the financial stress that policy shifts may bring, faculty can support students by:

- Informing students about available financial aid programs, emergency assistance funds, and scholarship opportunities.
- Inviting students to speak with their financial aid officers or career counselors about federal policy changes and financial planning strategies.
- Offering flexible deadlines or incompletes for students experiencing financial hardships due to policy-related disruptions to allow the student more time to resolve their administrative matters in question.

4. Encourage Civic Engagement and Advocacy

Rather than allowing uncertainty to cultivate apathy, faculty can empower students to engage in civic processes by:

- Encouraging participation in voter registration drives and discussions on the importance of civic engagement.
- Highlighting opportunities for students to get involved in policy advocacy, community service, and grassroots movements.
- Connecting discussion forums to current events for all students to share their concerns and proposed solutions, where applicable.

5. Support Mental Health and Emotional Well-being

Faculty members are not mental health professionals, but they play a significant role in promoting student well-being (Here for Texas, 2019) by:

- Recognizing signs of distress and referring students to university counseling and support services.
- Incorporating wellness check-ins, stress management discussions, and mindfulness practices into weekly announcements.
- Creating an inclusive and compassionate learning environment where students feel seen, heard, and valued.
- Connecting students with the Office of Student Access and Wellness for resources and guidance.

6. Adapt Teaching Methods to Changing Circumstances

A shifting political landscape may require adjustments in teaching strategies to maintain student engagement and academic performance. Faculty can:

- Utilize flexible grading to accommodate students facing disruptions by offering incompletes and extensions.
- Incorporate real-world case studies and policy analysis into announcements and discussions to make learning more relevant to current events.
- Direct students to career guidance resources to help them navigate uncertainties related to employment and professional development.

Conclusion

The uncertainty surrounding a new presidential term presents significant challenges for university students, ranging from financial instability to mental health concerns. Faculty members, as trusted mentors and educators, can play a pivotal role in supporting students through this transition period. The U.S. Department of Education (2023) emphasizes the importance of federal initiatives in supporting university students through policy changes. The department advocates for increased access to financial aid and mental health resources to help mitigate the impact of political and economic uncertainties on student well-being. By fostering open dialogue, providing access to reliable information, addressing financial anxieties, encouraging civic engagement, supporting mental health, and adapting teaching strategies, faculty can help students navigate political and economic uncertainties with confidence (Falk, Frisoli & Varni, 2024). In doing so, we can fulfill the mission of preparing students not only for academic success but also for active and resilient participation in society.

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BUILDING ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

THE FIRST STEP: INITIATING A CONVERSATION ON CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING AND BELONGING RESEARCH

Alexa Dunne, Associate Director, Articulation & Prior Learning Assessment

Is there a need for research on credit for prior learning (CPL) and Belonging, and if so, how would that research be conducted? Industry data shows the value of CPL for college students, and emerging data has shown Belonging as a factor in student success. However, no specific data exists on the intersection of CPL and Belonging. Determining what, if any, impact CPL has on Belonging would allow higher education leaders to better include CPL in student success strategy discussions. By leveraging tools such as CPL, especially if it positively impacts Belonging, leaders have an opportunity to increase students' sense of Belonging and success. Let's explore this idea.

In the session, "[The First Step: Initiating a Conversation on Credit for Prior Learning and Belonging Research](#)," at the 2024 TLC Conference, the panelists (Alexa Dunne, UAGC; Matt Bergman, University of Louisville; Melissa DeBlois, Community College of Vermont, Vermont State Colleges System; Susan Forseille, Thompson Rivers University, British Columbia)) explored the correlation between CPL and Belonging. CPL is generally defined as college credit awarded for college-level learning gained outside of a traditional higher-education classroom. This valuable source of credit has been proven to impact student success positively, but there is no direct data on whether or how it impacts Belonging. Anecdotally, students report feeling more confident, seen, and appreciated when an institution recognizes their learning. Upon reviewing industry data in "The PLA Boost" (2020), and "Equity Paradoxes in the PLA Boost" (2021), where PLA is synonymous to CPL as discussed here, along with data from the panelists' institutions, the panelists identified and discussed benefits of using data to inform CPL policy and process, approaches to filling gaps, and how to initiate CPL and Belonging research.

TLC Teach Us More Award Recipients
Clockwise from top left: Forseille, Bergman, Dunne, DeBlois

During the presentation, the panelists identified areas of importance in future CPL and Belonging research: quantifying and measuring Belonging in a way that can be replicated across departments and institutions, accurately attributing increases in Belonging to CPL versus other sources, and how current policies and processes may inadvertently decrease feelings of Belonging. While the discussion focused on CPL, a cohesive institutional approach to the study of a concept such as Belonging must include aligning what is done in one department with the definitions, metrics, and other data that is used across various internal departments. This allows each institution to compare the impact of initiatives across the entire institution, using a common language. Similarly, when benchmarking success across peer institutions, having directly comparable data between peers helps measure where institutions are in relation to peers and provides a common language to speak with each other, accreditors, and students. Any implementation of CPL Belonging reporting must review Belonging studies at other institutions and cross-industry. The United States National Institute of Health (NIH) has developed a General Belonging Scale (GBS) survey and research methodology providing a framework for measuring Belonging. The panelists highlighted the possibility of leveraging the GBS established framework, noting that other industries have previously done the same. By working with the GBS and tailoring it for CPL, researchers would have the opportunity to compare between continuing studies regardless of industry.

Moving on, the panelists discussed methods to collect information, what information is desired, and how to realistically use collected data. Is this data even necessary to implement changes that positively affect student outcomes? The panelist from Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia has been pursuing data related to the discussion at their institution. The panel sees this as a step on the path to

broader research. The Thompson Rivers University research highlighted one of the most important aspects of any drive to influence Belonging: understanding how *individuals* across the community being studied define, feel, and experience Belonging. In higher education, this includes students, staff, and faculty who collectively create the culture of their institution. Culturally, there are differences across populations, in the same way that learning and proof of learning may differ between cultures. In the world of CPL, learning is often measured in the same way it always has been in higher education. The discussion explored the need to expand measurement tools to honor and include the variety of cultures that students bring to the table. By making this policy change, institutions can show students that they, and their culture, are valued, rather than demand conformity to the 'traditional' ways CPL has been reviewed.

The Next Step

For CPL, this is an opportunity to enter into the Belonging discussion. The next steps mirror any research opportunity: review literature on Belonging studies to determine the best approach of tailoring research to CPL and Belonging; determine the potential impact of tailored research and probability of actionable data; identify needs to complete research, such as funding, time, and resources, and source interested partners for discussion and collaboration. Initial discussions should also outline parameters for a go/no-go decision on a research study.

Within higher education, collaboration between institutions and other stakeholders frequently occurs. Any research participation request must convince prospective participants that participation will result in actionable data in pursuit of student success. When sourcing participants, a proposal must include information on benefits to participants, along with requirements for participation, such as sharing aggregate and disaggregate data, minus personally identifying information. Upon convening, the initial group of interested participants would develop the specifics for the study, including required resources, plans to ensure the captured data accurately reflects CPL influence on Belonging and vice versa, timelines, and more. This research must survey students to collect information on their feelings of Belonging. The student voice should be heard by every institution of higher education, in pursuit of meeting students where they are, and helping them as they need. When it comes to Belonging, only the students can tell us how they feel. With so many requests for student input, institutions need to weigh the importance of each request against the benefits of pursuing it. Looking at all of this and more provides a scope of the work required to get buy-in from institutions and to establish a replicable CPL and Belonging survey.

The panelists recognize the importance of industry partners and experts in planning and implementing research studies. The two studies previously shared on CPL were completed by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). "The PLA Boost" from 2020 and the follow-up 2021 "Equity Paradoxes in the PLA Boost," are a phenomenal resource for any institution looking to measure their own CPL/PLA programs. Organizations like WICHE and CAEL have established research divisions and could support and guide creation of a survey to support unbiased outcomes. Having an independent organization partner like WICHE or CAEL

in a CPL and Belonging study would lend weight to the overall importance of the study and open up sources of participant institutions who have previously worked with either organization. A study like this would add to the body of research available on CPL, in which CAEL leads the way. All panelists are institutional members of CAEL, finding powerful support, allyship, and resources in the CAEL community. As a group, the panelists are committed to working with industry partners on various projects, and a study on Belonging in CPL aligns with previous CAEL work. The key takeaway is that it is important to explore options for partnering with industry-leading research organizations.

This panel and session grew from the panelists being members of the Prior Learning Assessment Network, (PLAN), a networking group of higher education CPL professionals. PLAN hosts monthly meetings with peers from across North American institutions to discuss industry challenges, changes, successes, ideas, and more. Monthly topics are set in advance with presentations from various members. This network of student-centered individuals is a valuable resource for CPL/PLA professionals. Ongoing conversations will occur between panelists and PLAN members around running a Belonging in CPL research study, and PLAN peers will be invited to participate if, upon completing a needs assessment, a "go" decision is made. If you are a higher education Prior Learning Champion looking to expand your network, you are encouraged to join PLAN.

At the end of the day, knowing that an increased sense of Belonging helps students succeed is a fact that all higher education professionals should consider as they plan for student success. Regardless of your area of expertise, what can your department implement to recognize and celebrate students? Are there policies that exclude certain populations due to cultural differences? Can institutions measure learning in different ways? Do institutions need to study increased Belonging in pursuit of a why, or is an increase in student success enough? If student success is the goal, and the answers to these questions may positively influence the actions institutions take in pursuit of student success, it makes sense for all of us to pursue this data.

Want to join the conversation? We highly recommend visiting the UAGC TLC 2024 playlist on the UAGC Faculty Affairs YouTube channel, to watch the 2024 TLC conference session recordings. While CPL is a niche department at many institutions, fellow conference presenters covered Belonging as it relates to a plethora of areas.

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EXPLORING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND: INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSE APPROACH

Nancy Wood, Associate Faculty, Department of Health Sciences
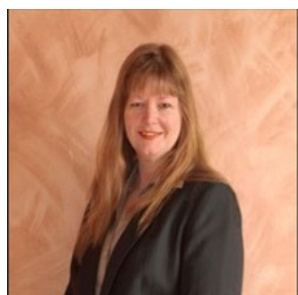
Incorporating the study of the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) into higher education curricula has the potential to enrich students' educational experiences by fostering essential skills such as empathy, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of human-animal interactions. The purpose of this article is to advocate for the integration of HAB topics into specific courses within the existing curricula. For example, courses within health sciences, criminal justice, and human services programs could benefit from exploring how the human-animal bond connects to issues such as animal cruelty, the ethical treatment of animals, counseling services, and the broader impact of human-animal relationships. By introducing HAB concepts into certain programmatic courses, students can better understand the social and psychological dimensions of human-animal relationships, while also discovering career paths that focus on these important issues.

The human-animal bond is a complex relationship that lends importance in an educational context. Instructors across various disciplines can provide an overview of how Human-Animal Interactions (HAI) and the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) impacts animals, society, and the workplace. Topics for exploration may include the social, physical, and emotional/psychological effects of HAB, its educational benefits, the therapeutic roles of animals, ethical and animal welfare considerations, and the connection between violence toward people and animals. By incorporating HAB concepts, instructors can facilitate discussions on empathy, ethics, and the interconnectedness of human-animal relationships. These conversations will engage students in deeper dialogue, especially as students from diverse disciplines have the opportunity to interact. Such discussions will enable students to explore interdisciplinary connections through the perspectives of various academic fields and real-world contexts.

Human-Animal Studies (HAS) is a rapidly growing, multidisciplinary field, but experts note that it is often challenging to introduce students to this area of study and inspire curiosity about potential career paths within it (Erdman et al., 2023). It is essential for educators from various disciplines to incorporate this interdisciplinary knowledge into their teaching to raise awareness of the field. In my experience teaching an HAB course, I was one of three instructors from the following disciplines: social work, criminal justice, and human services, which provided varying perspectives to this interdisciplinary field. Researchers suggest touching on the various career pathways of animal-assisted therapy, animal care, animal welfare advocacy, education and outreach, animal behavior and training, wildlife conversation, writing and media, as well as explaining the numerous roles that animals can have in a variety of settings (e.g., education, counseling, public safety, healthcare, human services, business) (Erdman et al., 2023).

Instructors can share HAB information and resources through course announcements and postings to help students explore the HAB field. For instance, students might be encouraged to engage in volunteer opportunities with organizations that involve human-animal interactions

such as those in public safety, social services, nonprofits, education, or healthcare. Another option is to suggest that students reach out to professionals working with animals to gain insight into potential career paths. Resources such as the Animal Society Institute, the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute, and the National Link Coalition can also serve as valuable tools for students. In my experience teaching HAB, I have found that students passionate about animals often struggle to connect their interests with their chosen major. By sharing these opportunities and resources, instructors can help ignite students' curiosity about future career options related to the human-animal bond. Integrating the study of the human-animal bond into curricula will equip students with the soft skills of empathy and critical thinking and the knowledge that may spark interest in these career paths.

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HOW MY GRANNY TAUGHT ME ABOUT MASLOW

Yvonne Lozano, PhD, Assistant Dean, Professor of Gerontology, Faculty Council Co-Chair

As I contemplate the evolving landscape of our society—a time that advocates for 'scrubbing' language to align with {fill in the blank}—I find myself thinking of my grandmother. She exemplified remarkable resilience and grace, serving as a living testament to the enduring power of compassion and understanding. She opened my eyes to a world characterized by diverse thinking, a concept that contemporary literature defines as including varied perspectives, ideas, and approaches to problem-solving (Page, 2018). This approach emphasizes the importance of gathering insights from individuals with different backgrounds, experiences, and expertise, ultimately leading to more innovative solutions and better decision-making outcomes (Page, 2018).

While this definition may imply an essential nature in various forms, much like my Granny, it symbolizes a profound evolution of one's emotional and mental landscape. It encompasses the growth of personalities and cognition that actively seek out and embrace a diverse world, even as some may choose to look away. My Granny exemplified this spirit, embodying the ability to see, speak, and accept without judgment. She nurtured diverse thinking by inspiring me to view the world through the eyes of others, encouraging exploration of cultures and communities beyond our own family and neighborhood. Her hope for me was to nurture compassion—the key to understanding—by challenging the assumptions that could steer me away from my fears. Drawing on Page's (2018) compelling insights into

the transformative power of diverse thinking within educational institutions and professional environments, it is clear that this approach can dramatically enhance the learning experience and propel the advancement of knowledge. In a world increasingly defined by individualism, fears, biases, and the isolating aftermath of COVID-19, embracing diverse thinking is essential for breaking down the barriers that obstruct openness to our beliefs. Granny's legacy beautifully complements broader discussions of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and diverse thinking, highlighting that at every level—physical, social, and personal—the integration of varied experiences significantly enriches individual lives and fortifies communities (Maslow, 1954). By attentively listening to and valuing each person's unique narrative, we can cultivate inclusive environments where every individual, regardless of their background, feels secure, connected, and inspired to thrive (Maslow, 1943).

Back to my grandmother- You may be inclined to regard my grandmother, affectionately known as 'Granny,' as merely another narrative of a migrant farm worker in America—the archetypal hero. Yet, she transcended the confines of any simple stereotype. As the eldest of 21 siblings, Granny embodied resilience and matriarchy long before those terms gained popularity. She played an essential role in guiding her undocumented parents through the formidable challenges of raising a large family, of which 17 children ultimately survived to adulthood.

Granny spent her formative years laboring in the grueling fields of South Texas and Louisiana, picking strawberries and cotton while nurturing her younger siblings. She was far more than a grandmother; she was my best friend, next-door neighbor for many years, and an unyielding pillar of strength. She was a curandera or healer with a profound knowledge of folk remedies. A culinary genius and a master with garden tools, she also held deep faith, always advising the local priest on church matters. Moreover, she acted as a compassionate grief counselor and the neighborhood's unheralded social worker without formal training or credentials.

Her capacity to provide unconditional love and support is a powerful testament to the warmth she radiated. Granny's extraordinary ability to address the diverse emotional, social, and practical needs of those around her embodies the essence of humanity. It highlights the complexities involved in fulfilling our fundamental needs. Her multifaceted presence in our lives echoed the principles found in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a psychological framework introduced by Abraham Maslow in 1943. Although Granny never encountered Maslow's work, her unwavering commitment to compassion, safety, nourishment, and affection revealed a profound understanding of what it truly means to nurture the human spirit. Her instinctive ability to care for others, regardless of fear or misconceptions, exemplified unconditional love, encouragement, and an indomitable spirit of resilience.

Maslow's hierarchy is compellingly illustrated as a pyramid comprising five distinct levels representing essential human needs. This structure is carefully organized in a hierarchy, with the ends forming the foundation's most fundamental needs. Understanding this model highlights the importance of fulfilling basic requirements before progressing to higher-level aspirations, ultimately guiding individuals toward personal growth and fulfillment.

1. Physiological Needs: These are the fundamental requirements for human survival, such as food, water, warmth, and rest.

2. Safety Needs: Once physiological needs are met, individuals seek security and safety, including personal, financial, and health-related security.

3. Love and Belongingness Needs: After safety needs, humans desire social relationships, affection, and connection with others. This level includes friendships, family, and intimacy.

4. Esteem Needs: These involve the need for self-esteem, recognition, and respect from others. Individuals seek accomplishments and a sense of effectiveness and value.

5. Self-Actualization Needs: This is the highest level and represents the quest to achieve one's full potential and seek personal growth and fulfillment.

Why It Matters: The connection between Love, Resilience, Maslow's Hierarchy, and Diverse Thinking

Love and belongingness, the third level in Maslow's hierarchy, are crucial for developing resilience. As I spent countless hours by my Granny's side, my youthful innocence began to appreciate the depth of her spirit and the wisdom she imparted. My grandmother was a woman who navigated life with remarkable fortitude yet little support—she divorced early in her marriage and became a single mother of four. She could neither read nor write, signing her name with a simple **X**. Despite her limited education, she took on two jobs, tirelessly working as a cook and housekeeper for two different families, all while maintaining her respected role as a curandera. Her commitment to her family and community, demonstrated by balancing two jobs as a cook and housekeeper, reflected a deep understanding of practical needs, aligning with the foundational levels of Maslow's hierarchy. Each time I visited, she would hand me a not-so-crisp $5 bill—a small token she insisted I take, even when I went off to college, reminding me it was to "buy a taco." The gesture was more than financial support; it symbolized her care and concern, ensuring I always felt I belonged. Granny was a public transportation master, navigating the city bus system with the skill of a seasoned driver. I would often join her on these rides, amazed by her keen insight into human nature. Her vibrant spirit engaged everyone around her; she spoke to strangers as if they were old friends, embodying warmth and openness.

Her role as a curandera, revered by many, contributed to her multifaceted identity. This profound openness and empathy pointed directly to the universality of love and belonging, fostering resilience in herself and those she touched. I cherished my "so-called" position as her translator, helping articulate the care she felt for those who sought her wisdom. However, Granny, through her actions and words, continuously imparted the essence of compassion—another thread woven into Maslow's theoretical framework. Her quiet concern for others was evident in her remarks: "I hope they figure it out soon... I worry about them." These expressions were signposts to her holistic understanding of love, belongingness, and resilience.

At the foundational level of Maslow's hierarchy, embracing diverse experiences like my grandmother's— an immigrant, farm worker, and community pillar—can help address basic physiological and safety

needs. Maslow illustrates how collective efforts, rooted in diverse backgrounds and compelled by empathy, can effectively address life's fundamental requirements. My grandmother, despite her struggles, opinions, assumptions, and biases, created an environment of physical and emotional safety for those around her. By working multiple jobs and navigating life's challenges, she demonstrated resilience and fortitude, key qualities that can inspire collective problem-solving within a community. In similar communities, exposure to diverse experiences can lead to inventive solutions to common issues like food security or housing stability. For example, learning from my grandmother's resourcefulness helped me support and inspire others to find ways to ensure everyone's basic needs are met.

Addressing Social and Esteem Needs Through Empathy

As one ascends Maslow's hierarchy, the need for social belonging and esteem grows. These social needs can be effectively met by valuing diversity and fostering inclusive environments. My story reflects how my grandmother's life and teachings promoted a sense of belonging, respect, and esteem in her community. She practiced what diverse thinking champions: unconditional acceptance and understanding of an individual's circumstances. In environments where these principles are upheld, individuals feel recognized and respected. By serving as a neighborhood helper and confidante without judgment, my grandmother created a space where people felt valued and appreciated—a key component in fostering social belonging and esteem. Similarly, by embracing a tapestry of cultures, skills, and narratives, communities can promote connections, build trust, and create support systems that recognize and elevate everyone's worth and contributions.

Encouraging Self-Actualization through Personal Growth and Fulfillment

At Maslow's highest level, the stories of individuals like my grandmother highlight how diverse thinking enables personal growth and fulfillment. (Maslow, 1943) My grandmother personified self-actualization through her roles as a curandera, social worker, cook, and guide. Despite lacking traditional educational credentials, she impacted countless lives—understanding that self-actualization is not solely the pursuit of personal achievement but also the empowerment of others to find their paths. Encouraging diverse perspectives fosters an environment where community members can express their true selves, pursue opportunities, and engage in lifelong learning. (Maslow, 1954) My grandmother engaged with everyone, and this openness to interact and empathize broadened individual and group growth horizons. Following her principles, one can explore one's potential within a collaborative, supportive community, discovering talents and interests they might otherwise overlook.

The Legacy and Application of Diverse Thinking

Reflecting on the significance of language and perspective in today's evolving landscape, my grandmother underscores that true inclusivity and diversity go beyond mere words (Smith & Winter, 2022). They are embodied in actions defined by kindness, empathy, and understanding. Her timeless wisdom encourages us to view differences not as obstacles but as gateways to a richer, more nuanced life. Through this perspective, I have developed a deeper appreciation for the diverse needs of individuals beyond my immediate environment. My journey began with my involvement in the Girl

Scouts, where I remained a member from first to eleventh grade. During this time, I cultivated an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance, discovering how personal and collective fulfillment are interconnected through volunteerism.

After college, I started my professional career early as an adult probation officer working with sex offenders, and I served as a social worker in a county jail. Eventually, I became a licensed mental health clinician in a psychiatric hospital, and later, I worked with older adults diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in a med-surgical hospital. My commitment to volunteerism continues, particularly in supporting those who care for loved ones with dementia. Before my career in academia, It became evident that I wanted to integrate my grandmother's wisdom and Maslow's foundational teachings into the classroom. Throughout this journey, I recognized that it was not just about my activities; it involved an evolution of thought that unexpectedly transformed me into a more diverse thinker. In time, I came to understand that my grandmother was right—no one could take this way of thinking from me. It has become intricately woven into the fabric of who I am. Integrating my grandmother's ethos with Maslow's framework makes it evident how essential diverse thinking is in meeting needs and nurturing a world where unity flourishes amidst differences (Maslow, 1943). Her legacy persists, urging us all to adopt the principles of empathy and care that transcend societal divides, strengthen safety and connections, and inspire purposeful exploration and growth.

Back to Granny

Tragedy struck when Granny perished in a house fire, a devastating loss that left an aching void in my life. We often shared beautiful conversations, where she imparted a piece of wisdom that still resonates deeply within me: "Mija," she began—affectionately meaning daughter or loved one— "When you find love that fills your heart every day, ensure they love you more than you love them."She continued, emphasizing that I should believe I deserve all the good life has to offer, just as everyone else does. Delivering her eulogy was among the hardest things I have ever done. However, it felt essential in so many ways—a final gift to the woman who had shaped my understanding of unconditional love and kindness. In the wake of her death, my mother and uncle revealed the burdens she had carried silently: the struggles of an immigrant, the challenges of being a woman without formal education, the weight of her heritage, and the scars from a marriage gone bad. At first, I was crushed, believing she had somehow not trusted me with her past. My uncle explained that she specifically asked him to hide her story from me; it was unimportant to her. What mattered most was that I learned empathy and compassion, regardless of others' circumstances. She wanted me to embrace life without the stain of hatred or prejudice, and walk my path guided by love and understanding. In today's 'scrubbing' world, where we strive to understand and manage grief over losing a language that reflects inclusivity and respect, my grandmother's principles remind me that our true character shines through our actions and how we treat one another. Her legacy carries forward in my heart, urging me to continue her mission of caring for others and fostering kindness in a world that often feels divided.

Lastly, there were many days during my childhood when I would come crying to my grandmother after my cousins wouldn't let me play football because I was a girl or when my mother wouldn't let me wear

pants to school. Her response was always the same: She wiped away my tears, speaking to me in Spanish.

"Did they take away your birthday?"

"No, Granny."

"Now, who loves you more than anyone, no matter what?"

"You, Granny."

Let us remind ourselves that societal restrictions do not determine our value in a world that may try to dictate our worth and abilities. Stand firm in the face of adversity and allow the love you carry to empower you to rise above. Together, we can create a more inclusive and accepting environment for everyone. Let us champion the spirit of love and resilience!

BTW:
I still have my birthday.

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FACULTY VOICES

This section of the Chronicle is dedicated to recognizing our amazing faculty body's contributions to their 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.

Chris Tex |Department of Health Sciences

Dr. Chris Tex received the 1st Annual Clifford Blizzard Award at the 2025 Culture of Care Summit for passionate care and creative excellence for his "Passion Play! Self-care Through Music" presentation.

Shannon Harris| Department of Health Sciences

Dr. Shannon Harris, an assistant professor for the Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management (BSHIM) program at UAGC, was interviewed on air by Janice Rogers, anchor for WBRC Fox 6 News in Birmingham, Alabama, on blood clots and blood clot awareness month. She is a thrombassador for the National Blood Clot Alliance, whose role is to build community partnerships, promote awareness, and provide education on blood clots. Watch her interview here!

Charlie Minnick | Department of Advanced Management
Alexa Dunne | Articulation & Prior Learning Assessment

In March 2025, Dr. Charlie Minnick, *Assistant Dean,* and Alexa Dunne, Associate Director, Articulation & Prior Learning Assessment, collaborated with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's (CAEL) Dr. Scott Campbell, Vice President, Higher Education Partnerships, and Doug Heckman, Vice President, Partnerships & Development, to present the session "Empowering Student Success through Credit for Prior Learning: Industry Insights and Best Practices" at the 2025 UPCEA conference, in Denver, CO. Their session covered industry data on the benefits of credit for prior learning (CPL) for students, faculty, and institutions, and specifics of how CPL is facilitated at UAGC. CPL was discussed in multiple sessions as schools see more adult learners seeking validation of experiential learning from their work and life experiences.

UAGC has a fantastic CPL (nontraditional credit) policy, seeing an average of 19% of UAGC undergraduate, degree-seeking students, in AY21-AY24, earn at least one non-traditional credit (source: OIE internal report, 2024) compared to the industry average of 11% (Source: CAEL, WICHE, 2020).

Darla Branda | Department of Health Sciences

Dr. Darla Branda has been selected to serve as a peer reviewer for the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM).

Earning CAHIIM accreditation signifies that an academic program meets high-quality standards that prepare students for entry-level work in the health information profession and assures continuous quality and monitoring of programs. The peer reviewer evaluates a program's compliance with the CAHIIM accreditation standards during formal site visits. Serving in this role will allow Dr. Branda to contribute to her profession and learn best practices from peer institutions.

NEW FACULTY INTRODUCTIONS

LaDelia Jordan | Department of Technology Studies

Greetings! With over 20 years of experience in software engineering, data analytics, and online teaching, I am passionate about fostering student success in diverse and non-traditional learning environments. I hold a Master of Science in advanced data analytics with a concentration in management from the University of North Texas and a Bachelor of Science in computer science with a minor in mathematics and statistics from Louisiana Tech University. Throughout my career, I have designed and delivered practitioner-focused courses leveraging the latest technologies and industry trends. My teaching interests include Python programming, data analytics, machine learning, and business analytics. I have extensive experience with learning management systems such as Canvas, Moodle, and Blackboard, and I specialize in creating interactive and accessible online learning experiences. Professionally, I work as a Principal Business Analytics Advisor at Cigna, leading advanced analytics initiatives to identify high-performing healthcare providers and enhance network efficiency. Previously, I have held roles as Senior Data Analyst and Manager of Software Engineering at UnitedHealth Group/Optum.

Beyond my professional work, I am deeply involved in my community, as a Girl Scout troop leader for 13 years, and as a passionate advocate for autism awareness. Outside of work, I cherish time with my husband and our four children. We love creating magical memories at Disney World, and my children are actively involved in extracurricular activities. One of my children is autistic, and my advocacy for autism awareness remains close to my heart. As Temple Grandin once said, *"I am different, not less."* I believe in the power of diversity and strive to create an inclusive learning environment where every student feels valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their academic and professional goals.

Tony Emetu | Department of Advanced Management

Hello. I hold a Doctor of Management degree from the University of Maryland Global Campus, a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Education degrees from Georgia Southern University, and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree from Troy University. I am the Founder and Lead Consultant at Scholarly Strategies Consulting Firm, LLC. I am also an adjunct professor of business administration at Jarvis Christian University and a business administration faculty member at Mitchell Community College. During my 11-year career in higher education, I served as department chair of accounting and business technologies and program coordinator of the entrepreneurship program at Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Before those roles, I completed stints as a medical office administration instructor, program chair of office administration, division director of professional careers, and associate professor of business administration at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina. A former dissertation chair in business administration, I have produced two peer-reviewed publications related to management strategies, submitted an additional two manuscripts for potential

publication, served as an expert reviewer for two peer-reviewed journals, presented research at several national conferences, completed a term as faculty scholar chair and proposal reviewer for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and assistant editor for the North Carolina Journal of Teaching Innovation (NCJTI). My research interests include management strategies in higher education and teaching and learning at community colleges.

Karen Coombs | Department of Technology Studies

Greetings. I am excited to join the University of Arizona Global Campus. I bring over 20 years of experience in software development, leadership, and project quality management, and one year in academia. Currently, I teach systems analysis and design at the College of Southern Nevada and mentor students in software development projects. Additionally, I work full-time as a Quality Assurance leader at VF Corporation, supporting digital initiatives for multiple brands, including The North Face, Vans, and Timberland.

My academic background includes research on cybersecurity risks in DNA data storage. I am passionate about integrating real-world industry practices into the classroom to equip students with practical and career-ready skills. I look forward to contributing to the university's mission and engaging with students in meaningful ways.

Latonya Dennis | Department of Technology Studies

Hello. My interest in technology started in grade school. While completing my degrees, I spent decades in the private and public sectors, gaining experience as a hiring manager and IT consultant. Today, I am an artificial intelligence expert passionate about helping people advance and improve their livelihoods to benefit from the proliferation of robotics, artificial intelligence, and automation. My research focused on the impacts of disruptive technologies on lower-skilled workers, resulting in job loss, widening wage gaps, and the societal influences that exacerbate underemployment and unemployment.

I am an entrepreneur, educator, and strategist with a human-centered approach to work. I earned my Ph.D. in technology and innovation management with a specialization in computer science. I was inducted into the prestigious 2024 National University President's Circle after earning several awards, a 4.0 GPA, and the dissertation poster of the year for my research on technology job loss associated with AI. My research is both a warning cry and a message of hope, urging people to pay attention to technology trends and continue learning because no one is exempt from the catalytic change of disruptive technologies. I am excited about being part of the faculty community and supporting students in the Master of Science in technology management at the Forbes School of Business and Technology! I live in Atlanta with my family.

Krista Whipple | Department of Professional Studies

Hello. I hold a Doctor of Business Administration with a finance cognate from Liberty University, a Master of Science in predictive analytics from Northwestern University, and a Master of Business Administration with a concentration in finance from Wake Forest University. I have managed auto and commercial vehicle insurance portfolios for over 30 years at Progressive, Kemper, and Root, and I now serve as a director of state management at GEICO. For my contributions to the industry, I was awarded the 2024 Society of Insurance Research Smith & Mangum Award. I currently reside in Northeast Ohio and enjoy teaching various group fitness classes for fun mental breaks.

Richard Sarabia | Department of Professional Studies

Greetings. I have a Master of Arts in Industrial and Technical Studies as well as a Doctor of Business Administration. My professional background includes 18 years of supply chain and logistics management within the areas of automotive, technology, food, retail, distribution, transportation, and corporate training. This includes the management of reverse logistics centers, facility operations, transportation planning, and hazardous materials management. My professional academic background spans 12 years, including teaching and program development for both on-ground and online Supply Chain and Logistics Management courses.

I was the co-recipient of the 2022 Miami Dade College President's Innovation Fund for AI for Business Innovation and Sustainability. This academic work was cited in EDUCAUSE 2024, and I was the 2017 Educator of the Year with the Greater Kendall Business Association.

C. Ellen Washington | Department of Research

Hello. I am currently a Senior Associate Faculty and Area Faculty Chair at the University of Phoenix. Formerly, I was a core faculty member in the BA Psychology Program at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Previously, I was the Director of STEM Continuing Education at Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, CA. Before joining Fielding, I was the Assistant Director of Leadership Development and Scholar-in-Residence at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC. My foundation for leadership in higher education comes from my seven years as Chair of the Department of Psychology and Chair of the IRB Committee at Saint Augustine's University in Raleigh, NC. I hold a PhD in Industrial Psychology, a Master of Arts in Psychology from the Georgia School of Professional Psychology, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Arkansas. I am a graduate of the OURS Fellowship Program at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, where I earned a Post Doc Certificate in Academic Leadership. My current research interests are leadership development for minorities in STEM and organizational change.

I have completed the African American Board Leadership Institute and am a graduate of Leadership Raleigh and Emerging Leaders both of which are directed by the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce. I am a Goodman Fellow having completed the Leadership Triangle Emerging Leaders Program. I am also an avid proponent for diversity in the workplace, and leadership and social competencies. I have published articles in the Oxford University Public Policy Journal and the International Journal of Business and Social Science. My hobbies include reading, collecting art, international travel, attending music festivals, and following the world of fashion.

Maureen Maycheco | School of General Studies

Hello. I am a first-generation college graduate with a Master of Arts in International and Intercultural Communication from the University of Denver and a Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of California Davis. I have spent over 15 years blending my communications, marketing, and leadership expertise to help organizations tell their stories with authenticity and impact. My professional experience spans nonprofit leadership, people-centered strategies, government work, and entrepreneurial ventures through my agency, Loop and Honey, where I specialize in building connections and fostering belonging. A passionate storyteller, I bring a human-centered approach to teaching, empowering students to think critically, embrace creativity, and develop communication skills that foster understanding and connection in today's diverse, global landscape. As a professor, I believe in creating a supportive, inclusive environment where students feel valued and inspired to explore the power of communication. I approach teaching with my signature "supportive Aunty" vibe, emphasizing collaboration, curiosity, and real-world application of communication principles.

When I am not solving puzzles, you will find me adventuring outdoors, playing volleyball, or hanging out with my pack of rescue dogs. I also serve on the City of Aurora Immigrant and Refugee Commission and love good coffee, cooking with my ancestors, and gardening.

Taylor Charles | Department of Technology Studies

Hello. I am an accomplished Network Security Engineer with a proven track record in the computer networking and cybersecurity industry. Holding several advanced degrees, including a Master of Science in Information Technology, a Master of Science in Information Security, and a Ph.D. in Information Technology. With extensive experience at organizations like IBM, Cisco, Fidelity Investments, and Verizon, Taylor has successfully led large-scale projects and implemented advanced security measures. As an associate faculty member in Cyber Security, I am passionate about educating the next generation of IT professionals, bringing real-world scenarios into the classroom to enrich learning experiences.

Lisa Lamb | Department of Research
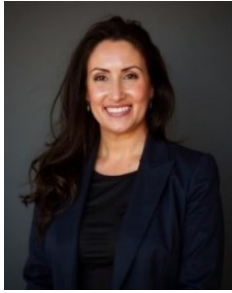
Greetings. I hold a PhD from UAGC, a Master of Arts in Psychology, Mediation, and Conflict Management from the University of the Rockies, a Bachelor of Arts in Social and Criminal Justice, specializing in forensics, from Ashford University, a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and Leadership for Student Success from Walden University and a Graduate Certificate in Organizational Management from the American Public University System.

I have twenty-seven years of experience in diverse teaching, advocacy, and leadership scenarios working with children, youth, and adults, including as a community college instructor in the Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language program, tutoring students in literacy and numeracy at various learning levels. Before formally becoming an educator, most of my professional background was working in the justice system and healthcare industries, such as a district and juvenile court clerk, intellectual property (corporate) paralegal, mediator, Esthetician, and business owner.

Glenn Purcell | Department of Organizational Studies

Greetings. I was born in Massachusetts, but I currently work in Cleveland, Ohio, as a chief financial officer for a privately owned manufacturing company. I earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, a Master of Business Administration, and a Master of Science in Accountancy while attending college in Massachusetts. I have four children, 2 boys and 2 girls, who range in age from 14 to 30. In my (limited) spare time, I enjoy sports, particularly European Football.

Natalie Williams | Department of Organizational Studies

Hello. I hold a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's in public administration from Strayer University. I am a certified Executive Coach and Professional Development Coach. I am deeply committed to empowering leaders and teams to unlock their full potential and deliver exceptional results. My top strengths include strategic leadership, results-driven execution, accountability, continuous learning, and innovative thinking. I have over 25 years of experience shaping transformative multi-channel business strategies in Fortune 20 communications and technology organizations. I specialize in designing and delivering high-impact development programs that drive organizational growth and employee engagement.

As an accomplished professional speaker, curriculum architect, and workshop facilitator, I seek to inspire individuals and teams to achieve their highest potential. I am the author of The CORE Method:

Guide to Purpose-Driven Results, a proven framework for achieving measurable, purpose-driven outcomes.

Dale Fodness | Department of Professional Studies

Hello. For nearly three decades, I have been teaching marketing, management, and business analytics—online and in the classroom, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, in the U.S. and internationally—driven by a deep interest in how people think, make decisions, and create impact through business. I hold a PhD in Marketing from Florida State University, an MBA from the University of South Dakota, and a BS in Psychology from the University of Iowa. Alongside my academic work, I have run a consulting firm for over two decades, helping organizations use data, insight, and strategy to make better decisions. I am especially passionate about data visualization and storytelling as a tool for leadership—and about advancing responsible business and sustainability through education and practice.

I've been designing and teaching online courses since back when "asynchronous learning" needed to be defined in every syllabus—and I still find joy in building spaces where students connect, engage, and grow. Whether online or in the classroom, I strive to create inclusive, dynamic learning environments where students feel supported, challenged, and inspired. I believe teaching is one of the most powerful ways to keep learning, and I'm always energized by the unique perspectives students bring to the conversation.

Outside the classroom, I'm a curious gardener, a devoted home cook who finds peace in the kitchen, and a lifelong seeker of big questions and small joys.

Kimberly Gayfield | Department of Organizational Studies

Hello UAGC. I hold an MBA from LeTourneau University and bring over 20 years of corporate experience in the Human Resources field, specializing in Compensation and Benefits. I also have two years of experience teaching at the collegiate level. Currently, I am pursuing my doctorate at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX. I live in Spring, TX, a suburb just outside of Houston, and am a proud mother of two—my son is in college, and my daughter is in high school. Additionally, I serve on the board of directors for a non-profit organization. I'm passionate about learning, growing, and evolving, and I'm excited about the opportunity to contribute to the UAGC community.

Ryan Little | Department of Technology Studies

I've had the pleasure of calling Colorado home for the past 26 years. My wife works as a contract manager in the healthcare industry, and we have two children who are currently attending the University of Colorado Boulder—Go Buffs! When not teaching or working in technology, I love spending time outdoors, snowboarding, hiking, catching live music, watching movies, and cheering on my favorite sports teams, especially football and hockey.

Professionally, I bring over 30 years of experience in the Information Technology industry. I've held various roles ranging from hands-on engineering and technical positions to client-facing roles like technical account manager and solutions architect, as well as leadership positions including manager and Field CTO. I hold a bachelor's degree in computer information systems from Minnesota State University – Mankato and a master's in systems engineering from Regis University in Denver, CO. My career has given me a strong blend of technical expertise and business strategy, which I am passionate about sharing with my students. In the classroom, I aim to bridge the gap between theory and practical application, helping students develop technical skills and professional abilities like problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. I am excited to see students grow, gain confidence, and prepare to succeed in today's dynamic and fast-paced technology landscape.

Sally Traft Lozada | School of General Studies

Hello. I am honored to be among the new faculty members at UAGC! My career has had many doors unexpectedly opening to provide experiences and opportunities that have allowed me to grow and learn. My first classroom was in the Peace Corps, teaching English in East Africa. Higher education became my home for the next 20 years, gathering administrative experience but always keeping one foot in the classroom. I'm currently in my fourth year serving as a high school principal. I still dedicate time to teaching AP and honors English.

My husband and I have raised seven children, proudly having survived five in college at the same time. We spent many seasons traveling to cheer for their football and softball teams, as well as a lifetime of having full hearts as they have grown and flown. I live in Ohio and thoroughly enjoy time around the US, visiting the kids (two of whom are in Arizona). I have visited all 50 states and 5 of 7 continents (gives you an idea of what two things are at the top of the bucket list). I'm delighted to be here at UAGC, supporting and guiding students to accomplish their educational goals.

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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