

# The UAGC Chronicle

Summer Issue 25/26



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
**GLOBAL CAMPUS**

10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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# 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

### HAPPY 10<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY TO THE UAGC CHRONICLE!

*"What began as a simple effort to spotlight faculty accomplishments has grown into a vibrant, trusted publication that fosters community, celebrates innovation, and keeps the spirit of teaching excellence alive."*

Kingsley Jackson, Academic Issues Liaison, Student Affairs  
(One of the original editors of the Faculty Focus)



Over the last 10 years, The UAGC Chronicle has evolved from a small internal faculty newsletter into a meaningful tool for connection, recognition, academic research, and community-building across UAGC. The development of this publication reflects our institution's commitment to amplifying faculty voices and strengthening the academic community. By reinforcing transparency and creating a platform for scholarship, the Chronicle is another vehicle for innovation that supports UAGC as a whole.

When the UAGC Chronicle started as the *Faculty Focus* in July 2015, its mission statement was:

*This publication highlights the many success stories of our faculty and aims to keep the broader academic community informed about the events, initiatives, and people that help shape our university.*

Despite changes in name, leadership, and structure, the publication has remained committed to its mission. *The Chronicle* has also expanded its reach by embracing higher academic standards for contributors, fostering cross-institutional collaboration, and strengthening our partnership with the University of Arizona through integration with the University of Arizona journal publication platform, [Janeway](#).

When I joined the Chronicle team six years ago, the publication was modest in format and design but had great potential as a space where faculty could celebrate their accomplishments and feel seen by their colleagues. That potential, coupled with the support and perseverance of faculty contributors, academic leadership, and passionate staff, allowed the Chronicle to go from a simple PDF to a journal-style publication that doesn't just reflect our faculty but helps unite the UAGC community overall.

Every goal we set, whether it was increasing readership, developing quality content, or fostering collaboration, was rooted in the purpose of amplifying faculty voices and strengthening the academic community here at UAGC. And with each issue, we've watched those initial goals become standards.

In this 10th anniversary issue, that spirit continues. You'll read about innovative teaching practices from Faculty Affairs team members, Nicole Egelhofer-Wells and Diana Boggan, who dive into applicable ways to incorporate accessibility in the classroom, removing barriers to learning and providing each student with the support and resources they need to be successful. Meanwhile, associate faculty member, Dr.

Carlos Carrillo, offers meaningful scholarship about Mexican American students' perception of the American higher-education system and how a better understanding of cultural nuances can support instructional practices and student success. And Stephani Kilby, Director of Student Success, sends a call to action to the UAGC community to bring commencement energy into our daily work.

These contributions remind us not only of the work being done, but of the people doing it. The UAGC Chronicle has evolved to become more than a publication about faculty. It is now a platform that uplifts the experiences, perspectives, and shared purpose of our entire UAGC collective.

I'm incredibly proud of this publication, and you should be too. Every issue reflects your work, your impact, and your success.

Happy 10th anniversary to the UAGC Chronicle. I can't wait to see what the next 10 years will bring!

Sincerely,

**Jackie Bullis**

Lead Faculty Support and Classroom Consultant, The UAGC Chronicle Editor

## UNIVERSITY, PROGRAM, CURRICULUM, AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

### 2024-2025 UAGC FACULTY EXPERIENCE SURVEY RESULTS AND TAKEAWAYS

**Cole McFarren, Associate Director, Academic Technology and Innovation**



#### Overview

One of the challenges of adequately supporting a fully remote and mostly adjunct faculty workforce is the ability to gauge their needs, well-being, and sentiments. Understanding the faculty experience is more critical than ever as UAGC strives to empower our faculty to best support our students. The UAGC Faculty Experience Survey offers academic leadership the opportunity to check in with this essential population annually across a breadth of topics to help inform and prioritize initiatives for the upcoming year.

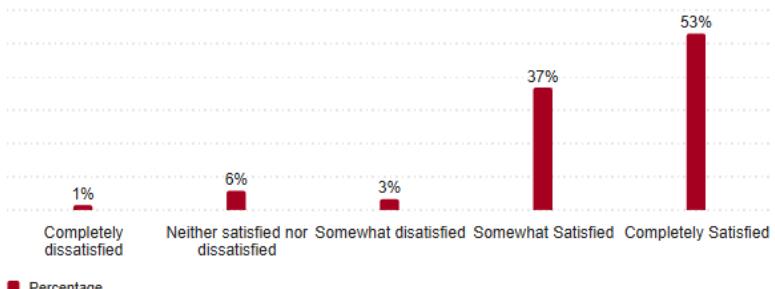
The academic year 2024-2025 marks the seventh year that UAGC full-time and associate faculty have completed an annual faculty experience survey. Earlier survey iterations focused on classroom technology, while surveys over the last four years have expanded into a more comprehensive faculty

experience. This year's survey was created with input from Faculty Affairs, Academic Affairs, and approval from the Faculty and Student Success subcommittee of the Faculty Council. This survey edition received the most responses yet, with 1,018 responses or a roughly 49% response rate. Responses came from 54 full-time faculty and 964 associate faculty.

### **Faculty Satisfaction with Online Teaching Tools**

UAGC faculty continue to be highly satisfied with their classroom and overall experience. 53% of faculty were completely satisfied with their classroom experience, with 37% somewhat satisfied. Canvas technology, such as Announcements, Speedgrader, the Gradebook, and Canvas Inbox, continues

Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with the UAGC Canvas classroom experience.



to receive high satisfaction ratings. Similar to previous years' results, areas of improvement include Discussions, Waypoint, Signalz, Turnitin, and mobile experience. Faculty also shared positive feedback about the accuracy, length, and alignment of rubrics used to assess student work in Waypoint. In open-ended comments, faculty voiced concerns about a lack of AI detection and a desire for clearer policies on AI usage. Survey results also indicated interest in exploring ways to improve the discussion forum experience and new ways to engage our student population.

### **Institutional Culture and Faculty Engagement**

When asked to what extent they are dissatisfied or satisfied with their experiences as a UAGC faculty member, faculty ranked their average satisfaction level at 7.86/10. This is a slight decrease from the survey conducted in 2023 (8.22), but comparable to 2022 (7.84).

A majority of UAGC faculty claimed that they feel somewhat knowledgeable about the University's policies and resources and rate high levels of satisfaction from tech support, Library, Writing Center, tutoring, Faculty Scheduling, and especially in support from their Program Chairs or Lead Faculty. When provided opportunities to indicate what types of training they preferred for the upcoming year, the two highest rated categories were best practices in online teaching and feedback strategies, with Culture of Care rating lowest as an area of interest for professional development. Faculty rely heavily on the weekly Faculty Digest and developmental- and program-related emails, while social media seems to be one of the lowest-rated sources of information.

In line with results from last year, faculty's top motivations continue to be serving our student population and being a part of a learning community. Benefits, ratio of compensation to workload, and contributing to their field through research were less significant motivators. Faculty agree that UAGC

has taken significant steps to create a culture of care within the classroom, and they feel capable of facilitating the UAGC Culture of Care pillars. The vast majority of faculty surveyed are not involved with program review or the Faculty Council, and the level of interest in involvement when questioned was essentially to continue at a lower level of involvement.

When asked how UAGC faculty facilitate Culture of Care in the classroom, the following themes were common in the responses we received:

- flexibility and understanding
- personalized engagement
- encouragement and motivation
- inclusivity and respect
- academic support
- flexible policies
- proactive communication
- creating a supportive environment
- empathy and compassion

Another set of questions encouraged faculty to reflect on some of the most frequent barriers they see to student success and suggest ways to remedy them. Common barriers to student success included external responsibilities, time management, need for additional faculty and writing support, and general lack of academic preparedness. To combat these barriers, suggestions included additional faculty and writing support, expanded tutoring services, increased advising support, and potentially restructuring courses or encouraging further engagement.

### **Actionable Insights and Future Directions**

The 2024–2025 UAGC Faculty Experience Survey offers valuable insights into a diverse and distributed faculty body's evolving needs, motivations, and challenges. While overall satisfaction remains strong, the data highlights key areas for continued investment. Faculty remain deeply committed to student success and fostering the Culture of Care. As UAGC moves forward, these findings will inform strategic decisions aimed at enhancing both the faculty and student experience. By listening to faculty voices and acting on their feedback, the university reinforces its commitment to a collaborative, responsive, and student-centered learning environment. Continued dialogue, transparency, and innovation will be essential as we collectively shape the future of online education. Complete results from the survey are available in the [2024-2025 Faculty Experience Survey Result Slides.](#)

## RESEARCH CORNER

The research corner is a space in the *UAGC Chronicle* dedicated to exploring innovative ideas related to teaching and learning. We want instructors to share their research interests and pursuits in this space. In addition to fostering a community of educators eager to exchange insights, the research corner is 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.

### CULTURAL DISCONNECT: MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Carlos Carrillo, Associate Faculty, Department of Professional Studies**



Mexican American students navigate higher education amid profound cultural disconnects, educator biases, and systemic barriers that reflect broader structures of exclusion. Drawing on my lived experience as a Mexican American and as a Doctor of Education graduate with distinction from Northern Arizona University, I have seen how dominant higher education environments often marginalize Mexican American cultural values and silence our voices. This article centers on Mexican American student perceptions and lived realities, exploring how cultural values shape educational experiences and how educator perceptions hinder or support student success. By uncovering these dynamics, I call for institutional transformation beyond surface inclusion to authentically embrace Mexican American epistemologies, dismantle systemic barriers, and foster genuine belonging.

#### Cultural Values and Educational Impact

Traditional Mexican American cultural values such as *familismo* (strong family orientation), traditional gender roles, *religiosidad* (religiosity), and *respeto* (respect) (Morgan et al., 2013) profoundly shape how Mexican American students approach education and career decisions. However, conflicts often arise when these values encounter educational environments designed around different cultural norms. For example, *familismo* may be misunderstood in the college context when institutions fail to accommodate students' family-centered obligations, interpreting family commitments as distractions from academic

focus rather than vital sources of support. Similarly, *respeto* emphasizes respectful relationships, and faculty may interpret cultural deference as disengagement or lack of participation, leading to misjudgments of student motivation.

When Mexican American students do not see their culture and values represented or respected in educational settings, they may disengage academically. Perceived discrimination arising from these cultural misunderstandings is significantly linked to decreased academic motivation and lower GPA among Mexican American students (Alfaro et al., 2009; Núñez, 2009; Sy & Romero, 2019).

Understanding how cultural values intersect with discriminatory experiences is essential to addressing educational disparities within this community.

Many Mexican American students also develop impostor syndrome, feeling pressured to assimilate into the dominant culture instead of fully embracing their cultural identity in academic spaces (Peteet et al., 2015; Cokley et al., 2013). This cultural disconnect frequently leads students to prioritize immediate family responsibilities, often through work in traditional blue-collar or service industries, over higher education pursuits. Recent research continues to highlight how these competing demands, coupled with systemic barriers, reinforce cycles that limit educational advancement in Mexican American communities (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Núñez, 2009; Tienda & Haskins, 2011).

### **Educator Perceptions and Expectations**

Mexican American students continue to face significant achievement gaps and underrepresentation in higher education compared to their Anglo American and African American peers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), the six-year graduation rate for Hispanic students at four-year institutions is approximately 52%, considerably lower than the 65% rate for White students. Likewise, Pew Research Center (2021) reports persistent disparities in college enrollment and degree completion for Mexican American and broader Hispanic populations. These statistics underscore ongoing challenges in educational equity.

Research on teacher expectancy effects demonstrates that educators' perceptions and instructional decisions profoundly influence student outcomes. Foundational studies (Babad & Taylor, 1992; Rosenthal, 1985) established the powerful impact of teacher expectations on academic achievement, and contemporary research (Jussim & Harber, 2005) confirms these effects remain relevant today. Mexican American students are particularly aware of teacher expectations, which directly affect their engagement and academic performance (Bae et al., 2008). However, traditional research often overlooks student perspectives. It fails to address how cultural incongruities, such as curricula and instructional methods that do not reflect Mexican American cultural values, contribute to student disengagement and attrition (Solórzano & Yosso, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). It is important to note that while recent empirical research isolating Mexican American-specific experiences with teacher expectancy and cultural incongruity is limited largely due to data aggregation within broader Latino research, the foundational and contemporary studies cited provide strong evidence of these dynamics. Emerging institutional efforts offer practical models to address these challenges.

Institutions that actively embrace cultural diversity and adopt culturally sustaining practices foster environments where Mexican American students can thrive without sacrificing their cultural identity. The University of Arizona Global Campus exemplifies this approach through its *Culture of Care* initiative, emphasizing student-centered support and culturally sustaining pedagogy that acknowledges familial and community responsibilities, helping students overcome systemic barriers (University of Arizona Global Campus, 2025). Similarly, many Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) prioritize cultural celebrations, targeted mentorship programs, and inclusive curricula, resulting in improved retention and graduation rates for Mexican American students (Every Learner Everywhere, 2024; Excelencia in Education, 2021). Moving beyond superficial diversity efforts toward authentic inclusion rooted in cultural respect and equity, these institutions demonstrate how Mexican American students can be empowered to achieve academic success and a strong sense of belonging.

Recent institutional data from the University of Arizona Global Campus indicate that undergraduate students, including Hispanic learners broadly, experience a six-year graduation rate of approximately 20%, notably below national averages. Graduate programs at UAGC demonstrate higher completion rates, with about 55–60% of students graduating within three years. Although data specific to Mexican American students are not publicly disaggregated, these figures highlight persistent challenges Hispanic students face at UAGC and underscore the critical importance of the university's *Culture of Care* initiative and culturally sustaining practices designed to improve student outcomes.

## Conclusion

Higher education institutions must move beyond superficial diversity efforts and fundamentally transform their practices to dismantle the systemic barriers uniquely impacting Mexican American students. These barriers include both visible obstacles, such as financial hardship and underrepresentation, and hidden forces like cultural erasure, implicit bias, and curricula that marginalize Mexican American histories and epistemologies. Faculty have a pivotal role in this transformation by embracing culturally sustaining pedagogy that centers on Mexican American values such as *familismo*, *respeto*, and *religiosidad*, which have been historically marginalized or erased in dominant educational narratives. This commitment requires deep curricular decolonization, integrating Latinx intellectual traditions and community knowledge as core, rather than peripheral, content. For instance, institutions like the University of Arizona have effectively embedded Mexican American Studies within their core curricula, validating student identities and fostering greater academic engagement.

Institutions must institutionalize mentorship networks that connect Mexican American students with faculty and leaders who share and affirm their cultural identity, fostering a sense of belonging critical for academic persistence. Support systems should be intentionally designed with an understanding of familial obligations and economic realities, offering flexible policies that honor *familismo* without penalizing students for prioritizing family. Specific examples of such policies include flexible attendance options, hybrid or online course offerings, and structured family engagement programs, as successfully implemented by institutions like Texas A&M University (San Antonio) and Solano Community College. For instance, Texas A&M University (San Antonio) has developed comprehensive family-oriented

initiatives, including a family engagement office that hosts family orientation, bilingual seminars, and ongoing community building events, alongside their Educare San Antonio program, which provides after-hours childcare critical to student-parents attending evening courses. Similarly, Solano Community College offers robust support through its Early Childhood Center, Parent Cafés, and extensive wraparound services via its Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS) and NextUp initiatives.

These structural reforms demonstrate concrete commitments to culturally responsive practices that genuinely support Mexican American students' academic success and holistic well-being. As a first-generation college graduate, raised within a Mexican American family whose values of *familismo*, *respeto*, and *religiosidad* profoundly shaped my educational journey, I deeply understand these students' lived experiences. I navigated the isolating challenges of higher education systems that often lacked meaningful representation or institutional understanding of my cultural identity. Programs like those at Texas A&M University (San Antonio) and Solano Community College would have significantly reduced barriers for students like me; students who simultaneously manage family obligations, cultural expectations, and the often-invisible struggles of impostor syndrome and systemic inequities. By implementing and expanding these proactive, transformative strategies, institutions not only validate the experiences of Mexican American students but also create pathways that allow them to thrive academically, culturally, and professionally, thus genuinely addressing the equity gaps that persist in American higher education.

This transformative approach demands courageous self-reflection from educators and administrators, challenging implicit biases and dismantling deficit narratives that have long pathologized Mexican American students. Educators at institutions like California State University campuses participate in mandatory culturally sustaining pedagogy training aimed explicitly at recognizing and operationalizing *respeto* in interactions with students. By recognizing cultural identity as a wellspring of resilience and academic strength rather than an obstacle, higher education can become a space where Mexican American students are not merely present but empowered to thrive and lead.

While American higher education serves a rich tapestry of cultures, true equity requires actively centering those historically silenced, including Mexican American students, not as exclusion but as a necessary corrective. Multicultural awareness alone cannot substitute for authentic inclusion that validates and amplifies marginalized epistemologies. Mexican American faculty and community leaders can lead continuing education initiatives to bridge cultural divides and equip educators to authentically connect curricula to Mexican American traditions and values.

For Mexican American students to succeed in higher education and beyond, educators and institutions must confront visible and hidden systemic barriers that uniquely affect their educational journeys. Concrete structural changes, such as curricular integration of Mexican American histories, flexible policies respecting *familismo*, and institution-wide training on culturally sustaining communication practices, are necessary first steps. This requires a collective, conscious effort to create environments where cultural identity is recognized and valued as an asset, paving the way for equity, belonging, and academic excellence.

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## FIVE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Timothy Cedor, Faculty, Dallas College**



### Introduction

Innovation is the result of questioning conventional wisdom and then offering a new, common-sense approach to the accepted way of doing something (Njenga & Fourie, 2010). Hall and Lulich (2021) used research to narrow this definition in education by defining innovation as the entrepreneurial ideas leading to educational transformation. Many universities use the terms entrepreneurial, transformational, and innovation interchangeably in their strategic plans. Garrett (2021) simplifies this and defines innovation as simply something attempting to change the status quo for good. Educational innovation should be designed to support all learners; otherwise, it risks reinforcing existing

achievement gaps by primarily benefiting high-performing students while leaving struggling students behind. Five key principles should guide the facilitation of instructional innovation in higher education: (1) innovation should be grounded in reliable data; (2) it should emerge from collaboration among all educational stakeholders; (3) it must demonstrably benefit students rather than serve as a superficial enhancement; (4) it requires sustained, ongoing professional development for faculty; (5) innovation must be built on trust.

### **Innovation Must Be Based on Good Data**

Research has raised concerns about the reliability of data supporting claims that innovation in higher education is effective. Njenga and Fourie (2010) and Al-Imarah and Shield (2019) found a lack of robust data on whether technology is enhancing educational outcomes as purported. Selznik and Mayhew (2018) found it difficult to develop and validate an instrument that accurately measures innovative success. Barger et al. (2021), extending the work of previous studies, observed that the available data frequently lack clarity regarding what is being measured, making conclusions about the effectiveness of technological innovation questionable. As an example, a college may propose eliminating certain majors based on data that show these majors have low enrollment or are not in line with workforce data received from the state. The college may even go as far as eliminating these programs only to find later that the data surrounding these decisions was incomplete or unreliable. Strasser and Edwards (2017) stated that if data are the sole determinant of innovation success, educators must start asking better questions to obtain the correct data to make their conclusions. Otherwise, educators risk relying on flawed data to make overly conservative decisions that may hinder institutional growth, lead to stagnation or regression, or yield no long-term benefits.

### **Innovation Must be the Result of Collaboration Between All Education Shareholders**

According to Saula (2020), innovation is often the result of a crisis (real or perceived) in education. This leads to innovation that is often fast, cheap, and exciting, but rarely the product of collaboration between higher-level administrators and the teachers implementing innovation. Legislators, board members, parents, and taxpayers consume data to accurately assess the education system's effectiveness and validate the acquisition of money to pay for it. Still, teachers know data does not measure everything taking place in a classroom, and there is no effective test for measuring student well-being (Alexandrova, 2017). The current practice of implementing innovation begins at the administrative level and does not involve faculty or staff. Rarely, if ever, do administrators seek to truly understand if the innovation they want implemented is something the teachers feel will be effective or necessary to enhance student learning.

In 2020, COVID forced many colleges to implement technology-driven instructional innovation, but because of time constraints, faculty were not adequately consulted about what these innovations should include. When introduced to the innovation, faculty expressed concerns that the system was chosen based on administrative priorities rather than pedagogical effectiveness. Instructors found the innovation incompatible with their teaching methods and unsuited for their students' diverse learning

and socio-economic needs.

Collaboration helps ensure the correct innovation is chosen and provides other benefits. According to Laloux and Griffiths (2019), collaboration leads to experimentation, which makes innovations easier to find, and processes become easier to change as control is shared within the organization. Decision-making will take longer as responsibilities are shared, but campus buy-in increases, which is a major determining factor in the ultimate success of any innovation (Laloux & Griffiths, 2019).

### **Innovation Must be Beneficial to Students, Not Just Something Shiny**

Garrett (2021) concluded that for the past 22 years, “game-changing system-level innovation, tied to the instructional core, is largely absent” despite numerous claims that this innovation will be the one that changes everything (p. 10). Sotiriou et al. (2016) concluded that while reform initiatives, especially those involving technology, often promise greater effectiveness, they rarely lead to meaningful changes in classroom or school practices. Bartholomew et al. (2020) argue that for an innovative instructional method to be effective, it must meet seven specific criteria:

(1)[develop] novel approaches for planning and implementing design-based learning cycles, (2) [face] challenges with personalized learning, (3) [establish] methods for creating authentic and industry-driven learning experiences, (4) [address] challenges with open-ended learning, (5) [confront] concerns about competencies that are not measured through standardized assessments, (6) [struggle] with teacher burnout, and (7) [challenge] traditional school systems and facilities with integrated learning environments. (p. 2)

Olin College of Engineering in Massachusetts successfully innovated in all seven ways. For a novel approach, Olin uses iterative, project-based learning cycles where students tackle real-world problems from the start of their education. Courses are structured around continuous feedback, redesign, and reflection, fostering true design-thinking approaches. Olin then challenges students with personalized learning by allowing students to co-design parts of their curriculum. Next, Olin provides authentic and industry-driven learning by partnering students directly with companies like Google, Boeing, and Microsoft to solve industry problems. Even with these innovations, Olin students and faculty face challenges in defining success criteria, navigating uncertainty, and developing assessment models that capture nuanced learning, but they keep the lines of communication open to help face these challenges together. This led to another innovation where faculty had to develop alternative assessment methods, like reflective portfolios and peer evaluations, to capture those skills that testing does not always measure. Olin has also implemented an intense mentoring model since constant course redevelopment places a significant load on staff, requiring institutional strategies to mitigate fatigue. Finally, Olin’s campus design defies traditional classrooms by featuring flexible spaces, maker labs, and collaborative hubs that foster interdisciplinary and integrated learning environments (“Innovate,” n.d.).

### **Innovation Needs Ongoing and Continuing Professional Development for Faculty**

Professional development should be created around the core competencies that innovation should

enhance. Teachers should have core critical competencies, and their support system should be designed around continuous learning and developing these crucial competencies. According to Martin et al. (2019), these core critical competencies are: clarification of the teacher's role, effective course design, effective course management, teacher expertise, teacher access to a mentor, and teacher access to highly effective professional development.

Sellars (2020) argued that "understanding cultural differences and their importance in terms of emotional intensity" (p. 121) is fundamentally important to any future professional development. As institutions focus on improvements in diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is important to make sure these improvements meet the professors' cultural needs instead of just window dressing to appease the current demands of society. For example, an institution may encourage faculty to engage in professional development in understanding cultural differences but fail to address systemic issues such as unequal support for minority faculty or the lack of culturally relevant course offerings. As a result, professors from underrepresented backgrounds may feel that these efforts are symbolic gestures rather than genuine commitments to equity. This can lead to skepticism and frustration, as the lived experiences of this community remain unchanged. Authentic improvement through innovation involves embedding equity in institutional practices.

### **Innovation Must Be Built on Trust**

Perhaps the most important principle to remember is that none of the things discussed will work without building trust. Innovation is usually inspired by change, or the creation of change, within an institution, and according to Finn and Feldhaus (2021), organizational change is often viewed as a negative force. Because faculty members start from a negative standpoint regarding institutional change, institutions need to communicate well and build the trust of faculty members when supporting them in instructional innovation based on change. One effective way to build trust with faculty is to have collaborative relationships between instructional designers and faculty (Richardson et al., 2019). This means that having meaningful and authentic conversations with faculty about their practice as teachers, their students as learners, and their hopes and frustrations about both things is incredibly important (Carpenter & Fitzmaurice, 2018). Collaborative relationships allow faculty to relax, become more open, and have stronger buy-in (Richardson et al., 2019). Based on their research, Richardson et al. (2019) suggest the following four components to creating collaborative relationships leading to trust: getting to know the faculty as people, making sure that faculty know administration and other supports are there to help, showing faculty you care about them, and being respectful. Trust is the cornerstone of any collaborative effort, and corners should not be cut because building trust is a slow and sometimes sporadic process where even tiny missteps create incredibly difficult barriers to overcome.

### **Conclusion**

Educational innovation must be approached with deliberate care. It cannot succeed without a foundation of reliable data, collaborative decision-making, student-centered goals, continual professional development, and trust between partners. Institutions that rush innovation by adopting the

latest tools or strategies without consulting the people who implement them risk introducing change that is superficial at best or, worse, counterproductive. True innovation emerges not from urgency or trendiness, but from a deep, sustained commitment to equity, shared purpose, and continuous improvement. When innovation is grounded in evidence, guided by diverse voices, and supported by a culture of trust and learning, it holds the power to genuinely enhance education for all learners.

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## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT – TIPS AND RESOURCES

### MASTERING THE CLOCK: TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTORS

**Laura Sheneman, Associate Faculty, Department of Health Sciences**



Summer is one of the busiest seasons in my calendar. Our schedule fills up quickly with my daughter out of school for the summer and both of us involved in sports during the day. In addition to this, I am a freelance instructor, juggling multiple courses across institutions. This forces me to be intentional about using my time for my online instructor duties to avoid burnout. Over the years, I've learned that rigid scheduling doesn't work, especially in the summer, but thoughtful time-blocking by institution and strategic use of technology can make the difference between feeling overwhelmed and staying on track. In this article, I share the practices that help me create space for both student success and personal balance. While resources like Chris Croft's *Efficient Time Management* course and Jean Mandernach's "Ten Productivity Strategies Online Instructors Can Borrow from Entrepreneurs" informed my approach,

it's the day-to-day application of these ideas that has shaped how I teach during my busier times and how I stay sane doing it.

One way I protect my time during the summer is by automating the repetitive parts of online teaching so I can focus more on student engagement. Canvas makes this easier through tools like scheduled announcements and Waypoint comment libraries, allowing me to maintain consistent communication and feedback across courses without repeating the same actions daily. I also use [TeacherTool.AI](#) to quickly generate personalized feedback based on assignment rubrics and create email responses for common student questions. These tools help me stay organized and responsive across institutions. While automation is a core principle in Mandernach's (2021) productivity strategies, I've seen firsthand how combining technology with intentional planning can significantly ease the teaching load. This aligns with recent findings by Sluijs et al. (2023), who show that integrating learning analytics and AI tools can help faculty optimize time-management behavior and proactively identify workflow bottlenecks.

Additionally, clear, proactive communication early in the term significantly reduces the volume of repetitive questions from students later. Clarifying rubrics, expectations, and assignment instructions in advance—via written/video announcements or short overview messages—decreases confusion and helps students feel more confident. This allows instructors to spend less time troubleshooting and more time engaging meaningfully.

Lastly, flexibility is essential to managing multiple teaching roles effectively. I've learned that rigid schedules often lead to burnout, but a structured approach that leaves room to adapt helps me stay balanced and responsive. One practice that supports this is prioritizing high-impact tasks—like providing timely feedback or engaging in discussion boards—over low-yield administrative work. This reflects the 80/20 rule, which suggests that roughly 80% of outcomes often come from just 20% of focused effort. When I focus on the tasks that matter most, I see better outcomes for my students and less stress for myself. Time-blocking by institution is another strategy that adds structure without rigidity; it creates mental boundaries while still allowing me to shift my schedule if needed. Technology also plays a key role here, since automating repetitive tasks frees up space to focus on what needs my attention. These strategies mirror findings from Oyarzun et al. (2020), who emphasize that online instructors benefit from compartmentalized planning and flexibility to reduce cognitive overload. Croft (2016) and Mandernach (2021) both reinforce the importance of intentional prioritization and flexible routines, but it's these small, specific strategies that make the most significant difference in practice.

With intentional planning, Canvas and other technology tools, and effective time management principles, instructors can navigate even the busiest terms with clarity, confidence, and a little more breathing room.

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## **MAXIMIZING SUCCESS IN ONLINE LEARNING: THE POWER OF CONNECTION IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS**

**Kelvin Hicks, Associate Faculty, School of General Studies**



Online learning provides accessibility and flexibility, making education attainable for working adults, military personnel, and individuals returning to school after an extended break. However, despite its advantages, online learning can feel isolating if instructors do only the bare minimum—grading assignments, posting announcements, and facilitating discussions—without meaningful engagement.

As an online student, I experienced this firsthand. Many of my instructors followed their syllabus requirements but never went beyond that to create a welcoming or supportive environment. I often felt hesitant to reach out, fearing I was an inconvenience rather than a valued member of the class. This disconnect made learning feel transactional rather than transformative.

Now, as an educator, I prioritize ensuring my students feel seen, supported, and connected, even in a virtual setting. At the end of each course, I reach out to students who excelled academically and those who persevered despite challenges, ensuring they feel recognized and supported. One of the most effective ways to identify students who may need additional assistance is by reviewing their Week 1 Introduction Discussion Post. This initial submission often provides insight into their academic confidence, personal challenges, and learning goals. Students who express uncertainty, mention

difficulties with time management, or show hesitation about returning to school may benefit from early intervention.

Through weekly virtual lectures, personalized outreach, and other engagement strategies, I create an environment where students feel empowered rather than isolated. My teaching philosophy is rooted in a culture of care, reinforcing that education is not just about course content—it is about people.

## **BEST PRACTICES FOR INSTRUCTORS**

### **Create a Structured and Predictable Learning Experience**

One of the most important things I do for my students is to provide a clear and structured learning environment. I've found that students thrive when they know exactly what to expect, so I post weekly schedules, deadlines, and expectations upfront. Breaking complex assignments into smaller, manageable steps has been effective. Students often tell me that this approach reduces their stress and helps them stay on track.

I also incorporate multimedia tools, including videos and interactive materials, to make lessons more engaging. Many students have shared that these resources make learning complex concepts more accessible and enjoyable.

After struggling with a concept, one student told me that the video walkthrough I provided was “a game-changer” that finally made the material click.

### **Check In Regularly & Identify Students Who Need Support**

In the first week, I carefully review student introductions in the discussion board—not just for participation, but to identify those needing extra guidance or encouragement. This allows me to reach out before challenges escalate.

Throughout my courses, I prioritize periodic check-ins, often just a quick message asking how students are doing. These small gestures have proven invaluable, particularly for those who miss discussions or submit incomplete work. Many students express that knowing their professor genuinely cares motivates them to re-engage with the class. Simple outreach has led to students returning with renewed focus and commitment.

One student shared their appreciation in an email: *“Thank you, Professor Hicks, for working with me—for your patience and guidance. I would not have gotten through the class without your support, and I really appreciate you.”* This kind of feedback reinforces why I invest in connection—it’s not just about coursework; it’s about fostering an environment where students feel encouraged, supported, and empowered to succeed.

### **Encourage Optional Virtual Lectures**

I've introduced optional virtual lectures for students who want extra support. Since not everyone can attend a live session, I record sessions to provide flexibility. Many students have expressed that these recordings give them confidence heading into assignments and exams.

One student recently told me that attending a virtual Q&A helped them overcome a major learning hurdle, while another said watching recorded sessions was the reason they felt prepared for the final project. Offering these opportunities—even when optional—has boosted student engagement in ways I didn’t expect.

### **Go Beyond the Minimum Requirements**

Every week, I send motivational messages—simple reminders that they’re doing great and should keep pushing forward. It’s amazing how such a small gesture can resonate. I’ve had students reply, telling me those messages were exactly what they needed to stay encouraged.

At the end of each week, I send deadline reminders to help students stay on track. When final grades come in, I reach out to high-achieving students and those who overcame challenges. Celebrating their success helps build confidence and keeps them motivated as they progress in their academic journey.

One student, who had struggled early on, was shocked when I messaged them to acknowledge their progress. They told me that knowing their progress was recognized and valued made them feel like they truly belonged in the academic space.

### **Foster a Culture of Support & Accessibility**

Beyond course content, I strive to make students feel seen and valued. I am intentional in my outreach and ensure communication is personal—not just routine messages, but real encouragement tailored to their efforts.

I also promote peer collaboration through structured activities, helping students feel more connected. For example, I guide students toward using the Global Campus Café for peer discussions beyond formal coursework. Whether they need advice on assignments, encouragement during challenging weeks, or simply a place to connect, this platform provides an open space to interact freely. One strategy I use is prompted discussion starters, where I encourage students to introduce themselves, share study tips, or discuss personal growth and resilience topics. This helps students feel more invested in their learning journey and builds a sense of belonging within the course. Some students shared that engaging with peers made them more confident, invested, and willing to contribute to discussions.

By promoting the Global Campus Café, I create opportunities for meaningful collaboration, helping students gain confidence, deepen their engagement, and feel supported in their academic journey.

### **Strengthening Connections in Online Learning**

Education should be transformational, not transactional. A strong virtual classroom is not built on content alone—it thrives on engagement, connection, and support. Students excel when they feel acknowledged and included; instructors must intentionally create those opportunities.

As faculty, we must commit to doing more than is required, ensuring every student feels empowered, encouraged, and connected. By fostering a Culture of Care, implementing personalized outreach, and embracing proactive engagement strategies, we set students up for long-term success in online learning.

## FROM ARC TO APPLICATION: ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES FOR UAGC COURSE FACILITATORS

**Nicole Egelhofer-Wells, Faculty Support Classroom Consultant, and Diana Boggan, Faculty Coaching and Development Specialist**



Accessibility in education involves removing barriers to learning and providing each student with the support and resources they need to be successful. While accessibility standards are often utilized to provide equitable learning experiences for students with physical and/or learning disabilities, all students benefit from consistent and intentional accessibility practices. As a learning community that prides itself on student-centered support, faculty and staff at the University of Arizona Global Campus (UAGC) have a shared responsibility to ensure that our virtual learning environments, resources, and teaching practices are accessible to our diverse student body.

### Compliance Versus Care

Recent efforts to promote accessibility practices at UAGC are in part spurred by an April 2024 change to Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The rule change requires all digital content (websites, mobile apps, PDFs, videos, audio files, documents, etc.) to comply with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 Level AA](#) by April 2027—April 2026 for public entities like UAGC with populations over 50,000.

To meet this deadline, UAGC and public entities like it are implementing digital accessibility plans, which include auditing all digital assets, training staff and content creators on accessibility guidelines, implementing and testing accessibility updates, and maintaining ongoing compliance. However, accessibility is about more than compliance: Accessible teaching practices are an indicator of instructional excellence, as they reflect a commitment to equity, continuous improvement, and the [UAGC Culture of Care](#).

Integrating accessibility standards into teaching practices ensures that all students are able to participate fully in the learning experience. Providing accessible content (e.g., alt text for images, transcripts for videos, appropriate fonts) enhances students' ability to process, comprehend, and retain information (CAST, 2025). This contributes to increased engagement, improved academic performance, and better learning outcomes (CAST, 2025). For course facilitators, [staying informed on best practices for digital accessibility](#) increases their instructional effectiveness by enhancing their ability to meet students' unique learning needs (Rusconi & Squillaci, 2023). Integrating accessibility into course

facilitation removes barriers to learning and fosters a more inclusive, supportive, and high-quality educational experience for all students.

## Accessibility and the CARES Pillars

By integrating accessibility principles into your teaching practices, you demonstrate the UAGC commitment to the C.A.R.E.S. Pillars:

- **Communicate:** We ensure our content is clear, readable, and perceivable by all students.
- **Advocate:** We create inclusive learning environments that support the diverse needs of our student body.
- **Respect:** We acknowledge and accommodate the various ways students access and engage with course materials.
- **Empower:** We give students the tools to engage fully and confidently in their learning.
- **Student-Centered:** We prioritize the learning needs of our students and facilitate courses with the goal of maximizing student success.

## Accessibility Resources for UAGC Course Facilitators

To better promote accessibility, faculty, and staff can turn to the UAGC [Accessibility Resource Center \(ARC\)](#), which was developed using WCAG and ADA regulations and serves as an institutional resource for ensuring accessibility in the course development process. However, UAGC course facilitators can also explore more tailored, specific topics in the new [Accessibility for UAGC Course Facilitators Guide](#) as well as the [FacultyHelp](#) entry “[How do I make my classroom more accessible?](#)” (University of Arizona Global Campus, 2025).

UAGC faculty had requested that the Faculty Affairs team provide greater support in promoting accessibility in course facilitation. In response, the Faculty Affairs team explored ways to adapt some of the ARC’s content to make it easier for all instructors to integrate accessibility practices into their teaching, keeping in mind that UAGC educator-practitioners bring a wide variety of experiences to their online classrooms, including varying levels of expertise with accessibility principles and technology.

Through a series of discussions with faculty and staff from the Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CASC), Academic Quality Services, and Faculty Affairs, specific accessibility topics and resource formats were identified that would be most useful for UAGC faculty. This included developing several step-by-step guides highlighting common ways instructors can create and share accessible content via course announcements, feedback, and supplementary resources. During the development of these guides,

every effort was made to apply the very same accessibility principles we are promoting, including appropriate fonts, descriptive hyperlinks, and alt text for all images/screenshots.

- [Using Appropriate Fonts](#) provides guidelines for selecting fonts that promote readability, emphasize important information, and help the reader effectively process text-based content.
- [Using Descriptive Hyperlinks](#) outlines techniques for creating links that promote ease of navigation for all users and allow assistive technologies like screen readers to understand the purpose of the link within its respective context.
- [Writing Alt Text for Images](#) introduces strategies for describing images to ensure students with and without visual impairments can perceive and understand the information conveyed by the image.
- [Adding Captions to Videos](#) offers guidelines and best practices for making spoken dialogue and important sounds accessible to all learners in real-time, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- [Creating Transcripts for Videos](#) explains how to produce text-based versions of video content that support learners who prefer reading, use assistive technology, or benefit from searchable, note-friendly formats.
- [Using Accessibility Checkers](#) introduces the built-in accessibility tool in Canvas that identifies and reviews potential accessibility issues in your course.

### Let's Make It Fun!

**Hidden in the accessibility resources above are three Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) "easter eggs." How many can you find?**

### Conclusion

Accessibility is not just a compliance requirement; it is an inclusive practice that reflects UAGC values, acknowledges the needs of our diverse student body, and supports our open-access institution's mission. Faculty are encouraged to use these guides and the ARC website to make their online courses more accessible for students. In addition, the Faculty Affairs team invites UAGC faculty to engage with future professional development opportunities, resources, and conversations on accessibility in the coming months.

By sharing our process and resources, we hope to contribute to a broader dialogue in higher education about how institutions can move beyond compliance and toward a culture of accessibility-first teaching and learning.

The Faculty Affairs team would like to thank Stacy Gresnick, Academic Quality and Accessibility Specialist, for her efforts in developing the ARC. We would also like to thank Kate Johnson, Associate Director of Faculty Development; Alaina Pascarella, Manager of Academic Quality Services; and the Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CASC) for their feedback and support throughout this project. We look forward to future collaborations and continuous learning on accessibility. If you have any questions or would like additional information on this ongoing project, please contact Nicole Egelhofer-Wells at [Nicole.Egelhoferwells@uagc.edu](mailto:Nicole.Egelhoferwells@uagc.edu) or Diana Boggan at [Diana.Boggan@uagc.edu](mailto:Diana.Boggan@uagc.edu).

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## BUILDING ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

### BEYOND AWARENESS: EMBRACING ADULTS WITH AUTISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Kayla R. Butler, Associate Faculty, Department of Education and Liberal Arts**



As an autistic adult, I often occupy a liminal space between visibility and invisibility. I do not exhibit the overt behaviors commonly associated with autism. I am articulate and mostly independent. I have earned advanced degrees, work in higher education, and meet professional deadlines. Yet, beneath this competent exterior lies a nuanced experience marked by sensory overload, social exhaustion, and an internal rhythm that often runs counter to the neurotypical pace of academic and workplace culture.

The dominant discourse surrounding autism tends to focus on early intervention in preschool, K–12 educational supports, and individuals with visible or high-support needs. These are essential areas of

advocacy. However, there is far less attention paid to autistic adults who have developed advanced masking strategies: those who perform well on paper, yet privately experience significant cognitive, sensory, and emotional challenges. For many of us, the effort to blend in comes at a steep cost: fatigue, anxiety, agitation, depression, and burnout. My experience as a low-support autistic adult highlights the hidden challenges of navigating neurotypical academic and professional spaces. This article aims to foster understanding and advocate for inclusive environments by encouraging employers and colleagues to recognize invisible disabilities and normalize accommodations, ultimately creating workplaces where neurodivergent professionals can genuinely thrive.

### **Autistic Professionals in Higher Education**

Despite rising college enrollment and graduation rates among autistic individuals (Vincent, 2020; Vincent & Ralston, 2024; Wolpe, 2024), a significant employment gap persists (Bury et al., 2024; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). In 2024, only 22.7% of people with a disability were employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). For autistic individuals specifically, the outlook is even more grim, with just 38% of that 22.7% holding paid employment despite being qualified and ready to work (Bury et al., 2024).

Notably, autistic adults are often drawn to a career in higher education (Cherian et al., 2021) because it typically offers flexible work schedules that accommodate sensory needs and communication styles, quiet workspaces or low-stimulation environments that reduce sensory overload, and clear, straightforward communication—common workplace accommodations that support autistic employees' success. Additionally, academia provides autonomy to engage deeply with specialized interests and values, detailed orientation, and intellectual rigor, aligning well with many autistic strengths (Cherian et al., 2021). In my experience, early childhood education, elementary, and secondary settings have not been compatible workplace environments for me due to the lack of these accommodations. I love to educate others, but the demands of those settings caused countless moments of fatigue, anxiety, and irritability. Eventually, I decided to continue my education and pursue a higher-education career; UAGC has provided what I need as both a student and an employee.

Even in higher education, though, certain systemic barriers persist, meaning that a strong personal fit and academic success do not guarantee true inclusion. In the education field, where “collegiality” is a prominent expectation, low-needs autistic educators may appear to integrate while silently struggling. The demand to perform hidden social labor—to engage in small talk, decode vague norms, or maintain a warm social presence—can overshadow the quality of one’s teaching or research. For instance, an autistic instructor might excel at research and deliver engaging lectures but still be viewed as falling short because they do not naturally participate in informal hallway conversations, social gatherings, or department politics that often signal “team player” status. Cherian et al. (2021) highlight that many autistic students are deeply motivated to pursue academic careers precisely because they excel in focused, specialized work, yet they also face social and communication barriers that make navigating unwritten expectations especially challenging. This is something I have experienced in many educational environments over the years.

## The Culture We Create Matters

My call to action is twofold. First, I urge institutional leaders, human resources professionals, and colleagues to move beyond a one-size-fits-all understanding of disability. Without clear definitions of what collegiality means—and without recognizing that differences in social communication are not deficiencies—autistic faculty risk being unfairly judged as distant or uncooperative, facing stalled promotions, strained peer relationships, or burnout despite their evident contributions (Cherian et al., 2021). Consider how flexibility in communication styles, meeting formats, and work environments can create space for autistic professionals to thrive. Recognize that some of us excel in asynchronous settings, prefer written over verbal communication, or need quiet environments to focus.

My direct supervisor has done very well with this. She communicates primarily through email and gives me time to adjust when Zoom calls are required. She has helped me improve my tone with students and ensure my feedback sounds collaborative rather than overly blunt, which ensures feedback is better received. This guidance has been valuable, but I still wish that, every so often, the world adjusted for us too: by normalizing direct communication, respecting silence as thoughtful processing, or making space for differences instead of requiring constant masking.

Research shows that personalized accommodations significantly improve quality of life and job performance for autistic employees, including simplified processes for disclosing disabilities, greater workplace satisfaction, and retention (Zhou et al., 2024). Rather than assuming, ask—with curiosity, not judgment—what support looks like for each individual. Remember, if you've met one person with autism, then you've met one person with autism. Begin by asking each autistic professional directly: "What support helps you excel?" and integrate their responses routinely into work structures.

Second, I invite other neurodivergent faculty and staff to share their stories, because storytelling is a powerful catalyst for change. Too often, we remain silent out of fear of being misunderstood, pathologized, or dismissed, yet speaking up normalizes diverse ways of thinking, learning, and working. Neurodiversity is a vital but often overlooked facet of diversity, equity, and inclusion; when we broaden our understanding of diversity to include neurological and cognitive differences, we build a culture rooted not just in compliance but in genuine belonging. Despite real barriers like stigma and job insecurity, transparent self-advocacy can spark institutional empathy, reduce unnecessary barriers, and create environments where diverse thinking and approaches to problem-solving are valued. As a university serving many nontraditional students, including adult learners with disabilities, our internal culture must mirror the same empathy, flexibility, and innovation that we model for our students. You do not need to fit the mold to belong here.

UAGC did all this and more for me; I am a product of the Culture of Care. I received my bachelor's and master's degrees from our school. During this time, I was accepted and given flexibility and understanding. During commencement, the disability liaison ensured I had the exact seat so I would not feel overwhelmed by the crowded space. This might seem insignificant to an onlooker, but it was what got me through the ceremony. I was featured on the school website, invited to speak at the

commencement celebration and a handful of conferences and symposiums, and received several academic honors. This recognition of my potential, this elevation of my voice, drew me to work for the university as an associate faculty member. This culture is what motivated me to pursue my PhD with the hope that I can continue to work for the school in a greater capacity. I want every autistic adult to experience this feeling of belonging and success. Let us be a university where diverse minds are not just welcomed—but truly empowered to lead.

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## BRINGING COMMENCEMENT ENERGY INTO DAILY WORK

Stephani Kilby, Director of Student Success



There is a special energy that surrounds commencement weekend. It's a time when faculty, staff, students, families, and friends come together to celebrate a transformational achievement. Working in online higher education, commencement is often one of the few opportunities we have to connect with our students face-to-face. And when we do, something remarkable happens—a real, human connection that transforms how we work and what we can achieve together.

In-person connections tend to foster greater empathy, accountability, and a stronger sense of shared purpose. As Weidlich et al. (2023) found, social presence matters when it comes to interpersonal engagement. When there is physical distance between people, it reduces feelings of closeness and attention. This helps explain why in-person interactions often feel more empathic and engaging than virtual ones. When a student is physically standing in front of us, nothing else seems to matter in that moment. Their presence triggers an immediate sense of urgency, empathy, and responsibility. We shift into action, into problem-solving mode—holding ourselves directly accountable to that student. Titles and departments fade into the background. We become one team focused on one thing: meeting that student's needs. This is what I've come to call "commencement energy." The challenge—and the opportunity—is to carry that same energy into our remote work and to treat every digital interaction as if the student is standing right in front of us.

### The Commencement Mindset

***"I left commencement weekend wondering: How might we be this responsive, this creative, this connected, this focused on joyful problem-solving – every day?"***

What struck me most during UAGC's recent commencement weekend was how seamlessly the faculty and staff present operated from this student-centered mindset. We didn't ask whether the request we were fielding was in our job description. We didn't worry about whether we had all the correct answers precisely at that moment. We showed up, we worked together, and we made things happen. There was a sense of camaraderie, collective purpose, and joyful problem-solving. No challenge was too big to tackle, no question too small to answer, and no other priority more important than to pause and create a special moment. The student in front of us was the priority.

I left commencement weekend wondering: How might we be this responsive, this creative, this connected, and focused on joyful problem-solving – every day?

What if the way we showed up for our students during commencement weekend wasn't a special occasion mindset? What if instead it was our *default* mindset? Commencement weekend reveals that when human connections are made, we unite to break down barriers, collaborate quickly, and focus wholeheartedly on the student experience. It reminds us how powerful such intentional connection can be in achieving what we value most: meaningful experiences for our students and ourselves.

Our students may walk across the graduation stage only once, but they walk through hundreds, if not thousands, of smaller moments with us long before that day arrives. Each of those moments is an opportunity to show them that they belong at UAGC, that they matter, that we care, and that we are committed to helping them reach their goals.

### **Powerful Practices to Embrace**

So, how might we bring commencement-level energy into our everyday virtual world? The following are five simple but powerful practices we can embrace to help foster the commencement mindset:

1. **Stay true to our student-first lens.** When faced with a decision, a question, or a barrier, pause and ask yourself: What would I be doing if this student were standing right in front of me? We know from the commencement and Culture of Care mindsets that the answer is acting with compassion, flexibility, and persistence.
2. **Prioritize connection over process.** At commencement, the priority is the student, not adhering to a predetermined set of rules. We often find ways to work within our scope of possibility to create a positive experience and remove the burden of worry from our students. Whatever "it" is, we make "it" happen. In our daily work, we can be mindful not to let rigid procedures overshadow human connection.
3. **Own the problem.** At commencement, we don't give students another number to call or vaguely point them in the direction of someone else—we work alongside them until the problem is solved or until we are confident that they are in the hands of someone who can help them. In the virtual space, this might look like following up, looping others in, or staying connected with the student until their needs are fully addressed.
4. **Communicate like we care—because we do!** Every message, whether email, chat, in-course feedback, or phone call, is an opportunity to convey warmth and belonging. The words we choose and the tone we set make a difference.
5. **Celebrate small wins.** Commencement is a big celebration, but student victories happen every day. Pause to notice them. Create spaces to acknowledge and elevate those milestones. Find ways to recognize and celebrate progress and encourage students to do the same.

## A Call to Action

Commencement is a powerful reminder of why we work in higher education; it brings to life the impact of education, celebrates each graduate's transformative journey, and embodies countless moments of effort, growth, and grit, both from our students and those who support them. But commencement energy doesn't have to be reserved for a single weekend or solely for those individuals able to attend in person. It is within our power to create that energy daily and in every space—virtual or otherwise—for our students and each other.

As a starting point, consider the following:

- When was the last time you brought commencement-level energy to a regular workday?
- What is one powerful practice you could embrace starting tomorrow?
- How can we, as colleagues, encourage each other to bring the commencement mindset to every student interaction?

I invite you to reach out to me at [SuccessTogether@uagc.edu](mailto:SuccessTogether@uagc.edu) to share your thoughts, strategies, and ideas for bringing commencement energy into our daily work. I look forward to continued collaboration, celebration, and joyful problem-solving together in the coming year.

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## HOW AI IS RESHAPING THE ROLE OF NURSES AND ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

**Quida B. Davis, Associate Faculty, Department of Health Sciences**



Artificial intelligence is not replacing nurses and allied health professionals; it is transforming their responsibilities and redefining what it means to deliver care. As automation takes over routine and repetitive tasks, the healthcare workforce must evolve to emphasize advanced clinical reasoning, ethical decision-making, and human connection skills. The future of healthcare will be driven by professionals who can interpret data, apply insight, and maintain empathy in an increasingly digital environment.

To meet this challenge, healthcare instructors must reimagine how they are educated. Educators are not just teaching students by prioritizing critical thinking, ethical literacy, and the strategic use of AI in patient-centered care; they are shaping agile, tech-savvy clinicians ready to lead in a healthcare landscape where technology enhances, but never replaces, human judgment.

### **From Routine to Intelligent Assistance**

Traditionally, nurses and allied health professionals have spent much of their time on documentation, scheduling, medication administration, and basic patient monitoring. These tasks, though essential, are often time-consuming and prone to human error. With AI-enabled tools like voice-assisted documentation, automated medication dispensing systems, and wearable monitors, much of this manual work is now being delegated to machines.

#### **Curriculum Application:**

To prepare UAGC nursing and allied health students for a workforce where AI handles routine tasks, curricula must pivot from a focus on manual skills toward technology integration and data interpretation.

- **Health Informatics Courses:** Introduce UAGC students to platforms like electronic health records (EHRs), automated medication dispensing systems, and wearable health technologies (e.g., Holter monitors, biosensor patches).
- **Case-Based Learning Modules:** Assign scenarios where UAGC students interpret AI-generated vital sign trends and lab data to create care plans.
- **Hands-On Training with Devices:** Simulation labs can use wearable monitors and voice-assisted charting tools to mimic real-life hospital settings. UAGC students can learn to interact with these tools and interpret outputs in context.
- **Quality Improvement Projects:** Encourage UAGC nursing and allied health students to identify inefficiencies in clinical workflows where AI could optimize outcomes, training them to become problem solvers and innovators.

*Example:* In an interactive lab scenario, a nursing student may monitor a simulated patient wearing an AI-powered patch that detects early signs of atrial fibrillation. The student must respond by analyzing the data and escalating care per protocol, rather than simply documenting the arrhythmia.

This delegation of repetitive tasks allows nurses and allied health professionals to focus more on interpreting data, identifying patterns, and making informed clinical decisions. In addition, it helps healthcare managers identify areas of weakness and strength. Rather than simply recording a patient's blood pressure, a nurse and provider may now review AI-generated trend reports to assess cardiovascular risks or evaluate treatment effectiveness. This shift can transform nurses from task executors into critical decision-makers and patient advocates who work closely with technology to deliver personalized care.

## **Enhanced Clinical Judgment and Analytical Thinking**

One of the most significant changes brought by AI is the increasing demand for analytical thinking and clinical judgment. AI provides a wealth of real-time data, predictive insights, and decision-support tools, but does not replace human reasoning. This is one of the most critical elements in which personal healthcare still has advantages. Healthcare professionals are now expected to interpret and contextualize AI outputs, integrating them with patient history, symptoms, and psychosocial factors to arrive at sound clinical judgments.

### **Curriculum Application:**

With AI generating diagnostic suggestions and risk predictions, education must emphasize the development of advanced clinical reasoning and ethical discernment.

- **Clinical Decision-Making Courses:** Teach students to integrate AI outputs with patient narratives, physical assessments, and psychosocial contexts.
- **Ethics and AI Modules:** Include dedicated content on ethical frameworks, such as deontology and utilitarianism, for evaluating AI decisions—especially in life-critical scenarios.
- **Predictive Analytics in Practice:** Introduce platforms that use predictive modeling (e.g., for sepsis, readmission risks). Students analyze outputs and decide appropriate actions based on case variables.
- **Interdisciplinary Case Conferences:** Encourage collaboration across disciplines (e.g., nursing, respiratory therapy, physical therapy) to interpret AI-driven recommendations, fostering holistic and team-based thinking collectively.

*Example:* UAGC students can use an AI tool that predicts sepsis onset in an advanced medical-surgical course. They must validate the prediction with clinical evidence, assess the ethical implications of acting prematurely, and formulate a response plan—bridging data science with patient care.

According to Park (2025), ethical challenges posed by AI systems necessitate a well-grounded philosophical framework. While this transformation is most often associated with physicians and administrators, it fundamentally reshapes the roles of nurses and allied health professionals. As routine and repetitive tasks become increasingly automated, the emphasis in healthcare roles is shifting from manual labor to analytical reasoning, critical thinking, and enhanced patient engagement.

Some of these interventions include immediate notification to the provider. Similarly, physical therapists might use AI-driven gait analysis systems to monitor rehabilitation progress. However, they must still apply their clinical expertise to adjust care plans based on the patient's pain tolerance and mobility goals.

In this environment, the ability to think critically, evaluate multiple data sources, and exercise clinical reasoning becomes more important than ever. AI enhances the scope and speed of decision-making, but the responsibility for interpreting and acting on that information still lies with trained professionals.

## **Patient Education and Communication Roles Expand**

As AI takes on a larger role in diagnostics and monitoring, nurses and allied health professionals are becoming the essential human link in the care experience. Their role in patient education, emotional support, and communication is becoming more prominent. Patients may receive a diagnosis or treatment recommendation from an AI-assisted tool, but it is often the nurse or therapist who explains what it means in layperson's terms, addresses patient concerns, and ensures compliance with treatment. Artificial intelligence has become increasingly utilized within healthcare. According to Labrague et al. (2023), artificial intelligence is transforming healthcare rapidly. The healthcare landscape is undergoing a profound transformation driven by advances in AI. AI technologies are increasingly integrated into clinical practice, from diagnostics and documentation to patient monitoring and predictive analytics.

#### **Curriculum Application:**

As AI tools deliver technical data, professionals must be equipped to provide the human interpretation—bridging knowledge and compassion.

- **Health Literacy and Patient Communication Classes:** Teach UAGC students to translate complex AI-generated data into accessible language tailored to diverse populations.
- **Cultural Competency Training:** Include modules on navigating fears or mistrust of technology, particularly in underserved communities.
- **Role-Play Scenarios:** Use simulated patient interviews where UAGC students explain AI-generated diagnoses or treatment plans to patients with varied emotional responses.
- **Empathy in Tech-Supported Care:** Assign reflections or debriefings focused on maintaining empathy and trust in highly automated settings.

*Example:* After receiving an AI-generated treatment plan for diabetes management, a student must explain the rationale, address patient concerns about relying on algorithms, and adjust the plan based on the patient's socioeconomic challenges and health beliefs.

Moreover, the growing use of AI can sometimes lead to patient anxiety or mistrust of technology versus an actual human. Professionals on the front lines must be prepared to bridge this gap—reassuring patients about these technologies' safety, accuracy, and ethical use. This requires a strong understanding of AI tools as well as empathy, cultural competence, and communication skills. In essence, the more technologically advanced the system becomes, the more essential human connection and trust become.

#### **New Competencies and Education Requirements**

The changing landscape necessitates new competencies for healthcare professionals. Understanding how AI works, recognizing its limitations, and applying it appropriately are now key components of modern clinical practice. Nursing and allied health education must evolve to include data literacy, technology ethics, informatics, and human-AI collaboration strategies.

## Curriculum Application:

Programs must formally embed competencies that reflect the AI era: data literacy, ethical AI use, system design awareness, and collaborative technology use.

- **AI and Data Science Foundations:** Offer introductory courses or modules on algorithms, machine learning basics, and bias in data interpretation.
- **Technology in Healthcare Courses:** Require UAGC students to evaluate the accuracy and ethical implications of AI tools in use (e.g., diagnostic apps, triage bots, robotic assistants).
- **Simulation-Based Training with AI:** Use advanced mannequins that simulate decision points influenced by AI recommendations—e.g., suggesting drug interactions or changes in treatment urgency.
- **Capstone Projects with Real-World AI Tools:** Partner with healthcare tech companies or local hospitals to allow students to assess real AI tools in current practice and make policy or practice recommendations.

*Example:* A student group completes a project evaluating how a predictive AI tool used in a local hospital impacts discharge planning for stroke patients. They identify algorithmic biases and propose strategies to reduce disparities.

## Conclusion

Simulation labs are incorporating AI-driven mannequins and decision-support systems to help students practice responding to real-world scenarios with the aid of technology. Curricula are being redesigned to teach students how to critically appraise AI tools, interpret digital data, and navigate complex ethical dilemmas surrounding data privacy, bias, and accountability. These shifts ensure that tomorrow's professionals are tech-savvy and capable of maintaining a human touch in the digital world.

To remain relevant and forward-looking, nursing and allied health education must adopt a **deliberate, layered approach** to AI integration:

- **Year 1–2:** Build foundations—basic informatics, health tech literacy, and communication skills.
- **Year 3:** Introduce ethical dilemmas, AI-enhanced simulations, and interprofessional data interpretation scenarios.
- **Year 4 (Capstone):** Require projects demonstrating competency in analyzing, interpreting, and applying AI tools to solve complex clinical problems while preserving ethical, patient-centered care.

This educational evolution ensures graduates are not just surviving the tech transformation—they're leading it.

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## FACULTY VOICES

This section of the Chronicle is dedicated to recognizing the 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](#).

**Tanya Scherr | Department of Health Sciences**



Tanya Scherr has peer-reviewed several published articles:

[U.S. Withdrawal from the World Health Organization: Emergency Preparedness Implications](#)

[The Human Factor in Cybersecurity Events: Critical Education Components](#)

[Agroterrorism: A Persistent and Overlooked Threat](#)

[AI Software in 911 Dispatch Centers: An Innovative Solution](#)

### **Edward Strafaci | Department of Professional Studies**



Edward Strafaci successfully defended his thesis titled:

"Examining the Influence of Arbitrageur's Hedge Activity on Negative Share Value Following Convertible Security Call Announcements"

He also completed his studies and graduated from Pace University, Lubin School of Business, with Beta Gamma Sigma Honors.

### **Dequies Lanier | Department of Advanced Management**



Dequies Lanier recently published an article focused on advancing women leaders. The goal is to continue to empower women leaders on their path to purpose! The qualitative study includes in-depth interviews underscoring women's experiences leading through crisis and developing emerging leaders. Women shared their stories of serving in corporate, nonprofit, and educational organizations. It presented the conceptual framework as a guide for women's future leadership development.

### **Reference**

Lanier, D. (2025). The role of empathy in strategic thinking: Women leaders championing change and cultivating the next generation of leaders. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, 44(1), 44-56. [https://lnkd.in/eMp3M5\\_A](https://lnkd.in/eMp3M5_A)

## NEW FACULTY INTRODUCTIONS

### Tiffany Lemmen | Department of Administrative Management Professions



Hello. I have more than 30 years of experience in the Healthcare industry, with more than 20 years in Healthcare Information Technology. I currently work at Hawaii's most extensive healthcare system, where I lead IT strategy, an analytics team, an enterprise imaging systems team, and an enterprise business systems team.

I hold a Doctor of Information Technology with focused research in patient engagement using personal health records, a Master of Business Administration from Capella University, and a bachelor's in management from Kaplan College. I have served in higher education since 2019, teaching courses in the following programs: Bachelor of Business, Bachelor of Data Science, Bachelor of Information Technology, Master of Information Systems, and Master of Business Administration.

When not working, I enjoy living in Alaska and spending time with my family – husband, three adult daughters, and two grandchildren. My family and I focus on returning to a sustainable lifestyle, enjoying nature, and the beautiful surroundings.

### Ryan Lynn | Department of Information Technology Professions



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'm 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'm excited to see students grow, gain confidence, and prepare to succeed in today's dynamic and fast-paced technology landscape.

#### **Maile Canlas | Department of Communication & Humanities Studies**



Hello. I'm excited to be part of the UAGC faculty. My journey through higher education began at South Mountain Community College, where I proudly earned my first degree, an Associate of Arts. I dearly remember what it was like to be a first-year student in college. As a First-Generation Latina, each step forward has been a personal milestone and a statement of possibility. I recently earned my Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration from Northern Arizona University (Fall 2023) and completed my Master of Science in Positive Psychology at Arizona State University (Fall 2024). Before that, I earned dual bachelor's degrees in liberal studies and social behavioral science, as well as master's degrees in liberal studies (Film & Media) and Interdisciplinary Studies (Creative Writing), all driven by a deep passion for growth, learning, and helping students realize their potential.

My philosophy is simple and heartfelt: *If I can do it, so can YOU.* I hold a strong belief in my students' ability to thrive, especially those navigating the challenges of their first year. I strive to create environments where students feel welcomed, inspired, and fully supported as they build confidence and chase their dreams. I also proudly reflect the University of Arizona's Global Campus **Culture of Care**, always leading with empathy, respect, and a commitment to holistic student success.

Outside of academia, my love for travel, aviation, culinary exploration, and good wine complements the energy I bring to my work. These passions remind me that learning is everywhere, and joy is often found

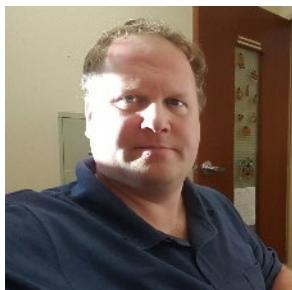
in discovery. Although I haven't yet reached my ultimate career goal, I know I am getting closer every day, and walking alongside my students through their educational journey is the greatest gift of all.

**Jennifer Barraza | Department of Communication and Humanities Studies**



Hello. I have a Bachelor of Arts in English from California State University Fullerton, as well as a multiple-subject teaching credential and a Master of Arts in Reading Education from California State University San Bernardino. My second master's degree is in library and information science from San Jose State University. You may have noted there's a bit of a trend in what majors I chose for my degrees. Reading and writing are what I consider my life's passion; this is not only reflected in my degree choices but also in my personal life and hobbies. I am an avid reader, and my ideal day would be spent with my dogs, a big cup of coffee, and a good book. Along with reading, I enjoy the art of writing. While I don't expect to write the next great American novel anytime soon, I do enjoy dabbling in writing now and again. This appreciation of the English Language Arts field led me to pursue education as a career choice with the hopes of sharing my passion for reading and writing with students of all ages and backgrounds. My career in education started in 2012, and since then, I have worked with every grade level from preschool through adult learners.

## Eric Wright | Department of Communication & Humanities Studies



With over 25 years of higher education teaching experience and administrative management experience as a Director of Education (DOE), Departmental Lead Communication Faculty, and several full-time English positions, my higher education leadership skills are exceptional, with a mind open to learning new technologies and ideas from others.

I appreciate my early start in academia, which was when I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in mass communications and a Master of Arts degree in English at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). Two awarded graduate assistantships helped fund my master's degree. I worked in Disabled Student Services and the Learning Resource Center at MTSU. My Doctorate in Higher Education and Administration has enhanced my leadership skills and increased my awareness of interacting with various stakeholders, fellow administrators, and the business community in a global society. While learning about the P-20 Ed.D program at Murray State University, I learned about interacting and communicating with real-world businesses and other higher educational institutions. As Director of Education, I constructed and developed curriculum strategies and improvements to increase student retention. Additionally, I have assisted with curriculum design at several colleges and participated in committee membership as a California Teachers Association (CTA) union member and on various faculty committees.

I believe that with a globalized, diversified economy, individuals must communicate effectively to become successful critical thinkers and achieve strategic college goals to share with the world.

## 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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## CONTRIBUTORS

A special thank you to the contributors to this issue!

**Diana Boggan**

**Quida B. Davis**

**Cole McFarren**

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