

# 2025 UCCS Teaching & Learning Conference

## ABSTRACTS

Session 1 – Tuesday, 10:00-10:45

### **The More You Know... About AI (Part 1)**

AI in Academics

*C. Edward Watson, Josie Smith, Johanna Baez, and Angie Dodson*

Room 109

*The More You Know... about AI* marks the beginning of a spring AI in Academics series that is aimed at raising AI Literacy. This session will introduce specific AI tool features and demonstrate faculty and student assistive use of AI for research, writing, and assignments. Additionally, participants will be given the opportunity to play with the tools presented and develop an AI-assistive strategy to implement into their instructional practice.

### **Empowering Learners Through Metacognitive and Reflexive Awareness**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Shannon Johnson*

Room 132

This session will explore strategies educators can use to empower students by furthering metacognitive and reflexive awareness. By exploring methods that promote self-awareness and a sense of personal educational agency among students (*e.g.*, self-assessment of learning behaviors and outcomes, goal-setting, self-directed learning contracts, structured reflective journaling, co-reflection exercises, reflexivity practice, peer observation and feedback processes, opportunities for iterative assignment development), attendees will expand their teaching toolkits and position themselves to better support learners' critical and reflexive thinking, problem-solving abilities, and personal and professional growth and resiliency.

### **Infusing Sustainability into the Classroom: Cultivating Environmental Literacy and Action through Engaged Pedagogy**

Teaching and Learning Outside of the Classroom

*Polly Knutson*

Room 133

As the global demand for sustainability education intensifies, integrating environmental, social, and economic sustainability into the classroom has become essential to fostering students' understanding of complex ecological challenges. This session explores effective strategies for embedding sustainability concepts across disciplines, encouraging students to think critically about environmental issues, and inspiring active participation in sustainable practices. Drawing on the UCCS campus resources, such as the UCCS Farm, Green Action Fund, and Sustainability Office, this session highlights interactive methodologies that engage students through hands-on activities, collaborative projects, and experiential learning. By linking theoretical content with tangible, real-world applications, faculty can cultivate an awareness of sustainability that extends beyond the classroom, empowering students to become proactive environmental stewards. This session will provide practical examples, tools, and resources for educators across all fields to create a curriculum that not only meets academic standards but also enriches students' educational experiences with a focus on sustainability.

### **Growing Mindfulness at UCCS in and Outside of the Classroom (Part 1)**

Campus: Mental Health and Resilience

*Katie Sullivan, Chrissie Bailey, and Alicia Vanlandingham*

Room 233

Mindfulness practices have a positive impact on well-being and academic success in higher education. In this two-part presentation, we will share several UCCS initiatives that bring mindfulness practices to campus stakeholders. Part 1 shares evidence-based practices on the benefits of mindfulness in higher education settings. Part 2 provides hands-on experiences including from the UCCS Learning Preparedness Toolkit, created by the UCCS Wellness Center for faculty to use in their classrooms and from The Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults (MIEA) courses offered on campus for students, staff, and faculty. Time for Q&A will be provided in both parts 1 and 2.

Session 2 – Tuesday, 11:00-11:45

### **The More You Know... About AI (Part 2)**

AI in Academics

C. Edward Watson, Josie Smith, Johanna Baez, and Angie Dodson

Room 109

*The More You Know... about AI* marks the beginning of a spring AI in Academics series that is aimed at raising AI Literacy. This session will introduce specific AI tool features and demonstrate faculty and student assistive use of AI for research, writing, and assignments. Additionally, participants will be given the opportunity to play with the tools presented and develop an AI-assistive strategy to implement into their instructional practice.

**Ready, Set, REFRESH**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Delyn Winters and Angie Dodson*

Room 132

Stuck in an instructional rut? Do you find yourself continuously intending to update aspects of your course(s) and realize when you are in the midst of teaching it that you still haven't? If so, this session is for you. *Ready, Set, REFRESH* walks participants through strategies for enhancing their instructional practice by **R**eflecting on current practices to **E**valuate what is working and what is not, then **F**raming a relevant approach to **R**e-energize, rethink, and redo a course component that can be **E**levated through a universally designed principle and a **S**tudent-centered strategy, and then **H**oned for immediate implementation.

**Seeing and Supporting Advanced Learners From Every Population**

Equity and Access for ALL Learners

*S. Nikki Myers and Annika Mote*

Room 133

Students with unusually advanced learning abilities are present in every population and demographic, but sometimes they remain unseen and under-supported including students of color, or with limited resources, and/or where staff do not have a background of training for their needs. They may crave complexity, ask more questions, and sometimes struggle to complete work. Occasionally, they might also have a disability that complicates their experience in school and the workforce despite their capacity for exceptional achievement. This session will provide specific ways to recognize and support these learners' academic journeys through the university level for maximum growth and achievement.

**Growing Mindfulness at UCCS in and Outside of the Classroom (Part 2)**

Campus: Mental Health and Resilience

*Katie Sullivan, Chrissie Bailey, and Alicia Vanlandingham*

Room 233

Mindfulness practices have a positive impact on well-being and academic success in higher education. In this two-part presentation, we will share several UCCS initiatives that bring mindfulness practices to campus stakeholders. Part 1 shares evidence-based practices on the benefits of mindfulness in higher education settings. Part 2 provides hands-on experiences including from the UCCS Learning Preparedness Toolkit, created by the UCCS Wellness Center for faculty to use in their classrooms and from The Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults (MIEA) courses offered on campus for students, staff, and faculty. Time for Q&A will be provided in both parts 1 and 2.

Keynote Address – Tuesday, 12:00-1:30

**Embracing AI as Essential Learning: Preparing Students for Life Beyond College**

AI in Academics

*C. Edward Watson*

Room 180

Generative AI tools have had an astonishingly quick impact on the ways we learn, work, think, and create. While higher education's initial response was to develop strategies to diminish AI's influence in the classroom, it is now clear that AI competencies and literacies must be embraced as essential learning for most colleges and universities. These responses and realities create a challenging tension that higher education must work to resolve. Drawing from his new book, *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024), Dr. Watson will detail the challenges and opportunities that have emerged for higher education, especially in terms of pedagogical practice and student learning. The core focus of this keynote will be on concrete approaches and strategies higher education can adopt, both within the classroom and across larger curricular structures, to best prepare

students for the life that awaits them after graduation. It will also detail the pedagogical possibilities regarding how AI can have a positive impact on student learning.

**Session 3 – Tuesday, 1:45-2:30**

**Reimagining Grading at UCCS (Part 1)**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Chris Creighton, Kacey Ross, Colin Wren, Jordan Nikkel, Angie Dodson, and a Student Panelist*

Room 109

The issue of grading weighs on most faculty's minds throughout the semester. From students not implementing feedback to equity issues in grading systems, faculty at UCCS join the Faculty Resource Center's Community of Practice on Reimagining Grading for many reasons. First, you will hear how some members of our community are already reimagining grading through a panel discussion. Second, a workshop to consider which ideas may fit well in your classes. Our goal is for you to develop a critical reflective sense on grading, to learn of new grading techniques, and to reimagine what you can do with grading.

**Peer-to-Peer Service-Learning: The Example of Fitness Partners**

Teaching and Learning Outside of the Classroom

*Brynn Adamson and Kelly Haan*

Room 132

Improving disability competency among health promotion practitioners is fundamental to addressing disability-related health disparities. Training programs that incorporate both didactic learning and exposure to people with disabilities have the greatest impact on competency and attitudes. At UCCS, students enrolled in the course: Adapted Physical Activity, Recreation and Sport participate in a service-learning opportunity called Fitness Partners. Students course pair up with students living with Intellectual Disabilities from the Office of Inclusive Services on campus. Students exercise weekly for one hour throughout the duration of the semester. Practical solutions for offering peer-to-peer service-learning opportunities will be shared along with program impact.

**Showcasing and Certifying Seniors: PORT 4000 - The Professional Portfolio**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Phillip Haisley*

Room 133

Over the past year, the Compass Curriculum Team has worked hard to build more opportunities for students to display the skills and knowledge they gain through general education. Our presentation describes the development of our first "micro-credential" certifying students as Outstanding Writers. Next, we discuss a new course (PORT 4000), where students create a professional portfolio and have opportunity to earn four micro-credentials certifying their skills (Outstanding Writer, Outstanding Oral Communication, Outstanding Knowledge of Inclusiveness, and Outstanding Knowledge of Sustainability). We will end with a description of Compass's plans for the future and an invitation to faculty and staff collaborators.

**2-Minute Stress Reduction Tools for STEM and Pre-Health Students: Practical Tips and Student Perceptions**

Campus: Mental Health and Resilience

*Crystal Vander Zanden*

Room 233

Mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques are gaining popularity because they are effective, simple, and free. These techniques could be effective for STEM and pre-health students who often report feeling high stress regarding academic performance. In this study, students in a UCCS Biochemistry class were asked to voluntarily participate during in-class 2-minute mindfulness-based stress reduction activities once a week during semester. On a 1-5 scale, more than half of students rated the activity with a 5 (strong like), while the remainder felt neutrally (n=99 students, 2 semesters). This workshop will present data, practical exercises, and tips for classroom implementation.

**Session 4 –Tuesday, 2:45-3:30**

**Reimagining Grading at UCCS (Part 2)**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Chris Creighton, Kacey Ross, Colin Wren, Jordan Nikkel, Angie Dodson, and a Student Panelist*

Room 109

The issue of grading weighs on most faculty's minds throughout the semester. From students not implementing feedback to equity issues in grading systems, faculty at UCCS join the Faculty Resource Center's Community of

Practice on Reimagining Grading for many reasons. First, you will hear how some members of our community are already reimagining grading through a panel discussion. Second, a workshop to consider which ideas may fit well in your classes. Our goal is for you to develop a critical reflective sense on grading, to learn of new grading techniques, and to reimagine what you can do with grading.

### **Supporting First-Generation Students**

Equity and Access for ALL Learners

*Ashley San Miguel*

Room 132

This workshop will help participants understand the first-generation college student experience and empower them to become first-generation advocates. We will discuss strategies to better understand the unique experiences of first-gen students, the barriers they face, and how to shift from a deficit mindset to asset-based thinking and put it in practice. Participants will leave this workshop with resources and tools to support first-generation students inside and outside of the classroom.

### **Transforming Freshman Engineering: Innovative Approaches to Learning**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Lynnane George and Kinzy Pearson*

Room 133

Join us for an interactive workshop that will transform your freshman course! Based on a unique Aerospace Engineering course for first-year students, this session explores how project-based learning can energize your teaching. In this course, students engage in weekly lectures with interactive elements and hands-on lab sessions designed to reinforce key concepts through exciting, real-world projects—created by both faculty and students. In the workshop, you'll discover practical, innovative strategies for incorporating hands-on activities into your own classes. Whether you teach engineering or any other field, you'll leave with fresh ideas to help students actively apply what they're learning and deepen their understanding through real-world experience.

### **Transition to College Woes - Introducing Skills for Optimizing Student Success (SOS) Program**

Campus: Mental Health and Resilience

*Kristi Webb*

Room 233

Come learn more about the Wellness Center's new mental health support program SOS (Skills for Optimizing Student Success). SOS was created to support students through their transition to college. This program works on building skills, identifying strengths, and helping with things like study and test taking skills, sleep hygiene, making friends and overcoming homesickness. Join Wellness Promotion staff for an overview of SOS and how faculty can utilize this program and its resources to support student success.

Session 5 – Wednesday, 9:00-10:30

### **Level Up the Grade: A Design Workshop to Plan, Start, and Feel Confident testing an Ungraded Assignment**

Equity and Access for ALL Learners

*Hayley Blackburn*

Room 109

**Summary:** This workshop guides participants through tested ungrading and universal design for learning options with the steps to plan, tools to implement, and feedback to feel confident making a change in an upcoming course. Participants are encouraged to bring their Spring or Fall 2025 syllabus to select one area where an ungraded and/or UDL approach might be suitable to try in the upcoming semester. Together, we will walk through multiple options to find where you are comfortable and begin the implementation process.

**Outcomes:** Participants will leave the workshop with an action plan for trying an ungraded approach and a checklist for implementation. The workshop will ask you to identify one project or course learning outcome to use in the process, and you may have the entire structure complete in your Canvas shell.

### **Setting Boundaries, Shaping Success**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Jon DeWitt*

Room 230

Setting expectations and holding difficult conversations can be a dreaded part of this work. It can feel like it takes away from the objectives we want to accomplish with our students. At the same time unresolved conflicts can escalate and take more of our time. In this workshop we will explore how to set clear classroom expectations as well

as hold difficult conversations with students to avoid later escalation. It will also include resources for email responses and steps to take when the situation escalates to a level where additional support would be helpful.

### **Sustainable Self-Care for Faculty: Building Resilience and Community in Academia**

Campus: Mental Health and Resilience

*Laurel Bidwell and Monica Furey*

Room 233

This workshop invites faculty to pause, reflect, and recharge. Together, we'll explore practical self-care strategies to manage stress and build resilience in the face of academic challenges. Through guided activities, participants will reflect on their needs, share ideas, and practice simple techniques like mindfulness and setting boundaries. The session also creates space for brainstorming how to support one another and foster a culture of care within departments. You'll leave with fresh insights, practical tools, and a renewed sense of connection to your work, colleagues, and yourself.

Session 6 – Wednesday, 10:45-12:15

### **Creating Equity-Minded & Neurodiverse Classrooms: Best Practices for College Educators**

Equity and Access for ALL Learners

*Sloan Gonzales and Nicole Simmons-Rochon*

Room 109

This workshop focuses on equipping educators with strategies to create inclusive, supportive, and neurodiverse learning environments for all students. Inclusive and equity-minded teaching practices are crucial in addressing diverse learning needs, backgrounds, and experiences to ensure equitable access to education. The workshop will focus on identifying common barriers to inclusive teaching, understanding the needs of neurodivergent students, developing communication and collaboration practices, and creating inclusive curriculum and assessment. By the end of this workshop, participants will understand the needs of neurodivergent students and equity-minded teaching principles and acquire practical tools to enhance both neurodivergent and neurotypical student engagement, belonging, and success.

### **Design Thinking Studio: A Collaborative Learning Approach**

Classroom Methods and Management

*Carolyn Gery and Gail Richards*

Room 230

How might we design learning communities where everyone experiences interconnection as part of a collaborative learning environment? Design Thinking drives innovation and is a frame for developing novel solutions. The frame operates from the notion we are all designers, that everyone is creative, and everyone can use design to improve the world around them. During this interactive session, you will learn practical applications of design thinking you can leverage to enhance classroom engagement, deepen student learning, and integrate collaboration. You will play with tools designed to enhance student learning and interaction as you reimagine the student experience in your course.

### **Teaching with PreTeXt**

Instructional Technology

*Lauren Nelsen*

Room 233

PreTeXt is a system for writing and publishing textbooks, course materials, and other documents in an accessible, browser-friendly format. It is a particularly useful tool for creating accessible, interactive documents involving mathematical notation. PreTeXt creates highly accessible documents that are easily navigable by screen-readers, and these documents are also easy to convert to Braille (which is something that is normally expensive to do). Getting started using PreTeXt can be intimidating, but in this workshop you'll learn how to start creating accessible documents for your courses in PreTeXt and where to go for questions as you continue working with PreTeXt.

Notes: Participants will need to have a (free) GitHub account to participate in this workshop. I am still learning when it comes to using PreTeXt and GitHub, but you don't need to be an expert to create fun, accessible course materials and textbooks! I will show you how to get set up and get started, and no prior knowledge is required.