



Center for Excellence in TEACHING AND LEARNING

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A Message From Our Director

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter from the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). As the director of CETL, and along with the CETL staff, we want to recognize the hard work of the faculty throughout this unprecedented semester and thank you for your dedication and commitment to student learning. We are excited to launch a quarterly newsletter to feature center updates, faculty spotlights, teaching tips, and more information on the [Academy for Experiential Learning](#). This newsletter officially welcomes Vicki Pitstick, director of the Academy for Experiential Learning, to the center. She joined us in March and spent her first six months supporting departments as they explored new ways to integrate experiential learning in their curricula. Also, a Q&A with Ozzie Abaye features her approach to student service and the ways her students are “finding joy in the time of COVID.” We look forward to sharing information with you in this new way and hearing your thoughts and feedback. Although this is not the semester we imagined, it has served to highlight the invaluable role faculty play in students’ lives. If you have small victories or ‘good news’ success stories, we invite you to email your bright spots to us and encourage you to share with others.

Kim Filer | CETL Director, Associate Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning

In this edition...

Q&A with Dr. Vicki Pitstick

p. 1-2

Excellence in Teaching Awards

p. 2

Faculty Q&A with Ozzie Abaye

p. 3-4

Q & A: Dr. Vicki Pitstick, the New Director of the Academy for Experiential Learning

What is the Academy for Experiential Learning?

The academy is a society of faculty working as a learning community to develop enhanced degrees integrating discipline-customized experiential learning. The goal is to increase access to experiential learning for all Hokies. My hope is that members will engage in informed, creative problem-solving to frame and facilitate strategies, expectations, outcomes, and accountability for experiential learning.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Who is Dr. Pitstick, the new director of the Academy for Experiential Learning?

First off, I am thrilled to be a part of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning team as the director of the new Academy for Experiential Learning. My interest in experiential learning spans my entire career as I have engaged with and created many service-learning opportunities, assisted with undergraduate research opportunities, and provided guidance to numerous students in the creation of programs that involved internships and study abroad programs. Most recently I supported the development of and provided leadership for the Second-year Transformational Experience Program at The Ohio State University. There is nothing I enjoy more than creating new initiatives that involve cultivating important connections between faculty and students in an effort to help students be as successful as possible.

What has been happening in the Academy for Experiential Learning this semester?

In June, I started working with three pilot departments: Chemistry, Sociology, and Political Science. Through the Academy for Experiential Learning faculty are enhancing or creating structures for degree-embedded experiential learning for their students. These departments shared more about their experience with the academy and updated the campus on their approaches to experiential learning during town halls in October and November.

2019-2020 Excellence in Teaching Award Winners

Mike Nappier
Linsey Marr
Sterling Nesbitt
Renee LeClair
Emmanuel Frimpong

Steve Skripak
Matthew Komelski
Hannah Scherer
Greg Tew

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Each month, the center recognizes a faculty member for effective, engaged, and dynamic teaching approaches and achievements.



Our September award winner, Angela Anderson, brings student-centered instructional excellence to the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise. [Read the full story.](#)



Our October award winner, Dana Garner, champions real-world problem solving in the Department of Accounting and Information Systems. [Read the full story.](#)

Save the Date

December 17 & 18, 2020 - Course Design Clinic:
Designing for Community and Engagement
<https://profdev.tlos.vt.edu/browse/teachingandlearning/courses/cetl50-121720>

February 3-5, 2021 - 13th Annual Conference on
Higher Education Pedagogy
<https://chep.teaching.vt.edu>



What's New in Teaching?

Faculty Q&A: Ozzie Abaye

Dr. Ozzie Abaye of the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences spoke to us about building community during pandemic, growing in her adaptability through the online shift, and maintaining positivity and care in the classroom.

Below: Dr. Abaye's students created Theatre Through Windows, a service-learning project bringing songs and skits to seniors at a local retirement home.



What has it been like adapting to teaching during a global pandemic?

I was in Senegal over Spring Break, so the decision to move online was made while I was abroad. I had a weekend to get acquainted with the new format, and it was stressful. I was physically and emotionally upset. It was like you left your home and when you came back, it was burned down. A lot of good things came out of it, though.

Can you give us an example?

In my World Crops and Cropping Systems class, we usually cook in the food lab. We talk about crops—corn in Mexico, lentils in India, rice in China—who eats them, what holy days center around the crops, and we celebrate the whole cultural transformation around a single crop. The students are exceptionally engaged when we cook those foods and celebrate the holidays

around them, but that was all gone when we switched to the online platform. It was very upsetting for all of us, and I tried to find ways that would allow us to remain connected while separated.

One of the options I gave them was to cook the weekly recipe with their family and post pictures of the process. That was quite successful because families were quarantined and stuck together, so they made a bunch of good stuff. I also started cooking on Zoom and Facebook, and some of the students were cooking along with me. I had former students watch it, and they said that hearing my voice brought back memories of their time on campus and inspired them to start cooking the recipes with their children.



It sounds like your learning community had to adapt to being disconnected from campus and each other, but that developed into a new way for students to connect with their families and alumni by sharing what they were learning online.

Yes. Change is difficult to swallow, but change is not bad once you get into it. I thought that was the only time I would teach this way virtually, but now we can use this method in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Spring semester. The students will be physically in the food lab in small groups, and they will teach the ones who are at home and take turns.

How has the change brought new opportunity and flexibility to your service-learning projects this semester?

It's just fantastic. We have normally done local projects, but this year connected to remote projects through VT Engage and the Cooperative Extension. One that I love is called Theatre Through Windows, where students sing and perform for the elderly at a nursing home in Christiansburg. We've also partnered with a social worker who taught us how to interact with elders. Some other students are working with Seed Programs International to create fact sheets for seeds that will be distributed all over the world.

I've been complaining about the service-learning projects that we've done in the Blacksburg area in the past. The students are engaged, but they don't actually see the people they are serving, there's no interaction. I've found that in our remote projects, they can see them via Zoom and interact. And so, to tell you the truth, I'm not sure I will ever go back to in-person service learning—this is actually the platform I'd like to adapt for the future in service learning.

What have you learned about your students and about yourself throughout this process of change?

About myself, I'll say that I never thought I was a flexible person. I was a traditional teacher. I never thought that I would actually feel comfortable enough to value teaching from home, but I learned that those relationships can be fostered in another way.



Photo taken before COVID-19

Learning is all about communication and understanding and trust and love for the profession—when the students can see that, they will accommodate you actually.

That was a total discovery for me. Technology is not bad. My fear was that I would fail at technology and that I would fail the students, but that wasn't the case. Fall semester, I am back teaching in-person. The first day of classes, we made a pact to follow all the proper protocol—face mask on all the time and social distancing—so we can finish the semester as we started in class. No plan B. I have exceptionally collaborative students. They love being in the classroom, and I love seeing their faces. So far, it is going very well.



Find us on Facebook

Stay up to date with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning on our Facebook page! We post weekly updates on important programs and upcoming events. We also share helpful teaching tips every Tuesday in a fun, video format. If you have any teaching tips you would like to share, please email ava3@vt.edu to be featured in one of our videos and boost our teaching excellence at Virginia Tech. Be sure to give our Facebook page a follow at TeachingVT! We are excited to use this platform to engage more with you all.