

# Teaching Commons News For Graduate Students

## Share your Love of Teaching with the Community



Even though we often teach alone, we are part of a much larger community of Teaching Assistants and teachers at York. Since learning often occurs in a variety of different social frameworks, we encourage you to share your passion for teaching and continue to learn new teaching tips and practices from each other. The Teaching Commons is a place where you can come, meet like-minded individuals and share your love of teaching and learning with one another. We encourage you to stop by anytime, not only for the workshops and events we offer, but also just to chat in our newly refurbished lounge. If you are looking for an excuse to come by, look no further than our TA drop-in! Experienced TAs would be happy to offer you free coffee and conversation. They are happy to answer any questions you have, share tips and strategies, but they also want to learn from you!

### TA Drop-in Hours with TCT Pat Breton

Thank you for your valuable feedback from the TA drop-in hours survey distributed in the December newsletter. We have taken your feedback and organized the TA drop-in hours in February to meet your needs.

Hello. Bonjour. My name is Pat Breton and I am a 6th year PhD student in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies. Since 2012, the Teaching Commons has supported my teaching development in learner-centered teaching through the TACT, STA, ISW programs and related workshops that I have facilitated and attended. The Teaching Commons is also supportive of the Equity Reading Group that I am involved with. We are an interdisciplinary group of 5 York PhD students, currently presenting workshops and papers on critical pedagogies and student learning and neoliberalism and anti-oppression education.

I have taught at York for 6 years, as a TA in predominantly 1st year foundations courses and as a course director in 3rd and 4th year social science courses. My teaching development is centered around how to critically engage diverse learners, such as students with disabilities, ESL students and first year students, in the classroom with complex social in/justice issues.

Here's a quick teaching tip I learned at the Teaching Commons to engage diverse learners with a complex threshold concept: Ask students to work in groups and "draw their answers" on the board. In my class, the visuals help diverse learners better grasp the concept and the students often tell me they have great fun with this interactive activity.

There are lot's more teaching/learning supports and materials at the Teaching Commons. So please drop in and visit on **Monday February 2, 11am-1pm** have a coffee and chat, in english or en francais. TA drop-in hours take place in the Teaching Commons Lounge, located in the Technology Enhanced Learning Building, TEL 1050.

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=230462> or just drop in!



TCT, Pat Breton (far right) speaking with two Junior Record of Completion awardees at the first bi-annual Record of Completion Celebration.

## Upcoming Workshops by STAs

### Trigger warnings: How to approach distressing course content with care

Wednesday, February 4, 2015, 12:30-1:30pm, TEL 1009

This workshop on the pedagogy on trigger warnings aims to assist TAs in approaching potentially distressing or disturbing graphic course material. In this workshop participants will discuss current debates around exposing students to textual and visual contents that can trigger painful memories among survivors of trauma. Originating in the blogosphere, the term “trigger warning” is used to warn readers about graphic scenes of sexual violence. It has gained a wider spectrum to include various traumatic experiences, such as racism, oppression, war, death, suicide, eating disorders, and pregnancy loss. For the past few years, educators have been debating the move of trigger warnings from online spaces into the classroom context. Bearing this in mind, this workshop will address the following questions: Are trigger warnings necessary? Effective? What is the best way to advise students about disturbing content in the course material? Is the idea of trigger warnings being trivialized and overused? Participants will be invited to reflect on these questions and discuss strategies on how to deal with potentially distressing material in the classroom through individual and group work activities.

Facilitated by: Veronika Novoselova, Senior Teaching Assistant in Gender, Feminist and Women’s Studies.

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=222311>

### If they're laughing, they're learning, effective strategies towards using humor in the classroom

Wednesday February 11, 2015, 11am-12pm, TEL 1014

Well-planned, appropriate, contextual humor can help students ingrain information. A growing body of research suggests that, when used effectively, classroom comedy can improve student performance by reducing anxiety, boosting participation and increasing students' motivation to focus on the material. Moreover, the benefits might not be limited to students: Research suggests that students rate professors who make learning fun significantly higher than others.

This workshop has 3 parts: The What, The How and The Who. In this workshop you’ll learn about what humor actually is, why to use it, some basics about “Brain Compatible Learning” and the concerns that many people have about using humor.

During this workshop you’ll:

- 1) Feel clear about the benefits humor can bring to the invaluable teaching you do
- 2) Be convinced to start using humor in your learning environment
- 3) Have a ready “tool box” of tried-and-true techniques to draw on
- 4) Feel fearless about using humor in your classroom
- 5) Participate in 8 activities that aim to enhance your understanding of using humor in your teaching.

Facilitated by: Soudeh Afsharian, Senior Teaching Assistant in the Department of Earth & Space Science & Engineering.

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=220882>



### What do participants say about our workshops?

“It was great to see how enthusiastic the presenters were about teaching.”

“I really enjoyed this workshop – great content and great leadership that allowed for personal experiences to be involved in the direction of the workshop.”

“The handbook of resources is useful as well as tips on how to help students succeed. Drawing info on strategies from a scholarly article was also useful.”

“I really appreciated the discussion on what is required for critical reading – I will be able to bring some of the material directly to my students for their consideration.”



## Ethical considerations when dealing with student academic emergencies or issues

Friday, February 27, 2015, 1-2pm, TEL 1014

Often due to circumstances beyond the student's control, there are emergencies and/or issues that can make it difficult to complete required course work within the assigned time. There are often doctor's and/or counsellor's notes that accompany these circumstances. Using case studies, participants will discuss the ethical issues involved in assisting students who may need more time to complete their assignments and provide options that may be used to assist these students that go beyond simply allowing more time for assignments. The goal is to make TAs better informed about relevant options and to provide guidelines for dealing with ethical issues that may arise.

Facilitated by: Jean Smith, Senior Teaching Assistant in the Department of History.

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=229355>

## More Professional Development Workshops

**How to use Prezi for your tutorials** (please bring your own laptop)

Thursday February 5, 2015, 12-1pm in TEL 1014

Register at: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=177940>

**Reading week is over – Strategies to maintain and inspire student motivation**

Wednesday February 25, 2015, 12-1pm in TEL 1009

Register at: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=178178>

## Foundations Seminar

### Working with Students at the Margins

Foundations TA's are invited to participate in a seminar featuring Foundations TA Matthew McManus. This seminar will take place on **Wednesday, February 4th at 2:30, in the Ross building, Room 752.**

This talk will focus on how to work with students at the academic margins: those who are doing especially poorly and those who are doing especially well. The presenter will be discussing strategies to accommodate these two groups of students, including how best to work to their abilities, and responsibilities TA's have to engage with students as pedagogical mentors. The formal presentation will be followed by group discussion.

First-time Foundations TA's attending this session may be paid for one hour's compensation at the CUPE overload rate, to a maximum of 7 hours of payment.

Matthew McManus has been a TA in the Law and Society Program at York for the past four years. He has also worked as a Foundations TA for the past three. His research focuses on the relationship between liberal and democratic theories of law and politics.

All are Welcome to Attend!



### Discipline Specific Workshops:

#### How a TA can actually create conflict in their classroom

This session is designed for TAs in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies, but all are welcome to attend.

**Monday February 2, 2015, 12-1pm in Founders College, Room 201**

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=221354>

Facilitated by: Ann Henley, Senior Teaching Assistant in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies

#### What to do when you are assigned to TA a course in which you have no academic background?

This session is designed for Humanities TAs, but all are welcome to attend.

**Wednesday, February 18, 2015, 12-1pm, in Vanier College, Room 029**

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=222634>

Facilitated By: Roland Shainidze, Senior Teaching Assistant in the Department of Humanities.