

Teaching Commons News For Graduate Students

Welcoming 2017



The Teaching Commons would like to wish you a happy, healthy and productive new year. We hope you had an opportunity to rest, relax and recharge. This is imperative for your mental health and also helps you to be more productive in your research and teaching. Did you make any new years resolutions for this year? The Teaching Commons' resolution is to provide even more engaging opportunities and helpful support. We have new workshops this winter and will be celebrating teaching at the 5th annual Supporting Teaching At York (STAY) Symposium in May. We hope you will be able to join us. Please let us know what else we can do to achieve our resolution as well as yours.

Congratulations Junior 'Record of Completion' Certificate Recipients!

The Teaching Commons is proud to announce the names of the dedicated graduate students who have earned a Junior 'Record of Completion' Certificate. These individuals have attended at least 5 workshops since only September! Please join us in congratulating these individuals and thank them for their commitment to teaching and learning at York University.

Crystal Benko, Yimo Dou, Mike Giggey, Betty Ann Henry, Heather Leung, Leon Liberman, Wendy Alejandra Medina de Loera, Wendy Moffatt, Catherine St-Hilaire, Asma Siddiqi, Jena Velji-Ibrahim, Kyle Wagner.

If your name does not appear in this list, but you have met the requirements, please contact Natasha May (maynat@yorku.ca) so that we may double check our records. There are also many more workshops upcoming that will count toward either the [Junior or Senior 'Record of Completion' Certificate](#). We hope to engage with you all again soon.

Upcoming Workshops

Marking and Grading Practices

Friday January 13, 2017, 1pm-4pm in DB 1014

[Register for the Marking and Grading Practices Workshop](#)

Fostering Integrity in the Classroom

Monday January 16, 2017, 12pm-1pm in DB 1014

[Register for Fostering Integrity in the Classroom](#)

Learn How to Use Prezi for your Tutorials

Tuesday January 31, 2017, 12pm-1pm in DB 1014

[Register for Learn How to Use Prezi for your Tutorials](#)

Classroom Strategies for When They Haven't Done the Readings

Thursday February 9, 2017, 12pm-1pm in DB 1014

[Register for Classroom Strategies for When They Haven't Done the Readings](#)



New Workshop - Threshold Concepts for Information Literacy: A TA Workshop on Teaching Undergraduates Critical Information and Research Skills

This hands-on workshop, **developed by York University Libraries**, will introduce attendees to threshold concepts and outline the major elements of [a new information literacy framework](#) founded on six distinct threshold concepts. By using this framework, teaching assistants can rework the way they run their tutorials and/or labs to incorporate activities that challenge students to develop their critical research and inquiry skills when engaging with information sources. While participants will learn about information literacy threshold concepts, they will also discuss best practices for teaching key research skills to students and work in small groups to collaboratively develop subject-specific tutorial/lab activities that incorporate elements of this framework.

Date: Wednesday January 25, 2017 from 2pm to 4:30pm

Location: Victor Philip Dahdaleh (formerly TEL) Building DB 1014

[Register Now!](#) – Space is limited to 25 participants

Introducing the Senior Teaching Assistants and STAY!

The Senior Teaching Assistants (STAs) have been working hard since September developing their ability to design and facilitate workshops on teaching for graduate students and TAs. If you attended some of our general workshops for all graduate students during the fall semester you may have had an opportunity to interact with and learn from these experienced TAs. During the winter semester they will be offering a discipline-specific workshop within their own departments, supporting their colleagues in teaching. Stay tuned for more details on these discipline-specific workshops, which can also count toward the Junior or Senior Record of Completion Certificate! In the meantime, let us introduce the STAs (from the picture on the right)

Top row (left to right): Matthew McManus and Katrina Gaibisels.

Middle row (left to right): Catherine Pavlik, Diane Sepa-Kishi, Katherine Chung, Mariela Giuliano and Justeena Zaki-Azat.

Front row (left to right): Janet Seow, Muhammad Murtaza Hassan, Melanie Wilmlink and Jenna Danchuk.

Absent: Revi Bonder, Elnaz Moghimi, Christine Nguyen and Jessica Whitehead.



On Friday May 5, 2017 the [Senior Teaching Assistant \(STA\) Course](#) will culminate in the Teaching Commons' 5th annual Supporting Teaching At York (STAY) Symposium. This event is an opportunity for graduate students to come together, share their experiences of teaching and learning, collaborate across disciplines and celebrate the exceptional and essential work that graduate students contribute to York every day.

The [STAY Symposium](#) is aimed at graduate students from across York and consists of an opening and closing plenary with parallel sessions in between that are designed and facilitated by the STAs. The STAs are already working toward their STAY sessions, considering the topics to cover that will inspire and inform you and your teaching. Whether you are completing your first year of teaching or have extensive experience at York and elsewhere, the STAY Symposium has lots to offer you and we hope you will be able to join us. More details of the symposium will follow in the coming months, but [registration is now open!](#)

Incorporating Online Environments into Tutorials

by Melanie Wilmlink

Between your iPhone, e-reader, and smartwatch, technology clearly infiltrates every aspect of private life. Academia generally lags technologically, for many monetary and bureaucratic reasons, however there has been extensive interest in the teaching possibilities of the digital, as evidenced in York's push toward eLearning, and a more general academic turn towards MOOCs (massive open online courses).

Since these devices are such an integral part of our cultural zeitgeist, we take it for granted that everyone has the same ability to access and properly navigate these exciting new tools. Unfortunately, even with students who are “digital natives”, it is unwise to assume that there is a baseline competency with any of the technologies that we use in a university setting. Cost (among other factors) may prevent students from owning their own smart-phones, tablets, computers, specialized software etc., and it is crucial to plan alternate means for students to participate without purchasing a specific technology. This may mean offering resources for on-campus access (<http://www.library.yorku.ca/web/ask-services/computing/laptop-borrowing/>), off-campus borrowing (<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/using-the-library/computer-services/innovation-spaces/branch-equipment.jsp>), or allowing students the flexibility to complete work from either mobile or desktop devices.



Software developed for universities often uses outdated, or clunky, interfaces that may require more effort to understand. With the rapid obsolescence of devices and operating systems, technology users adapt quickly to new forms of navigation, making the return to older systems feel awkward or aggravating. Although [York's Moodle system](#) is actually quite flexible, there is definitely a learning curve for new users. When you are acting as a TA, the course instructor will likely have set up an interface already, or there will be a basic template that you can adjust to your own taste or teaching plans. You will want to familiarize yourself with this system before your tutorial. If you are unsure of how to use Moodle there are great training tools once you log-in, under the [INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES](#) tab (you can also direct students to the [STUDENT RESOURCES](#) tab), and you can find video tutorials on the Moodle website (https://docs.moodle.org/32/en/Moodle_video_tutorials).

If you are lucky enough to have an in-person tutorial to support online content, it is important to take some time during the first class to walk through the interface as a group, reminding students of the basics like updating their email address and uploading profile photos (a real bonus if you're as bad at names as I am!), showing them where to find important information, how you prefer to be contacted (and what your timeline for responding will be), and how they will be expected to submit assignments. It is wise to anticipate where students might struggle, and explain how to access information multiple times. I've found it's useful to do so through several classes, usually on the first day and then repeating the walk-through when discussing specific assignments. If the course is completely online, it might be possible to create simple .pdf cheat-sheets, or send out regular email reminders.

Remember to make online tasks simple to understand and access; students should spend their time with the assignment, not on figuring out the interface. Also keep in mind that for the students, digital assignments—whether they happen on Moodle, Twitter, Instagram or other forums—are still work, not fun. Even if it seems like they should be happy to use a system they might already know, we are sucking all of the life out of it by forcing them to do it, and they will still need incentives. It helps to attach online tasks to grades, such as a participation mark, however as a TA you may not always have that power. Just remember that whatever incentive you find must connect directly to a clear task (i.e. 5 forum posts = 5% participation) and deadline in order for it to function properly. Finally, try to not to feel too uncool when your students roll their eyes at the fact that their old fogey instructor is making them use the archaic platform of Twitter when they've long since moved on to Snapchat.

Don't forget, we are looking for submissions for the TC Grad Student News Monthly Blog. Send your submissions to maynat@yorku.ca today! (or any day)