

# Reflections



A look back at some of the best stories, tips and blogs of the 2016-17 academic year with Carleton University's Teaching and Learning Services.



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Reflections is an annual magazine published by Carleton University's Teaching and Learning Services. The magazine highlights stories of teaching excellence and innovations happening all around campus. If you have a story you'd like to share, please contact us at [oavptl@carleton.ca](mailto:oavptl@carleton.ca).

**On the cover:**  
Michael Runtz teaches along the river on campus.  
Photo: Chris Roussakis

# Trigger warnings in class: Helpful or harmful?

By: Emma Brown,  
TLS Staff Writer  
September 2016

“I’m going to play a 911 call for you,” he said.

The police officer stood at the front of the class, delivering his guest lecture for a criminal psychology class.

“Someone’s breaking in,” a young woman’s frantic voice echoed through the class. “They’re coming... they’re coming.”

The professor, Adelle Forth, shifted nervously in her seat. She wasn’t aware that her guest would be playing this.

The tape continued: the young woman was raped while crying out for help. Forth sat in shock. Two students got up and left.

“I was appalled,” Forth says.

This incident happened in her early days of teaching in the 1990s. “I learnt my lesson,” she says.

Now she warns students when material covered in class will be disturbing or traumatic.

Recently, there has been debate

around the use of trigger warnings in academia. Trigger warnings are alerts to notify victims of sexual assault or other traumas that the material about to be presented could elicit a strong emotional response and/or memories of their trauma. The warnings give students the opportunity to leave class if they do not want to be exposed to the material.

Forth includes a general warning in her course outlines to inform students they will be studying “cases that may be upsetting.” She also warns students the week before they discuss cases to which someone in class may have a personal connection (i.e., one student was Russell Williams’ neighbour).

“I do think we have to be very sensitive to people’s history,” she says.

Ron Saunders, a professor of criminal law, doesn’t explicitly warn students but he does include the topics on the syllabus so they are aware of what will be covered and can choose not to come. His courses touch on disturbing topics such as domestic violence and sexual abuse.

“I don’t want to tell the students what’s difficult or what’s challenging or what should be shocking in advance. I want them to be led by the author, by the language, by the context a novel sets up.”

Jennifer Henderson

However, he hopes that students who have been victims of these crimes would appreciate his treatment of the topics if they do come to class.

“Certainly, if they wanted to engage, I would hope that there’s a sense that there’s a welcoming atmosphere,” he says.

English literature professor Jennifer Henderson doesn’t use trigger warnings. She says this is partly because the sensitive material is always encountered as writing, rather than in public spectatorship (as in a film class).

In addition, she says, “I don’t want



to tell the students what's difficult or what's challenging or what should be shocking in advance. I want them to be led by the author, by the language, by the context a novel sets up."

The trigger warning puts a name to what happens in a novel in a way that "reduces or does violence" to the students' experience of it, she says.

"There's something a bit patronizing in that, that [students] need protection or that they need advance warning about what's shocking," she says.

Kenta Asakura, a professor in the School of Social Work, also doesn't

use trigger warnings in class.

"I explicitly encourage them to stay and become aware of the discomfort that they're experiencing... recognizing their own wounds or vulnerabilities," he says.

He thinks giving students the option to leave is a missed opportunity. This is particularly important in the field of social work because clients are taught how to "sit with the discomfort" rather than flee from it, he says.

"If we ask our clients to do that kind of difficult work every day, we must do the same to demonstrate to

our clients that this work is possible," he says.

And so, the discussion continues. What are your thoughts on the trigger warning debate? Do you think trigger warnings have a place in academia? ✨



Photo: Chris Roussakis

# Who is teaching whom?

By: Claudia Buttera,  
Lab Coordinator,  
Department of Biology  
January 2017

In the nearly 29 years that I've been a lab coordinator in the biology department, more than 6,000 students have sat, worked and learned in my labs. I have learned everyone's name, gotten to know most of them, and for many years afterward, can even remember where they sat. If our paths crossed on the street, I think I could probably recognize most of them, and I often do, stopping to chat for a bit.

As educators, we work hard to provide the best learning experience for our students, for the most part never knowing the ultimate impact we have had on their lives beyond this campus. Did we do a good job of teaching them? Did we leave a positive mark on their lives?

It is natural for us to wonder how we may have influenced our students through our teaching, but over the years I have come to appreciate and value the effect students have had on me, not only as an educator, but as

a person, and so, I would like to pay tribute to a very small sampling of students who, over the years, have left a mark on my life and have contributed to my growth as an educator.

Students like Ian, in my lab over 25 years ago, who demonstrated such a genuine passion for learning that it was infectious – so much so that his girlfriend, who wasn't even taking the course, came to the plant lab every week and learned along with him. His commitment to learning and doing not just a good job but a great job when working in the lab was one of the early influences that fueled my own drive to do not just a good job but a great job for students.

Students like Pradeep who took the course three times before passing, each time with dedication, commitment and enthusiasm. He made me rethink and change the way I assessed students, because he could prepare the most beautiful plant tissue sections, but almost always did terribly on written work, which always cheated him of the recognition of his talents in the lab.

And then there's Jonathan, who

had returned to university after several years away from school. For a lab report, he wanted help to better understand what he needed to do before heading home to work on it. His questions were what we had expected from students and we'd successfully tackled them with several students already, so the TAs and I explained things, just like we had before. But it didn't work – he didn't understand.

So, we talked to figure out what he did understand, and we tried to explain things a different way. Nothing. By then, it was an hour past the end of the lab and the TAs had to go. So I stayed, and tried something else. And I kept on trying. I lost track of how many ways I tried to get him to understand, and about two hours past the end of the lab Jonathan started laughing, which honestly, I wasn't sure how to take. So I asked him, "Why are you laughing?" He said, "Claudia, no one has ever tried that hard!"

Jonathan was the perfect reminder that not all learners are the same – they vary on so many dimensions of learning, and as educators we need to be mindful of those differences. 'Trying



that hard' was his way of punctuating the shortcomings and failure of a one-size-fits-all approach to design, delivery and assessment in teaching.

Emma in my second-year lab several years ago, was a very good student but not outwardly interactive, was super quiet, would turn beet red during in-lab discussions. I noticed however, that she would always quietly help her bench mates understand the material. So I asked her if she would want to be an undergrad TA for the course the following year. She was nervous but she came out of her shell and did an absolutely amazing job. She's now one of the grad TAs for both of my courses and regularly contributes new ideas for experiments and things to try. The quiet, not outwardly interactive student in the classroom, when given an opportunity, can be a great leader.

Dylan, who was in my Wednesday afternoon lab a few years ago, sat on the far left side of the room and had the worst attitude – absolutely hated being there. There was no way of making him interested, no matter what we tried. I honestly got chest pains before every Wednesday lab, but the TAs and I never gave up on him. He did however give up on us and dropped the course two-thirds into the term.

Two years later he walked back into the lab and sat in the same spot he had before, and I took a long deep breath. Here we go again. But at the end of that first lab period he came to talk to me and apologized! He said he was really sorry he had acted so badly, that he had been too immature and didn't know what he wanted back then, but that he really wanted to be here this time because he knew it was a great lab. I genuinely choked up a little. He reminded me to never to give up on a student.

Students like Corey, two years ago, who sat at the same spot as Dylan had, seemed totally uninterested in plant biology until the day I made a connection between plants and architecture and engineering. His head popped up and he jumped right into the conversation. It was like a switch got turned on. It was so interesting to

watch because it worked every time! Sometimes making a connection with a different, and what may seem unrelated subject, can be the spark that ignites that flame in a student, a flame that kept burning bright for the rest of the term.

And there was Evan, who was in the lab last year. For bonus marks and as part of an end of term assignment, students were asked to connect the plant anatomy they had learned to anything they were interested in, in any way they wanted. He asked if he could do it through interpretive dance. "Are you a dancer?" I asked. He said no. I asked him if he was serious, and he said yes. "OK! Do you want to do it just in front of the TAs and myself?" He said no, that he was OK doing it during the lab in front of the class.

So he did, and it was SO GOOD! No leading explanation, no words, just movements. He just did it and we all totally got it. Giving him the free-

how impressive a person he was.

Albert, I came to know, had been orphaned, adopted and raised by a nurse, and by the age of 16 had experienced a fuller life than most of us will live in a lifetime. A life peppered with obstacles, challenges and events that gave him hands-on experiences in life that most of us only read about in novels, every one becoming a learning opportunity for him.

Not only did he dedicate himself to his studies, he dedicated himself to working toward making a difference. An entire continent away from home and doing it all on his own, he worked to pay for his studies and living expenses while at the same time putting aside 10 per cent of his earnings to fund a bursary for future students requiring financial support to come to Carleton.

Albert is perhaps the student who most vividly highlighted for me that the 'student' version of the people in our classrooms are but a mere drop



Photo: Chris Roussakis

dom to express himself in the way he chose was unconventional and a valuable learning experience, because it was fun, interactive, innovative and very effective. Great job Evan!

And finally, there was Albert, quite a few years ago. Academically, Albert was outstanding. As a student he was fully engaged and a pleasure to have in the lab but it wasn't until he shared with me his medical school application letter that I came to appreciate

of whom they are as people and, most often, all we ever get to know about most of our students. He made me realize that getting to know and value the person beyond the student is what truly feeds and enriches my own attitude, approach and passion toward my job as an educator.

So, thank you to all the nearly 6,000 students so far and the ones yet to come, because for me, the learning never stops. ✨

# Inspiring instructor: Carleton's Alan Steele wins 3M teaching award

By: Suzanne Bowness,  
Freelance Writer  
February 2017

Alan Steele's voice energizes when he's talking about his engineering students. He's particularly eager to describe some of the neat projects they've come up with in his third-year design course, a project-based class that invites students to synthesize the skills they've learned to that point with the goal of building something practical in preparation for their capstone project in final year. This year's efforts include an insect habitat that changes lighting and heat to mimic dusk and dawn, and a project in partnership with a local office building to monitor commuters' use of bicycles with a shed that logs greenhouse gases saved through pedal power.

Steele adds that the excitement the students have for bringing their ideas to life makes the class fun.

"To learn about some of the real world applications is obviously worthwhile for the engineering students, but it also enthruses them," he says.

While Steele's own talents for inspiring such enthusiasm may not be news to his students, this associate professor has just added a new honour to his teaching record—a 3M National Teaching Fellowship, one of only up to 10 awarded per year by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) and 3M Canada.

The award is not Steele's first rec-

ognition. In 2011, he was awarded both the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations Teaching Award and Carleton University's Provost Fellowship in Teaching. He has also received a University Teaching Achievement Award (2007) and was a co-recipient of a University Service Excellence Award for Innovation (2013) for the Discovery Centre.

"To learn about some of the real world applications is obviously worthwhile for the engineering students, but it also enthruses them."

Alan Steele

As director of the Discovery Centre for Undergraduate Research and Engagement, an informal learning space in the MacOdrum Library, Steele's impact has moved even beyond his home department of electronics in the Faculty of Engineering and Design. Tasked by the Provost to create a space that was collaborative and inclusive, Steele (along with librarian colleagues Margaret Haines and Valerie Critchley) came up with an environment that features flexible furniture arrangements, white boards, and large screen displays for students to hook up their laptops and gather around the same screen. Other additions include treadmill desks and

3D printers.

Three years later, the space is incredibly popular.

"The Discovery Centre is set up to be a place where groups of students can get together, can talk, and can interact and further their studies. The interaction that they will have discussing ideas, concepts, maybe self-correcting, all helps as an added dimension to their learning," says Steele.

The Discovery Centre has also attracted visitors from other academic institutions and even government departments keen to create similar spaces. Along with his librarian colleagues, Steele recently authored a chapter related to the project, called "Informal Learning Spaces in University Libraries", as part of a book on informal learning spaces called *Exploring Informal Learning Space in the University: Its Place in the Digital World* (Ashgate 2017).

Publishing about pedagogy and sharing ideas with other teachers have also long been part of Steele's own teaching practice. He has published several papers on pedagogical topics, and founded an informal group called the Carleton Committee on Engineering Education Research, to share teaching advice. The group now presents its insights even more widely by presenting papers at the Canadian Engineering Education Association. Steele is also a part of the interdisciplinary Carleton Committee on Community Engaged Pedagogy. Working with the Office



Photo: Chris Roussakis

of the Vice-President Research and International, he also helped developed the Internship – Carleton University Research Experience for Undergraduate Students (I-CUREUS), to engage undergraduates to participate in research.

Back in the classroom, Steele says that even beyond those rewarding “lightbulb moments” where you can see students grasp concepts, he likes the challenge of thinking on his feet and also the back and forth between teacher and students. He also loves the practical aspects of engineering, such as seeing students solder for the first time, or designing and constructing their own circuits for a practical project, even if they do not get it working the first time.

“They learn a lot better than me

just telling them. They may have to order new parts and they’ve learned something significant. It builds a confidence, it builds ability, it builds extra understanding in ways that you can’t often convey in a classroom,” says Steele.

In addition to being impressed by his students, Steele is inspired by his colleagues.

“We do have an excellent support structure, including the Educational Development Centre and Instructional Media Services,” says Steele.

He adds that the increased number of teaching awards at Carleton is also motivating.

“These are ways that show that Carleton supports development of teaching and celebrates it,” he says.

Steele says he is humbled by the

3M award and also to be counted among Carleton’s past winners, who include Alan Gillmor (1995), Brian Little (1995), Donald Westwood (1997), Aviva Freedman (1997), Tim Pychyl (1998), Janna Fox (2002), Robert Burk (2006) and Adrian Chan (2012).

“We’ve got some great innovators here with teaching. You just need to look at those awards over the years and there is a community of some excellent academics who do amazing things in the classroom.” ❁



# Putting ease back into the equation: cuPortfolio in engineering and physics courses

By: Cassandra Hendry,  
TLS Staff Writer  
May 2016

For numbers and equation-based courses, such as engineering, physics or math, handing in printed sheets of paper with page after page of computer-drawn graphs or equations is not always the best use of time and resources. For the ease of both student and instructors, many have turned towards more advanced technology to get their message across.

For physics professor Etienne Rollin, moving class submissions to a dynamic, online setting is a no-brainer.

“[Hardcopies] are static. They aren’t very pretty. While on the computer, students can use colours and animation . . . It’s very easy, especially for physics students who are in general technologically inclined,” Rollin says.

Rollin uses cuPortfolio with his students, a relatively new electronic portfolio system for Carleton students to submit and showcase their assignments in an exciting, interactive way.

Rollin’s students, who are in a second-year lab-based course on optics, can record data and display graphs with different conditions that the viewer can toggle through. No longer do students have to submit a printed lab report with pages full of graphs. Instead, they are now condensed into one interactive image on cuPortfolio, which Rollin says he appreciates.

Liam O’Brien, an assistant professor of engineering, uses cuPortfolio’s capabilities in a unique way. His fourth-year students who are completing a large group project must submit memos, notes and presenta-

The screenshot shows a cuPortfolio submission page for a Fraunhofer experiment. The page has a navigation bar with tabs: Title, Outline, Introduction, Why, Example (highlighted), Experience, Plot.ly, Trinket.io, Summary, and Equations. Below the navigation bar, there is a title 'Example' and a subtitle 'An example from a student in PHYS-2202 for the Fraunhofer experiment.' The main content area is color-coded and includes a 'Purpose' section, a 'Theory' section, and two figures. The 'Purpose' section states: 'To verify the Fraunhofer Diffraction condition at far distances. Find the width of a single slit and double slit apertures. To find the constant of a multiple slit (diffraction grating) and its corresponding resolving power. And finally to identify the unknown light source being aimed through the diffraction grating.' The 'Theory' section discusses Huygens' Principle and Fraunhofer diffraction conditions, with the equation  $R > \frac{b^2}{\lambda}$ . Figure 1 is titled 'Single slit interference' and shows a graph of intensity versus angle. Figure 2 is titled 'Double slit interference' and shows a graph of intensity versus angle.

tions through cuPortfolio to demonstrate what parts of the project they’re contributing to.

With six professors all supervising the course due to the large number of students, O’Brien found that even though his students had used an online format previously to submit their work, cuPortfolio injected well-needed organization and reflection into submissions.

“We find it extremely useful to evaluate their work. Before they used to upload to a big Dropbox and it was a real nuisance to the professors,” O’Brien says. “Now, it forces them to think about the value of their work. They can comment on what they’ve learned and their individual contribution to the group project.”

Both professors highlighted that their students can easily show future employers, friends or family

their work in a condensed, visually appealing way rather than emailing separate Word or PowerPoint documents.

Leah Morrell, a fourth-year engineering student in O’Brien’s class, says it’s her first time using cuPortfolio and she found it to be an excellent way to demonstrate her knowledge to employers as she approaches graduation.

“My favourite aspect of cuPortfolio is that I can use it as an addition to my job applications. Rather than attempting to put eight months’ of work into two sentences, I can put a link to my cuPortfolio.”

For more information about cuPortfolio and how it can be used to promote student-centered learning in your courses, visit the cuPortfolio support page at [carleton.ca/cuportfoliosupport](http://carleton.ca/cuportfoliosupport). ☼



# Elevating learning in an online format: Using cuPortfolio for reflection

By: Cassandra Hendry,  
TLS Staff Writer  
June 2016

In Janne Cleveland's first-year English course on how to write an essay, she says she's seen some students who have been challenged by the course content improve over the semester. One of the reasons behind the improvement? cuPortfolio, Carleton's new learning tool for students.

Cleveland uses the online portfolio system for her students to submit reflection-based assignments on what they've learned over the past week and what they believe they need to improve upon, though she says there's more learning happening than meets the eye.

Cleveland says that with cuPortfolio, students have an easily accessible way to see their own progress throughout the term. Students control the content, unlike in other online learning formats where they can't engage with the process of learning.

"Giving students the feeling of having something over which they have direct input and a sense of ownership really helps to instill greater confidence in them, as well as a deeper recognition of their own responsibility in the learning process," Cleveland says.

"I have ESL students, international students, mature students, and students from different programs who have no idea how to write a humanities paper; a real mix of people in the room," she says. "Plus, if students are held responsible to go and comment on what they've learned and what they've picked up, then that gives me feedback when the course is on, not just when it ends."

Trevor Lapointe, a student in Cleveland's course, is a new user to cuPortfolio. He's able to submit

his reflection pages as well as essays and annotated bibliographies through the system, which he finds convenient.

"Being a part-time student, and not having a lot of time outside of work, the convenience of being able to submit everything electronically has been very much appreciated," Lapointe says.

Political science professor Melissa Haussman also has students use the tool for reflection on issues discussed in her class, which is centered on electoral reform around the world and how it relates to Canada.

"Students submit responses to

readings and because of the format, it transmits it to me and I can get back to them almost immediately without waiting for a piece of paper to be dropped on my desk the next day. It actually makes the experience much more responsive and more immediate," Haussman says.

One student from Haussman's class, Liliane Langevin, has used cuPortfolio for her weekly responses, as well as to prepare and report on her job shadowing experience that is facilitated through the course.

Langevin says that cuPortfolio was "very intuitive and convenient" for her to embed a PDF resume as well as to look back through the work she archived through her job shadowing.

Haussman finds that in general, the

The screenshot shows a user profile on the cuPortfolio platform. The profile is titled "Policy interests" and is owned by Jordan MacLaren. It features a navigation menu with "About me", "Clinical interests", "Policy interests", and "Writing samples". The main content area is divided into three sections: "A focus on policy" with a video titled "RDA Shows - Growth is Not Enough", "Published work" with a report titled "REPORT BY JORDAN MACLAREN: COMPARATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS ON STUDENT FINANCIAL AID", and "Media coverage of the report" with links to articles from Canadian Business, Toronto Star, and Redeye Interview.

reflection papers and assignments students submit through cuPortfolio are better than those submitted in hardcopy.

“I think the quality is actually better, to be honest. It’s a more condensed format. Maybe it’s because

it’s more of a job to put it online so there’s less filler and students get to the main points, thinking about what they’re writing,” Haussman says.

Another key aspect of cuPortfolio, according to Haussman, is the option of making student portfolios and the

associated instructor comments public.

“[Students] have a bigger stake in the quality and relevance of their weekly responses . . . It’s really made the course more immediate. Students can see the implications much more.” ☼



Photo: Chris Rousakis

## Helping students see the value of a flipped classroom

By: Emily Cook,  
TLS Staff Writer  
May 2016

When most students enter a classroom, they expect to hear a professor talking at them for three hours straight. But professor Jeffrey Erochko is hoping to change that expectation by flipping the classroom and showing students the value of class time.

Erochko has been teaching structural engineering at Carleton University since 2013 with a research focus on earthquake engineering. In 2015, he won a New Faculty Excellence in Teaching

Award for his commitment to teaching excellence and innovation. When he first developed his courses he says he decided to make them unique.

“I thought, if I’m going to do something interesting, I better do it the first time,” he says.

Erochko says he adopted a flipped classroom model of teaching, where the “lecture” happens at home in the form of videos or readings and class time is saved for more interactive, hands-on activities. He says this was tricky to implement because engineering students expect to be presented with information before working independently.

“Students are not used to preparing to come to class,” he says.

Erochko has his students watch YouTube videos with sample problems and complete readings and quizzes ahead of time. During his first year with the flipped classroom model he assigned textbook readings, which students didn’t like, so he adapted by giving them his notes on textbook chapters.

“One of the biggest challenges is to convince students that there is value in what you’re doing, in order to convince them to actually engage with the kind of learning context that you’re trying to get them to adapt to,” he says.

Erochko says students also need to be encouraged to come to class.

“I think that’s the pitfall of the flipped class sometimes, that if they don’t perceive the lecture time as valuable then they just won’t come,” he says.

What works for Erochko is allowing students to get stuck on problems in class so they realize they need help.

“It’s much better for them to get that help from professionals in lecture or in tutorial than it is for them to try and struggle with that part on their own,” he says.

Erochko is now looking to incorporate an assignment where students post short videos on YouTube explaining an engineering concept or skill.

He says he is constantly adapting and changing his teaching every year, with student perception influencing the changes.

“If it’s something good I should be able to explain it to them in a way that they also agree it’s valuable,” he says. ☼





Photo: Chris Roussekis

## In praise of online teaching – Thoughts as the first millennials turn 40

By: Rebecca Bromwich,  
Instructor, Department of Law  
and Legal Studies  
June 2016

We are riding a generational and technological wave into a new mobile age, and teaching and learning in higher education are along for the ride. I didn't start off as a tech enthusiast, but recent experiences, and the example of a wonderful friend, have turned me into a proponent of online education. I've come to realize that meaningful human connections of the sort that facilitate education can happen online.

I'm approaching some milestones this year. My 40th birthday is approaching at the end of the summer, and my 15 year law school reunion is coming then too, both of which signal that I'm no longer a young teacher, young lawyer, or young person, by any stretch of the imagination.

My 40th is a mile-marker for me but it's also a personal instance of a larger social trend. I'm on the "shoulder," right between Gen-X and the millennials. I'm one drop in a cultural wave. This year, the year I turn 40, is the moment at which the first wave of millennials is turning 40. The "generational" literature about different demographics in the workplace is about to become dated. The "younger" group is coming of age, and the electronic world they live in is becoming mainstream across professional and educational settings.

It makes a lot of sense that, riding this cultural wave, I have become excited about the potential of online teaching. I've been thinking lately about how well travelled my laptop is. It has been to New Orleans, Cancun, Calgary, Banff, Montreal and Toronto, and I've only had it a few months. I have to pause and

marvel that I often reach students who are in my online class while living in Beijing, Vancouver and Vienna, by sending and receiving emails while in flight.

"I've come to realize that meaningful human connections of the sort that facilitate education can happen online."

Rebecca Bromwich

For a long time, I have had some cynicism about online teaching. I share popular criticisms of online education and worry about how it can be an easy "cash cow" for universities, the ultimate way to cram more "butts in seats" without having to pay for infrastructure. The first time I taught an online course,

at another institution 10 years ago, the technology didn't support much interaction between students and teachers. I could post slides and send and receive emails and that was it.

Now, we have live chat and the ability to have online synchronous classroom discussions using BigBlueButton and streaming video. Further, western society has shifted a great deal so that through social media platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, we all have personal and professional connections who we contact regularly but certainly don't see often, if ever.

A close friend of mine died a couple of years ago, a few months before she would have turned 40. Her name was Debra Shelly and we were law school classmates. We didn't see each other often, but, mostly online, we had always kept in touch. She was a feminist trailblazer in the comic book community and a social media master. Deb had epilepsy, which was what ultimately ended her life, and it sometimes presented a barrier to in-person communication.

However, online, Deb was able to function fabulously, and her incisive intellect, lightning wit, and wonderful warmth came through almost magically. When she passed away, her family and friends marveled at the geographic reach of her kindness and support.

She had been a friend and mentor to a huge network of people, from soldiers serving in the Middle East, to her fellow law school alumni across Canada, to comic book aficionados across North America and the UK. She is sorely missed by so many of us, hundreds of whom she never met.

So, yes, I am excited now, as I turn 40, about the prospects and potential of teaching and learning online. Deb's incredible example of mentorship around the world shows how online relationships of mentoring, support and teaching can be very real. So, as I enter my next chapter in teaching and learning, at mid-life, remembering her example, I'm enthusiastically embracing electronic communication. ☼



Photo: Chris Roussakis

## Pros and cons: Debating accounting in the classroom

By: Cassandra Hendry,  
TLS Staff Writer  
May 2016

If you walked into Hilary Becker's classroom at Carleton on any given day, you might be serenaded by salsa music or become a witness to a passionate debate between students.

His course? Why, that would be accounting.

Becker, an associate professor of accounting with the Sprott School of Business, is the master of unorthodox learning methods in his classes.

"I guess I've always sort of done things differently. I'm always looking for unique and different ways to engage the students," he says.

Accounting isn't the first course that comes to mind when one pictures students preparing debates,





“I guess I’ve always sort of done things differently. I’m always looking for unique and different ways to engage the students.”

Hilary Becker

but for Becker, it makes perfect sense. Accounting is often fact-based learning without much context or chance to think about the issues and ethics of certain topics. In these classroom debates, students are able to fulfill that side of learning as well.

“Students have to learn these skills to get by with clients or if they’re consulting with companies about accounting policy choices. I get them to think broadly and picture how these skills are actually going to be used,” he says.

To start the debate, Becker divides his class into two or three groups and gives them about 15 minutes of preparation time. Similar to a real

debate, students need to think about what their opponents will say and prepare counter arguments to rebut. From there, he usually lets the students jump right into it with little structuring on his end.

Some of the topics his students have recently covered include debating stock options and role-playing as representatives from local tourist destinations to determine who gets what in bundle pricing, such as dinner and a movie for a set price.

Becker says the feedback over the 10 years he has been conducting debates has been “very, very positive.” One student noted that learning professional judgment and thinking beyond

the numbers has really helped, while another, who was on one side of an issue, found the debate opened her eyes to a completely different perspective.

He says he rarely receives less favourable feedback, hearing only that sometimes students don’t have the opportunity to state their full arguments when there’s a large class, an inevitable situation.

Besides that, it’s not uncommon for students to tell Becker about how it prepared them well for the exam, in addition to how enjoyable it was being able to really relish the chance to show off their knowledge.

Debates in an accounting course? Not so strange after all. ✪

Your  
comfort  
zone



# Becoming comfortable with discomfort

By: Cassandra Hendry,  
TLS Staff Writer  
July 2016

In professor Kenta Asakura's classroom, it's not unusual to see a local actor milling about, getting ready for a performance. From the outside, it may seem that theatre class is about to begin. In reality, Asakura and the actors he works with are preparing for a second-year master's course in social work.

"One of my signature teaching pedagogies is the use of simulation," Asakura explains. "I work with actors to assist them in enacting [clinical social work] cases I've had in the past."

To ensure his students are ready to face the world outside of Carleton, he uses actors funded through a grant by the Educational Development Centre to role-play as clients with his students. While Asakura admits that it can be an anxiety-inducing situation treating a client in front of the class, he says the students who interacted with the actors said it was useful overwhelmingly.

"The only way for us to become comfortable with discomfort is to really dive into it and not be afraid," he says.

Asakura, who just completed

his first year as a faculty member at Carleton, is no stranger to this unique way of teaching social work theories. He has taught as a contract instructor using these methods at his alma mater, the University of Toronto, and also at the Smith College School for Social Work in Massachusetts. With the exception of the last year, Asakura has practiced as a social work clinician for 14 years in his own private practice as well as in group homes, outpatient counselling programs and LGBTQ centres, his area of specialty.

"The only way for us to become comfortable with discomfort is to really dive into it and not be afraid."

Kenta Asakura

For Asakura, the learning curve wasn't that steep coming to Carleton as he was able to use his expertise in an academic context with which he was familiar. While he says he's still getting used to local Ottawa hospitals and services, it's been going well.

For him, it was a natural progres-

sion to use his years of hands-on experience as a teaching tool.

"As a practitioner, this is an important pedagogy. I'd say it's the most effective way of teaching students how to integrate theories into practice," he says.

This approach stems from the changing environment of the social work community, he says. More than a decade ago when Asakura was completing his master's program like his students are today, he says that local employers were able to provide more training for students entering the field.

"Those days are over. Agencies and hospitals are looking for students who are able to provide practice pretty quickly...that leaves a lot more responsibility for schools of social work to be able to better prepare our students for practice," he says.

One of the only stumbling blocks he encountered last year was assuming that his students knew more about assessment in social work, which he says he glossed over. After speaking with fellow Carleton professors and having a year under his belt, he's revised the syllabus to fit his students' needs to help them face the professional world soon after they leave. ✿





## How to get students to spot their “academic discipline” around every corner

By: Mira Sucharov,  
Associate Professor,  
Department of Political Science  
October 2016

An exciting byproduct of my fourth-year seminar on political opinion writing has been the phenomenon of students discovering politics — the “home discipline” of the course — around every corner. The class, which I developed this year as a special topics course, is intended to get students to both analyze and learn to master the op-ed writing form.

The course involves students writing four op-ed assignments (plus two required pre-read versions), plus orally presenting on two op-eds that they select from that week’s news. The writing assignments are hybrid ones, which is to say that students are required to footnote extensively and provide background data and addi-

tional empirical analysis in the notes.

And while it’s technically a “political science” course, I have encouraged students to think about politics in the broadest sense: anything regarding social and political understandings around identity (whether gender, sexual, ethnic or national) and power (whether material or ideological), or government regulation at any level (municipal, provincial, state or national); and policies at any level (local or international).

The breadth of topics students have chosen to write about reflects the benefits of casting the net wide. Topics have ranged from online gambling to media portrayals of Hillary Clinton to gender reassignment surgery to Black Lives Matter to learning policy lessons from history to urban hen farming to “voluntourism” to tuition fees to rock climbing and provincial park regulation.

What’s particularly satisfying for

me is enabling students to discover analytical links as they navigate through their everyday life — whether by engaging in a favourite hobby (like sports, gambling or rock climbing) and wondering about the political possibilities of domestic regulation, or by watching the news and getting frustrated by seemingly arbitrary rules restricting urban hobby farmers, or by trying to uncover the less visible political and global implications of an activity they may be initially attracted to — like traveling abroad to volunteer.

Forging these kinds of intellectual links is the hallmark of critical thinking, which in turn forms the bedrock of strong democratic citizenship. I’m gratified, therefore, that a course that I developed to help shore up strong writing and analytical skills actually is proving to have far greater implications for the possibilities of democratic engagement. ✿



# Flexible evaluation

By: Kevin Cheung,  
Associate Professor, School of  
Mathematics and Statistics  
August 2016

As a new academic year is about to begin, many instructors are in the process of drafting course outlines.

When I was a student, I always went straight to the evaluation scheme as soon as I received a course outline. I suspect that many of my peers did the same then. After all, the evaluation scheme often provides an indication on the workload during the term and what it takes to obtain a desired grade.

Having taught more than a decade, I thought coming up with an evaluation scheme for a course would simply be a matter of routine. But some recent experiences compelled me to consider what is known as “flexible evaluation.”

As the name suggests, flexible

evaluation offers flexibility in how students are evaluated. The most extreme form of flexible evaluation is to allow each student to come up with his or her own evaluation scheme (subject to approval of course). But many flexible evaluation schemes are in the form of offering different predefined pathways for earning grades.

Advocates of flexible evaluation schemes argue that students learn differently and therefore there is no one-size-fits-all evaluation scheme. However, when course grades are used for determination of awards and learning-outcome assessments, the issue of consistency cannot be ignored.

For example, if a student gets a C+ under a flexible evaluation scheme, what does that say about what the student has learned? This is a question that instructors must be able to answer.

My motivation for considering a

flexible evaluation scheme comes mostly from the idea that students learn at different speeds. For the courses that I teach, the term is a period of formation. It often makes little sense to give students (especially early on in the term) a C for poor work on an assignment covering something that they have just learned. I feel that grades on term work should not have a huge negative impact on the final grade.

One approach to minimizing the impact of poor term grades is to assign no weight to formative activities. I have seen that done in some courses and what ended up happening was that hardly anyone would do the work.

“My motivation for considering a flexible evaluation scheme comes mostly from the idea that students learn at different speeds.”

Kevin Cheung

Another approach is to allow students to submit revisions to their work to improve their grades. Unfortunately, such an approach is often logistically infeasible, especially in a large class.

A more practical approach is to assign marks to term work as usual but transfer a portion of the marks lost to the final exam. In other words, students who have done poorly on assignments will have their final exam worth more. With this approach, the incentive to do the work is not entirely lost because having a good term grade eases the pressure to perform well on the final exam. ☼





Photo: Chris Roussakis

## Bringing research into the classroom

By: Emily Cook,  
TLS Staff Writer  
July 2016

In one of Prof. Martin Geiger's classes you might find yourself learning from emerging researchers via Skype, or peer-reviewing more senior students' papers. But whatever you do, it all comes back to research.

Geiger joined Carleton's Department of Political Science and Institute of European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies in 2014. Since then, he co-founded Mobility & Politics, a transnational research collective, and was awarded a 2016 Capital Educators' Award for the significant impact he's had on student learning both in the classroom and through his extensive research work. He says he always tries to extend his teaching outside the classroom.

"My teaching doesn't go without my research and my research doesn't go without my teaching, both are completely entwined," he says.

In his classes, Geiger says he tries to make the subject as interesting

and interactive as possible. This includes breaking larger classes into smaller groups, and using tools like Pinterest, Skype and videos to engage students who learn differently.

"It's so that they have another way of expressing themselves," he says.

Geiger says he's always looking for ways to integrate undergrads with grad students so they can learn from each other.

"My teaching doesn't go without my research and my research doesn't go without my teaching, both are completely entwined."

Martin Geiger

"The idea is to bring in MA students to the undergrad classroom and by doing this, to encourage and stimulate more people to go down the research path," he says.

He also does something that's mostly unheard of: bringing in BA students to graduate courses to give

peer-to-peer feedback on MA or even PhD students' work.

"I don't really care about undergraduate versus graduate, I see the person," he says.

Above and beyond that, Geiger says he works alongside students to publish papers with them – whether they're graduate students or not.

"There is a hierarchy with students," he says. "But I try to keep that as flat as possible. I see my role as being the facilitator and senior collaborator."

This is where Mobility & Politics comes in. The collective brings together more than 70 emerging scholars from across the globe to collaborate in research.

When he won the Capital Educators' Award, Geiger says he was very happy, but felt the award was more representative of that collaborative work inside and outside his classes.

"For me the award is actually for my students. Because only they make it possible that I can do these things. Without their excitement and commitment, it would not work." ❁



Illustration: zibi.ca

# Collaborative engineering: A look inside one of Carleton’s unique capstone projects

By: Cassandra Hendry,  
TLS Staff Writer  
June 2016

Engineering is based on knowing your specialty, and knowing it well. But what happens when you’ve reached the limits of your expertise? A collaborative class featuring six professors and seven degree programs at Carleton may have the answer.

When engineering students reach their final year of university, their accumulated skills and knowledge are tested through a unique, year-

long capstone project segregated by program.

But two years ago, while working on a capstone project for housing in Canada’s North, the 25-student mechanical and aerospace class had hit the limit of their knowledge. A broader approach with various specialties was needed, and a collaborative class was born.

Mechanical and aerospace engineering professors Cynthia Cruickshank, Craig Merrett, Glenn McRae and John Gaydos, and civil and environmental engineering professors Liam O’Brien and Jeffrey

Erochko, all oversaw the past school year’s 50-student class of engineers.

The year-long class brought two teams of 25 students together to address an issue close to home: the sustainable building redevelopment of Albert Island as a part of Windmill Development’s Zibi project in Ottawa and Gatineau.

“We wanted to work on a project that aligned more with the students’ ideas of sustainability,” Merrett says, explaining that the professors had coordinated with the vice-president of Windmill to create two competing student designs for sustainable





Photo: zibi.ca

“It was a real world experience. The students were out there talking to people in the community, and the community was interacting as well.”

Craig Merrett

building engineering. These included student innovations in retrofitting existing buildings, optimizing the use of water and sunlight, and providing insulation through a green roof.

In the past, Merrett says, students had worked on projects throughout the world, which broadened their knowledge but also limited their ability to see up close and personal the effects of what they were designing. With the Zibi development, students were able to engage in something that could influence their daily lives.

“Students get to design something that may be built in Ottawa so that

when they’re older, they can walk with their kids and say, ‘Yes, I helped design this,’” McRae says.

That kind of reality became a large part of the course when many students took issue with the land dispute between Windmill and the Algonquin tribes that traditionally lived in the area.

McRae says that it forced the professors to think on their feet during the course. To address these issues, a representative from Carleton’s Centre for Aboriginal Culture and Education was brought in to give a workshop, while anonymous surveys were circulated and students gave presentations based on their ethical viewpoints.

“Frankly, it challenged us as professors...The course is really about technology, society and the environment. And the society part is something engineers don’t really learn about in school,” McRae says. “It was a real world experience. The

students were out there talking to people in the community, and the community was interacting as well.”

Real world experience is what the course is all about, Cruickshank says.

“The project involves other disciplines and it really gives students a chance to gain an appreciation of the other disciplines involved,” she says. “Past students have said the fourth-year project helped them decide what they want to do with their careers. It’s really rewarding that way.”

For the professors, the course was a learning experience as well. Cruickshank says that they had the opportunity to meet more students and professors with whom they usually wouldn’t collaborate and gain an appreciation for their skillsets.

“I think we all bring something unique to the table,” she says.

To learn more about the Zibi project the class worked on, visit [zibi.ca](http://zibi.ca). ☼

# Celebrating our teaching award winners

Many Carleton educators show tremendous passion for teaching and learning and dedication to student success, whether it's through their use of technology, high-impact practices or other classroom innovations. This year, many of those educators were recognized for their efforts at the institutional level and beyond. Please join us in congratulating the 2016 teaching award winners!

- Christopher Dieni (Institute of Biochemistry)  
– Capital Educators' Award
- Martin Geiger (Department of Political Science) – Capital Educators' Award
- Nduka Otiono (Institute of African Studies)  
– Capital Educators' Award
- David Dean (Department of History)  
– Provost's Fellowship in Teaching Award
- Shawn Graham (Department of History)  
– Provost's Fellowship in Teaching Award
- Michael Hildebrand (Department of Neuroscience) – New Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award
- Rodney Nelson (Centre for Initiatives in Education) – New Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award
- Erik Stephenson (College of the Humanities)  
– New Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award
- Shannon Butler (Sprott School of Business)  
– Excellence in Teaching with Technology Award
- Claudia Buttera (Department of Biology)  
– Excellence in Learning Support Award
- Cynthia Cruickshank (Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering)  
– Teaching Achievement Award
- Maria DeRosa (Department of Chemistry)  
– Teaching Achievement Award
- Dana Dragunoiu (Department of English Language and Literature) – Teaching Achievement Award
- Jeffrey Erochko (Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering) – Teaching Achievement Award
- Kanina Holmes (School of Journalism and Communication) – Teaching Achievement Award
- Kristin Bright (Department of Sociology and Anthropology) – Contract Instructor Teaching Award
- Andrea Charron (Norman Paterson School of International Affairs) – Contract Instructor Teaching Award
- Shermeen Nizami (Department of Systems and Computer Engineering) – Contract Instructor Teaching Award
- Michael Donkers (Department of Physics)  
– Contract Instructor Teaching Innovation Grant
- Erik Anonby (Department of French)  
– FASS Teaching Innovation Award
- Eva Kartchava (School of Linguistics and Language Studies) – FASS Teaching Innovation Award
- Gregory MacIsaac (College of the Humanities) – FASS Teaching Innovation Award
- Mark Pearcey (Department of Political Science) – FPA Teaching Excellence Award
- Simon Power (Department of Economics)  
– FPA Teaching Excellence Award
- Kevin Cheung (School of Mathematics and Statistics) – Faculty of Science Teaching Award
- Travis Martin (Department of Physics)  
– Faculty of Science Teaching Award
- Caroline Mitchell (Department of Physics)  
– Faculty of Science Teaching Award
- Pat Morin (School of Computer Science)  
– Faculty of Science Teaching Award
- Jeff Smith (Department of Chemistry)  
– Faculty of Science Teaching Award

# Reflections

MAY 2016- APRIL 2017

Interested in reading more stories like these? Sign up for Teaching and Learning News, our monthly e-newsletter, for the latest information about Carleton's teaching and learning community. Email [oavptl@carleton.ca](mailto:oavptl@carleton.ca) to subscribe.

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