

August 2023**Message to Faculty**

I hope you are having a wonderful summer. I am reaching out now to remind you that the McGraw Center is open and available to you this month as you prepare your courses for the upcoming semester. Our team consults on a wide range of topics—from putting together your syllabus, to planning in-class activities, to devising innovative assignments and grading rubrics. Please don't hesitate to reach out to **set up an appointment.**

This spring, we funded ten Inclusive Pedagogy Grants. These grants offer faculty a modest honorarium to revise an element of a course to more strongly reflect equitable and inclusive teaching practices. Reading the applications was inspiring; I was thrilled by the number and diversity of the proposals we received. (Learn more about the projects proposed on **our website.**) I look forward to the grant recipients sharing the outcomes of their course modifications in the coming year.

We have a terrific slate of fall programs planned, including workshops, discussions, and an event celebrating excellence in teaching and mentoring. We will continue to convene our dynamic **Faculty Learning Communities,** so if you're seeking a welcoming space to talk about teaching, please consider joining one that suits your interests. Enjoy August, and we will be in touch again as the semester starts.

All my best, Jessica

Resource Reminder

The newly revised [Teaching at Princeton](#) pages offer guidance on curating a syllabus, developing learning goals, cultivating active and collaborative learning, and evaluating student work. The section titled [Before the Course](#) might be of particular interest at this moment, as it encourages reflection on previous teaching experiences as we look forward to a new semester.

Program Highlights

Our well-attended session on alternative grading featured professors Alexander Glaser, Brian Herrera, Barbara White, and Stacy Wolf discussing the different approaches they use in their classes. The panelists shared how—in their experience—the implementation of these alternative methods changes the student-professor dynamic for the better. In White’s words, using collaborative assessment practices makes her feel like “more of a coach and less of a police officer.” We offer brief descriptions of Specifications, Contract, and Portfolio-Based Grading, as well as some broader recommendations for student evaluation, in the [Teaching at Princeton pages](#) on our website.

Teaching Tip

A start of the semester survey is a great way to gather information about your class and to begin to get to know your students. You might use the survey to ask about student’s motivation for taking the course, to find out what interests them about the topic, or to inquire about their prior knowledge of the subject matter. I use [mine](#) to invite students to share their pronouns and to ask whether they want me to correct others if they are misgendered in class. You can find more ideas for what you might include in such a survey and suggestions for how to administer it [here](#).

What We're Reading

This summer, McGraw Center staff read and discussed several chapters of [Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning](#) (2014) by Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel. Rooted in cognitive psychology, the book calls into question common assumptions about how we learn, specifically critiquing cramming, re-reading, and repetition as strategies that may appear to work in the short term but fail to create lasting learning. The book’s argument for the importance of the retrieval process has implications for college teaching. The authors advocate for frequent, low stakes quizzing, leaving time in between review sessions, and varying what material is tested. The discussion of “desirable difficulty,” which the authors define as “short term impediments that make for stronger learning,” is a useful reminder that learning can (and should) be hard (68). Throughout the book, the authors emphasize the importance of being transparent with your students about your pedagogy—always sound advice, whatever learning strategies you’re implementing in your classes.

Our Assistant Director of Educational and Program Assessment, is participating in a book club with the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) in which they are reading [Reframing Assessment to Center Equity: Theories, Models and Practices](#) (2022) edited by Henning, Baker, Jankowski, Lundquist, and Montenegro. A volume of works written by assessment practitioners and leaders across the nation, the book has proven inspiring and energizing as it prompts deep thought about equity and access in education.

Oftentimes lambasted in educational spaces as a major part of the equity problem, assessment can be used not only as a tool to identify inequity, but also as a mechanism to support its elimination. Assessment itself should be fair and inclusive, but it should be used to ensure our teaching practices and educational programs are fair and inclusive as well.



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