# Training Students for Collaborative Learning

*By Lindsay Bernhagen, Ph. D.*

**M**any of us rely on group work in our courses, confident in the wisdom that getting students to collaborate with their peers is a tried-and-true active learning strategy. However, group work doesn't always pan out the way we—or our students—hope that it will. Group dynamics can become toxic, resentments between

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students can simmer, and negative experiences in one class can carry over into future courses.

Much of the research on the challenges of collaborative learning focuses on the problems engendered by two types of singular student: the slacker student who prefers to ride their group members' coattails, and the "lone wolf" who finds collaboration more tedious than doing the work alone. But Margaret Finnegan, writing for *Inside Higher Ed* cautions: "To embrace such stereotypes, however, is to embrace the idea that groups have problems because particular group members are personally defective. In fact, problems with groups are usually social in nature and stem from lived social dynamics and histories." With that in mind, making group work *work* requires a more thoughtful approach in order for our students to gain the maximum amount of learning through collaboration.

Consider the following strategies, which I've adapted from Finnegan:

1. Train students to work in teams, especially if group projects are a significant part of a student's experience and/or grade in the course. Talk to students about how to delegate and manage team roles, and how to develop a plan and timeline that is fair to all group members, how to communicate (beyond exchanging contact information), and, importantly, how to handle conflict if it arises within the group. Such skills serve students beyond coursework, as well, as they are commonly needed in almost every workplace.

2. Make time for the groups to work on becoming a team in class. Give them some simple

# New Team Member Welcomed

Bridget O'Neill joined the CITL team in July as Instructional Designer and is quickly getting acclimated to our campus and meeting many of the faculty and staff members we serve. Feel free to stop in and welcome her.



Bridget O'Neill, CITL Instructional Designer

Here is an introduction from Bridget:

After 25 years in the secondary English classroom, I've stepped into the role of official instructional designer here at UWSP. I'm a previous Canvas administrator as well as online adjunct instructor and course designer for Ottawa University. My husband Daryl, who is a high school history teacher for Pacelli Catholic High School, and I moved to Kronenwetter from Phoenix, Arizona, in June. We have one perfect son who just married his love and lives in the Portland, Oregon, area. Our Michael was born in Milwaukee where we lived for ten years, so being in Wisconsin truly feels like home. Our two dogs, Lucky and Teddy, keep us on our toes. I love an embarrassing amount of pop culture (can't get enough of HGTV or Orange is the New Black), mystery novels, singing, baking chocolate chip cookies, and updating my personal blog on my musings about our amazing and sometimes frustrating universe.

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collaborative tasks where they can start to figure out their dynamics before they have to work on the higher-stakes assignments.

3. Talk to students about why you value group work, what the research shows about diverse groups outperforming homogenous ones (especially over time), how to

individually reflect on their own contributions and challenges in the group, how to be mindful of social dynamics that may be affecting their group, and that even the difficult parts of group work (conflict and failure) are important—albeit frustrating—learning moments.

Teaching and learning itself is a collaborative relationship, so as the instructor you are likewise well-served by reflecting on what worked and what didn't in your relationship with your class, as well as the possible reasons why.

Finnegan's article, "It's Good Till It's Not" is available on InsideHigherEd.com.

**TRANS\* IN COLLEGE**

TRANSGENDER STUDENTS' STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING CAMPUS LIFE AND THE INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS OF INCLUSION

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FOREWORD BY KRISTEN A. RENN
AFTERWORD BY STEPHEN JOHN QUAYE
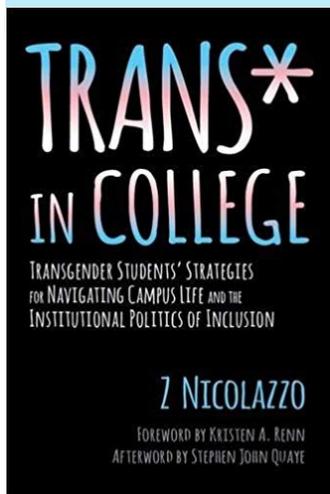
# Fall Book Group Registration Opens

### *Trans\* in College* by Z. Nicolazzo

From the publisher: "This is both a personal book that offers an account of the author's own trans\* identity and a deeply engaged study of trans\* collegians that reveals the complexities of trans\* identities, and how these students navigate the trans\* oppression present throughout society and their institutions, create community and resilience, and establish meaning and control in a world that assumes binary genders. This book is addressed as much to trans\* students themselves – offering them a frame to understand the genders that mark them as different and to address the feelings brought on by the weight of that difference – as it is to faculty, student affairs professionals, and college administrators, opening up the implications for the classroom and the wider campus."

Registration is limited to 10 participants, each of whom will receive a complimentary copy of the book. **Please register to attend.**

# Participate in a Course Design Institute

Are you preparing to teach a new course, or are you ready to make a change to one you are already teaching? Join CITL for a five-part intensive institute designed to provide you with the tools, the time, and the collegial support to really dig in and design or re-design your course.

By the end of each institute, participants will have created the basic structure of a course, including plans for a syllabus, assignments, assessment tools, and a course outline. Perhaps even more importantly, they will have had a chance to exchange feedback with a diverse group of colleagues from across our university, allowing them to share their ideas about teaching and gather new ideas from their peers.

Participation is limited to 10 people. $200 in professional development funds available to those who complete the institute.

**Registration link.**
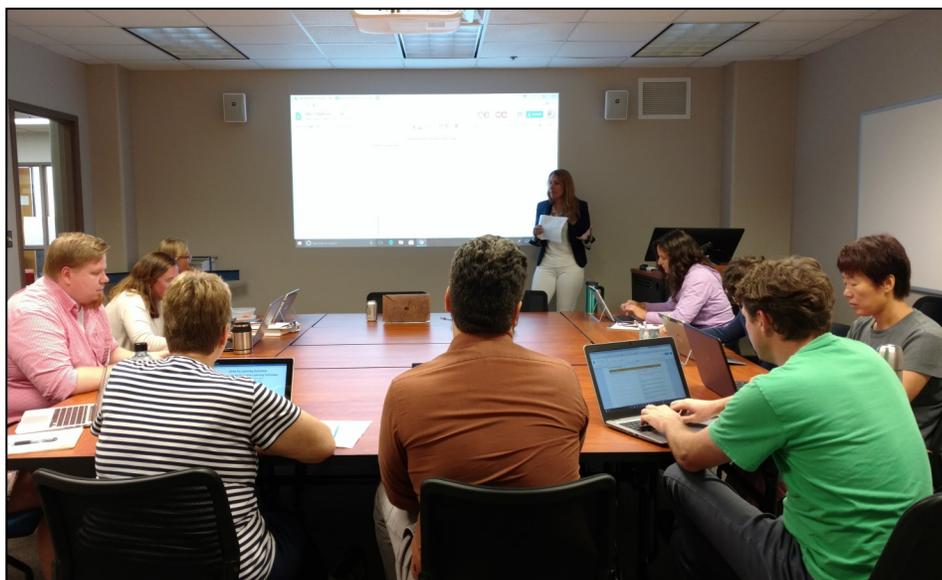
# Grant Deadline Extended

The application deadline for Online Course Development Grants for Winter and Spring 2019 has been extended until September 5, 2018.

**New Online Course Development Grants** are available for online courses that have not been offered during the past four terms. **Online Course Revision Grants** are available for existing online courses.

**Apply now!**

# Difficult Dialogues Workshop

Friday, October 5
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Presenter: Libby Roderick, Ph. D.

Libby will share hands-on strategies and resources for engaging difficult dialogues in the classroom, and provide faculty developers and university leaders information about campus initiatives that strive to advance the expansion of innovative approaches to civil discourse on controversial topics and complex social issues at the college level.  Let's start talking!

**Learn more and register to attend.**

# Canvas for Fall 2018

Canvas will be used for instruction in a pilot program for approximately 100 courses this fall. Any new instructors to campus, or instructors teaching a course prep for the first time, can opt to use Canvas instead of D2L, if they wish. Only instructors meeting these criteria should be using Canvas during the fall 2018 semester. Please contact Sean Ruppert, **sruppert@uwsp.edu**, with any questions. Support for D2L will continue, but we will be unable to offer training in D2L for this and future semesters.
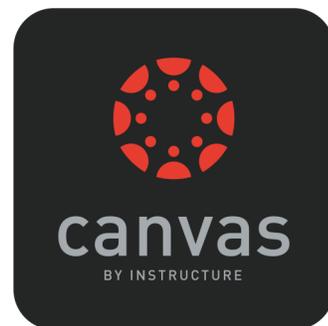
## Teaching in Canvas

Canvas access can be found on the "Logins" menu on the university navigation banner and on the UWSP Canvas website: **https://uwsp.edu/canvas**.  Instructors using Canvas for Fall semester should place an announcement on their D2L home page for the course indicating that the course is being offered in Canvas.

A pre-semester checklist, available on the UWSP Canvas website, will walk instructors through the final steps they need to take to copy their courses from the Master course area into the semester, combine their sections, and to prepare their courses for teaching. Under "Instructor Resources," click the link for "UWSP Canvas documentation" and look for the "Pre-semester Checklist."

## Instructor and Student Training

Face-to-face training for instructors has been ongoing through the summer; approximately 31% of our faculty are now trained on Canvas.  Even if you aren't teaching in Canvas this fall, you should plan on attending training sooner rather than later. The schedule and registration for training sessions beginning in October will be available soon. Online training for instructors is available at **https://uwstp.instructure.com/enroll/PY6MBF**.

Student face-to-face training will be available through the middle of September. Face-to-face training may continue if student interest is apparent. A student online training/orientation is available for self-registration at **https://uwstp.instructure.com/enroll/FNRAL8** .