



## CENTER FOR ENGAGED TEACHING AND LEARNING

### Newsletter

#### Welcome from the CETL

It is hard to believe we are already through August and into September. Most of us have spent much of the past month thinking about what the rest of this semester will look like and how to ensure that our students are getting the most out of their learning experiences. It is great to see the number of faculty that have such a passion about getting this semester right for our students. Faculty have asked the CETL so many good questions, from designing discussion forums to making sure their students can engage in the virtual (possibly recorded) environment while they teach in a face-to-face setting. We want to share these great inquiries and some of our ideas to address them. Therefore, the CETL board is working very hard to create a website that will house not only a pedagogical Q and A forum to share ideas, but also many other resources for you. Please let us know your thoughts and needs. If you have not had an opportunity to fill out the [CETL Needs Assessment Survey](#) please take a moment and let us know how we can help you. Remember this is your CETL and we are here for you.

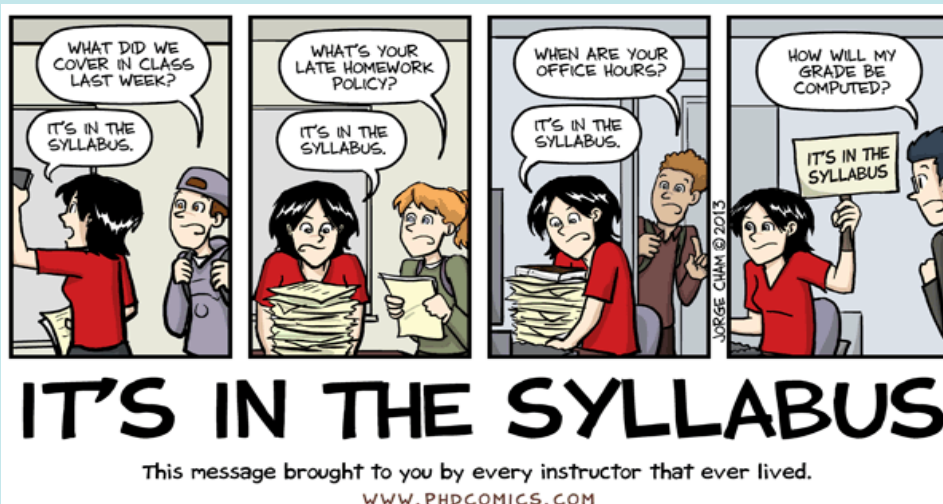
#### New CETL member: Nicole Soper Gorden

My thanks to Chris Cain and the rest of the CETL for inviting me to be part of their work. I'm excited to contribute to an engaged teaching community on campus! For those who don't know me, I grew up in a tiny rural town in northern Minnesota and graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College with a double major in biology and English. I completed my PhD in plant biology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, focusing on interactions between flowers and the things that eat them (florivores are the coolest!). During my postdoc at the University of Minnesota Duluth, I helped build the Project Baseline research seedbank to study plant ecology and evolution over the next 50 years. My academic training gave me experience with a variety of institution sizes and teaching approaches, and I realized early on that the liberal arts are where I want to be. I started at Mars Hill University in 2015 and am a faculty member in the natural sciences department (biology) where I teach botany and general biology courses. My teaching interests include active learning and lab activities, student learning through research experiences, teaching writing and analytical skills, community engagement, and interdisciplinary courses. This semester, in addition to introductory biology, I'm excited to be teaching two interdisciplinary courses: an honors mini course on pteridomania (the Victorian obsession with ferns) and an I&I class on the science in science fiction. I live in Burnsville with my husband, my dinosaur-obsessed 3-year-old son, an elderly puggle, an overly-affectionate black cat, and a turtle. In my down time I enjoy reading, fiction writing, vegetable gardening, and baking. I look forward to working hard to help make the CETL a resource everyone on campus benefits from!



## FACULTY2FACULTY

There's a reason that "It's in the syllabus" has generated memes, T-shirts, posters, stickers, jokes, and low-key (or not so low-key) eye rolls for as long as syllabi have existed. Students often don't read the syllabus despite the fact that answers to their questions are most often found there. It's tempting right now to still use "it's in the syllabus" as the fallback response, but these are not ordinary times. One of the things I've noticed since we moved to remote/online/hybrid teaching is that I've had a harder time focusing, and I need to create more reminders and supports for myself than is typical for me. My students report similar things when I check in with them, so the way I'm trying to care for all of us and keep us all on track is just to write weekly run-down emails. Every Monday morning, I send an email to each class and include the highlights of the week for that course. I clearly list what students need to read (or what content they need to access, if it's not a reading), what they need to do (whether it's to reflect or to make an appointment with me for a conference, etc), what is due, and where they can access any relevant materials. I also include all of that information in Moodle for that week's module, but



the weekly run-down email helps me stay on top of things, connect with students, and make sure they have one more resource for those questions that would typically be answered in the syllabus. I also try to include something personal to wrap up the weekly run-down. It can be something simple, like how grateful I am that the weather has been sunny so I could get the kids out of the house; something silly, like a joke or meme that provided a moment of levity in a time that feels oh-so-heavy; or just a personal note about how I'm feeling, if I'm struggling with something, or how much I care about them. That's it. It's nothing groundbreaking or world changing, but it is a little bit of grace in email form, in a time when "It's in the syllabus" just doesn't feel like the right answer to any of our questions.

-Jessica Van Cleave

## RESOURCES

[Unpublished Article – Humanizing Online Teaching](#)

[Article: The Secret Weapon of Good Online Teaching: Discussion Forums](#)

## WELLNESS CORNER

While we are spending all this time focusing on our classes and our students, it is equally as important to focus on our own wellbeing. We encourage you to find a quiet space and curl up with a good book, take a warm bath, go for a long run, take a secluded walk, do something enjoyable for yourself. In this article [“What is Loving-Kindness Meditation?”](#) the author provides four scripts (activities) we can utilize to feel more at peace when we start to get overwhelmed.