The Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching promotes university teaching that leads to meaningful student learning. Our offerings are available to any members of the Vanderbilt community interested in developing their teaching practices.

YEAR IN REVIEW
2020-21
When higher education pivoted to remote and online instruction in the face of COVID-19, the Vanderbilt teaching community faced the herculean task of fostering student learning during a pandemic. They confronted this challenge with resolve, creativity, and compassion. I’m proud to be a part of such a dedicated community of teachers. The Center for Teaching, in turn, faced the challenge of helping that teaching community learn and practice the kinds of adaptive teaching they needed to navigate changing conditions. By some measures, the Center provided about ten years of programming in just four months. And all this during a year that was as tumultuous politically and socially as any I can remember.

I am honored at the trust the university teaching community placed in the Center for Teaching during this trying time, and I am proud of the work that my CFT colleagues accomplished. I am grateful that our campus sees the value of the Center for Teaching both during crises and in more ordinary years and that the university administration has invested in a world-class teaching center.

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The Center for Teaching supported the teaching mission of Vanderbilt’s educators in this difficult year and, through inclusive teaching, the CFT continued to enhance the effectiveness of Vanderbilt’s educators in this difficult year and, through them, enrich the learning experiences of our students.

In the pages that follow, readers will get a sense of the many ways the Center for Teaching supported the teaching mission of Vanderbilt University between March 2020 and June 2021.

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

The last 16 months saw the demand for educational technology rise to extraordinary heights as faculty and graduate instructors sought to adapt to online and hybrid education. In response, CFT dedicated extraordinary time and labor to help instructors, not merely by introducing various technologies, but also by fostering principles and practices of effective teaching. This occurred through a wide variety of programs.

Online Course Design Institutes

From May through August 2020, the CFT offered eight two-week Online Course Design Institutes (OCDI) to help prepare faculty for a year of online and hybrid teaching. A total of 490 faculty and other instructors participated from across the disciplines. The participants developed course plans, designed learning materials, built skills with educational technology, and learned how to help students thrive online. In May 2021, the CFT offered a redesigned one-week OCDI with more opportunities for practical application, with 13 participants.

I started my all-online class today, and I have to say, it was great. I am hugely relieved and super grateful to you (and the rest of the CFT team). I used so, so, so many of the tools and ideas and graphics. I could not be pulling this off at all without having gone through the course!

Terry Maroney
Robert S. and Theresa L. Rader Chair in Law
Professor of Medicine, Health and Society

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the areas of my course design that needed to be more adapted to online instructional design. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the 2021 Summer OCDI. I learned evidence-based strategies for designing and presenting online materials in a way that is motivating, engaging, and rewarding for both students and faculty. I really got more than I was expecting. I learned how to use cutting-edge technology in course delivery. OCDI is worth your time investment.

Queen Henry-Okafor
Assistant Professor, School of Nursing

The BOLD fellows helped me truly become an expert in online teaching. There is nothing like teaching something to help solidify and internalize your knowledge of it. I also found it gave me instant credibility with my students, which helped me gain their trust with so much change. As I was introducing all that I was doing (so much of it new!), I could point to my work as a BOLD fellow teaching other faculty as evidence that what I was doing was to the student’s benefit. Finally, my colleagues at Owen all thanked me at some point last year for the course—they all found it helpful in their own teaching.

Jesse Blocher
Associate Professor of the Practice of Data Science and Finance

Blended & Online Learning Design (BOLD) Fellows

To help facilitate 92 small group cohorts throughout the Online Course Design Institutes in 2020, the CFT, with the critical support of the Provost’s Office, recruited 25 faculty and one graduate student as our new BOLD Fellows. Their expertise and generosity proved invaluable as they supported their colleagues in building online courses and developing new teaching skills. Several BOLD Fellows even went so far as to continue to mentor and convene teaching discussions throughout the Fall of 2020. The CFT is deeply grateful for their work and collegiality during a difficult time, and to the Provost’s Office for making their fellowships possible.

REACH

From March 2020 through June 2021, the CFT had a total of 3,261 participants in all consultations, workshops, conversations on teaching, learning communities, and other programs, not including Brightspace Support. This represents 1,884 unique individuals, including 511 tenure-line faculty, 441 non-tenure-track faculty, 381 Ph.D. students, 221 administrators and staff, 143 postdoctoral fellows, 34 undergraduates, and 162 external participants. This means that the CFT reached 53% of Vanderbilt’s 1,790 faculty (not including those employed by VUMC), a 42% growth over 2019-20.
EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Brightspace Support
Between March 2020 and February 2021, the CFT’s Brightspace Support team experienced a 230% increase in support requests over the previous 12-month period. For the extended period between March 2020 and June 2021, Brightspace Support saw a total of 11,849 tickets and 1,011,291 website page views, participated in vendor processes and roll-outs for Provost-approved educational technologies (GoReact, Gradescope, Perusall, and Proctorio), provided some technical and practically all pedagogical Zoom support, hired new staff (Michael Coley and Jenny Park) to expand support hours and services, and organized multiple online teaching workshops with senior staff.

Online Course Visits
In Fall 2020, the CFT offered an Online Course Visits program that allowed more than 80 instructors to visit virtual courses hosted by more than 25 colleagues. This was a valuable way to help instructors learn from others about how to organize their courses, communicate with students, and foster student interaction.

Learning Community on Online Teaching
In Spring 2020, the eight members of the Online Teaching Working Group began compiling useful resources from previous meetings and, along with much of the OCDI content, created a public-facing website entitled, Course Development Resources (CDR). This site serves as a self-paced tutorial on designing and teaching successful courses in online and hybrid formats. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the group worked together to create and update CDR pages and offer two Conversations on Teaching, one on group work online and one on accessibility.

Coursera Partnership
The Vanderbilt-Coursera partnership provides educational opportunities for learners around the world and introduces them to Vanderbilt’s teaching and research missions. Currently, Vanderbilt has ten courses and two specializations on the platform. Coursera opened a new process for course and specialization proposals from Vanderbilt faculty members.

Workshops and Conversations on Educational Technology
The CFT also opened and oversaw the One Button Studio, an automated video studio that can be used without any previous video production experience. Despite being closed for much of the year due to COVID safety measures, 19 faculty from 14 departments used the studio on 84 separate occasions to create educational videos for student review, flipped classrooms, online teaching, and more.

TEACHING, DIFFERENCE, AND POWER

Social events over the past 16 months revealed that, as a society, we have a distance to go before we achieve full inclusion and equity. Vanderbilt faculty, staff, and graduate students, however, have been eager to do their part to help Vanderbilt become a model of inclusive higher education. They have dedicated themselves by participating in, if not co-facilitating with CFT staff, the CFT’s various course design institutes, learning communities, workshops, conversations on teaching, and other programs.

Course Design Institute on Inclusive Teaching
In May 2021, the Center for Teaching offered its first Course Design Institute on Inclusive Teaching. Participants redesigned courses with a focus on developing their practices of inclusion, particularly motivating and challenging all students regardless of background, engaging a diverse range of voices and perspectives, supporting student belonging and empowerment, developing productive dialogues about difficult subjects, providing accessible assignments and activities, and closing performance and persistence gaps. A total of 36 instructors participated, along with 17 faculty and staff from across the disciplines who, with the CFT senior staff, modeled a variety of approaches to inclusive teaching. In post-CDI surveys, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the CDI prepared them to design courses aligned with principles of inclusive teaching, and that ideas shared in the CDI were likely to have a positive impact on their teaching.

Learning Community on Teaching and Race
In 2020-21, the CFT hosted a learning community dedicated to understanding the many challenges and opportunities of teaching about race and racism, as well as teaching strategies that ensure students of all racial identities can thrive at Vanderbilt. In five events throughout the year co-facilitated with expert faculty and administrators, a total of 132 participants from across the disciplines engaged in a variety of conversations about the challenges of teaching about race and racism, managing classroom conflicts around race through intergroup dialogue, how to support faculty development for anti-racist teaching, culturally appropriate pedagogies, and closing performance and persistence gaps.

Workshops and Conversations on Inclusive Teaching
In addition to these longer format programs, the CFT offered 18 workshops and conversations on various aspects of inclusive teaching with a total of 274 participants. Some were open to all and some were offered to specific schools, departments, and programs by request. While the general focus for all was professional development around inclusive teaching, several schools requested workshops on teaching issues of race and racism, given the year’s events.
Learning Community on Supporting LGBTQI+ Students
This academic year the CFT, the KC Potter Center for LGBTQI Life, and the Faculty Senate co-hosted a learning community on ways faculty can better support the needs of LGBTQI+ students. Over 30 participants met on four occasions to explore LGBTQI+ student’s experiences inside and outside the classroom, to discuss scholarly literature on strategies for inclusion, and techniques of integrating these strategies into our teaching and mentorship. These meetings were co-facilitated with Rob Nelson (Interim Director of the Potter Center), Catherine McTamaney (Faculty Senate/Teaching & Learning), and various contributions from expert faculty and staff from across the disciplines.

Learning Community on Promoting Persistence in STEM Learning.
STEM disciplines have long been concerned with disparities between underrepresented and well-represented student groups and the associated “pipeline” problem, where underrepresented students are more likely to switch away from STEM majors. In 2020-2021, a group of 16 faculty from eight departments met biweekly to consider ways to address this problem individually and collectively, using the book Talking about Leaving revisited as a starting point. Notably, the group collectively produced a guide on making exams more equitable and effective.

The partnership with the CFT amplified campus resources, created connections among faculty and staff, and expanded our understanding of best practice among our faculty. While these are strong elements in any teaching community, they are especially valuable within Vanderbilt’s commitment to the residential college experience, enacting community-based inquiry and foregrounding the lived experiences of students in faculty preparation for teaching and advising. The learning community created a safe space for faculty to discuss teaching and advising in vulnerable ways and helped bridge the gap between good intentions and best practices.

I really appreciated the CiCT Course. It helped affirm for me the transformative potential of teaching when done thoughtfully, critically, and in a way that is student-centered. The instructors were thoroughly prepared all the while being relatable as fellow graduate students, and they modeled the kinds of teaching practices that we were reading about and later practicing. I found preparing the various deliverables to be very helpful, and I have very concrete tools and resources that I will be able to draw from as I continue in my journey as a theological educator.

Teaching Assistant Orientation
Many Vanderbilt graduate students are awarded teachingassistantships (TA) with duties that could include grading, consulting with students during office hours, leading discussion or problem sessions, teaching labs, or giving lectures. This year, 152 new TAs participated in the fall Teaching Assistant Orientation, offered online for the first time, where they explored effective teaching skills and knowledge needed to be effective in face-to-face and online learning settings.

Graduate Teaching Fellows
Over this unprecedented year, our four Graduate Teaching Fellows (GTF) supported Teaching Assistants, postdocs, and other graduate students as they transitioned to online teaching. The GTFs collaborated with the CFT senior staff to provide online teaching resources, design and facilitate workshops for the Vanderbilt teaching community, and consult with teaching assistants and postdocs. This year, the GTFs conducted 86 consultations with 81 unique graduate students and postdocs.

Teaching Assistant Orientation
The Certificate in College Teaching (CiCT) prepares graduate students and postdocs to develop and refine their teaching skills for use at Vanderbilt and beyond. The certificate focuses on research regarding the most effective practices of teaching and learning. In this year, 230 graduate students and postdocs participated in the program. Of those, 141 completed the certificate requirements. Additionally, 31 graduate students completed the Online Teaching Specialization.

Workshops and Conversations on Teaching
The CFT also offered 22 workshops or conversations on foundational teaching skills with a total of 433 participants, some open to the entire campus and others for specific schools, departments, and programs by request. Here is only a sample of the range of the topics these events covered.

- Immersion Advising Workshops (2 offerings)
- Humanities Teaching...Now
- Overcoming the Busyness Dilemma
- Let’s Talk about Love: Bridging the Gap between the Affective and Cognitive Domains
- Self-Compassionate Teaching: Putting on Your Oxygen Mask First
- Relationship Rich Education with Peter Felten, for Peabody College
- Good Practice in Developing and Using Rubrics, for the School of Medicine
- New Faculty Position, New Teaching Challenges, for the School of Nursing
- Good Practice in Tutoring, for Engineering Tutors
- Designing Lifelong Learning Courses for Coursera, for the Divinity School

Teach, difference, and power
The discussions we had related to the book Talking About Leaving revisited were incredibly relevant to understanding why we lose talented underrepresented students from STEM majors. I was particularly struck by how strongly the environments and policies of typical intro STEM courses activate real pain. For example, we often think we are doing students a favor by grading on a curve, but those practices are harmful to students. For example, we often think we are doing students a favor by grading on a curve, but those practices are harmful to students. I really appreciated the CiCT Course. It helped affirm for me the transformative potential of teaching when done thoughtfully, critically, and in a way that is student-centered.

Shane Hutson
Professor of Physics and Chair of the Physics & Astronomy Department

Catherine McTamaney
Associate Professor of the Practice, Teaching & Learning, Peabody College

Francisco Garcia
Graduate Student, Divinity School

Additional Workshops and Conversations on Inclusive Teaching

- Inclusive Teaching Workshops (5 offered)
- Diversity Statement Workshops, for graduate students and postdocs (4 offered)
- Teaching Race and Racism, for the School of Medicine
- Anti-racist Teaching, Parts 1 & 2, for the School of Nursing
- Teaching Race Inclusively, Part 1-3, for African American & Diaspora Studies
- Inclusive Advising Workshop, for the Writing Studio
- Trust and Boundaries in the Classroom, for the Margaret Cuninggim Women’s Center
- Conversation on Teaching During an Election Year with David Lewis (Political Science), Paul Stob (Communication Studies), and Gabriel Torres Colon (Anthropology/American Studies)
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UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Committees
CFT Senior Staff also have been active in supporting several Provost, school, and interdisciplinary committees to advance teaching effectiveness and innovation across the campus. These collaborative efforts include:
- Provost’s University Committee on Teaching
- Provost’s Education Continuity Subcommittee
- Provost’s Zoom Working Group
- School of Arts & Science Diversity, Equity, and Engagement Committee
- School of Arts & Science Pedagogy Task Force
- Divinity School Lifelong Learning Committee
- HHMI Inclusive Excellence Committee
- NEH Connections Grant Committee
- Learning Assistant Leadership Team

Courses
In addition to their administrative work, most of the CFT senior staff teach courses in their home departments, applying innovative pedagogies and making significant contributions to the curriculum. In 2020-21, those courses included:
- Biochemistry (BSCI 2520)
- Environment and Development (SOC 3312)
- Leadership and Change in International Organizations (HODI 3210)
- Second Language Acquisition Theory and Research (SLA 7030)
- Cryptography: The History and Mathematics of Codes and Ciphers (MATH 1111).

Awards
For the significance of their contributions, the CFT staff have received awards. The Brightspace Support team received the Chancellor’s Anchor Down, Step Up Excellence Award for their exceptionally hard work supporting instructors in the shift to online education, and Cynthia Brame received the School of Nursing’s Dean’s Award for Outstanding Service to Faculty and Students as well as the Biochemistry and Chemical Biology Award for Excellence in Teaching. Derek Bruff was also promoted to assistant provost and executive director of the CFT.
SCHOLARSHIP ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

The CFT senior staff, even during a difficult year, remained actively engaged in academic communities beyond Vanderbilt, producing research and participating in professional associations focused on critical innovations in the scholarship of teaching and learning. This has enabled the CFT to be at the forefront of advances in teaching, an authoritative resource for Vanderbilt instructors, and a model center for teaching and learning internationally.

Scholarly Publications


Johnson, S.M. (2020) Authentic Resources and Critical Reflection as Contributors to Transformative Learning. In B.L. Stott, & D. Davidson (Eds.), Transformative Language Learning and Teaching. Cambridge UP.


Virtual Presentations and Workshops


Bruff, D. (2020, October). Intentional tech: Teaching principles for educational technology in online teaching. Presented at the West Virginia University Teaching & Learning Commons, online.


Online Resources

The CFT continues to extend the reach of its online resources, with 4,342,021 total unique website pageviews, 49,000 downloads of the CFT’s Leading Lines podcast, and several new guides, including the following.

- Active Learning in Hybrid and Physically Distanced Classrooms by Derek Bruff
- Assessing Student Learning (video series) by Joe Bandy
- Online Course Development Resources by Stacey Johnson
- Self-compassionate Teaching: Putting on your Oxygen Mask First by Julaine Fowlie
- Teaching International Students by Joe Bandy and Alex Oxner
- Teaching, Difference, and Power by Joe Bandy
- Writing Science Exams by Katie Clements and Cynthia Brame
The Center for Teaching recognizes the creativity, dedication, and teamwork that its staff brought to their roles during this challenging year. Below are the full-time staff who worked at the CFT between March 2020 and June 2021.

Derek Bruff
Executive Director

Cynthia Brame
Associate Director

Joe Bandy
Assistant Director

Heather Fedesco
Assistant Director

Julaine Fowlin
Assistant Director for Instructional Design

Stacey Johnson
Assistant Director for Educational Technology

Rhett McDaniel
Assistant Director for Digital Media

Ransford Pinto
Assistant Director for Graduate Programs

Paige Snay
Lead Instructional Technologist

Carly Byer
Digital Media Specialist

Erica Brandon
Instructional Technologist

Michael Coley
Instructional Technologist

Brandon Crawford
Instructional Technologist

Jenny Park
Instructional Technologist

Tracy Tveit
Program Coordinator

Juliet Truab
Administrative Assistant

Rachel Gould
Graduate Teaching Fellow 2019-20

Chelsea Yarborough
Graduate Teaching Fellow 2019-20

Abena Boakyewa-Ansah
Graduate Teaching Fellow 2020-21

Amanda Brockman
Graduate Teaching Fellow 2020-21

Mohammad Meerzaei
Graduate Teaching Fellow 2020-21

Leah Roberts
Graduate Teaching Fellow 2019-21