

CAE NEWS

The Center for Academic Excellence | Volume 12, Issue 2

Teaching through the Hinge Moments

As this one marks our **fifth pandemic-affected semester**, we know it can seem a little bit repetitive to remind one another of the unprecedented times in which we are continuing to live, practice our service, research and creative activity, and to teach, but it bears repeating, especially as new challenges emerge seemingly every day. Thinking about how to conceptualize the ways in which these two years have transformed our own work at the Center, we arrived at this metaphor for our thinking: **the hinge moment**.



And we know it can feel uneasy, unnatural, and just plain strange to keep on teaching as the gears of our institution bend and move around us. Our most recent hinges arrived quickly this spring as the mask guidance changed within days of a call from many quarters of our community **to reckon with what it will mean for each of us** to practice antiracism and inclusion at Fairfield and as war broke out in Ukraine. Each development required us as engaged practitioners to dig deep into our pedagogy and reflective practice in order to derive what it was that would work best for our students in the **particular learning environments we've created in our classrooms**.

As we met with you to consult about your responses to these developments, as we saw the ways in which you lived your hinge, **we want to reflect back to you that you were up to it**. Because you have made it your practice to gather in learning communities, study the best practices in your field, and prioritize active learning and student engagement, you have met each hinge moment with **just the right amount of firmness and just the right amount of give**.

And really, **to be firm and yet to give** is what our University--and the world around us--requires of us; we are here to support your ongoing process of finding that balance as our community **teaches into its hinge**.

*Carol Ann Davis, Jay Rozgonyi & Emily Smith
Directors, Center for Academic Excellence*

Where It's At: Learning Together

We have **enjoyed the many teaching and learning circles** we have offered this year. Usually comprised of between 5 and 7 faculty and staff, teaching circles have allowed faculty to work together on emerging challenges in their teaching in monthly Zoom meetings. Some groups focus on a specific aspect of teaching, such as our **Decolonizing the Syllabus FLC**, which assists faculty with familiarizing themselves with the essential best practices of inclusive and anti-racist pedagogy. Others, such as our **Professional Learning Communities focused on antiracism**, invite faculty and staff from throughout our University community to walk together with colleagues from [across the University to explore anti-racist practice in many contexts](#). We find that the more we gather in small groups, the better our reflective practice becomes. Flexible in nature, and designed to overcome or at least [transparently negotiate](#) the **nuances and differences that exist** along rank, professional, and divisional lines, circles help to build communities that can sustain and support our work in inclusive ways. Email us at cae@fairfield.edu if you'd like to join us!

Join us in May for Course Design!

The CAE will once again **offer our popular Course Design Institutes** this May. A CDI is appropriate for any faculty wishing to substantially redesign or re-imagine a course, or to design a new course, and can also assist with the design or redesign of courses to meet the learning objectives for any of the three Signature Elements of the Magis Core. In addition, we have worked to integrate into our CDIs all we have learned in the past two years about **antiracist pedagogy**; look for our CDI to include many updates to our design from **this transformative work**.

Two CDI Modalities to Choose From!

CDI Summer Option 1, Virtually offered: Held remotely from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. on Monday, May 23 & Wednesday, May 25 with independent work Tuesday, May 24.

CDI Summer Option 2 in person at the Center: Held in person from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Center on Tuesday, May 24 & Thursday, May 26 with independent work Wednesday, May 25.

Apply at this [link](#) by Tuesday, April 19 to join us for course

New This Semester: Self-Service MATs

The CAE's Mid-Semester Assessments of Teaching (MATs) have always been one of our most popular offerings. The MAT format--comprised of an anonymous student survey and a CAE liaison-led follow-up discussion--offers a valuable opportunity for instructors to gather feedback and make teaching modifications right in the middle of a semester. We continue to offer our full-service MATs but this semester we've also designed a Self-Service MAT option, giving instructors who might want to solicit feedback from multiple classes, or who don't feel that they need liaison-led discussion, to use our CAE-generated template to conduct their own mid-semester assessment. Just copy our template, send the link to your students, and follow our instructions for retrieving the results!

If you decide to conduct your own Self-Service MAT, you can always request a consultation with a CAE staff member to review and process the feedback. You'll find the complete instructions for using the CAE's MAT template at [Conducting Your Own Mid-Semester Assessments of Teaching \(MATs\) Using Microsoft Forms](#). If you have any problems setting up your own form from our template, please contact us at cae@fairfield.edu.

*Ongoing work at the Center:***New Faculty Cohort**

The **New Faculty Cohort** continues to meet monthly to provide opportunities for our newest colleagues to network, share joys, and process the shared and ongoing challenges of thriving as a new faculty member in these trying times. In addition to supporting the cohort, we encourage new faculty to reach out to their colleagues to develop mentoring networks; we hope you will join us in supporting their growth.

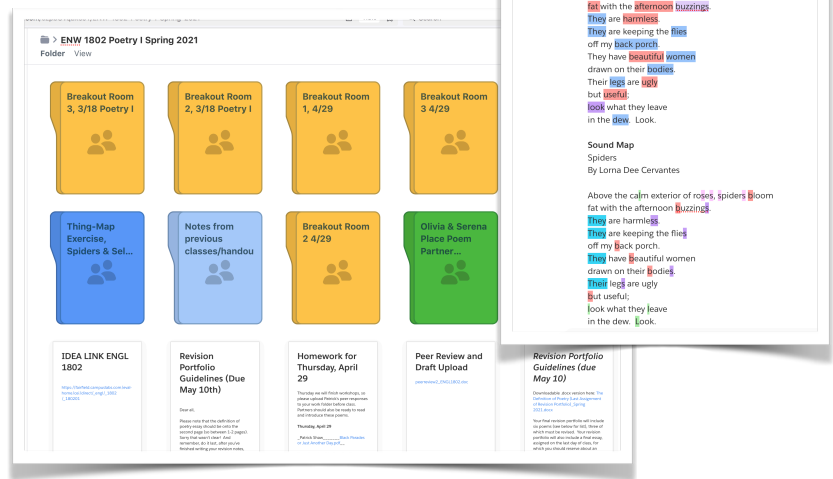
Leadership Cohort

In January we welcomed 11 new colleagues to the **2022 CAE Leadership Cohort**. We are thrilled to engage in this leadership journey with department chairs, program directors and assistant/associate deans from The College of Arts & Sciences, The School of Education & Human Development, The Egan School of Nursing & Health Studies, The School of Engineering, The Dolan School of Business and the Library. Throughout the year, we will engage in mutual mentoring as a learning community focused on our development as leaders.

Even if you can't join a formal FLC or Teaching Circle, we're here! Talk through your challenges with us at cae@fairfield.edu

Outreach to Part-Time Faculty: Workshops

From our part-time faculty workshop on exploring active learning possibilities through the use of technology: Quip, Padlet & more...



Teaching with Quip: breakout rooms (above) allow students to co-compose (inset) in person or online. And above: quick formative assessment with Padlet.

For the past few years, the CAE has connected with our part-time faculty through new faculty orientations and teaching workshops. During the 2021-2022 year, a passionate group of part-time faculty have come together regularly to engage around a variety of pedagogical topics, including authentic assessment, learning technologies, and active learning. Co-led by Nick Kapoor (see spotlight story on p. 6), Visiting Assistant Professor of Mathematics and CAE Liaison for Part-Time Faculty, the pedagogical workshops have been a rich site for conversation and learning among our part-time faculty - and have led to numerous one-on-one consultations between these instructors and CAE staff. The CAE invites part-time faculty to join any of our workshops or offerings as well as to attend the workshops held expressly for part-time faculty. If you have ideas for workshops you'd like us to offer, please email us at cae@fairfield.edu

Liaison Gathers Mid-Career Faculty of Color into Learning Community



As part of her CAE liaison work, **Associate Professor of Politics Gwen Alphonso** launched a Faculty Learning Community for mid-career faculty

of color. The group has been meeting monthly this semester to discuss common challenges, to share advice and to support each other during this particularly difficult semester. Like all of our learning communities, colleagues benefit from talking across and into the challenges they face, and also to celebrate small and large successes. We are **especially grateful for Gwen's insight** that this crucial community would benefit from gathering, and for her leadership in organizing it! Thank you, Gwen, for all you bring to us! Your Fall stint as a liaison is, we hope, **only the beginning** of your work at the Center.

Write With Us!

Join a Writing Accountability Group

We gather periodically at the Center for writing retreats, but we also recommend that you meet more often in a small group with other writers in order to keep yourself accountable to your research even during the challenging and busy times during the semester. Email us at cae@fairfield.edu to join a writing group, or come to our next writing retreat on May 27 to meet some writing pals.

Supporting faculty and professional staff since 2003

Meet the Spring 2022 CAE Liaisons

Fall 2022 CAE Liaison

Katsiaryna (Katya) Bardos

is Associate Professor of Finance and the Chair of Finance Department at the Dolan School of Business. Her award-winning research focuses on the areas of corporate finance with most recent projects studying inequality, corporate governance and corporate social responsibility. She also studies students' perceptions of online learning. In her free time she enjoys spending time on the beach with her family.



kbardos@fairfield.edu

Kevin Feeney is Visiting Assistant Professor of Classical Studies based out of the History Department. Kevin is interested in innovative tools for immersive pedagogy and meeting the needs of new students where they are academically, especially in a pandemic environment. He



and his wife enjoy travelling (when they can!) as well as European football (which he refuses to call soccer).

kfeeneyr@fairfield.edu

Dilani Perera is Professor and Chair in the Counselor Education program in the School of Education and Human Development. Dilani's professional interests are in assessment and training practices of professional counselors and counselor educators. Outside of work she spends time with her daughter, pets, and gardening. dperera@fairfield.edu



Antiracist Pedagogies: The Foundational Question

We have **spent the last few years collaborating** with colleagues such as **Rachelle Brunn-Bevel, Faculty Chair for Inclusive Excellence, and Kris Sealey, Professor of Philosophy and former coordinator of the Social Justice Signature Element of the Magis Core**, to offer workshops that allow faculty to familiarize themselves with the essential best practices of inclusive and antiracist pedagogy. We have many resources at the CAE to assist faculty with this work (and see additional opportunities throughout the newsletter), but they proceed from this essential question:

How can I intentionally mitigate, interrupt, and offset the vulnerabilities that have been and continue to be compounded by intersectionality? Answering this question is where **antiracist approaches to course design** come into play.

Save the Date!

FDEC Day: Enacting Antiracism throughout University Life will be held Tuesday, May 2 in the Kelley Center after the General Faculty Meeting. Watch faculty announcements for more information.

Join us for FDEC Day...

and get the T-Shirt!

Mid-pandemic (which seems ages ago now), the CAE was asked to present the extraordinarily flexible teaching approach you adopted to shepherd students through those first tumultuous days to a number of audiences--among them trustees and administrators--who sought to understand and support your work. To do so, we came up with a



Center for Academic Excellence



mantra describing how we pulled together as a teaching community. We saw that **Fairfield faculty are at our best when we are present, human, together, and true to ourselves.** A member of the board was **so moved by**

your excellence that they asked us to celebrate it with t-shirts, and we will be giving them away at the **first in-person FDEC Day** in recent years (see save the date and more about the topic at left). Until then, remember those elements of **being true to yourself** that have sustained you during challenging times:

- **Prioritize** and build relationships. • **Focus** on engaging students.
- **Be true to yourself.** What you are committed to hasn't wavered: your learning outcomes and student engagement. You are at your best when you are letting their needs drive your pedagogy.
- **Model humanity** to students and they will return it. Perform vulnerability and empathy. • **Model** and practice **self care.**



Special Liaison Spotlight & Interview: Nicholas Kapoor



Recently, CAE checked in with **Nicholas Kapoor**, Visiting Assistant Professor of Mathematics in the College of Arts and Sciences and CAE's Special Liaison for Adjunct Faculty Outreach. After his extensive work developing resources for adjunct teachers, we thought we'd ask him to share some wisdom from his unique perspective.

You've taught at a number of colleges and universities now, and have experienced Fairfield as both a part-time and a full-time faculty member. How have you found the experience here to be different from that of other schools - both positively and negatively?

Fairfield's students are the best I have ever seen - their intellectual curiosity is boundless. I find myself able to go deeper into the material and give students more latitude in discovering concepts for themselves. Small group activities and active learning engage the students in what I am teaching and they take the ball and run with it.

Additionally, I am extremely proud to be a member of Fairfield's faculty. Our faculty is the strongest I have seen or been a part of. Faculty members use their voice and their vote to better our institution. Seeing my colleagues speaking up against an injustice has inspired me to say

and do more in our university's governance structure. It is refreshing to see a faculty care so deeply about their institution and continually step up to make it better. However, we certainly do not take care of our part-time faculty in a manner consistent with other institutions I have been affiliated with. Our part-time faculty have not seen a raise in five years and are not eligible for many of the benefits that full-time faculty members have. As an institution, we must do better for our part-time colleagues.

How would you describe your shift in teaching practice during COVID? Was there something in doing that work that you discovered or tried that you're carrying forward as we move beyond COVID adaptations?

Shifting to fully remote and, at times, hybrid learning was difficult for everyone. I had never taught online before and therefore had to learn how to do it fast and effectively. The CAE was great in aiding all faculty with the sudden shift. Fortunately, some good did come out of this exhausting and mentally draining process. For instance, remote learning forced me to reevaluate my learning objectives and goals - what do I want students to take with them from my classes? The shift to remote made me strip out any and all "fluff." Once I rethought the core tenets of my classes, I have been able to build new activities and pedagogical techniques around them now that we are back in the classroom.

If you could give one piece of teaching-related advice to faculty who are just coming to Fairfield, what would it be? And what would you say differently to part-timers than you would to full-timers?

To part-timers, I would say stay as engaged in Fairfield as you can. Attend CAE workshops, attend events, and attempt to make meaningful connections with colleagues and students as your schedule allows. Being an adjunct faculty member with another profession, or teaching at another institution can be draining, but your work is valued and appreciated here! I am hopeful that in the coming years more benefits and programming will be implemented for our part-time colleagues. To full-timers, be sure to make time for yourself to decompress. Teaching, research, and service, especially in the first few years of your career, can be demanding, and emotionally and physically draining. Time to take a walk, or sip a cup of coffee while staring outside is needed every now and then. You won't be at your best if your mind and body are not at their best. Also, never forget your "big why" of entering academia. Your work can and will have an impact!