

# A New Era for the Teaching & Learning Center

By Stephanie Fiore, Senior Director, Teaching & Learning Center

The Teaching & Learning Center is seeing some exciting new changes and I invite you to come see what all the fuss is about. The new Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) is the result of the merger of the Teaching & Learning Center (TLC) and the Instructional Support Center (ISC). This merger makes a lot of sense as both units have the same mission—to advance great teaching at the university. And, of course, combining the training the ISC delivers on instructional technology tools to support teaching with the discussions on pedagogy that take place at the TLC is a model that has the potential to provide more holistic and complete faculty development opportunities. The newly integrated team is dreaming big—figuring out how to provide a seamless experience for faculty, deciding what kinds of enhanced programming we can offer, and identifying promising new initiatives to pursue. We’re talking a lot about the importance of serving our customers—that is you, dear faculty colleagues—in the most robust way possible. What we know for sure is that, as always, we will deliver programming and services based on the evidence about how people learn so that students develop the capacity to think deeply and engage more meaningfully with course content, and so that faculty feel greater satisfaction in their professional work. We chose the word “Advancement” in our new name intentionally as it conveys best what we are about: we want to advance our professional practice by drawing on the evidence available in the literature on how people learn, but also by creating a collaborative space in which colleagues can learn from each other and support each other to maximize instructional quality. We also seek to advance our professional practice by contributing to the scholarship on teaching and learning and encouraging faculty at Temple to do the same.



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The Center for the Advancement of Teaching serves all faculty at the university on every campus here and abroad, as well as at our medical affiliates throughout the state. Full-time or part-time faculty and TAs can use our services for their online, hybrid or bricks-and-mortar classrooms, studio, clinical or lab environments. In this fiscal year, the CAT consultants will serve faculty over 9,000 times, either through individual confidential consultations, attendance at a training, workshop or conference, drop-in help at the ISC lab, classroom observation, or a request for resources. Some faculty may wish to take advantage of one of our more immersive opportunities. For example, Faculty Learning Communities are semester or year-long interdisciplinary teaching circles on specific topics. This fall, we are leading Faculty Learning Communities on teaching international students, teaching with digital pedagogies, and applying the science of learning to the classroom. The Provost’s Teaching Academy (PTA) is an intensive summer faculty development program where participants study topics such as human learning and adult development, integrated course design and assessment, and teaching methods that promote engagement and collaboration. In our Teaching with Technology Fellows program, undergraduate students provide hands-on assistance to faculty in implementing technological solutions in the classroom. For those who are serious about delving into professional development, the six-credit Teaching in Higher Education Certificate offers a graduate-level credential for study in the theory on how people learn as well as the practical applications for that theory in our teaching.

## But why should you join us at the new CAT? Here are four good reasons:

**Put your good teaching into overdrive.** Let’s dispel immediately the notion that our center is only a place for remedial help. We can certainly assist faculty who struggle in the classroom, but the majority of faculty who attend our programs and use our services do so because they are already accomplished instructors who care about providing the best learning environment possible for their students. They know that we can help them think about how to get where they want to go with their teaching—supporting them as they implement innovative teaching methods, assisting them in how to improve student motivation, or seeking out new methods for supporting critical and thinking. This year, for instance, in our annual panel discussion with the Lindback and Great Teacher Award winners, it struck me how many of the awardees referred to the transformative power of their time spent in TLC programs as an integral part of the reason they had become the teachers they are.

**Boost your facility with technology, even if you choose not to use it.** With all of the emphasis on technology these days, you might imagine that I will say that faculty absolutely cannot teach without all the technological bells and whistles available to them. But, in fact, technology is a tool that should be used when it is the best choice for helping your students to learn. You may decide to teach “naked” or you may choose to soup up your course with every technological tool you can get your hands on. Without knowing what is out there, however, there is no way to make an informed choice. The important thing is to understand which tools are available, what their best pedagogical use is, and then (if you choose to use them) how to embed them into your course so that you achieve the results you want. Something as simple as automatically-graded Blackboard quizzes can provide opportunities for students to engage in self-assessment of their understanding of course concepts (and streamline your grading too—a nice benefit!). And more advanced tools like the screencasting software Camtasia Relay can help you flip the classroom to create room for a more active learning experience during class time. At the CAT, we can support you to learn about a variety of tools—techie or not—that you can use to support good teaching.

**Get out of your silo.** Faculty are so enmeshed in the demands of work within their own departments and colleges that they often have no opportunity to discuss their work with others on the outside. When I was a full-time faculty member, whole days went by where I never left the fifth floor of Anderson Hall and rarely saw anyone outside of my department, much less had a meaningful interaction. At the CAT, you can participate in conversations with faculty from every discipline at the university. It can be incredibly enlightening to hear how others address teaching challenges in their disciplines, and can breathe new life into how you think about your own pedagogical practices. Those rich interdisciplinary conversations also feed a more nuanced understanding of the connections between our disciplines, ones we can reference to help students make those important connections. The networking is a real perk as well. I have witnessed a

number of instances where colleagues at our programs have made plans to collaborate across departments so that students on both sides benefitted. These serendipitous possibilities are facilitated by giving colleagues these moments of interaction and collaboration.

**Connect to your community.** In our three-legged stool of professional activity—research, teaching, service—we collaborate with colleagues, debate ideas, and receive feedback in research and even in service, but rarely in teaching. Stanford University’s Lee Schulman (also President Emeritus of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) argues that teaching in isolation means that we miss opportunities for the feedback, reflection, and a lively exchange of ideas that lead to ever more increased quality in our teaching. Connecting to members of our intellectual community is essential for just this reason and the CAT is the place where this regularly happens, either in individual and confidential consultation with a faculty developer or in a group dialogue with other colleagues. The validation of our practices or perhaps the nudge we sometimes need to look at things in a different light makes us better teachers and better professionals. Just as interaction with our peers makes our research better, it hones our teaching skill as well.

Since I took over as senior director of the center in September, I have been asked on numerous occasions how I like my new job. My answer is always the same: “I have the best job on campus.” In any given week, I get to engage in spirited dialogues with the smartest folks around—faculty colleagues from all over the university. I get to hear about the questions and problems that each discipline grapples with and that they try to help their students understand. I get to problem-solve, building solutions to sticky and sometimes stubborn teaching problems. I get to engage in scholarship that contributes to the knowledge in the field. Who is luckier than me? But here’s the thing—you can experience all this too. You just have to join us at the CAT. ♦