



Teaching Matters and Assessment Center (TMAC)

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Director's Note

February, the shortest month, always seems long. Once March arrives, the year speeds by. But there are multiple events in the offing to engage you as teachers, including the 5th annual Faculty eLearning Conference next Thursday, March 5. Our Office of Instructional Technology always produces an excellent series of workshops and presentations on the use of technology in the classroom and online. To register, see the link below.

On March 5, Teaching Matters hosts a conversation on fostering positive teacher-student relations, including best practices for communication by email, for holding office hours, for responding to student concerns without becoming overwhelmed, and whatever is in on your mind. We have all learned and are always learning. Please join the conversation.

I'm on record as "not a fan" of Turnitin as a plagiarism policing technology. I believe that tuition dollars are better spent elsewhere and that the key to promoting academic integrity is assignment design. You can read more about that below.

Also below, once again, is the major factor impacting higher education overall: the ever increasing cost of a college degree, a thing now out of reach for many students. There's no good teaching that is not responsive to the realities of an affordable education.

Finally, some words of welcome to Jason Rivera, our new Vice-Chancellor for Student Academic Success. I look forward to working with Jason on many fronts to support teachers and student through attention to pedagogy, learning, and assessment.

In The News

The Crushing Weight of Student Loans

In a poignant NYT [opinion piece](#) that will ring true for many graduate students and young instructors, Howard-educated writer [Michael Arceneaux](#) discusses the overwhelming burden of student loans and the drain they put on an entire generation of college graduates. He discusses the specific pain of feeling betrayed by a system of predatory loans, while knowing that there wasn't much of an alternative. He writes: "Despite the cost, going to college is still the only way high-achieving, lower-income students can hope to get a good job with a decent wage. It's not our fault that no one told us the system beyond higher education was set up for us to fail."

Among the seemingly endless debt repayment plans, Arceneaux references [newer legislation](#) that has made the process of escaping debt increasingly difficult, especially in ways of eliminating legal oversight of the student loan industry. Recent national [budget proposals](#) have eliminated the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, and there is little to suggest that a [student loan bubble](#) is in any way being prevented from bursting. Stories like Arceneaux's are far from uncommon and can be found on every campus across the US.

Free College for Low-Income Families

While the cost of college and burden of loans can overwhelm an enormous number of undergraduate and continuing students, many universities are taking concrete efforts to drastically reduce the cost of their education. In a [major move](#) by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in-state families making less than \$56,000 a year will be eligible for free tuition and fees, under their new program, [Bucky's Tuition Promise](#). Before the major scholarship rollout, in-state students have been paying \$10,533 annually, a sum that had felt out of reach for many Wisconsin families. Says Chancellor Rebecca Blank, "We want to make it very clear to low- and moderate-income families in Wisconsin that we're going to do everything we can to make this an affordable school."

The initiative at Wisconsin will be accomplished through private donations, rather than state taxes. Similar programs are already underway at other Big Ten schools, of which UW-Madison is a part. In [Illinois](#), tuition is virtually free for students with a 3.0 average or above from families making less than \$125,000. The [University of Michigan](#) is offering free tuition for full time undergraduates with a less than \$65,000 family income, and [Ohio State University](#) provides in-state students who qualify for Pell Grants with aid covering tuition and mandatory fees, starting in the fall of 2018. As the movement towards free community college and state universities grows, more states are likely to watch carefully at the programs' successes and potentially follow suit.

The Growing Case Against Turnitin

Some instructors see plagiarism-checker website [Turnitin](#) as a lifesaver, while others have long rallied against both company's [profiting from student work](#) and its [poor track record](#) at even catching the majority of student plagiarists. Recently, the company has announced the launching of a new program, [Authorship Investigation](#), that will go beyond the usual practice of scanning submitted documents for text that has occurred elsewhere in their database.

This program is [pitched](#) as a solution for 'contract cheating', in which students pay outside parties to write papers, rather than simply copy and pasting from online sources. Far harder to track than lifted text, Turnitin proposes to detect ghostwritten work by identifying writing that does not match up with the level and style of other pieces the student author has submitted to their site in the past.

In a [critical opinion piece](#) for InsideHigherEd, author and instructor John Warner lays out the ways that this new Turnitin product will spell even further disaster for student writers and university education as a whole. He notes that while purchasing plagiarized papers is certainly a widespread issue, further automation of the student writing process is a short-sighted and damaging solution. Instead, it only continues to "pave the road to an ugly future where students spend more time interacting [with] algorithms than instructors or each other."

As a solution, Warner instead recommends instructors focus on creating engaging writing assignments that cannot be so easily purchased, including those that emphasize process and personal experiences and intentional student engagement. This is the approach of our First Year Writing program. For readings on [academic integrity](#) and designing [engaging assignments](#), among other related topics, visit the TMAC [website](#).

Learning Beyond the Texts

It comes as no surprise that today's teens and young adults spend more time online than ever before, and the technology that captures so much of their daily attention can be harnessed into more engaged learning practices. Rather than fighting back against the changing nature of student focus, it's useful for instructors to investigate ways to meet students where they are already interested. An in-depth and interactive [New York Times feature](#) looks at many of the multimedia elements that are taking off and seeming to stick: social media, podcasting, digital advertising and political memes, as well as some of the pitfalls of what's increasingly known as internet addiction.

In the classroom, one of the most easily accessible technologies is video. [Virtually all](#) students are familiar with [YouTube](#), which has a wide range of educational content, including particularly engaging video essays. A new article in [Educator Innovator](#) explores ways that using video essays on YouTube can be useful supplements to bringing students in to the ongoing classroom discussion. It lists a number of suggested channels, with the caveat that the instructor should certainly review each video for content and accuracy before assigning viewing to students.

TMAC Calendar

Upcoming events by TMAC and Campus Partners

Faculty eLearning Conference | March 1st | 8:15 am - 3:30 pm | Campus Center

The eLearning Conference is a **free one-day conference** for all full- and part-time faculty at Rutgers University–Camden. This conference is for you if you're interested in: engaging students in classroom discussions and activities; creating interactive communities of learners online; trying new types of student assessments that teach as well as measure; sharing your experiences with online and hybrid delivery; or spending a full day with fellow faculty members, discussing how best to teach and inspire our students. [RSVP online.](#)

Connecting With Students | March 5th | 12:45 - 1:45 | Armitage Faculty Lounge

Join TMAC for a discussion of best practices in maintaining a positive connection with students. This conversation will be designed to best benefit Teaching Assistants, but other instructors across departments are welcome. Lunch provided. Please [RSVP online.](#)

Difficult Dialogue in the Classroom | March 26th | 10:20-12:30 | West AB Conference Rooms

Sponsored by the Office of Civic Engagement and the Committee on Institutional Equity and Diversity, this workshop on identity, race, and power in the classroom will be facilitated by Dr. Ali Michael of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. The workshop will strengthen awareness among faculty by helping us look more deeply at how inequalities among race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability affect (and sometimes cause us to perpetuate) injustice in our classrooms. We will discuss strategies for injustice in our classrooms. Lunch provided. Please RSVP to Associate Chancellor for Civic Engagement, Nyeema Watson, at ncwatson@camden.rutgers.edu by Wednesday, March 21st.

Making Sense of Your Course Evaluations | April 5th | 12:45-1:45 | Armitage Faculty Lounge

As the semester winds down, we will be holding a reboot of our popular program on Making Sense of Your Course Evaluations. Come for a fruitful discussion of ways that you can use student responses to adjust future teaching or how to best present the results to represent your strengths in the classroom. Lunch provided. Please [RSVP online.](#)

If your department would be interested in holding a particular pedagogically focused event, please reach out to teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu.

For additional resources, visit tmac.camden.rutgers.edu, or write us at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu

