

TEACHING TUESDAYS



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BELLISARIO BULLETIN



– By [Denise Bortree](#)

Welcome to Teaching Tuesdays. It's the last week of classes, and the finish line is just ahead. Congratulations on (almost) making it to the end of a very long semester. In the last Teaching Tuesdays IRL session we discussed engagement in the classroom. If you're looking for ways to connect with your students next semester, consider the suggestions in this issue (and see the Nov. 14 issue of TT). Check out the great idea Chris Ali has adopted for his students. He writes about a weekly coffee hour that connects him with his large class. And, in the Canvas Cue, Danielle Harris writes about how to build community in the online space. We wrap up the issue with a Q&A with Matt Jackson, an excellence in service award winner (and a genuinely hardworking and funny guy). We have some great articles this week. I'm cheering you all to the end of the semester! Take care. Denise

Upcoming Events

- **December 6** | 10 am - 12 pm | [Accessible Word Templates](#) | In this session, we will walk through creating accessible documents using Microsoft Word with templates as an example.
- **December 8** | Fall 2023 Classes End
- **60 Days** | Self-Guided | [Accessible Online Course Authoring](#) | This course is designed with the intention of equipping course authors and instructors with knowledge about accessible web practices and course design that can be applied when creating and adding content in Canvas.

TEACHING TIP



Coffee Hour with Professor Ali

– By [Chris Ali](#) | Telecommunications & Media Industries



COMM 180 can be an intimidating space for undergraduates, with over 300 students, many of them first years, together in a room twice a week to learn and talk about all things telecommunications and electronic media. Despite best efforts and many references to RuPaul, Britney Spears, *Clueless*, and *Murder, She Wrote*, it can be tough to reach everyone. It's tough to make connections and this is true for the professor as much as it is true for the students. As a new faculty member in the Bellisario College, one of my priorities is to make meaningful connections with my undergraduate students. When I started teaching at the College in January 2023, one of my first questions to myself and anyone else who would listen was “who is a Bellisario undergrad?”

Food can break down barriers and get us talking and sharing. While at the University of Virginia I started “Policy and Pancakes” for my undergraduates interested in nerding out about media policy over a carb-heavy breakfast. As a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communications, I notched it up and did “Policy and Pizza” for graduate students and postdocs. Thinking that the best (and most economical) way to get to know my students in COMM 180 was over a hot beverage and a deep fried, sugary round ball of goodness, I introduced “Coffee Hour with Professor Ali” last year and it took off like gangbusters.

Coffee Hour happens once a week – this semester on Wednesdays from 12-1. Fueled by coffee and munchkins from Dunkin, the hour is predicated on conversation and getting to know one another. Students need to sign up through a Google doc, with attendance capped at 10 to keep it intimate.

Like *Fight Club*, there is one major rule about coffee hour: we can’t talk about class. **Office hours are about class, coffee hours are about life.** Thus far this semester conversations have ranged from tailgating, to what it means to sit in the student section of a football game, to hockey, raising chickens, travel, majors, minors, family, hopes, fears, dreams, and politics. I even have students from last semester popping in to keep our conversations going.

My goal is not only to get to know my students, but for them to know me, and, ideally, to break down some of the barriers that may exist between faculty and students. Office hours can be intimidating, sharing a cup of weak coffee is less so (let’s be honest, Dunkin is no Tim Hortons). Wednesdays have become my favorite day of the week thanks to coffee hours with our students. And it isn’t confined to students – should you find yourself roaming the halls of Carnegie on a Wednesday craving caffeine, sugar, and conversation you can find us in Carnegie 101 and you’re always welcome!

CANVAS CUE



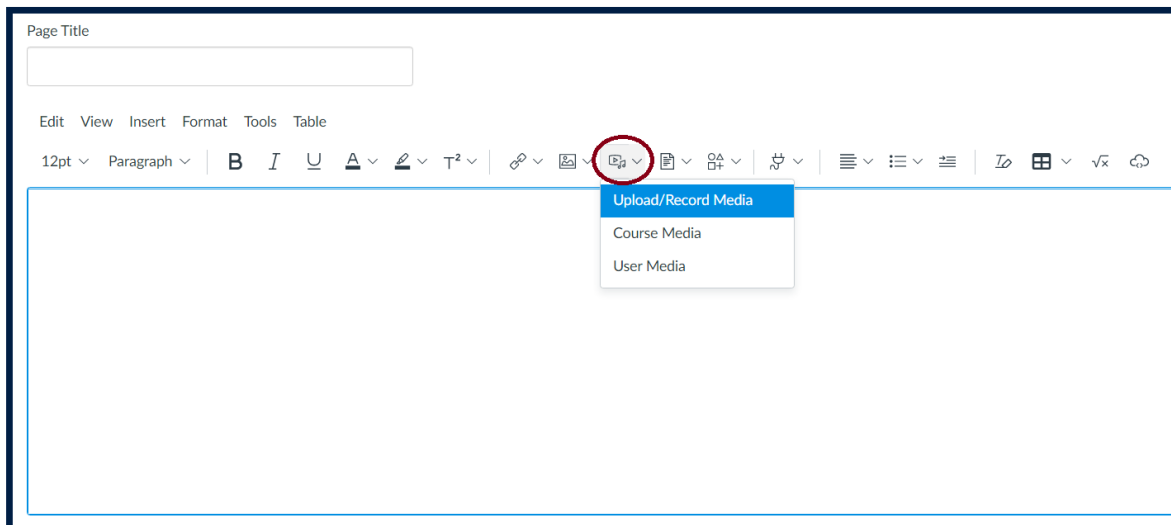
Community Building in the Online Classroom

– By [Danielle Harris](#) | Instructional Design



Creating a sense of community in the asynchronous classroom can sometimes feel challenging. When we cannot see student faces, read body language, or engage in *real* life, it's easy to feel disconnected and like everyone is simply checking off what they need to do in order to successfully complete the class. The need for a connection and sense of community can certainly make some teachers, and even some students, reluctant to get involved with an online classroom. However, I have seen students get genuinely engaged with online class content and build relationships with teachers and classmates. Oftentimes this can be achieved with some slight adjustments to the design of an online learning environment.

- **Introductions/Icebreakers:** For your introduction, consider recording a short video so that students can see your face, hear your voice, and learn more about you. This can help tie an actual person to the asynchronous classroom. For student introductions, ask unique questions that will get them engaged and consider having them record their introduction as well.



- **Early Low-Stakes Assignments:** Get students talking to one another early in the semester. This can be achieved using [group assignments](#) or [discussions](#).
- **Acknowledge Discussions:** Identify ways to participate in discussions and respond to students' work. A less time-consuming option would be to respond to discussions by video. For example, after several students have responded to a discussion prompt, you might post a brief response in which you acknowledge what these students have said and provide a thoughtful question to prompt deeper discussion from students who have not yet posted. Or, after all the students have replied, post a brief video in which you make a general response to the class's work.
- **Groupwork:** Create groups in the [People](#) section of your course. Groups then have their own collaboration location in Canvas where they can share files, links, notes, etc.
- **Face-to-Face Opportunities:** Using the [Zoom Canvas](#) integration, you can easily schedule virtual office visits or occasional synchronous class meetings.
- **'Coffee Shop' in Canvas:** Create a discussion board for students to talk to each other in no-stakes interactions and encourage some posting there early in the semester.

SPOTLIGHT



Matt Jackson, a 2023 Excellence in Service Award recipient, is an associate professor of Telecommunications and Media Industries with the Bellisario College of Communications. He also teaches communications law, Internet law, advertising law, and copyright. Matt's research focuses on how copyright impacts free speech and shapes the production and consumption of cultural texts.

Q&A with Matt Jackson

Be sure to check out Matt's full [biography](#) and [Faculty in :90](#) video!

What is your favorite aspect of being a teacher with the Bellisario College of Communications?

My favorite aspect of being a teacher is interacting with our bright and creative students year after year. I came to Penn State in 1998 and just got my 25-year chair. What we teach and how we teach has changed significantly in that time, but what hasn't changed is the enthusiasm and energy that our best students bring to the classroom. Plus, they help me keep up with current music and culture. I wouldn't be this cool without them.

How would you explain your teaching philosophy?

My teaching philosophy is to treat students as complete human beings and to remind them that teachers are too. We all have bad days, other commitments, doubts and fears. I think it is important to relate to students as individuals first. We're all in this (school and life) together. The other main tenet of my philosophy is that learning is a mindset and an approach rather than a series of facts. I long gave up trying to teach them everything about a topic. The reality is that they will remember very few specific facts a year later. As a result, I'm more focused on teaching fundamental concepts and perspectives so that they can learn how to look at concepts in relation to each other. I want them to be able to see both the forest and the trees and how they shape each other.

What makes you passionate about Telecommunications and Media Industries?

Art! Telecommunications and the media industries powerfully shape every aspect of modern life, and they are constantly evolving, which is fascinating to observe if not always to live through. But at the end of the day, art is what speaks to my humanity. Poetry, music, storytelling, performance—great art touches me physically, emotionally, spiritually. As communication technologies evolve, they allow for

new forms of art to emerge and expand the opportunities for everyone to participate in figuring out what it means to be human.

What have you found to be the key to student engagement and success in your course(s)?

For me, the key to engagement is authenticity. I have learned from many incredible teachers throughout my career, and I have often borrowed their methods and examples. But I think the relationship you develop with students is just as important. Our field knows better than most that effective communication requires trust. I find the best way for students to trust me is to let them see who I am.

The Bellisario College mission statement aims to "...prepare students to take their place in an information-rich society and in the professions as active, critical and ethical participants." What does that statement mean to you, as a professor of Telecommunications and Media Industries?

Our mission statement certainly resonates with me. I especially appreciate the broad focus of our mission, to help students become active, ethical participants in society. Again, after more than 25 years of teaching, I recognize that many, if not most of our students will ultimately settle into a non-media related career. But every single student will become a member of a community—one in which the communication industries play an important role. To be honest, I'm being selfish. I want the members of my community to contribute to the harmony of the group. On top of that, for those who do pursue communication careers, it is important that they understand the impact of their choices and how those decisions shape the world around them.

What are your thoughts on teaching technologies and their relevance when it comes to teaching Telecommunications and Media Industries? In other words, do you feel it's important to explore different teaching technologies in order to stay abreast of what's happening in the world of Telecommunications and Media Industries, and to keep students engaged in your course(s)?

I think you have to be careful when using technology, not to get caught up in using it for its own sake. Certainly it offers many advantages for both students and faculty, but you also have to recognize that it will continue to change. I learned to edit audio by splicing reel to reel tape. There was something very visceral about holding up a few inches of tape and understanding this represents a silent pause that can be inserted anywhere in the recording. Teaching students how to splice tape isn't a particularly useful skill anymore, but understanding when and why you might insert a pause is crucial. A lot of my courses are large lectures where I am presenting a lot of information. I used to write on the chalkboard and use overhead transparencies, and my students clamored for powerpoint. But if you need an animated "fly in" of your bullet points, something is wrong. At the end of the day, it is words on a screen. About a decade ago Prezi became popular, because it created the sense that you could emphasize the relationship between concepts and how they connect to each other. But even then, once the movement stops you are still left with words on a screen. Next semester I'm thinking of giving my students clay tablets and sharp sticks. I think we need to go back to our roots.

SHARE A TEACHING STRATEGY



Share something fabulous that you have been doing in your classroom! Do you have a teaching technology or strategy that you've seen succeed and would like to share it in the *Teaching Tuesdays* newsletter? If so, please [share your idea](#) for an upcoming issue.