

COUNCIL ON TEACHING
Follow-Up Report for
Teaching in Higher Education Conference Award

Name: Jennifer Sterling

Department/Unit: Department of American Studies

Conference Attended: American Association of Colleges & Universities Conference on General Education, Pedagogy, and Assessment

Date of Conference: February 9-11, 2023

Award Amount: \$1500

Briefly summarize how your attendance at the conference enhanced your professional development and allowed you to gain a better understanding of teaching in your discipline or trends in higher education in general.

While I have run teaching sessions at my disciplinary conferences this was my first time attending a conference dedicated to teaching. My conference attendance also coincided with my first year of service on CLAS's General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC), though I have taught General Education courses for several years. Thus, the conference was poised to enhance my professional development and teaching in a number of ways.

I found the conference plenaries inspirational and the sessions offered practical applications. Some of my favorite plenaries included Angela Thi Bennett's informative session on Digital Equity. As Director of the Digital Equity Program (a program I was previously unaware of) for the National Telecommunication and Information Administration, she discussed funding practices and provided helpful tips such as student access to internet discounts. Cate Denial's plenary on a 'pedagogy of kindness' supported a number of teaching approaches I already incorporate (e.g. trust, transparency, and student-led learning) and illustrated useful additions (e.g. kind and compassionate syllabi). Finally, James Lang's (an author I was familiar with and excited to see on the schedule) plenary on innovation provided a powerful discussion of the necessity for creativity and experimentation in the classroom...and what institutions can do to clear a path for this to happen (e.g. student evaluation exceptions).

Sessions provided important takeaways for my teaching as well as my role on GECC, including learning and assessing general education objectives (e.g. critical thinking) and the construction and assessment of general education courses and programs. The session on assessing general education curricula was particularly useful as GECC was in the midst of an assessment of our own. The session was very interactive and allowed for discussion with other institutional teams from a variety of similar (other R1) and dissimilar (community and technical colleges) institutions.

The conference was also my first attending as an institutional team. Thus, conference attendance offered an opportunity to strengthen relationships with colleagues and to return home with shared experiences and a strengthened teaching community. One of the biggest overall takeaways for me was the idea of general education as a community (rather than standalone courses) and it's been important for me have others on campus that were in attendance at the conference to think about ways to work towards this culture shift here at the University of Iowa.

As an instructional track faculty at a R1 institution, the conference was a thoroughly enjoyable and validating experience that allowed me to be immersed in a culture where teaching was celebrated, where those in attendance were prioritizing pedagogy (as individuals and institutions), and where teaching was at the center of even the casual non-conference conversations.

How have you been able to share what you learned about teaching with your department, the University of Iowa, and/or beyond?

There have been a number of formal and informal opportunities for me to share my experience and learning from attending the Conference on General Education, Pedagogy, and Assessment.

The opportunity most formally dedicated to sharing takeaways was a GECC meeting shortly after returning from New Orleans where the conference attendees from the University of Iowa (3 of the 4 were also GECC members) discussed takeaways and possibilities for incorporating ideas. The GECC was obviously an important audience to share this information with given the focus of the conference.

The conference content also informed more informal discussions with the Assessing Assessment Faculty Learning Community (which I co-lead) in relation to equitable assessment practices and related conversations between the FLC and UEPC about grading policy updates. Additionally, takeaways related to broader curricular- and department-level innovations informed my contributions to conversations about ongoing department and program restructuring. Finally, as a course supervisor of three TAs, I was able to share insights gained from conference in a mentoring capacity – both specific ideas related to ongoing teaching interventions in our classroom such as metacognition and experiential learning, and more broadly in relation to AAC&U as an important professional organization and teaching conferences as important professional development opportunities.

In general, even months later, I often found myself starting sentences with “At this conference I went to...” followed by some idea or piece of information that stuck with me when having teaching-related conversations with colleagues at the University of Iowa and my discipline more broadly.