FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

By Haley Vickers

This month’s spotlight faculty member (and our first ever spotlight faculty member!) is Dr. Alisha Howard from the Biology Department. Dr. Howard is an Ada native who came to East Central in 2016. Dr. Howard comes from a long tradition of educators. Both teaching and research are very important to her. Here are some highlights from our interview:

Q: What is your favorite technology tool for the classroom?

A: I like writing on the slides and delivering on-the-spot clicker questions.

Q: What about online teaching?

A: Videos I make covering best practices and JoVE videos from the library are a favorite teaching supplement.

Q: I’ve heard great things about a Blackboard integration you’re using called Labster. Can you tell me more?

A: Labster was amazing! Virtual reality (VR) platforms for online lab deliveries are becoming more popular as online curriculum is becoming more popular. Labster is the VR I have tried, and the students loved it. The department was very supportive of a demo/trial in one of my biology lecture classes (no lab traditionally included) to see if we could maybe use them to bring some courses online. The feedback that we did get from the students (both in class and on anonymous course evaluations) was 100% positive. The closest to a detracting voice that I got was the complaint that the students wanted more labs (in this non-lab lecture course). I was impressed.

Q: How do you motivate students?

A: What a good question... and ever evolving! I think it’s first important to show them that they are capable. I think it’s important to tell them the material is hard to grasp unless they tackle it and employ learning techniques. I tell them that if they learn how to get around tough obstacles, that is what will distinguish them at the next phase of their careers. I also like to stay quirky, excited and up-to-date in lectures or in discussions with students to show them the application and the relevance of what they are putting their time, money and effort into. I also like to listen to podcasts on learning techniques and engagement to learn new ideas and keep adapting.

Q: What’s one piece of advice you would give to faculty starting to teach online for the first time?

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A: Close your door and get course themes done in chunks. Read emails out loud to make sure they sound encouraging and upbeat. Make “how-to” videos for technical skills you expect your students to employ commonly (such as screen shots).

Q: CETL is starting a reading initiative, so I’m asking everyone, “What was the last book you read?”

A: If you want some professional learning theory book recommendations, you are gonna have to ask a different question! I am currently reading Glass Sword in the Red Queen series by Victoria Aveyard. I often read fiction for relaxation. I enjoy it, and I would recommend reading fiction to others who spend their day divided by multiple interpreted tasks (emails, visits, etc.).

ACCESSIBLE DESIGN & QM
By Haley Vickers

As most of you know, QM went through a rubric change this past summer. While the changes were not revelatory, these edits could be what stands between you and your “MET” course, particularly as concerns Standard 8: Accessibility.

In the 5th Edition of the rubric, Standard 8 equated to a total of 12 points. In the 6th Edition, however, Standard 8 equates to 15 points, with three essential standards.

Readability is at the top of the QM Accessibility list. No one wants to look at a poorly designed webpage. It is confusing for everyone— instructors, students, and reviewers. One way to combat bad design is to take a look back over the Online Training for Faculty shell on Blackboard that CETL has provided for you. In it, we use the most up-to-date course design principles.

Another way to promote readability is to not use color to convey meaning. Color can be tricky. As teachers, we often want to put all tests, assignments, and due dates in red, but many people are red and green colorblind. It is difficult for those who are colorblind to see these due dates and the importance of the red color. When in doubt, contrast it out—as far as color is concerned.

Next, take a glance at your own Blackboard shells. Are the materials there pleasant to the eye? Have you stayed consistent in using the same fonts? What about styles and headers? Do any glaring spelling or grammatical errors jump out to you? Does plenty of white space appear on the page?

Besides readability, making the course accessible to diverse learners is something else that has been emphasized in the 6th Edition. When one is able to hear or see or speak, it is easy to forget that there are others who are not able to perform these functions or who are not able to perform them as well as others. People tend to forget even more about cognitive accessibility barriers. To address these factors, let’s consider a few elements that should be integrated into every online and blended course (and maybe even our face-to-face courses, too).

Do you use PowerPoint slides in your Blackboard shells or in your face-to-face classes? If you do, run
those slides through Accessibility Checker in PowerPoint. Click here for a quick tutorial: **Accessibility Checker**. Accessibility Checker is great because it can help you determine if your PowerPoint needs Alt-Text, Alt-Tags, headings, and more.

Accessibility doesn’t just extend to PowerPoint. If you have any spreadsheets, Word documents, PDFs, or videos of any kind, all of these materials need to be made accessible to diverse learners. For Excel and Word, follow the same instructions as you would use for PowerPoint. For PDFs, use the instructions listed [here](#).

Trying to make all of your content accessible can be a daunting task, but remember that you have places to turn for help! Contact your textbook representative and ask for ADA-compliant PowerPoint and materials. You could also contact Testing and Accessibility on campus. TAS is located in 302 Fentem Hall. They can be reached at 580-559-5297 or [tas@ecok.edu](mailto:tas@ecok.edu). The skilled professionals at TAS can help you make your content more accessible for all students. CETL is also here to help with any online accessibility issues you may have. If we don’t have an answer, we will get you to someone who does!

In closing, remember to always be kind with your learning design.

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**SERVING STUDENTS THROUGH THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES: PART III**

By Haley Vickers

In past issues, we (re)introduced you to Chickering and Gamson’s 1987 article, “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” and to Principles #1 and #2. This month, we will be looking at Principle #3 and how to promote active learning.

**Principle #3 of Good Practice: Encourages Active Learning**

“Learning is not a spectator sport,” Chickering and Gamson open the third section of their article. Learning is *not* a spectator sport, and I know that I am sometimes guilty of forgetting that principle myself. Learning is, by its very nature, active! To learn something, a neural pathway is created or is made stronger in the brain ([Bernard, 2010](#)). So, how do we help students get this process jumpstarted? Here are a few ideas to promote active learning in your blended, online, or face-to-face (F2F) classroom.

1. **Blended:** Discussion boards are a great tool to use in a blended setting because they extend the learning outside of the classroom. Perhaps your class is having a heated debated about climate change. This debate does not have to end when the class does. Put it online! Discussion boards are also great when you have shy students who feel more comfortable voicing their opinions on a digital platform than in the F2F class meeting.

2. **Online:** Wikis are an interactive way to make online learning more engaging. In a wiki, both students and the instructor can upload videos, documents, and links, which builds a repository for learning.
3. **F2F**: Gamify the classroom! One tool I really enjoy using is Kahoot. After a lecture, playing a Kahoot game is a great way to see if students understood the material. It’s also a great way to let students use their phones in class and build community.

For more discussion about active learning, join the CETL book club, Wednesday afternoons from 4:00 to 5:00 this semester in the CETL Lab, Admin 214-A. You can sign up here, or just show up! We’d love to see you!

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**BLACKBOARD TIP OF THE MONTH:**

By Wendy McKibben

Discussions are a good way to open a line of communication and encourage students to think critically. Also, discussions will allow students to interact with each other, the content, and the instructor. But, good discussions do not just happen! Discussions must be intentionally designed into your courses. Discussion questions should be carefully crafted in order to create analysis. Here are 4 steps for a successful discussion plan in Blackboard:

**5 Steps to Successful LMS Discussions**

1. Define participation requirements.
   a. Share your expectations. Provide an etiquette statement and a grading grid or outline.
   b. Model proper discussion interaction and reinforce appropriate behavior with public recognition.

2. Craft an effective question.
   a. Use multimedia resources into your questions when appropriate. (Ex. YouTube Video on a related topic).
   b. Ask students to respond to the questions in relation to the multimedia resource.

3. Extend the discussion to encourage new ideas.
   a. Assign students with the last names A-M to support one side of the topic and N-Z to support the other side.

4. Moderate.
   a. Establish your presence. Ask for clarification, resources, or input from silent participants.

5. Structure your board.
   a. Create a forum>create a thread>create posts (see diagram below).

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**Tip: Make the Discussion count for a Grade**

1. Select **Grade Discussion Forum** and enter a point value.
2. If you want to evaluate participants on performance in each thread, select **Grade Threads**.
3. Optionally, select the check box for **show participants in Needs Grading** status and select the number of posts required to show in the **Needs Grading** area.

4. The setting shows the Needs Grading icon in the Grade Center after each student makes a **specific number of posts**.

5. If you select a grading option and do **not** select the check box, the Needs Grading icon will **not** appear in the Needs Grading area. Instead it will appear in the Grade Center with the In Progress icon.

**If you choose three posts from the list and a student submits two, the In Progress icon appears in the Grade Center cell until the specific number of posts is met.**

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**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

By Haley Vickers

UCO is hosting the 2019 Transformative Learning Conference. This event will take place on March 13th and 14th and will be held at the Embassy Suites OKC Downtown. Click [here](#) for registration information.

ABLE Tech is hosting the TechAccessOK conference in Downtown Oklahoma City June 6 – 7 this year. This conference focuses on making technology accessible for all. Key presenters include Luis Garcia (eBay), Karen Hawkins (SapientRazorfish), Robert Jolley (Knowbility), Christa Miller (Virginia Tech), Korey Singleton (George Mason U), Jonathan Whiting (WebAIM), and more. Proposals are now being accepted and should be sent to Robb Carr. More details can be found [here](#).

Smarthinking is offering a free webinar about integrating tutoring support in online classes. The webinar is available Tuesday, March 26th at noon CST and Wednesday, March 27th at 2:00 pm CST. Click [here](#) to register.

The Council for Online Learning Excellence (COLE) is hosting the Learning Innovations Summit April 1-12. This conference is completely online and free, with sessions being recorded. If you would like to attend, register [here](#).