

# Congratulations Jenni Gallagher: Pathways to General Education's new program coordinator!

The Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs has named Jenni Gallagher as the new Coordinator for General Education.

Gallagher brings eight years of experience in higher education to the position and previously served as the program's support specialist. She has also taught a Pathways course on United States history.

"With our first, four-year cohort of Pathways students graduating this spring, this is a really exciting time to be a part of this program," said Gallagher. "I'm looking forward to continuing to work with our incredible community of faculty and be a part of the collaboration that makes the Pathways General Education program so valuable to our students."

Gallagher will serve as the primary contact for the program and support faculty in the approval process of new courses and minors through the Pathways General Education Curriculum Review Committee. She will also support the University Curriculum Committee for General Education and oversee the management of grants and other professional development opportunities for Pathways faculty. In addition, she plans to promote the program both on campus and in the wider general education community with the assistance of a student intern.

In 2018, Virginia Tech launched the Pathways General Education program with the intention of revitalizing its core curriculum and moving towards a program that both worked across disciplines and addressed real-world problems. To foster a broad-range of knowledge and skills, the program requires students to work within concepts that range from Quantitative and Computational Thinking to Critical Analysis of Identity and Equity in the United States.

Central to the initiative are the Pathways Minors, cross-disciplinary programs built around a theme that allows students to examine topics from a variety of perspectives while working towards their general education requirements. The minors address vital issues to our students such as climate change, social justice, cybersecurity, and big data.

Since its inception, more than 1,000 students have declared one of the 29 approved Pathway Minors. Several minors have enrolled students from more than 20 different majors.

"At its best, general education programs, like Virginia Tech's Pathways initiative, create shared community knowledge and values that enable students to understand the political, social, and economic forces they'll encounter after graduation," said Gallagher. "I'm passionate about this work, and I know with the help of our talented faculty, our students will leave Virginia Tech well prepared for the future."

Gallagher earned master's degrees in history and curriculum and instruction from Virginia Tech and is currently pursuing a doctorate in educational psychology.

Faculty with questions about teaching, assessing, promoting, or creating new Pathways courses or minors are welcome to contact Gallagher at [jennigal@vt.edu](mailto:jennigal@vt.edu) or [gened@vt.edu](mailto:gened@vt.edu).

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““ Jenni has been a great asset to our department and I'm excited for the future of Pathways to General Education as she continues to collaborate with our faculty. I will continue to be involved in my new role at University Academic Affairs but I know the day-to-day support of the Pathways program is in good hands. Congratulations Jenni!”

**Stephen Biscotte**  
Assistant Provost for  
Undergraduate Education

## Bringing the Field to the Classroom

Dr. A. Ozzie Abaye on how her international outreach informs her teaching and creates student engagement

**OFFICE OF GENERAL EDUCATION:** You received your PhD in agronomy from Virginia Tech and have taught here for more than 25 years. Tell us more about your background and what started you on this career path.

**ABAYE:** I always loved agriculture, there's no question about it. When I came to the U.S. from Ethiopia as a teenager, I was adopted by a family that had a dairy farm in Pennsylvania and I really liked the work. That's what got me started in agriculture.

Originally, I had wanted to be a veterinarian. We had a vet that would help us on the farm and I was assisting him with a cow that was giving birth and when I saw the calf actually coming out, I fainted. He told me I might need to rethink my plans, that I could work in agriculture without being a vet. He was right, I couldn't stand the sight of blood.

So, I continued to help on the farm, milking cows, and went to a small college and majored in biology, and eventually got a master's degree in dairy science from Penn State and my doctorate from Virginia Tech. After that I've stayed here, it was my first job and I'm lucky to be finishing my career at the institution where I started. It usually doesn't happen that way.

**OGE:** Part of your appointment at CALS is for international outreach linked to cooperative extension. How does that work influence your teaching?

**ABAYE:** My first passion is teaching. I always wanted to expand into outreach and research that would support my teaching programs, so I try to bring the field to the classroom whether it's global or local issues. Outreach, research, study-abroad programs, and teaching are all interconnected. My international work for the last 11 years has been in Senegal. For the first five years, it was funded by a grant from the USAID (United States Agency for International Development). Everything I've done looks back to teaching and what I can bring to the classroom.

**OGE:** Tell us more about your work in Senegal. What was the focus of that project?

**ABAYE:** Our first project, between 2011 and 2018, was funded by the USAID's Global Hunger and Food Security 'Feed the Future' Initiative with the overall goal to revitalize the agricultural sector through education, research and discovery, and outreach. The second project, beginning in 2019, was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's McGovern-Dole Food For Education

Program with the objective of helping farmers provide high quality, nutritious commodities for school meal programs. Central to both projects is the mung bean, which we introduced with the goal of improving soil fertility and diversifying the local diet, which is mostly based on cereal crops like rice, sorghum, and millet.

We found it was really difficult for the farmers to invest additional resources for the introduction of a new crop, so we sought buy-in from the community regarding 'room for mung beans' in their existing production system. As we held meetings in the villages, all these issues came up. The major crop production constraint for these farmers is water. One of the mung bean's attributes is its ability to grow and produce under moderate rainfall. Additionally, mung beans have a short cycle, a maximum of 65 days from planting to harvest. This short cycle would reduce the hunger season that is often experienced by resource-poor farmers between the end of the dry season to the next rainy season when crops are harvested.

We also started seeing a lot of women coming into these meetings, wanting to know more about the mung bean. How to grow it, process it, and prepare it for school meals as well as household consumption. So, my colleagues from Virginia Cooperative Extension, Dr. Erika Bonnett and several other extension agents and specialists, trained the women on food safety, sanitation, food conservation, and preparation. We introduced a community-based curriculum that brought kids, teachers, and the community together around the introduction, production, and consumption of this single crop.





I started the project as an agronomist but my role morphed into education. Once the community saw the value and advantages of the newly introduced crop, we were able to train over 1,000 farmers. The system we worked out gave farmers the mung bean seeds, and they would give 25 percent of the yield to the schools for meal programs. Between 2019 and 2021, the project provided more than 5,000 school meals for children.

Due to the successful implementation of the mung bean program in the northern part of Senegal, we have been asked to extend the program to other parts of the country for the next 5 years.

**OGE:** Is that a common situation for international development projects? You start with a single objective in mind and then find there are other issues that need to be solved, using a range of skills, to make the program successful?

**ABAYE:** Yes. That approach comes from our mission as a land-grant institution; you already have the mindset that research, education, and outreach are all interconnected.

**OGE:** Tell us about Cooking with Ozzie, which is part of a Pathways course you teach. You were able to make the best out of a difficult situation during the initial phase of the pandemic.

**ABAYE:** Things happen by accident. The course is called World Crops and Cropping Systems, which includes three food labs that highlight what we've discussed in class. In our food labs, we connect students with the cultures of those crops, how it's used today in different countries. For example, when we talk about wheat in class, we'll celebrate Chinese New Year in the food lab by making dumplings.

The food lab is really a joyous place. I always tell students you can't be sad in the kitchen. But after COVID, that was gone. I went to Senegal during spring break in March 2020, when I came home, I had a weekend to transition the course to remote learning on Zoom.

During the initial phase of the pandemic, I gave the students several options, like writing a page or two on food culture or being part of the online, video cooking sessions with me from home. When the students cooked at home, their whole family got involved. The college of agriculture asked if they could link the cooking sessions to their Facebook page. It was amazing, former students and their families participated, and we had more than 30,000 views. The Roanoke Times also came to my house and did a story. It really came out of desperation but what choice did I have? I needed to stay engaged with my students.

**OGE:** What's next for your teaching?

**ABAYE:** Beginning this semester, this course is now a Pathways course and it covers the Core Concepts of



Reasoning in the Social Sciences and Critical Analysis of Identity and Equity in the United States. We will talk about food migration and the contribution of migrants to the food system and culture in the U.S. Also, I really want to include students and their own personal histories in the discussion. Food is identity.

Because it's a Pathways course, we'll have students from a lot of different backgrounds and I'm really looking forward to learning from them.

Dr. Abaye is a professor in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Recipient of the 2021 Jerry G. Gaff Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching for the Association for General and Liberal Studies.

# Program Update

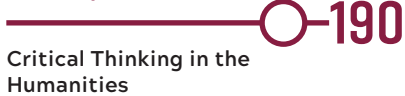
Four years after the first class of students entered the Pathways to General Education program, the number of available courses and minors has continued to grow in number and topics.

## Pathways to General Education courses by concept:

### Concept 3



### Concept 2



### Concept 1



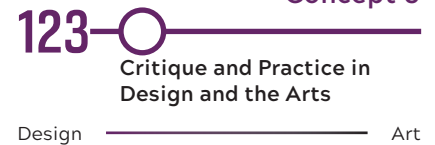
### Concept 4



### Concept 5



### Concept 6



### Concept 7



## Pathways courses offered by college:



More than 1,000 Virginia Tech students are now enrolled in 29 Pathways Minors while completing their General Education requirements:

- |                                     |  |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Adaptive Brain & Behavior           | Event & Experience Management                            | Language Sciences                 |
| Appalachian Cultures & Environments | Ecosystems for Human Well-Being                          | Leadership & Social Change        |
| Biodiversity Conservation           | Global Business Practices to Improve the Human Condition | Materials in Society              |
| Blue Planet                         | Global Food Security & Health                            | Organizational Leadership         |
| Civic Agriculture & Food Systems    | Health Communication                                     | Pathways to Sustainability        |
| Climate & Society                   | Housing & Society  | Peace Studies & Social Justice    |
| Data & Decisions                    | Innovation   | Philosophy, Politics, & Economics |
| Disabilities Studies                | Integrated Security                                      | Strategic Communication           |
| Ecological Cities                   | Language and Culture for the Practice of Science         | Science, Technology, & Law        |
|                                     |  | Technology, Humans, & Environment |
|                                     |  | Visual Arts & Society             |



## Teaching Complexity: How John Chermak uses poster sessions for his Pathways students



For a university professor, John Chermak in Virginia Tech's Geosciences Department, has led an unconventional career.

In addition to teaching at Virginia Tech for more than 15 years, Chermak has worked in the mining and energy industries on projects in 14 states and nine countries. They've ranged from permitting a gold and copper mine in Peru's northern highlands to studying nuclear waste storage at the University of Bern in Switzerland.

It's that experience Chermak tries to impart on his students in the Pathways course, Earth Resources, Society, and the Environment.

"My teaching is all about trying to explain to students the complexity of the real world," said Chermak. "As scientists, we collect data to understand systems, but our work is never done in isolation.

For example, consider Virginia Tech's Climate Action Commitment, which Chermak is involved with as a member of the renewable energy working group.

The initiative aims for carbon neutrality by 2030, which will mean wide-reaching changes for the community, like retrofitting existing building for efficiency, switching the power source for the university's steam plant, limiting the number of cars on campus, and purchasing renewable energy credits, a marketplace that allows the purchaser to offset their emissions by supporting sustainable projects.

Reaching the goals set in the university's climate commitment will require collaboration between university, local, and state officials while interpreting proposals on emissions, economics, and construction from a range of stakeholders.

The question, Chermak says, is how to get students to engage and retain similarly challenging concepts?

"I've worked with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and its director Kim Filer, and what they have taught me is that in order for students to learn, we as educators need to understand that students need to process information in order to retain it," said Chermak. "In short, for learning to happen, we need to get students to do stuff."

That has meant students preparing and presenting material at poster sessions, a recurring project for his students, which he says are valuable for several reasons.

The prompt for the assignment asks students to follow an energy source from extraction, to use, environmental and social impacts, and waste management. Or students can research a country and examine the natural resources, economy, environment, population, culture, and opportunities for sustainable development.

The class is then divided into teams of approximately four students, and once a semester, they present their posters in the Commonwealth Ballroom in the Squires Student Center to fellow students as well as other faculty and staff. Students also have to conduct at least two peer evaluations of other teams' posters.

"Presentation skills are a challenge for a lot of students and I found having to answer unanticipated questions a really valuable experience," said Wyatt George, a second-year student in the Virginia Tech Corp of Cadets majoring in political science. George was part of a team that presented a poster on Lebanon during the fall 2021 semester.



“The subject isn’t part of what I usually study but I came away with a greater understanding of environmental issues, which has led to other classes outside my major,” he said. “Also, I’m 50 percent Lebanese, so this assignment - along with an Arab culture course I took last semester - meant a lot to be able to learn more about where my extended family lives and came from.”

The presentations, and the work to prepare posters, also encourage students to develop skills that are valuable to employers.

“Coming from the private sector, you realize everything is done in teams,” said Chermak. “And the poster sessions reinforce all the skills needed for working with a group, like communication, delegating tasks, meeting deadlines, and collaboration.”

At it’s best, the poster sessions (and the university’s Pathways to General Education program) creates a valuable feedback loop between the specific, technical training students get in their majors and the broader societal and global context for their future careers.

“The issue of sustainability is applicable to any field in engineering. As a materials engineer, it’s a topic I know I’ll



be returning to in my classes in the future,” said Keshav Chandran, a second-year pre-med student majoring in materials science engineering. “This class, which looks at real-world issues from different perspectives, presents the problems that I take back to my classes and try to look for solutions.”

These poster sessions are applicable to a range of courses and topics that could be adapted by other faculty.

“We created the course with the title ‘Earth Resources, Society, and the Environment’ and it’s this balance between those three issues that I want them to grapple with when looking at an issue,” said Chermak. “And the poster sessions are a great way to make that happen.”



## The Class Fighting for Appalachia

by Melody Warnick

To tackle the substance use disorder epidemic, the Appalachian Community Research course gets undergrads off campus and into communities they can help.

If you live near Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus, chances are good you live in Appalachia, the storied cultural region that meanders through 13 states, from Mississippi to New York. That doesn't mean you know much about it. For many, Appalachia is a fuzzy concept, a combo-pack of stereotypes and statistics.

That changes fast for students in Virginia Tech's transdisciplinary Appalachian Community Research (ACR) course, an elective in the new Appalachian Cultures & Environments Pathways minor. For Emily Satterwhite, an associate professor in the Department of Religion & Culture, who's co-taught the class for three of the past four years, the proof is in the end-of-semester student reflection papers. "There's a strong theme of, 'How have I been here three or four years and not even spoken to a local person about what it's like to live here?'" she said.

Or, as one past student put it, "Academia rarely seems to be more than peripherally connected with its greater community. This class was very special in the way that it was entirely shaped by it."

The course is shaped by it, and hoping to have an impact on it, most recently by tackling one of Appalachia's most intractable problems: its substance abuse.

### A plane full of people

Between April 2020 and April 2021, 100,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. That's like an airplane full of people falling out of the sky every single day for a year.

Things are particularly dire in Appalachia, where the overdose mortality rate in 2018 was 43 percent higher for 25- to 54-year-olds than it was elsewhere in the country.

Yet, until he signed up for the Appalachian Community Research class in fall 2021, none of this was really on Saket Bikmal's radar. "I'd heard of the opioid crisis in Appalachia," said the senior in computational and systems neuroscience, who hails from Northern Virginia. Beyond that, "I was actually pretty clueless to this whole thing."

On the first day of class in Solitude, the 200-year-old historic home near the Duck Pond, Satterwhite and co-teacher Julia Gohlke, an associate professor of environmental health in the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, challenged their students to develop policy recommendations for substance use disorder recovery in Southwest Virginia. ACR participates in a



grant program from the Appalachian Region Commission, called the Appalachian Teaching Project, which stipulates that students conduct original research and develop an innovative project to bolster community development in Appalachia.

The course's 11 students conducted interviews with 27 key informants, including government officials, local nonprofit leaders, and medical professionals. Cheryl Hartman, a faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine at Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, spoke with students several times, as did Sam Rasoul, a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from Roanoke.

One of the best conversations happened early in the semester with community partner Bently Wood, a peer recovery specialist with New River Valley Community

Services, who shared his personal experience with drug addiction and recovery. Hearing Wood's story changed Bikmal's ideas about substance use. Suddenly he could see how someone's life could land here. How Wood wasn't so different from him, "I think that's probably what started the emotional connection for me," he said.

ACR students from a cross-section of majors such as public health, biological sciences, and humanities for public service embraced Wood's guidance on person-first language, abandoning the term "addict" in favor of the less-stigmatizing "person with substance use disorder."

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They also participated in Hokie Wellness's REVIVE! training for reversing an opioid overdose with NARCAN nasal spray. "I think that it felt important to the students to be able to go into the world with such specific knowledge of how to help people who are struggling, not just to study them," Satterwhite said.

But the major project — the one that students would present to the Appalachian Regional Commission at the end of the semester — took a while to take shape.

In past semesters, ACR students had researched hospital protocols for people with a substance use emergency; the utility of needle exchanges; the effects of COVID-19 and the accessibility of telehealth services on people with substance use disorder; even, back in fall 2018, community health concerns related to the Radford Army Ammunition Plant. Linsey Marr, the Charles P. Lunsford professor of civil and environmental engineering who helped design the course, collected air samples to test for pollution, Chris Thompson of the School of Neuroscience tested blood samples from local cows, and students interviewed residents who lived near the plant.

Findings from the 2018 class's research were published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* — a coup for the undergraduate students involved. The most important impact, said Gohlke, may have been "getting students out of the university environment so they understand that [the university] is a bubble. Right outside the border of the university, there are people who have just completely different lives."

To find their next project, ACR students would have to leave the bubble.

### No Tests Today

One issue that came up repeatedly in interviews with key informants was the pervasive lack of housing and treatment facilities in Southwest Virginia for those who suffer from substance use disorder.

Currently, services are available for only about one in 10 people who need them, said Wood. Pregnant women, new mothers, and those with additional health problems are at particular risk.

Perhaps, it was suggested, Catawba Hospital, a sprawling state mental health facility northeast of Blacksburg, could be expanded into a substance use disorder treatment facility.

Hannah O'Malley, a senior majoring in neuroscience, didn't think college students took field trips. But early in November, she found herself riding in a Virginia Tech van through the autumn leaves outside Blacksburg, headed toward Catawba Hospital's 700 forested acres. "I had never heard of this happening in a class before," O'Malley said. "Usually you go in, and you take a test."

No tests today. Satterwhite drove the van onto the Catawba Hospital grounds. Five students hopped out. With supervision from the hospital's chief operating officer, Cynthia McDaniel, they explored the grounds, originally built in 1858 as a resort.

Amanda Ljuba, a junior majoring in criminology and sociology, was skeptical when she eyed the antiquated main hospital building. "It looked like Chernobyl," she said.

Could this motley assortment of gardens and basketball courts, brick and stone outbuildings, be repurposed into a holistic facility offering addiction treatment, medical care, counseling, and stable housing? The more they explored, the easier it became to catch the vision. The site was close enough to Roanoke to attract workers and access additional services. The natural setting provided its own healing balm.

Two hours later, when the students and Satterwhite climbed back into the van, they were convinced. Here was their project.

### Where others fear to tread

Of course, one semester would not be remotely long enough to make over Catawba Hospital, a project that could cost \$200 million. ACR students settled on championing a feasibility study for the project that they hoped to introduce in the Virginia General Assembly.

With the help of a "You Write the Bill" workshop that Rasoul led for the class, they came up with a legislation that recommends looking at "transforming Catawba Hospital into a facility at which a continuum of substance abusetreatment and recovery services, including long-term, short-term, acute, and outpatient services, is provided." As O'Malley said, "I had no idea that I could actually be so much more involved in the whole legislative process than I ever could have imagined."



In November, class members gathered at Solitude to present their project to the Appalachian Regional Commission. Normally this would happen in person in Washington, D.C., — a plan scuttled by COVID-19. This year, they listened by Zoom as other Appalachian Teaching Project students from across the region spoke about community gardens and electric car charging stations. Then they delivered their own well-rehearsed group presentation about substance use disorder.

### Kickstarting hope

Even after the end of the fall semester, more than half ACR's students, including Bikmal, O'Malley, and Ljuba, made the surprising decision to keep advocating for the Catawba Hospital feasibility study. So far, so good. Sam Rasoul filed the bill, HB 105, early in January 2022, and picked up a co-sponsor in Delegate Joe McNamara, who represents the area where Catawba Hospital is located.

More obstacles remain in the 60-day legislative session that convened on Jan. 12.

The bill still needs to be assigned to a committee. It needs approval for a budget amendment, not to mention a passing vote.

That's okay. "This process will obviously take years," said Bikmal. "But we want to be kind of the kick starter that sparks this project. The motivation of helping people and seeing the opioid crisis subside is what drives us."



By getting students emotionally and educationally into the broader community semester after semester, ACR produces the kind of passion and persistence for Appalachia that is a source of hope to people who live there. "We're creating change agents," said community partner Bently Wood. "That's absolutely what I believe."

Faculty interested in supporting or learning more about HB 105 can get more information from Hokies for SUD Recovery on Twitter or Instagram.



# Meet the Interns

## Ashley Wynn

Multimedia Intern at Undergraduate Education

**OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:** Tell us about your background. Where are you from and what are you studying?

**ASHLEY WYNN:** I'm a senior studying multimedia journalism in the School of Communication and I'm from Chesterfield, which is a small town south of Richmond. Where I live is out in the boonies; you have to drive 30 minutes to get a supermarket. It's the kind of place where everyone knows everyone.

**QUE:** How did you get started in photography?

**AW:** My father was a photographer, so I've been shooting film cameras since I was six or seven years old. Growing up, he was also encouraging me to bring my camera and shoot photos everywhere I went. I've pretty much been taking pictures my entire life.

**QUE:** Do you remember your first camera?

**AW:** It was a Nikon F 120. A big, heavy brick-sized camera that you had to crank to advance the film.

**QUE:** What's your favorite way to work? You have experience in videography as well.

**AW:** Given the choice, I prefer taking photos. I've always done it, so it feels more natural to me versus shooting video. If I could, I would always shoot photos on film, it's my favorite thing to do.

**QUE:** What do you like about shooting on film?

**AW:** Film cameras are so much simpler, there's just the light meter, f-stop, and focus. But with a DSLR, there are so many things to pay attention to and you can shoot hundreds of images in a few minutes. With a film camera, you have to pay attention and watch for something that's worth a photo. If you only have 26 or 24 images on a roll of film, you want to make each one count. Plus, it's fun because you don't know what you have until you develop the film, which is the best part.

**QUE:** After you finish your degree, what's next for you?

**AW:** After graduation, I'd love to work as a photojournalist. I love to write too. Anything that would allow me to have a camera in my hands and create images that are worthwhile and make an impact on people.



## Katina Tran

Graphic Design Intern with Pathways to General Education

Hi! I am Katina, a student intern for the Office of Undergraduate Education. With this role, I assist with creating flyers and advertisement materials.

I'm from northern Virginia, and am a second-year student majoring in Graphic Design and minoring in Innovation. As a graphic design major, I am immersed in concepts like print, digital, and logo design. In the Innovation Pathways minor, I learn about entrepreneurship and human-centered design. I aspire to be a professional graphic/user-interface designer in the future.

Outside of academics, I am involved in many extracurriculars; I am an officer for the Vietnamese Student Association, a member of Bambooz Dance Crew, and the Cornerstone Christian Fellowship.

## Leah Hammes

Graphic Design Intern at Undergraduate Education

I'm a graphic design major, with a minor in art history, so I like being able to study and learn how design has changed over time.

For example, in Egyptology we've looked at how hieroglyphics was arguably the first form of graphic design.

Last semester, I took a course about the development of comics in America, which is one of my favorite classes I've taken at Tech. Comics were considered a throw-away medium, outside the mainstream culture, which allowed them to discuss social issues of gender, race, and representation in America. Then with my major, I get to combine all that knowledge with what I'm learning about the present state of design and apply it in the studio.

Probably the most valuable thing I've gained at college is the desire to continually learn. Last summer I took a few Harvard edX courses (they're online and free) on art history, the Pyramids of Giza, and the opioid crisis. I also love reading and have a book club with my Dad, who is a retired police officer, and we read true-crime books, which I really enjoy.

After graduation, my primary focus will be starting an apprenticeship as a tattoo artist, which I think of as a storytelling medium. But I know my future will also be doing design work. It's something I'm passionate about and always will continue to do to support projects I believe in.



## Authentic Teaching with Hannah Shinault

After the university shifted to remote learning, a colleague shared with Hannah Shinault that her class had done a “silent disco,” where the entire class danced to music with their computers’ microphones on mute. The exercise provided a badly needed break from the stress of remote learning and afterwards her colleague made a playlist for her students.

It sounded like the kind of fun, engaging idea that faculty are always looking to bring to their classrooms. But when Shinault, an instructor in the School of Communication, mentioned it to her students, they weren’t interested.

“My students told me it was ‘not my personality,’” said Shinault. “After I got over not being the ‘cool, fun’ teacher, it forced me to think about what it meant to teach authentically, which to me, means when your work aligns with your personality and core beliefs.”

And while teaching during a pandemic created a lot of challenges for students and faculty, the last two years have allowed staff a rare opportunity to step back and re-evaluate their approach to teaching, she says.

“I think many of us at some point have felt like a fraud while teaching or pressured to chase the latest fad for student engagement,” said Shinault. “But COVID made us more authentic teachers; it stripped people down to the basics where everyone only had the energy to be themselves while teaching.”

Below is an adaptation of a talk Dr. Shinault gave on February 11, 2022 at the 14th annual Conference of Higher Education Pedagogy presented by the Virginia Tech Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Here are a few suggestions that Shinault recommends when thinking about authentic pedagogy:

### Don’t try too hard to entertain your students.

Each year new teaching techniques — like multimedia assignments and gamification — become buzzwords for college instructors. While trying something new in your classroom can be a great idea, Shinault says, students aren’t looking for entertainment from their lectures.

“What’s important is students need to know that you care about how they’re doing and whether or not they’re meeting expectations,” she adds. “They want engagement not entertainment.”

### Don’t anticipate outcomes that might prevent you from trying something new.

When planning something new in your classroom, it’s easy to let your expectations get in the way of experimentation in your teaching style, said Shinault.

If you don’t think something will work with your students, it may be because you’re underestimating their ability. Also, don’t get too emotionally invested in trying a new element to your pedagogy, not everything works for a specific class or group of students. Regardless, it’s important to evolve as a teacher and experimenting is a part of that process, says Shinault.

“Students are forgiving and won’t hold it against you if you experiment,” she said. “Plus, those failures can become memorable bonding experiences for everyone.”

### Don’t compare yourself to others.

Often, when fellow faculty will share what they’re doing in their classrooms, Shinault says, they’re sharing their successes, not when things fall apart.

“Don’t compare yourself to your colleague’s highlight reel,” said Shinault. “It’s them at their best, and like comparing your living room to the perfectly-decorated ones you see on Pinterest.”

Instead, she says, look for elements in those assignments that match your skill set and class.

### Do create a community of faculty and staff to support your teaching.

While comparing yourself to others isn’t always helpful, it’s important to have a group of colleagues you can turn to for feedback.

“Having people you can troubleshoot problems and help you progress in your pedagogy is invaluable,” said Shinault. “And if they’re part of your department, it can be really helpful for learning about university resources and funding that might be available to you.”

### Do teach using your strengths.

“There are a lot of tools out there, but if you’ve been teaching for a while, you know what you’re good at,” said Shinault. “Use that knowledge to adapt ideas you get from colleagues. Authentic teaching reflects your strengths and core values.”

Hannah Shinault is an advanced instructor and academic advisor at the School of Communication in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. She is also the faculty lead of the Pathways Minor, Health Communications.

## Thank You!

### Sincere thanks to the members of this year's Pathways to General Education Curriculum Review Committee

Hannah Shinault, Chair, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Kimberly Carlson, Pamplin College of Business

Page Fetter, University Studies

Jennifer Friedel, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Gebre Gebremariam, College of Science

Katlyn Griffin, University Libraries

Tom Hammett, College of Natural Resources and Environments

Kevin Jones, College of Architecture and Urban Studies

Earl Kline, University Curriculum Committee for General Education

Majid Manteghi, College of Engineering

Kerry Redican, Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine

Annie Ronan, University of Curriculum Committee for General Education

### Many thanks as well to the following for their support of the PGE CRC's efforts:

Gary Costello, Office of the University Registrar

Becki Smith, Office of the University Registrar

Rachel Pitcher, Office of the University Registrar

Anna Taylor, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Amanda Parsons, College of Architecture and Urban Studies

Tracy Sebring, College of Engineering

Nicole Freeman, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Cathy Barker, College of Natural Resources and Environment

Michel Pleimling, College of Science

Julia Acton, Pamplin College of Business

Sara Vandyke, University Honors

### Appreciation as well for the members of this year's University Curriculum Committee for General Education:

Hannah Shinault, Chair, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Angela Anderson, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Aaron Ansell, Provost Appointee

Sara Arena, College of Engineering

Stephen Biscotte, Provost Designee

Brian Collins, Pamplin College of Business

Ainsley Cragin, Undergraduate Student Senate

Molly Hall, Assessment and Evaluation

Janet Hilder, Division of Student Affairs

Earl Kline, College of Natural Resources and Environment

Victoria Lael, Provost Appointee

Greg Novack, Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies

Nicole Pitterson, Faculty Senate

Annie Ronan, College of Architecture and Urban Studies

Alireza Shojaei, Faculty Senate

Zack Underwood, University Studies

Anita Walz, University Studies

Sparkle Williams, Division of Student Affairs

**Contributors to this edition of the Pathways Newsletter:** Leah Hammes, Will Rizzo, Melody Warnick, & Ashley Wynn





## Save the Date

### Pathways Office Hours

**WHEN:** The first Friday of every month of the semester.

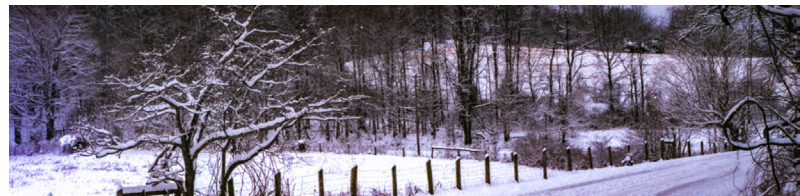
**TIME:** 10:00 - 11:00 AM

**ZOOM LINK:** <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/85154450609>

**NOTE:** If you are unavailable at this time, please contact Jenni Gallager ([jennigal@vt.edu](mailto:jennigal@vt.edu)) to set up a time that's convenient for you.

### The 2022 Summer Institute

Save the date! This year's Summer Institute will be held the week of May 16 and will once again bring the Pathways, FYE, and HHMI Inclusive Excellence communities together.



Photographs by Undergraduate Education's Multimedia Intern, Ashley Wynn.

Animal iconography created by Pathways' Graphic Design intern, Katina Tran.