

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NEWSLETTER

November 2022

AnnouncementThis is our last  
edition for 2022!

See you in 2023!!!

-ITLC

## Spotlight

An Interview with Mary Ann Sexton, Assistant Professor of Biology



Please share your thoughts on the importance of Professional Learning in academia.

I believe that PL is essential for any instructor that wishes to grow in their practice. Reading the literature on new pedagogy and connecting with like-minded instructors who also want to grow in their teaching practice is a wonderful opportunity! As students and education continue to grow and evolve in an ever-changing world, it is important to allow our teaching methods to evolve with them.

How do you use Professional Learning?

As I read articles, listen to podcasts, and attend conferences or PL meetings, I hear of new teaching methods that pique my interest. I then take the practices I wish to use and spend some time researching and reflecting on how I wish to use them in my classroom and how they might fit. During the semester, I take notes and adjust my classroom practices. Finally, I try to engage in as many opportunities as possible to share what I have learned. As I engage with other instructors, I find that not only can I share what I have learned, but I get many new suggestions and ideas from others that only make my new strategies more effective!

What is a Professional Learning strategy you have learned and have started implementing?

I am continually looking at new ways to use very small-scale collaborative assignments and projects in my classroom. I like that these small groups provide a chance to engage with individual students in the groups and find out where the learning gaps are. I find that in small groups, students are much more likely to share with me and with each other something that they do not understand than when I am teaching from the front of the room. It also makes the student take a critical thinking role where they must step away from being a "passive" learner that is simply copying information off a whiteboard or PowerPoint to a critical thinker. The weekly types of group assignments that I do may be a case study that engages critical thinking, using manipulatives to create a process or a structure, working on one small part of a larger process where all students can put their work together (jigsaw strategy), or creating an original drawing that ties in several concepts together that can't be found in a book.

work together  
several concepts



"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." - C. S. Lewis

# Classroom Challenge

## Fail Forward

By Jillian Miller, Mathematics

Have you ever been excited to try something new, but were concerned about the (potential) impact on your students (or, the comments on your course evaluations)? \*Gasp\* How would you ever recover? John C. Maxwell describes Failing Forward as “the ability to get back up after you’ve been knocked down, learn from your mistakes, and move forward in a better direction.”

In Spring 2022, I used a method called ungrading as my primary means of evaluation in my courses. Ultimately, ungrading hands the responsibility of grading over to the students. Instead of grades, I gave extensive qualitative feedback. While some students enjoyed this form of evaluation, others evidently did not. When I first read the comments on my evaluations, my ego was...bruised. So, I sat down to explain away the negative comments. But, as I sat down to do just that, I realized that I wasn't really honoring that feedback. Data should be viewed objectively – not emotionally. I shook my head loose and sat down with a new goal in mind: find trends in the data and use the feedback to inform my teaching.

As I analyzed the comments, I recognized the following trends: 1) students needed accountability 2) students needed an organization technique (to gather evidence of their learning), and 3) students needed some grades to determine where they stand in the course.

With a renewed mindset, I returned to the idea of ungrading and determined how I could meet my students where they were at while still honoring the essence of it. Ultimately, I implemented an Engagement Tracker (to track and organize students' work), provided a mix of qualitative and quantitative feedback, and focused on the reflective components of ungrading in successive semesters.

By applying a Failing Forward mentality, we can model for students what it looks like to receive and respond to feedback in a productive way. Let's get comfortable being uncomfortable by taking deep breaths, honoring the feedback, looking for trends in the data, and showering ourselves and others with grace as we explore solutions.

## Classroom News

The department of Mathematics & Sciences has installed ten new Olympus teaching microscopes, funded by a TAF grant awarded to Dr. Saeed Rahmanian for use in Biology, Microbiology, and A&P.

Traditionally, students have each had their own microscope and samples in the lab, which can be time consuming. These new, cutting-edge microscopes interface with a camera, allowing teachers to digitally project real-time images of important biological specimens for all students to see. Because these microscopes can save images and videos, students may also revisit these samples and even complete more advanced analyses using a built-in suite of software tools.





# Upcoming Opportunities

## November

- [NISOD November Connections & Conversations](#) (Nov. 8th)
- [Anthology Digital Teaching Symposium](#) (Nov. 10th)
- ITLC Workshop "QEP Revival" (On Demand)
- CTAT - Setting Up and Using Rubrics in Your Course (Nov. 15th 11 am, Nov. 16th 2 pm)

## December

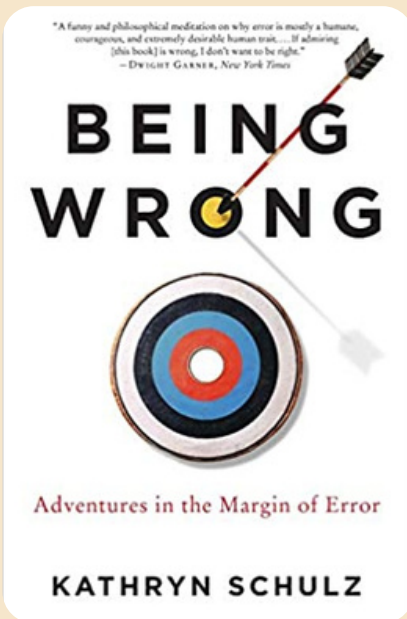
- [NISOD December Connections & Conversations](#) (Dec. 6th)

## On Demand

- [RSCC PL On Demand](#)
- [Monday Morning Mentor](#)



# Reading Recommendations



**Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error**  
By Kathryn Schulz

"Being Wrong explores what it means to be in error, and why homo sapiens tend to tacitly assume (or loudly insist) that they are right about most everything. Kathryn Schulz argues that error is the fundamental human condition and should be celebrated as such. Guiding the reader through the history and psychology of error, from Socrates to Alan Greenspan, Being Wrong will change the way you perceive screw-ups, both of the mammoth and daily variety forever."

[Click Here to View on Amazon](#)

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Contact: Jessica Dalton-Carriger  
dcarrigerjn@roanestate.edu

