



Teaching Matters

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<http://cte.uwaterloo.ca>

AI: It's Not What You Might Think

We seem to be living in times of “not enough” and “almost but not quite”. As an institution, we have many ambitious plans to do more and be more. Within CTE, we are about to revisit and extend our initial strategic plan. Plans are required to move forward purposefully and to implement constructive change, but the question is where do the plans stem from: a position of deficit or one of strength?

When we work from a position of deficit, we tend to focus primarily on problems – what’s wrong? what’s not good enough? Then we seek to identify causes to the problems – why is this happening? Finally we brainstorm solutions and develop action plans to resolve the problems.

Starting from a focus on problems may result in us forgetting to think about what we’re already doing well and considering how we can do more of that. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and positive change, based on the work of Cooperider and colleagues, put the focus on areas of strength and how to move forward from a positive position.

In AI, a different cycle for planning and change exists. You start at the **discovery** stage by appreciating “what is” and focusing on the best features of a situation, team, department, or institution. Then you move to the **dream** stage. Here you focus on “what might be” – what will take something that is already good to something that’s even better? The **design** stage is next and this is where you decide “what should be” to make it possible to reach ideas from the dream stage. Finally, you move to the **destiny** stage where you create “what will be” – the specific actions that will help you put the dreams into action.

Our academic training often teaches us to identify problems and create solutions, but sometimes it can be helpful to look through a different lens or even turn a situation right around to see it from a completely different angle.

Let’s think about AI in relation to how we analyze course evaluations. How often have you opened the envelope of evaluation sheets only to zero in on the lowest numbers and the negative comments? If this resonates for you, you are not alone. But I’d like to challenge you to come at those evaluations from an AI perspective. Start with the positives: what items got the highest scores and what comments are most positive? Then think about what your ideal course evaluations would look like? Would the students’ comments reflect a teacher who is committed and

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Rob de Loë, Committed to Student Development



Among Rob de Loë's students he is well known for his 'Robisms'. Consistently asking his students, "so what"? He encourages students to go beyond accepted knowledge and seek new interpretations and relevancy of research. His famous 'Robovision' is also legendary, referring to the extensive commentary and feedback his students receive on their work. Both are evidence of Rob's commitment to student development and teaching and are core to his work in the Department of Environment and Resource Studies. Graduate student Seanna Davidson sits down with Rob de Loë, a [recent recipient](#) of the Award of Excellence in Graduate Supervision, to hear why he does what he does.

Q: Why do you teach?

A: I think it is always a shame when research is the only thing that is important to faculty, because in the cold light of day most faculty members are likely to have the most impact through teaching. Very few people can look back on their careers and say that they changed the world in big, positive ways through their research. However, I think that most of us have the opportunity to make a huge difference in the world through our teaching. Sometimes we do not even know it has happened! I remember getting a letter from a student that I taught in a course near the beginning of my career. She wrote me a long letter – out of the blue – many years after she had taken the course to explain how I had changed her life, and how the successful career that she was currently having was attributable to my course. It felt magnificent!

Q: How did you develop your teaching philosophy? What is your approach?

A: A big part of my philosophy is to teach the whole class, not just the keeners in the front row. I have been successful if I can help a D student be a C student or a B student be an A student. Students have different capabilities and we have to teach them all. I think it is incumbent upon us as teachers to try to stretch everybody, to try to help everybody in the class be better than they have been before. My approach is a mixed bag. In some respects I think I'm fairly traditional. I think lectures have their place if done properly. In my lectures, I try to be as interactive as possible -- so that they are a bit more conversational. I also think that writing and independent research are really important. Writing is an art and a craft. It has to be practiced continually, and you need feedback. Therefore, I try to create as many opportunities for people to try, and then try again.

Q: What role do you see for mentoring in the university setting? Why is it important?

A: I can look back on my own time as a student and as a starting professor and identify all of the people who took the time to show me the ropes, give me encouragement, demonstrate good practice, etc. and I'm grateful to them. So whenever possible I try to do the same for other people. I have always been happy to talk to people about teaching, to participate in mutual support sessions, to share resources, etc. I think that as professors we all need to do more of this because society is questioning the institution of the university. More and more it is clear to me that people do not understand the distinctive role of a university professor. I worry whenever I read columnists in major newspapers arguing that our teaching can be replaced by videos and online materials. University teaching is supposed to reflect our scholarship. The story is that we bring our research into our classrooms. If we never do that, or if we do not teach well, or if we do not respect teaching, then it is inevitable that at some point society will have had enough and will seek a new kind of university. In that sense, we have to walk the talk better – which means we have to help our colleagues through mentoring.

Q: If you could give one piece of advice to new professors starting out, what would it be?

A: I would say that you do not always have to be right the first time. We often go into the classroom thinking that we are supposed to be the ultimate authority and that it is terrible if we do not know the answer to a question. As a result, I see professors who are either afraid to answer questions -- and thus they do not *seek* questions, or they try to improvise their way through. Neither scenario is desirable. This came home to me one day near the start of my teaching career when I simply admitted to the class that I did not have a clue. I promised to get back to them with the correct information the next day, and then I did. Admitting my fallibility, demonstrating how to address that gap, and then actually following through sent a powerful message to the students. I proved to them that I was a learner too, and I showed them that it is a big messy complicated world, and that nobody can know everything. They felt empowered, and they loved it

Seanna Davidson

Opportunities and New Directions Conference 2011

This [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conference](#) focuses on research that explores improvements to student learning. We welcome everyone interested in this scholarship to join us for an exciting opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues from multiple disciplines and institutions and to engage in conversations about new research, work in progress, and emerging ideas.

This year's conference will include 2 keynotes, a plenary, and workshops that explore not only how we do research about teaching and learning, but also how we make the results public in a way that will inform not only our own students but also our colleagues. Submissions for workshops, concurrent sessions, and poster presentations are invited to address this or other themes.

Keynote Speakers

This year, we've expanded to a two day event, and will bring in two extraordinary keynote speakers. Dr. Maryellen Weimer will be our opening keynote on Wednesday, April 27. Well known for her book *Enhancing Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning* and numerous articles, she will speak about the kinds of resources educators need regarding teaching and learning and how to get the greatest impact from research on teaching and learning – both our own and others. Dr. Julia Christensen-Hughes, co-author of *Taking Stock: Research on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, will give the closing keynote on Thursday, April 28 – she will ask us to think about the extent to which the result of research about teaching and learning make it into practice – and how we can strengthen that connection. Each of our keynote speakers will give a special workshop as part of the conference program. In addition, Dr. Nicola Simmons will give a plenary presentation reporting on her research at the University of Waterloo about the impact of research on teaching and learning: how and where we make the results public.

Call for proposals

The deadline for the [call for proposals](#) is **Friday, January 14, 2011**. As usual, conference presenters may also submit to the peer-review publication that follows the conference.

Please consider joining us for this extraordinary two day event on using research to improve teaching and learning! Questions? Please contact Nicola Simmons at nsimmons@uwaterloo.ca.

Nicola Simmons

AI: It's Not What You Might Think

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enthusiastic about being in the classroom? Would your scores all be 4 or higher? These are both possible. Next you would consider what you could do in order to have evaluations closer to your ideal. And finally you would identify specific behaviours or actions that you could take to make your “dream” evaluations a reality.

This approach may seem too optimistic in its orientation. Even in CTE we typically aim to provide balanced feedback when observing a course or teaching others how to analyze course evaluations, but I wonder if taking an AI approach might lead to greater gains? Psychologically, it would seem to be much less onerous and daunting to work from our strengths than to overcome obstacles. Perhaps we can all consider how to “dream for our destiny”, whether at the personal, departmental, or organizational level. I am confident we can only get even better!

References:

Cooperider, D. & Whitney, D. (n.d.). *A positive revolution in change: Appreciative inquiry*. Retrieved November 30, 2010: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf>

Wilson, M. (2005). *Using the appreciative inquiry approach in educational development: the possibilities*. Workshop at Educational Developers' Winter meeting. Kingston, ON.

Donna Ellis

Blending Across Canada - Insights from the 4th Annual Cohere/ CSSHE Conference on Blended Learning



I had the opportunity this October to attend the 4th Annual Cohere (Collaboration for Online Higher Education and Research) / CSSHE (Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education) [Blended Learning Conference](#) at York University. The presentations were grouped into two streams: techniques for enhancing the pedagogical effectiveness of blended learning, and policies and practices for ensuring that pedagogically effective blended learning is also cost effective. We attended many engaging sessions (see Scott Anderson's CTE blog posting on [lecture capture](#) at Queen's University), however most interesting to me was to hear how other institutions are succeeding to integrate blended courses into their offerings. The concluding panel discussion included representatives from five different Cohere institutions (University of Alberta, University of Saskatchewan, Memorial University, University of Manitoba and York University) who reported on the extent to which blending has become an established strategy on their campuses. To my surprise there was a great range from a substantial number of blended course offerings (MUN and York) to none (U of A).

The two main reasons for institutions to go down the blended path are pedagogical effectiveness and cost effectiveness. A well-designed blended course can lead to better student engagement. Shifting student interaction with concepts to the online environment to free up face-to-face time for group work or problem solving, or moving face-to-face discussions into the online environment to promote student reflection and to develop their writing skills were just a few of the advantages of blending that were discussed at the conference. Most presenters stressed the importance of making a clear connection between the learning experiences that students are having in both the online and face-to-face environments and of helping students manage their time on their activities in blended courses.

Cost effectiveness seems to be an additional driver for blending at universities and colleges where there are increasing enrolments of students who are part-time and/or "commuter" students. These students appreciate the flexibility and convenience of anytime, anywhere access to online course activities and course resources. Ron Owston and his team at the Institute for Research on Learning Technologies at York University have predicted how increasing the number of blended courses over the next 5 years at York will reduce the costs for new infrastructure needed to accommodate a projected increase of 5,000 undergraduates. It is harder to predict if the decreased face-to-face classroom time in their blended courses will translate into reduced costs for hiring instructors and teaching assistants though; the time required to engage with the students can be the same, or more, in good blended courses.

Definitions of "blended learning" vary from campus to campus. For some institutions the term only refers to courses where there is reduced face-to-face time, for others it includes on campus courses where significant learning takes place online ([see our definition of blended learning at Waterloo](#)). To establish blending as a recognized instructional strategy it is important that blended learning aligns with the institutional vision and personality. Our [About Us](#) webpage describes Waterloo as enterprising and practical, creative and risk-taking, and innovative and relevant. Helping our students to develop into self-directed, life-long learners who are comfortable in a variety of learning environments seems to fit with this description. The increasing number of blended courses offered here confirms that Waterloo is not only a leader in fully online learning but is embracing the potential of the blended learning environment as well.

Jane Holbrook

Course: CTE637 The Best of Both Worlds: A Day-Long Workshop on Designing Blended Courses

Date/Place: Monday, January 31, 2011 (9:00 am to 4:00 pm), Flex Lab (LIB 329)

Notes: Limited to 8 uWaterloo instructors

Register: Online at [myHRinfo](#), using the registration system.

CTE's Blog Celebrates Its Second Anniversary

CTE has maintained a blog devoted to disseminating ideas about teaching and learning for over two years now: the blog's second anniversary occurred on November 10, 2010. During that time, my co-editor (Trevor Holmes) and I have written dozens of blog postings, and have elicited scores of other postings from our fellow CTE staff members, as well as from uWaterloo faculty and from staff at other teaching centres. In fact, all in all, the CTE blog has enjoyed over 150 thoughtful, well-written postings on topics ranging from video lecture capture to leadership training; from experiential learning to RSS feeds; from large classes to Thomas Edison's version of an eBook Reader; from mentoring to "green learning"; and many more.

Since its inception, our site has been visited over 17,000 times, and our traffic continues to grow: over the past year, the average number of visits per day has tripled. Our readers spend an average of about a minute and a half on each posting, which is more or less what we've been aiming for: we want the posts to be concise, lively, and informative. Some of our posts have been picked up or referenced by other universities. For example, Tufts University linked to a post contributed by one of our co-op students; that link alone resulted in over 800 visits to our blog coming from Tufts University. Additionally, several of my CTE colleagues have told me that when they've attended a conference, they've encountered folks from other universities who say, "Oh, you're the one who wrote the blog about..."

Our most visited blog posting is the one made by Chris Ray (the co-op student whom I mentioned above), which was on the topic of [using a concept map](#) platform to take notes in class. Another popular post was contributed by Richelle Monaghan, one of CTE's Teaching Assistant Developers, who blogged about how [different teaching modes](#) (lecturing, demonstration, discussion, etc.) result in different degrees of information retention by students. Trevor Holmes' post about writing effective letters for teaching-award nominations has also been popular, as has the post from Greg Mayer (from the Centre for Extended Learning) about grade inflation.



All of this is to say that the CTE Blog has been highly successful in sharing ideas about teaching and learning with a wide audience, both at uWaterloo and beyond. We continue to publish a newsletter at the end of each term, because that medium (which you're reading right now) is a great way of providing a "long view" of what CTE has accomplished or is planning to accomplish. But to me (and others might disagree), our blog seems more lively: most of its postings feel like they were written by people who were captivated by an idea and who wrote about it while it was still fresh in their heads. We're always looking for more contributors, too – so if you're struck by an idea about teaching and learning, and want to share it with the world, send me an email at mmorton@uwaterloo.ca.

Mark Morton

Annual CTE Research CV

During 2010, staff at the Centre for Teaching Excellence engaged in many research activities. In the Centre's [Annual Research CV](#), it notes that two staff members received grants, two books were published in addition to several book chapters/reviews, and several journal articles were peer reviewed and published.

Instructional Skills Workshop Offers Valuable Feedback from Peers

University of Waterloo began offering Instructional Skills Workshops (and their attendant Certificates) in 2008, first to staff at CTE and [CEL](#) as a pilot and then more widely to faculty and postdoctoral fellows. This past summer, five more participants finished the 24-hour workshop; as a representative group (faculty, instructional staff, postdoctoral fellow and CTE staff members) I asked them to comment on the impact of the ISW on their practice so far, and on their future plans related to teaching development.



L-R: Fabiola, Katie, Angela, Veronica, Samar, Trevor

Trevor Holmes: What has been one big take-away from the ISW for you this term?

Fabiola S: The opportunity to have a more flexible approach when I am teaching. The workshop encouraged me to try different teaching approaches with responsibility, but also with the objective to improve students' learning. Additionally, this workshop is very interactive and an effective way to remember what students feel, how you can approach them, and how can you engage them.

Angela S: Almost nothing is too crazy to try as a teaching tool or technique.

Samar M: The most important part was realizing that I can use different modes of information delivery other than the PowerPoint slides and the blackboard. I am planning to teach next summer;

I'll try to use some of the techniques we learned in the ISW. I may use the components of the model differently depending on the topic of the lecture.

Veronica B: Although I'm not teaching this term, it has really helped with some planning I am doing for next term.

Katie P: Using a variety of teaching methods - including creative activities - not only results in more engaged students who connect to and retain the lessons better, but also less preparation for me!

TH: What would you say was the most valuable part (or parts) of the ISW process?

FS: The most valuable part of the ISW process is your peers' feedback. Your peers provide you with excellent tips and strategies to address, face and improve your mistakes when you are teaching. By thinking about your peers' teaching methods, you also analyze the areas in which you can improve.

AS: I can make changes to my teaching approach, but it's okay to start with baby steps.

VB: Getting immediate feedback from the learners to hear how they experienced the lesson; what worked, what didn't work, and why. Meeting people from other disciplines to learn more about their programs and the work they do.

KP: Experiencing other people's mini-lessons from a student's perspective and having to think about what worked well and what could have been improved. Having such a small group was crucial for this, in my opinion.

TH: What, if any, next steps do you have planned for further professional development in the area of teaching/learning?

FS: I believe that becoming an excellent teacher is a process that requires permanent reflection of your skills. I want to continue analyzing and strengthening my skills as a teacher, and also identifying and improving my limitations. Thus, I would be more than happy to continue attending CTE's workshops.

Launching a New Program for Postdoctoral Fellows

In Winter 2011, CTE will pilot [Teaching Development Seminar Series](#), a new program aimed at Waterloo's postdoctoral fellows. Coordinated by CTE's Svitlana Taraban-Gordon, the program will be piloted with a small group of postdocs and will be offered every term. As part of the program, postdocs will participate in six interactive seminars on university teaching ranging from 1.5 to 2 hours. Topics of seminars will focus on learning principles, student motivation, interactive teaching, course design, student assessment and teaching philosophy. Preference will be given to Waterloo's postdocs who have teaching opportunities during their postdoctoral tenure at the University of Waterloo. Upon successful completion of six seminars (10 hours of training), participants will receive a Certificate of Completion issued by CTE.

Designed to help postdoctoral fellows seeking academic posts, this new program will allow participants to discuss current issues in university teaching with their peers and CTE facilitators and get formal recognition of their teaching development efforts. To promote the program to current and future postdocs at Waterloo, we plan to partner with the Graduate Studies Office (GSO) that maintains an active listserv of postdoctoral fellows which is updated every term. Although the number of postdocs varies from term to term, there are currently over 200 postdoctoral fellows on the University of Waterloo campus.

The new programming for postdocs is an exciting development for the CTE which joins a number of other teaching centres in Canada with similar instructional programs for postdoctoral fellows. If you have any questions about this initiative, email [Svitlana Taraban-Gordon](#).

Svitlana Taraban-Gordon

New Graduate Instructional Developer



As a Graduate Instructional Developer, Jen Doyle is responsible for observing teaching events, facilitating workshops and providing feedback for participants in the Certificate in University Teaching (CUT) program.

Jen is a PhD student in the Department of English Language and Literature where she studies Ecocriticism and American Literature. Before attending Waterloo she completed her MA in English Literature and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, her BEd in Intermediate and Secondary Education at Memorial University, as well as, her BFA in Photography, Printmaking, and Drawing, and her BA in English with a minor in Art History at Mount Allison University.

Jen is enrolled in the Certificate in University Teaching at Waterloo, has been a TA at both Wilfrid Laurier and Waterloo, and has previously taught high school English and Art. Jen is looking forward to working with her peers in the CUT program.

Task Force Struck on Innovative Teaching

Donna Ellis has been asked by Geoff McBoyle, VP & Provost, to chair a university-wide task force on innovative teaching practices promoting deep learning. From January to June this year, the group will work on providing an overview of relevant teaching practices internally and externally, recommending innovative practices that would benefit Waterloo, and developing an implementation plan. Task force members include: Carey Bissonnette (Chemistry), Steve Furino (Dean of Mathematics Office), Tim Kenyon (Philosophy), Ron McCarville (Recreation & Leisure Studies), Nicola Simmons (CTE), Gord Stublely (Mechanical & Mechatronics Engineering), and Clarence Woudsma (Planning).

Changes to CTE Graduate Student Programming

In January 2011, CTE will launch restructured teaching development programs for graduate students. The key changes focus on the introduction of the new program, Fundamentals of University Teaching, and corresponding changes to our long-standing program, the Certificate in University Teaching. The details of the two programs are outlined below.

1. Fundamentals of University Teaching ([Fundamentals](#))

Workshops	Microteaching (practice teaching)
Attendance at 6 workshops on university teaching (90 minutes each) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Lesson Plans workshop (required) • 5 Fundamentals workshops (participants choose) 	Participation in 3 microteaching modules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prerequisite: Completion of Effective Lesson Plans workshop <p>Each microteaching module includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 minute lesson by each participant • Verbal and written feedback from peers and CTE staff <p>Topics of mini-lessons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your favourite theory or theorist 2. A key concept or skill from an introductory course in your field 3. Your favourite teaching method

2. Certificate in University Teaching (CUT): Current and [Revised](#)

(Meeting the CUT prerequisites does not guarantee admission to the CUT program.)

Program Description	Current CUT (previous to January 1, 2011)	Revised CUT (effective January 1, 2011)
Target Audience	Primarily PhD students	PhD students only
Prerequisites	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of the Fundamentals program • CUT Statement of Interest Form
GS 901: Preparing for University Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 workshops – 2 required (Course Design and Understanding the Learner) • 4 response papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 required workshops – Assessing Student Learning, Course Design, Interactive Teaching, and Understanding the Learner • 4 response papers
GS 902: Preparing for an Academic Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Dossiers workshop and consultation session along with a completed teaching dossier • Research Projects workshop and consultation session along with a research project on a teaching/learning issue 	No changes
GS 903: Teaching Practicum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 3 teaching observations • Minimum of 3 response papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 2 teaching observations • Minimum of 2 response papers

If you have any questions about CTE's programs for graduate students, email cte-cut@uwaterloo.ca.

Course Internationalization Grants

Waterloo International and the Centre for Teaching Excellence are pleased to announce that [Course Internationalization Grants](#), at \$1500 each, are open to full-time faculty members at uWaterloo. For more information, contact staraban@uwaterloo.ca.

NOTE: Grant applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, subject to availability of funds.

Teaching Awards

Tips on writing a persuasive nomination letter can be found in Trevor Holmes' blog entry '[How to Write an Effective Nomination Letter](#)'.

[Distinguished Teacher Awards](#) are given in recognition of a continued record of excellence in teaching at the University of Waterloo. Nomination deadline: Friday, February 4, 2011.

[Amit & Meena Chakma Awards for Exceptional Teaching by a Student](#) are given in recognition of excellence in teaching by students registered at the University of Waterloo. Nomination deadline: Friday, February 11, 2011.

LIF/PIF Funding Forthcoming

There will be a [LIF PIF](#) funding call in early 2011 for research projects that seek to study innovations in teaching and learning. Email Nicola Simmons at nsimmons@uwaterloo.ca to get onto the Teaching-Based Research Group listserv for information about these grants and the workshop series to help you prepare an application. The next two workshops in the series are: *Getting Started in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (Thursday, January 27, 1-3 pm) and *Reflecting on Action Research* (Monday, February 14, 1-3 pm). Contact [Nicola](#) to sign up for either event.

TEA—Teaching Excellence Academy

Are you looking for some ideas for that course redesign on the horizon? Consider attending the 2011 four-day Academy:

Tuesday, April 19, 2011,
Wednesday, April 20, 2011,
Thursday, April 21, 2011 and
Monday, April 25, 2011

Your Chair/Director must recommend you for the Academy.

ISW

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AS: While planning now, I'll be just starting to apply some of my learning next term. My next step is to evaluate what works or doesn't work.

VB: I am hoping to complete the Facilitator Development Workshop in May to become an ISW facilitator; Learning more about different kinds of assessments to move beyond exams and assignments.

KP: I'm planning to take the [Teaching Excellence Academy](#) (probably not this April, but in 2012 perhaps).

Currently, we have twice the demand for our capacity to offer ISWs. After May 2011, we should be able to offer more spaces as we will have more people trained as Facilitators through the Facilitator Development Workshop. If you have the ISW Certificate from Waterloo or elsewhere, and wish to become a Facilitator in this peer-based program, write to tholmes@uwaterloo.ca or call ext. 33408.

Trevor Holmes

Congratulations Fall 2010 CUT Grads!

The following 11 students completed the Certificate in University Teaching program: Osama Amin, (ENG), Terry Anderson (MATH), Hussein Attia (ENG), Amanda Clark (ARTS), Amanda Hooykaas (ENV), Belinda Kleinhans (ARTS), Bryan Kuropatwa (SCI), Somayeh Moazeni (MATH), Gina Passante (SCI), Arash Shahi (ENG) and Esmat Zaidan (ENV).

Techno Tuesdays

Title: CTE648 Data Visualization Tools, Part 2

Date: Tuesday, February 8, 2011

Time: 2:00 to 3:30 pm

Place: FLEX Lab (LIB 329)

Register

Title: CTE647 Data Textual Analysis

Date: Tuesday, March 22, 2011

Time: 11:00 to 12:30 pm

Place: FLEX Lab (LIB 329)

Teaching Matters

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