

# Teaching Matters

Great Teaching . . . by Design

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## Engaging Ideas about Writing

You know when an idea comes along that changes the way you see things? That's what happened to me when I first read John Bean's book, *Engaging Ideas*, back in the mid-1990s. Bean laid out various arguments and ideas that strove to connect writing, critical thinking, and active learning. As a university student, I had written numerous traditional essays. I thought I knew all about writing assignments. When I read Bean's book, I had been newly hired into the teaching centre as an advisor on teaching and learning. His book helped me to think far beyond my student experiences with writing to see countless possibilities for faculty members who wanted to support students' development as writers, thinkers, and learners.

Fast forward almost 20 years: when I learned that we had confirmed John Bean as the plenary speaker for our annual teaching and learning conference on May 1, you can imagine my excitement at the prospect of meeting him! He was every bit as inspiring when sharing his ideas in person with our largest-ever conference crowd.

He shared concrete examples from a cross section of disciplines to convey his various strategies for helping students to develop their thinking and communication skills, reinforcing that his ideas are applicable across the university. One of his most intriguing strategies involved setting authentic assignments that go far beyond the generic "write a 20-page paper about X topic". Bean advised that faculty need to connect writing assignments to course-level intended learning outcomes about subject matter and/or ways of thinking and communicating. The hook into these assignments is a "critical thinking problem" that relates to the course and can lead to a claim backed up by supporting arguments.

Bean reminded us that these assignments can be of varying lengths for different audiences, and they can use different genres. One example assignment that he provided at the conference was from Economics. In it, students were asked to imagine themselves as an intern for a politician. Based on their economic analysis of a proposed increase in gasoline tax, they were to prepare a two-page memo to convey their recommendations. Such an assignment can help students understand and practice the types of writing they may need to do in their future careers. Limiting the length of the paper also makes writing assignments more manageable, particularly in larger classes. And sharing the grading criteria with students in the assignment description via a rubric helps to clarify expectations for students and expedite the marking process for faculty.

Bean advised that developing students' thinking and communication skills isn't a job for just one course, though. Thinking about how to scaffold this type of instruction across an entire program is a more realistic goal. Scaffolding assignments within a course is a pedagogically sound approach in which you assign shorter assignments that build toward a larger one (e.g., an annotated bibliography to support a longer research paper). However, thinking about building students' skills intentionally throughout an entire program holds even more promise in the quest to develop skilled communicators.

If you want to learn more about John Bean's ideas, you can check out his book (a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition has come out since the one that sparked my interest initially), contact a CTE staff member, or connect with colleagues from your department who attended his plenary talk. If developing students' writing skills is important in your courses, I urge you to engage with Bean's ideas.

## References:

Bean, J.C. (2014). *Faculty-friendly problem-based writing assignments to enhance students' growth as disciplinary thinkers*. Handout from Opportunities and New Directions Teaching and Learning conference, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

Bean, J.C. (1996). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Donna Ellis

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## Carlos Moreno - CUT Award recipients



CTE is pleased to announce that Carlos Moreno, who obtained his PhD from the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, has been selected as this year's Certificate in University Teaching (CUT) Award recipient. This award, funded by an anonymous donor, is given annually to an outstanding CUT participant who has completed the program within the past three terms. Carlos was selected for his commitment to developing his teaching skills, significant progress made in his teaching observations and his creative workshop titled, "Mistakes as a Learning Tool" which he developed and presented to his graduate student colleagues enrolled in the CUT.

Teaching Matters had the pleasure of interviewing Carlos, now a postdoctoral fellow on campus, about his experiences in the CUT program and his development as a teacher while in grad school.

*Q: Why did you decide to pursue the Certificate in University Teaching?*

When I started my PhD studies, I moved into a new area of research which was very different from what I studied before. As a result, during the first years of my doctoral studies my focus was solely on research. However, I was hoping to be a teaching assistant eventually so I completed the engineering TA training program called ExpectATIONS. When I entered the fourth year of my PhD, I heard about the CUT program during one of the CTE teaching workshops that I attended. It was also the time when I started to teach a course as a sessional instructor. The timing seemed right, so I decided to sign up for the CUT program to learn about teaching and get feedback on my teaching through classroom observations.

*Q: Which aspects of the CUT program were the most useful?*

I think that the interdisciplinary nature of the CUT program is the most valuable aspect of the program. As a program participant, you are surrounded by people who are bright and interested in teaching. You have an opportunity to talk about teaching with people from different disciplines. They often have ideas that are very different from what is done in terms of teaching in your discipline. When listening to other workshop participants, I frequently found myself thinking, "Hey, that's a great idea - why didn't I think about it before!" Another valuable CUT component was the opportunity to be observed by CTE graduate instructional developers when I taught a course as a sessional instructor. I got very detailed and useful feedback and great tips on how to manage the classroom better and how to connect with my students.

*Q: Did you have an opportunity to try any ideas or techniques that you learned in the CUT in your own teaching?*

I learned a number of classroom management and motivational techniques through workshops and observational feedback. The feedback that I got on my delivery skills was helpful in improving student

motivation when teaching a course that many students perceive as not relevant and that is offered during the toughest term in their undergraduate career. One useful tip that I implemented in the course that I taught was to email students after the mid-term exam with a message tailored to their performance. I created several customized emails which I then sent to students to congratulate those who did well and encourage and offer help to those who did not do well. The response from students was very encouraging: many of them emailed me and came to talk to me. In addition to this strategy, I also plan to use a mid-term student feedback technique that I learned during the CUT program. I did not have an opportunity to try this idea in the course that I taught in grad school but I plan to use it in the course that I will teach on campus in the Spring term.

*Q: Could you tell us a little bit about your CUT project on mistakes as a learning tool and why did you become interested in this topic?*

I was always interested in the idea of using mistakes as learning opportunities. As a software engineer, I am used to seeing problems that have incorrect solutions which look plausible. So this got me interested in the idea of using incorrect solutions and mistakes as learning tools. Then I came across the article titled, "[Getting it Wrong: Surprising Tips on How to Learn](#)" published in the Scientific American. I decided to develop a CUT workshop on this topic as part of the GS902 course requirement. At the same time, I was experimenting with using the idea of mistakes as learning tools in my second-year course, "Algorithms and Data Structures". I wanted my students to make use of the pre-lecture slides which were available on my website so I told the students that I deliberately included mistakes and open-ended questions on the pre-lecture slides in order to encourage them to review the material with a critical eye and to get them to think deeper about the material they were learning. I explained to the students that the lecture slides would have the correct information and clarifications about challenging aspects explored in the pre-lecture slides. In developing the CUT workshop, I came across a wealth of interesting studies from cognitive psychology on the role of mistakes and incorrect guessing in learning. These studies provided the framework for my session which also included examples of learning mistakes which I used in my second-year course.

*Q: What advice do you have to graduate students about developing their teaching skills while in grad school?*

I would tell them to sign up for the CUT program. Anyone who is interested in postsecondary teaching should consider taking this program, even those who have a lot of teaching experience. I learned a lot from my colleagues in the program and from CTE facilitators.

*In recognition of receiving the CUT Award, Carlos' name will be added to the CUT plaque displayed in the CTE office in EV1. He will also receive his own plaque and a cash award. Congratulations, Carlos!*

*Svitlana Taraban- Gordon*

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## Teaching Stories

The Centre for Teaching Excellence continues its series of teaching stories to honour excellent teaching and to inspire others. On the Centre for Teaching Excellence's website, visit the Teaching Stories section, to read stories such as: "Hilary Bergsieker: Enhancing Classes with Live Feedback", "Mary Louise McAllister: Illuminating Experiences", "Bill Power and the Power of Twitter", and "BJ Rye: Teaching with Candour and Aplomb". Visit the Centre's website often as new stories are being published regularly.

If you would like to recommend that a specific Waterloo instructor be highlighted in a teaching story, please email the Centre for Teaching Excellence at [cte@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cte@uwaterloo.ca) with the instructor's name and department.

*Verna Keller*

# Distinguished Teacher Award recipients for 2014

## Kashif Memon

*Science and Business*



Kashif Memon, an academic advisor, coordinator, and lecturer for Science and Business, has been teaching at the University of Waterloo since 2005. His students and colleagues give high praise to his dedication to excellence in teaching, his devotion to advising and mentoring, and his sincere concern for students. In addition, using group discussions in his classroom has made a valuable impact on student learning. As one of his students notes, “I am extremely proud to be under the guidance of such an incredible educator. Kashif genuinely, and I cannot emphasize this enough, *genuinely* cares for his students”. One student nomination summarizes Kashif’s teaching as “he captivates every class, fills us with information, teaches us how to apply concepts, provides support outside the classroom, and most importantly makes all those that he teaches strong, well-rounded individuals that are ready to take on any challenges that the world may throw their way”. Kashif’s impact on student learning clearly extends far beyond the classroom.

## Anindya Sen

*Economics*



Anindya Sen, an associate professor and associate chair in the Department of Economics, received support from his students and colleagues pointing out that he was successful in providing extremely positive and lasting learning experiences. As an alumnus states, “Captured in three words, Professor Sen’s teaching is succinct, simple, yet powerful”. Dr. Sen pushes his students to take their thoughts to the next level and use them in real life applications. In addition, he creates a comfortable environment for students to ask questions, and he always ensures that students in the class understand concepts before moving on to new material. A student reports that “I never gave much thought to economics before, but because Dr. Sen taught in such an easy to digest and approachable manner, my interest grew”. Dr. Sen’s teaching style matches real life experiences with what is academically valuable to the students. Dr. Sen was able to lead many of his students to achieve both academic and professional success.

## Levent Tuncel

*Combinatorics and Optimization*



Since joining the Faculty of Mathematics in 1992, Dr. Levent Tuncel has made an exceptional contribution to teaching undergraduate and graduate optimization courses. In addition, he played an integral role in developing and redesigning courses for the Combinatorics and Optimization Department. Students praise his teaching methods including the use of diagrams, geometric interpretations, and “carefully-crafted questions on assignments and exams.” As an alumnus states, “When I teach my own courses, I am influenced by Levent’s interplay of algebra and geometry, by his illuminating questions on assignments and exams, and by his continually-improving course notes”. Dr. Levent’s well-prepared and well-organized lectures reflect his effort to ensure a positive learning environment for his students. Furthermore, Dr. Levent’s teachings are made more effective by his empathy with students and, as one student describes, by his “infectious” enthusiasm.

## Christina Vester

*Classical Studies*



Christina Vester, an associate professor and undergraduate advisor in the Department of Classical Studies, joined the University of Waterloo in 2004. Dr. Vester impacts students directly through her classroom teaching style, mentorship, engaging and fair teaching practices, and supportive character and indirectly through her contributions to strategic re-design of the Classics programs. A student reflects that “When I leave this year, I know I will take her words of encouragement with me: to experience as much of our vast world that I can, and never be afraid to push your limits”. Dr. Vester’s dedication manifested itself in the development of an online teaching tool called “Ketos” used for learning Ancient Greek. The online tool is widely recognized as the most-user friendly of the Greek tutorial tools available online. She has reshaped the Labyrinth site designed to “navigate the twists and turns of Classical and Medieval Studies” and initiated the undergraduate journal Tiresias.

*Husnia Barakzay*

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## Teaching Awards nomination due dates for 2015

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. The nomination deadline is Friday, February 6, 2015.

[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. The nomination deadline is Friday, February 13, 2015.

*Verna Keller*

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## Amit and Meena Chakma Awards for Exceptional Teaching by a Student recipients for 2014

### Rania Al-Hammoud

*Civil & Environmental Engineering*



Rania Al-Hammoud completed her Masters of Applied Science and Doctor of Philosophy in Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Waterloo. From Fall 2010 to Fall 2013, Rania taught a total of ten undergraduate courses in the Civil and Environmental Engineering program including 4 different core second-year courses and 2 advanced fourth-year courses on structural systems and structural analysis. Her dedication to enhancing student learning in a range of undergraduate courses is greatly appreciated by the students. Students regard her as a “hard working, caring and intelligent instructor”. A student writes, “She would not rest until we not only knew *how* but also *why*.” Her extraordinary ability to teach and ensure student engagement and a deep understanding of the course material through various interactive teaching methods, in particular within large classes, has had a great influence on student learning. She recently secured a faculty position at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

*Photo Courtesy of the University of Minnesota-Duluth*

## **Nathaniel Barr**

*Psychology*



Nathaniel Barr, a PhD graduate student in Psychology at the University of Waterloo, is known as a teacher who makes an admirable impact on student learning by creating a positive learning environment and expressing passion for the field of psychology. Nathaniel, as a teaching assistant and an instructor for various psychology courses, “went beyond and above in his teaching role”. He recently taught PSYCH101 (online), PSYCH207 and PSYCH398 as an adjunct instructor. A student commented that “No matter where his career takes him, he will have a profound and positive impact on those around him, although I truly believe that teaching is where he needs to be”. A faculty member writes, “I know that teaching is his first love, and it shows!”

## **Brenda Lee**

*Biology (Nanotechnology)*



Brenda Lee, a PhD graduate student and teaching assistant in Biology (Nanotechnology) at the University of Waterloo, is being recognized for her positive impact on student learning in various Biology labs. Her students share their high regards in her ability to give constructive criticism and explain concepts thoroughly. Students note that Brenda “used creative approaches such as demonstrations, drawings and thought provoking questions to make her points”. In addition, they describe her as “very friendly, approachable, helpful, and knowledgeable”. Her friendly demeanor, genuine interest in helping students, wealth of knowledge, and effective teaching skills have played a significant role in creating a positive learning experience for her students.

*Husnia Barakzay*

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## **The University of Waterloo’s Annual Teaching and Learning Conference – Opportunities and New Directions (2014)**



This year’s Opportunities and New Directions (OND) 2014 Conference took place on Thursday, May 1. We were excited and humbled by the participation of over 200 people, mainly from the University of Waterloo, but also from other local universities. This made it clear that, as teachers at Waterloo, we are part of a growing, thriving community of people dedicated to teaching and learning. The day began with an enthusiastic welcome by Vice-President, Academic and Provost, Geoff McBoyle.

The theme of this year’s Conference was “Rethinking and Reframing the Assessment of Learning.” A diverse array of panels, workshops, and presentations explored the many facets of assessment – from assessment practices in different disciplines, such as Math and English, to assessment in online, blended, and face-to-face environments. Assessment at the course level, program level, and on work-terms was also

explored by presenters who included faculty and staff members, as well as graduate and undergraduate students from across the disciplines.

There was an unmistakable and enduring excitement about the ideas presented by Presidents' Colloquium Keynote Speaker, Dr. John Bean. During his session, John explored how students' growth as disciplinary thinkers can be enhanced by integrating problem-based writing assignments into our courses, whether we teach in the humanities, sciences, or social sciences. John also explored how using writing can be useful for assessing not only learning outcomes related to writing, but also for assessing skills that are critical in the formation of disciplinary thinkers – skills, such as inquiry, research, critical thinking, and problem-solving. If you're intrigued by these ideas, you are welcome to download the handouts from the keynote session, available through the Conference website: <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/research-teaching-and-learning/university-waterloo-teaching-and-learning-conference-ond/keynote-speaker-dr-john-bean-seattle-university> . In her lead article in this newsletter, Donna Ellis also explains and reflects on John's session.

Another highlight of the day was the "Igniting Our Practice" session. Kelly Anthony, AHS's Teaching Fellow, and Hamid Jahed, Professor in the Department of Mechanical and Mechatronics Engineering, drew us into the learning spaces they create for their students by teaching us a concept from their own courses. As Hamid noted when he began his session, both he and Kelly addressed the idea of "structural stability," but did so from very different perspectives. Kelly explored the stability – and fragility – of some of our social structures, and took us on an emotional journey of the experience of youth in foster care. She discussed how collaborating with members of the wider community can be a powerful teaching tool. Hamid also explored the idea of structural stability, this time from an Engineering perspective. Through engaging demonstrations involving broken rulers and crushed pop cans, Hamid brought to life the concept of how structures behave under load. Hamid and Kelly's session was inspiring and moving, generating thoughtful questions from the audience.

The Conference closed with a wine and cheese reception. It was time to connect with colleagues over a drink and some food. Associate Vice President, Academic (AVP-A), Mario Coniglio closed the Conference, thanking the many people who had contributed to the Conference, including the participants, the Teaching Fellows, members of CTE, the people who had provided technical support, CTE's Co-op students, as well as FAUW for generously sponsoring the delectable breakfast following the Presidents' Colloquium. At CTE, we're particularly grateful for the vision and support of the AVP-A, Mario Coniglio, and Vice-President, Academic and Provost, Geoff McBoyle.

And now, it's time to pursue the ideas that were sown at the Conference. We look forward to learning about the ways in which those ideas have developed at OND 2015.

For details about the Conference, please visit the OND 2014 website: <https://uwaterloo.ca/cte/ond2014> .

*Julie Timmermans*

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## **February LITE Seed Grants**

In collaboration with the Office of the Associate Vice President, Academic, the Centre for Teaching Excellence is pleased to announce that three LITE Seed Grant projects were funded through the February 2014 competition. Projects will run from May 2014 – April 2015. To read descriptions of these and other exciting projects, please visit the LITE Grant website: <https://uwaterloo.ca/cte/lite-grants> .

Congratulations to the recipients!

Project Title	Names of Applicants	Faculty and Department or Unit of Applicants
Experiential Learning via Longitudinal Design Cases in the Chemical Engineering Curriculum	Marios Ioannidis William A. Anderson Ariel Chan Jason Grove Christine Moresoli	Engineering, Department of Chemical Engineering
Intercultural Encounters: The Impact of Study Abroad on Students' Intercultural Learning, on their Development of Language and Identity and on the Curriculum	Grit Liebscher Emma Betz Michael Boehringer Christine Kampen Robinson	Arts, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies
Blended Learning: Development and Evaluation of E-modules to Enhance Undergraduate Learning in Biomechanics	Andrew Laing Justin Yates Brett Beston Kelly Anthony	AHS, Kinesiology AHS, Kinesiology CTE AHS, School of Public Health & Health Systems

The purpose of the LITE Grants is to provide support for experimenting with and investigating innovative approaches to enhancing teaching that aim to foster deep student learning at the University of Waterloo.

Two kinds of grants are available: LITE Seed Grants for projects up to \$5,000, and LITE Full Grants for projects up to \$30,000. Both grant formats emphasize the contribution of the project to the University of Waterloo learning community.

There are two annual LITE Seed Grant application deadlines: February 1 and June 1. The one annual deadline for LITE Full Grants is October 1.

For more information about the grants, please visit <https://uwaterloo.ca/cte/lite-grants>.

If you and/or your colleagues are considering applying for a grant and would like to discuss your project, please contact Dr. Julie Timmermans at the Centre for Teaching Excellence: [julie.timmermans@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:julie.timmermans@uwaterloo.ca) or x32940.

*Julie Timmermans*

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## **Congratulations to CTE Winter 2014 Grads!**

The following four students completed the [Certificate in University Teaching](#) program in Winter 2014: Seyedeh Parinaz Akhlaghi (ENG), Ahmed Samir Ahmed Awad (ENG), En-Shiun Annie Lee (ENG), and Michael Pyne (ENG).

In addition to CUT graduates, 47 graduate students completed the [Fundamentals of University Teaching](#) program in Winter 2014. The numbers by faculty are: Applied Health Sciences 6, Arts 8, Engineering 17, Environment 2, Mathematics 9 and Science 5.

Congratulations also to the 17 Postdoctoral Fellows who completed our Teaching Development Seminar Series this term.

*Monika Soczewinski*

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## Teaching Excellence Academy 2014



The Teaching Excellence Academy was held at the Centre for Teaching Excellence in Environment 1 over a four-day period in April 2014. Seventeen uWaterloo instructors engaged in both small-group and individual activities as part of the course design process. Each participant created a revised course outline that aligns intended learning outcomes, teaching activities, and student assessment. Congratulations to all!

*Verna Keller*

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## Welcoming CTE's New Educational Research Associate Crystal Tse



CTE is delighted that Crystal Tse has joined us in the Educational Research Associate role, supporting our Scholarship of Teaching and Learning work and internal CTE program evaluation work. Her first day was a real treat: she got to be around us all day at the Opportunities and New Directions conference.

Crystal Tse is working on a PhD in social psychology in the Department of Psychology, to be completed August 2014. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Toronto where she majored in psychology and biology. Crystal's primary research interests are in stereotyping and prejudice, and applying social psychological theory to inform practical and evidence-based interventions. In her main line of research, she is developing interventions to change academic and work environments to become stereotype- and identity-safe. For example, she has conducted lab and field studies to address the gender gap in representation, sense of belonging, and performance in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.

At the University of Waterloo, she had the opportunity to complete the Fundamentals of University Teaching program, mentor undergraduate students, take on teaching assistant and guest lecturer roles in numerous psychology courses, and to be a course instructor for an introductory psychology course. She is excited for her new role as educational research associate where she will conduct research and program evaluation, and help develop effective programming for the Centre of Teaching Excellence. Outside of

work, Crystal is interested in social justice and public policy surrounding race and gender inequality. She spends her spare time running, rock-climbing, travelling, reading, and training in the martial arts.

*Trevor Holmes*

## **Welcoming CTE's new Graduate Instructional Developers**

### **Stephanie Chesser**



Stephanie is a PhD student in the Aging, Health, and Well-being program through the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. Before beginning her work at the University of Waterloo in 2010, Stephanie completed her Master of Public Health degree and a diploma in Health Services and Policy Research at Lakehead University, and a BScH in biology at Queen's University. Her commitment to understanding the lives of graduate students is demonstrated through her dissertation research, which examines the factors that influence first-time parenthood among doctoral and postdoctoral trainees. Since 2011, Stephanie has taught courses through Women's Studies and the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, and has held numerous teaching assistantships. To date, her involvement with the Centre for Teaching

Excellence has included completing the Fundamentals program, as well as an instructor-level intensive workshop on course design.

As a Graduate Instructional Developer, Stephanie will primarily be working with graduate students in the Fundamentals of University Teaching program, to help expand their teaching expertise, both through workshops and microteaching sessions. She looks forward to sharing her own knowledge of teaching, as well as learning from the experiences of others.

*Stephanie Chesser*

### **Amy Hackney**



As a Graduate Instructional Developer for the Centre for Teaching Excellence, Amy is excited to assist her peers in improving their teaching skills by sharing her own experience and knowledge of teaching. Amy will primarily be involved in facilitating microteaching sessions and workshops in the Fundamentals of University Teaching (Fundamentals) program, and providing written and oral feedback to graduate students.

Amy brings both academic and non-academic teaching experience to the Fundamentals program. She has improved her own teaching and communication skills through her experience as a contract academic staff at Wilfrid Laurier University, where she re-developed and delivered two courses; as a teaching assistant for multiple courses in the Department of Kinesiology at both the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University; and as guest lecturer. Outside of the classroom, Amy has 7 years of experience creating and delivering lessons to all levels of swimmers, and is a certified professional figure skating coach.

Amy began her doctoral studies in the Fall of 2012 in the Department of Kinesiology (Neuroscience) at the University of Waterloo. Her research focuses on understanding how individuals avoid collisions with other obstacles and other people while walking in cluttered and crowded environments. Specifically, her research aims to identify how avoidance behaviours change as a function of environmental context, age and disease.

*Amy Hackney*

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*Teaching Matters is published by the Centre for Teaching Excellence at the University of Waterloo. At the Centre, we foster teaching and learning of the highest quality at Waterloo.*

Centre for Teaching Excellence

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