Call for Proposals:

18th Annual University of Waterloo Teaching and Learning Conference

May 5, 2027 – Online | May 6, 2027 – In-person

Learning That Sticks: From Productive Struggle to Powerful Breakthroughs

Learning is hard work. It takes time.
And it *should*.

Learning that sticks requires sustained attention, deliberate practice, reflection, iteration, and a willingness to sit with complexity long enough for effort to yield insight. In these moments of productive struggle, questions and experimentation matter more than immediate answers. The processes students use to think through and really learn core concepts and skills require patience and persistence. As educators, we work to create learning environments that are accessible, inclusive, and supportive, while also encouraging students to grapple with challenging ideas, think deeply, persist through difficulty, and grow beyond their comfort zones. This kind of difficulty is not an obstacle; it is a hallmark of learning itself.

Our 18th annual University of Waterloo Teaching and Learning Conference invites us to reconsider what makes learning meaningful: the conditions that foster curiosity, reflection, productive struggle, and the insights that emerge through sustained effort. How do struggle and difficulty deepen understanding? How do we help to unlock student breakthroughs? How can students and instructors work together to create learning experiences that are meaningful and enduring? What are the unique contributions of a university education in a world where information is everywhere, but learning remains deeply human? How do we redesign assessments to promote and capture learning in an AI-mediated world?

We seek proposals that engage these questions through presentations, panel discussions, workshops, alternative sessions, innovation spotlights, and/or posters. We invite you to share your own insights, whether they are grounded in research, informed by practice, or shaped by the dynamic interplay between the two. We also welcome proposals from recipients of Learning Innovation and Teaching Enhancement (LITE) grants and the GenAI Teaching Enablement fellowships.

Questions to inspire your proposal

The questions below are intended to help you explore possible connections between the conference theme and your own teaching, learning, or research activities.

Teaching and Learning Innovations

- What innovative learning experiences have you designed to encourage curiosity, productive struggle, and deeper engagement?
- How are you leveraging emerging technologies, including generative AI, to support critical thinking, creativity, or inquiry?
- Which traditional teaching and learning approaches have you reinvented, repurposed, or refreshed to meet today's context?
- What opportunities have you created for students to navigate the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in the learning process?

Assessment of Learning

- In what ways do your assessments encourage students to engage in revision, iteration, and continuous improvement?
- How can we ensure assessments remain valid measures of student learning in the current technological landscape?
- How have you redesigned assessments to make students' own critical thinking, interpretation, and knowledge creation visible?
- How can assessment support students in developing resilience, self-regulation, and confidence when confronting challenging tasks?

Rethinking Courses and Disciplines

- What is one significant change you have made to a course, and what did you learn from it?
- How do we redesign courses and programs to create more meaningful and lasting learning experiences?
- How do we design courses and programs to engage with complex problems and contemporary issues that cannot be solved through a single disciplinary lens?
- How do we design courses that enable students with different disciplinary backgrounds to have meaningful learning experiences?

Indigenization and Decolonization

- How do we invite students to critically examine relationships, responsibilities, and systems of power within their learning?
- What insights, tensions, or transformative moments have emerged through our Indigenization or decolonization efforts?

Accessibility, Equity, and Inclusion

- How do your teaching practices reduce barriers to participation and foster a stronger sense of belonging to support learning?
- How do we create more inclusive learning environments that recognize and value diverse identities, experiences, and ways of knowing?

New Culture of Teaching and Learning

- How can institutions cultivate environments where intellectual risk-taking, productive struggle, and breakthrough learning are valued and supported?
- How do we challenge traditional assumptions about teaching and learning to create engaging, meaningful, and transformative educational experiences?

AI and Other Emerging Technologies

- How do we design learning experiences that leverage emerging technologies while still encouraging productive struggle, reflection, and independent thinking?
- What opportunities, challenges, ethical considerations, or unintended consequences have emerged from integrating new technologies into teaching and learning?
- How do we encourage students to sit in moments of productive struggle and persist through difficulty when they are surrounded by tools that make tasks faster and easier?
- In an era of increasingly powerful digital tools, what remains uniquely human about learning, and how can emerging technologies help cultivate and augment rather than replace those capacities?

Further readings

Bjork, R. A., & Bjork, E. L. (2020). Desirable difficulties in theory and practice. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 9*(4), 475–479.

Bridges, M. W., Ambrose, S. A., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2023). *How learning works: Eight research-based principles for smart teaching* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Brown, P. C., Roediger, H. L., III, & McDaniel, M. A. (2014). *Make it stick: The science of successful learning*. Harvard University Press.

Lang, J. M. (2016). *Small teaching: Everyday lessons from the science of learning*. Jossey-Bass.

Mucheli, S. S., & Chow, M. (2026). When I say … productive struggle. *Medical Education, 60*(9), 958–960.

Proposal Guidelines

Please consider the following when developing your proposal:

- We welcome proposals from faculty, staff, and students (undergraduate and graduate) from the University of Waterloo and beyond.
- We welcome proposals that are research-based, practice-based, or both:
    - **Research-based**: Individuals engaged in conducting research on teaching and learning (including recipients of LITE grants).
    - **Practice-based**: Individuals who seek to share practices, strategies, and examples from their own experiences about teaching experiences, course design, student support, program development, or educational leadership.
- The deadline to submit a proposal is **Monday, January 18, 2027, at 11:59 p.m**. There will be no extensions.
- Proposals must be between **200-300 words**.
- **Number of proposals per person:** Each applicant may participate in multiple conference proposals, **but can only be listed as the primary presenter or main corresponding author for one**. If the applicant is part of another proposal, **they must be listed as a co-presente**r. This approach is intended to promote a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and voices across the conference program.
    - If you are submitting a poster, you may be the first author in up to two sessions.
    - If you submit more than one proposal as primary presenter, we'll only consider your first submission.
- Anonymize your proposal, as the review process is double anonymous. Replace names of people and institutions with Xs in the title, abstract, and session description, and reference list (3-5 references).
- Ensure that your session will be relevant to people from a variety of disciplines.
- Include two to three key takeaways from your session. If someone were unable to attend your session, what are the two to three most important ideas, findings, resources, practices, or recommendations you would want them to know?

Session Types

Online day	In-person day	Session Length
	Alternative session	60 minutes
Online panel	In-person panel	45 minutes followed by a 15-minute Q&A
Online workshop	In-person workshop	60 minutes
Innovation spotlight	Innovation spotlight	Six 5-minute showcases, followed by a 10-minute group Q&A session (60 minutes total)
Presentation	Presentation	Three 15-minute sessions followed by a 15-minute Q&A session (60 minutes total)
	Poster Session	60 minutes

Online day (on Zoom) – May 5

Online workshop: 60 minutes. Refer to the in-person format description.

Online panel discussion: 45 minutes followed by a 15-minute Q&A. Refer to the in-person format description.

Online presentation: 20 minutes (15-minute presentation, plus 5-minute discussion period). Refer to the in-person format description.

Innovation Spotlight (5 min.): Six 5-minute "spotlights," followed by a 10-minute group Q&A session (60 minutes total). Refer to the in-person format description.

In-person day (Science Teaching Complex and Biology 2) – May 6

Technology provided for all sessions (except the poster session): Computer, remote for advancing slides, projector, and microphones.

Innovation Spotlight (5 min.): Six 5-minute "spotlights," followed by a 10-minute group Q&A session - 60 minutes total. The Program Committee will group Spotlights into thematic areas. Please note that slide decks (ratio 16:9, widescreen) need to be sent to the organizing committee by **May 4 at 12:00 p.m., noon**.

This session invites educators to present a concise overview of a pedagogical innovation—such as an assignment, rubric, resource, or activity. Presenters will briefly describe the resource, explain how they use it and how it was received by students, and share lessons learned.

Presentation: 20 minutes (15-minute presentation, plus 5-minute discussion period). Share practical approaches, classroom strategies, and lessons learned; present empirical findings; or examine theoretical or methodological issues.

Panel discussion: 45 minutes followed by a 15-minute Q&A. With a panel of colleagues, address different topics related to the conference theme and/or its sub-questions. Topics may raise issues and include insights from practice, research, or both. Panels may relate to one discipline, several disciplines, or integrate insights gained from working in an interdisciplinary/multi-disciplinary way. Panels should involve three to five panelists and a moderator, and should include a discussion period of 15-20 minutes. In your **panel outline**, please provide sample questions the panelists will be invited to discuss.

Workshop: 60 minutes. A workshop is a hands-on session where participants actively engage with strategies, tools, or practices. In your **participation plan**, be explicit about how attendees will engage in the session through discussion, application, reflection, and hands-on activities.

Workshop presenters must also demonstrate why a workshop format is the most appropriate way to achieve the intended learning outcomes and describe the concrete skills, resources, strategies, or ideas that participants will be able to apply in their own educational contexts. Workshop proposals will be evaluated on the quality and specificity of the participant participation plan (including opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and application), and the practical value of the session and its takeaways for attendees.

Alternative session format: 60 minutes. We invite you to propose a format for your session that may better suit your outcomes than the session formats suggested here. When submitting your proposal, please describe the session format and why it better supports your session outcomes.

Poster: Share an approach (practice-based) or present empirical findings (research-based).

We will showcase posters at different points during the day. We want to recognize the work that goes into designing a poster and offer presenters multiple opportunities to highlight their research during the day.

- **Flash talk presentation (Concurrent Session 3, 3:00-4:00 p.m.)**: Participants will be asked to deliver a 1-minute flash talk presentation in front of their display during the third series of concurrent sessions of the day. (Presentations held in the atrium; some seating can be made available.)
- **End-of-day reception** (4:45-5:30 p.m.): a more traditional poster session walk-around.

Materials provided: A large mobile board (dimensions = 48” x 60”), with clips/pushpins.

Please ensure your poster is no larger than these dimensions. You may design your poster however you like.

Components of the Proposal

If you prefer to work offline as you draft your proposal, you can download a copy of the proposal submission form (Word document). You will then need to input your answers in the online proposal submission form on Qualtrics.

- **Session type:** Please review and select the session type best suited for your proposal and session goals**. Please be mindful that we have limited space for in-person and online alternative sessions, panels, and workshops (8-12 slots in person, 16 online); if you select these modalities ensure you provide a strong rationale that focuses on the interactive aspects of your proposal.**
    - For in-person and online alternative sessions, panels, and workshops, you will be prompted to provide an outline of the session activities, including a description of the types of guiding questions and interactions planned. Be as detailed as possible.
    - Research session proposals should describe methodology and results.
- Presenter information (include name, affiliation, and current contact information for the main presenter and all co-presenters).
- Session title.
- Session abstract (no more than 300 words), **with learning outcomes.**
- Keywords (between three and five keywords that describe the main topics, themes, or approaches addressed in your proposal).
- Takeaways (two to three specific, actionable takeaways for participants).
- If you are **sharing Indigenous knowledges**, perspectives, ways of knowing, or pedagogies, you will be prompted to share your relationship to the knowledge you are presenting. This helps reviewers and attendees understand the context from which the knowledge is being shared, supports respectful engagement, and acknowledges the importance of Indigenous authority and lived experience.
- References (most often 3-5). Please do **not** include URLs.
    - Please note that references are **required** for all session formats. Proposals without a reference list or relevant contextual background (see below) will be rejected. Panels, Innovation spotlights, and Workshops can be based on practice, Posters are generally based on literature, and Presentations can either be practice- or research-based.
    - We recognize that some scholars use non-Western systems of knowledge and that citation practices vary. If you use sources that do not lend themselves to a bibliography, please tell us about them.
    - If your session is based on practice, please identify the context of the course or program on which the proposal is based and any resource(s) that

influenced or informed your design or implementation decisions, lessons learned, and what others might learn or adapt from your experience.

Proposal review criteria

Proposals will be reviewed based on the following criteria (you can download the rubric (Word document)):

- Relevance of proposal to the conference theme **or** previously funded Learning Innovation and Teaching Enhancement (LITE) grant or GenAI Fellowship project.*
- Innovation.
- Demonstrated understanding of issues related to teaching and learning (not applicable to Innovation Spotlight).
- Extent to which proposal ideas are situated within relevant literature, best practices, or lived experience.
- Relevance across disciplines.
- Clarity of intended session objectives/learning outcomes.
- Appropriate engagement of conference participants (for workshops and panels only).
- Overall clarity of proposal.

For sessions including Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, teachings, stories, cultural practices, or community-specific content: Presenters are expected to respect relevant protocols, relationships, and permissions. Proposals may be referred for additional Indigenous-informed review or consultation where clarification is needed.

*__Note__: Learning Innovation and Teaching Enhancement (LITE) grants and GenAI Fellowships demonstrate the range of pedagogical research across the institution. Hence, we strongly encourage grant recipients to submit proposals; these submissions will be evaluated on all criteria except their relevance to the conference theme.

Important Submission, Review, and Schedule Release Dates

Acceptance Notifications: Notification about conference acceptances will be sent in early March to the email address used for your submission.

Submission dates

- November 16, 2026: Call for Proposals circulated.
- November 30, 2026: Proposal submission opens.
- January 18, 2027: Proposals submission closes at 11:59 p.m.

Reviewer dates

- January 27, 2027: Anonymized proposals sent to reviewers.
- February 19, 2027: Proposal reviews completed.
- Late February: Decisions sent to Corresponding Author.
    - Please note that decisions will only be sent to the Corresponding Author. The Corresponding Author is responsible for all communication with the organizing committee throughout the application and conference planning process, including scheduling. Responsibilities also include providing details of authorship and answering questions that arise throughout the peer-review process in a timely manner, as well as forwarding necessary information to the remainder of the proposal team.

Schedule release dates

- Mid-March to early April: Preliminary schedule released for presenters to flag time conflicts; last opportunity to edit title and abstract.
- Mid-April: Final schedule and full program with abstracts released.

Artificial Intelligence Disclosure

Artificial Intelligence Tool: Microsoft Copilot (University of Waterloo institutional instance);
Conceptualization: Microsoft Copilot (University of Waterloo institutional instance) was used to brainstorm title ideas and alliterations;
Writing – Review & Editing: Microsoft Copilot (University of Waterloo institutional instance) was used for sentence-level editing and to highlight writing patterns.