



THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Center for Teaching Excellence

Annual Report

Academic Year 25-26

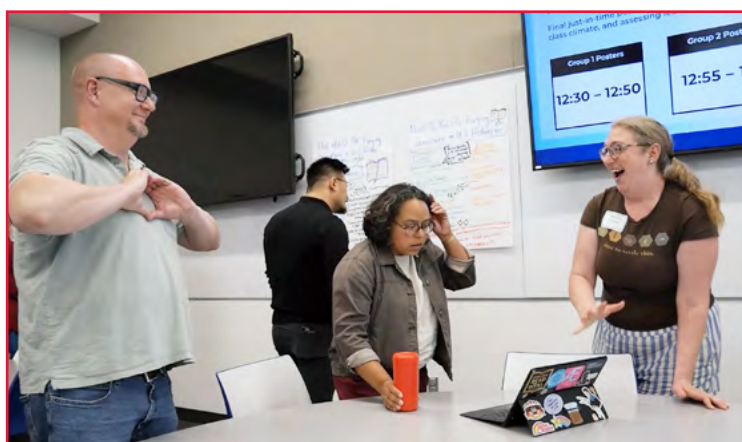
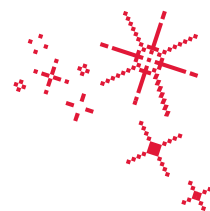
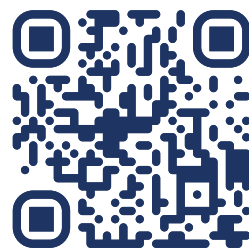


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Scan the QR code to access additional multimedia content related to the features highlighted in this report.



cte.ku.edu/cte2526ar

Director's Message

Building the Future of Teaching at KU

The 2025–26 academic year made clear that higher education is in an extraordinarily dynamic moment. Generative AI, pressure to demonstrate student success and the value of a degree, a changing social contract, shifting enrollment, and new student needs are all reshaping the work of teaching. CTE helped KU respond by supporting faculty in the foundational work of effective, responsive teaching while driving educational transformation through new approaches and partnerships across the institution.

Engagement in our AY 25-26 programming was robust. Nearly **700** unique participants from more than **150** departments and units took part in CTE programming. Our work with the Medical Center grew substantially, with two KUMC ambassadors, multiple workshops, and rising requests for participation in our programs.

Our work this year spanned many areas. Here are five highlights.

Advancing AI-ready education. We helped KU educators navigate generative AI through our working group, fall symposium, and course innovation grants. In spring, we built on that work by launching an innovation lab to reimagine online courses for an AI-saturated world and working with an incubator group of Business faculty on their courses.

Teaching and partnering for student success. Supporting each and every student requires collaborative, multi-unit approaches, and partnership was central to this work. We wrapped up a multi-year effort with the natural sciences and mathematics, originally funded by the Howard

Hughes Medical Institute, to strengthen student success through cross-department collaboration. Faculty teams used DFW rates, classroom observations by undergraduate researchers in our Teaching and Learning Innovation Lab, and input from student pedagogical partners to develop course-level interventions and pilot common problems that promote transfer of learning. We also worked with student-facing support units to bridge student and faculty supports. The initiative is now evolving into a broader cross-disciplinary effort on engaged learning for student success.

We also partnered with Undergraduate Education and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to launch the Student Success Academy, a one-day program paired with the Course Design Institute. The partnership helped bring CDI participation to 70, a significant jump after years of steady growth. CDI is making a measurable difference. Undergraduate courses redesigned in the previous year's institute saw a 27% reduction in DFW rates compared with their five-year historical average. Every participant saw improved student outcomes, and 53% saw strong evidence of meaningful improvement after just one iteration.

Our work on reframing grading is another critical lever for student success. We carried forward our working group and launched a new Grading Studio to provide hands-on support for faculty redesigning their grading practices to keep the focus on learning.

Data-informed curricular improvement. We continued to drive curriculum improvement



through our assessment and analytics work. In Ideas-to-Action, we helped nine departments use alumni and student surveys, focus groups, and/or institutional data to revise curricula and develop interventions to ensure that their students are gaining the knowledge and skills they will need for their futures.

Supporting education components of faculty grants. Faculty increasingly seek our help with the education and evaluation components of grant proposals. This year we supported three successful NSF REU proposals and the education plans of several NSF CAREER proposals. We plan to expand this work as another lever for educational transformation.

Documenting and evaluating teaching. CTE continued to lead the national conversation on reforming evaluation to better recognize and support effective teaching. With our TEval coalition partners, Doug Ward and I published Transforming College Teaching Evaluation (Harvard Education Press, 2025), which presents our model for rethinking how teaching is documented and evaluated. In response to growing international interest, we also launched the NextGen TEval Alliance, a community of practice for the hundreds of individuals and institutions working to align reward structures with effective teaching.

Andrea Follmer

CTE Director and Professor of Psychology

AY 25-26 CTE Staff



Andrea Follmer
Director and
Professor of
Psychology



Prajna Dhar
Associate Director
and Professor of
Chemical and Petroleum
Engineering



Joshua Potter
Associate Director
for Student
Learning and
Analytics



Doug Ward
Associate Director and
Associate Professor in
Journalism and Mass
Communications



Kaila Colyott
Teaching Innovation
Program Manager



Judy Eddy
Program Manager



Massa Mafi
Postdoctoral
Researcher



Omar Jamil Safir
Principal Analyst:
Evaluation and Outreach



Drew Vartia
Documenting Learning
Specialist



Mike Welchhans
Communication
Coordinator

Faculty Fellows

The CTE Faculty Fellows for AY 25-26 included:
Jane Barnette, professor of dramaturgy, theatre history
Nisha Fernando, associate professor of interior architecture
Sheyda Jahanbani, associate professor of history
Dyan Morgan, associate teaching professor of biology
Sarah E. Ngoh, assistant director of First Year Writing
Benjamin Rosenthal, associate professor of visual art
Sara E. Wilson, associate professor of mechanical engineering

CTE Faculty Fellows have responsibilities in specific areas of CTE programming, actively participate in CTE programs, contribute to the Center’s GTA preparation program, and guide individual faculty members through CTE resources for development of their teaching.

Grad Student Fellows

The CTE Grad Student Fellows for AY 25-26 included:
Aaron Beuoy, graduate student in Educational Psychology
Abby Breyer, graduate student in English
Laura Northup, graduate student in English
Rebecca Wood, graduate Student in Psychology
Sarah Unkel, graduate student in Anthropology

In AY 25-26, CTE added a Graduate Research Assistant to assist CTE. That new role was filled by **Ryan Ming**, graduate student in Counseling Psychology.

- ★ Drew Vartia: KU Staff EOM for July 25
- ★ Kaila Colyott: KU Staff EOM for Nov 25
- ★ Judy Eddy: KU Staff EOM for June 26

CTE Mission and Values

CTE Mission

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) is KU’s teaching and learning hub where educators at every career stage come together to explore effective teaching practices and make student learning visible. We connect faculty across campus to advance student success and create more meaningful learning experiences together.

We organize seminars, working groups, and workshops to help faculty and graduate student instructors innovate, assess, and improve teaching and learning. We support educators in representing their intellectual work as teachers, offer individual consultations on teaching and learning, and partner with departments and schools on learning analytics, assessment, and curriculum transformation initiatives.

Through cross-disciplinary intellectual exchange and support for growth and continuous improvement, we advance teaching and learning excellence across the university.

CTE Values

Our team developed these values in 2024 through collaborative discussion and reflection to define and communicate our collective commitment to supporting students, faculty, and each other. Over the past year, they became a foundation and stabilizing force that helped us ensure our programs and work reflect our shared vision of learner-centered teaching and community engagement.”

Through collaborative discussion and reflection, we crafted a framing statement along with supporting principles that articulate our stance on key issues related to student-centered teaching and community engagement. These values will serve as a beacon for our work, ensuring that every program and initiative aligns with our shared vision.



AT THE KU CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

WE BELIEVE

TEACHING AND LEARNING FORM THE HEART OF HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDENTS WANT TO LEARN

WE ARE EACH UNIQUE AND WORTHY OF RESPECT

EVIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE INFORM OUR PRACTICE

COMMUNITY EMPOWERS OUR WORK

EXCELLENCE AND EMPATHY ARE COMPLEMENTS

GOOD TEACHING IS REFLECTIVE AND ITERATIVE

Events and Workshops at a Glance



CTE AY 25/26 Program List

In addition to these events, we supported ongoing working groups and intensive programs throughout the year.

Annual Events

- Teaching Summit
- Student Learning Symposium
- Celebration of Teaching

Working groups

- AI Working Group
- Online Teaching Working Group
- Alternative Grading Learning Community
- Teaching Scholarship Collaborative
- New Faculty Book Club
- Mentoring for Success: Faculty & Staff Learning Community
- Faculty development: Spring 2026 Faculty Book Club

Funded opportunities

- Course Transformation Grants.
- Teaching for the Future: AI Course Integration Grants - up to
- * KU IRISE Virtues Initiative
- Spring Faculty Seminar on Smart Teaching for Better Learning
- * Grading Studio
- AI & Online Teaching Innovation Lab

- Business and AI Working Group
- * COIL Seminar
- Course Design institute
- * Student Success Academy

Department programs

- Ideas to Action - academic-unit teams examine student success and learning questions with CTE support.
- TEval/Benchmarks for Teaching Effectiveness
- Transforming STEM Initiative (HHMI Project)

Programs and workshops

- Teaching documentation: Representing Your Teaching for Annual Review (and Beyond)

Ready to Launch sessions:

- Developing Your AI Policies and Strategies
- Course Policies and Practices That Promote Attendance and Engagement
- Getting Students to Read and Do Out-of-Class Work

Classroom workshops:

- Promoting Belonging and

- Student Engagement
- Designing Learning Environments That Ignite Student Motivation
- Moving Beyond Check-the-Box Assignments

Mentoring workshop series:

- Aligning Expectations
- Communication Strategies
- Fostering Wellbeing and Independence
- Respectful Mentoring: Supporting Students with Accommodations

Lunch & Conversation Series:

- What's Working in KU Classrooms?
- Making Sure Your Course Is Accessible
- Creating Engaging Learning Environments in an Age of Digital Distraction

- * Partnership with another unit.

CTE Essential Facts

Faculty Impact

CTE invests in faculty innovation and teaching excellence.

During AY 2025/26, **650** faculty and academic staff from **153** units participated in CTE workshops, programs, and learning communities.

CTE also provided **\$174,000** in grants and stipends to support teaching development and innovation.

Over the **past five years**, we have invested more than **\$864,000** in our faculty colleagues, drawing on both our operating budget and external grants awarded to our center.

Digital Communications

CTE reached a global audience in AY 2025-26.

More than **110,000** active users viewed **178,000** pages on cte.ku.edu

CTE communications delivered **30,622** emails that generated **20,682** unique opens with an exceptional **67.5%** average open rate.

A redesign of cte.ku.edu introduced clearer homepage pathways to teaching resources and faculty programs. The **Programs & Initiatives** and **Teaching Resources** hubs ranked among the website's **15 most-viewed page paths**.

*Grading Studio

Faculty are helping faculty rethink grading to enhance learning.

We piloted a **Grading Studio** that brought together faculty mentors and mentees to explore and implement alternative grading practices.

In its first year, the program engaged **14** faculty members across disciplines, invested **\$7,000** in stipends, and influenced courses serving **474** students.

Participants are developing practical grading approaches while expanding KU's collection of grading resources.

AI in Higher Education

INCORPORATING AI INTO LEARNING : As conversations about generative AI shifted from experimentation to implementation, CTE helped faculty explore practical approaches to its use in teaching.



Maggie Mosher (center), assistant research professor demonstrates AI technology to KU faculty at the CTE AI Symposium held in November of 2025. Photo by Mike Welchhans / CTE

CTE and the KU FLITE Center Host AI Symposium for Faculty

49 KU Faculty Members Gather to Learn About Implementing AI in the Classroom

At our AI Symposium in November of 2025, we noticed a distinct interest from simply “building barriers” against AI, and toward meaningful integration into courses.

The event was led by Doug Ward, associate director, **Center for Teaching Excellence**, and sponsored by **CTE** and the **Center for Flexible Learning through Innovations in Technology & Education** and focused on exploring how to use generative AI in classes.

The morning was dedicated to finding ways to help faculty go “beyond” simply putting up

barriers to AI. A panel of KU faculty presented how they are implementing AI in their courses.

Presenters discussed:

- **AI Fluency**
- **Process Over Product**
- **Safe and Compliant Tools**
- **Reading Comprehension**
- **Promoting Trust:**

A key theme across all presentations was the necessity of teaching students how to use AI tools critically and responsibly, rather than just banning them.

AI Symposium Facutly Spotlight

Teaching coding in the Age of AI

At November’s AI Symposium, Sara Wilson, associate professor of Mechanical Engineering and CTE Faculty Fellow, shared how she’s adapting programming instruction for a world where AI tools for coding are everywhere.

Her approach? Focus on process over product.

“Instead of grading whether the code is right, I bring students into an interview and ask questions like, What did you find challenging? What did you learn in the process?” Wilson explained. “I want to know they actually did the work and understand it.”

Wilson allows AI tools in her courses albeit with guardrails. In introductory programming, students must master fundamentals before turning to AI. In advanced courses, she encourages smart use of tools like GitHub, Copilot and ChatGPT, paired with critical evaluation.

To make this work, Wilson uses a structured method called Learn–Question–Evaluate–Reflect:

- **Learn** core concepts in class.
- **Question** AI tools for coding help.
- **Evaluate** responses for accuracy.
- **Reflect** on AI’s reliability and limitations.

Her takeaway for educators: adapt assessments to emphasize learning, reflection, and critical thinking. As Wilson put it, “Grade the process, not just the product.”

Gamification of Learning

HOW GAMES ENCOURAGE LEARNING: Gamification is more than adding games to a course. It is a teaching strategy that challenges creativity while fostering interaction to support deeper learning and student engagement. Read how KU instructors are using game-based approaches to create meaningful learning experiences.

SLS Enters Third Year of Gamified Adventure

Although the Student Learning Symposium (SLS) has always included gamified elements, for the past three years the event has been designed as a fully immersive game experience. This year’s symposium, “**Building the Future of Curriculand: A Parable of Living, Working, and Bonding in Higher Education**,” transformed the familiar footprint of the Kansas Memorial Union into a fictional realm.

In welcoming attendees to this year’s Student Learning Symposium, CTE Associate Director Josh Potter emphasized how the event was intentionally shaped around one of the CTE’s core values: the belief that students want to learn.

Potter reminded participants that this value is not just descriptive but an invitation for instructors to recognize student strengths and stay open to the ways learners are evolving.

“At the CTE, we assert that students want to learn and this year’s symposium was designed to center that belief. By stepping into Curriculand together, we asked participants to look past the noise, recognize students’ strengths, and reflect on our shared responsibility to meet them where they are,” Potter said. Each Curriculand adventurer took on a role managing



Laura Kirk, professor of Theatre & Film & Media Studies, shares details of her character during the Student Learning Symposium. Photo by Mike Welchhans / CTE

an apprentice, one with unique strengths (endurance, invention, guidance and connection) to collective tasks that mirror the complexities and joys of academic life.

“They did a beautiful job of setting up the structure, stepping back, and letting us physically move through it. If we can give students the kind of experience we had today over a semester, that would be pretty great.”
-Laura Kirk professor of Theatre & Film & Media Studies

Leveling Up Learning: Adapting Games to Engage Students

Participation in SLS helps KU faculty member find ways to adapt games for learning

When it comes to making learning active and meaningful, Jennifer Grode, lecturer and academic program associate at KU’s Applied English Center, has found that games are more than just fun, they’re powerful teaching tools.

“I’ve been using some form of gamification since I started teaching almost 20 years ago,” Grode explains.

“Over time, I’ve gotten much more intentional about it; I think a lot more now about how to make sure the games I use are tied to real learning outcomes and not just fun for fun’s sake.”

Her approach often involves adapting existing games to fit discipline-specific goals. “When I modify a game for a specific goal, practice a language point, simulate certain roles or structure collaborative problem-solving, students

tend to respond with a lot of enthusiasm. They appreciate that the mechanics feel fresh and they usually see how the game supports the skills we’re targeting.”

Jennifer shared these insights during a December presentation to the Gamification Working Group, a CTE program that brings together KU instructors to explore how game-based models examples of gamified learning, review scholarship, and build a community of game enthusiasts across KU’s campuses and the Lawrence and Kansas City areas.

Grode credits the Student Learning Symposium (SLS) for reigniting her passion for gamification: “Attending the SLS reminded me how energizing and pedagogically rich gamification can be, and it pushed me to bring it back into my teaching with more intention.”

Collaborating for Student Success

CTE SHINES AS A PROVEN PARTNER: Teaching is central to student success, and our impact grows when we partner with colleagues across campus. This year's highlights include the inaugural Student Success Academy, collaborations with International Affairs on course internationalization, and an expanded CDI with past participants serving as co-facilitators.

Student Success Academy Launches with CTE Support

The Student Success Academy, a new program designed as a prelude to the Course Design Institute, showcased the power of collaboration.

Developed through a strategic partnerships between Undergraduate Education, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, the academy was created to help instructors better understand the needs and experiences of first- and second-year students.

Weeks into the fall semester, Rachel Davis, director of Undergraduate Education reports the work done in the Academy is becoming visible, “Our first-ever Student Success Academy was a great success thanks to an exceptional group of presenters from across KU. In follow-up sessions with participants, they’ve described how the Academy shifted their mindset regarding their approach to teaching freshmen.”

“These instructors have always cared about their students’ well-being; however, I think the Academy encouraged them to see that you can have an academically rigorous course while also creating a welcoming, supportive classroom environment from day one.”

— Rachel Davis, director of Undergraduate Education

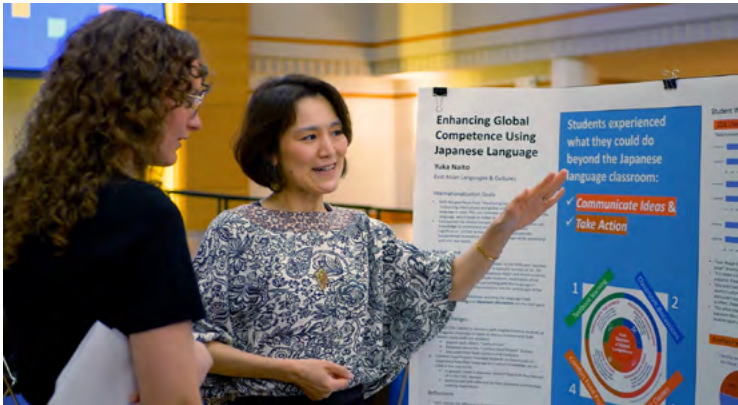
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Rather than relying on a single office or program, the Student Success Academy brought together expertise from across campus to provide faculty with a more holistic view of student learning and persistence.



Record Participation in 2026 Course Design Institute

The 2026 Celebration of Teaching showcased many of our collaborations across campus.” Gary Broils (center), director & professor of the practice, Project Management Programs leads a discussion during the 2026 Course Design Institute. Broils, a CDI alumna alumnus, along with CTE staff and Fellows helped expand the reach of CDI as the program reached a new participation record of 70 KU faculty. Photo by Mike Welchhans / CTE



Celebration of Teaching Highlighted Collaboration

Yuka Naito (center), associate teaching professor in Japanese language, explains goals and outcomes of her course design through the KU International Affairs/CTE Course Internationalization Seminar. The seminar, a collaboration between CTE and KU's Office of International Affairs helps faculty internationalize courses, connects to a broader university initiative to transform KU into a comprehensive international university. Photo by Mike Welchhans / CTE

Department Case Study: How CTE Programs Work Together

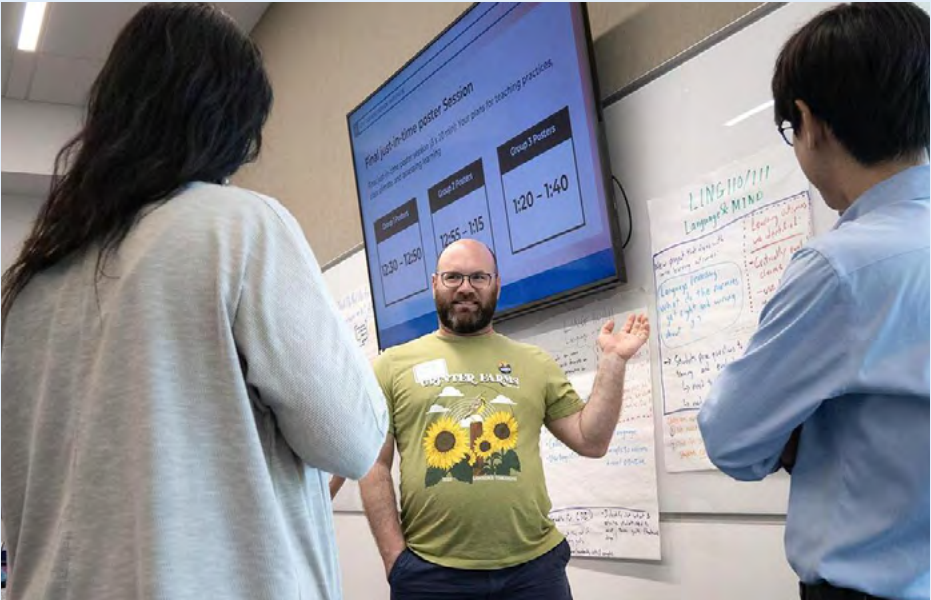
FEATURE SUMMARY: CTE programs are designed to work together, and departments that draw on several of them can make deeper, more lasting improvements than a single program can support. The Department of Linguistics shows what is possible when leveraging multiple programs to make meaningful, data-informed changes in curriculum.

How Student Insights Led to an Effort to Connect Curriculum, Careers and Student Success

How KU's Linguistics Department Utilized CTE Programs to Gain Student Insights to Update its Curriculum

During the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 academic years, the Department of Linguistics partnered with the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) through the Ideas-to-Action (I2A) program to align departmental curricula with long-term student career outcomes. Data and CTE-led student focus groups revealed that undergraduate decisions to major or minor in linguistics were heavily influenced by how clearly coursework connected to career opportunities. To address this, the department integrated drop-in career modules into introductory courses, established professional development workshops with the KU Career Center, incorporated hands-on applications in fields like video game design and branding, and leveraged alumni networks to showcase diverse career pathways.

At the course level, Linguistics faculty participated in CTE's Course Design Institute (CDI) to overhaul foundational offerings, including LING 110 (Language and Mind) and LING 106. Moving away from traditional survey-style instruction, the team established action-oriented goals centered on training students to evaluate everyday claims



Steve Politzer-Ahles (center), assistant professor in the Department of Linguistics, shares details of a course redesign for LING 110 to colleagues at the Course Design Institute in May of 2025. Photo by Mike Welchhans / CTE

about language using scientific evidence. A primary outcome was the implementation of a “person on the street” interview project, where students gather public beliefs about linguistic topics and systematically analyze them against peer-reviewed research.

This integrated approach produced measurable gains in student learning and engagement, including documented

improvements in students’ ability to evaluate empirical evidence and articulate transferable skills.

By combining department-wide inquiry with targeted course redesigns, the collaboration between Linguistics and CTE demonstrates a successful model for data-driven, student-centered curriculum reform.



Center for Teaching Excellence

Budig Hall 135, 1455 Jayhawk Blvd, Lawrence , KS 66045
cte@ku.edu

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