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University Park, IL,  
November  
30,  
2020

# Instructional Designers Help Showcase Faculty's Passion

When COVID-19 closed college campuses around the world in March, many faculty and students were suddenly forced out of the classroom and into an unfamiliar new world of remote learning. At [Governors State University](#), professionals with the [Center for Active Engagement and Scholarship \(CAES\)](#) were ready not only with technology support but also with the teaching strategies needed to deliver good online instruction — a mission that has expanded as the pandemic continues.



**NIKKI LAGRONE**

CAES' core team of instructional designers understand how to plan and deliver engaging instruction, said Colleen Sexton, Associate Provost/Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. "They are professionals with advanced degrees who know how to create a learning environment so there are clear outcomes and a rich experience every time," she said.

CAES staff have always been responsible for the online learning management systems that Governors State uses, like Blackboard. Before the coronavirus hit, they ensured software was running well and that faculty and students knew how to use it. Many turned to them as trouble-shooters.

But when nearly all learning moved online, the CAES team members — Nikki LaGrone, Scott Thesen, Doug Johnson, Christa Guilbaud and Annette Keca — ramped up efforts to instruct faculty by adding staff, creating instructional videos and designing a plan for certification with Quality Matters, a global organization that provides professional support for quality assurance and innovative digital teaching and learning environments.



Faculty and administrators readily acknowledge the skills of CAES staff, which quickly added two part-time instructional technologists and are working to embed up to 10 student workers in classes to assist faculty new to teaching in a virtual environment.

As the first full semester of remote learning comes to a close, all university deans agree the designers showcased their faculty's skills and helped improve learning experiences.

"COB faculty worked with CAES staff to develop or revise about 20 online courses in summer 2020 and early fall 2020," said [College of Business](#) Dean Jun Zhao. "These online course shells were reviewed using a checklist developed by CAES staff based on the Quality Matters standard. As a result, COB students can expect more consistency in the design and delivery of online courses, which has greatly enhanced their remote learning."

[College of Arts and Sciences](#) Dean Andrae Marak applauded CAES staff for their helpful attitude and expertise. Dr. Marak said



16 division members completed CAES-designed training on Quality Matters and many others participated in the wide range of Blackboard-related workshops over the last seven months.

“New and experienced faculty alike report how helpful and responsive the CAES staff has been,” he said. “In particular, when it was clear last spring that we would quickly transition to teaching remotely, CAES quickly ramped up and began offering workshops on how to use Collaborate software in Blackboard. These very clear-headed instructions and tips assisted in the transition to teaching remotely and helped a lot of our faculty better deal with the feelings of uncertainty and concern.”

With the support of CAES, College of Arts and Sciences faculty created 18 new templates for online courses, including classes to support general education. “As a result of this work, we are now in position to seek the necessary approvals to offer the entire Bachelor of Arts degree in Criminal Justice online,” Marak said.

For Dean Shannon Dermer of the [College of Education](#), the CAES team’s contribution to the online transition was valuable because



**CHRISTA GUILBAUD**

the instructional technologists translated face-to-face pedagogy into effective online teaching practices. “They balance both the everyday practical issues with the overall philosophy of best practices for online teaching and learning,” she said.

In the [College of Health and Human Services](#), CAES staff earned top reviews from Dean Cathy Balthazar, who said Social Work Department Chair Geri Outlaw organized useful training for faculty. In a training request, Dr. Outlaw asked CAES to provide guidance on such topics as how to integrate frequent polling during live classes and whether there was a way to host paired activities instead of group work.”

The training has been especially helpful to CHHS adjunct faculty, Dr. Balthazar said. “Our field faculty are primarily adjunct faculty, and the training provided was quite comprehensive and tailored to meet their specific training needs,” she said.



**ANNETTE KECA**

Dr. Sexton pointed to the CAES website where a host of workshops, best practices and quick tips continue to address faculty concerns. She also noted that tips provided by the instructional designers are useful whether teaching remotely or in a face-to-face learning environment.

Calling the team the “unsung heroes” of campus, Sexton said, “These specialists help the faculty, as content experts, showcase their knowledge and passion while delivering their content in a remote learning environment. GSU is very lucky to have them.”