

# TOPkit DIGEST

This month's TOPkit Digest is brought to you by a collaborative contribution with **Eric Main**, M.A., Associate Director of the Karen Smith Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Central Florida ([Eric.Main@ucf.edu](mailto:Eric.Main@ucf.edu)), **Martha Hubertz**, Ph.D., Assistant Lecturer in Psychology, University of Central Florida ([Martha.Hubertz@ucf.edu](mailto:Martha.Hubertz@ucf.edu)) and **Patricia Farless**, M.A., Senior Instructor, Department of History, University of Central Florida ([Patricia.Farless@ucf.edu](mailto:Patricia.Farless@ucf.edu)). They discuss the topic of **Teaching Squares: How can you start one?**

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## Video Tip

### Teaching Squares at UCF

The Hows and Whys of Success



In this video, Instructional Specialist with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning at UCF, Chrissy Cruz, shares how and why the Teaching Squares Program has proven successful at UCF.

[Watch Video](#)

### Must-Read Announcements

- Join [Josh Strigle](#) for the "Regular and Substantive Interaction: An Instructional Design Approach Toward Compliance" webinar back by popular demand, at 2:00 p.m. (ET) on **July 27, 2022**. [Register now!](#)
- Check out one of the new content pages on TOPkit.org: [SUNY Exploring Emerging Technologies for Lifelong Learning and Success \(#EmTechMOOC\)](#) and [Teaching Squares: I'm in love with the shape of you!](#)
- Stay tuned for the August Digest that will include the Fall 2022 Hack-a-thon dates!

### Top Tips

## Teaching Squares as a Development Tool

What are the benefits of using a Teaching Square?

Teaching Squares (TS) are a development tool that can enhance teaching by incorporating interdisciplinary feedback focused on course planning, implementation, and execution to increase students engagement, learning, and success.

UCF teaching squares are created to emphasize interdisciplinary and multi-modality learning

experiences.

- Following the traditional use of TS, the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning utilizes [Teaching Squares](#) as a faculty development tool for several programs.
- The [GEP Refresh](#) also used them as a tool to plan and implement ideas for General Education Program classes for incoming students to emphasize the trans-disciplinary nature of the General Education Program. Indeed, GEP Refresh provided the template for FCTLs program.
- In its innovative tradition, the [Center for Distributed Learning](#) is implementing teaching squares as a tool in the [IDL6543 course](#). IDL6543 is the required course all UCF faculty must complete for certification to teach online. What makes it innovative? This class mixes faculty with Instructional Designers as they create online course content!
- In a future iteration, a novel approach would be to incorporate faculty, Instructional Designers, librarians, and other instructional specialists.\* Central to this belief is a broader understanding of teaching faculty to include all who ensure a course promotes deeper student learning. Indeed, a program could have a square of four instructional designers, or a blend of IDs and others engaged in technology support. Your program is only bound by the limits of your imagination!

The collaborative synergy of this tool is limitless. As the goal of using Teaching Squares is to improve course content and delivery for students across course modalities and disciplines, the use is infinite!



**#1 - The Quest: Planning is Key.** Find the right people to start-up and support the teaching square at your local institution. Think about your goal. Are you primarily using this to teach people how to teach in a specific course modality? Are you interested in focusing on pedagogy and how that is explored in different course modalities-blended, fully online, synchronous video, face-to-face? If you are focusing on 4 faculty members consider having an instructional designer or someone from the faculty center to serve as a member or as a facilitator. Set the ground rules and expectations as well as some common setup and protocols for your Square.

>> George Mason University (GMU's) [Teaching Square's](#) page and Stone Hills College's [Start-up Guide](#) provide planning ideas.

**#2 - Assembling the Teaching Square.** Assembling the group involves promoting or recruiting faculty collaboration across the disciplines. Here at UCF, we have now utilized teaching squares in interdisciplinary, varied teaching levels and potentially different modalities. Collaboration across campus is key! Mix individuals by discipline and teaching and/or experience? Consider how long faculty have taught online.

>> This [Faculty Focus article](#) discusses the benefits of cross-disciplinary perspectives.

**#3 - Share.** Help faculty understand their role in sharing their courses and receiving feedback from colleagues. Create tools that point them toward their role as collaborators of building effective courses and not that of criticizing the work of their colleagues. Teaching Squares should also schedule a time to observe each group members teaching, allowing for the sharing of different techniques based on class size and modality.

> GMUs [What does a Teaching Square Share?](#) section provides a substantial exchange of information that occurs. The [Teaching Effectiveness Self and Peer Review form](#) provides a guide for outcomes and reflections.

**#4 - Reflection.** Key component to the success of the Teaching Square is reflection on pedagogy and teaching practices and how to incorporate best practices carried out by their colleagues. This also allows faculty and instructional designers to build for the experience.

>> The Appalachian State University [Teaching Squares Program](#) shares examples of [Observation Rounds](#) and [Observational Forms](#).

**#5 - Expand the Impact.** Help faculty think of teaching and learning projects that maximize the impact of the square (i.e., research publications and blogs). Indeed, encourage them to use their work in teaching squares to write publish in teaching journals. Or work with their instructional designer to present their work at conferences. Like Squares, teaching is best when shared with the community.

>> The UC Santa Cruz's Center for Innovations in Teaching and Learning provides [guides](#) to show the impact of your Teaching Squares efforts.

\*Please note that like in Travis Thurston's [Resilient Pedagogy: Practical Teaching Strategies to Overcome Distance, Disruption, and Distraction](#), we define faculty broadly as anyone who is committed to improving teaching and learning (Thurston, Lundstrum, and Gonzalez, 2021).

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## From the Community

# Faculty Development Resource

Support and Build Community with your Faculty that Teach Online

Teaching Squares offer instructors a professional development tool that can be utilized in multiple settings across a campus. They are informal groups of four individuals from different disciplines who observe each others classes in the spirit of discovery and self-reflection rather than evaluation or critique. Teaching Squares foster dialogues on teaching and learning topics and prove insightful to disciplinary ways of knowing, thinking, and teaching.

[Learn more about Teaching Squares](#) →

## New Content Contributions

### Teaching Squares: I like the shape of you!

The sheer brilliance of the Teaching Square is the inter-disciplinary focus that allows faculty to emerge from their silos and understand greater trends of student learning needs.

[Read more →](#)

### SUNY Exploring Emerging Technologies for Lifelong Learning and Success

Organizations and institutions can use EmTech to provide professional development opportunities for cohorts of participants in a wide range of situations.

[Read more →](#)

## Top Community Topics



- [Developing - SUNY Emtech MOOC](#)
- [Developing - Best Practices for Using Video in Online Learning](#)
- [Evaluating - Checklists & Rubrics](#)
- [Developing - Sample Course](#)
- [Developing - Provide Incentives](#)
- [Developing - Teaching Squares](#)
- [Online CoLAB](#)

## Works Referenced or Cited

[SEE REFERENCES](#)

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