

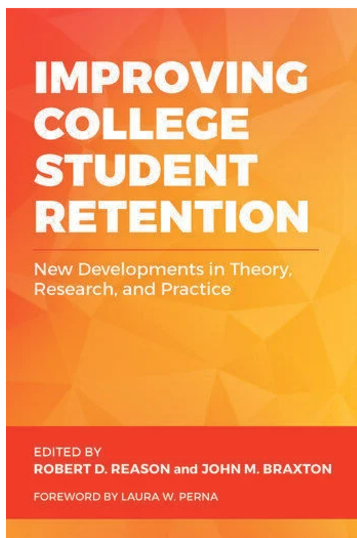
NCTL Newsletter - Fall '23, No. 1

From the Jane B. Nord Center for Teaching + Learning

Start of the Year Reflections

In this newsletter, I share my reflections coming into this new academic year, and I outline the offerings and services of the Nord Center for Fall 2023.

Beginning Thoughts



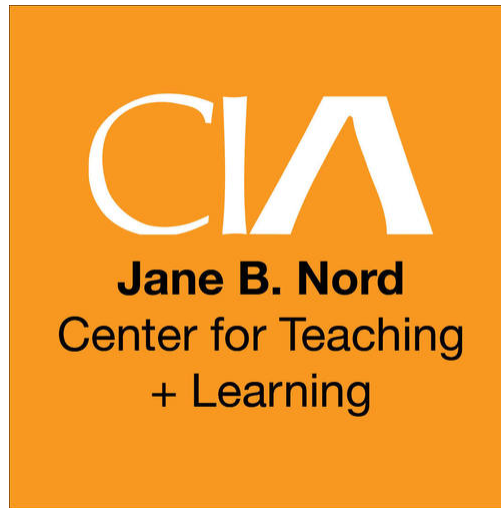
I spent much of the summer reading, learning, and talking about two topics, retention and neurodivergence. In this work, I ran across two parallel ideas. The first was a powerful quote from the book, [Improving College Student Retention](#) (Reason & Braxton, 2023):

*"When policies and practices are implemented in a manner that is overly bureaucratic or overly political, students' persistence is likely to suffer. **But when policies are implemented in a manner that is collaborative and includes students as part of the decision-making process, students are likely to feel valued and included, which should result in greater likelihood of persistence.** So, as the style of policy implementation increases students' sense that the institution cares about their welfare, students' persistence should*

increase."

The second is a slogan often used by marginalized groups, particularly those with disabilities: "Nothing about us without us." This refers to the need for people to have input on the laws, policies, and practices that impact and govern them. Both of these speak to the importance of incorporating experiential or [situated knowledge](#) in the development and implementation of policies. This is important because it addresses relations of power that can lead to unintended consequences of inequity. And as I often say in my work with other educators who utilize critical approaches to teaching and learning, we cannot relinquish our power in the classroom, but we can share some of it and use that position to promote engagement, trust, equity, and understanding.

This year, the Nord Center will focus on incorporating more voices and perspectives in issues that impact belonging and retention, particularly around neurodivergence. We will do this with new and expanded programming and partnerships. It is my hope that every member of the CIA community finds a way to join in this conversation and have their voice heard.



At the end of the inaugural year of the Nord Center, I conducted a survey on the resources and services offered to explore effectiveness and to guide my offerings for this year. The [report summarizing the survey findings](#) shows the top resources and services for faculty and staff.

<p>Top Faculty Resources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Nord Center's myCIA resource page2. Workshops3. Canvas Training4. 1-on-1 consultations5. NCTL Newsletters	<p>Top Staff Resources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. CIA's TRI Conversations2. Reading Groups3. NCTL Newsletters
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A full list of offerings can be found on the [NCTL's myCIA page](#).

New This Year

The NCTL is excited to announce two efforts that aim for transformation, connection, innovation, and community-building. Both of these efforts are meant to support retention through increasing our practices to foster belonging.

Focus on Neurodivergence: Although not all neurodivergent students disclose their diagnosis or request accommodations, studies indicate the percentage is easily between 15-25% of any given undergraduate student population (American College Health Association, 2022; NCES, 2018). These students bring unique strengths to the classroom, but they also face unique challenges that can be difficult for them—and for faculty—to understand and navigate. During this academic year, the Nord Center will offer specific programming to increase understanding and support for neurodivergence, including a workshop on course design for neurodivergence by expert learning designer, Megan Kohler (during our Teaching Summit in October). [Click here to register for a September workshop on understanding neurodivergence](#), and see below about a related reading group opportunity.

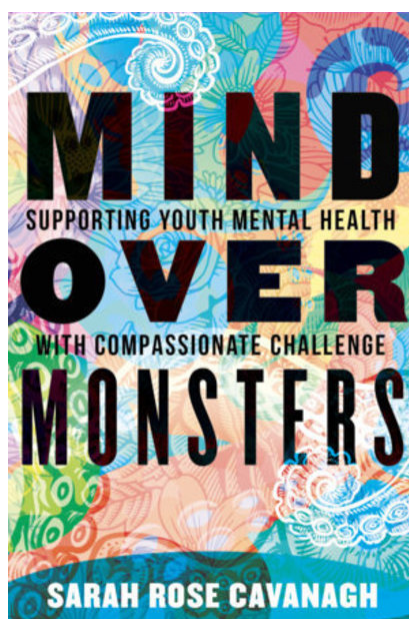
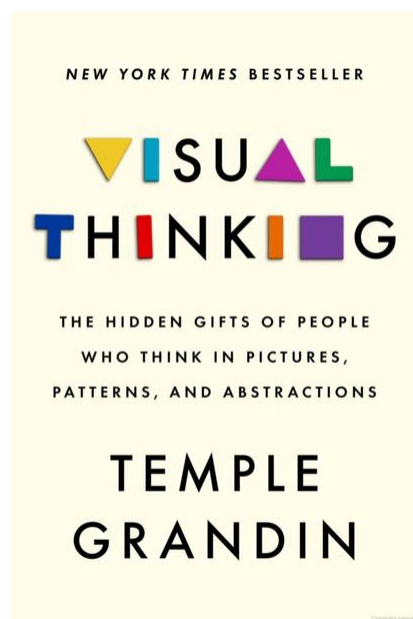
Learning communities: These are cross-disciplinary groups of faculty, staff, and students who engage in an active and collaborative yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning. Learning communities offer learning, development, and community

building. They are outcome/output-based and often structured around a central topic. Learning community members will be asked to come to regular meetings (1-2 times a month) prepared to discuss topic-based resources, develop intended outcomes/outputs, and take steps toward reaching those outcomes and outputs. Learning community members should see themselves as institutional change agents, prepared to share their learning with others through opportunities such as departmental meetings, Nord Center programming, and written research.

Learning communities are open to faculty, staff, and students. You should have received an email with additional details and information about joining a learning community

--Please contact Kari Weaver (keweaver@cia.edu) with any questions about this programming--

Reading Groups



The book choices for this academic year can help us explore issues of mental wellness and neurodiversity. [Click here to sign up for a reading group.](#)

The first book, [Visual Thinking: The hidden gifts of people who think in pictures, patterns, and abstractions](#) (2022) is written by Temple Grandin. Dr. Grandin has authored several books illuminating her own experiences as a person with autism and investigating the ever-expanding research on autism and differences in cognition. In this book, Dr. Grandin's focus on visual thinkers "makes us understand how a world increasingly geared to the verbal tends to sideline visual thinkers, screening them out at school and passing over them in the workplace. Rather than continuing to waste their singular gifts, driving a collective loss in productivity and innovation, Grandin proposes new approaches to educating, parenting, employing, and collaborating with visual thinkers." [The Gund Library has provided electronic copies of this book.](#)

The second book, [Mind over monsters: Supporting youth mental health with compassionate challenge](#) (2023) is written by psychologist and professor Sarah Rose Cavanagh. Increases in anxiety and depression prompted Dr. Cavanagh to offer a "an invigorating tour of pedagogical, neuroscientific, and psychological research on mental health" that seeks solutions through interviews with "a roster of experts across the country who are dedicating their lives to working with young people to help them actualize their goals, and

highlights voices of college students from a range of diverse backgrounds. [The Gund Library has provided electronic copies of this book.](#)

---Please contact keweaver@cia.edu if you would like to receive a personal copy of either of these books.---

Announcing Our First Faculty Fellow



The Nord Center is excited to introduce its first faculty fellow. Faculty fellowships can be found at many centers for teaching and learning. They can extend the capacity of the Center to meet strategic goals and foster leadership among faculty. The Nord Center faculty fellowship is reserved for contingent faculty, helping CIA to better meet the needs of all faculty members by offering programming on additional days and times outside of the typical work week. **The faculty fellow for the 2023-24 academic year is liberal arts professor, Dr. Whitney Porter.** Dr. Porter was chosen out of a pool of applicants due to her leadership capacity, innovative ideas, and ability to support the Nord Center's goals for the academic year.

Dr. Whitney Porter is a professor of composition and graphic narratives. She earned her degrees in English literature from CUNY and Kent State, where she taught courses in writing, literature, and cultural studies. Dr. Porter is an experienced facilitator and has led workshops and discussions with various audiences. Equity in higher education is important to her pedagogical framework, and she views the fellowship as an "opportunity to equip CIA faculty with the tools they need to create inclusive and empathetic spaces for learning."



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