



# UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## ACURIT 2025

The Augustana Conference on Undergraduate Research and  
Innovative Teaching

10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE (WITH 2 YR GAP 2020-21)

**“FLEXIBILITY AT THE HEART OF LEARNING AND TEACHING”**

Friday, May 9, 2025

In-person at Augustana Campus of U of A, Camrose, AB  
Roger Epp Room (2-004 Forum Building)

8:30 – 8:45 am	<b>Registration</b> (coffee/tea light refreshments provided)
8:45 – 9:00 am	<b>Welcome to ACURIT 2025</b> Mélanie Méthot, Chair of ACURIT Committee introducing Dear John Parkins
9:00 – 10:00	<b>Keynote</b> <i>Encouraging Student Autonomy in Learning.</i> Anita Parker, Lead Educational Developer, Online and Hybrid Instruction & Strategy Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Alberta, Edmonton  When your students feel a sense of control over their decisions and actions for learning, they are more inclined to be driven by personal interest, curiosity, and internal desire to learn. Autonomous students are more engaged, innovative, creative, and invested in their learning than their peers who are dependent on the instructor. Dependent students commonly lack trust in their own judgment and can need multiple check-ins with the instructor to feel confident they are meeting the instructor’s expectations. Autonomy is a skill for lifelong learning; for students, autonomy is the ability to independently and collaboratively solve problems in university, future career, and personal situations. Student autonomy is a result of personal, social, and environmental circumstances; therefore, you, as the course instructor, can aim to provide opportunities for students to practice autonomy.
10:00 – 10:45	<b>Panel 1</b> <i>School-Life Balance: Fostering Flexibility in the Classroom.</i> Panelists: Hailey Anderson <sup>1</sup> , Kathy Davies <sup>2</sup> , Lynne Honey <sup>2</sup> , Jocelyn Kublik <sup>1</sup> , Anne McIntosh <sup>1</sup> , Jody Rintoul <sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> University of Alberta (Augustana), Camrose, <sup>2</sup> MacEwan University, Edmonton  Both instructors and students are individuals beyond the classroom too; being rigid in our class policies and activities can be a detriment to learning and balancing life with school for both students and instructors. In this

	<p>panel, instructors and students will share the lessons we have learned about fostering flexibility in our classes. Examples of flexibility that we have incorporated into our classrooms include: integrating flexibility into universal design learning principles, incorporating deadline flex days, team size and selection of team members, choose-your-own-adventure assignments and lab activities, incentivizing vs requiring, textbook options, adopting a behaviorist perspective on teaching and course design, and transparency about the purpose of evaluations, deadlines, and constraints. Our student panel members will share their perspectives on flexibility and what they like and/or don't like about it. While overall we think that there can be power in flexibility, we also think there are limits to being flexible - we will also share the consequences and trade-offs of flexibility in our classes and labs.</p>
<p>10:45 – 11:00 am</p>	<p><b>Break</b> (refreshments provided)</p>
<p>11:00 am – 12:30 pm</p>	<p><b>Session 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Incorporating Flexibility in Teaching a First-Time Marketing Research Course.</i> Tetyana Khramova, Andre De Castro, Bernarda Vajs, The King's University, Edmonton (30 min)</li> </ul> <p>This presentation examines the integration of flexibility in a first-time senior-level Marketing Research and Analytics course, offering valuable insights for an interdisciplinary post-secondary audience. The course featured a collaboration with a social enterprise dedicated to increasing youth participation in sports. By integrating real-world challenges, the course provided a dynamic platform for developing essential research skills.</p> <p>Flexibility played a pivotal role in addressing unexpected challenges, such as canceled focus groups and delayed surveys, which necessitated students pivoting from primary to secondary research. This shift tested students' adaptability and problem-solving capabilities, ultimately fostering resilience and resourcefulness. The innovative course design set by the instructor paired exploratory labs with a hands-on project. The labs featured open-ended research questions, encouraging critical thinking and preparing students to handle project pivots and the uncertainties of real-world scenarios effectively.</p> <p>This session presents both instructor and student perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of how flexibility can enhance undergraduate education. Students reflect on overcoming challenges while the instructor shares strategies for maintaining academic rigor and meeting learning objectives in a dynamic teaching environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Innovative Ways to Teach Entrepreneurship and Innovation: an Albertan Case of Academic Entrepreneurship.</i> Evandro Bocatto, Samuel Mugo, Eloisa Perez de-Toledo, MacEwan University, Edmonton (20 min)</li> </ul> <p>Higher educational institutions have established themselves as the primary source of knowledge for social development and the labour market. Publicly funded universities, in particular, have responded to changes in funding by fostering an entrepreneurial attitude in student learning. This shift has led to the "entrepreneurial university" concept becoming essential to many contemporary learning systems. This study explores academic entrepreneurial projects involving Business, Chemistry, and Computer Science students from an Albertan post-secondary institution. It contributes to the body of work on work-integrated learning (WIL) by examining how students engage with local innovation ecosystems, such as incubators, startups, and international partners. The study</p>

provides insights into entrepreneurship and innovation by analyzing students' perceptions of learning in entrepreneurial contexts. Interdisciplinary engagements, especially between business and chemistry students, create an environment that encourages divergent thinking and broadens students' knowledge beyond their specific disciplines. Additionally, international partnerships and pitching days offer unique learning opportunities, allowing external stakeholders to provide unexpected questions and feedback. The paper uses content analysis methodology to assess the perception of students and partners after participating in the cases. Academic entrepreneurship exposes students to entrepreneurial traits, equipping them with adaptability and an innovation mindset. These skills are particularly valuable for success in innovation-driven companies.

- *Letting Go: Giving Students Control Over Course Content*, Shauna Wilton, University of Alberta (Augustana), Camrose (20 min)

Higher education is increasingly student-centred, with flipped classrooms, team-based learning, and project-based learning being a few of the ways in which professors seek to increase flexibility and involve students in active learning. The idea of having students determine course content and design is radically opposed to the perceived role of professors as experts in their field and their historical role as a “sage on the stage.” There is certainly still an important role for the traditional lecture in today’s university and some courses necessarily focus on knowledge and content transfer. However, there are increasingly spaces within the academy where the course objectives revolve around skill development. This presentation suggests that giving students control over course content and design in skill-based courses is one way to encourage student engagement and learning, but it requires professors to be flexible and let go of their control over their classes. I will present two examples of giving up control over course content to students, and the benefits and risks of each approach.

- *Interdisciplinary Meaning Making: A Collaboration Between Design and English Students Augments the Reading Of Pride & Prejudice*. Constanza Pacher, MacEwan University, Edmonton (20 min)

This project showcases Design students (MacEwan) collaborating with English students (Augustana) in interdisciplinary meaning making from a passage of text (*Pride and Prejudice*, Austen). English students were asked to write a proposal (complete with images) for a design partner, who were then tasked with creating a visual representation of the chosen passage. In English courses, students most commonly deliver their interpretations of text in written format. Conversely, in traditional design projects when students work with literary pieces they primarily create images on covers and illustrations. This interdisciplinary approach challenges both parts to step outside of their disciplinary expertise and borrow methods from the partner discipline. When English students visualize their concepts in a picture board, and design students engage in close readings, they expand their creative processes. From initial observations and student reflections, the experience has augmented the result as meaning evolved in each stage, where interdisciplinary partners added unique insights and ways of thinking about a concept. The original proposals by the English students were augmented when the designers made myriad creative decisions —selection of specific words/sentences, fonts, size, case, weight, colour, and layout, to name a few — to visually represent the ideas, which predictably carried their own interpretations of the passage. In the last stage of this project, English students

	<p>used the designs to present their work, showing signs of the designer’s ideas melded into their final speeches.</p> <p>The presentation of this exploratory assignment will invite a discussion of pros and cons of cross-collaboration in the classroom. Student comments: “The poster made me reflect more deeply on the scene, and in a different way than I am used to.” — AUENG “Because the text was analyzed by someone else my personal connection was difficult, however this helped me learn how to tackle client work in the future.” — Design</p>
12:30 – 1:15 PM	<b>Lunch</b> (included in registration fee)
1:15 – 2:00 PM	<p><b>Panel 2</b></p> <p><i>Perspectives of Senior Students: What Happens When Professors Introduce Flexibility in Undergraduate Term Assessments?</i></p> <p>Panelists: Parmida Beedle, Dakota Ekelund, Thanhhai Nguyen, University of Alberta (Augustana), Camrose</p> <p>In this panel, three senior students share their insights on some of the assignments they did during their undergraduate studies. They will discuss the challenges but also the rewards they experienced with term projects. Taking into consideration the specific learning objectives of the courses, they explore how flexible assessments encouraged autonomy and metacognition. They reflect on the skills they honed, be it as thinker, researcher, collaborator or communicator.</p>
2:00 – 3:00 pm	<p><b>Session 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>A Vision for Inclusion: Navigating Barriers and Embracing Novel Insights in Undergraduate Research with a Visually Impaired Student.</i> Heather Looy, Jonathan Sieswerda, The King’s University, Edmonton (20 min)</li> </ul> <p>Navigating university with a visual impairment brings both obstacles and opportunities. This became particularly clear when Heather invited Jonathan to work with her on scholarship involving knowledge translation of biopsychological research on gender diversity via a podcast as part of Jonathan’s senior undergraduate research courses. Jonathan’s visual impairment presented a challenge for research tasks that assume normal vision: Searching databases, reading and coding articles, writing and reading scripts, editing audio recordings. Systems that claim to be accessible are often not, and many of these tasks involve a “disability tax” of extra time and effort. Working through these challenges provided opportunities to develop better communication, flexibility, problem solving, and creativity for both teacher and student. It also raised Heather’s awareness of ways that academic systems and expectations present unjust barriers to university success and future careers for students with disabilities. As well, Jonathan’s experiences of visual impairment provided fresh insight into and informed interpretation of the research and realities of gender diversity. These experiences are not exclusive to psychology; they apply across disciplines and research areas. We share our journey to help other teachers and students adapt systems, assignments, and expectations in ways that support a greater diversity of students and create spaces for that diversity to enrich the learning of everyone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>The Art of "Fours": A Narrative-based Approach to Course Design,</i> Stephen Cruikshank, University of Alberta (Augustana), Camrose (20 min)</li> </ul>

	<p>There is something about the number "four" that echoes in how we relate to our environment and the world around us. Indigenous Educators, for example, have long recognized this and have built value-based pedagogy and teachings around the number four: four seasons, four directions, four parts of our self (spiritual, physical, mental, emotional), etc. Our life narrative can be broken into four-stages (infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood) or structured into four parts of our life-cycle (birth, growth, aging, death). The way we shape stories—both oral and written—is likewise structured around the chronological structure of these movements. The common five-point narrative arc (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution), for example, is represented by the same four movements we see in the seasons, in our self, in the stages of life and the parts of our life-cycle: the author births the narrative, grows the narrative, pushes to a peak of the narrative, and guides its fall towards a conclusion. This workshop posits one question: What happens if we orientate pedagogical structure in the same four-pronged approach of life, formulating a narrative arc in both the design of our course content and its assessments? As part of this workshop, participants will be encouraged to strategize structures of a narrative-arc in their own course design through a "Four-M strategy", that is, establishing a motif (key recurrent theme), a motive (learning objectives), motion (via course structure), and moral (key lesson or take-away).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Students Today: Teach-Able Moments and Learner Engagement Practices in Post-Pandemic Times</i>, Nicole Patrie, MacEwan University, and Gillian Robinson, University of Alberta, Edmonton (20 min)</li> </ul> <p>Higher education instructors have expressed frustration with the current learners entering their classrooms, at times attributing these perceived changes to Gen Z or post-Covid learners. Expectations to accommodate and reach all learners can lead some instructors to express that they are being forced to choose between rigour and accessibility in the university classroom. Layered in this context, the Covid-19 pandemic presented a significant disruption to how learners seek community and engage with their learning. Simply put, post-secondary teaching finds itself in an identity crisis.</p> <p>In our presentation, we argue that rigour and accessibility are not mutually exclusive and instead, complementary. A universally accessible classroom can enrich learning experiences, acknowledging the diversity of ways of thinking and being, and allowing for a more thorough co-construction of knowledge. As instructors with experience in classroom settings of more "reluctant" learners, we share our experiences of engaging our students outside of higher education, and how these practices shape our pedagogy within post-secondary contexts.</p> <p>In our presentation, we will reflect on our experiences as new instructors in higher education classrooms, from our position of being former teachers in junior high schools and prisons. While the expectations and course content differ, we tend to rely heavily on our non-higher education teaching experiences to "deal with" the common struggles that instructors in higher education have with "students today". Specifically, we lean heavily on our ability to reflect-in-action and change course mid-lesson-plan as necessary. Our familiarity with diverse classrooms has forced us to become creative and flexible with assessment and universal design. Overall, we find that the strategies that we honed in other contexts tend to meet the needs of the new group of learners in higher education.</p>
3:00 – 3:15 pm	<b>Break</b> (refreshments provided)
3:15 – 4:45 pm	<b>Session 3</b>

- *Student-Generated Exam Crib Sheets: A Flexible and Personalized Exam Aid*, Brian Rempel, Amber K. Hutton, University of Alberta (Augustana), Camrose (20 min)

Historically, students enrolled in introductory chemistry at the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus have been provided with an instructor-generated data sheet for exams. The purpose in providing this data sheet to students has primarily been to reduce the amount of rote memorization required of students when studying for exams. However, past students have identified a number of issues with the instructor-generated data sheet including the presence of a significant amount of extraneous information and the absence of highly relevant information, which has ultimately affected the perceived utility of the instructor-provided data sheet. To address these issues, we have recently experimented with allowing students to generate and use their own crib sheets for exams in introductory chemistry at Augustana. So how well does it work (or not)? Are student crib sheets better than instructor data sheets? What do the students write? What do they think about it? We shall present perspectives from both an instructor and student perspective trying to answer these questions. We shall also engage the audience in a wider discussion about their experiences with exam aids, and the bigger purposes and methods behind how we evaluate student knowledge.

- *No ChatGPT in My Class: Analysis of Ethical Academic Uses of AI Outside the Classroom*, Mariana Castillo Arce, University of Alberta, Edmonton (20 min)

At the bottom of many university course syllabi, a clause often forbids the use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, for assignments, citing the need to protect students' creativity, analytical thinking, and critical thinking. However, banning AI tools entirely overlooks their potential to enhance learning when used ethically. This presentation explores an alternative perspective: instead of prohibition, students should be taught how to use AI tools responsibly and effectively.

Drawing from the evolution of the internet's integration into education, this study employs a comparative qualitative analysis of 30 key texts—15 supporting and 15 opposing the use of AI at the university level. Both sides present compelling arguments, yet a recurring binary narrative emerges: either full acceptance or outright rejection of AI. My findings suggest a need for a nuanced middle ground that emphasizes ethical and pedagogical use of AI.

AI tools like ChatGPT can serve as time-saving assistants, reviewers, and even supplementary teachers, but they require active human engagement to refine their outputs. Contrary to fears of fostering academic dishonesty, using AI effectively demands creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking to guide, critique, and improve AI-generated content. For example, crafting a high-quality essay through ChatGPT is not as simple as generating a single response. It involves iterative refinement, thoughtful input, and meaningful revisions by the student.

This presentation advocates for integrating AI literacy into the curriculum, framed through an ethical lens. By emphasizing the importance of human participation and critical oversight, students can learn to collaborate with AI not for shortcuts to better grades, but as a means to deepen their understanding and enhance their work. This aligns with the conference theme, "Flexibility at the Heart of Learning and Teaching," by demonstrating how educators can adapt teaching

practices to incorporate transformative tools while preserving the core values of academic integrity and human creativity.

- *Too Many Readings, Too Little Time?: Addressing Coverage Constraints Through Poster Presentation Pitches*, Stephanie Oliver and Augustana Canadian Literature Since 1950 students Shaylyn Belland and Chance Foster, University of Alberta (Augustana), Camrose (20 min)

No matter the discipline, many instructors struggle with content coverage. This issue intensified in the age of COVID-19, as concerns about student workload and mental health resulted in many instructors reducing the amount of reading in their courses. While there are many benefits to a “less is more” approach, at times it exists in tension with other principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, which call on instructors to teach a diverse range of texts by authors who represent a variety of experiences and worldviews. Flexible and creative approaches to course and assessment design are often necessary to address these overlapping concerns. Drawing on pedagogical approaches to backward design (Wiggins and McTighe), this presentation provides a case study of one summative assessment designed in response to these concerns. Inspired by the popularity of BookTok and CBC’s Canada Reads competition, this scaffolded assignment – called “Why you should read this book next” – was developed for a contemporary Canadian literature course. Students design and deliver poster presentations for Augustana’s Student Academic Conference that “pitch” a novel (or other long-form book) published within the last ten years. Departing from conventional summative assessments in humanities courses (e.g. final exams, argumentative essays, conference papers), students use their communication, research, and argumentation skills for a particular purpose: to convince broader audiences to read a diverse selection of Canadian literary texts.

### **Kitchen Table Session**

- *Enhancing Undergraduate Learning through Business Case Writing: Personal Insights and Reflections*, Theresa Chika-James, EJ Manangan, MacEwan University, Edmonton (30 min)

The case method is recognized as a common active and effective learning method in business and management studies (Farashahi & Tajeddin, 2018; Pilz et al., 2024), enabling students to bridge theoretical concepts with real-world business challenges. Traditionally, case writing involves academic instructors collaborating with senior managerial personnel to develop business cases that depict complex organizational problems, accompanied by teaching notes to guide students’ discussions on resolution strategies. This session examines how business case writing can be creatively adapted as a pedagogical tool to promote flexibility in undergraduate education. By engaging in this process, students apply theory to practice while developing transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving—competencies for employability. Drawing on an instructor’s experience and the reflective learning of a 400-level undergraduate student, the discussion highlights the multifaceted nature of case writing, including its benefits to enhance critical thinking, research proficiency, and professional development that strengthens students’ career prospects. The session also addresses how mentorship, collaboration, and feedback can enrich students’ learning experiences. While acknowledging challenges such as time management and research skill development, the discussion illustrates how these obstacles can be reframed as opportunities for growth through reflective practice. The penultimate section of the discussion

	introduces a structured approach to engaging students in business case writing, emphasizing flexibility in learning by using Gibbs' reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988) to support students' reflective learning journey. Ultimately, the presentation demonstrates how integrating business case writing into undergraduate curricula enhances learning, professional growth, and students' readiness for the work environment.
4:45 – 5:00 pm	<b>Conference Closing Discussion</b>

*After the conference while there is no formal banquet, you are invited to join other participants at a restaurant in Camrose (TBD) to continue the conversation!*