

Teaching Nests Guide

Welcome to the Teaching Nests program! We hope that through your participation in a Teaching Nest, you will have the opportunity to:

- Have conversations with colleagues about teaching practices and student learning issues
- Observe other instructors in the classroom and experience being in a learner role
- Reflect on your own teaching practices
- Create collaborative connections with other faculty members

A Teaching Nest is a group of 3-4 instructors across disciplines who visit each other's classes (face-to-face or online) for their own reflection and learning. It is not an opportunity to offer feedback or evaluation on Nest partners' teaching. All faculty members (full-time and part-time) and instructional staff are invited to participate.

The foundation of Teaching Nests is the creation of a safe, supportive, and non-evaluative environment through:

- Mutual respect
- Shared responsibility
- Self-reflection
- Appreciation

Commitment (~5-7 hours across the semester)

- Build your Nest meeting (~1 hour)
- Observe classes of your Nest partners (2-3 hours)
- Self-reflect on your observation experiences (1 hour)
- Share your reflections with your Nest (1-1.5 hours)

The Teaching Nests program is part of the [Making Teaching & Learning Visible](#) initiative sponsored by CETL. Other programs and activities include the Formative Assessment of Classroom Teaching (FACT/eFACT) program, the COPUS classroom observations, faculty learning communities (FLCs), custom classroom observations and individual consultations, and the Celebration of Teaching & Learning Symposia. These and other programs provide faculty and instructional staff with opportunities to build community, discuss ideas and issues with colleagues, and engage in reflection – all centered around teaching and learning, which is a foundation of USI. Please visit www.usi.edu/cetl to learn more.

The Teaching Nests program was developed based on [Teaching Squares](#) programs at Leeward Community College, Stonehill College, St. Louis Community College, York Technical College, Northern Virginia Community College, and others. The material in this guide has been adapted from their content, including some direct copies of their material.

Register to join a Teaching Nest by completing the brief [online form](#).

Suggested Schedule

A Teaching Nest is comprised of four key components: building your Nest, course visits, self-reflection, and Nest Share. The suggested schedule for these activities is a guide.

Week	Activity
Weeks 1-2: (<i>early February</i>)	Build your Nest: Meet with your Nest partners, develop a visit schedule, and share course materials.
Weeks 2-6: (<i>February - early March</i>)	Observe at least one class for each Nest partner
Weeks 6-7: (<i>mid March</i>)	Nest Share: Meet with your Nest to share your reflections

Build Your Nest

This introduction meeting is to build your nest by meeting your Nest partners, establish guidelines for your Nest, and clarify Nest members' expectations and roles. Please use the following Nest discussion items to guide this meeting (45-60 minutes).

1. Expectations: Share your goals and what you hope to gain from participating in this Teaching Nest.
2. Course information: Share the goals of the selected course, profile of students in the course, how the course fits into the curriculum, and your philosophy for teaching the course. Please have relevant course material (e.g., syllabus, handouts) available to your Nest partners prior to their visits.
3. Scheduling: If possible determine a preliminary visit schedule. Otherwise, determine the amount of notice required for scheduling your observations. Usually 24 hours is adequate, although you may prefer longer notice. For online course visits, please provide the Nest member an Observer role to access your course's Blackboard site.
4. Determine the length of your observations. Observing the entire class period is ideal; a minimum of 50 minutes is recommended. Observe an online class several times throughout one- to two-week period.
5. Identify who will communicate with CETL; if possible, schedule the Nest Share meeting.

Course Visits

Please use the following questions to guide your class visits or online observations:

- What instructional strategies and/or tools were used to support student learning (include student/instructor interactions, student/student interactions, activities)? How did the instructor implement these?
- For face-to-face courses: How did the instructor began and ended the class?
For online courses: How the instructor interact with the class throughout the week?
- What tips did you pick up on classroom management and facilitating a productive course climate?
- What did you observe that you might incorporate into your classes?

Self-Reflection

The Teaching Nest program is a personal experience. You may wish to share it at the Nest Share, but there is no requirement to do so. The following are suggested questions to help guide your self-reflection.

1. What have I learned about my teaching philosophy from my class observations (it could be something new or something that has been affirmed)? What personal values do I bring to my teaching?
2. How has the experience of again being in the “learner” role impacted my teaching?
3. What surprised me during this Teaching Nest experience?
4. What challenged me during this experience? What assumptions about teaching and learning did I confront?
5. What have I learned is one of my teaching strengths?
6. What aspect of my teaching do I wish to improve? How am I going to do this?
7. What is one thing I learned that will make my teaching more effective in supporting my students’ learning?
8. Did I learn any tips, best practices, or educational research that I might want to incorporate in my teaching?

You will gain the most if you write your reflections and allow each reflection to lead to other thoughts about your own teaching. Again, there is no requirement to share this beyond what you wish to do.

Nest Share

After each Nest member has visited or observed other Nest partners’ courses, plan to meet over lunch or coffee (CETL will treat) to share your experience.

Each Nest can decide for itself what kind of conversation will be the most useful to them. However, you should not offer opinions (negative or positive) about your observations nor ask for those opinions from others. Experience has indicated that this may create a judgmental climate and undermines the trust necessary to the successes of your Teaching Nest experience.

Here are some questions that will help you shape your discussion to be reflective:

1. How have the class observations helped you to improve your own teaching?
2. Has there been anything about the experience that surprised or challenged you?
3. How has participating in the Teaching Nest given you a greater appreciation for your colleagues, your students, the University, and the teaching profession.
4. What specific aspects do you like about the Teaching Next program?
5. Share suggestions you have for improving the Teaching Nest experience.

