

2026

**FORT WAYNE TEACHING  
& LEARNING CONFERENCE**



**FEBRUARY 20, 2026**

INTERNATIONAL BALLROOM, WALB UNION BUILDING  
PURDUE FORT WAYNE

# A Collaborative Effort of Fort Wayne Area Colleges and Universities

8:00 a.m. – Registration, Coffee and Light Breakfast: (Walb 149/150 International Ballroom)

8:30 a.m. – Welcome and Introduction of Keynote & Plenary Speakers:  
Dr. Sarah E. Silverman (Keynote)

8:35 a.m. – Keynote Speaker

## Dr. Sarah E. Silverman - Keynote & Plenary Speaker



Sarah Silverman, PhD is an independent faculty developer and instructor of Disability Studies. As an autistic educator, she has a personal stake in Neurodiversity as well as extensive college teaching and faculty development experience. Her interests include accessible and feminist pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and disability-informed critiques of educational technology. Her writings appear in *To Improve the Academy*, the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, the blog *Feminist Pedagogy for Teaching Online*, *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, and on her newsletter *Beyond the Scope*. Her book *Classroom Mindscapes: An Introduction to Neurodiversity for Educators* is forthcoming in 2026 from the University of Oklahoma Press.

## **Keynote Title:**

### **An Introduction to Neurodiversity for Educators: History, Theory, and Practice**

#### **Abstract:**

Neurodiversity, or the naturally occurring variation in human cognition, is becoming a popular topic in higher education and adjacent fields as more of our students identify as “neurodivergent” and neurodiversity gains recognition as an important component of inclusive teaching efforts. But what is neurodiversity, and what is the history and political importance of this concept? This workshop will introduce educators to the basic terminology of the Neurodiversity paradigm (including the terms “neurodivergent” and “neurotypical”) as well as the history of Neurodiversity as a disability rights movement with roots in the Autism rights movement. Participants will be introduced to common forms of neurodivergence in higher education and how instructors can both respond to neurodivergent students' needs and integrate neurodiversity more broadly into their teaching. Participants will also be provided with several resources for syllabus and assignment design that take a neurodiversity-informed approach to Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

## **Plenary Title:**

### **Navigating collaborative learning in neurodiverse classrooms: A case study workshop**

#### **Abstract:**

Neurodiverse classrooms, or those that contain a mixture of neurodivergent and neurotypical students, can present both challenges and opportunities in collaborative assignments or group discussion activities. Teaching with attention to neurodiversity often requires us to build in time for students to learn more about their peers' communication styles and needs before expecting them to work together effectively. In this workshop, participants will analyze two complex classroom case studies involving neurodiversity which will help them develop the skills to navigate a neurodiverse classroom. One case study will address student dynamics during a group project and another will address student openness to inclusive teaching approaches that are designed to be accessible to neurodivergent students.

<p>Location: WALB G21</p> <p>Session: 1-A</p>	<p><b>Timeless Teaching, Modern Challenges: Ensuring Learning in an AI World</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>“How do we know students are earning the degrees we confer?” That deceptively simple question has never felt more urgent. In an age where AI can complete essays, solve equations, and simulate real-world tasks, how do we ensure students are actually doing the work—and learning from it?</p> <p>This session tackles that challenge head-on with practical, classroom-tested strategies to promote authentic learning in the AI era. We’ll begin by focusing on in-person exams, why they still matter, how to scaffold them effectively, and how to support student confidence and preparation without turning to surveillance. Then we’ll turn our attention to upgrading out-of-class projects and performance tasks, exploring how purpose-driven design, process grading, and “uniquely human” thinking can discourage AI misuse and drive meaningful student effort.</p> <p>Educators from every discipline will leave with practical, ready-to-use ideas for designing assessments that verify real learning, foster student engagement, and uphold the timeless value of authentic work in an AI-driven world.</p> <p>Dr. Jeremy Rentz (Trine University)</p>
<p>Location: WALB 08</p> <p>Session: 1-B</p>	<p><b>Harnessing AI to Reveal Weaknesses in Course Design: An Algorithmic Stress Test for Curricular Improvement</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>The integration of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers faculty a unique opportunity to enhance their teaching and learning. This interactive presentation focuses on a novel application: utilizing AI to objectively and rapidly identify structural, pedagogical, and logical weaknesses within existing course blueprints. Using established course design frameworks, such as backward design or constructive alignment, we will demonstrate how to create 'Adversarial Design Review Prompts' that compel an LLM to harshly evaluate syllabi, assignment sequences, and assessment strategies against criteria like clarity, equity, and cognitive load. The goal is to look at the course as a whole; the AI prompts challenge assumptions and expose potential areas of student confusion or misalignment within the course. Attendees will leave with a practical, discipline-agnostic methodology for employing AI as a critical peer reviewer, resulting in more robust, student-centered, and defensible course designs. The methods are applicable across various disciplines and modalities.</p> <p>Jay Johns (Purdue Fort Wayne)</p>

<p>Location: WALB 226</p> <p>Session: 1-C</p>	<p><b>From Panic to Plan: Turning ADA anxiety into actionable strategies for success</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>Beginning April 2026, ADA Title II will require all digital course content to be accessible from the moment it is published. While these rules directly impact public institutions, private colleges and universities should also be working toward compliance to ensure equitable access and minimize future risk. For many faculty, this means taking responsibility for reviewing and correcting their own materials—often with limited institutional support. This session provides practical strategies to make that process manageable and effective.</p> <p>We'll start with a brief overview of what the new requirements mean for faculty-created content. Then, participants will engage in an interactive "Is it ADA-compliant?" polling challenge, where you'll vote on whether sample materials meet accessibility standards. This activity will highlight common issues such as missing alt text, poor color contrast, and inaccessible documents. Next, we'll explore tools that simplify accessibility checks and fixes, including Microsoft Accessibility Checker, your LMS, and free browser-based resources. You'll learn how to use these tools to identify problems and apply quick corrections without needing advanced technical skills.</p> <p>By the end of the session, you'll leave with a practical checklist, tool recommendations, and confidence to make your course content compliant and inclusive.</p> <p>Melissa Bray (Manchester University)</p>
<p>Location: WALB 222</p> <p>Session: 1-D</p>	<p><b>From Entertainment to Academic Inquiry</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>This interactive presentation asks, "how do we meet students where they are?" and "how do we leverage their knowledge to increase student engagement in learning?" We will use our literary genre studies courses "Crime &amp; Fiction" and "The Evolution of Romance" as case studies to demonstrate our own efforts in answering this question.</p> <p>In these courses, we design curriculum and activities to take students' popular understanding of a topic and turn it into academic inquiry. As these courses are generated by student interest, we use the students' prior knowledge to scaffold the curriculum.</p> <p>By using our courses as case studies, we will provide session participants from a variety of fields the opportunity to brainstorm how they might build courses from students' prior knowledge and increase student engagement based on our own experiences.</p>

	<p>In this session, we aim to provide practical information for instructors in all fields, space for reflection on how to engage students using popular trends, questions to consider when taking students' knowledge from entertainment to academic inquiry, and research on student engagement applicable to all disciplines.</p> <p>Dr. Janelle Pulczynski (Trine University) Dr. Jeanette Goddard (Trine University)</p>
<p>Location: WALB 114</p> <p>Session: 1-E</p>	<p><b>Integrating Perusall and Video Discussions to Deepen Learning and Engagement in Online Courses</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>In this session, we will discuss two strategies that had a significant impact on online student engagement in our courses. The first strategy is the use of video posts in online discussion boards. Based on student feedback, students feel a deeper connection to their instructor and peers when using video posts. They are also able to respond more authentically to the course material. This format encourages reflection and self-expression, allowing learners to connect theoretical concepts with real-world experiences.</p> <p>The second strategy is the use of the website Perusall to engage students in meaningful discussion about the course textbook. Students reported that real-time discussion is typically not possible in an asynchronous course, and they appreciate the option to introduce additional written or video content to add depth to the discussion.</p> <p>Instructors have found these methods effective at the associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels.</p> <p>Dr. Aaron Wilkingson (University of Saint Francis) Diana Ross (University of Saint Francis) Dr. Nathalie Rouamba (University of Saint Francis)</p>
<p>Location: WALB CLASSIC BALLROOM</p> <p>Session: 1-F</p>	<p><b>Using the Classics to Engage Students in General Education – Roundtable Session</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>Teaching the classics enables students to encounter the greatest teachers that have ever written or thought. They learn the language, idioms, and substance of the works that founded most of what they know as civilization and its many institutions, gaining a deeper insight into the values we hold today such as equality, freedom, and human rights. The classics free students from the transience and myopia of the present moment in history, which means their education will serve them for a lifetime, rather than for the next five years only. This means that students who read the classics participate in a solid and</p>

	<p>thorough foundational education which they can use and apply to any time and trend.</p> <p>Many schools who teach classics have been teaching the great books for years if not decades; however, our panel will be able to speak to the challenges and benefits of introducing the classics into a typical college setting. We will also be able to address the pedagogical techniques we use to make the classics relevant and understandable for students from all backgrounds and abilities.</p> <p>Dr. Carrie Duke (University of Saint Francis)  Dr. Lewis Pearson (University of Saint Francis)</p>
<p>Location:  WALB  CLASSIC  BALLROOM</p> <p>Session: 1-G</p>	<p><b>Why Bother? An Office Hours Discussion – <i>Roundtable Session</i></b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>Last year, the presentation “Annoyingly Effective” argued that the well-established underuse of office hours and deficiency of student engagement overall were, in part, issues faculty can help mitigate by intentional efforts to change student perceptions of the practice. This year, we hope to continue the discussion on their use by examining our own beliefs and perspectives about office hours and how they fit into our jobs. The facilitator will help guide the discussion to examine ways that our actual practices and messaging do and don’t align with these stated goals for office hour usage. We will also bring informal comments from current students about their perceptions of office hours and why they do or don’t choose to make use of them. While all of these have received academic study, the goal of this session is practical: to help current faculty bridge the gap between our understanding of the resource and that of our students.</p> <p>Michael Smith (Trine University)</p>

<p><b>11:00 – 11:45 PM</b>  <b>PLENARY SESSION – Dr. Sarah E. Silverman</b></p>
<p><b>11:45 – 12:30 PM</b>  <b>LUNCH BREAK</b></p>

<p>Location: WALB G21</p> <p>Session: 2-A</p>	<p><b>Artificial Intelligence Implications for College Teaching and Lesson Planning</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>Artificial intelligence (AI) offers college professors unprecedented efficiency by reducing time spent on routine planning, drafting, and content creation. This session explores how to reinvest that reclaimed time into high-impact teaching practices—redesigning curriculum, strengthening student relationships, and elevating instruction beyond foundational tasks. Faculty will examine how AI can help shift courses toward higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, supporting analysis, creation, and problem-solving rather than passive information delivery. The session emphasizes transforming traditional “sit-and-get” models into collaborative, inquiry-based learning environments rooted in 21st-century skills and the 4Cs: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Through practical examples and professor-tested strategies, participants will learn how to integrate AI as a partner in instructional design while reimagining the role of the college classroom. The focus is not on replacing teaching—but on freeing educators to do more of what matters most: engaging students, deepening learning, and fostering meaningful academic experiences.</p> <p>Dr. Abigail Dutcher (University of Saint Francis ) Dr. Kelly Eckel (Trine University)</p>
<p>Location: WALB G08</p> <p>Session: 2-B</p>	<p><b>Behind the Curtain: Capture Student Attention through AI-Assisted Game Design</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>In an era where educators compete daily with digital distractions, this session invites participants to step behind the curtain to explore how generative AI can assist in the development of engaging learning materials. Participants will play an original game designed with AI assistance and examine the iterative design process that capitalizes on the instructor’s creativity, knowledge of a discipline, and technology.</p> <p>Attendees will see how generative AI supports rapid idea generation, adaptive feedback loops, and reflective prompts and aligns games and simulations with course content and objectives. Examples include original games, “fused games” (familiar game structure with course content), and simulations/case studies to deepen understanding or apply concepts.</p> <p>The session will equip participants to create, refine, and personalize games and activities. Attendees will leave with practical strategies and imaginative design ideas for capturing student attention.</p> <p>Dr. Heather St. Peters (Indiana Tech)</p>

<p>Location: WALB 226</p> <p>Session: 2-C</p>	<p><b>Beyond the Live Sessions: Utilizing Asynchronous Debriefing for Online Materials</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>Timely feedback plays a critical role in supporting student success in online and distance learning. This session highlights lessons learned from a pharmacy skills course that implemented asynchronous debriefings in both video and written formats. In one semester, feedback was released to the entire cohort after assignment due dates; in the following semester, students immediately received feedback upon their individual submission. The main concern with releasing feedback immediately was whether it might be shared with students who had not yet submitted. A survey was conducted to capture student preferences, patterns of access, and perceptions of academic integrity among their peers. Attendees will gain insight into how feedback timing influences student motivation and participation in asynchronous courses, how design choices shape the effectiveness of debriefing formats, and whether immediate release of feedback is perceived to increase academic dishonesty among students.</p> <p>Dr. Riley Eichenauer (Manchester University) Dr. Samantha Champion (Manchester University) Dr. Kierstan Hanson (Manchester University)</p>
<p>Location: WALB 114</p> <p>Session: 2-D</p>	<p><b>Cultivating Calm in Crisis: de-escalation techniques for real world situations</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>This session looks at identifying signs of anxiety and defensive behaviors in others and how to react in a supportive way to these behaviors. Part of the presentation involves reflecting on our own emotions during times when others are in the defensive stage and finding ways to separate our emotions from the situation. We will also discuss proactive strategies that can potentially prevent crisis situations from happening or escalating. Finally, we will discuss how to rebuild a relationship and re-establish trust after a crisis situation.</p> <p>Chelsea Superczynski (Trine University)</p>
<p>Location: WALB 222</p> <p>Session: 2-E</p>	<p><b>Building a Growth Mindset via Writing and Continuous Revision</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>Continuous revision policies provide sizable benefits to students ranging from increased student confidence in their work and giving them an opportunity to better see how they have developed as writers throughout their semester of learning. Ultimately, such a policy can help students develop a growth mindset, which encourages them to view intelligence as malleable and challenging work as an opportunity to learn and grow.</p>

	<p>This presentation is the result of a semester-long observation of two sections of a basic writing class at a regional campus of a midsize university. As such, it is particularly applicable for other similarly situated institutions. While this study specifically pertained to the teaching of basic writing, the policy can be adapted to other disciplines. As many disciplines involve some written component, such a policy can help students develop a growth mindset in classes that otherwise may have had limited opportunities to do so. I will also discuss ways to structure the policy to try and minimize the amount of extra effort that instructors need in order to review their students’ previously-graded work.</p> <p>Dr. A.J. Rivera (Indiana University Fort Wayne)</p>
<p>Location: WALB CLASSIC BALLROOM</p> <p>Session: 2-F</p>	<p><b>Making Alternative Grading Work for Your Students and for You – Roundtable Session</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>Traditional grading schemes can sometimes be opaque, stressful, imprecise, and demotivating to students and instructors alike. When implemented thoughtfully, alternative grading schemes offer ways for instructors to help students to meet learning goals with greater transparency and less stress. In this session, the facilitators will briefly introduce the Four Pillars of Alternative Grading (clearly defined standards, helpful feedback, marks indicate progress, and reassessment without penalty) and summarize some ways that they have implemented alternative grading in their own courses. Together, facilitators and participants will consider the following discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do students stay motivated without a “traditional” grade?</li> <li>• What course contexts lend themselves well to alternative grading? What contexts might not?</li> <li>• What successes have you encountered when implementing alternative grading schemes?</li> <li>• What challenges have you encountered when implementing alternative grading schemes?</li> <li>• What advice do you have for an instructor who is considering an alternative grading scheme?</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Kathy Davis (Manchester University) Dr. Kyle Watson (Manchester University) Dr. Kelsey-Jo Kessie (Manchester University)</p>

## 1:30 – 2:15 PM | SESSION 3

<p>Location: WALB 21</p> <p>Session: 3-A</p>	<p><b>Building Interactive Classroom Tools for Any Course with ChatGPT</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>This session introduces the idea of vibe coding—using natural conversation with ChatGPT to create interactive classroom tools without any programming background. Instead of writing code, instructors simply describe the purpose or “vibe” of the activity, and ChatGPT generates fully functional Google Apps Script–based web tools using simple HTML and script files within minutes. The approach applies to all disciplines, from engineering and business to the humanities. The session will highlight several successful examples, including design project selectors, concept evaluation tools, and peer evaluation apps that promote collaboration and engagement. A live demo will also be conducted where a new tool will be created on the spot based on an audience request, showing how easily ideas can be transformed into customized, interactive classroom applications. Participants will leave with practical strategies and confidence to use ChatGPT to design their own teaching tools.</p> <p>Dr. Gurudutt Chandrashekar (Trine University)</p>
<p>Location: WALB 222</p> <p>Session: 3-B</p>	<p><b>Learning Needs a Witness</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>You remember the teacher who believed in you before you believed in yourself. The mentor who noticed when you were struggling—not with content, but with belonging. The guide who sat with you in confusion without rushing to fix it. They didn't just deliver information; they witnessed your becoming.</p> <p>This interactive session reclaims the profound, irreplaceable work of human educators in an age of algorithmic optimization. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy and learning science research, we'll explore what it means to be a witness to learning: creating psychological safety that allows risk-taking, communicating belief that shapes identity, sustaining presence through struggle, and recognizing growth as part of someone's larger story.</p> <p>Through case studies and collaborative reflection, participants will distinguish between feedback and validation, between personalization and being known, between teaching content and forming learning identities. Yes, AI can tutor and assess—but learning requires something AI cannot provide: a human who sees you, believes in you, and refuses to let you disappear.</p> <p>Dr. Michelle Blank (Goshen College)</p>

<p>Location: WALB G08</p> <p>Session: 3-C</p>	<p><b>From Lecture to Learning: Developing and Evaluating a Student-Centered Curriculum</b></p> <p>Abstract:</p> <p>This presentation describes the design, implementation, and evaluation of a student-centered curriculum within a newly developed Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) program. Grounded in constructivist and active learning theories and supported by faculty development workshops, the initiative replaced traditional lecture-based instruction with evidence-based methods. Five approaches have been trialed, including flipped learning, peer teaching, case-based learning, peer teaching, and project-based learning. The process involved structured professional development, iterative faculty reflection, and action research to evaluate both faculty engagement and student response. Early findings suggest improved faculty confidence in implementing student-centered methods and greater student engagement in course activities. The session will include a discussion of implementation challenges, lessons learned, barriers and solutions, and strategies for integrating continuous program evaluation and data collection to ensure ongoing improvement. Attendees will participate in an interactive activity designed to help them apply evaluation strategies to their own programs. The model presented is adaptable across disciplines and institutional contexts, seeking to foster deeper learning and student engagement.</p> <p>Dr. Beth O'Rourke (Trine University) Dr. Brenda Prosser (Trine University)</p>
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