

From: NCE Dean
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Subject: NCE Winter Quarterly Newsletter: Updates from Our Community



**NATIONAL LOUIS
UNIVERSITY**
National College of Education™

NCE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Winter 2026



Dean's Letter

Dear National College of Education Community,

Happy New Year and welcome to the winter quarter! As we begin the year, I hope you are feeling energized and inspired by the opportunities ahead. The start of the winter quarter offers a meaningful opportunity to reflect on our shared successes and look forward to the work we will continue to do together in service of our students, partners, and communities.

Despite inclement weather, it was heartening to see so many adjunct faculty join us for our recent Adjunct Connections event. Their commitment to professional growth was evident during sessions focused on artificial intelligence and student engagement, as well as in program meetings that created space for connection and collaboration. These moments of coming together, even under challenging circumstances, reinforce the strength of our NCE community.

I am also excited to share the continued growth of the AI Innovations Badge Series. In addition to the original Teaching & Learning badge, the series now includes badges in Student Agency and Educational Leadership. These offerings provide targeted learning for PK–12 educators, pre-service teachers, and educational leaders, with a focus on practical classroom use, responsible student engagement with AI, and informed leadership decision-making.

Our partnerships with schools throughout the region remain central to everything we do. The challenges and breakthroughs happening in real classrooms continue to shape our priorities and keep us grounded in what matters most. We remain committed to listening, learning, and aligning our efforts to support the incredible educators serving students every day.

Thank you for being part of this journey and for the important work you do every day. I look forward to all we will accomplish together as we continue this important work in the months ahead.

Warmly,

Georgina Kwikwa

Dean, National College of Education

What's New

NLU Hosts the IATE Conference



The NLU Lisle Campus hosted the [Illinois Association of Teacher Educators \(IATE\) Fall Conference](#), welcoming educators from across the state. **Dean Theard-Griggs** opened the conference, followed by updates from Illinois State Superintendent **Dr. Tony Sanders** and a keynote address by **Dr. Pam Jessee** on data quality in faculty-developed assessments. More than 16 NCE faculty and colleagues presented sessions aligned with the conference theme, *Education and Educator Preparation: Shaping the Future*.

Thought Leadership

Publications

Associate Professor Todd Price co-edited the book [Public Spaces, Politics, and Policy: Historical Entanglements with Irrational Momentism](#).

Associate Professor **Angela Elkordy** published the book chapter "[Co-Creating With AI: Augmenting, Enhancing, and Elevating Instructional Design](#)" in *Foundations and Frameworks for AI in Education*.

NCE faculty published articles in the Fall 2025 *Illinois Reading Council Journal*. **Sophie Degener**, Dr. Adelfio Garcia (Alum), and Dr. Ivy Sitkoski (Adjunct Alum) published "[Professional Development: Keeping Literacy Instruction Relevant and Meaningful](#)" and Professor **Kristin Lems** published "[A Warm wELLcome for Language Learners: Visual Literacy, English Learners, and the 'Slider.'](#)"

Associate Professor **Colleen Hamilton** published the book chapter "[Borderlands Identities and Translanguaging Stance in Language Teacher Education](#)" in *Decolonising Language Teacher Education: Voices from the Global North and Global South*.

Assistant Professor **Mary Quest** published the article "[Teaching Presence in Online Discussions: Implications for Design](#)" in the *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Dr. Quest also published the article "[Engaging Adult Learners: Centering Equity from Research to Practice](#)" in the *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*.

Associate Professor **Sadia Warsi** published the article "[Integrating Muslim Representation in Children's Literature for Special Education: A Critical Literacy Approach](#)" in *Critical Questions in Education*.

Associate Professor **Sadia Warsi** and Professor **Seema Imam** published the article "[Enhancing Equity in Special Education: Integrating Cultural Responsiveness Through Universal Design for Learning](#)" in the *Special Educator e-Journal* of the National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASSET) (September 2025).

Associate Professor **Tracee Farmer** published two peer-reviewed articles in the *Journal of Reading Recovery*: "[Improvement Science at Work: Strengthening Teaching Decisions with the Record of Literacy Processing](#)" and "[Early Literacy Without Exclusion: Making the Case for Multilingual Students in Reading Recovery](#)."

The Fall 2025 issue of NLU's peer-reviewed journal, [Inquiry in Education \(i.e.\)](#) was published. It features the editorial "Struggle and Generosity" by Dr. **Elizabeth Minor**, Director of Educational Leadership Studies.

NCE Reading faculty presented at the Fall 2025 [National Council of Teachers of English \(NCTE\) Convention](#) in Denver, Colorado.

- “Dream Boldly: Transforming Literacy Education by Confronting the Racist and Exclusionary History of Literacy in the United States.” **Sophie Degener**
- “Dreaming Boldly: Using Immigration Literature in K-8 Classrooms” co-presented by **Ruth Quiroa**
- “Dreaming About a Green Earth: Discussing Climate Crisis with *Global*, a Graphic Novel” Poster co-presented by **Ruth Quiroa**

Assistant Professor **Tim Dohrer** co-presented research on instructional coaching at two conferences, including findings from a study of instructional coaches and administrators at the [Teaching Leading Coaching Conference](#) in Phoenix, AZ, and the workshop “Coaching and Wellness” at the [Illinois Council of Instructional Coaching Annual Conference](#) in Naperville, IL.

Associate Professor **Carla Sparks** was an invited presenter and moderator at OLC Accelerate, hosted by the [Online Learning Consortium](#), in Orlando, FL, where she presented “From Blackboard to Screen: Unlocking Best Practices for Virtual Learning.”

Associate Professor **Mary Hoch** presented “Context Matters – An Examination of How Literacy Clinics Elicit Student Growth” and “Beyond the Words: Bridging Assessment, Instruction, and Equity to Support Comprehension” at the [Literacy Research Association](#) Annual Conference in Las Vegas, NV.

Associate Professor **Renee Gugel** presented “What Teacher Leaders Want You to Know about Professional Development” at the [Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools Raising Student Achievement Conference](#) in Oak Brook, IL.

Associate Professor **Bilge Cerezci** presented “Building Mathematical Mindsets Through Play in the Early Years” at the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC) Annual Conference in Orlando, FL.

Also at NAEYC, Early Childhood Education Professor and Senior Director of Applied Research and Evaluation **Xiaoli Wen** co-presented “Ready to Lead: Empowering New Early Childhood Administrators for Success and Retention.” **Dr. Wen** also co-presented “Building ECEC Program Leaders with Equity at the Heart: From Research to Policy and Practice” at The [BUILD](#) Initiative Conference in Los Angeles, CA.

In the Field

Associate Professor **Gloria McDaniel-Hall** visited first- and second-grade classrooms at the school of one of her graduate students, where she read her book *Payton Finds a Friend* and engaged students in a conversation about friendship, kindness, and listening.

Dr. Stephen Curda, Associate Professor and Special Advisor to the President for Veteran’s Education, participated in a Fulbright Specialist Program at Busitema University in Uganda, Africa, where he engaged in a month-and-a-half collaborative project with the host institution.

NCE Teacher Prep and Enrollment teams, along with Professor **Ayn Keneman**, presented at El Valor Cicero Center’s Professional Development Day to explain Illinois’s new requirement for early childhood teachers to earn a Professional Educator License and to outline National Louis University programs that support teachers in meeting this requirement.

Associate Professor **Bilge Cerezci** is leading *Early Math in Action*, a five-month professional learning workshop series for CPS residents designed to build confidence and practical skills in teaching early childhood mathematics.



In the Media

Lisa Mozer, Executive Director of Field Experience & School Partnerships, authored the NLU Blog article [Mentor Teachers: Paying It Forward, One Conversation at a Time](#), highlighting the vital role of mentor teachers in preparing future educators.

Professor Emeritus **Carlos M. Azcoitia** shared the article [Experiences from My First Trip to Cuba](#), reflecting on his family's departure from Cuba and his first return visit, published in advance for NCE.

Associate Professor **Todd Price**, Co-Editor of [SPACE](#), announced the new issue of this online journal promoting student service-learning and civic engagement, featuring articles by NLU colleagues.

Lisa Stukel, Field Experience and Tutor Placement Specialist, was featured on *Eagle Talk*, NLU's undergraduate student-produced podcast, discussing the role of the Office of Field Experiences and tutoring opportunities for education majors. Listen to the podcast [here](#).



Associate Professor **James Fitzpatrick** was featured in the [Beloit Daily News](#), reflecting on his career in the School District of Beloit and shared insights from his new memoir [The Intersection of Faith and School Leadership](#).

Celebrations

Professor **Seema Imam** received the Lifetime Educator Service Award from the Islamic Schools League of America in recognition of her 20 years of service, including four as chair.

Congratulations to Dr. **Aleli Vazquez** '21 Ed.D., recipient of the Recent Alumni Professional Achievement Award for her outstanding professional impact.

Assistant Professor **Ben Lathrop**'s co-authored English Journal article, *Try This in a Small Town: Climate Change and Critical Media Literacy in a Rural High School*, received a 2025 Paul and Kate Farmer Honorable Mention Award from NCTE.

New Faces



Madeline Pimlott joins National Louis University as an Undergraduate Field Experience Specialist. She earned her BA in Communications from the University of Illinois Chicago and has experience as a writing tutor, camp director, dance instructor, and development team member at Curt's Café, a nonprofit supporting young adults.



Avanti Lalchandani joins National Louis University as an Undergraduate Field Experience Specialist. She brings over ten years of experience in education and community engagement, including roles as Director of Education at Sylvan Learning, early learning instructor at FasTrackKids Enrichment Centre, and library support at Arlington Heights Memorial Library.



Nina Nusbaum joins National Louis University as an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership. She brings nearly 20 years of experience as a teacher, school leader, district director, and university professor. A scholar-practitioner, she has published research on Standards-Based Grading and focuses on equity-centered curriculum, authentic assessment, and developing 21st-century leadership skills.

Dr. Nusbaum is a double alumna of NLU and also holds a Master's in Educational Leadership from Concordia University and a Certificate in School Management and Leadership from Harvard Business School. Her research interests include human-centered leadership, educator wellness, and leading diverse teams.

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