

Hixson-Lied Success Scholar Newsletter

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What is the Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Project? (*TILT Higher Ed.*) Interview with Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes

By Yana Ryjova, Hixson-Lied Success Scholar

Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes is the Coordinator of Instructional Development and Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), and the founder and director of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Project. The goal of this project is to help students understand exactly how they learn, as well as train faculty in transparent teaching methods. From a short interview with Dr. Winkelmes, it was apparent that she had tremendous passion for helping students.

After graduating from Harvard University with her PhD, Dr. Winkelmes became the Associate Director for the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University, where she began to seriously focus on pedagogy. She later worked at campus teaching centers at the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois, where she founded the Transparency Project in 2009-2010.

Q: How long have you been working with students at UNLV?

I've been at UNLV for two and a half years. In addition to the workshops I offer for UNLV students about how to decipher the purposes, tasks and criteria of academic work, I also teach a course about once a year in the History and Art departments: Art and Politics in Renaissance Italy. I'm also fortunate to collaborate with staff from 10 or 11 units across the campus to coordinate UNLV's Instructional Development & Research services. Our goal is to support all members of UNLV's teaching community in using evidence

-based practices to maintain a high quality of teaching and learning experiences at UNLV, and to implement teaching adjustments that incorporate recent research findings about best practices for students' learning.

I'm so thankful to be working at UNLV, where the Transparency in Learning and Teaching Project (*TILT Higher Ed.*) can be a national leader in researching and implementing teaching practices that enhance students' learning. UNLV's student population is one of the most diverse in the country, and it is reflective of what the national population of US college students will be like in another 10-20 years: ethnically and culturally diverse, with increasing numbers of first-generation students, low-income students, and students coming to college from under-performing K-12 schools. When we research and then implement best teaching and learning practices that help UNLV students, we are also modeling what other colleges and universities can do to improve their students' learning experiences now and in the future.

Q: What is the Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Project?

The Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Project (*TILT Higher Ed.*), housed at UNLV, is an award-winning national educational development and research project that trains faculty across the



Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes

(Continued on pg. 2)

Ms. Christina M. Hixson graduated from high school in Clarinda, Iowa and moved to Omaha, Nebraska to attend business school. She later went to work for Mr. Ernst F. Lied, a car dealership owner in Omaha and in 1960 she joined Mr. Lied in Las Vegas, Nevada as his assistant. After Mr. Lied's death in 1980, Ms. Hixson became the sole trustee of the Lied Foundation Trust and turned the Lied Foundation Trust into one of the largest foundations in the state of Nevada at that time. Ms. Hixson has a special understanding of young people who, like her, came from a challenging family background and are willing to work hard.



Mr. Ernst F. Lied was born in Columbus, Ohio and attended the University of Kansas for two years, where he played on the golf team. He ultimately graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1927. Mr. Lied became a Buick dealer in Omaha, Nebraska and later his dealership was ranked third in the country for the number of cars sold. Mr. Lied established his charitable foundation in 1972, and upon his death in 1980 at age 74 nearly his entire estate funded the Lied Foundation Trust. Lied Foundation Trust has enhanced the capabilities of many schools and enriched the quality of many lives!

What is the TILT Higher Ed. Project? (Continued)

United States (and in several other countries) to implement transparent teaching methods that promote college students' success equitably. Last year, the Project partnered with the Association of American Colleges & Universities on a research project that involved 35 faculty and 1800 students at 7 Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI's) across the country. That project identified transparent assignment design as an easily replicable teaching method that produces learning benefits already linked with students' success (Winkelmes, et



al., *Peer Review*, Winter/Spring 2016). Transparency around the purposes, tasks and criteria for academic work demonstrably enhanced the success of students in multiple ways at statistically significant levels, with even greater benefits for first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented college students.

Since that 2014-2015 study, the project's impact on teaching practice and college student learning outcomes has been the subject of scholarly publications as well as news articles – some of them written by UNLV faculty and staff ([listed here under "Publications" and "News": http://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning](#)). A front page feature length article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Berrett, September 21, 2015) drew further attention, and now there are two national networks of education researchers who want to join UNLV's *TILT* Higher Education research team. We hear every week from new potential collaborators and from faculty at other colleges and universities who want to learn about transparent assignment design!

Q: What is the goal of this project for students and faculty?

The overall goal is to improve college learning and teaching experiences for the benefit of students and faculty. To reach that goal, we encourage students and faculty to engage in class-time discussion explicitly about *how* students are learning what they are learning in a course or a class meeting or an assignment, and *why* teachers have chosen to construct the learning experience in particular ways. Specifically, students and faculty can discuss the *purpose* of an assignment or course in a major (what knowledge will students gain from doing an assignment or taking a course, what skills will they practice, and how that knowledge and those skills matter to students' lives in contexts outside the course or the assignment); the tasks involved and how to approach them; and the criteria for success (how can students be sure they are working efficiently and effectively, and do they have multiple, annotated, varied examples of what excellent work looks like).

The *TILT* Higher Ed Project's transparency framework (purpose, task, criteria) is a socially just pedagogical approach.

Some students in the US arrive at college already knowing how to figure out the purposes, tasks and criteria for their academic work – at the level of a single assignment, or a course or a major. But most students don't start college with that kind of knowledge. This leads to serious inequities in students' educational experiences in college. Our federal, state, and academic leaders have done well to provide greater access for more students to higher education. But once students get to college, there are great inequities in their educational experiences. Faculty and instructors, advisors and administrators alike can adopt a transparent framework to clarify the purposes, tasks, and criteria of academic work for *all* students – not just those few whose prior experiences allow them to figure it out on their own. This offers students more equitable opportunities to succeed with their academic work.

Q: How has this project impacted student learning?

At UNLV, students in courses that offer greater transparency report greater confidence in their ability to succeed in school than their peers who have experienced less transparency. Such confidence can lead to greater persistence and higher completion rates (according to the research studies cited below in the journal *Science* and elsewhere). Students in more transparent courses here report a greater mastery of skills that employers (in national employer surveys) value the most – like communication and evaluation skills, and collaborating with others to weigh information from various sources to address complex problems. UNLV faculty who are implementing the transparency framework (including David E. Copeland, Ed Jorgensen, Alison Sloat, Anna Smedley, Peter Pizor, Katharine Johnson, and Sharon Jalene) published an article about the benefits they have noticed: higher quality of students' work, higher quality of

TILT Higher Ed
Transparency in Learning and Teaching

their own teaching, fewer last-minute questions from students, and fewer disagreement about grades (“[Benefits \(some unexpected\) of Transparent Assignment Design](#)” <http://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning>).

Beyond UNLV, in the 2014-2015 national study, the impact on students' learning is exciting, too. Students who received more transparency reported gains in three areas that are important predictors of students' success: *academic confidence, sense of belonging, and awareness that they are mastering the skills that employers value most when hiring*. While the benefits for all students in the aggregate who received more transparency were statistically significant, the benefits for first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students were greater, with a medium-to-large sized magnitude of effect. Important studies have already connected academic confidence and sense of belonging with students' greater persistence and higher grades ([Walton and Cohen 2011](#), [Aronson et al 2001](#), [Painesku et al 2015](#))

What is the TILT Higher Ed. Project? (Continued)

Q: What is your favorite part of your work?

I love working with colleagues who are students and faculty and staff in this great educational community at UNLV. These colleagues are motivated, interesting, innovative collaborators. I enjoy traveling to campuses around the country, too, to share and observe how our best transparent teaching practices at UNLV can be helpful in other contexts. It's rewarding to see how our UNLV contributions around researching and implementing transparent teaching practices can benefit students' learning experiences across the US.

Q: Do you have any advice for UNLV students?

Yes! If you have a good understanding of the purposes, tasks, and criteria for your academic work *before* you start working on an assignment or project, your success will be significantly greater than if you aren't sure about the purpose, task, or criteria of success for your work. We teachers usually have very good

reasons for how we design your class activities or labs, take-home projects or assignments. Help us make those reasons transparently clear to you! We would prefer that you spend your time doing what we intended – instead of aimlessly guessing about how you should proceed, or wondering what important academic and professional skills you are practicing by doing our assignments. When you can focus your working time effectively, the quality of your work will be higher and we will know that we taught you well. Please use the Transparent Assignment Template, which can be found at https://www.unlv.edu/sites/default/files/page_files/27/Transparent-Assgt-Template.pdf, to help you frame good questions for your teachers about the purposes, tasks, and criteria for your academic work.

Source: (M. Winkelmes, Personal Communication, February, 2015).



(<http://www.cogic.org/iyd/2015/02/20/2015-iyd-scholarship/>)

What's Going on with CSUN?

By Joel Jimenez Vargas, Hixson-Lied Success Scholar

If you are a UNLV student and have been around campus for some time, there is a very high chance that you have heard something about CSUN. There are events organized by CSUN, scholarships offered through CSUN, and lots of other things organized by them, but who are they and why do we always hear about them? Well, CSUN stands for Consolidated Students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. They are the student government at UNLV, representing thousands of students that attend the university.

To have a better understanding of what CSUN does and who they are, I decided to contact someone who has been involved with the student government. I reached out to Vladislav Zhitny, a senator for the College of Science from 2012 to 2014 and the Student Body Senate President for the 2014-15 school year. To begin our conversation, Vladislav gave me an overall background of the student government; from the time it was founded to where it is now. One of the things that I found very interesting is the way in which the student government is funded. Vladislav explained to me how "all students pay about \$1.97 per credit that

UNLV CSUN
STUDENT GOVERNMENT

goes to CSUN" and all that money added up gives CSUN about a "1.5 million dollar annual budget." This money is used for a vast variety of things, including events and scholarships.

CSUN is one of the major contributors to most of the events that happen on campus. From the "Party in the Pida" to concerts, CSUN contributes in some part to those events. When I asked Vlad what are some of the things that CSUN does, he immediately said, "help student organizations and bring events to campus." All student organizations need assistance, and the student government is a significant part of that assistance. They help student organizations "recruit members, provide music, food, and

many other things." One of the biggest events CSUN has contributed in was the Victoria's Secret Pink concert with Iggy Azalea. Although the event was organized by UNLV and Victoria Secret, CSUN was a vital part of the advertisement process that helped UNLV win the concert. The student government is a big part of most of the events that happen on campus, and as Vladislav said, "without them life wouldn't be as interesting on campus."

Scholarships are another of the major resources CSUN provides. Every year, the student government distributes \$200,000 in scholarships and grants. Vladislav was the Chairman of the Scholarships Committee and he shared some very interesting insight. When he was in office, "only 60 applications" were submitted for the \$200,000 worth of scholarships; lots of money went to waste because of the lack of student interest. However, during his time in office and with the help of many members of CSUN, they were able to increase that number to "about 600 students applying to the



(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAIIDsYd0TU>)

What's Going on with CSUN? (Continued)

scholarships.” This was a major accomplishment as more students are aware of the resources available to them and using them to help them afford their way through college.

To end our conversation, Vladislav told me a little bit about his experience with CSUN. “Being in student government is a really good life experience,” Vladislav said. “Being part of CSUN teaches you many life skills. It teaches you how to network, and it teaches you how to negotiate to get the best possible outcome.” If a student is interested in being part of CSUN, Vladislav

shared that the best way to get started is to “talk to your senator or the Student Body President” as they can give you a broad overview of how it works and begin to introduce you to the student government. CSUN offices are located on the third floor of the Student Union, and next time you participate in an event or see something different on campus, remember that CSUN was most likely part of it.

Source: (V. Zhitny, Personal Communication, February, 2015).

Student Engagement through Rebel Spirit

By Jeanne Soriano, Hixson-Lied Success Scholar

Getting involved can be as easy as attending campus sport events! The University of Nevada, Las Vegas offers a variety of athletic programs for students. This means various, on-going sporting events throughout the school year. For this spring semester, UNLV has many home games students can attend. The sports active this semester include:

- Men's Golf
- Men's Basketball
- Men's Tennis
- Women's Golf
- Women's Basketball
- Women's Tennis
- Women's Track
- Softball
- Swimming & Diving

Attending UNLV's sporting games is not only fun and engaging, but it also allows students to support fellow schoolmates. On top of that, students participate in generating school spirit which is just as involving as being part of a club. School spirit is important to universities such as UNLV. It allows students to engage and learn UNLV's sport traditions.



I have attended numerous sporting events this school year. My first two years at UNLV, I never even thought about going to sport events because I thought they would be boring since I don't watch sports. When I decided to attend a volleyball game last fall for extra credit, I realized how much fun and engaging sport events were. I automatically had a sense of school spirit and what it felt like to truly support my fellow schoolmates.

UNLV athletics is a major part of our university and students should attend at least one game before they graduate. It is the easiest, fun, *and* cheapest way for students to get involved at school regardless of how busy they are. UNLV has such a large variety of sport events that students can choose to attend for *free*. Students wanting to attend big games, such as basketball, should expect a lot of noise and large crowds. For any game, big or small, students should still expect lots of school spirit from family members, other students, and staff that attend. Regardless of the sport, students should expect an enjoyable, fulfilling, and truly engaging experience.



- For information about UNLV's athletic program and sporting events, please visit www.unlvrebels.com
- For ticketing information, please visit www.unlvtickets.com/athletics.

Interview with Academic Success Coach Jess Soria

By Victoria Mitchell, Hixson-Lied Success Scholar

Jessica Soria comes to UNLV with an extensive educational background and a range of experiences that she uses to offer advice to the students that she coaches. An interview with Jess regarding her position as a coach is highlighted below.



Jess Soria, ASC Coach

Q: Where is the Coaching Spot located?

The Coaching Spot is located on the second floor of SSC-A room 254. It is right next to the Women's Center. The seating is similar to that of a casual coffee-shop, which makes students feel comfortable. This design takes away the pressure that students may experience in a setting where the coach is on one side of a long desk and the student is on the other. If topics do get too personal for this open atmosphere, there is a private room available for use in the coaching spot. If topics do get too personal for this open atmosphere, there is a private room available for use in the coaching spot.

Q: What does your role as a coach entail?

We know what coaches do, but Jess has a special take on the role of a coach. She really likes to use the first semester to help students navigate campus, learn best practices for study skills, time management, note taking, and so on. She likes to use the second semester to be reflective on what works best for each student. She enjoys hearing her students' personal reflections about what worked last semester and what didn't. Reflection is vital to coaching, otherwise students would just be getting information overload without ever being able to analyze what is truly working for them.

Q: What kind of topics can a student expect to cover during an appointment?

Typical topics covered in a coaching appointment include time management, study skills, overcoming bad habits such as procrastination, high school to college transitions and differences, stress management including not only academic, but also personal stressors. The coaches know that life still happens while you are in college, and it is important to find a way to deal with and manage those situations. Jess makes sure to participate in follow up discussions with her students on how things are going for them. She likes to call what she does "college life" coaching, because she helps students balance being a college student with the stressors they face in daily life.

Q: How can students use/benefit from coaching?

What makes coaching different is that the coaches are all highly-trained graduate students, who have gone through and are going through many of the same things their students are experiencing now. Jess likes to make sure that what she is discussing with a student makes sense to them. She always likes to get their opinions on whether they think a worksheet will work or drawing out a weekly schedule is beneficial. She is open to her students voicing their opinion and saying "No" if they don't like something. She does not want to send her student's home with tasks that they will not find useful. Jess really values the one-on-one interaction she has with students and she enjoys finding a way to say things in a way that her students will understand. For example, when working with students who enjoy playing sports, she uses sports analogies to explain academic concepts. Her students find this dialogue helpful since they can understand and relate to what Jess is sharing.

Q: How can students make an appointment? What are the hours for drop-ins?

Students who were admitted via alternative admission criteria, as well as Hixson-Lied Success Scholars, are assigned a coach at the beginning of each fall semester. Students who do not have a coach already and would like one are welcome to fill out the online coach request form. Students can call the coaching spot or email their coach to make an appointment. Drop in hours are from 9am to 2pm on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Q: Which program are you currently in? Which schools did you attend before this? Major/degree?

Jess received her Bachelors in Communication, with a minor in Peace Studies from the University of La Verne, located just outside of Los Angeles. She went on to get a Masters in Negotiation Conflict Resolution and Peace Building from California State University, Dominguez Hills. After graduating from CSUDH, Jess worked as a mediator for a few years, where she worked mainly on divorce settlements. She realized that was not a good fit for her and decided to spend a few months with her family in Spain pursuing other opportunities. When she was ready to come back to the states she moved to New York to attend Columbia University where she earned her second Masters in International Education Development. Currently, Jess is working on her PhD in Cultural Studies, Multicultural and International Education or CSMIE, with an emphasis in International Education. Her research interests include the impact of dual language learning and comparative, international education.

Q: What is one fun fact about you?

Jess has a dog named Mumbai, who is always excited to see her when she comes home from a day full of coaching and classes. Jess also enjoys running. You can often find her training for her next marathon on the weekends. She strongly advises that everyone run a marathon at some point. She believes that it is one of the biggest feelings of accomplishment you will ever have.

Campus Resource: The Writing Center

By *Bridget Manguiat, Hixson-Lied Success Scholar*

For most students, research papers, and essays have been assigned since back in their younger days in middle school. While some students find no difficulty in finding the words to express their ideas, there are some that cannot help but struggle to express what they wish to convey. Not everyone can be skilled in writing composition; that is to be expected. There is nothing wrong with that—nothing whatsoever. Even in college, in which we are constantly challenged with papers to work on, words can be a frustrating obstacle. So where should you go when you find yourself at a writer's block? Who to go to when you find yourself needing the extra help in producing a great paper? That's what the Writing Center is here for.

The Writing Center, as the name implies, is a place where students can go to in order to brainstorm ideas and even organize your papers. While, they will not edit any of your papers, they do help students work through and improve their writing. When it comes to writing papers, sometimes you will have the topic engraved into your head and know what you wish to write about but will have no idea how to start. On top of not knowing how to take that first step in writing the paper, the struggle might simply be in organizing your own thoughts. At times, just knowing exactly what you wish to discuss in your paper is the hardest part. Talking to someone allows a student to realize just how they want to approach their papers. The staff at the Writing Center provides advice and ideas that contribute to the structure of the paper in question.



(<http://www.reviewjournal.com/life/technology/here-s-why-using-pen-paper-better-your-memory-typing>)

Not only do they help with any papers that students find themselves struggling with, they can also help with building an impressive resume. Being in college, getting a job might be an option many students find themselves considering. However, sometimes figuring out how to create a resume is equally as difficult as writing a paper. Not every high school offered information on how to draft one so there are times a student, without the aid of another, does not know how to format the best version of their resume. Luckily, the Writing Center can help.

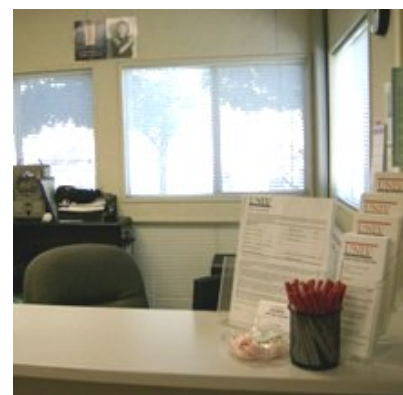
Now, the best part of the Writing Center is that their aid is completely free of charge! It's a great resource to have being in college. Walk-ins are available; however, the best way to secure a consultant is to make an appointment by calling. They can be reached at 702-895-3908. If a student has questions about something while they happen to be on campus, they can always stop by to see if



there are any consultants available. They are located at the Central Desert Complex in Building 3. These consultants spend about 45 minutes with a student to work through their papers together.

When a student visits a consultant, they should bring two hard copies of their paper—one for themselves to look over and the other for the consultant. This way, there will not be any problems in following the paper. If a student thinks they are going to need help from the Writing Center, they are recommended to consider their aid well ahead of the expected due date of the assignment because one session may not be enough time to get the paper done in time for submission. The Writing Center is open and consultants are available from 8am – 5pm Monday through Friday and 12pm-6pm on Sundays. They are closed on Saturdays.

There are many resources available for students to utilize in order to make the best paper and the Writing Center is definitely one of them. Writing is a big part of school curriculums. It would be a waste to not use that resource to help bring out the potential in your work. They most certainly help improve student's skills in writing. Even if writing just is not your forte, the aid they provide is extremely useful. Even if you find yourself an excellent writer, but suddenly hit writer's block, give the Writing Center a visit—you might just find the breakthrough you needed to get through that stressful assignment.



Brainfuse: Free Resource for UNLV Students!

By Kelly Lutzker, Hixson-Lied Success Scholar

Brainfuse is an online interactive learning resource for students in need of some academic help. It provides access to live tutors and chat rooms, writing labs, skill-building exercises, study tips and tricks, and opportunities to master both academic and writing skills. It is essentially an easily accessible all-in-one service with most subjects available 24/7 dedicated to helping students learn, master skills, and grow. Brainfuse is directly accessible through Webcampus. As long as you have an internet connection and access to your Webcampus homepage, you are able to access Brainfuse. All of the resources available on Brainfuse are clearly marked on the website with brightly colored tabs.

There are a variety of different resources available, ranging from study help and virtual study rooms to writing labs where you can upload an essay or some other form of writing assignment and have it analyzed and critiqued for future editing. You can schedule virtual meet ups between you and other Brainfuse users to discuss classes, projects, assignments, and study for tests without having the hassle of meeting up in person. There is also an expert help feature, where you can be tutored by someone who has expertise in the subject or just send in questions to be answered. There is also a 24/7 math tutor available to help students study before exams.

This site would be beneficial for a variety of people, particularly visual learners because there are a lot of visual resources available. Videos, flashcards, and notes are the most prevalent forms of materials available on the site. Auditory learners and physical learners can still experience the site and reap its benefits but they may take longer to learn than visual learners.

One of the most useful resources on Brainfuse would have to be the Learning Library. The Learning Library contains thousands of tests, quizzes, and lessons for a variety of different subjects to aid in mastering the concepts. There are components for help with high school equivalency tests, college placement tests, career preparation resources, and various adult learner resources. This resource is helpful to students who haven't even started college yet.



Academic Success Center

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*All photos used are original, can be found at unlv.edu or have references indicated