THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
OFFICE OF INNOVATION IN GENERAL EDUCATION

2025 SPOTLIGHT ON
FACULTY INNOVATION
IN GENERAL EDUCATION

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MICHAEL STARKEY

PSY 103
Toward Self-Understanding

College of Health Sciences

In a world that often feels outwardly focused, it can be easy to overlook the value of introspection. Yet, personal growth starts with understanding oneself. This is the underlying premise Professor Michael Starkey uses to guide students in PSY 103: *Toward Self-Understanding*. In this course he invites students to embark on a journey of self-exploration and psychological discovery. Whether students are curious about human behavior or simply seeking a deeper understanding of who they are, this course is a powerful opportunity for self-reflection. What sets PSY 103 apart is its highly personal, reflective approach. Within the context of psychological theories, students examine topics like personality, coping, and stress. Students complete two projects that require them to apply course concept to their own lives. Whether they are experimenting with meditation and therapy or signing out of social media and putting their phones down, these reflective exercises help students develop skills such as resilience and mindfulness. Professor Starkey sees this course as an opportunity to combine his practitioner and instructor knowledge to create a valuable learning experience for the class. He strives to create a supportive space where students can challenge limiting beliefs and gain confidence. Professor Starkey explains, "I want students to know they are uniquely human, and this comes with so many challenges but also so much potential and joy, and that each one has value." By the end of the course, students gain a more integrated understanding of who they are and how to use this knowledge to improve their personal and professional lives. This course offers a unique blend of self-exploration and scientific inquiry, making it accessible to anyone eager to understand themselves better and gain insight into human behavior.

DARKO LJUBIC

EGR 105
Foundations of Engineering

College of Engineering

EGR 105: *Foundations of Engineering* is where aspiring engineers begin their journey. For Professor Darko Ljubic, teaching this gateway course is an opportunity to explain to students that engineering isn't just about equations and machines, but about designing solutions that can change lives. EGR 105 is a dynamic launchpad that introduces students to the core principles of engineering design, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. The primary goal of this course is to provide students with a broad overview of engineering as a profession while equipping them with essential academic and practical skills. Course objectives include introducing the engineering design process, developing proficiency in technical communication, enhancing collaboration skills, and building familiarity with statistical analysis and engineering software. Students work in teams on open-ended problem sets and projects where communication and creative thinking are just as important as technical skill. This collaborative approach mirrors what they will face in their internships and careers. The course highlight is the engineering design presentation. Working in groups to identify a new product or a social problem they want to address, students identify a real-world issue and create a functional solution –often with sustainability, accessibility, or efficiency in mind. According to Professor Ljubic, the best part of teaching EGR 105 is "the opportunity to work with students and shape their educational experience from day one. I grow as a teacher when I can help students shift their perceptions and see that we are partners in this process." EGR 105 is an essential steppingstone that shapes the mindset and skills of future engineers. Through a blend of theory, application, and teamwork, students leave this course better prepared to tackle the challenges of their academic journey and, ultimately, the engineering profession.

ASHLEY BUCHANAN
JEFFREY BRATBERG

PHP 336GH
Exploring Interdisciplinary Healthcare Solutions for Opioid Use Disorder

College of Pharmacy

In a time when opioid use disorder (OUD) continues to devastate communities, the need for innovative, compassionate, and collaborative healthcare responses has never been greater. Enter PHP 336GH: *Exploring Interdisciplinary Healthcare Solutions for Opioid Use Disorder* — a transformative course designed by Professors Ashley Buchanan and Jeffrey Bratberg that challenges students to think beyond traditional healthcare models and step into the real-world complexities of addiction, treatment, and recovery. Rooted in an interdisciplinary framework, this course draws from the medical, pharmacy, public health, and public policy literature to explore how different sectors can come together to address OUD holistically. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, PHP 336GH emphasizes collaborative problem-solving. Through a semester long group project, students are tasked with designing interventions that address issues related to health disparities, stigma, and health policy issues. Team-driven projects have included such topics as developing a recovery friendly workplace, expanding vending machine access, and establishing a mobile healthcare recovery initiative. Professor Bratberg explains, "these projects are always thought-provoking and pique my curiosity. The questions students spark in me through their research are awesome. They become my think tank." PHP 336GH doesn't just teach students about the problem. It empowers them to be part of the solution. By fostering empathy, creativity, and collaboration, this course helps students understand that policy must be driven by data focused on identifying and removing stigma. For Professor Buchanan, the most rewarding part of the course is "helping students to think critically about the importance of data and science in making decisions. Ultimately, we hope our students will be conscious scientists who don't give up."

TRAVIS WILLIAMS

ENG 333
The Sensuous Sentence: Grammar for Grammarphobes

College of Arts and Sciences

What do you get when you weave together theories of English style and grammar, Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, rigorous debate, and Professor Travis Williams? The answer is one of the most intriguing, quintessential, and best titled courses on campus –ENG 333: *The Sensuous Sentence: Grammar for Grammarphobes*. Open to all majors, this reading intensive course explores the mechanisms of grammar from a stylistic perspective. Throughout the semester, students unpack how grammar affects the way people speak and write, and grapple with the impact grammar has on social issues such as gender identity, race, and economic class. Whether they are exploring the social impact of vocal fry and upspeak on young women's identity development, or how social constructs determine if vernaculars like African American English are celebrated or denied, students are teasing out the role grammar plays in the social construction of difference and the impact it has on issues of prejudice and privilege. Through a series of online debates referred to as "Provocateurs and Disputants", students engage in discussions designed to encourage deep thinking about their own interpretations of the assigned texts. Participation counts for a significant portion of the course grade and Professor Williams underscores how valuable this structure is, not only in exploring issues of grammar, but in developing students' ability to create relevant arguments, recognize how their lived experience shapes perspectives, and offer peer critique that is both robust and respectful. For Professor Williams, this course is "a continued source of inspiration, introducing students to my life's passion. I am very lucky –literally everything I am teaching is something I greatly enjoy. It is a pleasure opening students' eyes to some version of what I love and appreciate."