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Amanda Rugenski is a Senior Lecturer, undergraduate coordinator, and graduate faculty member at the Odum School of Ecology. Her work focuses on bridging the gap between ecological principles and real-world application. She teaches a range of courses, including general and tropical ecology, systems thinking for sustainability, ecological basis for environmental issues, capstone and field-based courses, and science communication. In addition to teaching, she contributes to curriculum development. She completed the Active Learning Summer Institute (ALSI) in 2022 and the CRDx program in Spring 2025 and has implemented active-learning approaches across both small and large enrollment courses for majors and non-majors.

I AM EXCITED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT...

How intentional course design with transparency, grounded in backward design can transform student engagement and foster community across diverse classroom contexts.

MOST USED ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Think-Pair-Share, bridges, Jigsaw, concept maps, TILT

BIGGEST SURPRISE IN YOUR COURSE REDESIGN

Having intentional activities. I was surprised by how many “activities” I had that were not supported by intentional AL course design.

GREATEST TRIUMPH IN ACTIVE LEARNING & COURSE REDESIGN

Student feedback went from 80% pace of course too fast with busy work to 86% course pace just write and activities supported critical thinking and students genuinely engaged.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Transparency is essential and small changes can have a huge impact. Be open to trying new things and open to having to revise them and let some go. Its ok to say, “well that didn’t work- lets rethink for next time” and reach out to the AL community for support and to share successes.

MOST MEANINGFUL ACTIVE LEARNING MEMORY

Mapping my course learning outcomes and with my assessment plan and activities. This really made me reflect on what I truly wanted students to learn and how each component of my course should support these goals (less truly is more), while also making alignment transparent to students. After this activity I had a more aligned, transparent and effect course structure. Additionally, setting classroom norms and the day 1 activity has been a game changer for me and mv students.

ADVICE FOR OVERCOMING ROADBLOCKS

Give yourself grace and time to reflect on what’s working and what isn’t, effective change is an iterative process. Using TILT and reminding yourself to be transparent about the purpose, task, and assessment for each activity increases student engagement and can help you recenter your approach.