

Compassion at the Heart of Informing & Reforming Educational Structures and Practices

Stream Organizers

Jen Cherneski, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
Rhonda Dever, Thompson Rivers University
Amanda Peticca-Harris, Grenoble Ecole de Management
Angela Owens-Schill, Utah Valley University

Compassion in higher education is gaining traction. Broadly, compassion refers to an interpersonal process in which individuals observe someone's suffering, experience empathic feelings, and then act to alleviate their suffering (Dutton et al., 2014; Kanov et al., 2004). It is a diffuse concept closely related to empathy, understanding and sharing the internal states of others (Chen et al., 2023; Singer et al., 2006) and self-compassion, offering kindness and understanding to oneself during moments of perceived inadequacy, disappointment, or overall distress (Neff, 2015; Yarnell et al., 2018). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing interest to integrate compassion in our teaching practices and demonstrate our own compassion as empathetic educators, not only during crises, but also in everyday educational contexts, with the aim of improving the overall well-being of students and educators alike (Bahn et al., 2020; Tan, 2022).

Yet, while compassion may be a critical element in educational reform through meaningful interactions, rooted in purposeful and trusting relationships (Andrew et al., 2023), less remains known about the critical specificities as to how this might unfold: *what role compassion can play, who is implicated in compassionate exchanges, and what tensions within the context of academic structures in the Global North might compassion attempt to rattle*. In this stream, we propose that compassion in higher education may be used as a vital strategy to dismantle systemic marginalization and discrimination related to gender, race, clan, and class, among other intersectional characteristics (Benschop & Brouns, 2003; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Harrison & Clarke, 2022). We are interested in submissions that create space for new knowledge about the role of compassion in higher education. We invite texts, accounts, alternative narratives, autobiographies, collective accounts, and other forms of contemplation that draw from various multifaceted approaches. Work submitted to this stream may encompass a wide range of topics, including but not limited to the following themes:

- How do we create compassionate learning environments as higher education educators in our teaching practices and approaches?
- What is the role of emotion in our educational encounters?
- What have crises taught us about compassion and how might this be harnessed for the every-day?
- What role do social expectations play in the expression or suppression of compassion?
- What are gendered, racialized, and intersectional expressions of compassion?

- How might compassion be conceptually ‘opened up’ and decolonized to incorporate non-Eurocentric considerations and ideations, such as Indigenous perspectives?
- How might we safeguard against ‘carewashing’ in our compassionate pedagogy?

Abstracts of approximately 500 words (excluding references) must be submitted to the GWO 2024 submission system hosted by FourWaves. The link is available on the [GWO conference 2024](#) website as of November 6th, 2023. No independent abstract submissions (i.e., an abstract submitted to someone’s personal email) will be considered for acceptance or presentation at the conference. Stream convenors will be conducting a blind review process and redirecting abstracts to the GWO organizing committee for consideration in the open stream if and when appropriate. The abstract itself should then not have any author details to ensure this blind review process. Abstract formatting specifics are available in the submission system. Abstracts are due by December 22nd, 2023, with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream convenors by the end of January 2024. No extensions to this deadline will be possible as some participants will need time and justification documents to secure visas to attend the conference onsite.

For stream inquiries, please contact Jen Cherneski at jennifec@nait.ca

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