# Reflective interaction builds students' educational resilience: 'Steeling' inspiration from high impact practices.



This study examines how reflective interaction supports student resilience, belonging, and self-efficacy. Reflective interaction occurs when students respond to structured prompts, share challenges and growth, and then engage with peer feedback. This process activates meaning-making, metacognitive reframing, and a sense of shared academic journey.

#### **Authors**

Alison Lietzenmayer, Megan Mize, Gary Beck

#### Affiliation

Old Dominion University

### **Research Question & Hypothesis**

RQ: How do college students use reflective interaction toward critical self-evaluation?

H: Higher levels of social support in reflective interaction predict greater self-efficacy, optimism, mindfulness, and student retention.

"[Peer mentors'] input really elevated the overall presentation, and I now feel more confident going into my upcoming career fair and future networking opportunities."

[Peer mentors] made sure I felt confident with each decision I made, and their guidance was incredibly valuable. I felt supported the entire time, and the clear explanations helped me gain a deeper understanding of the tools I was using."

## Reflective Interaction as a Catalyst for Resilience

Resilience emerges through communication, not isolation. When students publicly narrate challenge–response–growth cycles and receive peer validation or perspective-taking prompts, they enact the communication theory of resilience (Buzzanell, 2017).

# **Key Mechanisms**

- Identity anchors
- Alternative logics
- Adaptive sensemaking
- Social affirmation

# How this shows up at ODU:

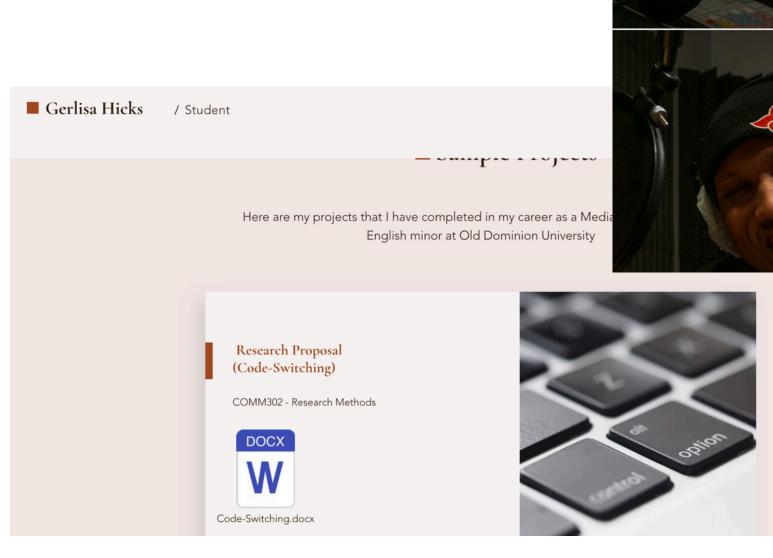
COMM 433 Capstone and WBL Student Module prompts guide students to revisit assumptions, name adaptive strategies, and make sense of setbacks.

# Communication Pedagogy, Belonging, and Retention

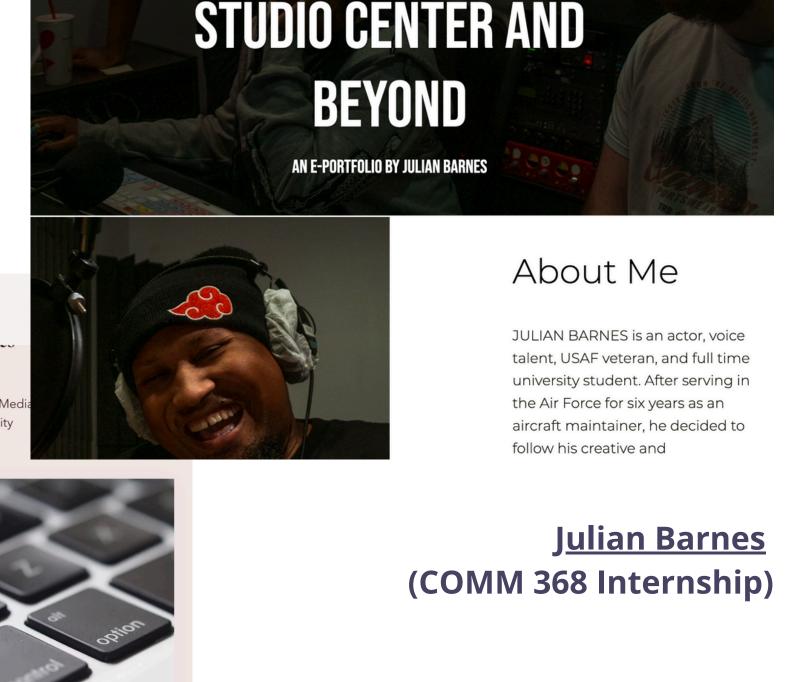
Resilience grows within relational networks. Communication pedagogy creates the structures where students reflect, respond, and imagine possible selves alongside others.

#### **High-Impact Practices (HIPs)**

These spaces normalize vulnerability, connect students across shared experiences, and leverage peer-to-peer meaning-making. This supports belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2011) and integrative learning (Eynon & Gambino, 2018), which are essential amid current enrollment and retention pressures.



Gerlisa Hicks (COMM 302 Research Methods)





### Discursive Artifacts of Resilience

ePortfolios serve as living records of student growth. Reflections, revisions, and peer exchanges become evidence of resilience-in-practice.

What we observe: movement from description to analysis, clear articulation of adaptation and problem-solving, professional identity formation through iterative storytelling.

## **Expected Impact**

- Scalable model for fostering resilience and belonging.
- Evidence for the role of communication practices in student persistence.
- Strong applicability for first-gen and marginalized students navigating academic transitions.