

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back, and thank you for being here where you are so deeply needed.

As I write and reflect, I find myself wrestling with the following, singly and in combination. Are these also living with you?

- The West Coast fires are devastating in breadth and velocity. The evidence strongly links the totality of the fires to climate change and historically to the oppression of indigenous peoples in those regions.
- The imperative for racial justice confronts us with an ongoing and soul-wrenching spiral of continued evidence of officially sanctioned forces to kill and incarcerate Black people and a direct result of systemic, institutionalized racism.
- The CoVid-19 pandemic persists in spreading infection and death and thus persists in creating emergencies in employment, housing, hunger, and health safety for millions.
- Formal education at so many levels continues to struggle to maintain expectations and experiences for children and adults studying towards their next levels of growth and societal roles and responsibilities while placed in environments of risk, anxiety, solitude, and unstable technologies.
- Families and communities are facing increased desperation and problem-solving challenges and may not be capable of healthy, satisfying next steps now and may not be able to promise these in the near future.

What do we do? How do we address these in our work together as a college and in our lives outside with our families and communities? So many crisis points are converging right now, today, that we have reason to feel shocked to the center of who we are. And. We have reason and need to hold our shock as catalyst for empathy and action towards a world we can work towards as a sustainable, meaningful, honorable, and even joyful future for all who choose to participate.

Tomorrow we begin celebrating [Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month](#), a time that recognizes the identities and histories of nearly half of our students (according to the college website). How are we recognizing this month with our students? How are we inviting them to share their stories and dreams with us? Please consider making space in your online courses for these discussions. [Visit HSI at John Jay](#) to learn more about the history of Hispanic Serving Institutions and recent HSI faculty development activities at John Jay.

This morning we begin our fourth week of classes, which usually indicates we are well embedded in the fall term and beginning to build on our initial interactions with students. We are fully online, with the exception of certain lab and studio classes. At this time, we may benefit from the following focused questions for reflection, which I've organized into four categories to frame the larger context for each set:

**Stability:**

- Do we know which students plan to continue in our classes?
- Do we have a sense of which of our students are likely to do well and which students are likely to need additional help?
- Do we have a sense of which technical issues seem to recur and what is working smoothly?

**Capacity:**

- Have we assessed our students' early assignments and engagement to form a sense of their prior knowledge and misconceptions as related to the course content?
- Have we outlined steps in the syllabus that demonstrate how students will gain the necessary knowledge and skills over the term to meet the learning objectives? (and have we reminded our students of these?)
- Are we modifying our expectations and instructions as seem appropriate to supporting our students' progress in their learning tasks?

**Flexibility:**

- Have our students demonstrated their awareness of flexibility in our policies for punctuality and participation?
- Do our assignments allow for any variations in interpretation? If not, do our students understand the need to follow instructions exactly as given?
- Are we creating spaces for student feedback that encourage us to explain concepts and assignments differently to respond to different ways of thinking?

**Community:**

- Do our students work together in pairs, groups, or teams? If so, what evidence do we see that these are improving student learning and pre-professional skills?
- Do our students know where to find academic support and life skills support (and are these resources on the syllabus or course site?)
- What connections are we making to our course activities and the professions our students plan to enter?

These are practical questions. For me, they address the opening concerns of this email in small, practical ways and can be linked to climate change, racial justice, the pandemic, education, and families and communities through connections to our course content and learning objectives. Sometimes we will need to make these connections explicit; at other times, our students will do this for us and likely with greater sophistication than we might anticipate.

Thank you for being present and aware. Please continue to value this in our students, who show up to the screen and the lab and the studio because they are present and aware.

Sincerely,



Director, Teaching and Learning Center  
335 Haaren Hall  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
524 West 59th Street  
New York, New York 10019

Email: [gifoster@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:gifoster@jjay.cuny.edu)  
Phone: 646-557-4660

*Preferred pronouns: she/her/hers*

Author of  
[Lyric Dwelling: the Art and Ethics of Invitation and Occupation](#)  
[heart speech this](#)  
[Beautiful Laceration](#)