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My dear colleagues,

My heart is with you. I cannot write of the grief and loss so present to us. I can share with you my empathy, sorrow, and prayers. Please be careful with yourselves and others. Please continue your efforts to stay safe and well.

Today, we begin our last three weeks of classes for what has been a fractured term of teaching and learning. We anticipate final projects and exams and the challenges of grading despite the disruption of so much of the continuity we trusted we would be able to provide our students. What can we do now, in these remaining days, towards increasing learning capacities? And by increasing capacities, I mean, in part, developing measurable evidence of learning, achievement of learning objectives, student progress towards graduation and careers, and instructor confidence in choices made and assessments given. With the communications necessary to achieve these, we may indeed feel this to be an intensified time for giving and receiving feedback.

This past week, I've been aware of the impact of feedback in nearly all areas of my working life. I've received and given feedback, observed feedback in action, and listened to experts talk about their feedback mistakes and lessons over decades of teaching. For me, feedback raises the often contentious relationship between *capacity* and *flexibility*.

Efforts towards the achievement of learning are one context of capacity and flexibility we share. Another is the pandemic and its devastation across our academic and personal communities. These two contexts are dissonant and in many ways working against each other, interrupting grief and survival, blocking attention and practice. We are not yet recovering; we are enduring, actively and passively. We are flexible; we are struggling to maintain and increase our capacities.

I write this to remind all of us that we have different experiences of capacities and flexibilities during times of endurance than we do during recovery or wellbeing. The feedback we provide our students merits this recognition. As you may remember, in a previous email, I referred to the effects of trauma on the learning mind. Attention and memory function differently when our minds are traumatized, and our minds learn more effectively with compartmentalized and concrete tasks rather than open questions and assignments. This advice holds true for feedback.

What I have learned and been reminded of this past week regarding feedback are that the most useful responses come from constructive criticism framed through these principles:

- The **purpose** of the feedback is explained and related to one or more learning objectives.

- The **details** of the feedback are connected to past, present, and future assignments or activities.
- The **concerns** of the feedback are potentially resolved through a specific, achievable action.
- The **response** called for by the criticism is focused on identifiable parts of the work and not on the person who did the work.
- The **timing** of the criticism takes into account how recently the student did the work being criticized and how soon conversation about the criticism is likely to take place with the instructor.

For most classes, we provide feedback throughout the course. In this term, we may have offered more feedback than usual or less, depending on the flexibility we and our students have chosen to continue during remote and online learning. As we work towards these final days of the term and grading, it makes sense that we might be thinking about feedback and how to use our critiques to guide our students towards their best outcomes and increased capacities. I encourage us to remain alert to the need for contained, connected, and catalyzing responses to our students. Let us agree to help our students and ourselves find the middle ground in all we are negotiating and to balance our desires for growth with our urgencies to adapt. We remain in crisis; let us continue to find stability and community together.

### **National Poetry Month:**

One more poem for National Poetry Month, this by the inimitable Japanese-American poet Garrett Hongo: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48947/the-legend-56d22a98239de>

### **Announcements**

**This week's Blackboard How-To Webinar on Assignments: Wednesday, April 29, 2 pm**

\*Keep an eye on your email for announcements with access information\*

**This week's TLC Open Conversation: Thursday, April 30, 3 pm**

Join URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/93135392887>

**Building Resilience in Times of Adversity Workshop: Friday, 1-3 pm**

Registration URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAldOCrpz0rG9G8jaaV31k74Xph-hPxUHC3>

Be safe. Be well. Be present.

Gina