

Dear Colleagues,

Many of us are rejoicing after the weekend's news and evidence of first steps by the incoming administration. We are feeling that a just, more humane, sustainable world might be one we can co-create. And we must acknowledge those in our community who feel differently and have acted out of different beliefs. There are conversations ahead that will be difficult and necessary. Let us commit to being present when and as we can and to making the kind choice the center of our advocacy towards justice.

Echoing these perspectives, I want to focus this monthly email towards balancing compassion and expectations with feedback. This past week, while we waited for the election results and while we witnessed the pandemic surge, a several students met with me to discuss their concerns and their visions for teaching and learning here at John Jay. A combination of graduate and undergraduate students, with various leadership positions and work responsibilities, this group has joined the TLC Advisory Board in response to their own positive and negative learning experiences at the college and their desires to advocate for their peers.

Much of our conversation focused on shared concerns that included asking their instructors to show greater compassion for individual student circumstances and also to provide more feedback indicating their progress towards learning objectives and grades. We were not, in our brief time together, able to define further what was meant by compassion and feedback; what I did note was that many of my conversations with faculty this past year (and before) have elicited confessions of disquiet and anxiety (Am I being unkind or overly compassionate? Have I helped enough? How can I maintain standards while making accommodations?) along similar lines.

Perhaps, as we approach the end of the term, it is a fertile time to address these questions. Many students are asking for compassion and feedback, and many of us are wrestling with heavy workloads and personal responsibilities that demand more attention than we believe we can spare. How can we be asked to make changes?

Two recent events sponsored by the TLC have proposed the often dismissed "less is more," and I encourage you to consider just this in your responses to students. Not less across the board but rather less in terms of frequency and intensity. The real change will come in being attentively present for students as they themselves identify their needs and next steps, with structured, specific advice offered on our side less frequently and more purposively.

When our students approach us for help, we can remind ourselves that the college has a community of offices and support personnel well-trained to respond to housing, hunger, employment, and health issues. We can ask our students if they have the resources they need to resolve their current challenges. And we can make appropriate referrals. This is

compassionate and empowers our students. These responses also free us from making potentially damaging changes to course schedules and assignment expectations.

When our students complete assignments, from small free-writing exercises and pop quizzes to presentations and research papers, they want to know the value of their work and how they measure up to their instructors' expectations as well as how they are progressing towards their final grades. For most of us, the amount of work we assign far exceeds the time we have to provide comments. Rather than burn ourselves out or mark only the largest of assignments and tests, we can be selective and offer students feedback on what we most want them to develop, with standardized comments we can copy and paste into ongoing work. We can use audio commentary when appropriate for asynchronous work. And we can provide students with rubrics that help them decode the comments and marks we offer.

Included in this email are resources from our recent *Caring vs, Care-taking* workshop facilitated by Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Academic Counselor & Adjunct Faculty member Delmar Dualeh and myself. In this workshop, we shared practices and questions for practicing respectful and empowered compassion with students. Also included below, you will find the description and recording for *Don't Panic at the Deluge: Responding to Student Writing Using Digital Tools*, Tara Pauliny's and Tim McCormack's excellent presentation on practical, effective approaches to grading student writing that can be translated to other fields.

Thank you for continuing to teach, mentor, support, and be the change. I am grateful for our communities of practice and our community that believes in both kindness and justice.

Sincerely,

Gina