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# INQUIRY

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# Introduction

This is an unusual issue of the *Inquirer* in many ways. First, months ago, due to the budget crisis in CUNY and at BMCC, we agreed to the Office of Academic Affairs' request that this issue of the *Inquirer* would appear solely on line. Then the COVID-19 crisis hit, sending everything on line. We had a bunch of articles submitted before March 10, but then it became clear we needed to shift focus, seeking articles about the virus's impact on our teaching, on our students, and on our relationship with colleagues and staff. The verb *zoom* erupted in our discourse. In late May, we sought letters from colleagues to their students, to give an indication of the kind of compassion and attention faculty were emitting and sharing with students, both those who remained engaged and those who had in some form disappeared.

And now, George Floyd, which led us to a snippet of faculty's thoughts about how to approach this new horror and the amazing protests across the country (and now around the world)—and as we go to press, over a month of continuous protests, some police procedures reformed, statues of confederate generals torn down, and a discussion of racism rooted in the history of slavery, raging across the country. We hope to devote a special future to race matters in CUNY, the city, and the world.

We stand by the mix here, many perspectives and projects at hand, and by way of introduction we thought we would offer two strands of our concerns, Elizabeth Wissinger's letter to her students, and Page Delano's memory of taking her students to Christo and Jean-Claude's *The Gates*, Central Park, 2005 (Christo died on May 31; his wife Jeanne-Claude died in 2009). Both of us address spaces "off campus," where we hold the city, from students' bedrooms to the pathways of Central Park, as integral spaces of education, of learning from our students, and encouraging them to be self-learners, and claiming their place in New York City as citizens and students, as workers, thinkers, knowledge-builders, and observers of art.

## **Page Delano on *The Gates* 2005:**

Just about the time that Christo and Jeanne-Claude had set up *The Gates* in Central Park, I was teaching a late afternoon Eng 095 (Eng 095 is a developmental writing, a course that has only one remaining section in Fall 2020 as we move more and more to a bridge class which contains the elements of developmental writing and Eng 101, our composition class). I was relatively new—it's hard to imagine that I'd only been at BMCC since 2004. If I broke rules, I have no apologies. It was a great teaching moment.

I treasure the community which is created in the six hours we meet each week—with both formal components of "teaching writing" and informal spaces of community and collective discourse and query. I am a firm believer in using the city as a resource, before it was an acceptable activity, back when V.P. Sadie Bragg

apparently ruled against taking students off campus (in contrast, the CUNY Honors college program makes it a principle of their first semester's teaching, using the city as a resource). I commend my colleague Marguerite Rivas's essay that we will reprint in "the best of the *Inquirer*" in the near future, about taking her students on a walk along the Rockefeller Garden stretch of land across West Street. I've taken my students to the Irish Hunger Memorial as well—finding out things such as student A called/texted student B (late) to inform her where we would be. This was a telling note that they had contact with each other outside of class. And they'd chat with each other about step-parents, being in Juvie, and race, religion, and their work ... (and I did not eavesdrop or intervene, catching only snippets). So, when *The Gates* appeared, it seemed the right thing to do.

Who had subway fare? I asked. I'd cover those who didn't (didn't want them jumping the turnstile). We walked out of the Murray Building (everyone had to carry their backpacks; some would leave for home, some for work or to return to their next class, but we had 1 hour and 45 minutes for our jaunt). Up the A Train to 59<sup>th</sup> St, out into the park.

It turned out that many of my students had never been to Central Park. We chatted as we talked about parks in NYC. It's possible that a few disappeared, rejecting this trek. But the others—we walked under the orange cloths, the "gates," they weren't sure what it meant, and what they were supposed to feel, but there they were out in the world working to make sense of something, being "exposed" to something ... There was joy, laughter; they had whimsical responses, no response, some liked simply being out of the classroom, and I didn't try to "teach" during the excursion. I was taking it in myself. We were equal in our footsteps under the gates. I look back on it as a special day of teaching, the city as a classroom (that's far too pedestrian a way to explore it, although we were indeed pedestrians that late afternoon).

### **Elizabeth Wissinger's letter to her Sociology 100 students:**

Dear Class,

What a "long strange trip it's been."

Some of you might get the 1970s rock reference. No matter if you don't, you get the idea.

We have made it to the end of what has been a very strange, and difficult, and trying semester, and many of you have come through it very well in this class. I was pleased to see the passion in your discussion about the benefits of studying Sociology, and also to hear about the ways you gained something useful from our class, which you will take with you into your lives in the future.

The conversion to teaching all online was hard on all of us. I personally found my responsibilities as your instructor were tinged with the daily panic and anguish of living in the epicenter of the virus during these last few months, feelings which got in the way of my being your same old professor as before. It was hard to concentrate when morgue trucks full of dead bodies became a routine sight while out walking my dog, and it was hard to stay on task amidst the constant wail of sirens. Some of us lost loved ones. Some of us lost friends. We all know somebody

who has died. And it isn't over yet, nor will it be for some time, because of the ridiculous idiocy of the US leadership. Or lack thereof, is probably more accurate.

That being said, it's pretty amazing how far you have come.

All of you should congratulate yourselves on the fact that you persisted and succeeded in finishing the course, despite suffering difficult losses—either personally, or in your experience as a student, or in your employment, or just as a human being living through all of what's come down during the last few months. We are all mourning various aspects of our lives in the "beforetime."

Someday, there will be what the French call *l'après-temps* (the time after) but that isn't here yet. We will prevail, but it's going to be a while.

All that being said, please do give yourselves a pat on the back, and a well-deserved rest. Our semester is over, it was an honor being your professor, especially during these last weeks, as I witnessed you rising to the occasion, and persevering against heavy odds.

Good luck to all of you in your future endeavors!

Stay safe and stay well,

Prof W.

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# Is Less More?

Adele Kudish

English Department

## March 2020

I had the good fortune of spending my sabbatical in Paris, and although it has been a trying year—between massive national labor strikes, Gilets Jaunes protests, and of course, attempting to survive the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequent confinement—I have also had gratifying opportunities to contemplate and work on my teaching. While research took precedence this year, and I was writing in libraries and archives around Paris—back before COVID-19 shut down the city—I couldn't help but find my way into the classroom. Using my Sorbonne Nouvelle affiliation, last fall I ended up sitting in on a first-year undergraduate course called "*Méthodologie du travail universitaire*," a 2-credit introduction to college-level writing for students contemplating a degree in literary studies. This course reminded me in many ways of our English 201 in its use of works of prose, poetry, and drama as the objects of investigation for writing essays, with a narrower scope (for example, no research paper was assigned). Observing a section of *Méthodologie du travail universitaire* served as both a primer for better understanding how college in France works and as a point of comparison to reflect on my own teaching practices.

France's higher education (*supérieur*) system, I am learning, is complex and multi-tiered. Students who complete a high school diploma are generally well-enough prepared to work in various sectors. Students who show academic promise are tracked into a Baccalaureate program, which is a competitive national test at the end of high school. "Le Bac" is used for admissions into universities like the Sorbonne. Another track takes the most promising students to the even more prestigious *grandes écoles* (École Normale Supérieure and Sciences Po are two of the more famous *grandes écoles* in Paris, but they exist in most major cities in France). These are on the level of the Ivy League, and confer BAs, but admission requires an additional two years of post-Bac study (*classes préparatoires*, or *prépa*, for short) offered at prestigious high schools. University faculty are initially hired as *maîtres de conférences*—akin to assistant professors—and become tenured after just one year. *Maîtres de conférences* are expected to teach, do research and publish, and do committee work just like us. In order to be promoted to *professeur titulaire* (the equivalent of a full professor), a *maître de conférences* must write a second dissertation (I was horrified until I learned that it is written as a book intended for publication), called a *habilitation à diriger des recherches* (HDR) that is judged by a committee of their peers. The title of professor allows you to direct doctoral dissertations. Of course, adjuncts teach courses too, but that is the subject of another article.

The Sorbonne is a prestigious, 800-year old university, many of whose buildings are located in the Latin Quarter of Paris. You don't hear the language of

Vergil (or Abélard, who helped found the Sorbonne) much in the streets anymore, and the neighborhood is gentrified, not unlike Greenwich Village. Despite my apprehension about what kinds of students I would encounter at the Sorbonne, I was pleasantly surprised to meet a diverse group of young adults who reminded me of my own students back at BMCC. More than half the class consisted of students of color, and along with a few Erasmus students from various European countries, many were the Parisian-raised children of African, Caribbean, and Asian immigrants, students who commuted to school from all over the city.<sup>1</sup> One student was of non-traditional age. In other words, just like CUNY students, they reflected the racially, economically, and socially diverse city they called home.

The class was taught by my friend and colleague Thibaut Casagrande, a scholar of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Comparative Literature, Cinema, and Gender Studies. Many elements of the daily practice of teaching and learning felt familiar: a mix of lecture and work in small groups, an admonition on the syllabus to follow proper netiquette; a strict warning against plagiarism; and an unfortunately dwindling number of students attending each session. Although Casagrande's teaching style has much in common with American ideals of a student-centered classroom, there were also some striking differences in terms of the expectations he had of his students. He distributed almost no handouts (save for the short daily readings that he handed out at the beginning of each session), assigned no take-home reading, administered no quizzes, and had no official attendance or lateness policy. Something like BlackBoard exists—and became quite useful when the strikes started—but teaching online here does not require the kind of high production value we pride ourselves on in the US. I learned that even handing out a syllabus is a relatively new phenomenon at French universities, and not every instructor provides one (and those who do stick to two or three pages, not nine like my most recent one).

While not every student came armed with a vast knowledge of the history of French literature or a complete lexicon of literary terminology, it was clear that the average Parisian public high school had prepared students far better than the average NYC public school. Students who volunteered or were called on to read aloud passages by Louise Labé, Colette, Corneille, Baudelaire, and Annie Ernaux did so fluently and with at least moderate comprehension of what they were reading. And while there was absenteeism, there was almost no lateness (a pet peeve of mine, especially when accompanied by a door slamming). I noticed that the last student to enter the classroom, who saw that the instructor was about to begin, would close the door behind them, and that door would remain closed for the rest of the hour and a half session. Only very rarely did I notice a student coming in without a notebook or a pen, and while I went around the room to chat with small groups while they were discussing the daily text, I remarked that most students were familiar with at least the basic elements of note-taking.

One goal many of us at BMCC share for our students is teaching them the habits that will serve them both in academia and in life. For example, like many other instructors, I painstakingly detail the steps students should follow to take notes,

<sup>1</sup> All of the schools I mention here are public, and tuition tops out around \$12,000 per year for students who don't win a scholarship and whose parents are not high earners. You can see the tuition rates for Sciences Po, for example, here: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/students/fr/financer/droits-scolaire>.

annotate their readings, outline their papers, create a bibliography, etc. This is all essential to succeed in a French class as well, but it is far more implicit. Those who don't know how, need to figure out a way to learn it. For example, Mr. Casagrande instructed students on the first day to create and maintain a literary glossary for themselves based on the vocabulary he wrote on the board, but it was completely up to them how, when, and if they did that. And rather than a large number of scaffolded assignments, the course grade for *Méthodologie* was based on only three criteria: a computer and library skills test administered by the university library; a take-home midterm analyzing an eighteenth-century lyric poem; and an in-class final exam for which students would have four hours to write an essay. No extra credit, no make-up assignments, no negotiations, and no fuss.

Clearly, the higher level of French students' preparedness for college, including their having already been through the rigors of taking the Bac, make a huge difference in terms of what skills they come into *Méthodologie du travail universitaire* with. The reading competence and fluidity of BMCC students is far more uneven, only because the instruction in our primary and secondary schools is so uneven, and is also unfair to working-class students and students of color. Centralization plays a big part here: there is one French curriculum, and it is taught in schools across France, public and private, in rich neighborhoods as well as poor. Children in my daughter's second grade public school class are learning formal grammar, are tested in spelling and punctuation with weekly dictations, and have so far had to memorize poems by Prévert, Desnos, and Baudelaire, just like second graders across the country. Parents are very rarely engaged in the learning process (the COVID-19 move to homeschool gave us rare insight into what and how teachers teach within the school gates). Although French university faculty members increasingly lament the decline of incoming first-year students' knowledge (and a slow but steady change-over to a capitalistic model of education; privatization doesn't loom quite yet, but neoliberalism has begun to encroach on France's valuation of intellectualism and the role of the university as a public good), it is, in some ways, a completely unfair comparison with the US, especially at community colleges. And yet, observing and listening to the students at the Sorbonne, I felt a sense of solidarity and a desire to import a little of their "*liberté, égalité, and fraternité*" into my teaching.

Even where remediation is still a major factor, could less somehow be more? Maybe I overwhelm my students with handouts, with too much background information, assignments, how-tos, and dos and don'ts. Have my online classes become data dumps? I even find myself swimming through oceans of electronic data every semester in my own filing system. And I suspect that many of my handouts are met with "TLDR"—"too long, didn't read." Am I somehow depriving my students by the very act of providing them with too much? Learning at the Sorbonne seemed to involve a certain amount of frustration, a certain amount of grappling with uncertainty. Those who chose to come to class practiced how to be responsible for their learning while also respecting the rules of collectivity—highly celebrated in French culture. Thus, doors don't get slammed and work is turned in largely on time, for the greater good of the class.

I'm not sure yet how much and how I will change my teaching based on these observations. But this thought experiment has led me to reflect on ways that less might be more in much bigger ways in France overall. I am finding that French culture is materialistic (fashion, gorgeous pastries, even books are status items here), but somehow less consumerist than American culture. People make do with less everywhere here: smaller homes, lower salaries, and smaller portions. Credit cards do not exist, so people literally cannot spend more money than they have, and thus they learn to want less. And many people consider a high-quality high school education enough for a happy and successful life, and on average people work fewer hours than in the US. In education overall, far fewer frills and more substance, even in a culture highly oriented toward the collective, seems to translate into more individual responsibility to succeed (within an economically-supportive framework, of course). In these uncertain times, it is clear that most of us will have to learn to make do with less in various aspects of our consumption, whether we want to or not. But it doesn't have to be all bad. The work of getting BMCC students to see the classroom as a space of collective learning without adding more assignments would be difficult, but I believe it could be ultimately rewarding both for them and for me. And I don't think that it is a bad idea, in any situation or place, to strategize how to do less to achieve more.

# “I will try my best”: Imparting Western-style Argumentation to Students in China

Katherine M. Johnson

*Academic Literacy and Linguistics*

Thanks to a generous scholar incentive award granted to me by BMCC, I had the unique opportunity to teach college composition at an American university in China during the 2018–2019 school year. For many years, I had already taught ESL and developmental writing to students of diverse backgrounds at BMCC, as well as literature and composition to international students at other colleges. In terms of travel to Asia, I had taken only one three-week trip to China before heading there for an academic year. Teaching college composition in China gave me new insights into both instruction in critical thinking and some of the differences in Western and Eastern argumentation styles. Through an examination of relevant literature and case examples, this article will share some of the lessons learned with a view to providing educators a deeper understanding of their nonnative students, both Chinese and others.

## Eastern and Western learning traditions

A good place to start in considering the differences between Eastern and Western concepts of education is the influence of the master teachers in each culture, Confucius and Socrates. Socrates (469–399 B.C. E.), a master teacher of philosophy in the West, taught that one should start from a place of doubt, question authority, and provide a justification for one’s beliefs. By demonstrating the unsound thinking of the political authorities, he believed, he was doing a service for the community (Tweed & Lehman 2002).

Confucius (551–479 B.C.), often referred to as the father of Chinese philosophy, created a tradition with a different understanding of serving the community. Confucius taught that respectful learning leads to the improvement of both skills and virtue. Excellence can be reached through diligent effort and practice. Confucius taught learners who were being prepared for civil service positions. The strong moral bent, pragmatic emphasis on the collective good, and respect for authority stand in contrast to the principles of Socrates (Tweed & Lehman 2002).

How does this relate to the teaching of college composition to first-year students, both Chinese and others? The line from the Socratic tradition of learning to today’s critical thinking and argumentative essay is quickly evident. Not only does a research-based piece of writing involve critical thinking, but also one might argue that it demands more agency than the other common rhetorical modes. Creating writing that integrates and responds to multiple information

sources requires a student to fully understand those sources, to discern which ones are useful to his or her project, and to maintain authorial control. Managing this is a challenging task for many first-year students, regardless of linguistic background or educational setting. The experience that I had of teaching college composition in China gave me a chance to see how the distinct Eastern and Western learning traditions played out, particularly in the students’ processes of crafting research-based argument essays.

## Learners’ difficulties in creating evidence-based arguments

In the area of research papers done by first-year students, their struggles are often evident. This work sometimes contains a confusing array of inappropriate sources, insufficient paraphrasing, and oddly juxtaposed facts. One study, the Citation Project (Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue 2010), examined the problems in students’ final drafts to better pinpoint their causes. Jamieson (2013), who further analyzed the project, found that students tended to use just a few individual sentences from a given information source, and that those sentences were often pulled from the first page or the abstract of the article. Selected ideas were often too lightly paraphrased, so that ultimately, students’ essays were collections of copied phrases and points from various information sources, pastiches that Howard has termed “patchwriting.” Rather than constituting the ethical violation of plagiarism, Howard argues, patchwriting should be seen as a developmental stage of learning that instructors can help students to work through (Howard 1993; Jamieson 2013).

## How critical thinking and research pose challenges for Chinese students

One area of cross-cultural difference and difficulty for international students is in the teaching of critical thinking, argumentation, and composition. Frequently, instructors in these disciplines are asking international students to learn a whole new way of thinking. Sometimes, a lack of knowledge on either side of the cultural divide leads to faculty frustration with their students’ work habits and thinking. In the U.S., faculty impressions of Chinese students have been shown to reflect a perplexed attitude in the face of what is seen as students’ passivity and lack of curiosity. In describing two groups of Chinese students at a U.S. university, Lin (2007) states that the students, while having strong academic backgrounds and work habits, are accustomed to assignments being fully structured by instructors, and not accustomed to taking risks, exploring subjects, or evaluating resources.

Many research studies (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004) have indicated that “challenges faced by Chinese learners could be attributed to the Confucius cultural heritage and the collectivism social context” (Zhang 2016). Participants in one study stated that they hoped that their instructors in the U.S. would give credit for their effort and positive attitude as opposed to their talent, as had been the case in their earlier educational experience (Heng 2017). In my own experience, knowing this helps to explain an expression that I have commonly heard when teaching Asian students, both at BMCC and abroad: “I will try my best.” The promise to make a great effort may be taken to carry a stronger weight in Eastern culture.

## English preparation in Chinese secondary schools

English as a foreign language education around the world occurs in a context particular to the local culture. Comparatively few studies have examined how Chinese students are taught English in the secondary education years that precede entry into a Western, English-speaking undergraduate college.

In China, nine years of education are mandatory for everyone. After finishing the ninth year, students choose whether or not to continue on to “senior” secondary school. The majority of those who do is college-bound, and will take the rigorously competitive National College Entrance Examination, the Gaokao.

In her article that compiles data on secondary school English education, Y. Sang (2017) identifies the traits of this instruction that lay the groundwork for students’ subsequent difficulties in writing in English. With class sizes ranging from thirty to fifty students, classes are typically teacher-centered, and offer few opportunities to practice writing or for teachers to adequately respond to it (Sang 2017).

The test-prep-driven educational system, furthermore, does not encourage the assigning of pieces longer than 150 words, or writing in drafts. Writing instruction in the Chinese tradition prioritizes language elements such as grammar and vocabulary over substance, and even the argumentative essays can often privilege beautiful language over step-wise idea development (Heng 2017).

My students at WKU often told me that there were disparities in the quality and intensity of English learning in Chinese secondary schools, with big-city schools differing sharply from rural ones. Nonetheless, students from a range of high schools and towns echoed the points mentioned in Sang’s study, remarking on the limited opportunity for both English conversation and essay-writing, as well as on the large classes, small number of hours, and heavy use of drills and exercises. The situation was improving, they told me, but it had not improved as quickly as many students would have wished.

## Wenzhou Kean University

The student work discussed in this article is drawn from two sections of College Composition 2 taught in Spring 2019 at Wenzhou Kean University, a U.S. university in south China. Operating since 2011, WKU is an international campus of a New Jersey state university, located in a medium-sized city in southern China.

The student body at WKU is comprised almost entirely of Chinese nationals, predominantly from Zhejiang or provinces near Zhejiang. It is ranked a “second-tier” university out of a four-tier system. Students attending it, therefore, scored from the mid-range to the upper range on their National College Entrance Examination. Tuition is relatively high by local standards. The university attracts a demographic that seeks an EMI (English as the Medium of Instruction), American-style education but without traveling abroad; the security of being at a smaller, more personal institution; and one that can afford tuition. Approximately 2,000 undergraduates are enrolled.

In all disciplines, the university faculty is required to follow curriculum from the New Jersey campus. First-year students are required to take one semester each of College Composition 1 and College Composition 2, regardless of their level in English writing.

## The argumentative essay in Composition 2

The case studies discussed below are drawn from student work on the third essay assignment of the second semester, the research-based argument essay.

The essay assignment in my sections was presented to students in a series of steps, starting with brainstorming for topics. Students created a working thesis and an initial set of supporting arguments, and three drafts of the essay, accompanied by a minimum of four APA-cited sources. Students completed a peer review on their second drafts, and received instructor feedback on all drafts. Ultimately, the essay length was a minimum of 1300 words.

Having a suitable topic is always paramount to writing strong research essays. Students’ topics ranged widely, including, for example: helicopter parenting, why China should increase its minimum education requirement beyond eight years, China’s one-child law, China’s filial piety law, preventing animal cruelty at zoos, “fake food,” and censorship of films in China.

### First Essay Case Study: “Fake Foods”

Walter’s essay took “fake foods” for its topic and used as a working thesis that the government of China needs to work harder to stop the manufacture, distribution and consumption of fake foods. Fake food is currently a popular topic in both the Chinese and foreign media.

Walter’s first draft used arguments that were not objective or supportable by evidence, and that demonstrated a reliance on morality. One of the causes of the unsafe food problem identified by Walter’s essay was the greed of those selling it. Walter wrote in support of the government “cracking down,” without specifying what that would entail. For example, the essay stated that, “Therefore, in the face of the temptation of profit, many people choose to produce fake food against morality, law and conscience.”

For a conventional American research essay, the topic of fake food as one of the violations of food safety laws and procedures, raises the question of how this crime is being permitted to occur. At this stage, I gave Walter detailed directives, asking him to define fake food, and prompting him to find factual information to answer several questions. I mentioned that research-based essays cannot cite greed or immorality as a cause of the food safety problem, but rather must rely on arguments supportable by objective evidence. Walter and I also discussed his draft. He was receptive to feedback and eager to improve his essay, although he may not have understood some of the deeper issues I was raising.

In Walter’s second draft, he included a great deal of new material and changed much of the essay in response to this feedback. The draft now defined fake food, described the Chinese FDA (CFDA), and included some examples of particular food safety violation incidents. Much of the newly added information, while showing an effort on the student’s part to do research and cite sources appropriately, still lacked a basis in sound argumentation. The descriptions included many statements with the ring of a government press release and bureaucratic jargon. For example, the essay cited the fact that in 2015 the CFDA had published new amendments to the law, which contains 10 chapters with 154 articles, and it included several

statements such as, “there is zero tolerance on crime,” a cited quotation from the vice minister of public security. Such statements, while they might serve an essay investigating media handling of the issue, supplied little substantive evidence for a study of a problem and its possible solutions.

By the third and final draft, the essay had now moved to providing more relevant, cited information; however, it still showed a lack of depth to make its facts meaningful, an acceptance of issued press releases as factual evidence, and some continued moralizing. As the essay neared its conclusion, it entered into a “government to the rescue” narrative. “In the face of such bad behavior, the Chinese government will never be able to sit still.”

Overall, Walter’s process showed some positive outcomes insofar as he learned to research and to include more factual evidence and data to provide the necessary background and to serve his thesis. The final essay relied less on morality than earlier drafts. Perhaps most revealing in light of the Eastern-Western distinctions mentioned above is his ready acceptance of government-issued press releases as genuine evidence for an argument, and the strong moral subtext to his essay, especially its early drafts.

As I told my students at WKU, there are numerous different ways to write a “good” essay, but it was my job to nudge their writing into the American academic style. In the process of talking with me and sending drafts back and forth, Walter was shown another point of view that forced him to question and justify the sources he was relying on, and ultimately, he was introduced to a whole new style of argumentation.

### **Second Case Study: Increasing Compulsory Education in China**

Rachel’s essay’s thesis was that China ought to increase the nine years of compulsory education, passed into law in 1984, to twelve years. Her initial arguments relied strongly on the idea that additional years of education make people “better,” expounding on the virtues of the knowledge gained and the preparation for college. She also pointed out that China was now a big economic power, different from what it had been in 1984.

Rachel and I had a conversation about her first draft, in addition to my giving written feedback. I suggested that she try to find more measurable good to society out of a requirement of more years of education, such as higher incomes or better health outcomes. The argument concerning college, I suggested, could be defended only provided that she wanted to suggest that more people needed to attend university. Lastly, she had included an uncited statistic about high school degrees being directly tied to employability that appeared to me to refer to the U.S., and not China. I urged the student to check it, and to use only data concerning China, as the job markets are so different.

In her subsequent drafts, Rachel gradually added a great deal of relevant, accurate information. One point that she and I discussed was her argument about the cost of secondary education. Her essay demonstrated how the cost of secondary school tuition was burdensome or out of range for most families presently. I knew there was a range of secondary schools in China, but I had supposed that some of them were free of charge. However, I learned from her

that in fact all secondary schools charged fees, which were often difficult to afford. Therefore, a fundamental change in making secondary school compulsory would be that the state would cover costs now being paid privately.

On Rachel’s final draft, the main point that seemed to get missed, despite my having questioned it, was the employability statistic; I confirmed that it did not refer to China but rather it came from the U.S. Department of Labor. The students were doing much of their research, frequently on China-based topics, in Google—still relatively new to them—or in the WKU library’s American databases, even less familiar. In doing so, there are various layers of potential confusion as to what context one is reading about, and Rachel was not the only student to mix up what country an article was referring to.

In brief, I helped Rachel to narrow her focus at the same time that she moved away from the loftier and less quantifiable arguments. She herself had included the economic argument early on, so I encouraged her to treat education in a business framework. The student did a good job of finding objective evidence to support the increase in compulsory education in China, and ended up with a persuasive, well-researched essay.

### **Discussion and comments**

Overall, I believe that the experience of coming up with a topic and narrowing it, researching it, reading what was often difficult material on it, and working from instructor feedback benefited Walter, Rachel, and my other composition students. Although I was in the role of the instructor to whom the students had to listen, I also learned a great deal from what the students had to say about issues affecting their own country and how they expressed those views.

Knowing more about the Eastern learning tradition has helped me to understand the attitude of students’ stressing the effort that they made. Likewise, it has illuminated the essay points Rachel made, such as that acquiring more knowledge is in itself “good,” and Walter’s views, regarding the immorality and greed of the profiteers. Institutions in China strongly promote these ideas so that many adults have internalized them, and have probably used them as accepted arguments for previous essays. Similarly, Walter’s acceptance of government press releases could be characteristic of the way students interact with media in his culture.

As someone who spent only nine months in China, and doesn’t speak Mandarin, I only began to graze the surface of Chinese culture. Still, the experience was helpful to me as an instructor. There are many suggestions that I would make to educators who are interested in this area, but if I had to distill them down to a few, they are:

- Try to understand some of the “givens” or accepted ideas of a student’s (native) culture.
- Develop ways to ask students, respectfully, the right questions about those givens or assumptions.
- Know that having certain values, such as “knowledge” or the “collective good,” does not prevent critical thinking, given the right guidance.
- Bear in mind potential confusion as to context when students are reading scholarly articles from databases.



- Remember that many aspects of American culture will seem strange to some students, such as our high prioritizing of our individual civil rights.
- Remember that “patchwriting” often represents a genuine effort to do research by a student whose reading and paraphrasing abilities still need some assistance.

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# An Economist Talks with Fashion Students

**Bettina Berch**

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Sometimes interdisciplinary work is prompted by a simple invitation from a friend: “Bettina, would you like to come talk to my fashion students about economics?” I hesitated for maybe half a second. Maybe I could repair the reputation economists have, for doing a lot of theorizing based on unrealistic scenarios, sketching impenetrable graphs, and pretending they can actually hold “everything else constant” while they examine changes in their favorite variable. Typically, if a fashion student wanted a simple answer as to how to price a garment they wanted to sell, for example, the economist might start with an explanation of pricing under conditions of perfect competition—clearly not relevant—before delving into more and more hypotheticals offering few practical insights. So, I decided to take up the challenge, to try to dig around in my discipline for some tools that a fashion student might find useful. Useful is key. Then I could look at trends in the fashion industry, not as *they* might, from the point of view of style, but with an economist’s lens.

I started with tools. The first concept that came to mind was the distinction we draw between *the short run* and *the long run*. The short run is *now*. In the short run we make decisions based on the resources at hand and the limited information available. In the long run, we may be able to build better supply chains, and we have more complete information about all our options. (Keep in mind the apocryphal comment of John Maynard Keynes, that in the “long run” we are all dead.) A business person’s decisions must be made in the short run, with all its imperfections, while keeping the long run in in sight.

Economists also make a useful distinction between *fixed costs* and *variable costs*, when making production decisions. Think of fixed costs as overhead—the costs of setting up your workroom or studio, licensing fees, etc.—costs incurred by starting the business. Variable costs are the day-to-day costs of operating the business—like electricity, labor, raw materials—that will vary according to your scale of production. In the short run, a business has to cover its variable costs, and can ignore its fixed, or overhead costs. However, in the long run, if a business is not covering both its fixed and its variable costs, it will have to close its doors.

Thinking about costs in this way leads to another aspect of costs that would be important to a contemporary fashion designer, the concept of economies of scale. It’s a given in economics that large scale enterprises experience substantial cost savings. As soon as there’s an interesting business idea, someone asks, “Will it scale up?” Fashion has been scaling up at a breakneck pace in the last couple decades, thanks to mega-businesses relying on a worldwide division of labor and a worldwide assembly line. Yet, those economies of scale may not deliver creative satisfaction or a “name” in the industry to the actual designer. (And as we shall see, the production of more and more garments means more and more landfill and threatens the planet’s ecosystems.)

This brings us back to the designer, the individual actually creating the fashion concept. The economist *can* offer insights from the law of comparative advantage, which says that if parties specialize in what they do best, and then trade with others for *their* products, more goods will be produced, more efficiently. For example, imagine you are a good designer and you could produce one design per week, that could sell for \$4000. But to finish that outfit in one week means hiring someone to cut and sew the design, say for \$800/week. When you watch your assistant, you realize you could do what they are doing in half the time, they are so slow. You might be tempted to fire them and do all the cutting and sewing yourself. The law of comparative advantage (in this case “absolute advantage”) tells you, no! Specialize in the higher-value design work full time, don’t take away from those higher-value-creating designing hours to do lower-value cutting and sewing, and you will net \$3200 for the week. If you fired your assistant and spent half the week doing the work they had performed, albeit slowly, you would net only \$2000 for the week. Of course, it is possible you might have come to this conclusion using common sense, but sometimes it is reassuring to know that a couple hundred years of economics are on your side. Not to mention that it becomes an argument in favour of the worldwide division of labor in fashion production. There are specific regions of India where girls only do applique or beadwork for high-end American and European firms—this specialization is comparative advantage theory in action.

### Macroeconomic Perspectives

Generally, when economists are focussing on costs, they are microeconomists, who graph cost curves and find equilibrium prices and quantities produced in various types of competitive and uncompetitive markets. But that road may not be the most useful for the fashion student, compared to where the macroeconomist would take us. So, let’s try the big picture, the macro view of issues in the fashion industry.

One of the most striking economic trends in the last few hundred years of the fashion business is what could be called *the direction of inspiration*. For a couple centuries, Paris designed and the rest of the world copied. In recent years, however, the direction has changed. The “street” inspires, and Paris (and other runways) copy. While this shift is tremendously interesting for fashion students, it also supports a very different business model: decentralized, focussed on previously marginalized people and neighborhoods, social media accessible. When you can be a force in the fashion world from your studio in Harlem with millions of fans instagramming your look ... that is very different from Chanel or Dior’s top-down control of the industry in centuries past.

Hand in hand with couture’s inspiration from the street, however, is the problem of cultural appropriation: the facile way high fashion seizes upon traditional weaves, garments, or embellishments, and reworks them into runway looks with no concern that the *meaning* of these artifacts has been violated. A particular choker, a style of applique—even concentration camp clothing—it’s all been thoughtlessly appropriated at one point or another to make a collection, to make a splash. That fine line between borrowing, or being inspired by someone else’s culture, turns into something quite ugly when something that has meaning

to its original people is used by outsiders for an “effect.” Is compensation for the harm even possible?

And this brings us to the greatest macro challenge of all, sustainability. The rise of “fast fashion,” it is said, is destroying the planet. Thanks to what’s sometimes called the ZARA/H & M model, garments are increasingly produced by a global supply chain. Sold at cheaper and cheaper prices, new garments are brought to stores at a faster and faster pace. Garments that have not sold, or garments that were sold and worn and then donated to thrift stores may simply be dumped in landfills. This is especially true of cold-weather garments, or non-cotton fabrics. If the clothing could be worn by people in hot climates, it could be baled and shipped to poor countries for resale (although this practice is increasingly controversial/regulated). Good quality cotton garments may be dismembered for the “wiper” or rag market. Wool clothing used to be broken down to make “shoddy” blankets, mostly for the disaster-relief or military markets, but shoddy is increasingly being replaced by ever-cheaper polar fleece. The growing volume of fast fashion has nowhere to go but landfills.

Apart from the sheer volume of clothing getting dumped, *how* these garments are being produced is also problematic. We have detailed reports on the low pay and terrible working conditions of workers in fast fashion. These workers (and the rest of the planet) are also surrounded by the pollution generated by the production process, particularly the byproducts of that most popular garment, denim jeans. Pesticide residues from cotton crops, sludge pits of artificial indigo runoff, runoff of the chemical byproducts of “distressing,” not to mention the huge use of water, make jeans production, in particular, ecologically unsustainable. Statistics for other common garments are also alarming. To produce the cotton for one t-shirt requires 700 gallons of water. Twenty percent of industrial water pollution in the world comes from treating/dyeing textiles. Production of fiber accounts for 18% of pesticide use worldwide and 25% of insecticide use.

So, what can the “conscious” producer/designer do? First, use sustainable, planet-conscious raw materials. Organic cotton *can* be cost-effective, especially when the externalities involved with non-organic cotton are factored into the balance sheet. Indigo is a sustainable crop and it is being grown once again.

Sustainable *marketing* makes sustainable products sell even better. Make environmental impact assessments of products easily available to consumers, perhaps with a QR link on the garment tag. People appreciate transparency—being able to know how their garments were produced is worth something to the modern buyer. Instead of “offshoring” production, consider “right-shoring,” or bringing production back to where the product is going to be sold. This can go hand in hand with vertical integration, where all aspects of a garment’s production, from designing to cutting the fabric to sewing, to adding embellishments, are all done under one roof (more transparency—invite the public for tours! Be proud that your aesthetic is consistent, that your workers are well-paid, that you are not ruining the environment). Vertical integration also gives producers more control over how *much* to produce. With more people shopping online, some businesses are going to a “made to order” model, similar to Amazon’s print-on-demand book division.

This move would go far towards reducing wasted inventory which is destined to become landfill. It suggests a return of clothing-making to its craft origins.

Consider the “30 Year T Shirt,” a brand pioneered by Tom Cridland, in L.A., that comes with a 30-year guarantee. Their products not only have classic design, but if anything, other than a stain damages them, the customer is welcome to ship it back to Cridland for a free repair. Their 30-year line currently includes a tee-shirt for about \$36, a sweatshirt for about \$85, and 50-year jeans for \$97. That’s not cheap compared to fast fashion, but an interesting way to nudge consumers into sustainable choices.

Another—almost opposite — approach to cutting down on surplus production has been pioneered by fashion rental /resale/consignment companies, recognizing that a lot of people, particularly at the high end of the market, might not want to wear a garment for more than a week, much less for 30 years. Rent rather than buy, then pass it along. Buy with the intention of resale, then pass it along. As the *Business of Fashion*/McKinsey report notes, innovators in high end rental/ resale marketing—Rent the Runway, StockX, and The RealReal—have reached “unicorn” class (privately-held, billion-dollar asset companies), suggesting the appetite for “wokewear” is huge and growing. Re-use is an important part of sustainability.

The ultimate re-use of a garment needs to be anticipated in the original design process. Upcycling, for example, should include both “offcuts,” or previously-discarded excess fabric, and actual garments. More companies need to innovate like Patagonia, developing a whole product line from upcycling their own garments. If the garment has reached the end of its usefulness, if it is at least compostable, there is less planetary burden. Blended fibers are notoriously unrecyclable, so laboratory research must continue on that front.

At the opposite end of homespun and quality crafting, are the lab people making bioengineered fabric out of fermented yeast and other unexpected substances. No more pesticides, water use excesses, animal slaughter—textile production might become more like making beer or yogurt in a nice clean lab. Then, too, they’re inventing processes to unmake that fabric afterwards, to break it back down to the molecular level, so it can be refashioned into something else. A zero-waste concept! Or, it’s suggested, maybe 3D printers will be more common and we will all be printing garments to our own specs.

### **Now, Back to the Short Run**

Having stretched our fashion vision to the sci-fi future, let’s reign it back to what the industry predicts for 2020. *The Business of Fashion*/ McKinsey report gives a fairly gloomy take on the state of the business, thanks largely to America’s trade wars and to the unsustainability of “fast fashion.” The cumulative impact of tariff wars, Brexit, and macro global uncertainty, can already be seen in the continuing trend of major bankruptcies (Forever 21, Debenhams, Barneys) and the rise of mall vacancy rates. They urge “resilience planning.” They suggest that firms look beyond China, both as a market and as a supply chain site. We should be looking at other growth areas in the world: the rise of “modest fashion” in Indonesia; huge markets in countries like Vietnam and the Philippines, with young populations;

partnerships with local brands in the mall-centric Middle East; the expansion of the luxury sector in Russia. They point to the growing importance of social media in fashion promotion, particularly the agile apps of Asia. They see a new role in America for brick and mortar stores, not as inventory-dispensers, but as consumer convenience stations, following the Nordstrom Local model.

And (take note, budding designers) they specifically mention innovations in the design of “adaptive clothing” lines, both for children and adults. Yes, there’s always some attention to “out there” concepts, like clothing that repairs itself, or adjusts itself to the wearer’s body temperature, but the strongest message coming out of the industry in 2020 is the need to address the un-sexiest thing around, the landfill. The planet says, time’s up!

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# Heresies I Teach

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I have not taught the foreign trade course at BMCC since the fall of 2016. Now it is styled SBE 201 International Business. But I was happy to again draw the assignment for the fall 2019 term. Much has changed, and not just the textbook.

As I teach it, the course emphasizes the practical activities of trade including the specialized personnel, financing, and logistic challenges of importing and exporting. Documents and credit are still the primary tools of trade.

But changes there are! The current global business environment is marked by confrontation, not the cooperation of the ought's and early teens when the E.U. expanded, NAFTA emerged, and the Trans Pacific Partnership was in negotiation.

Instead, we have arbitrary tariff changes and retaliatory currency devaluations. We witness trade decoupling with Brexit, uncertainty in U.S.-China trade, and a beer embargo between Korea and Japan. The World Trade Organization is neutered by widespread non-compliance.

And electro-trash talking has intensified. The traditional tropes emphasizing Japanese war crimes, anti-Semitism, and Chinese perfidy are rampant and buttressed by internet-stoked populist anger and opportunism.

Trade policies affect jobs and profits and so are naturally adversarial. They are not, however, zero-sum in which your loss is my gain. Trade negotiations can achieve tangible benefits for all parties. The 1981 Automotive Orderly Marketing Agreement with Japan is a triumph! The cap on finished imports has led to extensive investment in domestic final assembly and a robust regional and global parts trade, with the U.S. exporting electronic car components. Meanwhile, the domestic car light & truck market expanded to eighteen million units, and the vehicles are safer, more efficient, *and bigger!*

Trade is hard and continuous bargaining, but it is not war. The industrial strike is a better metaphor and policy guideline. For one, there is rarely an "economic" winner on either side of a labor or trade disruption. For two, creative solutions underwrite industrial progress and comity. "Just say no" is not a policy.

Whoever the national leaders, there is need for trade policies that encourage competition and reward innovation. The United States will better thrive if the following three opinions become more widespread.

## **No. 1: I like merchandise deficits.**

U.S. purchases provide global liquidity. U.S. industry purchases add to domestic productivity; consumer purchases add fashion & function. My view is that \$2.6 trillion annual imports, in a \$21 trillion GDP, is money well spent. Trade has given the U.S. many delightful things that incorporate labor we do not wish to do.

Trade deficits are not fiscal deficits requiring debt service; they are a statistic of profitable exchange. Merchandise credit liquidates within ninety days.

My view is heresy to the hard dollar economist who fears inflation, to the worker who fears for his job and to the marginal vendor who may be crushed by offshore competitors. For each, there is a response or at least a strategy. But capitalism, even in its authoritarian forms, engenders the *Creative Destruction* that makes an exciting if uncertain future.

Trade critics focus on the merchandise deficit (about \$700 billion per year). For many, especially labor-supported politicians, this represents job substitution. For heavy industry, it represents greater competition and narrow profit margins. But for tech, it is a massive global opportunity, as foreign labor applies American innovation and caters to our appetites. And for NYC, the trade deficit stimulates healthcare, art & fashion, travel, media, and financial service employment.

Monetary-sensitive economists believe the trade deficit leads to surplus dollar vulnerability. Their concern is that a falling dollar will spike costs and inflation.

The monetary argument has more moral than logical force. The build-up of foreign dollar reserves mutes currency volatility and underwrites supplier logistics. The build-up of foreign dollar reserves encourages product and service exports, as well as investment transactions. The Federal Reserve retains absolute U.S. dollar sovereignty.

With respect to inflation, merchandise imports reduce aggregate costs for intermediate and final customers, and stimulate local marketing spend. Always!

Many of the exported jobs are happily shed. Goodyear has shuttered its Akron-based tire production, while expanding a Cleveland-adjacent research and headquarters campus. They are closing the Gadsden tire factory near Goodyear, Arizona but increasing the export of synthetic rubber from Texas. Chinese and Korean manufacturers are filling Goodyear tire inventory. Few rubber workers mourn losing the hazards and stench of tire building.

The mass weaving and sewing trades are largely offshore. China demonstrated the effectiveness of gradual export-based industrialization and now many Asian and Central American economies are adopting similar strategies. Ethiopia may have a bright future through the needle trades.

For the record, apparel manufacturing is not a task we need to reserve for our children's children.

The win-lose paradigm embodied in the common perception of the trade deficit is misguided. The real policy challenge is not to reduce the trade deficit but to sustain domestic strategic investments and encourage competition. The success or failure of trade policy will be measured by the quality of job opportunities available to next generations here and abroad.

## **No. 2: China is not a demon.**

It runs by authoritarian socialism governing a profit-motivated economy. China (P.R.C.) is accused of security intrusions, currency manipulation, fraudulent flotations, product dumping, restrictive market access, IP theft and counterfeit and,

most recently, opioid distribution. Most of the charges are baseless or not outside the realm of normal business competition and malfeasance.

The main complaint about doing business in China arises from its authoritarian controls. The P.R.C. requires manufacturers to operate through local partners, effectively reserving transparency, and authority to the state. Secrecy is non-existent, as is judicial appeal.

In the same socialist vein, the government directly controls financial credit and energy pricing. This leads to allegations of dumping, the practice of selling products overseas below comparative cost.

Another high-volume complaint is about the theft of intellectual property. The main acts of this injury pertain to secret data arising from employment agreements; the issues are comparable to litigation between Samsung, Intel, and Apple. Yet, China disputes are often laced with the spirit of racism and the language of Red Menace. Instances of cyber security theft are, to date, trivial.

The fair test of Chinese intentions is not the difficulty of reaching agreement or even the harshness of the terms. The litmus is compliance with negotiated agreements. Here, the record is uncertain but there have been few visible trade litigations and U.S. industry retains a large appetite for China-based transactions.

China is our essential business partner. The efficiency of their manufacturers, and our appetite for serial feature & fashion, are the Zeitgeist of global growth.

Many of my San Diego friends are employed as electrical engineers at QUALCOMM. Their designs (CDMA, 5-G antennae) underwrite much of telecom functional improvements. These same friends would be less well employed if they were also tasked to assemble & test phones. This labor is performed by Chinese, Korean and U.S. offshore companies. Their gain is not our loss.

### **No. 3: Multilateralism works!**

Perhaps my most archaic and entrenched view is that global cooperation promotes collective prosperity.

I have for many years delivered my Coca Cola lecture in which I describe the spread of regional economic integration as a source of harmony and productivity. The European Union (E.U.) is a dramatic example of successful cooperation. More recently NAFTA, now USMCA, has boosted cross border manufacturing while also easing immigration pressure.

*That lecture* also suggested that Latin America's inability to honor compromise has been a cause of its persistent economic undoing.

*That lecture* is now on the electronic shelf. In the current global environment, treaties are abrogated, regional negotiations suspended, sanctions invoked, and bilateral tensions increased. Americans are not teaching the world to sing. Instead, the world is in danger of becoming Latin America!

Today's lecturing recognizes a new climate in which grand bargains will not be made. Indeed, the "weaponization of finance" enables selective penalties that deepen animosities. Trump/Iran today is an example; Obama/Russia another. For trade, it is demonstrably better to set aside political and personal issues but that is not happening (see Trump/China).

Still, trade happens. Domestic labor cannot substitute at comparable price and discipline. There is no alternative \$80 trillion industrial universe to enhance the growth of our own domain.

Multilateralism will eventually return to global fashion to address shared problems and promote industrial standards. It is hard to imagine that the U.S., with its abundance of agriculture, energy, and innovation, will not be a leader and a beneficiary of these happier developments.

The last bit, at least, is not heresy.

# The Disparate Impact of COVID-19 on BMCC Students

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*This article came to The Inquirer early in the pandemic.*

—the Editors

BMCC is home to a wonderfully diverse population that attracts students from all NYC boroughs, and even the Tri-State area. Students travel, often for hours, to come to this school that promises them the ability to earn a college degree and achieve financial stability. The diversity of the student body is a great strength to the learning community here at BMCC. Because students are predominantly Latinx and Black, many who are first-generation immigrants or international students, and because of systemic inequalities built into New York City and the US, the coronavirus pandemic also highlights the deep chasms that our students face when reaching for a basic human right—education.

A pandemic of a deadly, likely viral, respiratory disease is something the public health field has been anticipating for decades. The world has had several occasions to prepare for “the big one”—SARS in 2003, H5N1 or the “bird flu,” The H1N1 influenza pandemic in 2009, and the Ebola epidemic from 2014 to 2016. While some countries responded quickly and decisively when the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) emerged at the end of 2019, many lagged in their response. As we all saw, New York State and NYC became the hot spot of the pandemic, with rapidly increasing cases and mounting death rates (NYC Health, n.d.).

Other trends began to emerge in the United States about who was becoming sick and dying more often. In New York City, age-adjusted death rates have been much higher for Black (92.3 per 100,000) and Latinx people (74.3 per 100,000) than Whites (45.2 per 100,000) and Asian people (34.5 per 100,000) (NYC Health, 2020). People in Black communities are getting coronavirus and dying at higher rates all over the country, from Milwaukee (Johnson, Buford, 2020) to Chicago (Moore, 2020) to Louisiana (Louisiana Department of Health, 2020). Anecdotal information about people of color being turned away from emergency departments when they came for testing or treatment have been reported in the popular press (Salcedo, 2020; Sharp, 2020). According to the NYC comptroller’s office, more than 75% of all frontline workers in the COVID crisis—those in health care, grocery, transit and trucking industries—are people of color (NYC Comptroller, 2020).

Health disparities are not new but this pandemic is throwing into stark relief the underlying issues that have been driving health inequities in this country for generations (CDC 2020; Yancy, 2020). Particularly in the times of COVID-19, it is

vital to understand the myriad stressors that impact the health and well-being of our students.

## **Air pollution**

Gases and particles in outdoor air (known as ambient air pollution) have long been linked to health issues in the population including increases in lung cancer, heart disease, and other illnesses (WHO, n.d.). Some pollutants associated with ill effects are nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, ozone, and particulate matter (particles in the air, especially those lower than 10 or 2.5 microns in diameter).

Researchers have started to study the potential link between air pollutants and COVID-19. In particular, nitrogen dioxide was found to be a factor in COVID-19 lethality in England (Travaglio, et al., 2020) and in Northern Italy (Conticini, Frediani & Caro, 2020). While these studies are early, and no biological mechanism has yet been identified, these studies suggest that there may be a need to consider environmental factors with this disease.

In New York City, though air quality has been improving over time, high concentrations of nitrogen oxides and PM2.5. are still observed in certain neighborhoods (NYC Health, 2019). Globally and nationally, people of color continue to experience higher rates of air pollution and diseases associated with it. Areas such as South Bronx, a predominantly Black neighborhood, continue to have high levels of air pollution. The Bronx is the borough of the city that has the highest rate of COVID-19 cases (NYC Health, n.d.).

Indoor air quality is also known to exacerbate respiratory illness due to pollutants and toxins like environmental tobacco smoke, mold, lack of ventilation, construction, household cleaners, and other conditions (NIOSH, 2013). New York City housing quality is low in many neighborhoods, but particularly in places where people of color are in the majority. Many of our students live in crowded conditions, in housing with mold, pests, peeling paint (sometimes lead paint), and other conditions that negatively impact their health. On top of that, they face the stress of high rent burdens for inadequate shelter.

## **Social determinants of underlying health conditions**

COVID-19 has been more deadly for people with certain co-morbid health conditions, including hypertension, obesity, and diabetes (Garg et al, 2020; Richardson et al., 2020). These conditions are more prevalent among people of color. African-Americans have higher rates of hypertension than any other racial group, and they are more likely to have uncontrolled hypertension (i.e. blood pressure not reduced by medication or lifestyle modifications) (Million Hearts, 2020). Rates of diabetes are highest among people of color nationally (CDC, 2015) and in New York City (Raufman et al, n.d.). In particular, Native Americans, Blacks, and Latinx people are most likely to develop diabetes, substantially more than Whites and Asian Americans.

Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people live and work that lead to good or ill health. These include the physical environment, the social environment, policies, laws, and cultural factors. Long-time racist policies and

actions like redlining, white flight, and mandatory minimum sentencing for non-violent drug offenses have led to a concentration of poor housing, over-policing, economic disinvestment, lack of healthy food options and crumbling infrastructure in neighborhoods that people of color call home. Life expectancy varies widely in New York City based on zip code, with the highest being 85 in Tribeca, the place BMCC calls home, and other majority white neighborhoods, and the lowest being 74 in Brownsville, Brooklyn (Center on Society and Health, n.d.). Socioeconomic status is highly predictive of illness, including both infectious diseases like COVID-19 and chronic illness like hypertension and diabetes (Cockerham, Hamby, Oates, 2017). Poverty tends to concentrate in communities of color because of various historic and systemic inequalities (Haberle, Soto, 2014). In terms of COVID-19, the Bronx has the highest number of deaths in New York City, even though it has the lowest median age (older age has been linked with higher mortality rates in COVID-19); however the Bronx also has the highest proportions of Black and Latinx people, the highest percent of people living in poverty, and the lowest levels of educational attainment (Wadhera et al., 2020).

Another component of the social determinants of health has to do with the nature of work. Many BMCC students work while going to school full time. For some, these jobs are considered essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. But essential does not necessarily equate with high paying, nor do workers necessarily have job security. People of color are more likely to be underemployed or unemployed, employed in high-risk jobs, and employed with fewer benefits like paid sick leave or health insurance (Healthy People 2020, n.d.). More than 75% of all frontline workers in the COVID crisis—those in health care, grocery, transit and trucking—are people of color (NYC Comptroller, 2020).

### **Mental health**

Stress and anxiety during a health crisis like this can include fear and worry about students' own health and the health of their loved ones, changes in eating patterns, and problems sleeping or concentrating. For people with chronic health problems, or mental health issues, the stressor of the pandemic can exacerbate their conditions (Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19, April 16, 2020). Young people are more likely to have mental disorders, particularly among people aged 18–25 (NIMH, 2019). Certain at-risk groups are less likely to get a diagnosis of mental illness, including women of color, women with children, and Black youth living in urban areas and neighborhoods they perceived as unsafe (Farr et al., 2010; Assari, Caldwell, 2017). Even without concerns about COVID-19, students of color who have experienced racial discrimination are at increased risk for alcohol and marijuana abuse (Jelsma & Varner, 2020). Persons of color are also less likely to get treatment for all mental health condition – less than a third of Black, Latinx and Asian-Americans get treatment compared to almost half of whites (NIMH, 2019). Students' coping mechanisms may be inadequate, they may be going undiagnosed and untreated, and trauma-informed pedagogy is called for in helping them to succeed in their academic career. Chief among the factors in trauma-informed pedagogy is developing relationships between instructors and students, ongoing communication, and structure (Teaching Tolerance, March 23,

2020). Many students may experience very little of these attributes as they attempt learning at a distance.

### **Healthcare and health insurance inequalities**

Although health insurance access has been improving due to the Affordable Care Act of 2010, one in five New Yorkers still lack health insurance (NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2014). In particular, Latinx communities struggle the most with access to health insurance – in 2014, 31% were uninsured, compared with 12% of Whites. Uninsured people are less likely to get preventive health care, tend to struggle with controlling their chronic illnesses, and visit emergency rooms more often (Bernstein, Chollet, Peterson, 2010).

In addition to uncertain access to healthcare, people of color also face bias from providers and worse healthcare outcomes (Hall et al., 2015). Although this bias tends to be implicit and thus not always well understood by the providers themselves, it is an additional burden placed on people who already feel marginalized and excluded by society.

All of the above factors combine to paint a grim picture for our students. People of color struggle with access to health insurance, poor housing conditions, environmental exposures to pollutants, higher rates of co-morbid health conditions, and inequities in healthcare settings. It is likely that we faculty have all experienced students struggling with completing school assignments in a distance learning setting that most of them did not sign up for or want. But beyond our students' educational needs, we must consider some of the basic needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs that are unmet for many students throughout their tenure at BMCC, not only during the COVID-19 pandemic. One example that may become an urgent need soon is food assistance for our students. As the state and city budgets begin to tighten, CUNY will be impacted in a very real way. The 2021 preliminary city budget for CUNY is showing a cut of \$1 million for food insecurity (CUNY, 2020)—many students will no doubt be immediately affected if they lack the ability to obtain nutrition. Nation-wide, food prices may increase because of the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on communities of color. Many farm workers and food processing plant operators are people of color, who also suffer from the other issues mentioned above like lack of health insurance and access to healthcare.

While students face these various obstacles, they nevertheless demonstrate great resiliency and drive. Several BMCC students (and a total of 270 CUNY students) are working in the CUNY Census Corps to ensure that New Yorkers are accurately counted in the 2020 Census. Many students in the Health Education Department are applying to work as contact tracers to help New York City control the spread of COVID-19. Aside from their personal and work responsibilities and completing school, many students choose to participate in undergraduate research, student clubs, and activities and events around campus.

Social justice, environmental justice, and health justice go hand in hand. The mission of BMCC is to improve the lives of its students. We cannot divorce that from built-in structural inequalities that affect not only the students, but also staff and faculty of color. Caring for our students' intellectual lives means



caring for their physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness. Students cannot learn if they cannot nourish their bodies, live and work in safe conditions, breathe clean air, and get the best healthcare regardless of their income. Our instructional practice in this time was begun in crisis mode, but even when the pandemic subsides, we must consider how our pedagogy supports the health and wellbeing of our students.

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# Some Articles about CUNY & Public Education during the Pandemic

Domenick Acocella  
English Department

*As we go to press, there are many issues about CUNY and public education still unresolved—whether we will meet solely on line, how many adjuncts the university will dismiss, the ongoing response of the PSC, along with critical issues about funding, a tuition increase and budget matters.*

*—We thank Domenick Acocella for giving us insight into the following articles, we have added a few more, and we encourage our readers to continue pursuing articles relating to CUNY and public education. We start with an image from:*

<https://cdha.cuny.edu/collections/show/91>



*BMCC students challenged the role of Pres. Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War, c. 1970 ... From CUNY DIGITAL ARCHIVES, Radicalism at BMCC, the Early Years.*

—the Editors

### 1. *The New York Times*

[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

#### Opinion

#### CUNY Must Be Saved From Needless Budget Cuts

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/opinion/cuny-cuts-ben-lerner.html>

May 26, 2020

Ben Lerner pushes back on the austerity model so adored by neoliberals. He reminds readers of the *New York Times* (many of whom might see higher education through the expensively tinted lenses of the elite colleges, as his wonderful colleague at Brooklyn College, Corey Robin reminds us in his *New Yorker* piece (see the next link)) that CUNY is a gem that “crackles with energy and intelligence; its diversity represents a wealth that transcends any fiscal metric; that’s why it is, despite decades of disinvestment from the state, the most vibrant campus I know, here or abroad.”

Lerner urges us to push back:

Austerity is powerful people saying “we’ll have to endure painful cuts” when “we” means “everybody but us.” In the coming months, CUNY might well be told by Albany to slash its payrolls and compromise its classes. At that point, the CUNY leadership, along with our strong union and student activists, along with anybody who cares about the city, should fight back. It should demand that Gov. Andrew Cuomo increase taxes on the wealthy, issue bonds the Federal Reserve will buy, or otherwise find ways to make our city university system a priority.

### 2. *The New Yorker*

[www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)

#### The Pandemic Is the Time to Resurrect the Public University

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-pandemic-is-the-time-to-resurrect-the-public-university>

May 7, 2020

Corey Robin started this piece as a Facebook post out of despair of the number of deaths at CUNY campuses that he notes would have been covered more by major media outlets had these been Columbia University deaths. He writes with significant focus on the Brown’s president’s urge to reopen campuses and the detailed plan she outlined in the *New York Times*. But he notes that at CUNY, there is no money to, for instance, quarantine students who test positive in hotel rooms. He argues we cannot look to Cuomo for help nor should we focus on this one person—at the city, state, and federal level. In a Zoom talk at The City College on 26 May, Robin talked about collective action. He speaks eloquently about CUNY’s uniqueness and its impressive history but he is most urgent in calling

for special attention to CUNY’s needs, long neglected since the 1976 debacle of neoliberal policy:

Robin writes:

For decades, a handful of boutique colleges and powerhouse universities have served as emblems of our system of *higher education*. If they are not the focus of discussion, they are the subtext, shaping our assumptions about the typical campus experience. This has remained true during the pandemic. The question of reopening has produced dozens of proposals, but most of them are tenable only for schools like Brown; they don’t obtain in the context of Brooklyn College. The coronavirus has seeded a much-needed conversation about building a more equal society. It’s time for a similar conversation about the academy.

Now is the time, Robin urges, for us to talk about CUNY’s needs as emblematic of the inequality in the United States.

(Here is a response to Robin’s article):

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/theatre/research/current/culturesoftheleft/newsandevents/newsandevents/>

### 3. *The New York Daily News*

<https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-what-cuny-teaches-us-about-the-coronavirus-20200417-a3632rnkmjadldaoutmzyrimy-story.html>

April 14, 2020

Michael Yarbrough notes in this piece that CUNY seems to be hit by the virus in ways unlike other colleges and universities. He also shares a personal anecdote about his class of 25 students, many of whom are essential workers and many of whom have been affected by the virus. Yarbrough argues the needs of CUNY are the needs of the underserved and undercounted and ignored.

Yarbrough writes:

[CUNY’s students] all feel overwhelmed by the COVID-19 crisis, but the pandemic is intensifying social forces that were already familiar to them. They already knew that our neighborhoods are underserved by quality medical care. They already knew that expensive housing forces large families into crowded apartments. They already knew that undocumented immigrants and people experiencing homelessness have a hard time accessing necessary services. And they already knew that we and our families must work to survive, no matter the dangers.

Our students, Yarbrough reminds us, “embody the American dream that higher education supposedly represents” and that CUNY, despite severe underfunding by

the state, according to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* study boasts “seven of the country’s top 10 four-year colleges” that effect upward income mobility.

*And we add some more articles*  
—the Editors

**From the AAUP Academe Blog**

<https://academeblog.org/2020/05/29/the-disturbing-reopening-of-indiana-university-campuses-in-the-fall-a-tale-of-two-messages/>

And this, June 24, 2020 from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, referencing not only the financial disaster but acknowledging 38 deaths from the Covid 19 virus in the CUNY community. Sadly, there are more deaths.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/23/cuny-system-suffers-more-coronavirus-deaths-any-other-higher-ed-system-us>

*Forbes*, “On Line College Classes Should Have No More than 12 Students,” Derek Newton, June 28, 2020.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereknewton/2020/06/28/online-college-classes-should-have-no-more-than-12-students/#5fd6abc23179>

And one more: on capitalization! From the *Columbia Journalism Review*, “Why We Capitalize ‘Black’ (and not ‘white’), Mike Lewis, June 16, 2020

<https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php>

# Three Poems

Andrew Levy

*English*

## **Everyone is Your Home** with help from Celan

When it's stated that "in terms of access, telematics replaces the doorway,"  
I wish I could use the bathroom without opening the door. It's real meat and  
Vegetables, and the lie is in you. Instead of spreading goodwill, you pimp for it.  
Poetry makes it impossible to reuse the American people. These people  
Have no heart. These people (or what lies on them) are circulating in our  
Communities. I may be infected with the minds of the American people. With  
The moral dysentery, massage parlors, and bowling alleys. On the ground,  
Liver inflamed on ultrasound, buying gluten-free, twelve hour shifts, parked  
On a couch lymph nodes swollen with concern, grit in teeth. Farmers  
Plowing under their crops. Antifreeze in their drinking water. In light  
Of that, everyone shares the same body. The filters and the mind are  
Propaganda. Autobiographical recollections? From specks to mountains  
Something's wrong. It is comforting to think that the disproportion of things  
In the world seems to be only arithmetical. An injured vanity, a good  
Florida grapefruit, a kind of martial law connecting consumers and the light  
On the grotesquely grimacing retreating face. Like they say, someone  
Needs to be held. This is the poem I am writing to you. Shouldn't you  
Do something similar? What one only partially understands is in principle  
Impossible, snug as a bug in a rug. Nickle and dimed it just shatters.  
Your faith in people? The oracle's next mission is clarified and deepened to  
Support Americans in their spiritual obsolescence. A sip and it's off  
To dreamland. "In night's friable matter." Take a listen: In the vertical  
Narrow daygorge something came to stand. Where does it stand? Sicklescript  
Heart-satellite, though unvoiced in small groups, dredges up, after midnight,  
Lovesoundbuoys listening to pleas for guest-people's necessities.

**Slave Patrols and Night Watches** 365 days a year George Floyd

All guns are smoking. There are enough to stock  
A miniseries. Your pain is real. It is perhaps my immaturity,  
Now and then, i.e., relatively seldom, that prompts the  
Realization that my activities are superior to me. The known  
And unknown aided and abetted. What was in their minds?  
Surveys are helpless. Instantaneous propaganda-makers,  
And the intensity of it, need to be studied. Premeditation  
Assumes peasants are uninformed. Errors proliferate  
Without end. Even helicopters demand change. In a vague  
Ritual gesture, unsold seats take advantage of giveaways to  
Indifference. It guarantees the people trying to get on  
Are fighting with those who are trying to get off. Faraway  
Places disappear. The nebula coheres. "What am I to do with  
Lamentation?" What is your hospital capacity? I'm fourth  
Generation airless. Spiritual clarities provide illness and death.  
Postscript? Patriarchs prey on the stage of our depraved  
Interlude, pure products of America gone crazy. Purveyors of  
An alien calculus, it's not possible to avoid killing.

**Not a Day without a Lie**

The minimalism, formalism and indeterminism make it a harbinger  
Of crickets or the patter of rain, of so much to come. We know nothing  
Of the invisible, or of veal cooked in cream. Faraway places disappear.  
The specific mutation targets the eyes of the world. Wuhan to  
Washington. Curb-side rentals and transactions are wholly imperceptible  
To those imprisoned by them. Seamlessly, the lives of savages or  
A less discernible irony has completely deserted the real. Whistling  
Dixie, whether one wanted to or not, the prestige of personal existence,  
Its impotence and entanglement committed to optical illusions, a  
Comfortless distance of imbecility, is complete. All guns are smoking.  
You enter their breath with limitless trust. In drifting snowflakes one  
Gropes toward sugar or almonds, raisons, or preserves unencumbered by  
Bread. The capitol of a primeval frenzy achieved by particular mixtures  
Of memorable aphorisms and precious bodily fluids. The old  
Narratives, sleeping cars to eternity, are consulted. In the biggest closet  
An orange jumpsuit reopens its magical kingdom. On the horizontal  
Bar of exclusion, in gentle radiance, shut up and dribble. Due to de-  
Funding of bibliomaniacs, scarcity enters life as a stammer (and the trees  
Come to their senses). The shaman's soothsaying is occupied by  
Family values – the most ordinary of iron gates. 'After great pain,  
A formal feeling comes— the Hour of Lead' leads one to feel, while  
Trying to crack the code, a little crazy. Welcome back. I'm reminded  
Of the words "I can't breathe," and of the bliss of the epileptic.

# #Black Lives Matter, the Ongoing Korean War, and U.S. Militarism

Rose M. Kim

*Social Sciences, Human Services and Criminal Justice*

*Rose Kim's paper was delivered as part of a day-long Black Lives Matter/Six Years Later Symposium, April 12, 2019, sponsored at BMCC by the Social Science, Human Services and Criminal Justice Department. Sheldon Applewhite, Shenique S. Davis, Christine Farjas, Rose Kim, Amy Sodaro, Ross Tippit, and Jamie Warren were the event's organizers. Kim's paper was part of a panel addressing "BLM: Historical and Global Perspectives on State Violence."*

*Patrisse Cullors, whom Kim mentions in her presentation, gave the symposium's keynote address: "Defending Black Lives in the Age of Trump"*

—the Editors

The #BLM movement originated in the United States following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013, but has since developed into a global movement addressing state-sanctioned violence and all the ways Black people are disempowered and deprived of basic human rights and dignity—in the U.S. and globally. Patrisse Cullors, one of the three co-founders of the movement, has visited the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel, and spoken out against the state-violence she witnessed there. She has also traveled to the United Kingdom and Ireland, meeting blacks who experienced colonial legacies and the travails of immigration, in contrast to American Blacks who were enslaved and forcibly transported to the U.S. My presentation hopes to continue making global connections between oppression against black lives in the U.S. and U.S. militarism abroad. Using a #BLM framework, I want to discuss how the unresolved Korean War and U.S. militarism connects to the oppression of Black lives, Korean lives, and Korean-Black lives.

In the U.S., the Korean War is commonly called "the forgotten war" because it lacks the high profile of the Vietnam War or World War II (*just consider all the movies produced on World War II or the Vietnam War*). The Korean War, however, for me, is neither an impersonal nor forgotten event, for it was—it is—the catastrophe that brought my parents to this country. It is a topic that has haunted me, and been of growing interest in my life.

The Korean War erupted in 1950, and raged for three years until an armistice halted the fighting in 1953. At the war's cessation, almost 34,000 Americans had been killed from battle and other causes, and more than 100,000 were wounded. Among Koreans, *nearly 5 million people were killed*, roughly twenty percent of Korea's population, of which half were civilians. In *Korea's Place in the Sun* (1997), Bruce Cummings attributes the massive number of Korean deaths to what the Pentagon called "weapons of mass destruction:" atomic, chemical, and biological weapons. The number could have been even higher, if the U.S. had followed Gen. Douglas MacArthur's recommendation to drop 30 atomic bombs. While spared atomic bombs, napalm, a sticky, burning gel that clings to flesh, buildings, and other surfaces, was widely used to firebomb the northern part

of Korea. Cummings calls the use of weapons of mass destruction "the most disturbing aspect of the Korean War, difficult to write and read about."

In 1959, six years after the fighting had been paused with an armistice, my father, leaving a devastated nation, and at the forefront of war refugees to come, came to Provo, Utah to study English at Brigham Young University, a Mormon institution. He brought along my mother, leaving behind my unknown-to-me two older brothers and sister under the care of our grandmother. They joined us several years later, after my parents had moved to California, and settled in central Los Angeles. I am the only one in my family to have been born in the U.S. When people learn that my parents are from Korea, they usually ask, "South or North Korea?" I always answer, "When my parents were born, there was only one Korea." And that Korea had already existed for nearly 5,000 years.

Today most Americans regard North Korea and South Korea as discrete entities, but it was only after the end of World War II with the defeat of Japan, which had colonized Korea in 1910, that Korea eventually fell under the control of a joint U.S.-Soviet Union commission in 1948, with the northern half controlled by the Soviet Union and the southern half by the U.S. The Korean people initially protested the foreign occupations and tried to launch a provisional government, calling itself the *People's Republic of Korea* (PRK), but the U.S. occupation forces crushed it due to the party's suspected Communist sympathies.

In 1949, as the Soviet Union achieved its first successful atomic bomb test, and as the Communist Party won the civil war in China after decades of fighting, there was an escalation in the "Cold War", the power struggle between the capitalist western nations, led by the U.S. and including liberal European nations, against the socialist USSR and its satellite states. Meanwhile, in Korea, tensions across the northern/southern Korean border, had been simmering since neither side had ever accepted the arbitrary division. In 1950, when the hostilities finally flared into violence, the U.S. decisively moved in to support the southern government, since the northern government had the backing of the Chinese and the Soviet Union. U.S. President Harry Truman argued the Korean conflict was critical to the global containment of "communism."

The "Cold War"—the decades-long power struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union—is often said to have ended with the introduction of "perestroika," the liberal reforms of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the eventual dissolution of Soviet domination in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet still today North Korea—along with nations such as Venezuela and Cuba—are viewed as a threat to the U.S. because of their socialistic governments (which the U.S. government inaccurately calls "communist"). Further, beyond inaccurately labeling them as a "communist" threat, they are also viewed as a "terrorist" threat, especially North Korea, which was included with Iraq and Iran in the "Axis of Evil," prior to the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. As Angela Davis notes, the U.S. first began using the term "terrorist" for black liberation activists in the 1960s and 1970s, after the South African government designated Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress as "terrorists." The word was used to describe activists, such as the Black Panthers, of which Davis herself was a member.

Nearly thirty years later, following the attack on 9/11, George W. Bush revived the use of the term, as he proclaimed a war on "terror," and "terrorists" began to represent the universal enemy of western democracy. Thus, when Micah Johnson, an Afghan war veteran who reportedly was upset about the police shootings of black men, ambushed and killed five police officers in Dallas in 2016, the government labeled #BlackLivesMatter as a terrorist organization, even though Johnson was not affiliated with the group. Patrisse Cullors, one of the movement's cofounders, consistently defines #BlackLivesMatter as a peaceful, non-violent movement calling for the end of state-sanctioned violence against black lives.



While the Korean War is said to be “forgotten” in the U.S., it should be remembered for several significant reasons. It has important connections to black lives in this country, and to Korean and Korean-Black lives in the U.S. and Korea. First, it marked the rise of the U.S. military-industrial complex, and the idea that this nation should serve as a global police force, an idea that continues today. President Truman famously described the Korean War as a “police action” under the aegis of the United Nations, thereby setting an important precedent for the executive use of military force without Congressional authority—an act later used to justify George Herbert Bush’s First Gulf War in 1991 and Bill Clinton’s air strikes in Bosnia in 1995.

The Korean War also marked the end of racially segregated military units, leading to the deployment of more than 600,000 African Americans in all combat and combat service elements. After the fighting was paused, many Blacks chose to stay in the armed forces because of the relative financial and job opportunities the position offered, compared to comparable opportunities on the mainland, evoking the British working class who sought the life of the gentry in the colonies.

Today the U.S. military continues to entice poor and working-class young men and women to join the military, promising them travel, educational funding, and career supports otherwise foreclosed to them. It seems no coincidence that there are three military recruitment offices—for the Marines, the Navy, and the Army—in the storefronts along Chambers Street between the 6 train and BMCC, and that recruiters loiter on the sidewalk outside campus soliciting our students. Why aren’t they recruiting at NYU or Columbia? Why hang here? The U.S. military describes itself as a “voluntary” force, but is that really accurate when the military is your only way to secure housing, food, college funding, and career opportunities?

It is impossible to talk about the military without discussing the rise of U.S. empire following the breakup of the USSR, the only other superpower in the early 1990s. However, it is challenging since, as Sunaina Marr Maira notes in *Missing: Youth, Citizenship and Empire after 9/11* (2009), the current U.S. imperial state is “marked by invisibility, secrecy, and flexibility in its operation of power, and by nebulous, nonterritorial forms of domination that do not resemble traditional forms of territorial ‘colonialism.’”

Many Americans are unaware that just days after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, Congress passed the *Authorization for Use of Military Force*, which sanctioned the use of the military to fight those responsible for the 9/11 attack, along with any “associated forces”; since then, in 2002, a separate law focusing on the threat of Iraq was passed. And, just earlier this week, on April 8<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. designated Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization, the first time the U.S. has applied the term to an arm of another country’s military.

Today, nearly 18 years after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. has vastly expanded the reach of the War on Terror, and is conducting “counterterror” activities in an estimated 76 countries. According to the 2018 White House’s “Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding the United States’ Military Force and Related National Security Operations,” seven countries were listed as being bombed by the U.S.: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and Niger. The current president has been called “the most hawkish president in modern history,” after he dropped 20,650 bombs in the first seven months of 2017, at a rate of about 4 bombs an hour; the total, almost 80 percent the number dropped by Barack Obama in all of 2016. These wars are directly tied to an unprecedented flow of migrants seeking asylum and safe harbor.

Studies have reported a decline in the active-duty military—from 2,065,597 people in 1990 to 1,340,533 in 2015, the smallest active duty force since 2001—however, the reduction is also the result of increasing technological automation and the explosive growth of private security forces and unmanned drones. Currently South Korea has the

third largest active-duty U.S. military presence, following Japan and Germany. In 2016, there were 24,189 military personnel in South Korea. Asian countries, in general, contain about 38 percent of U.S. active-duty military personnel.

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2015, racial and ethnic minority groups made up 40 percent of the Defense Department’s active-duty military, up from 25 percent in 1990. That same year, Blacks constituted 17 percent of active-duty military, which is somewhat higher than their share of the 18-to-44 population, which is 13 percent. A 2011 Pew Research Center report discovered that Black women are enlisting in the military at far higher rates than any other group, and now represent a third of the women in the armed forces, a percentage almost double their proportion of the civilian population (15 percent). The share of active-duty military that are Latino has also risen rapidly in recent decades and represented 12 percent in 2015. It is important to note that the National Guard and Reserves have been deployed alongside the active-duty military, even though they are not categorized or counted as active-duty.

This 18-year-long War on Terror has led to repeated long deployments, resulting in a high percentage of soldiers having PTSD and other psychological problems. According to Brown University’s Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs’ 2018 report, more than 480,000 people have died due to direct war violence, including armed forces on all sides, contractors, civilians, journalists, and others. Over 6,950 U.S. soldiers have died in the wars. 21 million Afghani, Iraqi, Pakistani, and Syrian people are living as war refugees and displaced people in dehumanizing conditions. The cost of the Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria wars totals over \$170 billion.

In this constant, ongoing state of war in which we seem enmeshed, we speak rarely or not enough about the civilians being killed abroad—as we currently bomb seven countries, still averaging four bombs an hour. We also fail to speak about the soldiers who return home with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and related problems, such as addiction, homelessness, domestic violence, and suicide. According to a 2006 study by the Department of Veteran Affairs, veterans with PTSD were more likely to commit violence against their partner.

However, rather than integrating veterans into peaceful civilian life, they are being encouraged to go into law enforcement with legislation like the 2017 *American Law Enforcement Heroes Act* that prioritizes federal grants to assist law enforcement agencies in hiring veterans—a law introduced by Texas Sen. John Cornyn, a Republican, but also supported by Senator Amy Klobuchar and Rep. Beto O’Rourke, both current Democratic presidential hopefuls. These policies are being carried out, even as researchers at the University of Texas School of Public Health in Dallas have discovered that cops who were military veterans, regardless of their deployment history, are significantly more likely to fire their weapons.

Furthermore, since 1990, the government has been arming local police departments with surplus military weapons, vehicles and other items from its arsenal. While former President Barack Obama curtailed the program in 2015, following the disturbing images of heavily militarized police in the streets of Ferguson, “45” resumed the program two years later. Announcing the news to the Fraternal Order of Police convention in Nashville in 2017, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions said, “We will not put superficial concerns above public safety ... The executive order the president will sign today will ensure that you can get the lifesaving gear that you need to do your job and send a strong message that we will not allow criminal activity, violence, and lawlessness to become the new normal.”

U.S. militarism is a danger not only to those within the U.S., but also those in other countries, including Korea. Hopefully, you are aware of the war atrocity known as the “comfort women”—an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 Korean girls and young women who were misled and kidnapped to work as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers at war zones.

This war crime has gained global recognition, especially due to the activism of victims who demanded political recognition. What is less known is that after Japan surrendered, the U.S. military forces continued the practice. Today there remains an active sex trade that services U.S. military forces. The sex trade has led to the birth of biracial, multiracial children who until only relatively recently have been deprived of the rights of citizenship.

The military sex trade in countries such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, have influenced racial stereotypes in the U.S. Katharine Moon discusses how the three wars came to define Asian women as “fragile, docile, but sexually available ... Those three wars shaped the sexual imagination of men.” And, Hollywood films have furthered these stereotypes.

In closing, let me point out that while the U.S.’s current military situation is commonly understood as the consequence of the 9/11 attack, Sunaina Marr Maira and others have pointed out that a group of neoconservatives, aligned with Republican presidential administrations long before 2001, has been pushing for an aggressive expansion of the U.S. military that would facilitate global political and economic domination. Even more critically, Maira further notes that U.S. militarism is rooted in a long imperial history, which includes the following:

the genocide of Native Americas to the colonization of the Philippines and Puerto Rico; the annexation of parts of Mexico as well as Hawaii, Guam and other Pacific territories; the proxy wars in Latin America and Africa; the weapons of mass destruction used against Japan; the devastation of Southeast Asia; and the contemporary mix of covert and overt strategies of domination, including the bombing of Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq, and the client regimes installed in both countries. (2)

*(Note, again, here, how Marr, an academic I greatly respect, “forgets” the Korean War, jumping from the “mass destruction” of Japan to the “devastation of Southeast Asia.”)*

Currently, Camp Humphreys/Pyongtaek, the main base for most U.S. troops in South Korea, has been undergoing an expansion. Like armed gentrifiers, the South Korean-U.S. governments evicted many elderly people, mostly farmers, from their land, leading to large protests (known as the *Daechuri* Protests). When it is completed around 2020, the base will have tripled in size to 3,500 acres, making it the largest overseas U.S. military base. Why is the U.S. investing in military bases in other countries, instead of investing in social services and needs for the people here?

In February, Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA), along with 18 Democratic Congress members, introduced a resolution calling for a formal end to the Korean War, now, still unresolved, in its 68<sup>th</sup> year. The plan, supported by former President Jimmy Carter, calls for the Trump administration to provide a road map to a final peace settlement and also highlights the importance of building confidence and support between the nations. The American public—you, the public—need to support the end of this war.

But Korea is not the only country dealing with U.S. militarism. According to historian David Vine, there are more than 800 known U.S. military bases on the planet. Today, rather than fleeing U.S. wars in Korea or Vietnam, today’s war refugees are coming from Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria.

Returning to the #BlackLivesMatter movement as I close this talk, I remember the day I heard that George Zimmerman had been acquitted in the senseless murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. I was visiting my hometown of Los Angeles, and having dinner at an old friend’s house, along with his wife and teenage son. I had felt punched in the gut and in shock, ever since I had heard the verdict on the afternoon news, but my friends—good,

thoughtful people, the husband, white and the wife, Mexican-American—hadn’t heard the news, and when they did, took it in with nonchalance—not out of malice, but disinterest. It’s frightening that we can react so differently to such an injustice, to such a senseless loss of life. In my classes, I always suggest that each of us should have an inviolable shield protecting us against violence—a barrier impenetrable by a parent, a partner, a police officer, or a bomb. I say it here, now, again.

In 2017, we spent \$639 billion on the military. Rather than investing in war, militarism, and economic profiteering, why can’t we invest in life? Why can’t we spend our hard-earned tax dollars on affordable housing, public education, and healthcare? Why must over 50% of the nation’s discretionary budget be spent on war and occupation? We need to support the idea, proposed by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the 29-year-old Congresswoman representing the Bronx and Queens, for a new Green Deal that will fight climate change and create jobs that harness people’s creativity, imagination, and vision, rather than turning them into conforming, uncritical brutes. Why are oligarchs like “45” allowed to determine our collective fate?

# UNCOMFORTABLE

Ashtian Holmes

Director, Urban Male Leadership Academy

Winter in America

“And now Democracy is a ragtime on the corner / hoping for some rain”  
—Gil Scott Heron

*In the wake of some amazing rain, of the death of George Floyd, followed by demonstrations that erupted all across the country—on June 5<sup>th</sup>, the college held a Zoom Town Hall. 300 people attended, with others unable to “enter” because the Zoom room had reached its capacity. Many colleagues were asked to speak, and then the forum opened to others who wanted to add their concerns and thoughts. What follows is a presentation by one speaker, Ashtian Holmes.*

*The Inquirer will continue to explore and address the issues of racism, police violence, injustice, as well as suggestions and plans for change—from our classrooms to the globe. We hope to publish other speakers’ comments from June 5, along with articles and thoughts from colleagues, both faculty and staff, in a special on-line edition in the fall (see our call for papers as well).*

*In Interim President Karrin Wilks’s call for this Town Hall, she noted*

*The Town Hall will serve as a forum to express collective grief and outrage, and more emphatically to suggest recommended action for change. Let’s come together and unite in this fight against racism, and let us continue our mission of advancing equity and justice through education.*

—The Editors

Like millions around the country and the world, I am saddened, devastated, and angered by the death of George Floyd. My heart goes out to his family, his community, and people everywhere who witnessed the horrific public execution of this Black man, whose life was taken from him in the most inhumane, gruesome, and repulsive way imaginable.

We want justice for you, George Floyd. We want justice for all who lost their lives to senseless acts of police brutality. However, we know that this unrest did not begin with George Floyd and will not end simply because the officers involved in George Floyd’s death are arrested. Police brutality is not the cause of racial injustice. Police brutality is a symptom of the deep-rooted, pervasive, systemic,

systematic, structural, institutionalized racism that echoes and reverberates through every facet of our society. Change will only occur when we intentionally work to dismantle and destroy racism with the same level of pervasiveness and relentlessness that has allowed it to thrive and endure for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

I always say to my students that **comfort is the enemy of progress**. I say that in the context of student success and achievement. What I mean by that is, you really need to step outside of your comfort zone to acquire the career and academic opportunities that are going to lead you to where you really want to be. You will not achieve success by doing the same things you are doing now over and over and over again. This principle applies perfectly to this moment in time.

The hard truth is that our society is very COMFORTABLE with racism, oppression, marginalization, and white supremacy. The officers that murdered George Floyd, in broad daylight, in front of a crowd of people, while being filmed were very COMFORTABLE in their actions. The leading officer placed his knee on the neck of George Floyd for 9 minutes, while he had his hands in his pocket. He was COMFORTABLE, while his fellow officers made sure that no one could come to George Floyd’s aid and save his life.

President Trump was COMFORTABLE when he tear-gassed peaceful protestors so he could take a walk around the corner and take a photo with a Bible in his hand.

Society at large seems COMFORTABLE witnessing death after death after death of Black men and Black women who are unnecessarily and unjustly killed. We mourn, we cry, we march. And that energy, that urgency sometimes lasts for a day, or two days, or a week, or a few weeks but eventually things return to business as usual and folks act almost as if nothing had happened. By that definition, we’re very COMFORTABLE with racism.

Do you know who isn’t COMFORTABLE? Black people in this country. As a Black man, when I walk into spaces of power and privilege, nobody looks like me. If I’m lucky, there may be one or two folks in those spaces who might look like me. And that makes me uncomfortable. When I go to spaces of pain, marginalization, and poverty, where oppression is high and opportunity is low, when I go to shelters or correctional facilities to try to convince folks to go to college, almost everybody looks like me. And that makes me UNCOMFORTABLE. And it should make all of you UNCOMFORTABLE.

So, I challenge everyone in this community: students, colleagues, people of all races, but particularly our white allies, to get excruciatingly UNCOMFORTABLE in the name of social justice, unity, and equity. We need to have UNCOMFORTABLE conversations, we need to make UNCOMFORTABLE decisions, we need to take action that makes our stomachs churn with DISCOMFORT. We cannot go back to business as usual, we have to be bold, courageous, fearless, and relentless in the pursuit of equity for all and show our fallen brothers and sisters that their lives did indeed MATTER.

Lastly, I want to say to my fellow Black men and my extraordinary Black women, I appreciate you, I adore you, I hear your pain, I’m with you. You are

giants, you are intelligent, you are perfectly created. You are **KINGS** and you are **QUEENS**. And no matter how much your beautiful bodies are brutalized, your spirit cannot be broken.

Rest in Peace George Floyd.

In solidarity,  
Black Lives Matter,  
Power to the People,

—Ashtian Holmes—A Black man and father of two Black boys.

# The COVID-19 Project: Graphic Design & Oral History

Adele Shtern *Music and Art*

**F**inding strategies to rise above the angst of contemporary life is essential. Crisis presents an opportunity to bring us to a higher level of human consciousness. Art helps us deal with the accentuated reality of danger. In the spirit of compassionate teaching, to acknowledge the current traumatic reality and help us heal, I invited students to tell their stories from an authentic place and to combine them with photographs or collages. I suggested possibilities of exploring intellectual, emotional, philosophical or poetic realms.

My class demos and those of my Teaching Assistant Sarah Szabo inspired students to create coronavirus related art and presented us with an opportunity to get in touch with our thoughts and feelings by telling our stories. The work presented here is from Art 101 Digital Imaging Studio students with a range in art experience, English language skills and equipment.

According to Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, stories are containers of meaning which have healing power when they are shared. Dr. Remen, a pioneer in integrative medicine, says that the way we deal with losses shapes our capacity to be present to all of our experiences. Living well is not about eradicating our wounds and weaknesses, but understanding how they complete our identity and equip us to help others. They remind us we're not alone with whatever faces us and that there are resources, both within us, in the larger world and in the unseen world, which may be cooperating with us in our struggle to find a way to deal with challenges. She invites us to "listen generously."<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 project combines images with stories which have been translated into visual language showing a hierarchy of information responsive to the messages in the text. Typographic size and weight changes reflect increased or decreased textual importance. Line endings and space serve as punctuation and paragraph breaks. In expressive typography we take advantage of graphic license and eliminate most punctuation. "To design is to transform prose into poetry."<sup>2</sup>

"Art is reparative, its intention is to restore psychic health ... the ability through a determined however incomplete and flawed integration of all the powers in the self, to withstand negative reality, insane experience."<sup>3</sup> Art has the capacity to promote the synthesis of physical, emotional, cognitive and social functioning.

**S**pecial thanks to Sarah Szabo for her dedicated teaching assistance.

<sup>1</sup> American Public Media, *Speaking of Faith*, Dr. Remen Transcript of Interview by Krista Tippett, 11.29.2008

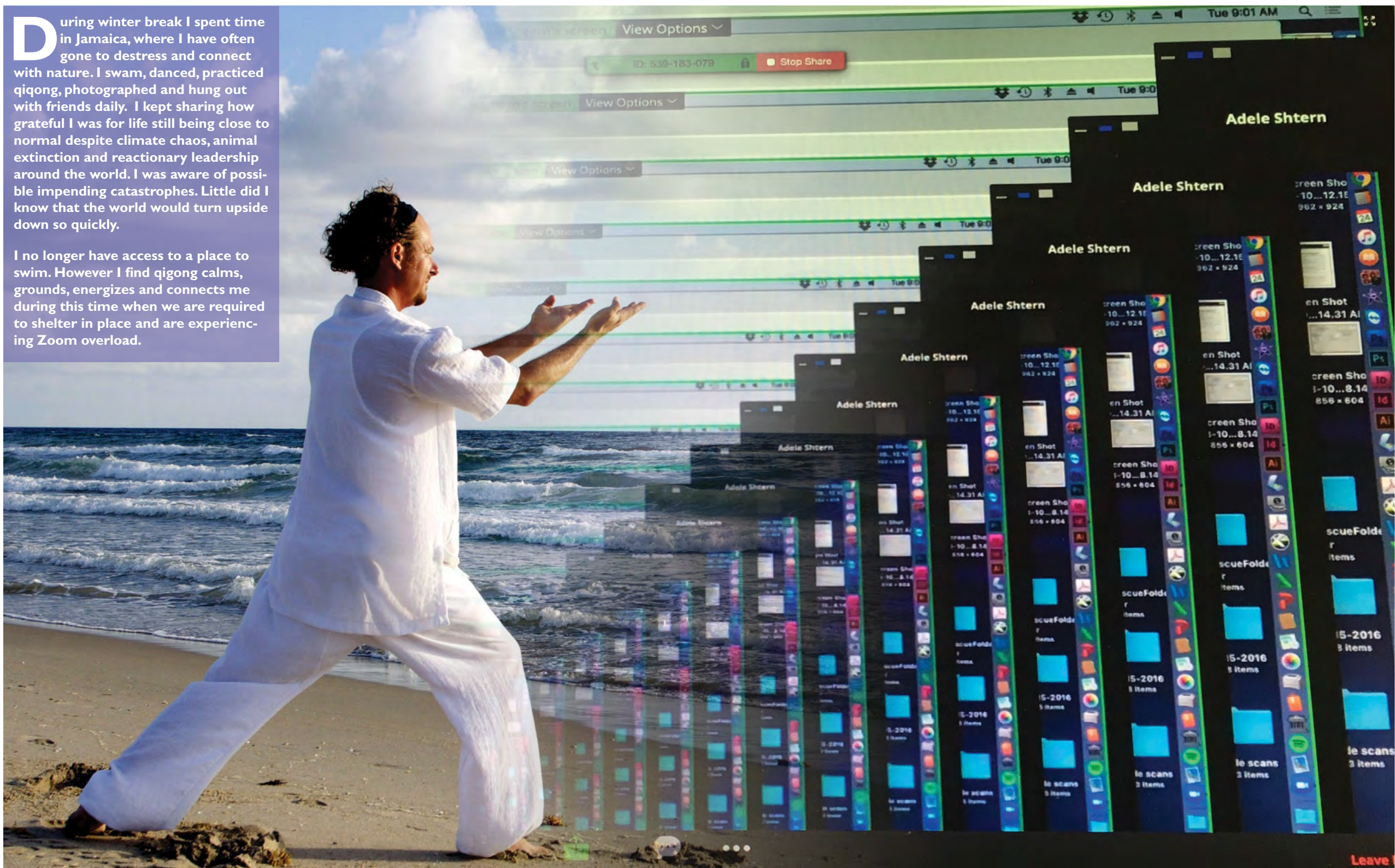
<sup>2</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Dover Publications: New York, 1977), p.5

<sup>3</sup> Donald Kuspit, *Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries* (New York: Allworth Press, 2000), p.21

Adele Shtern is a multi-disciplinary artist who has been a professor of art since receiving an MFA from Yale. She uses traditional and digital media and is considered a computer art pioneer. Committed to the process of art as a form of healing, she conceived Lotus Cusp, a multimedia presentation re 9.11 based on her and BMCC students' stories and art. The Covid-19 Project continues in this vein. Several of her images are on the 9.11 Online Memorial Artists Registry. Her art is digitally archived at the Columbia University Digital Commons of Art & Culture. She may be contacted at [ashtern@bmcc.cuny.edu](mailto:ashtern@bmcc.cuny.edu) or visit her website <http://www.adeleshtern.weebly.com>

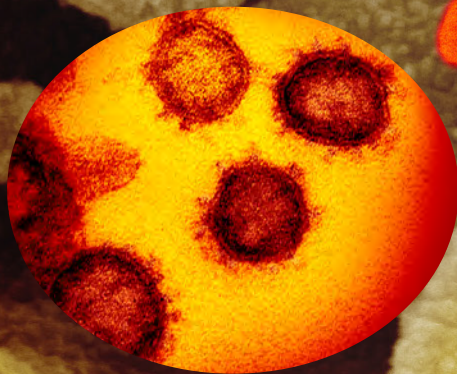
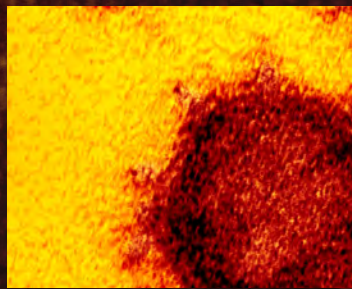
**D**uring winter break I spent time in Jamaica, where I have often gone to destress and connect with nature. I swam, danced, practiced qigong, photographed and hung out with friends daily. I kept sharing how grateful I was for life still being close to normal despite climate chaos, animal extinction and reactionary leadership around the world. I was aware of possible impending catastrophes. Little did I know that the world would turn upside down so quickly.

I no longer have access to a place to swim. However I find qigong calms, grounds, energizes and connects me during this time when we are required to shelter in place and are experiencing Zoom overload.



Adele Shtern: Photomontage, text & zoom photo; figure photo by Antonika: <https://bit.ly/2WYd3Go>

**Lockdown**



During winter break I spent time in Jamaica to **destress**  
I was aware of possible impending catastrophes

Little did I know that the world would turn **upside down** so quickly  
I find **qigong** calms grounds **energizes** & connects me

when we are required to **shelter in place** with zoom overload



Trying to find **unity** within a toxic ocean

Echoes of an era

**saturated by sirens**

I wait for

*the waves wind and rain*

to soothe the silence

*and stay sane*



# SELF ISOLATION

**T**he coronavirus pandemic has brought us to strange, surreal times. People don't leave their homes, do not meet and keep a distance in public places. Small businesses are collapsing. Many people are running out of money.

When it first started, we were laughing, we had no idea what it would lead to. Right now, I just want things to go back to the way they were or even better. Perhaps people all over the world needed such a reboot.



# Lessons from COVID 19

I respect **medical workers** more than ever

I miss the walks that I **used to have to do**

I **panic** about staying home

**Clorox** disinfecting **wipes** are my new **best friends**

**Media** makes me **frown**

Baked **#COVIDsourdough** from scratch

Clearance **emails** seduce me every day

Got three sets of **fancy pajamas** on online sale

But still living in my oldest jammies **3 days in a row**

Wish I had **never had to learn these lessons**

Wish I didn't have to end conversations with **stay safe**

Wish I didn't have to **fear** my **neighbors**

Wish I could run the **Brooklyn marathon** this weekend

Wish I could spend the **same old typical day** again

DUE TO THE **CORONAVIRUS** FACE TO FACE TEACHING ENDED EARLY

CORONAVIRUS IS THE REASON WHY MANY PEOPLE ARE **SUFFERING** FINANCIALLY

**REMOTE LEARNING** ISN'T WORKING FOR ME

MOST BUSINESSES ARE **SHUT DOWN**

I HAVEN'T WORKED IN OVER A MONTH

I DON'T KNOW WHEN MY JOB WILL BE OPENING UP AGAIN

I'M PRAYING CORONA GOES AWAY SOON

**STAYING QUARANTINED** IS HARDER THAN I THOUGHT

I HAVE LOST **MOTIVATION** TO DO ANY SCHOOL WORK

CORONAVIRUS WAS VERY **UNEXPECTED**

IT'S ACTUALLY BEEN **HARD** KEEPING UP

CLASSES HAVE BEEN BOMBARDING US WITH WORK BACK TO BACK

**WE DON'T KNOW** WHEN IT'S GOING TO **BE OVER**

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT WORK IS DUE ANYMORE, I JUST DO IT



## COVID-19 GLOBAL EPIDEMIC

Save Lives and Stay Home

- I got a call back for an appointment after 2 weeks had passed
- Hard to get testing, 2 hour hotline wait time, just to get an appointment
- I depend on my job to pay rent and other expenses as a college student, I did not qualify for pandemic relief even though I am a low income college student
- Drive through centers were selective, I was lucky to have gone with someone who works in the medical field
- Testing was painful and uncomfortable, my nose felt pain up to 3 hours after testing
- Getting results was difficult, I had to call a callback number and wait an additional day to get my results, in total I waited 4 days (more than "usual")
- I received no help from the government

# Neue Normal

It's **frightening** to realize that your life lies  
not in your hands but in the hands of others

**Money rules everything** around us

All I can think of are the millions  
lying still amongst the rubble piled up like **landfills**

There are only so many **burial plots** to be filled  
Surrounded by the sounds of **death knells**

**We yearn for normalcy but we know there's no going back**

**Where do we go from here?**

Nothing is certain

All I know is that I'd love to see you

in our **virtual world**

The **Coronavirus** is very scary

The whole world is **suffering** from this viral

**PANDEMIC**

**However**

I believe people will **overcome it** together and **give** each other

**positive energy**

# Qigong Connects Me to Consciousness

Through Siewli Stark, I embodied the passing clouds, the tree swaying in the wind and the waves at the edge of the water. I have arrived at moments of peace, expanded awareness, visited memories and a sense of connection, despite throbbing intestines, great uncertainty, chaos and confusion. I have experienced a sense of what I call the infinite, through glimpses of a perpetual undulating balance. I am forever grateful.



**In this challenging time we are faced with many limitations and called upon to persevere. There are many layers of loss. Radical acceptance teachings and medical qigong practice with Siewli Stark facilitate wellbeing and foster resilience**

# **WAYS OF CULTIVATING RESILIENCE**





**T**here is no night without a **dawning**

No winter without a **spring**

And beyond the dark horizon

Our **hearts** will once more **sing...**

For those who leave us for a while

have *only* **gone away** out of a

**restless** care **worn world**

Into a **brighter day**



# HOPE

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul

And sings the tune without the words

And never stops at all

And sweetest in the Gale is heard

And sore must be the storm

That could abash the little Bird

That kept so many warm

I've heard it in the chilliest land

And on the strangest Sea

Yet never in Extremity

It asked a crumb of me

# Letters to Students during the COVID-19 Retreat to Online Classes

We put out a call in mid-May for letters that faculty wrote to students. We were heartened to receive many submissions, which covered a large swath of territory, from encouragement to register for summer and fall courses, to concerns about students' well-being, to many waves of support. Some letters also pointed to the inequities that our students face, and the difficulties that many adjuncts face in being rehired. Others sought to engage the students in support for part-time faculty as well. The Inquirer's policy is not to note the particular status of our authors, simply their department, but many of the letter writers are adjuncts, who work just as hard in reaching out to their students as full time faculty do (and perhaps more!)

—the Editors

**Marguerite Rivas**  
**English Department**  
**Eng 353, Women in Literature**

Dear Students,

You have made it through a semester that no one could have imagined, not even in a science fiction novel. You have faced challenges—quarantine and isolation, worry about relatives and for your own health, perhaps caring for younger siblings or elders, and facing an abrupt change from the classroom to at-home learning. Some of you have faced even greater challenges and losses. Know that I have been concerned about you all and have been keeping you and your families in my thoughts and meditations each day.

I feel honored to have been your professor through this tumultuous, strange, and uncertain semester. You have been persistent and courageous. It is nearly impossible to concentrate under such stress as we New Yorkers have faced, but you tried your best. *Even if you were not able to finish the class, it's okay.* These are not normal times, but BMCC students are resilient. I trust that you will continue to try again next semester under better circumstances. I know times have been hard, but I have great hope.

I have had a difficult time, too. The trial-and-error of getting my classes online and trying to make sure my students were okay and learning was challenging. Also, I have been sad to be quarantined away from my children, two of them first-line workers. It was strange spending my birthday alone and Mother's Day without them for the first time in our lives. I knew, though, that as long as they were well and helping others that is all that mattered. Within the past few weeks, I have suffered the loss of a friend and the loss of a close relative, a cousin I grew up with and loved very much. Our mothers were twins, so we were like sisters. It has been hard. However, having a career that allows me to work with students like you has helped me along the way. I am grateful, and I appreciate you.

Whether you finished the semester or not, you should all be proud of yourselves. You tried and will try again. It must have been so overwhelming for you all to suddenly have your classes thrown online. Next semester will be different. If you have not already done so, I urge you to register for classes. You will see that many classes are listed as fully online. Some are not. Be aware that the instruction you had this semester was not normal e-learning. It was emergency online instruction. Professors who have had extra e-learning training teach online courses. Online classes are well planned in advance and are taught with a variety of learning activities, so consider registering for one if you haven't already registered for classes. If you haven't already registered for classes, you should do so as soon as you can. Settle yourself as best you can.

If you are graduating, congratulations! *You were stuck in a pandemic. You were stressed. Nevertheless, you persisted.* I am sorry that you have been deprived of all the customary rituals and big celebrations that you deserve. We will celebrate you, though. Please keep in touch.

I wish you all a peaceful summer. Read and write as much as you can. It will pass the time; you will have something to look back on. Be creative. Create an online blog based on your interests. Write about how you are feeling and what you are thinking in a notebook. It doesn't have to be fancy or grammatically correct. Just write. Write song lyrics and poems. Express your feelings and make observations about the world around you. Catch up on your sleep.

Traumatic stress interferes with your memory and learning. You may not remember what you learned this semester, but you will remember that you were a college student who did their/his/her best in a difficult and sorrowful time. Find opportunities to be kind to others. We lift ourselves up when we lift others up. You know this to be true. Don't forget to let me know how you are doing next semester if you get a chance. (Make sure you mention what class you were in! ) I'll be thinking about you and your loved ones.

Be well,  
Professor Rivas

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**La Shawna O'Faire**  
**Computer Information Systems**

You have satisfactorily completed *CIS100-1200 Intro to Computer Applications* this Spring 2020 semester earning more than a grade. Be proud of yourself and never forget this Spring 2020 turbulent journey. You survived this semester conquering what could have been defeats so now any other semester encountered should be a piece of cake! It was a pleasure expanding your learning capabilities as I learned so much through you. You are resilient and determined now go apply what you have learned to your future courses, career and life.

Respectfully submitted,  
Prof. L. O'Faire

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**Joel Oramas**  
**Speech, Communications, and Theatre Arts**  
**Speech 100 Fundamentals of Public Speaking**

Hey guys!

It's been truly a pleasure to teach you all. What a time to have met you, huh? In any case, I'm glad that we crossed paths and I'm glad you all persevered through this semester. I know this was and continues to be a tough time for some of you, but just remember that it gets better. Truly.

And academically, bumps along the road will also happen. I went through switching majors, transferring to a different college due to personal problems, taking classes over etc. But with persistence and drive, you'll ALWAYS (oops, look at me using absolutes) come out on top.

My IG is [JoelOramas21](#). If you would like to keep in touch, feel free to add me, otherwise, see ya around the city eventually :)

Professor Oramas

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**Joe Barker**  
**Accounting**

To Students in ACC 222, ACC 330, ACC 241, classes.

Dear students,

This past semester has brought challenges we have never seen before. We can laud ourselves for reaching past the unexpected challenges. These experiences have given each of us invaluable skills to continue in our endeavors. If nothing else is underscored, we have learnt the true meaning of community and family.

Like you, my emotions had the best of me. I was worried and concerned about the welfare of my family and loved ones, here, and abroad. At times, I felt helpless, and uncertain of my family's future. It was in the classroom I found solace. I was not alone. We collectively offered comfort to each other. We were a distraction to each other's pain. You found the courage to continue your education despite the challenges COVID-19 brought.

We at BMCC have prided ourselves on having a culture of care, a culture that kept us together as a family. Our continued survival will hinge on understanding and applying the concept of "It takes a village."

I'm looking forward to continuing the journey with you in the summer and fall 2020.

Sincerely,  
Prof. Barker

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**Suzanne Douglas**  
**Music and Art**

I sent this to my music student before she entered into her jury that night

Nova,

As you prepare to present your amazing talent to your adjudicators know that I am standing with you in spirit. I am there with you as well as those who have stood behind me to encourage me and lift me up, Gretchen Parlato, Theo Bleckmann, Kate McGarry, Sheila Jordan and the many mentors who have helped me find my way. You, by association will continue our legacy. I invite you to allow your awareness of your amazing gifts to inspire and encourage yourself and others. Yes, encourage yourself.

Your hard work has brought you a long way. Continue to grow your artistry as you move forward in life. I wish you the very best in everything you do.

Professor Douglas

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**Margaret Barrow**  
**English**

To Eng 100.5 (bridge composition course) students

Hello Everyone,

Let me begin by writing, I hope you and your families are all well and keeping safe in this very difficult time. A few weeks ago, our lives were turned upside down due to the COVID-19 virus. All of us felt the immediate impact. Recently, I have become more aware of the silent impact, the psychological impact. I don't think we all truly understood how deep the psychological impact would be. Now, I realize that what I am beginning to witness as a lack of participation in the course is a direct impact of the sudden drastic shifts we've had to make in our lives and behaviors. No response is a normal response when we are faced with a traumatic experience. We immediately think life as we know it is over. I understand your concerns and your fears. I have them too.

However, we must stand together strong, continuing with the goal we set at the beginning of the semester. All those motivational and inspirational videos we watched all speak about the challenges we will face as we work toward reaching our goals. No one ever knows what those challenges will be. We just know that we will have to face some of the most difficult challenges in our lives. This challenge we face today should not defeat us or steal our hope. We must remain hopeful together. We must stand together as a force to see this semester through. I believe you can and that together we can. This virus has created a deep fissure in our dreams and hopes of a tomorrow. But our dreams are still alive, and they reside in us and each other. As a community, we can turn to each other during this difficult time. We can reach out to each other and check on each other and offer our help to each other. You can offer to read a peer's writing. You can have a chat once in a while to see how a peer is doing. This is our humanity we are talking about here. We need to stand together during adversity. We give of ourselves because that's what a caring community does. Do not give up on yourself and do not give up on us.

I am here for you to lean on so that we can lean-in together to finish what we started.

Your friend and Professor,  
Margaret Barrow

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**Elisabeth Jaffe**  
**Mathematics**  
**MAT 206.5**

Dear Students,

To say this has been a difficult or challenging semester would be an understatement. This semester has tested all of us in ways we never thought possible. I want you to take a second, now that it is over, to think about what you accomplished. In a single moment, the whole world changed; it stopped, and yet you kept going. You kept watching videos and doing assignments. Yes, it may have taken a beat for you to get acclimated. You may have needed a second to breathe, but then you kept going. All of you suffered. Some of you did all of your assignments looking at the tiny screen of a phone searching for internet signals. Some of you kept going even though you were a frontline worker, literally risking your life for others. Some

of you went out and got a job as a frontline worker *after* this all began. Some of you have children who you now had to teach, care for, and reassure in *their* most difficult time. Some of you were sick, and in some cases, you were hospitalized. Some of you lost a person or people you love. Some of you dealt with all these things. Yet, you kept going, and you still keep going. I know that you have moments when you wondered or even still wonder if you can continue. **You can.** I know you can because I have sat here in front of my computer screen for the last two months as a witness. I have responded to your panicked emails when you thought you would not be able to hand in work because you could not find a place to secretly escape during your job to do an assignment. I have graded your projects in which you created new worlds similar to those of Einstein's Dreams. Then I received comments about articles you found describing possible new worlds recently discovered in Antarctica, and you did this all in a math class! I have tried to interpret your mathematical minds in weekly quizzes in which you described every step of your work. I sat next to my computer as your final exams came rolling in answering questions ad infinitum because you cared about the grade you received. Those of you who could not finish because of any one of the extenuating circumstances that existed this semester still did not give up. You are taking incompletes so that you can keep going.

I will be honest; I had a hard time too. I have had my own difficulties acclimating to life in a small dark room with my own dark thoughts. I have also never yelled at an inanimate object (my computer) so much. Don't worry, after I got my Internet working a few weeks in, my computer and I have become better friends. At that point I stopped yelling; I simply talked to myself for hours on end as I created videos explaining material. We have all had concerns and worries this semester, but in those moments, my worst moments, I thought about *you* and what you were doing. This is what kept me going. You all have shown such strength of character. I have learned as much from you as you have learned from me (I am assuming/hoping that is a lot). Thank you for getting me through this semester. I am only sorry that we could not say a proper goodbye.

Remember, you have made it through the hardest moments of your life; you have proven that you have the persistence and resilience to make it through all the rest. Please know that even though the semester has ended, I am still sitting by my computer ready to answer emails that come in. If there is anything I can do to help you continue to keep going, I am here, and I will be here when this is over. Please do not hesitate to email me. Thank you for an extraordinary semester!

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**Deniz Gokcora**  
***Academic Literacy and Linguistics***

Dear ESL 94 Students,

I wish we had face to face classes this semester. I missed seeing your faces. However, the circumstances that COVID-19 caused did not let us see each other. Although we could not meet on campus, we met online twice a week on Zoom class meetings. I would like to congratulate all of you because you have sustained until the end. No matter what the results of your efforts are, everyone is an achiever this semester.

It is my experience that education is very important. It will help you achieve your dreams no matter what your background and ethnicity is. Therefore, please do not give up, and do not quit. BMCC is a strong, caring family since there will always be resources available for students to catch up and improve their academic skills and learn more. The humanity is going through a difficult examination period. Please remember "the tenacity of trees" freewrite assignment and adopt a solid work ethic. You will be successful for yourself, for your family, and for your country.

I am sure the current situation will be over. You will be able to graduate from BMCC and get your degree to move on.

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**Jean-Yves Plaisir**  
***Teacher Education***

Dear Students,

I hope you and your family are staying safe, healthy and hopeful during these trying times. Despite all the unprecedented challenges that we have faced amid the coronavirus pandemic, we continue to pull our resources together and get through this semester successfully. The pandemic has also afforded us with incredible opportunities for learning and teaching. Through this multifaceted crisis, we have demonstrated uncommon capability and relentless resolve to hone our skills and construct new knowledge, understanding that what we do and learn today will make an impactful difference to the lives of the children we will teach tomorrow. Let's continue to press on with our mission to learn, teach and lead society during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am joining my voice with the BMCC community to express our solidarity with you and your family while also wishing you the very best in your future endeavor. Please remember that we stand firm, able and ready to support you at all times. Your success is our goal.

Best regards,  
Jean

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**Precious Sellars-Mulhern**  
***Counseling Center***

**Give Yourself**  
**TIME**

**Every day.**  
***You are worthy!***

Thankfulness  
Inspiration  
Meditation  
Exercise

—*Monk Jay Shetty*

Remember to give yourself TIME every day. You deserve it!

**Thankfulness**—focus on all the things in your life that make you happy, or cause you to smile.

**Inspiration**—read something or listen to a podcast that lifts your spirits—every day!

**Meditation**—allow quiet time to simply be present with yourself—practice Heart-Focused Breathing [Love in! Love out!], stroke your pet, tend your plants ...

**Exercise**—continue moving throughout the day. Take frequent breaks from your work—stand up, stretch, walk or run in place ...

If you follow Monk Shetty's model of **Thankfulness, Inspiration, Meditation, and Exercise**, you will discover that ***you are becoming more Thankful, Inspired, Mindful, and Enthusiastic every day.***

And yes, you will have to practice every day.

There is no **pill** to inner peace; *practice* is the way.

Be Well © Stay Positive!  
NAMASTE  
PSM: April 24, 2020

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**Nina (Devine) Derby**  
**Biology**

I sent this letter: I read it out to them on Zoom before the final exam and then sent it to them by email.

Dear Bio 420 Section 173,

I want to thank you for your strength and resilience this semester. As evening students, many if not most or all of you are already pushing your limits. Most are working, some are parenting or caring for your own parents, and I think you're all trying to complete the requirements for schools that will get you your career of choice. Now you may also be struggling to find or keep your income, you may be struggling to find a quiet place within a chaotic apartment or life to study, you may have even more family and personal obligations and issues. You certainly must have questions about what the future of your career will look like and what the world will look like. What is amazing is that through this, you have each shown up to this class and put in the work to do your best. Attendance remained very high. Participation remained very high. Many of you continued to excel and many improved. I'm proud to be your professor and I wish I could give you each a hug or even a handshake on this last day of the semester to congratulate you on a job well done. Remember that you are resilient. I wish each of you the best in your next steps, be it graduation or your next semester or a new school or job. Please know that I am available after the semester if you would like a reference or to talk. I'm providing my personal email in case any of you would like to stay in touch for any reason. Be well and safe and happy.

Yours truly,  
Professor Derby

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**Hyacinth Martin**  
**Leasha Lindsay**  
**Melissa Butler-Haughton**  
**Monique Cayo**  
**Nursing**

To Our Champions: Nursing 112—Fundamentals of Nursing students

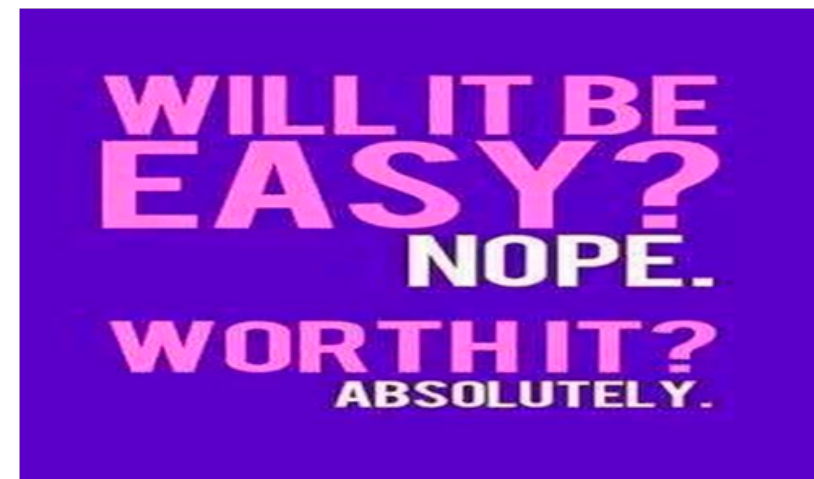
Dear Learners:  
What a semester! You were faced with insurmountable challenges and rose to the occasion. The entire Nursing 112 faculty want to say a loud **CONGRATULATIONS**. We are so proud of all of you.

Being a nursing student during this time when the world is going through the COVID-19 pandemic takes commitment. The epidemic has posed unprecedented challenges for all of you. Considering the circumstances you all have undergone as you transitioned from face-to-face classes to online learning environments, it is paramount to thank you for the sacrifices you have made to cope with this adjustment. Thank you. Several of you were faced with the challenges of working the front line and witnessing the devastation of COVID-19 and yet showed up to classes as scheduled and performed well. Some of you had to tend to family members who were ill, and home school young children, as well as deal with the alterations in class schedules. This is a challenge for anyone to manage and to sustain a positive mindset. Your courage and ability to stay strongly motivated during this time cannot be downplayed and must be praised for having to cope with tough moments.

Despite this, you persevered and prevailed. Despite the odds turning against you, you made it through.



Do not give up! You did not GIVE UP during the sudden COVID Crisis that overtook all of us, and here you all are transitioning into NURSING 211. Do not give up! Continue to work hard for your chosen prize. Nothing is impossible. **Never give up!**



**Darryl Brock**  
*Center for Ethnic Studies*  
*LAT/SOC 150: The Latino Experience in the U.S.*

Greetings Students:

I enjoyed having you in the course this semester. I am sorry we were interrupted by the coronavirus right at about the mid-point. Crises in life can occur and this one is of course virtually unprecedented (unless you have done some reading and you know what 1918 means). Yes, the Spanish Flu of that year was a much worse event in world history with 50 million deaths, but the world survived and moved on. We will too.

But it will take all of us to make that happen. Social distance yourselves, wear masks, don't gather in groups, and thus don't be the agents to keep this virus alive and spreading in the population. Your vulnerable grandparents, and your neighbor's grandparents, are counting on you to bring this under control so that they can live for many more years among us. Plus, the virus can strike down anyone at any age.

The Spanish Flu does provide a good lesson. Despite the flu's name, the virus did not originate in Spain but most likely in the United States at an army base in Kansas. Yet, nobody ever suggested that the US owes the world a great debt for "causing" these 50 million deaths and infecting one-third of the world's population. As you read and study the news carefully in the months to come before the fall elections, use your critical thinking skills gained from your CUNY courses to examine the statements in the news. Dig for a more nuanced understanding and inform yourselves so that you can select among the various candidates the ones who are honest and most likely to lead us out of this difficult time. Honor those thousands who have perished from COVID-19 and can't vote this fall. You can do this by registering (if you have not yet) and voting on their behalf. Make this the historic year when shocked politicians will say that today's youth defied history and had the greatest voting turnout of any group, rather than the lowest voting turnout of all groups. Make yourselves heard and demand that your interests be addressed by politicians of all parties for all offices. Take control of the future and make it the one you want.

You can take it a step further, even, and work on a political campaign for somebody you believe in. I have worked on Republican campaigns and Democratic campaigns, sometimes even at the same time for different people. I once worked for a progressive Republican when I lived in Georgia and the very well organized African-American Democrats joined us because they liked his new ideas vs the tired ideas of the old-style Democrats. That was a surprise to me! Vote at the very least, but get more involved if you can, and history will come alive for you. There is an almost timeless sense as you become the living embodiment of the Declaration's framers from 1776, making their dim future of centuries hence actually come alive.

Dr. Brock Villanueva

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**Helen Jarandillo**  
*Academic Literacy and Linguistics*  
*ESL 095.1800*

I count my lucky stars for having had an awesome class! All my students had great fortitude and perseverance throughout this COVID-19-impacted semester. They submitted their homework, in class-essays and reading response journals on time, 95% of the time (!!!)

without an iota of complaint nor an ounce of attitude. I am very proud of all 22 of them; the class remained intact to the very last day with one absentee during the final exam. My apologies for this braggadocio; I couldn't help it.

Despite upended routines, and without much ado, my students and I just simply Zoomed our way into each other's living room, kitchen and bedroom amid clamoring children and other home-life distractions on top of all the discombobulating academic and technological adjustments we had to make due to this pandemic. What an inspiring group and a singular joy to have worked with in this unprecedented and dark period in all our lives.

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**Stephanie Oppenheim**  
*English*  
*Eng 101 Composition*

Parting thoughts:

It has been an unusual semester, to say the least. Those of you who have managed to hang in there and complete your work in isolation should be very proud of yourselves. Some of you could not keep up with the course amid these immense challenges. I hope you will not give up and will return to your studies when it becomes feasible again.

You might remember from our section on communication technology that I am a complete technophobe. So, it was somewhat ironic that this pandemic forced me to become an online instructor. When campus closed, I was terrified—not of catching a deadly virus, but of having to learn to teach online! It was a definite struggle for me. I tried to take it step by step and learn one thing at a time. Andy Warhol once said something that has become a motto of mine: "It's like you get a new talent all of a sudden by being so bad at something for so long, and then suddenly one day being not quite so bad." I like to feel that I have a new talent now that I am a little less bad with technology than I used to be.

Despite this progress, one thing I have learned—or discovered all over again—is how much I like classroom teaching. After so many years of teaching, having it taken away reminded me of why I became a professor in the first place. Some of you mentioned in your pandemic papers that you missed the physical classroom. One of you said you missed the sound of your classmates' laughter. I miss it, too! One thing that sustained me through online teaching was that as I read your work, I could picture all of your faces and hear all of your voices. I could visualize you sitting in your habitual spots in the classroom. It felt like we were still together.

You might be wondering why we never had a zoom class. I was hoping that I would be able to add that, too, after I learned the basics of Blackboard. When I tried, however, I found out that my computer was too old to support zoom. I was sorry not to be able to see your faces again, if only on a screen.

I have enjoyed getting to know all of you, first in the classroom and through your writing, and then through your writing alone. I wish you health, courage, and optimism as we move onward from this crazy semester.

**Sharon Suchma**  
*Music and Art*  
*Art History*

Final Thoughts ...

Hi everyone,

I hope you are enjoying this bright, beautiful day, even if it is through a window! ... and as always, I hope you are safe and well.

I wanted to write and express a message that goes beyond our classroom. The message is that I am extremely proud of you and you should be so of yourselves. Our semester was unexpected and scary, but as a team we persevered. We remained strong in our dedication to better ourselves by learning about human history (as expressed through art and architecture) and we managed to produce work and focus during emotionally and psychologically challenging times. This will only make us better, stronger and wiser; in fact, it already has, whether it feels that way or not.

I applaud you for your stamina and for finishing out the semester. You really should feel both pride and joy. You have risen to a very difficult occasion and let art and its history temporarily divert you from any present misery or fear. Perhaps someday your output, in whatever form, will be someone else's saving grace or needed distraction during a struggle?

Remember, you are not alone.

Congratulations on successfully completing the Spring semester of 2020. Enjoy your summers and relax.

Sincerely,  
Prof. Suchma

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**Peter L. Mayer**  
*Business Management*  
*BUS 200 and BUS 104*

Dear All,

I know that this has been a very unusual semester. It has been difficult for some as many changes have been brought upon us and to no fault of our own. I want to thank those who persevered and actively participated throughout the pandemic situation in our distance learning sessions. I especially want to thank some of our own classmates that were also front-line respondents and were engaged in assisting others in many ways during this challenging time.

For those who could not participate for various reasons I also wish you the very best and I hope that you are safe, well and that you will return to continue your education and life journey. Please know that myself and many others are always available for you so please get in touch and reconnect.

Hopefully this class has helped you realize that we all have tremendous skills and values. Yet, many situations as we had discussed in class are NOT within our own control and we view them as weaknesses and threats. These external factors are generally the ones that provide the greatest challenges not only to us as individuals and businesses but also to humanity as a whole. Remember that a better understanding of our own individual

experiences and skills helps to better prepare for future journeys whatever or wherever we are engaged.

One of the items that you may have picked up on in lecture is my own philosophy. This includes the idea that all does NOT always go as planned or even as desired. How do we react? The realization that traveling across stormy oceans while learning how to avoid the roughest of seas is never easy. As an optimist myself I've weathered many of life's storms and accept that new storms will always appear on the horizon. We just never know how strong those storms are. Each and every one of these becomes one of life's many learning experiences. We must always keep in mind that our own hope drives opportunity that is also just across that horizon. It never takes forever to get past the horizon either. Forever is a very long time.

Many times, patience, true grit, determination and a little bit of luck have won many business deals, military battles and human struggles including survival. Please, let's all keep up our hope, determination and have some patience for a successful future. To those of you who are graduating, congratulations and new horizons are awaiting you. As discussed at the start of this semester, leaders often look at the situation, define where to take that situation and develop a path forward by setting some objectives and goals. Whatever your own personal goals, I hope you can set some objectives that are obtainable, that your life journey is safe and that you stay well.

In closing, I want to wish each and every one of you a safe, happy and enjoyable summer. I have posted your final grades. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Be and stay well and keep in touch.  
Prof. Mayer

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**Jason Schneiderman**  
*English*

Another professor acquaintance of mine shared this story. I found it a bit comforting, perhaps you will too:

In the center of Munich is a clock that celebrates the "Schafflertanz"—or the Barrel Makers' Dance. In 1517, after the plague had killed roughly half the population of Munich, people were afraid to go outside, even after the disease had passed, and there were no new infections. The Barrel Makers' Guild began to dance and make music in the streets, bringing the grief-stricken and terrified inhabitants back out onto the streets of Munich. This dance is still celebrated and re-enacted, five hundred years later because our human need for contact is so intense, and the experience of isolation and illness is so crushing. Coronavirus is not the plague—or even close to a plague—but let's remember that we are not the first to face an epidemic—and I hope that when this passes, we all meet in a *Schafflertanz* to celebrate.



**Boyda Johnstone**

**English**

**Eng 201, 350 (Topics in Literature: Dreaming in Literature),  
and 373 (Introduction of Shakespeare)**

Dear students,

This has been a trying and in some cases a devastating semester. In addition to keeping up with your schoolwork, many of you have been dealing with sickness and even loss of family members, sudden unemployment, and crowded and cramped working spaces at home. We know that this crisis, like all crises, impacts the lives of working class people of color exponentially more than those of privileged white backgrounds, and it is this diversity that at once makes CUNY the strongest and the most vulnerable. As you may or may not realize, some of your other professors are struggling through very similar crises and are facing possible unemployment.

Adjunct lecturers, who comprise an estimated 60% of CUNY and BMCC faculty, are in grave danger of losing their jobs as the administration pushes forward cuts that are as high as 40% at other colleges. **Essentially, adjunct teaching is the Uber driving of higher education:** even though in many cases they are as highly educated and talented as full-time professors, adjuncts are hired on a course-by-course basis and have little-to-no job security, and most earn a little over \$25,000 for the entire year if teaching three classes each semester (less than half of what full-time faculty receive for the same work). Often classes are stolen from them days before the semester starts. When their classes are cancelled, they lose their jobs, and when they lose their jobs they lose their health insurance, which depends on teaching a certain number of classes. The COVID crisis is endangering these jobs now more than ever—already, at John Jay College, over 450 adjuncts have received nonreappointment letters.

Because of this crisis moment, a group of CUNY faculty, including myself, are committing to withhold grades until the final hour on May 28<sup>th</sup>, the grade deadline for the semester. Note: **at this point, the plan is still to submit grades.** We don't want to endanger your graduation, financial aid, or visa status. But we do want to stand in solidarity with our adjunct faculty colleagues and send the CUNY administration a clear message that we will not sit idly by while course offerings are being sliced and valued faculty laid off. Holding off until the last minute will show the administration we are willing to take action to disrupt normal college proceedings, while not quite going so far at this point as to strike.

*In order for our action to be successful, we need students on board.* CUNY administration will say that we are pitting students against faculty, but I know you to be empathetic thinkers who understand that an injustice to one is an injustice to all. And the budget cuts harm your education too: if adjuncts aren't reappointed, there will be fewer course offerings and likely larger class sizes in the future. Eliminating adjuncts also eliminates the diversity of the faculty body, as there are more professors of color or from working class backgrounds who are adjuncts than there are in the ranks of full-timers.

If you have any questions about this policy, I would be happy to answer them. In the meantime, I will be available to help you with your final projects and guide you through these final steps of the course. Your grades will also be available to view on Blackboard. But they won't appear officially on CUNY First until May 29.

*Note: Boyda notes that her students received this letter with interest. It was the letter that Rank and File Action sent out to colleagues. The efforts resulted in nearly 800 signatures and*

*many more professors committed to this action without signing the petition—She writes: “while we didn’t ultimately withhold grades beyond the grade submission deadline, we were able to raise awareness” about layoffs of part time faculty. “Some colleges dialed back the threat of nonreappointments for hundreds of adjuncts.”*

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**Vasilii Znamenskiy**

**Science Department**

This text of mine is an appeal to students who have just completed my (Physics) course. Do not forget the skills gained in this course, practice. To do this, from time to time, return to this course, participating in the work of the specialized Facebook group.

Computer Methods in Science, ESC-120 (C ++ programming language):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ComputerMethodsInScience/>

General Physics, PHY 110 (for humanitarian students):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/GeneralPhysicsCourse/>

Physics 1, PHY 210, PHY 215 (Mechanics, Thermodynamics):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Physics1Course/>

Physics 2, PHY 220, PHY 225 (Electricity and Magnetism):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/GeneralPhysics2/>

General astronomy, AST 110/109/108 (for humanitarian students):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/GeneralAstronomy/>

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**Victoria H. Febrer**

**Teacher Education Department**

**Art in Education (EDU 203)**

Dear Students,

I want to congratulate all of you on finishing the semester, and to give a special congratulations to all of my students in the CUNY class of 2020!

I'm so proud of each and every one of you!!! It has been so inspiring to see how you, my teaching students, have stepped up to help educate kids in your families and communities while the schools were closed. I've seen my students teaching their own kids and relatives at home, and also providing distance learning to kids around the world. In your discussion board posts with artwork each week and in your sample lesson plans, I've seen examples of how you've been educating so many people. I'm so proud of the community we've built, and especially of how you've risen to the occasion to use your developing teaching skills to help others through this incredibly difficult time.

I know that you've done all of this while taking care of multi-generational families, working in essential jobs, volunteering in your communities, and also while sadly grieving for our city and communities, and sometimes fighting illness with COVID-19 yourselves. Many of our peers have lost friends or family members to the pandemic. The past few months have been unimaginably difficult, but you all still persevered.

As educators, our work is inherently political. We must help our students to learn to think critically about the world around them and to develop their own unique voice. This is especially true for us, as teachers using the arts to enhance learning. The pandemic has hit our CUNY community especially hard, because we are a community of majority Black, Brown, and Immigrant students, faculty and staff. The coronavirus pandemic has not affected the population of the United States equally—our communities have been disproportionately affected because of systemic injustices that were in place long before the pandemic hit. The acts of racist violence that continue to be perpetrated by people in power in this country are compounding the physical, emotional, and economic pain of the pandemic.

Through your teaching and learning, and by being part of CUNY, know that you are already making a difference to dismantle these unjust systems. Many of you submitted lesson plans that critically thought about systems of power and that thoughtfully analyzed the history that our students are taught in school and the stories we were told about our communities. Keep up the good work of using the arts to enhance a critical pedagogy that empowers and uplifts your students.

Don't forget to include joy in your lessons, even when dealing with difficult topics. As teachers, our ability to bring our students joy cannot be underestimated. If you only take one lesson from my course, I hope that it is the value of the profound joy that comes from creating an individual work of art within a loving community.

*I don't think there are many things more important than being a teacher and being a student. That, to me, is the deepest social contract, to understand the idea that individual creativity within a willing community is a profound social act. The privilege of being teachers and students within this remarkable place—to be teachers in a place of spirit, to be teachers of spirit, and to be with spirited students.*

*"All one can do is to celebrate one's discipline."*

*—John Hejduk (1929–2000),*

*Professor of Architecture at the Cooper Union from 1964–2000*

**CUNY is a place of spirit, do everything you can to protect this place.**

Thank you for the joy you have brought me this semester by making art with me each week, and for all the great work that you have been doing and will do in the future as teachers and leaders.

# Room to Zoom

Susanna Powell

*Speech, Communications and Theatre Arts*

*Professor Powell sent us what her students wrote for a final assignment. This occurred before the death of George Floyd. We thought it would be good to wind down this issue of The Inquirer with student voices.*

—The Editors

## **The Assignment for SPE 102 Students**

Read “What We Lose When We Go from Classroom to Zoom” in the *New York Times* [www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/sunday-review/zoom-college-classroom.html?searchResultPosition=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/sunday-review/zoom-college-classroom.html?searchResultPosition=1)!

*Then write a paragraph (at least 100 words) on your own transition from classroom to Zoom classes: what worked, what didn't work, what we need to do if this continues into Fall semester ... and anything else you would like to add.*

## **Student Responses**

“By the way, what is really important, the staff of BMCC is very fair and really think about it's students, for example I have been offered electronic equipment several times, if I don't have one. Also, the new system of grades is very helpful. All of that, gives students the feeling that they are not alone, that BMCC think about them, that students are not locked in their apartments wasting time, they still have the opportunity to get further knowledges and build their future. And this is the most important in quarantine!”

—*Evelina* (Russia)

“My own transition from the classroom to Zoom classes had many different feelings. I was sad and hard at the beginning for the reason that I don't like to use the computer. I liked being at home for classes instead of waking up very early to get to college. I also don't need to worry about the weather outside or commute since we were at home anyway. There was a little bit of time flexibility as well. But sometimes the problem with Zoom classes is that the internet is not always on our side. Also I couldn't communicate more clearly with the teachers. I also miss being in that environment with my classmates.

But even with pros and cons for both scenarios I would much rather prefer a classroom environment.”

—*Sarina* (Dominican Republic)

"I hope have more Zoom meeting instead of homework in fall semester, some professor will give lot of homework to student, it is not too much help for us. I'm a visual learner, I always learn by reading or seeing pictures because I can understand and remember things by sight, so hope the classes in fall semester will prepare more visual aid. I hope we can get back to school life as soon as possible!"

—Zita (China)

"CUNY is my first experience when it comes to Education in U.S for me. I am so happy that I am part of BMCC and the best professors. Even if my classes were too much intense, I loved every subject equally and I worked for single one the same. With the COVID-19 everything changes and our education too. My opinion is that we were learning more at classroom than on Zoom. We were more motivated and dedicated. Even the fact that I was attending on my classes from my bed felt good, I would love to start my classes at classroom for Fall semester. I love the classroom environment and there is anything better than the presence of the professor and students."

—Simona (Macedonia)

"Bring back normality"

"March, the month in which I last saw everybody that make my days. The month where everything just went from the ultimate high of our lives to the most devastating period. Every bit that we once loved about being outside—gone. New York City, the so-called city that never sleeps, is now in its deepest slumber. I love being outside and the feel of freedom, especially enjoying it with the people that meant the most to me.

My weekly routine was composed of waking up at 5 AM every day either for my 7 AM shift or 8 AM class, which I dreaded at first, but eventually adapted. Now, not just only today, but for the past couple of weeks, I wake up at noon and go to bed around 3 in the morning. I've lost motivation, and it has been hard to find it again. I felt that I was in my prime time and just vanished in a glimpse. I was always the person that could never stand being stagnant. I love being occupied by work, school, and personal relationships, but also being aware of the moment, and just live.

The transition to online classes did arise challenges and benefits. For me, personally, I have trouble with online classes because I prefer a more guided environment, rather than do it whenever you would like. Technical problems due to the sudden transition have become evident. Communication became the poorest quality. I speak for everybody that this situation that we are in greatly diminishes overall motivation, but also surges depression. It is not all negative. Flexibility is a key benefit. We now have full control over our studies, which I somewhat adore. I was planning on doing summer classes, but due to financial reasons, I will not be able to. Going to the Fall semester, I figure that most classes will still be online. It will be hard, but not as similar to the current situation.

As the whole world is crumbling down due to this pandemic, lives were lost but will never be forgotten. Each country will overcome this tragic hurdle, and once we reopen the world, it will take time to regain what has been lost, but

eventually, we will, and we will surpass it. As we have gained consciousness of the opportunity that this pandemic has brought to us, the vast majority of highly motivated individuals will come out of their homes with new extraordinary talents, ideas, skills that will help each country soar higher than before. The day in which the current normality disperses will be the day in which we will rejoice."

—Jan (Philippines)

"Putting a student in a room with a computer means that the student will never be able to bond with the professor and other students. What didn't work with online classes was the lack of informations and knowledge because the student is not in contact in person with his professors to ask questions and learn more besides that you have to add the fact that not everyone have the opportunity to own a computer and an excellent Internet connection, that is why many students gave up and drop off their semester."

—Samir (Algeria)

"Learning in a class with the classmates in person is fun and interesting thing for the students. It is also helpful in memorizing which is possible only in a physical class. Whereas there are no such types of face to face interactive in Zoom classes. This can lead to monotonousness. In Zoom classes, computer or mobile may affect our eyesight but there is no such harm in usual classes. On the other hand, in Zoom classes not every student is capable of good Internet connections. As a result, it will harm student missing their studies. For the pandemic not every student may attend the class on time. They might get an emergency with their families. Though in Zoom classes we got an opportunity to sit at our own houses and attend classes. But it may might make a student lazy too. Sometimes students do group studies for their lectures and assignments. Zoom classroom will not be as good as face to face discussing.

Sometimes the presentations also may be bad for the online classes because a student had to suffer for the multitasking in a Zoom class."

—Araffi (Bangladesh)

"The crisis, the entire nation going through, is still hard to grasp and comprehend. Some days feel like a set for contamination movies. The only thing that gave me state of mind and kept me sane is how fast our education system responded to the catastrophe, mobilized within a week or two, and kept me busy. Attentiveness and hard work of our professors and mentors won't leave a choice to participate with the same zeal and diligence. The transition to e-study was organic and smooth. Hopefully, we all succeeding. Indeed different platforms of e-study are more subtle for different types of classes.

First is Zoom what could accommodate a bigger class, presentations and discussion-oriented, sharing of the screen, and lowering of microphones. My regards to a student who kept their cameras on. Seeing students is motivates and provides an essential sense of presents. We got lucky to get to know our classmates and professors before the crisis and got some personal connection. Unfortunately for the summer and fall semester, that would make inattentive luxury.

The second is a blackboard. Suitable for smaller classes with possibilities of splitting class for even smaller discussion groups with digital hand-raising for an answer works just perfectly if participants have a good internet connection.

To conclude, transformation to distance education, even with very limited interaction, went tremendously well. This experience teaching us how much we can do and how much more we could do in person."

—*Sofya (Russia)*

"Two months ago, when CUNY said they were going to shut down the campus and switch all courses online. To be honest, I was thinking I finally don't need to take the crowded subway to go to school. I thought studying online is the same thing as sitting in a class and I never tried online study in my life. After a few classes later, I realized things were not going as well as I thought. My network is unstable and it's hard for me to catch the main points of professors. I lack motivation since i have so much free time now, I always think i'll do the work tomorrow because i have nothing but time now. I can't see my classmates anymore, when we were on campus we were not only talking about academics but also talking about our lives. But everyone is under a lot of pressure during this crisis. I don't know if i should ask them about their lives anymore. I reckon I miss sitting in the classroom interacting with professors and classmates, I even miss the cafeteria even if they don't have delicious food, I miss people on crowded subway that they are energetic in the morning. Because these little things were my life before. I really hope this pandemic can be over soon, I just want to sit in my classroom no matter how hard the commute is."

—*Shuhan (China)*

"By using Zoom for distance learning, we can eliminate the journey and time from home to the classroom, and we can reduce the waste of meaningless time. But for me, the disadvantages of distance learning far outweigh the advantages. For example, in a traditional class, I can use whatever I can to show my creativity, answer the teacher's questions or communicate with my classmates. But now that we have to communicate with each other through small screens, I feel like we are farther apart. Second, not everyone has the equipment to use Zoom, and not everyone can take classes remotely in a good Internet environment. I've never missed school so much."

—*Zhenchao (China)*

"I enjoyed my experience on Zoom class much less than in person class. I think there should be a specific environment for everything. For me most important part of education is interactions with my classmates and professor. As a new immigrant I feel I need more communication with people to develop my communication skill. While I was taking class on Zoom sometimes, I felt I needed in person discussion with my professor and classmate, but on Zoom it was not possible. My experience on Zoom was harmed by background noise, which made the professor lecture inaudible. I

was also unable to complete my side visit assignment, such as Early Childhood Education observation, and psychology seminar. Furthermore, I also felt that my speech class was less impactful as I did not get to practice in person presentation."

—*Anjuman (Bangladesh)*

"Dear Professor Powell, this pandemic has shown me many things I took for granted. Unfortunately, many people die because of it, but I truly believe that within the bad is good. This pandemic has shown me to be grateful for what I have and appreciate waking up in the morning, also counting my blessing instead of my problems. However, it has not been easy. Transitioning from our classroom to online school has been incredibly stressful and tiring. At school, I get to be a student, forget about my responsibilities, and concentrate on learning. I am a mother of two little kids, and handling my school work, and theirs have been challenging. College was for me, a place where I could be *me* again in a different environment than home. The only time I get to do my homework is at night when everyone is sleeping, and I got the chance to concentrate. I think that is a part of being a mom and going to college at the same time. In addition to this, Wifi has not been my friend. Zoom meeting has been challenging since everybody is using Wifi at the same time. Sometimes I didn't get to hear my classmates clearly since my internet connection was terrible."

—*Lizbeth (Mexico)*

"Although I have enough time to get along with my family but miss all my friends and the people who used to around me. My daily routine is completely opposite that I slept at midnight which I never do it before and felt more and more lazy than ever. I haven't gone out since the quarantine because I knew that this pandemic is much horrible than ever. I wish we can go to school in person, instead of meeting via Zoom in following semester."

—*Su (China)*

"I consider that if this continues until the fall semester, I think that the same considerations should be maintained with some students who do not have good internet access and that patience should be maintained too, which is a key point for all this situation we are going through. I especially liked the Speech subject at home because I felt more confident speaking towards a single object (my computer) and I felt very good with the positive comments, especially that sometimes I did not understand some things because I am still learning English, with Zoom and other platforms I was able to advance my learning level much more but in my point of view I will always vote for them to be face-to-face classes because it is better understood and if you have any other concern it can be solved instantly ... and I also really liked your patience by setting extended delivery time. I cannot lie it is very comfortable to be at home learning but it is not the most favorable for our future."

—*Alyssa (Dominican Republic)*

## Presentation at BMCC's Town Hall Zoom, June 5, 2020

Linta Varghese  
Center for Ethnic Studies

*And a final commentary, because Black Lives Matter will remain with us.*

—the Editors

Thank you Karrin and others for organizing this event. I have seen a couple of people drop this in the chat, but I want to start by stating that Breonna Taylor, the black woman killed by police in Louisville, Kentucky would have been 27 today.

With the limited time I have, I want to talk about questions of accountability. What does it look like in this moment? And share a couple of legacies from the two (of the many) communities I am part of that I have been drawing from as I answer this question.

The first community I want to talk about is the Asian American community. Long before the image of Tou Thao, the Asian American officer from the Hmong community and one of the four responsible for George Floyd's death started circulating, there were already ongoing discussions about the place of Asian descent people in the racial hierarchy of the US. But with Thao's complicity in the murder, these discussions have been propelled to the public as has happened before.

I've always looked to organizations and people who have been doing collective work to see clearly the possibilities that are already present and what we must do to keep expanding the horizon of what we *think* is possible.

In New York City, I look to organizations like [CAAHV](#) which emerged in the 80s to tackle anti-Asian violence, but realized that the horizon we want can only be reached by engaging in coalition work that addresses the ways that violence differentially impacts communities along lines of race and class. In their [Public Housing Organizing Project](#), which builds power of Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Korean NYCHA tenants, CAAHV works in coordination with Black and Latinx housing rights groups and incorporates political education. So when there was a move for more police in NYCHA, members of the campaign knew that more police would impact all NYCHA tenants but highlighted the differential impact it would have on Latinx and Black residents.

I wanted to go into this campaign because I think as Asian Americans we need to see the legacies being built around us that root, challenge, and push us to find forms of accountability and solidarity in action.

The second community is this one, BMCC. And I am reaching back 50 years to 1970, seven years after BMCC opened its doors, when BMCC students were part of nationwide student strikes fighting for an end to the Vietnam war and militarization and against increasing tuition fees among other things. BMCC students, joined by



Arrest bus in the wake of BMCC student strike, 1970 CUNY Digital History Archives <https://cdha.cuny.edu/items/show/3042>

faculty, occupied some campus buildings and shut the college down. I want to share this photo from the CUNY Digital Archive which was taken at the end of that strike. Right before the picture was taken, these students had confronted the administration for calling police to break the strike and arrest students. (All this was documented in the [1971 edition of Prism](#), BMCC's annual yearbook). I have turned to this photo repeatedly because people are still demanding many of the same things. This photo shows that from the start, there is a legacy of BMCC students fighting for larger possibilities for themselves and their communities. And I don't mean just the possibility of a job that college can help with, but the horizons of structural change that pushes for investment in their lives and communities. So as some of us work towards defunding the police we can look to past, present and future possibilities—including student activism at BMCC—when we demand that these (and other) funds be reinvested in communities that have been most impacted by this transfer of public wealth.

I want to reiterate what speakers before me have brought up about BMCC making material changes that support black lives institutionally. I searched for but could not find statistics on the racial breakdown of our faculty—but know that nation-wide only about 7% of all full-time faculty are black. I also know that the disproportionate percentage of adjuncts are faculty of color and women. Where do we stand in all this? How are we using this moment to create possibilities for the future?

I know there is more to say. But I'll stop here as I think I have hit the four-minute mark. Thank you.

# CALL FOR PAPERS

*Inquirer* is a journal devoted to teaching, learning, and scholarship at BMCC. The editors welcome manuscripts on any number of topics for No. 28, including but not limited to the following:

- Teaching in times of trauma & ethical teaching
  - How Black Lives Matter plays out in our classrooms
  - Expanding discussions of equity and inclusion
  - Zooming—What's good about it
  - The ordeals of on-line teaching: successes, failures, benefits, problems, joys!
- New pedagogies in theory and practice
- Ways to enliven the (on-line) classroom
- Teaching challenges faced and resolved
- Disciplines and skills across the curriculum
- Classroom-based research
- Impacts of syllabus, curriculum, and policy changes
- Teaching globalization and global citizenship
- Teaching sustainability and environmental awareness
- Fiction, poetry, and narratives related to teaching
- Book reviews
- Proposals for Teachable Moment Symposia (four or more papers on a shared theme)

Send *proposals* to the editors by February 15, 2021.

The deadline for completed manuscripts is April 16, 2021.

Authors should aim for a finished manuscript of roughly 2500 words, though the editors will consider longer and shorter submissions. Works in Progress will also be considered.

All submissions should be in Microsoft Word, double-spaced and in 12-point font, with text, notes, and references formatted in a recognized style (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) or in the conventional style of the author's discipline.

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