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EDITORIAL

Returning to the Classroom After a Year of Lockdown

—Benjamin D. Jee

Dear readers of *Currents in Teaching and Learning*,

For those of us in higher education, fall is a time of reunion and renewal. A return to long-vacated offices and classrooms, catching up with colleagues and students, commencing our classes and starting new projects. These are things that I have missed over the past year of lockdown and social distancing. As I look ahead to the fall, I feel invigorated by a return to an academic life that is at once routine and also a vast departure from the daily rhythm that became the new normal.

I am also exhausted. For many of us, remote instruction involved fully rethinking our teaching, our assessments, and our expectations for our students and ourselves. Much of this work was conducted under a cloud of uncertainty—about how long remote instruction will last, about the pros and cons of our pedagogical choices, about our own capacity to fulfill our commitments. Often, this work was part of a balancing act that involved caring for our families, engaging with larger societal and political matters, and (usually last on the list) maintaining our own physical and mental health. So, as I look ahead to the fall, I also feel overwhelmed, weary from the burden of a year of upheaval.

As the stress and anxiety of our pandemic year recedes, I want to take stock of the things that I missed about normal academic life, as well as the silver linings of doing it all remotely. I'm trying to reign in my tendency to dive headfirst into the semester, towed along by the currents of teaching, research, and committee work. I want to rethink my purpose in the classroom, and what I can give to my students while also restoring myself. Indeed, teaching is ideally a positive-sum game, one in which knowledge, passion, awareness, and respect are enhanced for everyone involved. I view my work on *Currents in Teaching and Learning* in a similar way. Editing this journal has been challenging in the past year, but it has rewarded me with the opportunity to learn, to be inspired, and to look at teaching and learning in new and important ways.

The present issue of *Currents* contains a number of inspiring and thought-provoking pieces. In the article, “Jumpstart Your Lesson: Connecting Students to Content,” Lynne Kennette and Morgan Chapman draw on cognitive psychology and universal design principles to suggest ways to “hook” students during the crucial first minutes of class time. Their recommendations are intended to not only energize the classroom, but also to activate students’ knowledge, experiences, and goals in order to foster deep, personal learning. In “Design Thinking in First-Year Composition: Writing Social Innovation into Service-Learning Pedagogy,” Jason Tham presents a model of design thinking in which students tackle real-world issues, engaging with people and institutions in their broader communities. Tham describes five key steps in the design thinking process—1) empathize with users/constituents/audience, 2) define the users’ needs/problems and your insights, 3) challenge assumptions and create ideas for innovative solutions, 4) prototype solutions, and 5) test. The article describes how these principles could be applied to a broad range of course topics, and presents an example in which students used design thinking to develop creative products that address the problem of food scarcity.

This past year of remote instruction has underscored the importance of belonging to a university community in which students have access to helpful people and materials outside of my classes. I gained a better understanding of when and how to draw on these resources to complement and supplement my own teaching. In their article, “Mathematics Tutoring in Higher Education: Impact on Students and Student Tutors,” Eileen Perez, Elizabeth Gilbert, Jessica Harter, and Linda Larrivee explore how peer tutoring affects both the provider and the recipient of the tutoring. The authors surveyed students who visited a university math center, as well as the student tutors who worked there, probing both their math performance and their attitudes. Their results suggest that peer tutoring is mutually beneficial for tutors and pupils, pointing to the promise of peer-to-peer instruction in math and potentially other

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disciplines. To that point, Jennifer Gray's article, "Slow Writing: Student Perspectives on Time and Writing in First-Year Composition Courses," reports that students value the opportunity to collaborate on writing and share ideas with their classmates. Yet, time pressure often limits these productive activities. Gray's article provides suggestions for how to slow down the pace of a course to cultivate quality student work, and to nurture habits of mind that are often undermined by the frenetic pace of a typical course. Rounding out the issue is Elizabeth Siler's review of Karen Costa's book, "99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos: A Guide for Online Teachers and Flipped Classes." As you can read, Siler shares a number of useful lessons about video making from the book, many of which are valuable for teaching in online, hybrid, and flipped classes.

As we prepare for the return to campus, I hope that you have time to process your experiences over the past year, and to find inspiration in the scholarship

of teaching and learning. I am thankful to all of the authors for their contributions to the present issue. As always—but especially in light of the challenges of the past year—I am grateful to the reviewers, copyeditors, and members of the Currents advisory board for their time and effort. I also want to note the work of Jonathan Tegg, who has worked to revamp the Currents website. We aim to make further improvements to the site in the coming months. Finally, I am deeply appreciative of Dr. Linda Larrivee, who helped to keep the whole operation afloat. I'm hopeful for calmer seas in the year ahead.

Until next time,

Benjamin D. Jee

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Currents in Teaching and Learning is a peer-reviewed electronic journal that fosters exchanges among teacher-scholars across the disciplines. Published twice a year (typically one issue in fall, one in spring), *Currents* seeks to improve teaching and learning in higher education with short reports on classroom practices as well as longer research, or theoretical articles related to teaching and learning.

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- Brief reports that provide a concise but complete account of new teaching methods or materials that will be of broad interest to college and university instructors (750-1250 words).
- Medium-length teaching and program reports on classroom/curricular practices (2500-5500 words)
- Longer research or theoretical articles related to current issues in teaching and learning in higher education (5500 - 7000 words)
- Book reviews, pending editor approval of proposed text.

All submissions must be original, previously unpublished work and, if based in a particular academic discipline, must explicitly consider their relevance and applicability to other disciplines and classroom settings.

Submissions and Contact Information

Please address all submissions and inquiries to Benjamin Jee via e-mail: currents@worchester.edu

For further information and submissions guidelines see our website: www.worcester.edu/currents

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