

BLACK LIVES MATTER AT TEMPLE

By Timothy Welbeck, Esq.

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Africology & African American Studies

Trayvon Martin wanted nothing more than to spend his Sunday evening watching [Dwayne Wade and LeBron James play in the NBA All Star Game](#). Considering the game took place at the Amway Center in neighboring Orlando, the annual NBA exhibition, and the stars it routinely gathers, seemed much closer than usual. He did not have a ticket to attend the game itself, so turning to channel 11 to watch it on TNT seemed the next best option. Slightly before tip-off, he strolled outside



Art by Timothy Welbeck. Used with permission.

of his home to a nearby 7-Eleven

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THE OPTIMISTS

By Sam Allingham

Adjunct Asst. Prof., English

When I was asked to teach an in-person class in the fall of 2020, I chose a certain brand of optimism. Maybe it was cruel optimism, as Lauren Berlant coined the phrase: a desire that is either impossible—what she calls “sheer fantasy”—or too possible, “toxic,” dangerous in the way it renders the subject complicit in their own degradation. But if my optimism was cruel, I shared it with many of the more than six hundred Temple professors who

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Reflections from the Pandemic: Where Are We Now?

By Dr. Andrew Mossin

Associate Professor of Instruction, Intellectual Heritage Program

Eight months into the global pandemic (I'm writing this at the beginning of October 2020) and roughly two months into Temple's latest shift to fully online teaching, what's become apparent to all is that we're in this for many more months to come, if not years. We may need in the coming months to rely on that “undercommons” specified by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, a fugitive space where all of us might meet in mutual need and common uncertainty to graft a better future from the one we're otherwise currently facing. In the meantime, it's worth reflecting on where we are and how the current shifts in faculty experience have come to define both the university as an institution and the

lived realities of students coming here for an education.

It's a truism in higher education labor talk that “faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.” For some that can be read as a statement of faculty priority over students in the process of managing the multiple demands of the university experience. That would be, in my view, a misreading of this statement's primary emphasis: faculty experience in the workplace dictates if and how we are able to foster learning in our students, who in turn can only be as successful as this dialectical relation allows. How has the pandemic shaped this relation? What are the impacts on faculty working conditions so far?

We can know some things. Across tracks and ranks, the pandemic has only heightened and brought to the fore divisions and hierarchies that were in place well before the virus arrived. Here, I will cite just a few instances from recent scholarship. For tenure-track faculty of color, Covid-19 has only accentuated the “marginalization, racism and sexism manifested as unintended barriers...faculty of color face in successfully navigating the tenure process” (Gregory A. Diggs, Dorothy Harrison, *et al.* 312). As childcare and remote schooling responsibilities have disproportionately affected women faculty across tracks, “long-standing inequalities in both paid and dom-

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Editorial: Pandemic & Precedent; Surveys & Surveillance

By Dr. Anna Peak

Associate Professor of Instruction, Intellectual Heritage Program

What Views Does the *Herald* Promote?

“One ought not reject the words of an opponent. It is preferable to seek them out and study them.... Such words should not be suppressed. For every man of valor who wants to wrestle with another and to show his strength is eager that his opponent shall have every opportunity to demonstrate his real powers. But what strength does he show when he forbids his opponent to defend himself and to fight against him?”

~ Rabbi Loew, Be'er HaGolah, 1598, chapter 7

My aim for the *Faculty Herald* is that it provide a voice for all faculty. This means contingent as well as tenure-stream (not as a supplement, but as the so-called new faculty majority); faculty from a range of schools and colleges; and faculty

of various ideologies, backgrounds, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and religions. It also means the *Faculty Herald* is by and for faculty, not administrators. Administrative views are certainly of interest to faculty, at times, and will be printed when relevant, but the *Herald* is primarily a space for faculty discussion.

Pandemic and Precedent

A mode of behavior that has been adopted without protest creates a precedent, and no one will object to actions that conform to precedents. The principle of inertia transforms every habitual way of doing things into a norm.... A customary form of behavior ... needs no justification.... It is only when someone maintains that what ought to be is different than what is that proof has to be supplied.

~ Chaim Perelman, Justice, Law, and Argument, pp. 27-28

The current pandemic has led to various ad-hoc adaptations, driven, doubtless with the best of intentions, by people in administrative roles. Budgets have been cut; schedules changed; new classrooms created; new systems of surveillance have been, and are being, put in place.

A pandemic is shocking, and precedents are powerful. When people are shocked, distracted, and fear for their jobs, they ask fewer questions. When people in administrative roles are more highly stressed than usual, they are liable to be less friendly, or more threatening, in their responses — which tends to depress further questioning. Thus, precedent-setting ad-hoc adaptations are being made with less faculty input than is healthy for a university. In the mean-

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Textbook Affordability: Helping Our Students to Have a More Affordable Education

By Dr. Steven Bell

Associate University Librarian for Research and Instructional Services, Charles Library

Options for selecting, acquiring and delivering course learning content are greater than at any time in the past. From requesting the campus store to order a traditional print textbook to choosing from a dizzying array of digital options and providers, faculty have more choice but also confront more confusion in deciding what is the best option for their students. Where most faculty can agree with their students is that traditional, commercial textbook costs remain prohibitively expensive and add thousands of dollars to the cost of a college education.

Even when textbooks may seem affordable to faculty, their cost can have negative effects on student

learning. According to the 2018 [Florida Student Textbook and Course Materials Survey](#), 64% of students reported not purchasing a textbook owing to its cost, 41% reported not registering for a course to avoid textbook costs, 36% reported earning a poor grade because they could not afford to buy the textbook and 23% reporting dropping a course owing to textbook costs. See this [Open Textbooks Guide](#) for more on the impact of textbook costs on students and [hear Temple students talking](#) candidly about their own challenges with high textbook costs. The good news is that Temple University is now confronting the problem on multiple fronts. Here are the

projects and activities that you and your colleagues can support if textbook costs are your concern as well.

[Textbook Affordability Project \(TAP\)](#): In operation since 2011, with 90 faculty participants to date, the TAP has saved Temple University students over \$1 million in textbook costs. Grants of \$500-\$1500 are provided to faculty who replace their traditional commercial textbook with an open textbook, convert their course to zero-cost learning materials or conduct an open education project. [Hear from past faculty TAP awardees](#) on why it was important for them to eliminate textbook costs for their students.

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Editorial: Surveys & Surveillance, continued

time, precedents are being set that may affect faculty for years, or decades, to come.

Faculty can only question or respond, however, to what they know about.

Surveys

Last year, the Research Programs and Policies Committee (RPPC), with the support of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, decided to conduct annual faculty surveys. This year, the RPPC was informed by the University Survey Committee (USC) that they may only conduct their survey every two years, rather than every year.

Regardless of the merits of this particular survey — of which the *Herald* will have more to say in a future issue — the criteria used by the USC raise questions.

The reason given by the USC for rejecting the RPPC survey was simple enough: Faculty receive enough emails already. This wholly laudable concern with faculty workload has not, however, prevented university administration from sending out several surveys of its own. The concern thus is not so much with respecting faculty's time as it is with prioritizing administrative concerns.

Perhaps even more troublingly, the current, somewhat nebulous, guidelines for surveys state that surveys can be approved only after the USC has determined that the “survey objectives and items align with the university's or administering unit's mission, goals and values.” In other words, only certain kinds of questions can be asked.

Some of the USC's goals make sense, for instance, to “reduce redundancy across surveys.” Restrict-

ing faculty to questions that “align with the university's ... values” might even make sense as well — so long as faculty have a significant number of seats at the table where those decisions are made. And “faculty” here again refers to *all* faculty.

Surveillance

The move to online teaching — while necessary for the health and lives of people at Temple, in Philadelphia, and wherever people travel — has made new levels of surveillance and performance evaluation possible. Already, administrators and faculty of all levels in newly-devised administrative roles have access to faculty courses, and make use of that access. While it is clearly important for online courses to be good ones, and for the faculty teaching them to actually teach them, these multiple layers of surveillance raise serious issues. One is transparency. Not all faculty are aware of the degree to which their courses are being observed (especially as some have been given contradictory information). It is also not clear if all faculty are being observed in some equitable fashion or if some faculty are exempted, and, if so, on what grounds. Another is academic freedom, and still another is student privacy.

Surveillance is such a serious issue that the *Herald* plans to run a series of articles on the subject.

If you are interested in contributing to the further discussion of online teaching and surveillance, please contact the editor at herald@temple.edu. All requests for confidentiality will be honored.

Surveillance: A Case Study

How bad can it be? Readers of the *Herald* may be interested to read of the changes wrought by surveillance of online teaching at Southern New Hampshire State University, in part under the leadership of Daniel L. White, who is now Associate Vice Provost and Director of Digital Education at Temple.

From a study published in the *Information Systems Education Journal*:

- “Each morning a list would be produced that supplied the names of the faculty members who were not meeting the requirements for teaching—they may not have been in the online course for two days or may not be participating to the required level in the online course. This list was submitted to an academic department head within the online business unit who would then be required to contact the faculty members to advise them of the corrective actions that were immediately needed.” (Tannehill, *et al.*, p. 28)
- All faculty members were required to complete the online teaching certification prior to being assigned courses. Faculty members were approved to teach courses through a faculty credentialing office housed within the business operation. During the delivery of the course, if the faculty member was found to be involved less than was desired or was not meeting any number of teaching criteria, that faculty member was immediately counsel-

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Textbook Affordability, continued

All Temple University instructors are eligible for TAP awards. TAP is funded by Temple University Libraries.

[North Broad Press](#): To confront the challenge of too few quality open textbooks being available to faculty across the disciplines, many academic libraries are establishing programs to support faculty to author and publish more of them. North Broad Press is a joint publishing project between Temple University Press and Temple University Libraries. It publishes works of scholarship, both new and reissued, from the Temple University community. All North Broad Press titles are peer reviewed and freely available online. North Broad Press provides some stipends to faculty to author open textbooks. North Broad Press has published one textbook so far, and there are over a dozen more open textbooks in various stages of development. NBP is funded jointly by Temple University Libraries and the Temple Press.

Textbook Task Force (TTF): Organized by Provost Epps in February 2019, the TTF is charged to make recommendations to the Provost that support faculty adoption of and student access to affordable instructional material. Most recently the TTF conducted a survey of faculty adoption of OER and other affordability options. Over 350 faculty members participated and over 150 requested more information on OER. The TTF is co-chaired by Michele O'Connor, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, and Steven Bell, Associate

University Librarian. Its members include four faculty members (Jacquie Phillips, CPH; Dustin Kidd, CLA; Natalie Flynn, CST; Daniel Goldberg, Fox) and representatives from the student government, Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Registrar, campus store, Temple libraries and press and Information Technology Services. The TTF is developing strategies for creating more awareness among faculty about textbook challenges our students face and how faculty can seek out and adopt open and affordable learning materials.

[Textbook to E-Book Database](#): As Temple University transitioned to remote instruction, many faculty were challenged to provide student access to traditional print textbooks and sought out e-book versions to which they could point their students. This was even more challenging for faculty who place print textbooks on reserve in the Library. With digital access to millions of e-books in their collection and acquiring new e-books, when available, on demand for faculty, Temple Libraries provides an easy way for faculty and their students to discover an existing e-book version of a required textbook with the Textbook to E-Book Database. Students can use these digital versions at no cost and they are always licensed for simultaneous use by multiple students. E-books are discoverable by course number.

Traditional commercial textbooks, in print or digital format, drive up the cost of our students' education and for some it forces difficult decisions around housing

and food insecurities. Where possible, department chairs and faculty, particularly for introductory level courses, should explore where opportunities exist to replace commercial textbooks with open textbooks, such as those available from [OpenStax](#). They are peer-reviewed and feature many of the same amenities as their commercial counterparts, such as integration into Canvas or supplemental learning materials. Adopting OpenStax textbooks in introductory courses such as statistics, math, business, anatomy and physiology, chemistry and others could easily save our students hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in textbook costs.

To learn more about the positive learning outcomes associated with faculty who are aware of OER and adopt open textbooks, refer to the 2020 study, [The Impact of OER Initiatives on Faculty Selection of Classroom Materials](#). A [2017 UMass Libraries student survey](#) reported that 88% of students found the quality of OER as good or better than a traditional textbook. If you have more questions about open textbooks or other ways to provide your students with zero-cost learning materials, please contact the [Temple University librarian](#) who serves as the liaison to your college or department. They have expertise in advising faculty on how to identify, find and evaluate open textbooks, library content and other zero-cost content. If you want to start by exploring resources on your own, take advantage of the [Discovering Open Educational Resources Guide](#).

HERALD EDITOR: Anna Peak ADVISORY BOARD: Teresa Gill Cirillo (chair), Cheri Cutler, John Dern, Jeffrey Doshna, Lisa Ferretti, David Mislin, Karen Turner, Rebecca Vernon

THE OPTIMISTS, CONTINUED

chose to teach some kind of hybrid or in-person class this semester.

Some were optimistic, at the end of spring, that COVID would be a one-season problem. (Sheer fantasy.) Others worried about the students who were poorly served by online learning: dropping out, or simply in and out, drifting through Zoom classes with their cameras turned off. We thought if we could only see such students face to face we might make a difference, our own health risks be damned. (Too possible? Toxic? I will leave deeper considerations of the pathology behind becoming a university professor for some other, less optimistic article.)

I'm not entirely sure where the origins of my optimistic choice lay. Maybe it's as simple as the fact that I have a young child, and it feels nice to get out of the house. But it's important to remember that I am an adjunct, and so a word like "choose" doesn't address certain facts about my position within the university. For an adjunct to say no—to be difficult, to insist on my personal preferences, even in the case of my own safety—carries significant risk. Adjuncts make careers out of an optimistic willingness to prove ourselves capable, semester after semester, of filling the final slot in the schedule: a slot we know many others would be ready and willing to fill, should we refuse. We must make ourselves too possible, in Berlant's words, if we want to stay.

It was hard, this summer, to get a sense of what was actually happening at Temple. An adjunct is always to some extent isolated from their working community. We don't go to department meetings, and we receive information late, if at all. But Temple's sudden shutdown in the

spring of 2020 only made things worse. Without the gossip that flows from office to office, adjuncts were forced to rely on official communication from Temple administration, discordantly sunny. Our fall reopening plan was incredible, comprehensive, a model for other universities to follow. We would greet each other in September with "smiling eyes."

When I look back on the summer, I think how lucky I am to be a member of TAUP. In the absence of real information from the administration, it was the union that helped to assemble us in our little squares in Zoom rooms to discuss the reality of fall. It was my fellow union members who emailed every faculty member at Temple, trying to get a handle on the situation. Who was teaching in-person? What did they know about their working conditions? Did they feel safe with their decision to teach in-person? Did they feel confident about Temple's plan?

This summer, despite rarely leaving my house, I had more conversations with fellow faculty members than I've had over the course of my teaching career. In between my son's erratic nap schedule, I talked on the phone with professors from History about the concern that their graduate students would be given no choice but to meet with students in small groups, in order to fulfill their TA assignments; with professors who taught music and dance who were learning frightening things about aerosols; with professors from Public Health who were worried about Temple's responsibility to the community of North Philadelphia, Zoomed into each other's studies and living rooms, I felt a sense of solidarity and connection between us that overcame the division be-

tween full and part-timer.

The question remained: how to get the administration to understand? Some faculty organized with student groups, assembling demonstrations and car caravans that got on the news. Some of us (some of them adjuncts!) wrote op-eds in the *Inquirer* about the stress of worrying over the student body—not to mention our elderly relatives. Some of us wrote letters to their Deans, asking them to use whatever power they could to move classes online. I was part of this letter-writing campaign within CLA, and it was my privilege, as my son toddled around his nursery and harrassed my dog, to add the names of more than three hundred of my CLA colleagues to a document that was the fruit of so many impassioned conversations between faculty members who might not otherwise have ever spoken to each other.

Even in the face of this response, Temple refused to budge. For one strange week, I taught in person. My classroom in Paley was enormous, the twenty-odd students cordoned six feet apart, unable to work in groups, fully masked. I spoke into a microphone through my own mask, and when the students responded it was nearly impossible to understand them. The possibility of contracting COVID from teaching in such an environment might have been less than I'd imagined, but so was the possibility of completing any kind of lesson plan.

Why would anyone have thought this was a good idea? Of all of the questions of this strange semester, this is the one I keep running over in my head—even after union action, as well as the protests of students, pro-

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BLACK LIVES MATTER AT TEMPLE, continued

to grab some snacks for himself and his brother Jahavis—[Arizona watermelon-flavored fruit juice cocktail and Skittles](#).

Trayvon never got to watch [Dwayne Wade record a triple double](#) that evening; he never even made it home that dreary night on Sunday February 26, 2012. With a decisive bullet rifling from his [Kel-Tec 9 mm PF-9](#), George Zimmerman shot Trayvon Martin in the chest at close range after a brief, but deadly struggle. When the smoke cleared, the unarmed teenager lay dead, his lanky frame sprawled across a sidewalk in The Retreat at Twin Lakes. George Zimmerman would ultimately face no legal penalty for his admitted role in the young man's demise.

Trayvon Martin's murder galvanized the nation's attention and sparked a movement. That movement—Black Lives Matter—[became one of the largest protest movements in history](#), ushered a new phrase into the American lexicon, and introduced a new generation to the Black radical tradition. It has also awakened tremendous opposition that still bristles at the fundamental tenets of the movement.

Aside from a historic pandemic, 2020 has offered painful reminders of the perilous plight of Black people in America more clearly than most in recent memory. The brutal killings of [Ahmaud Arbery](#), [Breonna Taylor](#), [George Floyd](#), et al, along with the heinous shooting of [Jacob Blake](#), have come to illustrate contemporary manifestations of [“the history of violence inflicted upon Black people.”](#) This tragic pattern of violence bears striking similarities to other incidents seared in our collective conscious. For example,

Ahmaud Arbery's murder has eerie parallels to the murder of Trayvon Martin. Breonna Taylor's murder resembles the murders of [Atitiana Jefferson](#) and [Botham Jean](#). George Floyd's death is reminiscent of [Eric Garner](#). The insidious nature of racism in America seeps into every conceivable facet of society from deadly encounters like Travis and Gregory McMichael and William Bryan's killing of Ahmaud Arbery to [Amy Cooper calling the police on Christian Cooper in Central Park](#) after he asked her to place a leash on her dog to or [Patricia Ripley drowning her son](#) and alleging two Black men abducted him. We reckon with these tragedies while daily witnessing militarized police forces across the nation partnering with armed forces to brutalize those who dared opposed these horrors. All of this occurred in the shadow of a pandemic that disproportionately impacted black people nationwide.

Black Lives Matter, as a movement and as a phrase, echoes the same sentiments of rallying cries from yore. It is the same refrain at the core of [“Ain't I a woman?”](#) [“I am a man;”](#) [“I am somebody;”](#) etc. This refrain is a to call to acknowledge the inherent personhood, worth, and dignity of Black people. This fight to acknowledge the basic humanity of Black people continues because of their subhuman treatment in America past and present. In the same way, prior movements have faced opposition, both literal and rhetorical, Black Lives Matter faces opposition despite its basic premise.

By way of example, the phrase “All Lives Matter” arose as a rhetorical device to delegitimize critiques of racial oppression and the struc-

tural imbalances it often creates. The phrase “All Lives Matter” thus arose as a means to silence and discredit “Black Lives Matter,” when the latter was merely an affirmation of the lives disproportionately torn asunder by state-sanctioned violence. The notion that Black lives matter, or that Black people feel the brunt of police overreach and abuse should not be controversial. It becomes controversial when people afforded untold benefits by the current system feel threatened by the potential unraveling of said system. Therefore, the critique of the unjust system then receives the categorization as unseemly and a deviation from social progress, which is why these conversations typically devolve into clumsy arguments like “why does everything have to be about race,” “I don't see color,” etc. In short, efforts to derail the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement originate from those who believe in the fundamental good of our nation and its corresponding societal order (because their identity is based in part on it). Those people desperately want to believe racism is a relic of bygone eras. As Dr. Marc Lamont Hill wrote in his newly released book, [We Still Here: Pandemic, Policing, Protest, and Possibility](#), “For many White Americans, it is better to accept a comforting lie than an unsettling truth. To accept that Black people are routinely terrorized by the state would force them to confront their most coveted beliefs about the country.” Our days have forced us to face these unsettling truths, which should require us to foster a commitment to confronting them.

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BLACK LIVES MATTER AT TEMPLE, continued

These systemic injustices and structural imbalances seem daunting to tackle if we believe ourselves to endeavor alone. Yet, we are not alone. I take great solace in the fact that when I embark upon the fight against these great societal ills, I join a band of people across this nation, across this world, who have undertaken the same fight. Furthermore, we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us who did the same. When I represent clients who have experienced discrimination based on their race, gender, national origin, etc., I continue in the tradition of the likes of [Cecil B. Moore](#), [Sadie Alexander](#), [Pauli Murray](#), Charles Hamilton Houston, *et al.* When I lead my students into a thoughtful analysis and interrogation of interconnected themes within the African American experience, law, and politics, I continue in the tradition of titans like Molefi Kete Asante, Eddie Glaude, Michelle Alexander, A. Leon Higginbotham, etc. When I write, I advocate for the rights of Black people in America and share the innate beauty of their humanity like those who came before me. These efforts, among others, are a means to acknowledge the innate value of Black people, center them in their narra-

CHERRY PANTRY

Crashell Allen, of the Cherry Pantry, tells the *Herald* that the pantry, which had been serving about 200 students a week at the beginning of Spring, saw 60 or 70 students per week after campus closed, and about 20 or 30 a week over the summer (a sharp increase from the usual 5) and during the fall semester.

The pantry is trying to determine if students now have a greater need

tives, and protect their fundamental rights and liberties. Black Lives Matter thereby becomes more than a phrase, but a mantra to guide my work to bend the “arc of the moral universe toward justice.” Scores of others join me in this noble work. In so doing, we work towards creating a more just and equitable world for the days to come. Prayerfully, it will allow other young people to make it home after getting snacks to eat while watching the All-Star game.

Owls for Justice

Undergraduate student-athletes at Temple recently formed this group in response to Black Lives Matter. Prior to the November 3rd election, the group prioritized registering students to vote and plans to collaborate with departments across Temple as well as work with the local community. – *Ed.*

Faculty Senate Statement

So many important events happened at the end of spring semester, 2020, following Temple University’s pivot to online teaching and remote learning, and in response to the world-wide pandemic and COVID-19. The Faculty Senate

was unavailable during summer recess during and immediately following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020, the national protests to that murder in cities across the country, and subsequently, the senseless murder of protestors. The Faculty Senate Steering Committee (FSSC) had to wait until the beginning of this new academic year to begin these difficult conversations, but in light of the recent executive order from President Donald Trump banning the teaching, training and discussion of race and anti-racism in America, we would be remiss not to take this opportunity to say unequivocally that institutions of higher learning have to be bold and brave; that as faculty, we believe that knowledge and education supersede ignorance; and that the academy, like our world, is stronger when it is diverse, equitable and inclusive. The Faculty Senate Steering Committee will continue to advocate for and support teaching, training and advancement in diversity education towards continued progress at Temple University. Let it be known that we, the elected members of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, strongly believe that BLACK LIVES MATTER!

for food relative to toiletries, or the reverse.

Allen also made clear that “[a]nyone with a current Temple ID has access to the Cherry Pantry. So all students (undergrad, grad, professional, etc.), staff, faculty, etc. has access to the pantry. No one is turned away.”

You can follow @CherryPantry on Twitter for more information. – *Ed.*

FEEDBACK?

The *Herald* welcomes letters, comments, suggestions, pitches, and feedback generally.

Write herald@temple.edu or fill out the feedback form at this link: https://clatemple.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6G61u0o4N5v-jGCx.

Using the form allows you to make your responses anonymous, if you wish.

THE OPTIMISTS, cont.

fessors, parents, and (finally) the City Health Department, put a stop to Temple's grand experiment after a week's worth of instruction.

The answer is money, I suppose: a short-sighted desire to get as many bodies in the dorms as possible. But I think the larger answer is that the people making the decisions had their own kind of optimism, only in their case the cruelty was turned outward: towards the professors and students who would bear the burden of accomplishing the impossible task, while those who made the decisions did so from a place of guaranteed safety.

In a sense, the great COVID-19

re-opening crisis of Fall 2020 taught me something about shared injustice—not just among faculty, but among students, as well, who were promised in-person instruction and ended, once again, as one of a mosaic of digital faces. In better times, I sometimes found myself resenting my position as an adjunct. It seemed to me that my isolation and my inability to have control over my working conditions was a result of my track. It took this crisis, and the optimistic cruelty of the Temple administration that accompanied it, to show me that every professor at Temple, in every track, deals with complete indifference from the ad-

ministration when it came to the area of our greatest professional expertise: our classrooms.

But if the crisis showed how thoroughly we can be ignored, it also showed the way to a different state of affairs. Even in the midst of a pandemic, faculty were more than capable of organizing to determine what we wanted from our teaching conditions. In the strangeness of a thousand Zoom rooms, curiously egalitarian in their shabby, pixelated displays, we discussed the situation with shared stakes. And if we did it once, then I do not think it is too optimistic to suggest that we could do it again.

Communities, Collectives, and COVID: A Graduate Student Perspective

By Scott C. Thompson

Ph.D. candidate, English; Advanced Graduate Fellow, Center for the Humanities at Temple

The last weekend before the quarantine lockdown, my partner and I met for dinner and drinks with another graduate student from my department and his partner in downtown Philadelphia. Our double date night had been a regular fixture for the past several years, and I looked forward to the chance to reflect with a colleague and friend on the graduate student experience away from the university. These social encounters left me mentally and emotionally refreshed and reminded me that the academy was only one part of my life. Over Thai food and craft beers, we shared stories about mutual friends, discussed the state of the job market, commiserated about our dissertation progress, and expressed our concern about the uncertain future. Then the lockdown went into full effect, and I haven't seen another person from my department in person since.

Fast forward three months. I'm on a Zoom call with a regional group of academics in my field. Since I moved to Philadelphia and began my graduate career, I've been on this group's email chain, and not once have I been able to attend one of their meetings. Beside the fact that I would most likely be the only graduate student in attendance, (and I was the only one on the Zoom call), the meetings are often at professors' homes all across the mid-Atlantic. Despite my interest in the group, I did not have the means (time, money) to, say, train to New York city for a Friday night living-room lecture over wine and cheese. But here I was, in my living room on a June afternoon, participating with the group for the very first time.

These two experiences demonstrate how the pandemic has affected me: limiting access to my established support communities but

creating new opportunities for me to form new, broader collectives.

Like the majority of folks, my in-person communities of friends and colleagues have been shut down. Especially at a large school like Temple, I've had to work hard to develop and nurture relationships outside of the classroom with my graduate student peers. When you have to train in to the campus or navigate city traffic, a coffee or happy hour drink after class requires more coordination than spontaneity. The difficult task of building connections with professors who might serve on one's committee or write a letter of recommendation has become even more challenging, without the ability to drop in for casual office hours, or bump into them at the food trucks, or wait with them in the elevator line in Anderson or Gladfelter. And my usual methods

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Communities, Collectives, and COVID, continued

of building community with my students—such as small talk before and after class, my animated classroom presence, and individualized in-class interactions—have had to be reimagined on the fly. Even in “normal” times, graduate school can feel overwhelming and isolating, and that’s without the added crisis of a global pandemic.

The increase in technology use and forced isolation, however, have provided me with some unexpected opportunities. Many conferences have switched to virtual platforms and lowered their registration prices. For better or worse, conferences are necessary notches on every

graduate student’s CV, and the increased access provided by the virtual platforms and reduced registrations have made more conferences financially viable options for those of us whose departments fund only a small portion of travel expenses, if any. Sitting at my desk at home, I’ve had the opportunity to participate in more free online workshops, Zoom in to more open lectures, and meet (virtually) more colleagues than I ever have before. Plus, as many graduate students might tell you, quarantine helps minimize the distractions that often interfere with dissertation writing.

The pandemic has affected ev-

eryone in some way, but it’s worth remembering our graduate student population. We’re a precarious bunch. Most of us rely heavily on our support networks to get us through the physically, mentally, and emotionally grueling experience of graduate school, so losing them this past year has been taking its toll. But I’ve tried to highlight some of the positives—I hesitate to call them “silver linings”—in the hopes of not losing sight of the new opportunities for building collectives that are available. After all, graduate students are in the business of learning new skills and adapting to new situations.

Surveillance, cont.

- ed. But, if corrective action was not taken, the faculty member would be replaced during the actual term of teaching. The teaching process was structured, mandated, and with little flexibility, even at the doctoral level.” (p. 28)
- There was “complete standardization of all online courses — an instructional design team worked with a person approved by the department head to be a subject matter expert (SME). This may have been one of the faculty members who taught the course once it had been created or the SME may never have taught or would teach the course. The SME worked with a team of instructional designers and media creation experts to create the complete online course. The SME created the content map with the design team and provided

oversight and review to the content created by the design team. Once the course was completed, it was reviewed by the academic department. This process may have taken as long as six months though there was a huge effort for it to be completed in less than four months. A SME would receive approximately \$2500 for their services.” (p. 28)

- “The concept of master course design and the standardized teaching requirements were viewed as ensuring a high quality student experience and avoiding a situation in which one student may have a robust online experience while another received little faculty interaction or inferior course learning materials. There was no faculty freedom regarding the teaching of content and there were tightly constructed requirements regarding teaching and responsiveness

to students. This included a 24 hour response time for all emails and course messages, a 48 hour turnaround time for grading all assignments, and a requirement to be actively present five out of seven days each week with no two consecutive days absent from the online course.” (p. 29)

- And finally: “There was tension between the academic units and the business unit with the academic units believing that the business unit was most interested in profitability and the business unit believing that the academic units operated too slowly and without enough of a thought toward return on investment (ROI).” (p. 28)

Temple has already implemented some of these practices in some programs. Will such practices be adopted further, and without protest? We shall see.

Reflections from the Pandemic, continued

estic work appear to be exaggerated during the present pandemic circumstances in ways that disproportionately hinder the productivity of academic women” (Oleschuk 502). Additionally, for contingent faculty, both NTT’s and Adjuncts, the pandemic has reemphasized the labor conditions of contingency: lack of access, lack of support, lack of security (al-Gharbi, Zahneis).

Glossing these realities is important, but it’s also worth noting that any of us is only able to see what we see when asked to consider our experiences across our otherwise bounded institutional identities. From the perspective of an NTT in a program staffed entirely by contingent faculty, I know that my own experience provides me access to only one set of understandings about faculty life at Temple. Because I’m part of the roughly 75% of faculty that is contingent in the university, I could assume certain things about the lives of both my TT and Adjunct colleagues, but I’d likely be wrong as often as I’m right about what their lives looked like on a daily basis. The assertion that we’re all in this together loses credibility when defining that “we” becomes enmeshed in conversations about who’s privileged, who’s not, and what solidarity looks like across the multiple tracks and ranks of faculty that compose the academic labor force of this university.

When Temple re-opened in September and some of my colleagues in IH, Adjunct and NTT, found themselves teaching fully face-to-face or hybrid while others were fully online, there was a strong sense that faculty who spoke up, who asked not to teach face-to-face, were potentially endangering their posi-

tions. More to the point, they didn’t know if they had the right to refuse to show up in person. How did our experience in this one program match that of our TT colleagues in other schools and programs across the university? What choices were they asked to make by their department chairs? What choices did they really have? Again, viewing matters only from only one positionality, we can’t know how our lived experiences differ from one another or what binds us together unless we probe beneath the layers of suspicion and misperception that too often inform our understanding of the university and our varied places in it.

The assertion that we’re all in this together loses credibility when defining that “we” becomes enmeshed in conversations about who’s privileged, who’s not, and what solidarity looks like across the multiple tracks and ranks of faculty that compose the academic labor force of this university.

“You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows,” goes the old Dylan song. And the winds of the world, to say nothing of the university, are likely to be harsh and unrelenting in the months ahead. In the meantime, key questions remain: How can we most effectively meet and help our students and our colleagues through? What collective networks of support, acknowledgement, awareness, and resistance do we need to seek in an undercommons that operates

against the false hierarchy of academic class?

Our ability to do this work and address these questions depends as much on our willingness to let go of preconceptions about who any of us might be and to start the process together of finding out where we stand together, where we’re apart, and how we can create collective solidarity.

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