



Teaching Matters Monthly

Dr. William FitzGerald, Director | Erin Miller, Graduate Assistant



Director's Note

This month feels different! Spring has arrived, and we await a Fall semester that will seem familiar in many ways, even as the long shadow of Covid-19 remains. We look forward to in-person classes and meetings with colleagues and chance encounters as we cross the campus. As we return, I hope we do so changed by experiences of separation and resourcefulness and especially by newly realized capacities for empathy in our work with students and each other. Atop a global pandemic, we continue to weather multiple crises-- economic turmoil, racial division and political unrest. We can't put these behind us; rather we must carry with us reminders of those factors that contribute to moments of challenge and transformation as we strive to teach with love and toward justice. I encourage us all (especially myself) to take stock of lessons learned and insights gained to meet the needs of the moment. We hope you find these items of news helpful in that stock-taking.

News

Are Vaccine Requirements Equitable?

With many colleges across the country announcing [their plans](#) for the fall, Rutgers was the first to [announce](#) that students must be vaccinated against COVID-19 before returning to campus. This requirement is similar to other vaccinations that students must have on record before starting classes, such as the measles, mumps, and meningitis vaccines. While access to these vaccines is not contested because they have been in use around the world for decades, access is a critical issue regarding COVID vaccines. Doctors without Borders [currently projects](#) that low- and middle-income countries will not have the resources they need to vaccinate the majority of their populations until 2023. This poses a problem for international students enrolling this fall who are from countries that do not have vaccines or countries in which they are not eligible for vaccines. As vaccine eligibility continues to expand in the United States, will universities streamline vaccine opportunities for their student populations?

What COVID Taught Us about Humanities and the Sciences

The onset of COVID-19 has revealed many ways in which our classes and the infrastructure of higher education can be more flexible. Many medical and sciences labs, which were formerly in-person, were cancelled or transitioned into remote learning experiences. This temporary shift has made room for medical and sciences students to explore how their work overlaps with the humanities. Molly Worthen, in an [opinion piece](#) for *The New York Times*, describes how this “once-in-a-century crisis” can educate doctors and scientists in skills and values typically relegated to the humanities, such as storytelling, interpretation, and the importance of understanding intersectional experiences. Worthen details how even a limited background in the humanities can help medical professionals understand extenuating factors that may influence their health or how to interpret the medical histories that patients share during appointments. She cites the Yale course “COVID-19: A History of the Present” as a compelling humanities course that can directly benefit future doctors and scientists. When we take into consideration the imbalance of vaccine distribution in the United States according to race and class, we are approaching just one crucial intersection of science and the humanities. For more information about how to design humanities-based assignments for any class, see the [three-part guide](#) on engaging humanities assignments from the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching.

The Problem with “Diversity” and “Equity” in Higher Education

As the need for equitable policies that benefit previously excluded groups becomes more and more prevalent, “diversity” and “equity” are sprinkled throughout university emails and public statements more than salt on fries. This is a problem—not because we shouldn’t be striving for diversity and equity, but because the methods universities use to work towards diversity and equity reaffirm existing structures that support the white, middle-to-upper class hegemony upon which higher education in the United States was built. A recent [paper](#) published by Jordan G. Starck, Stacey Sinclair, and J. Nicole Shelton defined [two approaches](#) to diversity in higher education: the first, an instrumental approach that emphasizes how useful diversity is in education, the second, a moral approach that believes all people deserve access to education. Thinking of how diversity can serve the institution only reifies its intrinsic power structures. [Howard Fields](#) exemplifies this point through the figure of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion specialist: “Too often, DEI specialists are set up to fail because they ultimately report to someone who has not done their own anti-racism and diversity work. Or they work for an organization that protects white supremacy by denying any attempt to address long-lasting systemic issues related to inequities.” For diversity and equity to really mean something, these words must be attached to actions. Universities can be radical [agents of social mobility](#), or they can quietly [admit legacy students](#) during one of the most competitive application cycles in the history of US higher education.

Acknowledging the Difficult Times We’re All Facing

Last month a York University student was [gaslit and mocked](#) by a mathematics professor who could not be bothered to care that the student faced significant hindrances to their education because of the ongoing military coup in Myanmar. The professor insinuated that the student does not “understand reality” and expressed doubt about the communications blackout and why protestors were dying. The professor has since been removed from this course, but we share this exchange with you as an example of how *not* to engage with students. The generation of students we’re teaching now have gone to high school alongside Parkland survivors, have aunts and cousins who are victims of hate crimes, have lost loved ones to COVID or police brutality or political unrest in their home countries. Students *en masse* are facing [layers of trauma](#)—all while going to college. When you have the opportunity to show compassion to your students, please do so. It may seem counter-intuitive to your course learning goals or schedule, but modeling compassion in the face of adversity teaches students a skill more valuable than anything they could find in a textbook.

Additional Resources

Here is a catalogue of our workshop slides from this past year’s workshop series, “Pedagogy in a Pandemic.”

<u>Facilitating Discussion over Zoom</u>	<u>Group Work over Zoom</u>
<u>Low-Stakes Writing</u>	<u>High-Stakes Writing</u>
<u>Giving Writing Feedback (when you’re not a writing teacher)</u>	<u>Here’s What I Want: Designing Effective Rubrics</u>
<u>Conferencing with Students (online or otherwise)</u>	<u>Assessment and Grading in Remote Teaching</u>

You can also find these resources on the Teaching Matters [website](#), along with additional pedagogical readings on a range of topics.

The TLT at Rutgers-New Brunswick still has ongoing workshops! Check out their [remaining dates](#) on all things remote teaching.

For additional resources, visit tmac.camden.rutgers.edu, or write us at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu

