



Teaching Matters Monthly

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



Director's Note

Like most of you, I look forward to returning to campus soon. I will miss online teaching when the weather turns wintry, I s'pose. I look forward to connecting directly with students and to chance encounters with colleagues. As I have opined in this space already, I believe we do so with fresh insights into the complexities of education in general and the lives of our students in particular. Having visited students in their homes, having welcomed them into ours, if only virtually, we are not the same again. I believe we must be chastened by the collective trauma we have experienced through this pandemic as well as encouraged by the stamina and resourcefulness we have discovered in our students and ourselves. I believe we should embrace the value of empathy as we design and deliver our courses. We have a keener vision of what it takes to succeed in higher education, what the challenges are, and why it matters that we remain committed to the mission of transformative public education.

This month, I bid farewell to my assistant of two years, Erin Miller, who has contributed immensely to keeping Teaching Matters as well as the First Year Writing Program afloat in choppy waters. We will miss her wisdom and her willingness to go the extra mile. Erin is off to a doctoral program in English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Happy Summer... it's over before we know it!

News

Cancel Culture and the Classroom

If you've read about Mr. Potato Head, Ellen DeGeneres, or former President Trump's statements at conservative rallies recently, you've probably read about cancel culture.

Aja Romano [explains](#) the phenomenon known as “canceling” originates in Black rhetoric, and it has traditionally referred to marginalized peoples announcing they will no longer engage with “public figures who retain power and authority even after committing wrongdoing.” The primary goal of cancel culture is to hold people with power accountable, but this rhetorical act has been appropriated by conservative leaders and warped into a debate about free speech and censorship. Although canceling has only become prominent in recent years, an iteration of this debate about accountability, free speech, and power imbalances has been playing out in schools for decades.

Carmen Maria Machado recently published an [opinion piece](#) for *The New York Times* about banning books in response to a Texas town’s attempt to ban her memoir, *In the Dream House*, from reading lists because it depicts queer sexuality and an abusive relationship. Machado identifies this banning as a form of censorship, an attempt to cancel her for writing about these topics. She rebuts the would-be cancelers by describing how books build empathy and understanding in readers and banning her book will only deprive students of an opportunity to learn. This brings to light two ways cancelling is used depending on the power balances between arguing parties: to hold people accountable and to control a person’s image and access. Before sending out your reading lists this fall, why not take a look at the authors and publishers of your texts? It may help you better understand the power dynamics associated with them, the content of their work, and its reception.

Investing in Higher Education

The United States Department of Education recently [announced](#) it would be releasing \$36 billion in federal aid to higher education institutions across the country. Half of the aid will be going to community colleges, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and institutions that serve minority populations to help them distribute vaccines, prepare for the fall, and recruit students. The other half will be going directly to students “with dire financial needs to help them cover food, housing, computers, internet, childcare and other essential expenses so they can stay enrolled.”

Community colleges faced the largest decreases in enrollment during the pandemic, so it makes sense to stimulate these institutions. However, the federal aid going to HBCUs is [long overdue](#). Individual states like Tennessee and Maryland face lawsuits with local HBCUs over state money that was owed to them for decades. This federal aid offsets the money HBCUs should have been receiving, but it does not compensate for the injustice of withholding money from these institutions. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation recently published a [report](#) on the value of higher education that foregrounds the importance of race, sex, and class. It seems that the Department of Education’s aid is an effort to rectify some of the inequities this report reveals.

Global Higher Education Infrastructure

In March of last year, colleges and universities across the United States made the switch to remote teaching through monumental efforts helmed by teachers, IT departments, and instructional design offices. Although the shift was not perfect, most higher education institutions managed to make do under these imperfect circumstances. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for education systems in other parts of the world. [Brazilian higher education institutions](#) face budget cuts and limited support from their government, and the move to remote teaching is a near impossibility for low-income students who don't have internet access.

Education infrastructure faces similar [problems in India](#), with the added crisis of an unprecedented COVID outbreak. Indian universities that had cautiously reopened in January alongside a vaccination campaign are now closed, with final exams postponed or moved online, showing that not every country has the option to “make do” under the threat of COVID. Some students studying in America are finding ways to extend the relative stability of our education infrastructure to other countries, such as one UC-Berkeley master's student, who's [offering coding classes](#) to girls in Uganda. What more can we do to help students around the world continue their education during the pandemic?

Updating Teaching Portfolios

After more than a year of teaching remotely during a pandemic, and with the upcoming fall semester looking more and more “normal,” we invite you to take stock of your experiences by revisiting your [teaching portfolio](#). This isn't an assessment request from Teaching Matters but rather an opportunity to reflect on and record your experiences teaching during an unprecedented year. What challenges did you encounter this year that helped you grow as a professional? What circumstances did you endure while teaching? What lessons, assignments, and readings resonated with your classes? What unexpected realizations occurred to you that changed your teaching methods and approaches?

Before rushing into the new normal that is promised us this fall, we encourage you to take a few moments to reflect on how hard this year has been and how much you have accomplished.

Additional Resources

This year, we hosted a series of workshops in our series, “Pedagogy in a Pandemic.” Here are our slides for these presentations.

<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.

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

