



Center for Teaching Excellence
Hampton University
Teaching Matters

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Community, Pedagogy, and COVID-19

by

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None of us could have predicted the seismic shift in all our normal patterns when we returned from Spring Break. In those first days of news about the novel coronavirus, I well remember caring staff members wiping down surfaces with disinfectant; they made sure to clean even door handles thoroughly. Nevertheless, it became clear that such precautions, however thorough, would not suffice. Suddenly, we were scattered into our own separate orbits and working hard to keep our students at the center of all these eccentric planetary pathways. The watchwords for the Hampton University learning community since that time have been care, creativity, and flexibility. The Administrative Leadership Team, seasoned faculty members, young, innovative faculty members, and, most of all, our students, have kept us in community together as we remain physically apart.

The administrative teams evaluated the situation in March, gathered input from the faculty, and made the hard decision to move to remote instruction for the safety of all. Once that plan was set in motion, the Center for Information Technology provided training and support to faculty and students in every medium, from live sessions to videos posted on Blackboard. Dr. Katina Ward-James has given stellar support with a calm demeanor and sharp skills as many of us have moved into the relatively uncharted territory of distance teaching. Younger faculty members shared their technical knowledge with seasoned faculty members, and those same seasoned faculty members provided stability and years of experience to the younger faculty members, building a strong distance learning community.

However, the greatest disruption has occurred for our students, and they have adapted beautifully. During the first week of the sheltering in place order, I asked upper-level English majors to reflect on the meaning of learning in the absence of the physical body, and their responses bear repeating. They expressed gratitude that they could be safely home with family members, despite struggling with distractions from those same family members and being forced to problem solve when the home (or hotspot) Wi-Fi connection let them down. They also praised their fellow students for helping with those problems, and for staying in touch through FaceTime and other communication platforms. They realized that they themselves are learning to better use technology through this trial, and that if they choose to, they can become stronger, more flexible learners because of the scattering. Overwhelmingly, they express a strong nostalgia for the intellectual sparks that flew in live classroom discussion, for the unpredictable moments, when walking between the cafeteria and the Student Center, they laughed until they cried, or sparred intensely over social issues. One

student wrote of his habituation to technology, and how that habit made him “blind to the value of shared spaces, face-to-face connections, and ordinary human interaction.” None of us will take that shared HU space and community for granted again, and that is a welcome renewal of the most important human values. We have to be apart to ensure a future together.

Announcements

Hampton University is a member of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, which offers the following information and opportunities for faculty members:



[\[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](http://portal.criticalimpact.com)

Weekly Liberal Education News Watch

Week of April 20–24, 2020

AAC&U is pleased to share news stories on liberal education and inclusive excellence each week. Please share with colleagues and all who care about liberal education and inclusive excellence.

[Sign up for AAC&U publications and resources \[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](http://portal.criticalimpact.com). If you have an AAC&U login, [manage your email preferences \[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](http://portal.criticalimpact.com).

Why Society Will Need Liberal Arts Graduates

[\[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](http://portal.criticalimpact.com)

Diverse: Issues in Higher Education

A liberal arts education is about much more than where we teach and learn. It provides students with lifelong skills and a broad base of knowledge. To be sure, these skills and knowledge translate into jobs and earnings over a lifetime. They also produce societal outcomes that we can no longer afford to ignore. [Read more >> \[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](http://portal.criticalimpact.com)

Higher Education and the Public Good [\[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](http://portal.criticalimpact.com)

Inside Higher Ed

As the country grapples with severe economic challenges, this is the time to enroll people laid off during the COVID-19 crisis so they can improve their skills. [Read more >>](http://portal.criticalimpact.com)

[\[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](http://portal.criticalimpact.com)

How Teaching Changed in the (Forced) Shift to Remote Learning [portal.criticalimpact.com]

Inside Higher Ed

A new survey documents how professors view this spring's mass move to virtual courses. Key findings: most used new teaching methods; half lowered their expectations for the volume of student work—and a third for its quality. [Read more >> \[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](#)

The Crisis in Black Student Debt Was Dire Before Coronavirus [portal.criticalimpact.com]—Now It's More Urgent Than Ever [portal.criticalimpact.com]

The Hechinger Report

Black Americans have to work harder and pay more to receive the same benefits and opportunities as their white and non-black peers. This phenomenon is commonly called the “black tax.” Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic is raising the cost of being black in the United States even more. [Read more >> \[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](#)

Colleges Should Cultivate More Equitable Transfer Pathways [portal.criticalimpact.com]

Inside Higher Ed

Equitable transfer for students is more pressing than ever during the pandemic, and institutions should take a more proactive and holistic approach. [Read more >> \[portal.criticalimpact.com\]](#)