

Dear Colleagues,

In forty years as a faculty member and then as an administrator at four very different institutions, I have never experienced anything remotely resembling the current crisis, and I am sure that goes for all of you as well.

However, I am writing to you now not to provide more bad news or issue more dire warnings and directives but for one simple purpose: to stop for a moment to take a deep breath and celebrate what this incredible community has so far achieved under the most taxing circumstances.

With practically no time to prepare, we have transitioned an entire semester's worth of our curriculum online, we have kept our community as safe as any institution can under these difficult circumstances, we have managed to continue paying salaries and benefits, we have made the right decisions (right in hindsight) at the right moments, painful though some of them were, and most importantly, we have supported our students and we have supported each other.

This - is Valiant Pride!

You should all take a moment, amidst the relentless onslaught of catastrophic news to realize what a momentous accomplishment this has been for all of us. Not for any one of us, or for any particular constituency, but for all of us, faculty, staff, and students. I have not heard from any students or parents that crossing over to online teaching has been a disaster; on the contrary, I have seen all the wonderful moments and experiences you have shared with each other and with me.

We all realize that online teaching cannot replace the give-and-take and communal learning experience of face-to-face instruction, but it seems that we have discovered some unexpected joys amid the hardship. We miss the physical companionship of meeting each other in Benziger and having a cup of coffee or watching a movie with our students or watching one of our Valiant athletic teams compete. And yet we have been more successful than I expected in moving a surprising amount of our sense of community and close interaction online. But perhaps I should not have been surprised: this was, after all, one of the reasons why I "flunked retirement" and decided to come to Manhattanville instead.

So this is a time to say "Thank You" to all of you, on behalf of the institution, on behalf of our students, on behalf of our alumnae and alumni, and on behalf of future generations, for working together and for working so hard to keep this community going, not just hanging by our fingernails, but with energy, creativity, sacrifices, and a relentless belief in the future of this institution. And, above all, with a sense of humor and empathy for each other. It is in times like these, that the true mettle of this faculty and staff shines through, as it has these past weeks.

I had originally intended to give specific "Thank You" shout-outs to a number of faculty and staff who have been particularly helpful and supportive in this transition. I had to abandon that idea because the list of specific names has now become so long that this communication would tax your patience. So I will just pick one name for now, and he shall stand for all the others, for

faculty, staff and administration: With imperturbable patience, good will, endless energy and unflappable good manners, Bancha Srikacha, our Instructional Technologist, has stepped forward when we needed him most. He has done so on his own initiative, without a directive from me, like one of my favorite characters from American literature, Jurgis, in Upton Sinclair's classic *The Jungle* who, whenever things got even tougher for his family than they had already been before, simply said "I will work harder!" Like Upton Sinclair's fictional character, Bancha Srikacha, in his quiet, unassuming way, simply moved up his game, saying quietly and reassuringly, "I will work harder." Thank you to Bancha for setting such a great example for all of us, and thank you to all of you who have followed his example!

So tonight, I would like each and every one of you, if you can, to pick up a cup of your favorite beverage and to toast **yourselves** for doing such a great job under such difficult circumstances. And as you do so, please know that, at exactly 8:00 p.m. tonight, my family and I will raise a glass of wine to toast all of you, to celebrate you, to thank you and to wish you well. If you have the time and are so inclined, please feel free to do the same wherever you are at 8:00 p.m. tonight. We would love to enjoy your company, even if it has to be virtual for now.

As I have quoted our motto so often before, it applies even more so now: "À coeur vaillant rien d'impossible" – "To a valiant heart, nothing is impossible."

I am proud to be serving this community!

Thank you and stay healthy!

Michael Geisler  
President

