

Faculty Welfare Committee



Excellence in Education

From the President

Fairfield University

FWC / AAUP Newsletter

Dear Colleagues,

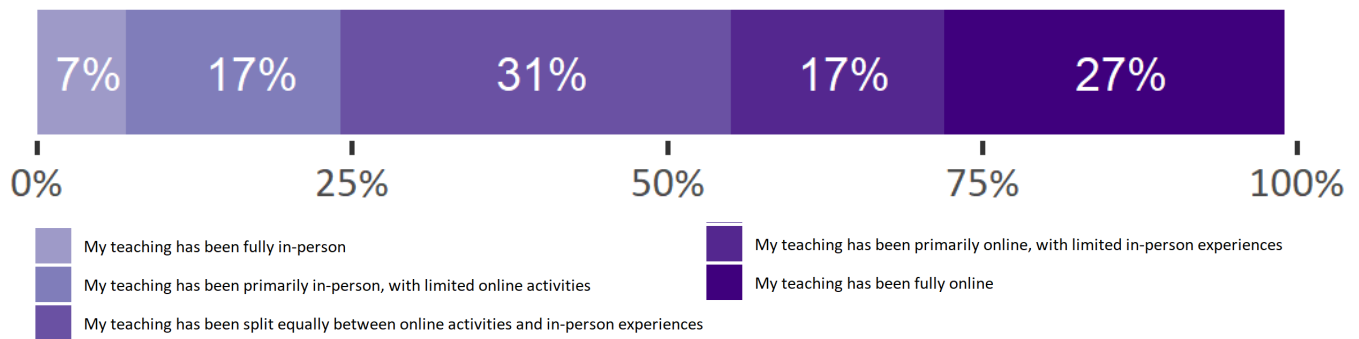
Congratulations on (nearly) completing one of the most challenging semesters in the history of our institution. We at the FWC are both amazed by the grit and determination of our colleagues, and terrified at the toll it exacts. We take “faculty welfare” seriously, and this is a serious time for faculty welfare.

In this issue

- Survey results!
- Guest editorials!
- Important links!

The challenges of our moment manifest differently for each of us. For example, I am a full professor, and so I am resigned to the hole this pandemic has blasted through my research trajectory. My junior colleagues are not so resigned. At least some are terrified, and believe that no kindness or consideration by rank and tenure in the future will compensate for the damage done now. Also, I lack young children at home, so I am not juggling daycare and temper tantrums during Zoom meetings. Young children are tough in the best of times. My partner did not lose her job (and I have not lost mine yet), so we are not in the dire financial straits of less fortunate colleagues. That has to be devastating. The courses I teach lend themselves to online teaching, and some of my job is now administrative, so I am not plagued by a lack of labs or studios in which to work. And I am old, so the cut to our retirement contribution has less time to (not) compound interest, and so does not impact me like it does those of you earlier in your careers. (I remain aggrieved that we chose so regressive a way to give the institution the financial latitude meant to help us manage contingencies.)

Faculty Teaching Modes in Fall 2020



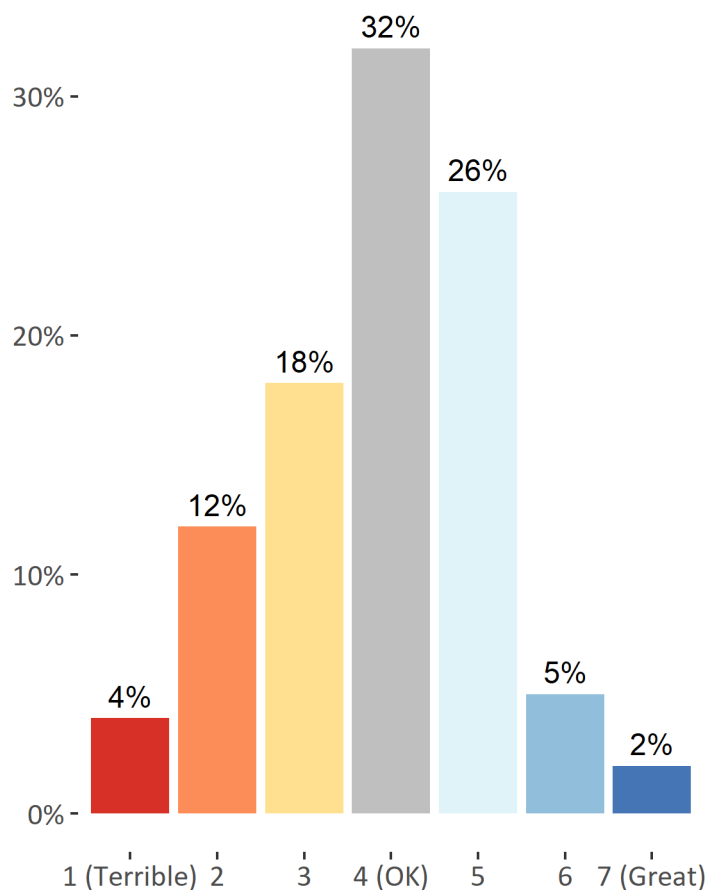
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So, everything is fine? No, actually. I enjoy a life of astonishing privilege, but the pandemic haunts my friends and loved ones, frays our nerves, challenges our resolve, and forces cruel decisions on us in radically uncertain times. While I congratulate all of us on surviving this semester, I am gut-churningly aware that the next question has to be: “are we ready to do it again?” Spring semester looms.... Are we ready? Could we ever be ready?

With all this in mind, we at the FWC decided to reach out and see how you are collectively doing. According to the survey, a lucky few of us are great, most of us are somewhere in the middle, but about a third of our colleagues rank themselves between terrible and merely OK. To me, that is not OK. We fear for our children and other family members, for our research, for our mental health. The statistical summary included here makes that clear. I would encourage everyone to remember that every single data point is at least one person.

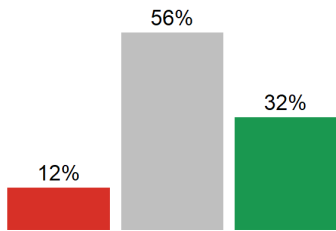
In the comments it was clear that some feel supported by the administration and satisfied that we’re doing what we can. Others are outraged, and for a number of reasons, especially the decision to fire staff without notice, and with disregard for the fact that we voted for a cut in our benefits precisely to avoid terminating staff. This was characterized by one person as “trading social values for market values,” and by another as “morally wrong.” One person said there were “no words to express how hurtful that decision was both in terms of loss of

Faculty Sentiment About Fall 2020

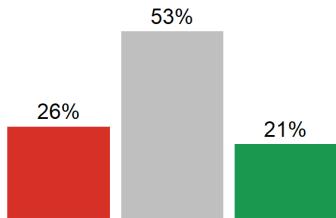


Professional Experiences of Faculty

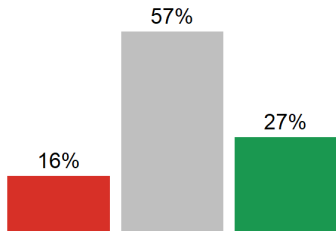
Support from Facilities and ITS



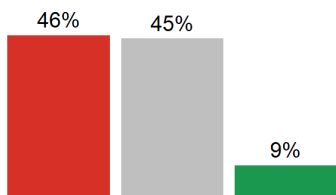
Communication Between Administration and Faculty



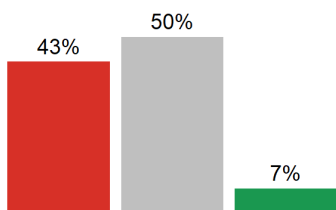
Students' Response to Rules and Regulations



Working on Research and/or Creative Work



Progress Towards Promotion and/or Tenure



■ Negative
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Positive

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livelihood and timing.” Others used terms like “sorry,” “disappointed,” “angry,” and “disillusioned.” One person said with evident sadness that their relationship with Fairfield is now “broken” due to the way the pandemic has been (and is being) handled. There were additional concerns of various sorts, including the opacity of decision-making, and the untimely sharing of decisions, concerns about accessibility and students who required accommodations, concerns that graduate students and other populations were forgotten in the decision-making process, and assertions of a lack of technical and organizational support.

Some of the most caustic assessments called having the students back on campus “criminal,” and the testing regime a “sham.” While one colleague said they felt “lucky” to work here, another summed up their view simply: “f*ck this.” So we, as a faculty, have a diversity of views, and even some individuals viewed different aspects of our situation, and particularly our Covid response, differently.

Overall, let me say that we at the FWC know the sacrifices you are making, and we are committed to doing what we can to help you navigate our challenges. We send this newsletter in the spirit not just of shared governance, but shared sacrifice. We want you to have a place to vent your opinions and express your experiences. Our hope is that others might gain from them, or even be strengthened by them. We believe that understanding our diversity of experiences helps broaden our vision and soften our hearts, that it might help us to avoid an “epidemic of indifference” that can only worsen our collective situation. We applaud your creativity, your resolve, and we hope to make you feel less alone in your struggle. We are a faculty, a community. Our struggle is communal. We will survive this... together.

Dave Crawford

Professing in a Pandemic

I guess the short version of my own experience has been that I've had to say 'no' to almost every invitation to write, collaborate, review, or produce scholarship during these last nine months. Some of my work that's happened to see the light of day during this pandemic year has been work that (luckily) was toward the end of the production pipeline as the world fell apart.

What remains of my professional life has been spent figuring out how to teach difficult courses on Zoom, or in person with a mask on, AND to students who are dealing with all kinds of stresses and tragedies. I'm barely attending to my administrative responsibilities. And as public schools get ready to go virtual again, this will become even more impossible as I have to be a single home-schooling parent to a 7 yr old between the hours of 8:30 - 3:30, Mon thru Fri.

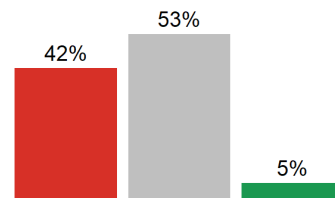
The scholarly projects that I need to finish currently (because I committed to them before the pandemic began) are getting delayed and delayed and delayed. I haven't asked for this many extensions IN MY LIFE. Moving forward, there's really no scholarship production for me until this pandemic is over and my youngest child can return to school with some consistency.

Kris Sealey

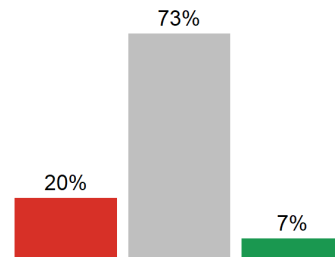


Personal Experiences of Faculty

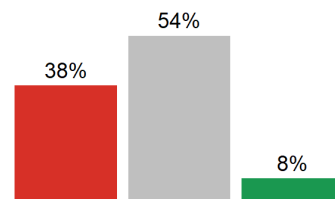
Childcare



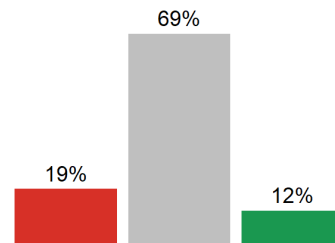
Caring for Family Members



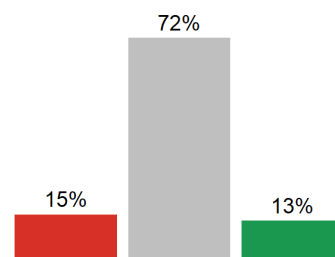
Mental Health



Physical Health



Household Finances



■ Negative
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Positive

Taking Stands

We hear the phrase “modern Jesuit university” quite a lot these days. Whatever it means, and I am not always so sure I know, it certainly has to include a concern to address contemporary social issues from the perspective of the Catholic intellectual tradition and with a particular slant towards the priorities of Jesuit pedagogy and spirituality. In his 1991 letter on the role of Catholic Universities, Pope John Paul II put it forcefully: “If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.” Notice, please, that it is the university and not simply its individual members, that must be ready to take on such a prophetic role. This is the big difference between public institutions and those private institutions that hew to a religiously-inspired mission and identity. Of course, many of us at Fairfield, of whatever religious persuasion or none, speak and act prophetically in our own lives, in small ways and sometimes quite substantially. But what about the prophetic role of Fairfield University as Fairfield University? While it may not need to pronounce on every single issue, we surely have to be ready to take a stand when necessary.

There is an almost 500 years-old guide to when and how to speak out in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, mostly particularly in the meditation on The Two Standards that occurs at a key moment in the four “weeks” of the retreat. The retreatant is invited to choose between two flags (or standards) under which to live. For Ignatius these were the standards of Christ and Satan. If those names do not speak to you, you would be entirely faithful to Ignatius’s vi-

sion if you substituted “the truly human” and “the less than human.” The call of the two standards is a call either to seeing oneself becoming a more fully human person by being turned outwards to others and to the world or, by adopting “Satan’s” standard, being fully consumed by self-interest. Even today, getting on for half a millennium since Ignatius wrote, the struggle in the world is the same struggle and our choices are the same. Do we want to be players in the struggle for a better world, or do we just want to shut the door and be comfortable, day-trading our wealth and counting our money? Is it self-interest or the common good that should motivate us?

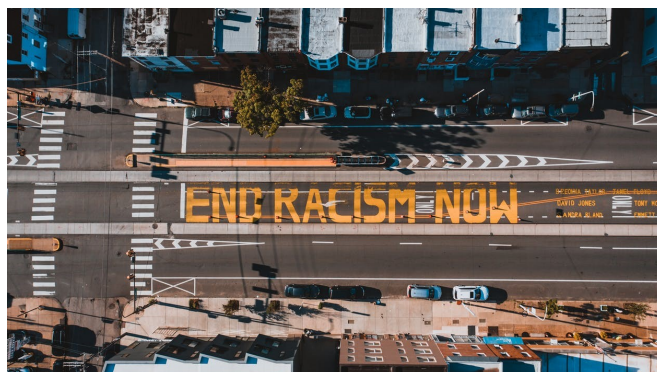
How does a modern Jesuit university exercise this responsibility to the world? The Catholic tradition commits to the pursuit of the common good, measured by how well any society treats its least powerful members. The tradition has grown to recognize that the human race is called to steward, not despoil, the world which is our home. So the Jesuit institution needs to be marked by three approaches. First, the myriad small things that all of us are summoned to do in the spirit of generosity. Second, by modeling in our Fairfield University culture a commitment to the service of the world. And third, by speaking prophetically when prophecy is called for. And how could it not be called for at the present day, when we see our elected officials making strenuous efforts to dismantle democratic life, when we labor to be human under the weight of neoliberal global market capitalism, when racial injustice becomes more and more clearly the besetting sin of American history, and when our very freedoms are daily trimmed by the excesses of social media? The great shame of the

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Catholic Church in Nazi-occupied France was the call of its bishops to “collaborate.” To their everlasting credit, French Jesuits responded by publishing an underground journal whose rubric was, “France, be careful that you do not lose your soul!” Today the temptation to quietism among the blandishments of our culture for the favored few like us is intense. The fear of upsetting donors or parents or alumni is real fear. But the price of silence could well be the loss of our soul, and perhaps especially the soul of our university. When nothing that challenges evil issues from our collective mouths we succumb, in Pope Francis’s words, to the globalization of indifference.

To be practical. Is Fairfield known as a place that puts Black Lives Matter front and center? Is Fairfield challenging the reigning neoliberal assumptions that the logic of markets is the way of the world? Are we known as an institution for promoting justice within our institution and proclaiming the need for it in the wider world? If we are perceived as a predominantly white, upper-middle class school bent on producing professionals who will blend seamlessly into the social and political status quo, is that a fair evaluation of our educational work? And if not, how are we as an institution addressing those misconceptions? Many years ago the psychologist Viktor Frankl, looking back on his years in a Nazi concentration camp, spoke of what he had learned about survival. Mere survival, he wrote, was not the point, perhaps not even a value. Rather, “survival with meaning” was the objective. I am sure we all agree with that. But what is the precise weight of the word “meaning” here? Whatever it is, I think that the work that we all do is enormously strengthened when we are confident that the institution qua institution shares the social convictions that each of us tries to express.

Paul Lakeland



Arriving in Isolation

It has been a tough semester for all. In some ways that comradery helps, in others it may make it easy to overlook just how hard this has been on new faculty. Research shows that moving can be more stressful than a divorce. Many of the new faculty have moved large distances to be here. We came to a new job, a new town, a new state in the middle of a pandemic where building a new sense of community has been exceptionally challenging to say the least.

As we finalized our moves, we learned that during a 100-year pandemic, the University we were about to work for was opting to not match retirement for faculty prior to using money from the endowment to help cover COVID expenses. Then we met the other new faculty through Zoom call after Zoom call. Many meetings, that in the past would have been opportunities to make new friends and really feel like part of our new community, switched to sitting alone at home or in our offices. No easy side chatter, no shared lunches, no shared coffee, no chance to discuss the challenges of our moves or the settling in.

Now we've spent the semester juggling students blinking in and out of in-person due to quarantines and isolations; this I had anticipated to be hard. At the same time, we're trying to figure out the ins and outs of a new place; this I also expected to be hard. It was the loneliness I did not expect.

The double standard of classrooms being safe enough to spend hours each week with students, but not safe enough to hold in person options for faculty

events. The loneliness of walking the halls to ask a colleague a quick question only to find a very quiet department with almost all the doors closed. Of course, there have been glimmers of the incredible community we moved here to join, moments of getting to know the students or talking with a new colleague one-on-one.

As we get to know this new space in such a strange time, I wonder how will it impact the futures of the new faculty cohort that joined during COVID? If one day it is possible to have shared lunches, will we think to go? Or we will have become so accustomed to closed doors and quiet spaces that we'll sit and eat alone. How will our research be impacted? Will our promotion to tenure be obtainable? Will it be delayed?

All of these thoughts loom as the pandemic is breaking records almost daily, and we are transitioning to being fully remote for the next few months. We are preparing to teach classes with all of the logistics still scattered in confusion. How will we effectively connect with our students as we start the semester remotely? Will we be in person by Feb. 8th? How many students will choose to be here? How will we engage remote learners without losing them in asynchronous activities? Will our efforts and struggles as new faculty trying to get our bearings in the chaos of the pandemic be recognized? Or will we suffer from an inability to reach normal standards for teaching and research success.

Chelsie Counsell

Just Like Starting Over...

It feels like my first year as a professor again, putting out fires left and right, working with content delivery that is new and experimental, and just barely keeping it together. One of the courses I am teaching now is General Biology I, a challenging, content-heavy course that focuses on cell and molecular biology. This course is required for biology majors and it is also required for admittance to medical school. It is a difficult course under the best of circumstances, and this semester is not the best of circumstances.

We normally teach with scores of students packed into the School of Nursing auditorium and we deliver to them interactive lectures, discussing exciting and foundational biology content that is complicated and at times counterintuitive. Our course is far too big to fit into one room with social distancing, so we elected to do a flipped version where we provide pre-recorded quiz-embedded lectures in advance and meet synchronously over Zoom to review the content using interactive activities.

The format that is new to me and I am using technologies that are unfamiliar. I spend a lot of time creating content, curating content, editing content, formatting content, reformatting content, troubleshooting content, and uploading content. When students are confused by my content, or when they find mistakes in my content, there is a rapid flurry of corrections and explanatory emails. I am making more mistakes than I usually do.

In addition, my students need me more this semester than usual. This makes sense. It is a disorienting

semester filled with constantly-changing demands and standards. In total I have a hundred General Biology students, most of whom are first-year students, many of whom are struggling. These students need pedagogical support, emotional support, clarifications and confirmations of course instructions, feedback about their work, feedback about their academic goals, feedback about their grade standing. It is important to be there for them and give them what they need. I worry that I am not doing enough to keep them all feeling engaged and secure and aware.

It's true that the tools and techniques I am learning now will make me a better professor moving forward, and that this will help my future students. In this moment though, the extra demands are taking a toll on my well-being and on my research progress. It looks like the spring semester will have similar challenges, and I am worried about how long I can sustain these efforts and keep my sense of humor.

Anita Fernandez



Labs and Instruction in a Pandemic

In April, when the lockdown came into effect, it became crucial to come up with online version of labs both in terms of content and mode of delivery of that content. As both an instructor and a laboratory coordinator, I worked with other faculty to provide students instructional materials. This meant that every week and I completed all the lab activities as the students would, taking photos and videos, then compiling those materials and delivering them to students on Blackboard. Labs were then held synchronously via Zoom, utilizing break out rooms for lab partners, allowing students to work through the lab activities together as they would in person. The students were provided photos and videos of procedures and followed along with their lab manuals. Subsequently, photos of results or data tables were provided and students interpreted and analyzed the results. For weekly lab notebook completion, we transitioned to Digital lab notebook format. Although not ideal, we were able to complete the last three labs, including a fetal pig dissection, online. Student feedback was positive and they enjoyed seeing each other via Zoom every week. We were able to also hold a virtual research poster presentation, where students presented by screen sharing scientific posters created in PowerPoint. This particular change was such a success that we have decided to make this transition to creating and presenting a PowerPoint poster permanent in the future (albeit in person, not in Zoom).

In the fall semester, the requirement for both in person and remote learners became necessary. for social distancing and room capacity decrease led to tremendous increase in the amount of materials and supplies for each lab. Normally students work in pairs, but due to distance requirements and room capacities, students worked alone, so from the lab coordinator perspective, the workload increased by 50 percent. Many supplies could not be shared as they normally are so changes to set up for each lab

had to be implemented accordingly, so that each student would have their own set of supplies and reagents. Daily disinfection of all surfaces and shared equipment such as micropipettes, microscopes and slides was also necessary. In addition, all labs also needed to have a fully online version created for students that were either fully remote learners or temporarily remote due to illness or quarantine.

Drawing on the experience from the spring, and building on it, I created YouTube video clips, found online simulation activities for skills such as microscopy, micropipetting, and DNA analysis via gel electrophoresis, and provided data sets. All these materials were compiled in weekly online lab supplements that were posted to Blackboard. Students used these supplements in conjunction with the lab manual to complete the activities each week. We once again utilized Digital Lab notebooks for weekly lab reports for all students.

Based on their feedback, the students were glad to be able to have in person learning experiences as much as possible. They also greatly appreciated the ability to seamlessly transition to remote labs if needed with minimal need for learning different digital platforms, since all of our materials were delivered via Blackboard.

Although the workload has been doubled for me as a result of the pandemic, the experience has been a positive one overall. I found many new teaching tools as result of being “forced” to use alternative ways of delivering the material to students but also new ways students can present their knowledge.

Lenka Biardi

Pass / Fail Fails?

In her letter announcing the Academic Council's decision to offer students a pass-fail option in this academic year, Provost Siegel cited, in justification of that decision, "a number of disruptions" to the students' learning environment that had unexpectedly occurred this fall: the 600 students testing positive for Covid-19, the 1000 students quarantined, the disruption in students' living and studying locations, and the resultant stress, anxiety, and undermining of student learning.

I can agree with these justifications as they apply to this fall semester, but I cannot understand why they are put forward to justify a pass-fail option for the upcoming spring semester. Is the University administration expecting that another 600 students will test positive, that another 1000 students will be quarantined, and that the same level of disruption will take place this spring as happened this fall? Is the University unable to prevent, or at least significantly mitigate, a recurrence of such problems?

Another justification presented in Provost Siegel's letter is "that unlike many of our peer and competitor institutions, Fairfield University does not have a standing policy for students to opt for pass/fail grading in a limited number of courses." This would be acceptable as a justification for pass/fail this spring semester if, as is the case at other universities, students were required to choose that option when they enroll for courses, or at the latest, at the beginning of the semester. I have never heard of any university offering students the opportunity to wait "until 5 pm on the last day of classes" to choose whether they want to take a pass or a letter grade. This makes a mockery of the whole grading process

and indeed of academic standards. By such logic, why not let a student wait to receive the final course grade, and then erase it with a pass if he or she isn't satisfied with it?

Further, why is it that students may opt for pass/fail in core courses but not in major ones? Is not academic rigor as important for the core as for the major? In my teaching experience I have noted that many students expect core courses to be easier and less time-consuming than major or minor ones. Does the University wish to confirm this view?

Bill Abbott



Working Moms and the Pandemic

Last spring, I transitioned to remote learning and fulfilled all of my teaching and service obligations as a faculty member. But other things became my responsibility when the schools closed in March 2020. Monday through Friday I was in charge of supervising distinct synchronous and asynchronous meetings for my second and third grade sons, Eli and Xavi López. As a working parent, I had to take over the job of their teacher and motivate them to do their assignments when they really wanted to do was play MLB 20 or throw a football in the backyard. Maybe I should have just let them play all day, and written off the year. But as educators my spouse and I tried to support remote learning. We made sure the boys attended their daily online meetings while navigating the following projects, which had to be documented, photographed, and uploaded to Google classroom: paint the Australian landscape; write a book about the dingo dog; build two fairy gardens with tiny faeries; create a found art project in the woods; extract, dry, and plant seeds for a garden science project; design and build a model of a park out of dirt, glue, leaves, and rocks; write a book review of Dog Man; and memorize multiplication math facts. At any given moment I might need to find watercolors, glue sticks, writing folders, buttons, Q-tips, old magazines, and the correct math sheet just in time for a Zoom meeting. Our school's project-based learning went from dream to dystopia. But the remote learning alternative to projects (videos, worksheets) is pretty bad too. To ask a seven-year old boy to sit without moving and listen to a boring video on Sturbridge Village because he can't go on his field trip to Sturbridge Village is a bad idea, all unfolding in my front of my eyes while I try to conference with students about Shakespeare papers. Remote learning for younger children requires a parent to hire a full-time tutor or become a teacher (that is, bring their education to life alongside them) – end of story.

Recently a male colleague complained that he had two young children and since his wife didn't work he was responsible for two car payments. I am pretty

sure he did not realize how lucky he was. Often colleagues with stay at home wives who raise their children are blind to the women around them who do twice as much, since our husbands or same sex partners traditionally work too. Faculty from dual-income households whose children are home now, as mine are, once again sacrifice their professional lives or run the risk of their children falling behind in school. It's around this age that some boys mentally check out of school based on curriculum they are not developmentally ready for, which we did not want to happen for us. The pandemic hits faculty differently, but as a working mom of elementary school sons, remote learning has been tough. Too old for daycare and too young to navigate Google classroom, Zoom, MS Word, or the internet independently, the boys must be handheld through confusing work on a day to day schedule that conflicts with mine.

Many working moms at Fairfield University are in the same situation, or worse off, with younger children or less support. When schools shut down our lives come to a grinding halt; how are we (as a nation) supposed to work when the schools close? And how are our children supposed to learn from screens? This was part of the reason that I taught in person as frequently as I could in the fall. I wanted to keep the sense that everyone was actually learning something together alive for my own students, even though we met in a tent and could not collaborate without legitimate fear of catching COVID-19, as four students did (all beach residents). Teaching at the primary school level is just as complex as doing so at the college level, and we cannot really learn to do it overnight. I am not really sure what is the most important thing for me to do right now: publish another article, or lay a strong foundation for my sons' education. I'm not sure I can do both, at the same time, with our schools closed.

Shannon Kelley

AAUP News & Updates

FWC/AAUP

Mission

We promote faculty welfare, broadly defined, through chapter programs and activities designed to advance academic freedom, advance the economic and professional status of the faculty, encourage faculty participation in governance, and inform the community about AAUP standards and policy statements to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good.



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