

Dear colleagues and friends,

I wrote to you in March as we began the transition to remote learning. I write to you today to complete that circle as we end the Spring 2020 term. As I contemplate what I will remember most about this semester, I think back to one of my first days as Interim CATL Director – the day of the Instructional Development Institute in January. We were gathered in the Phoenix Rooms, and there was a hum of excitement as instructors and advisors and staff from across campus contemplated the start of the semester and coming together to learn new things that might help us to connect with and teach our students more effectively. You inspired me that day with your enthusiasm and dedication to student learning. That was only a few months ago, but it feels in some ways like a lifetime ago. So much has changed since that day. What I think I will remember most about this semester of disruption, though, is how much has remained the same.

We don't gather physically in groups anymore, but hundreds of us attended the Coffee Break last week and asked questions that reflect the community to which we very much still belong. Departments and offices have still found ways to connect with one another, not just to do business, but to sustain and support one another.

We don't know when we'll attend another large, physical conference on teaching and learning – or on anything else for that matter – but your thirst for knowledge has not ebbed. You have attended CATL webinars, sought individual consultations, scoured the web for materials on teaching and advising strategies, and sought feedback from your students to learn how to teach them in new ways.

We don't meet with our students in offices or classrooms anymore, but you connect with them every day, and your focus remains on their learning and well-being. You have scheduled drop-in sessions to give them structure and community. You've labored to upload video presentations of yourself so they can still hear and see you. You have created discussion boards and student groups to give them a sense of connection in a time of isolation. And instructors have not been alone in this – the Dean of Students Office, GBOSS, Academic Advising, Residence Life, MESA, the Pride Center, Career Services, the Registrar's Office, and so many more have supported and engaged our students.

Finally, we aren't all together in the Phoenix Rooms as we were on that January day when you inspired me, but you inspire me still. You transformed your classes in a week. You virtually advised thousands of students and successfully got them registered for the Fall. You have supported countless students facing painful personal circumstances. You have struggled through early mornings and late nights of planning and grading to make this student experience the best it could be in a time of pandemic pedagogy. In the HEDS survey many instructors recently completed, more of you said that you worried very often about the health and well-being of your students than your own well-being. In fact, your students were what you worried about most amongst a long list of options. And your students know this – we have been overwhelmed with comments from them telling us about you and your work.

It may seem like very little, but please know it is heartfelt – on behalf of CATL and on behalf of our students, I want to thank you. It was and is a privilege to be a member of this community.

Warm regards,

Kris Vespia