

From Laurel's Desk – September 2020

Published 9/22/2020 by [Ashley Ribbel](#)

in the **September 2020 issue**

September snuck up on me, as I am sure it did for many of you. In some ways, it feels like we are living in an “endless loop” with time standing still, though the calendar notes otherwise.

We continue to live and work under conditions that are far from normal. We all miss being together – with our families, friends, and colleagues and students. Six months is a long time and President Agnew's announcement of our plans for the winter 2021 term means that for those of us whose work can be done fully online, we will continue to work, teach, and learn in a virtual world.

The work faculty, staff, and administrators have done to support student learning over the past six months is something to take pride in. The pandemic and, more recently, the protests against anti-Black racism and police violence, all cause stress and pain and serve as a reminder of long-standing issues of inequality in the US and Canada. For Canada, our national shame is our history of racism towards Indigenous peoples and we continue to read accounts of the poor living conditions, violence, and ongoing racism. Our efforts towards reconciliation must be amplified. As an institution that welcomes students from all over the world, we also acknowledge the impacts of racism and discrimination globally.

Despite these stresses and personal challenges, you have carried out your work with care, compassion, and thoughtfulness, always keeping your focus on the object of our important work – our students. I know you will continue to do so this term and next. Thank you.

Through the Au Large project, Seneca has declared its commitment to “building an equitable Seneca.” Each of us has a role to play. As faculty, you are keenly aware of issues of access related to the availability of



technology and infrastructure to support online learning. You are also aware that access issues more profoundly affect our more disadvantaged students – those who live in communities without proper infrastructure, those who live in poverty and struggle with housing, food insecurity, and are more prone to be victims of violence. While we have attempted to make available to students the resources they need to be successful, gaps remain. I ask that you keep in mind the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in teaching and interactions with students.

You may be wondering, what does this “look like” in practice? Keeping in mind that we need to meet students “where they are” rather than “where we think they should be,” knowing “where they are” is essential to supporting their learning. How might we find out “where they are”? Most of you are probably thinking about assessments. Yes, these can provide valuable information. But consider how the assessment is being delivered and what is really being assessed, keeping in mind issues of inclusion and access. The choices we make in learning materials, teaching strategies, programming, and services by design are meant to be inclusive. I would ask that we pause and consider who might unintentionally be excluded through these choices.

Thank you for all of the efforts you have already made and will continue to make to provide students with an engaging and supportive learning environment. Please take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Laurel

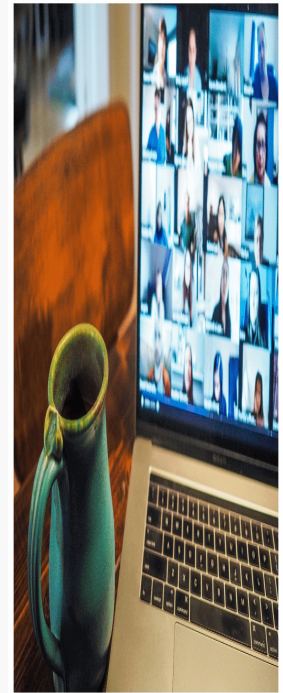
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