



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Office of

Faculty Advancement

Email: facultyaffairs@drexel.edu

drexel.edu/facultyadvancement

Phone: 215-895-2141

How Can We Come Back?

Dear Colleague,

In June, I asked myself the question: how can we **possibly** come back to a normal work life? How will we be ready to engage students who will bring the extra challenges associated with the pandemic (weak academic preparation, fragile emotional states, and a limited ability to engage)? By late July the question had changed. After having some rest and time away, I began to focus on how I could help faculty to re-engage and meet the challenges and joys of the coming year.

I realized by mid-summer, as I went about my day, mostly on campus, and ran into colleagues and friends, that many of us have been back. We were back teaching last year and, while it was tough, it was also rewarding. I realized that many of us, me included, **need** to be back. As I returned to a pre-pandemic schedule with increasing face to face meetings, the joy of my daily commute (and I do mean joy – I love and have really missed my daily 25-minute train ride in and out of the city every day), and the gift of being in-person, in-community with colleagues and friends, I realized that I need to be back. I am happier, I am more productive, and my work has more meaning when I do it in person, on campus. I learned that people, place and purpose are the things that make me happiest and help me to be my best self at work. (I say this knowing that there are people for whom coming back poses difficulties that I don't face and people for whom commuting is a hardship.)

I know that in the fall there will be unprecedented challenges. Our students may have gaps in their preparation, they may have fewer social skills, they may be [harder to engage](#), (as this article notes) and may need more from us than ever before. I have spent part of the summer working with colleagues to think about how we can prepare faculty for these challenges. We have put in place significant investments to assist students who are struggling in Mathematics. We have planned a [workshop](#) with the counseling center to give faculty tools to recognize signs of student distress. The TLC is offering a workshop titled [Reconnect, Recharge and Reengage Students by Plugging into Motivation Theory](#). And we are continuing to coordinate with colleagues in Student Life to meet our students where they are.

We will be teaching in a world that will be forever changed by the pandemic. With the ability to teach and connect through Zoom, we will have to figure out when and how it is best to use these new tools and when and how to help students understand that they are not a substitute for in-person interaction. We will have to learn how to set limits on how we will accommodate student requests for "remote options" and when to employ these tools to everyone's benefit. These are good challenges, and I look forward to the continued transformation of our university. Amid all of this, we also need to continue to care for ourselves and our colleagues. I hope that you will get the support you need from colleagues, family friends, and will take

advantage of some of the resources at Drexel: workshops through Drexel's membership in the [National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity](#) and counseling and wellness opportunities through [Human Resources](#).

As my summer draws to a close, I am grateful for what has turned out to be a relatively normal summer. I have gotten some rest. I have had some time away and I have been able to remember why I wanted a career in education in the first place. I am looking forward to welcoming our students back and being a part of their return to normal, whatever that looks like. I begin the fall with a sense of hope for what will come and the knowledge that now, more than ever, we need to approach our work with humanity and grace for ourselves and others.

I hope you have had time to recharge and remember why you wanted this job in the first place. I hope that you are looking forward to being in community with your colleagues and your students. I am grateful for your continued professionalism to do what you do and for your humanity in showing up for the young people who need us and this university.

Warm regards,

Erin

[Erin McNamara Horvat](#)

Interim Dean for the School of Education

Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement & Undergraduate Affairs

[Drexel University](#)

Randell Hall Room 234

3141 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia PA 19104

215 895-1827

emh@drexel.edu

she/her/hers