

# NINETEENTH CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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## Feeling Better: A Year without Deadlines

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<1>In Spring 2020, my students felt very bad. Around mid-March, my college had given instructors a week to move from in-person to synchronous remote learning. As I resumed my courses from home, bathed in adrenaline from Zoom fright and the general low-hum dread occasioned by the pandemic, a new mental burden of insecurity seemed to shape all class interactions. I was reminded of Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber’s observation in *The Slow Professor* (2016) that the “obvious difference between face-to-face and remote learning is the proximity of bodies and the transmission of emotions that inevitably follows” (34).<sup>(1)</sup> At least for my students and me, the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching seemed to heighten everyone’s stress. Social-distancing protocols were being enacted everywhere, and it was strange to ponder that the kind of physical proximity that is often the best way to alleviate group anxiety now functioned, in the context of the pandemic, as a threat amplifier. Going online stripped my four classes of much of the joy of learning because, frankly, everyone had other things on their minds. Before the new phase of instruction began, I sent students amended syllabi for the rest of the semester—a mercifully short period of four weeks—with most of the previous deadlines for papers and projects intact, although I had cut some readings and other course content and was prepared to grade leniently.

<2>The results were, perhaps predictably, horrible for both my students and me. In some classes, a good third of my students dropped off the face of the Earth. No amount of emailing solicited a response, yet I still worried that I wasn’t following up often enough and that I was failing as a teacher, let alone as a compassionate human being. Even for many of the students who were able to continue their studies, the deadlines I had set proved too much to handle. In March and April 2020, I received a steady flow of extension requests such as this one:

Dear Professor Thierauf,

The epidemic has left me scrambling for time as many of my class deadlines have been growing closer and closer, and I’ve been having to balance household labor and schoolwork. Compounded on top of this, there have been anomalies in the weather, such as the golfball-size hail that fell last night, and my power dropping from a low-level tornado that happened to be running through the area. It is because of this that I hope you

would be willing to give me a three-day extension for my third response paper. I should be able to get the quizzes and the second response turned in tomorrow.

Here, the student enumerates the cumulative pressures of the pandemic, the truncated semester, their family and home responsibilities, and the effects of increasingly frequent and vicious weather events North Carolinians have been seeing.(2) The student's last line, promising delivery of assignments despite all those adverse events, is simply heartbreaking. Emails like this, along with conversations I had with students throughout that catastrophic Spring eventually induced me to get rid of strict deadlines for the next academic year.(3)

<3>In this pedagogy short, I want to report on my experiment with deadline suspension in the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters and invite readers to rethink their syllabus policies for a time beyond the immediate urgency posed by the pandemic. I will suggest that deadlines are part of a wider culture of workism in academia that discipline students and teachers to adopt a range of habits and priorities which, if applied successfully, promise social rewards (some of them illusory), such as good grades, job opportunities, prestige, and, ultimately, the "good life." If one fails to abide by the dictate of the deadline, however, the punishment consists of a permanent record of failure that materially threatens one's prospects. Berg and Seeber call for the need to raise "collective awareness" among higher education workers that "non-instrumental intellectual inquiry" should be preserved across all fields if academic labor is to retain any meaning beyond rigid market dynamics (13). The narrow logic of "get-the-work-done-on-time-or-else" according to which academic instruction tends to run ultimately inhibits intellectual flourishing and, more radically, the *pleasure* necessary for engaged learning. This is especially true for student populations already affected by inequality and the ever-rising costs of college due to systemic state divestment from education.(4)

### **Who Are Deadlines *for*?**

<4>There is precious little pedagogical training for graduate students in literary fields and writing studies, especially not about how to design effective course policies (Flaherty, "Required Pedagogy"). Instructors tend to learn from example and, later, by doing. Judging from conversations with colleagues, many teachers in higher education replicate course policies they themselves encountered as undergraduates since, obviously, those policies *worked* somehow—otherwise, one wouldn't find oneself in the enviable position of having to devise a syllabus.(5) At their most basic, deadlines hold students accountable to the work that has to be completed in a given time frame, usually a quarter, term, or semester, to receive course credit. They subdivide the semester into manageable chunks, ensure linear learning (especially in classes with scaffolded assignments or cumulative unit narratives), maintain efficiency by keeping the course running as planned, and, not insignificantly, organize the instructor's own grading schedule so that papers and exams can be evaluated with reasonable turnaround time. But that's not all.

<5>Deadlines are also framed within higher education as tools that prepare students for the unforgiving world "out there." Instructors often tell students that they can't expect their future manager or supervisor to be forgiving with due dates, and so students should not expect to be met with leniency in college. Nowhere is "tough love-ism" more ingrained than in the setting and enforcing of deadlines, thought to impart time management skills and compelling students to

drop non-essential pursuits outside school (Boucher). Along with grades, deadlines structure classroom hierarchies by signaling and imposing the teacher's authority.(6) Deadlines derive from ideals of "mastery, self-sufficient individualism, and rationalism," all of them, incidentally, "patriarchal values [that] opened the door to corporatization," the malaise currently suffusing most of the educational sector in the US (Berg and Seeber 12). When universities import artificial time scarcity into classrooms, they risk replicating patterns of exclusion and discrimination that they're often trying to eradicate in their admission and hiring practices (Boucher). Imposing rigid deadlines further ignores the fact that academics' and other professionals' work lives are actually structured differently. Many deadlines "out there" are, in fact, negotiable since, as intellectual historian Stefan Collini notes, "efficiency mode is not conducive to having new or worthwhile thoughts" (xi).(7) Some things simply can't be rushed.

<6>The pandemic has newly induced some teachers, including myself, to ponder out loud why they should reproduce accountability mechanisms in their classrooms that, historically, have left so many people behind.(8) In such cases, it has also led those teachers to re-assess whether the policies provided in their syllabi are, in fact, meant to be supportive or punitive. It was probably clear to most instructors before the pandemic that students who struggle to meet deadlines are more likely to burn out. Enforcing deadlines when a student is already behind worsens their feelings of being overwhelmed and leads to the typical roster of cry-for-help behaviors: "shoddy work (submitted just to get something in), panicked cheating, or disappearing students (from the course, or worse, from the university altogether)" (Boucher). Transgressing from the ideals of mastery and rationalism during non-pandemic times might strike one as radical, as bell hooks observes. She memorably reminds readers that "standards cannot be absolute and fixed" in "a transformed classroom," even if they must always be held high (*Teaching to Transgress* 157). During the pandemic, however, jettisoning conventional accountability patterns is a matter of survival.

## Deadline Failures

<7>I teach at a small, private liberal arts college in rural Eastern North Carolina, an area in which the economy has been historically depressed. At least 51% of the students at my school are students of color;(9) among the among the 2020-21 cohort of incoming students, 26% self-identify as first-generation college students. Although I don't have precise data, I know from conversations with my students that the majority of them work at least one job—some two or three jobs—to pay for school and support themselves and their families. Although jobs became scarcer and front-line work scarier during the pandemic, my students never stopped working. In fact, students told me that they'd never been busier.

<8>My default pre-pandemic deadline policy read, simply, "I won't accept or give credit for any assignments that are not handed in on time unless you can claim extenuating circumstances." While this formulation allows for some wiggle room and debate—due to HIPAA concerns, for example, I've never mandated that students show me evidence of doctors' visits—it makes me sound as if I don't trust my students to get the work done.(10) I also have to confess that I did not alter this policy when the semester began in Fall 2020. However, I soon realized that my insistence on deadline adherence would lead to a near total failure rate since my students weren't doing better *at all*. The vast majority of my students did not meet Fall deadlines, not even the

graduating seniors in my Senior Seminar, most of whom are experienced and self-confident writers. At least in my own classes, the Fall 2020 semester had a devastating impact on my students, following the same dynamic the pandemic had set in the Spring.<sup>(11)</sup> This was despite the fact that two of my courses were fully face-to-face, a modality preferred by students at my institution, and two other courses met in-person twice a week and virtually only on Fridays.

<9>While I had not anticipated doing so at the beginning of the Fall semester, I ended up giving my students a universal deadline suspension until the last day of class. Low response rates to my usual syllabus quizzes at the beginning of the semester suggested that students were not consulting their class documents, so I didn't bother formally updating syllabus materials. Instead, I verbally announced the new deadline suspension around the halfway point of the semester when I realized how badly students were struggling. I believe that this change prevented a worsening of the impact of the pandemic at least insofar that students were no longer burdened with the compounding anxiety of not meeting deadlines. By softening deadline pressure, I managed to keep a leaky boat afloat, nothing more. My sense is that a far greater number of students would have failed my courses if I had not adapted to their needs throughout the semester in that way. Let me provide a brief snapshot of how that Fall semester went for my students: they were telling me on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis that friends, siblings, aunts, uncles, parents, and grandparents had been hospitalized with COVID-19. Some students caught the virus themselves, fell ill, and were quarantined away from campus for weeks. One student told me that several of their family members had passed away from the disease and that the family was bundling funerals over Zoom. Worse, the economic shakeup accompanying the pandemic severely deepened already extant struggles: so many students told me about friends' suicides, their own or family members' mental health crises, and seemingly random violent deaths. Once, a student started crying in my Intro to Literature course and couldn't stop due to stress and exhaustion. It was (and still is) a time of severe existential instability.

<10>For Spring 2021, I consulted with my colleague, Amy Kahrman Huseby (Florida International University), on the issue of deadlines because we were planning to co-teach an inter-institutional honors course on climate change and wanted to align our policies as much as possible to guarantee smooth collaboration between both classes. Since my Fall ad-hoc adjustment had come too late in some cases, I gratefully adapted her syllabus language regarding deadlines and distributed the following at the beginning of the Spring semester in all of my courses:

If you have an emergency, I understand that. Emergencies happen. Please communicate with me as soon as possible so that we can plan together how you might complete your assignment. I am always open to and generous with allowing extensions if you contact me in advance of the deadline. Once the deadline passes, then the following rule applies: If you do turn in late work and have not spoken with me in advance, a one-third letter grade deduction per calendar day late will be applied (e.g., if the work is three days late, you would drop from an A to a B+). What this means is that, once an assignment is more than 12 days late, the assignment is no longer eligible to earn any points (since there are only 12 total letter grades—see the grading scale below). It's always better to turn in something rather than have a zero in the gradebook.

Although this Spring semester isn't over yet, I can attest to the difference these more empathetic and deescalating words have made.[\(12\)](#)

<11>In contrast to the anxious emails I received in Spring and Fall 2020 attempting to justify the need for an extension, I now receive messages that are much less emotionally charged. Here's an example of a typical exchange from early April 2021, sent the night before a reading response would be due in my post-1800 British Literature survey:

“Hi Dr. Thierauf, Would I be able to get an extension on the paper?”

“Hi [Student], No problem! Do you need time until Thursday or next week Tuesday?”

“Next week Tuesday would be great!”

“You got it!”

And it works! This semester, students receive an unlimited number of no-questions-asked deadline extensions if they check in with me and, thus far, fewer students are at serious risk of failing compared to the same point in Fall 2020. Moreover, their relief is palpable. Although the Spring is not over yet, most students get their work in by the new deadline that we arranged mutually (if they need another extension, they get it). The quality of work has been high across the board. What this crystallizes for me is that actually paying attention to students' emotions, especially their stress levels, and building some slack into my courses increases their ability to learn. Schoolwork is about more than submitting assignments on time, and I would encourage teachers to rethink traditional definitions of successful pedagogy. I'm gratified that my students are comfortable emailing me, that they're trying to make up the work, and that they don't feel like failure is inevitable. It is a real success that they don't spend half an hour fretting about sending me an email in which they have to defend their need for an extension. That is to say, I don't eliminate deadlines completely since I'm convinced they aid students in structuring their coursework, but a more collaborative approach to setting deadlines has worked wonders for me. Ultimately, the hard limit is still set by the end of the semester, although my institution allows instructors to assign incompletes if students have made significant progress. Personally, I'm willing to work with students beyond the end of the semester so they can pass the course, although that decision lies with individual instructors.

### **What about Rigor?**

<12>As the pandemic swept into North Carolina in March 2020, faculty at my college were encouraged to give our best until things turned back to normal, whenever that would be. From conversations with colleagues around the country, I gather that many teachers in higher education received similar messages from their institutions. Administrations acknowledged the unprecedented nature of current circumstances and thanked faculty for their hard work (doubtless sincerely so), while fully expecting that learning outcomes would be met, existing standards of instruction be upheld, and more demanding care work be performed, both at home and in one's job. In effect, that meant that faculty were expected to teach *better* than before—enforcing syllabus policies, relaying content via new modalities, and creating well-functioning classroom communities while everything else in the world seemed to come apart at the seams. For me, this work involved, as suggested above, responding to frantic late-night emails by students in duress and submitting one early alert after another for students who appeared unable to make it to class,

ever.(13) From what I learned as I scoured pedagogy discussion boards for advice, school administrations generally did not invite much debate about whether it was realistic—or even appropriate—for faculty to adhere to pre-pandemic notions of “rigor” and “quality.”

<13>I had heard from fellow faculty members, both at my institution and elsewhere, that they would not alter grading or attendance policies to preserve said “rigor.”(14) They were not alone in calling for the continuation of the educational status quo since quite a few people thought that it would benefit students to learn in “hard mode” for a while. On April 16, 2020, for example, the day I happened to put in final grades for that catastrophic first semester of the pandemic, David Brooks’s *New York Times* column welcomed the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to walk back the “safetyism” and attendant “coddling” of students—manifesting as grade inflation in English classes when compared to chemistry, according to the example Brooks provides—that had lately invaded American higher education.(15) Brooks notes that “[t]he virus is another reminder that hardship is woven into the warp and woof of existence. Training a young person is training her or him to master hardship, to endure suffering and, by building something new from the wreckage, redeem it.” I quote from the column at length because I’m struck by the obvious satisfaction Brooks appears to take in imagining the pandemic’s seasoning effects on students. He seems to believe that virtues such as tenacity (which, according to Brooks, “manifests . . . in those whose training embraced hardship and taught students to deal with it”) and excellence (“not an action, it’s a habit”) will henceforth sprout more bountifully among students.

<14>What Brooks ignores is that, for students such as mine, there was never a time before hardship and simply having “to deal with it.” Many of my students have been toughened from birth because they and their families had no other choice, and the pandemic finally brought down a house of cards they had built upon multi-generational precarity and systemic exclusion from opportunity and resources. Brooks’s blatant masculinism and blindness towards the needs of *a vast portion of students in this country* is staggering.(16) With Collini, I distrust “those aspects of ‘discipline’ which are self-punitive to the point where unremitting toil becomes a perverse psychic satisfaction in itself” (ix). There’s no glory in burnout or hitting rock bottom. Brooks’s fantasy of wholesome hardship is misguided, to put it mildly.

<15>Since I don’t subscribe to Brooks’s theory of “overboard safetyism” in academia, the potential costs of deadline suspension in my own practice are limited to the following: it produces more work for me and marks my teaching as empathetic, perhaps even “easy,” thus creating an often gendered contrast to teachers who don’t adjust their teaching in the same way (more on that second point below). Let me elaborate on the first issue here. I usually teach a 4/4 load and have a total of fifty to sixty students per semester. I doubt that deadline suspension would be practicable for instructors teaching a significantly higher number of students since the labor of keeping track of students’ work is substantial. It includes fielding deadline extension requests, updating individual due dates in the LMS (often an annoying and clunky procedure that can’t be done in under fifteen clicks per student (17)), and checking in on students who have dropped off the radar. Especially for courses that rely on smaller, cumulative assignments, such as composition classes, deadline suspension will likely create a sense of chaos. Good record-keeping and high tolerance for tedium are key.

<16>Relatedly, teaching without hard deadlines can also involve substantial care work. Although I have a no-questions-asked policy this semester, my students tend to volunteer contextualizing information about their requests for extensions, simply because the language in the syllabus (and, I assume, my overall approachable ethos as a teacher) invite such disclosures. Such conversations usually morph into pep talks or expressions of condolence on my end, just when my own ability to cope with the personal strain of the pandemic might be at a low point.

### **Kindness as Feminist Practice**

<17>For the final sections of this essay, I'd like to take my cue from Catherine Denial and call on other teachers to reconsider their pedagogical practices using kindness as their guiding ethos, including the wording of syllabus policies, for the time after the pandemic.(18) As Denial writes, many instructors are trained mainly in adversarial teaching:(19) they consider their students "antagonists" which obliges them to constantly expect cheating, laziness, and insubordination. Similar to Denial, I was advised in graduate school to appear aloof and bored on the first day of class and to only ease off when class was going well to avoid being read as a "big sister" or "mom" to my students. Like her, I enforced deadlines with gusto and approached students' excuses for late work with suspicion.

<18>What these adversarial pedagogical strategies have in common is that they, if pursued relentlessly, are likely to elicit the same shocked reaction from students that hooks had when she first started college: "I was truly astonished to find teachers who appeared to derive their *primary pleasure* in the classroom by exercising their authoritarian power over my fellow students, crushing our spirits, and dehumanizing our minds and bodies" (hooks 2, emphasis mine). I've been tagging expressions of pleasure throughout this piece—like Brooks's apparently gratified response to the pandemic—since I want to remind readers that it often *feels good* to impose authority and power over one's students, especially if one struggles with a general loss of control. However, insisting that the instructor is the sole authority in the room can be destructive since it conveys to students that they won't ever be empowered, not in the classroom, not after graduation (Denial).(20) Moreover, this top-down approach usually perpetuates itself across the generations since teachers (perhaps quite understandably) enjoy using their power because it had been withheld from them when they were students.

<19>A better way to teach might be to embrace one's relationships with students *as* relationships, including such things as compassion, trust, and investment in students' success, even if it comes at the cost of efficiency. I wish to quote Denial's strategies in full here to illustrate what that might look like:

When a student comes to me to say that their grandparent died, I believe them. When they email me to say they have the flu, I believe them. When they tell me they didn't have time to read, I believe them. When they tell me their printer failed, I believe them. There's an obvious chance that I could be taken advantage of in this scenario, that someone could straight-up lie and get away with it. But I've learned that I would rather take that risk than make life more difficult for my students struggling with grief and illness, or even an over-packed schedule or faulty electronics. It costs me nothing to be kind. (Denial)

Students aren't consumers or customers or underlings. Education isn't a transaction of goods and it certainly isn't capitalism bootcamp. What is more, kindness as a pedagogical strategy is transgressive because it reveals that the authoritarian, top-down hierarchy students are told to expect "in the real world" is, in fact, a system of choices. Someone—many someones—decided not to be kind. And the thing is, students know this: their panicked emails and shame-faced requests for extensions prove that they have long internalized their teachers' combativeness. Even before the pandemic, it took me at least seven or eight weeks to convince students in my classes that I was on their side. Looking back at my deadline policy from that time, I wonder why I should have expected them to believe me.(21)

<20>As I end this brief essay, I wish to insist that the main activities associated with getting an education—"deliberation, reflection, and dialogue, cultivating emotional and intellectual resilience"—take *time*, and that it's not pampering or self-indulgent of students to demand that time, especially when the world is on fire (Berg and Seeber 11). Taking into consideration students' embodiment and their material circumstances, and *believing* them when they say they can't do it might help "restore a sense of community and conviviality" that has been lost during the pandemic—and, arguably in academia at large (90). Only that sense of community can possibly foment resistance to the decades-long attacks on academic freedom, non-standardized teaching, and secure employment, developments that have been supercharged in the wake of the pandemic. Teaching with kindness is not only part of a wider accessibility toolkit that the essays in this issue address. Ideally, it leads to a kind of productivity that *is* joy.

## Acknowledgements

I didn't make the deadline for this piece. By the time of this writing, the pandemic is still ongoing. My energy is depleted, my attention scattered, my writing time limited. This is to say, I relied on the kindness of my two co-editors to get this essay across the finish line, and I am grateful for our collaboration this year which has contributed substantially to my ability to keep an even keel, largely owing to our shared sense of purpose and solidarity. I would also like to thank Amy Kahrmann Huseby for repeatedly discussing the question of deadlines with me and for making her syllabus language available for inclusion in this essay.

## Notes

(1)A point that many essays in this issue address and remediate with tremendously encouraging results. See [Cox](#), [Draucker](#), [Patrick](#), and [Vestri](#).(△)

(2)These might stem from climate change, another amplifier of catastrophe in 2020. See "What Climate Change Means."(△)

(3)I'm grateful to the student who requested (and received) the extension for their permission to include their email here. They wrote a very thoughtful essay. Still, an unacceptably high percentage (16%) of my Spring 2020 students failed their courses with me owing to circumstances clearly beyond their control. This was evidenced in the fact that some had taken classes with me before the pandemic and earned grades of A or B. Most concerning, all nine students who either failed my courses or achieved a final grade of D were students of color, six



of them African American (out of a total of seventeen African American students enrolled across my four classes), which starkly illustrates that the sudden shift to remote instruction massively exacerbated existing material inequities along racial lines. Over the final four weeks of the semester, I continuously reached out to students who were in danger of failing, and, in the few cases I heard back from students, I learned that their performance had collapsed due to their (1) lack of access to reliable broadband internet or hardware/software necessary for writing papers, attending Zoom meetings, navigating the course LMS, composing emails, or recording screencasts; (2) difficulty parsing updates to class policies and assignments, or not understanding assignments and readings without in-person guidance; (3) experiencing a deep plunge in motivation caused by missing routines, mental and physical health issues, and physical distance from campus; (4) obligation to earn income as frontline workers which made it impossible to focus on school; and (5) inability to take required textbooks home due to the school's return/refund policy. (△)

(4) On these points and their consequences for pedagogues working in higher education, see Gannon 1-2. (△)

(5) This view obviously neglects the various sorting biases that determine what “kind” of student will likely end up teaching in higher education, parents’ affluence being an important selector. See Lee on stigma reported by faculty with working-class backgrounds; see Chu 161-64, on the conventional “sorting” practices of higher education; finally, see Gannon 89-95, on the urgency of developing collaborative rather than teacher-centric course policies. (△)

(6) As the idea that education possesses intrinsic value has faded, the message that college teachers are students’ bosses has only become sharper since there are no other models left to conceptualize student-teacher dynamics. Often, I encounter students’ resistance to that idea since they rightly perceive that I am, in fact, not their boss, nor do I want to be. More on the issue of deadlines as imposing the teacher’s authority below. (△)

(7) Also see Boucher. (△)

(8) See Barre, Davidson, and Flaherty, “Grading.” (△)

(9) In Fall 2019, 42% of students at North Carolina Wesleyan College identified as Black or African American, 28% as white, 4% as Hispanic, 3% as biracial or multiracial, 1% as Asian, 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native, and, for 14% of the students, their race or ethnicity are unknown (“North Carolina Wesleyan College”). (△)

(10) See Gannon (36, and *passim*) for a discussion of such drive-by language in course documents that are guaranteed to make students feel unwelcome. What’s on display here, clearly, are the instructor’s—my own—control issues. Too often, the university syllabus is “a list of rules and threats, whose tone resembles ‘something that might be handed to a prisoner on the first day of incarceration’” (Kohn xviii). For an argument for deadline suspension from an instructor who considers himself a “hard-ass” (“Thirty-two years of teaching at the college level has taught me that *in normal times*, you have *got* to have clear and unwavering rules and you *must* enforce

those rules . . . no matter what. If you don't, your students will walk all over you.”), see Krause.(^)

(11)The failure rate for my Fall 2020 classes remained virtually unchanged at 17%. Of the eight students who failed my courses, three identified as African American, three as Hispanic, and two as white.(^)

(12)See Boucher for an alternative, but equally empathetic, deadline policy.(^)

(13)An “early alert” is a functionality of the retention module of my school’s LMS. It allows the instructor to post electronic intervention alerts to students and their advisors in the case the student seems to require additional help to complete the semester.(^)

(14)Also see Flaherty on this point (“Grading”). A survey among more than 800 faculty members across the US in April 2020 confirmed that two thirds had adapted their grading and attendance policies in response to the pandemic (Lederman). The survey did not appear to ask faculty whether they had changed their handling of deadlines.(^)

(15)Brooks uses the term “coddling” as a reference to Lukianoff and Haidt’s *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018) which warns that long-term cultural trends such as helicopter parenting and the creation of safe spaces on campus leave students anxious and unprepared for the harsh reality of economic competition after graduation. Important to note is that Lukianoff and Haidt are mainly interested in trends at highly selective colleges and universities; their greatest worry appears to be that American elites won’t be able to produce responsible and future-proof leaders. The fact that low- and middle-income families have been facing deteriorating material prospects since before the 2007-8 financial crisis is absent from their discussion. On the fact that revision of written work as a long-established practice might be responsible for higher average grades in English courses, see Blum 13. Flaherty extensively discusses the problem of pandemic grade inflation and addresses many observers’ worry about “relaxing standards,” especially for pre-med students (“Grading”).(^)

(16)Brooks gestures towards the failure of medicine, a high-pressure field, to create an acceptable environment for patients and physicians alike when he admits that “[m]ed schools are struggling to become more humane and less macho, more relationship-centered and less body-centered.” In the end, though, Brooks glories in the “tough training” that physicians traditionally undergo and celebrates their endurance during the pandemic. (I agree with Brooks on the second point: this society owes an immeasurable debt to the doctors and nurses who cared for it during the pandemic.) For an overview of poverty levels among US students pre-pandemic (2019), hovering around twenty percent, see Fry and Cilluffo.(^)

(17)My institution’s LMS, Jenzabar, is inflexible with the due dates it displays to students. For teachers whose LMS allows for a greater range of deadline options, such as Canvas and Sakai, I would recommend setting a due date and a later “accept-until” date up front while also enabling a certain number of resubmissions.(^)

(18)See Gannon, ch. 7, which lays out a roadmap for rethinking one’s syllabus as a collaborative, rather than top-down, document. See also [Lau](#) in this issue for cultivating accessible classrooms for the time after the pandemic.(^)

(19)For interrogations of teachers’ adversarial stance, see Gannon 29, 37, and 116-20. More on the racist underpinnings of the US education system, particularly standardized testing, see [Milsom](#) in this issue.(^)

(20)See Kohn xv-xvi, and Gannon 116-20.(^)

(21)Whereas male-identified and male-presenting instructors are more likely to get away with a combative way of teaching even now, female-identified and female-presenting instructors are still expected to be caring and personable by default, which presents a problem when one has nothing left to give. In a recent blog post, Krause describes himself as “not one of those kind and nurturing teachers who regularly checks in on their students’ lives and who gives them hugs. I maintain a more professional and intellectual persona, and normally, I’d just give them a bad grade and that’d be that.” Note the binary opposition Krause establishes between “kind and nurturing” and “professional and intellectual.” In this writer’s mind, professionalism, intellectual rigor, and caring (including hugs!) are mutually exclusive, likely a result of the sharply gendered connotations that emotional labor—especially compassion—carries in American culture. But the pandemic has induced even an outright “macho” teacher like Krause to “really rethink the value of being such a hard-ass instead of trying to be like an empathetic human.” His post concludes with this appeal to his readers: “So, if you’re *that guy*, (and I guarantee you 90% of these kind of profs are guys), if you are the college teacher who is stubbornly holding on to all of your original plans, even if it is your own way of coping, *you need to stop that right fucking now.*” There is no reason why one can’t be kind, professional, and rigorous at the same time. It’s liberating and gets more stuff done.(^)

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