

## TEACHING WITH HOPE DURING LESS HOPEFUL TIMES

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For most individuals the Covid-19 pandemic has created an atmosphere of stress, uncertainty and concern, and for some sickness and grieving. For many academics, this time of year (May to August) is often spent working from home, researching and writing. Whilst the pandemic has changed life because of the risk of sickness and the need to physically distance oneself and remain at home, many professors have not experienced the same level of disruption as many workers in healthcare and other essential services. Those lives have been severely altered. It is difficult to continue to be present in one's work without acknowledging these trying times. We are living through a pandemic the consequences of which include lockdown, isolation, loneliness, and unemployment or at least uncertainty about one's economic security. How does a teacher and scholar contribute to the ongoing discussion about Covid-19? What issues should academics be focused on? What about the increased attention to racism and police brutality in America?

How can a scholar and teacher best use their knowledge and skills to further social justice? It depends on each scholar's differing perspectives as each occupies a different role. Does informing your students about how current events fit into a narrative about racism and slavery that began hundreds of years ago help or hinder? Should professors be marching in the streets or writing at a desk? Can one do both? In my most recent book (Sukdeo, *Business Ethics and Legal Ethics: The Connections and Disconnections between the Two Disciplines*, LexisNexis 2020) I examine the notion of disobeying an unjust law and how that fits into the narrative of social justice and legal ethics. Is there an underlying moral duty to oppose or try to "fix" an unfair law? If one benefits from an unjust system does one continue to support that system without acknowledging the inherent injustice built within the system? To amend the book now I would have looked at the role of protest in the streets versus achieving change through the political process and legal system. Both can be used to mobilize change. Is one route more effective than the other? Does one bring more lasting impacts?

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In his book *Radical Hope*, Kevin Gannon argues “teaching is a radical act of hope. It is an assertion of faith in a better future in an increasingly uncertain and fraught present.” (Gannon, *Radical Hope*, West Virginia University Press, 2020, Page 5). Gannon is prophetic as this was written before Covid-19 and the increased attention to racism in the United States after the killing of George Floyd. While reading *Radical Hope* I am reminded of the empowering role of teaching. As a teacher, one has the ability to educate, inform, discuss, and analyze issues in the classroom -- even if that classroom has moved online. What issues do we want to leave our students contemplating in the classroom and outside it? The most pressing issues of the day being the pandemic, social justice, climate change, anti-black racism, and compassion. I recently wrote a blog post that examined the notion of compassion fatigue: a term used to signify that there is a finite amount of compassion, and once exhausted we may feel numb or apathetic. We cannot believe that notion to hold true. We cannot let this moment, with the potential for change, pass unappreciated and unfulfilled.

On Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup> York University, Toronto, announced by email that classes would be moving online from March 16<sup>th</sup>. I did not feel the need to relay to my students that I cared about them during these times. Nor did I receive any emails from them expressing concerns. They already knew how I treat my teaching and I did not feel the need to send additional messages that conveyed my feelings. Sending ineffective messages during these times, like any other time, does not ring true.

How can collaboration on research move forward? This can be done through online technology but nothing can replace in-person interaction including eye contact. Teaching online allows for both professors and students to be able to remain in the comfort of their own homes and save on commuting time and cost. However, that sense of place and community gained by walking through a campus, be it the beautiful and picturesque Queen’s in Kingston or the gothic ambience of Western in London, will be lost by relying wholly on online teaching and electronic communications with our peers and students. Each university campus has a unique feel based on its geography, climate, architecture and the people be they students, staff or the wider community.

The pandemic has halted “normal life,” and will leave lasting effects, and precipitate major social and economic upheavals in societies across the

world. It is up to all of us, not just those who teach and learn, to make that “new normal” more equal and just. We have to focus on this pandemic, to build resilience and compassion to underpin a better society in its wake.

“All the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today” – Indian proverb