A circular wreath of various botanical illustrations surrounds the central text. The wreath includes green ferns, red autumn leaves, yellow flowers, purple flowers, and large green leaves.

Everything old is new again: Reimagining life in the classroom after two years of the pandemic

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Themes of today's keynote

- The COVID-19 pandemic turned higher education upside down
- It was an immense challenge, and it's tempting to focus on the difficulties and disappointments of the last 2 years
- COVID-19 sent our educators back to class, forcing them to learn new ways to keep their students enrolled, engaged, and on track
- Learning Communities gave an opportunity for social connectedness and alternative ways of engaging with students



Changing landscape of higher education

- Covid-19 pandemic led to or accelerated several challenges
 - 65% of colleges shifted to hybrid or full remote learning (Davidson College, 2021)
 - Enrollment declined across the nation - estimates US undergrad enrollment down 9.4% from pre-pandemic levels (NSCL, 2022), about 1.4 million students
 - Enrolled students report high stress (Gallup, 2022)
 - A survey by American Council on Education found the [top two issues facing university and college presidents](#) were the mental health of students and the mental health of faculty and staff (2020)
 - Students are coming to college underprepared
 - More demands placed on faculty to retain students
- Call for high impact practices



Learning Communities at JWU

- First-year learning communities, randomly selected
- Cohort model – set of students share 4 classes/2 faculty over the course of first year
- Typically 2 major classes + 2 Composition classes
 - Fall: Intro Issues & Ethics in Psychology + Rhetoric & Comp I
 - Spring: Abnormal Psych + Rhetoric & Comp II
- Currently 4 cohorts in Fall 2022



How has the pandemic changed our own experiences in the classroom?

- Do we notice more when people look physically or emotionally unwell?
- Are we more aware of challenges students are facing?
- How do we encourage not just “engagement” in the material but also real connections between students?



Get out those old-fashioned White Boards

Record your answers as a group...

- 1) How many years have you been teaching in Learning Communities?
- 2) Did you know what Zoom was before COVID -19?
- 3) Did you enjoy teaching during the pandemic?
- 4) Did the pandemic force you to improve your technology skills?



How has the pandemic changed the way we relate to our students?

- Flexibility
- Personal side
- Personal Disclosures
- Getting to Know You Activities
- Managing fears, worries, preferences



How has the pandemic changed the way we deliver content and instruct our class?

- Forced us to take a hard look at content; is this essential?
- Retaining tools used heavily during pandemic
 - Zoom guest speakers
 - Real-time polling/response platforms
 - Online submissions for assignments
 - Use of “chat” feature in video calls
 - TED Talks and Documentaries
- Making use of informal peer-to-peer mentoring



How has the pandemic changed higher education for you?

- We'll use a newer tool, Polleverywhere.com, to record key words/phrases/ideas
- In your small groups, discuss these questions
 - What is the biggest change *at your institution* over the past 2 years?
 - What is the biggest change you have observed, or had to contend with, *in your own work*?
 - On a scale of 1-7, have the changes you made to your classes improved them/not improved them/made no difference

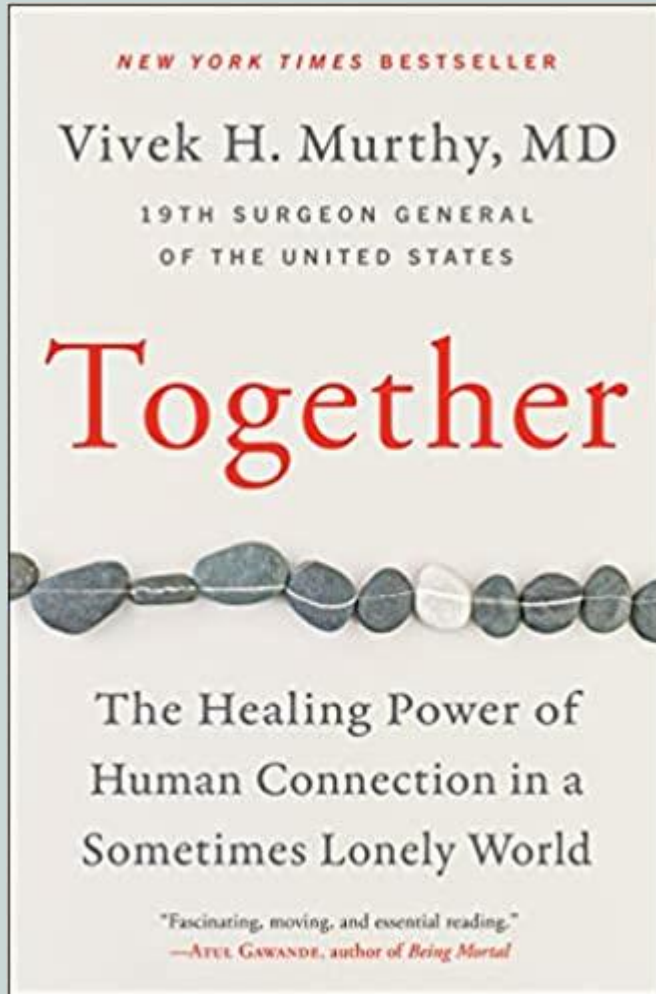


How learning communities at JWU have helped weather the changes

- During height of pandemic, Fall 2020, these were some of the few classes permitted to meet in person, on campus at JWU
- CLP provided one of few “real college experiences” for students
- Camaraderie with LC faculty
- Some evidence LCs had positive impact on grades
- Helped students make social connections



Why are learning communities especially important now?



“Quite simply, human relationships are as essential to our well being as food and water.”
- Vivek Murthy, MD





From *Together* by Dr. Murthy

“In caring for patients over the years and during my time as surgeon general, I met thousands of people who struggled with addiction to opioids, alcohol and other substances and when I reflect on those who made it through the dark tunnel and emerged in recovery, nearly all of them described a trusted relationship or a trusted group of close family or friends who had made their recovery possible. While loneliness has the potential to kill, connection has even more potential to heal.” (p. 51)

“Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one. You need one because you are human.”





In summary...

- Many of us entered this field because we care about students and value their development as well as increasing knowledge
- Pandemic forced us to look at our work in new ways, while also strengthening the things we already did well
- With some thought and intentionality, we can use the hard-learned lessons to continue to develop as professionals

Everything old is new again!





Thank you



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