

# FALL 2021

## VOL 13



# CTL REFLECTIONS NEWSLETTER



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# CTL TEAM

**“Creating better teachers to better serve our students.”**

**CTL Mission:**

In keeping with Hostos tradition, the Center for Teaching and Learning promotes excellence in teaching and learning with innovative pedagogies and state-of-the-art technologies by fostering interdisciplinary and cross-divisional collaborations.

**Goals and Objectives:**

In order to fulfill its mission, the Center for Teaching and Learning strives to accomplish the following goals and objectives:

- Provide faculty development to build a culture of teaching and learning excellence and transform faculty teaching experiences.
- Promote best practices of teaching excellence in both traditional and online pedagogy of teaching and learning.
- Provide faculty with opportunities for research, scholarship, service, and leadership development to create and use pedagogical innovations to improve student outcomes.
- Work with and support OAA and other offices to promote a culture of collaboration.
- Develop strategies to boost awareness and involvement in all CTL activities and initiatives.

Additional offerings by the Center for Teaching and Learning include: Support for student participation programs (honors programs, WAC, Study Abroad Program, etc.); collaboration with the Grants office to propose strategies to support faculty engagement in grantsmanship and provide development support for faculty research initiatives (assistance locating funding sources, grant writing workshops, etc.)



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## TEACHING TIPS



**ELIZABETH PORTER**  
Assistant Professor  
English

## Teaching Tips for Asynchronous Online Learning

“Making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy” (39).

Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994)

As someone who had never taught online before March 2020, I spent a great deal of time considering how to transfer successful elements of my in-person courses to the virtual classroom. Presented with multiple options for webinars and trainings, I had plenty of resources to consult as I retooled my classes and developed new ones for the asynchronous online environment. As I absorbed all of the information available to me, I reminded myself that students would neither have the time nor the training to adjust to online learning the way that I could adjust to online teaching. My pedagogical training has taught me to facilitate dialogue among students and to view the classroom as a learning community where all participants have a stake in our curriculum. In the midst of a pandemic where students, faculty, and staff have been experiencing various traumas related to Covid-19 and its economic consequences, as well as from racism and state-sanctioned violence, my question as an educator has been: How can I create a virtual classroom where students would feel supported and empowered to contribute in a substantial way throughout the semester?

The following suggestions highlight some strategies I have found helpful when teaching English gateway courses and Writing-Intensive electives online:

### 1.) Help students navigate the virtual college campus and systems of support

When teaching on campus, I, like many of my English department colleagues, began the semester with orientation activities that would introduce students to services like the Library and the Writing Center. Success coaches would visit the classroom to answer questions from students. It is especially important to maintain ties to these systems of support in a virtual classroom, so I regularly remind students about the resources available to them. One low-stakes assignment that students complete during the first week of class is to send me an email from their Hostos account with a brief introduction and the name(s) of their adviser or success coach. By integrating these tasks into the curriculum, I signal to students that I do not assume that they arrive in my classroom already knowing how to navigate the systems that are part of the college experience. Making the procedures of college life more transparent can help to retain students and increase their sense of belonging.

We know from [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) that people cannot work successfully if their basic needs are not met, so I strive to provide information about support services in addition to course-specific content. Early in the pandemic, I created a Google Doc for students that offered information about Hostos and CUNY policies and services, as well as community-based resources to help with food and housing insecurity.

### 2.) Go beyond text-based media to create multiple points of entry for students

In an asynchronous online class setting where text-based media is dominant, I seek to appeal to a variety of learners and differentiate instruction as much as possible. In short videos that are no longer than 10-15 minutes each, I demonstrate how to navigate the Blackboard course site, discuss readings and writing assignments, and share strategies for completing work. Students report that these videos help them engage with the material and learn to navigate the Blackboard course site.

In my ENG 110 class, I have found that students appreciate and learn from podcasts. In one of the learning units, students choose a podcast episode to evaluate in a formal essay, and this assignment serves as the basis for their research project later in the term. Any podcast I assign includes a written transcript, and all of my short videos contain captions. I recommend Screencast-o-matic for recording and captioning videos.

### 3.) Give students space to set their own goals and reflect on their learning

To foster metacognition, I ask students to write about their learning goals and reflect on their study habits. In discussion board posts, they brainstorm new strategies to help manage their time or improve their focus, such as using a calendar, setting a timer, or trying the [Pomodoro technique](#).

## TEACHING TIPS

# Teaching Tips for Asynchronous Online Learning

Students share ideas and check in on each other in a follow-up post a few weeks later. This assignment makes space for students to discuss their learning process and make changes throughout the semester. While students often are pressed for time and juggle competing responsibilities, they are able to strategize what variables are under their control to manage schoolwork more effectively. One outcome of this activity is to emphasize the *process* of learning, not just the *product*.

#### 4.) Make the course material relevant to the personal and professional lives of students

While it might not always be possible to tailor course materials to appeal to the topics and issues that concern the lives of our students, I believe it makes a difference if students can connect what they are learning in the classroom to what they experience outside of it. In ENG 110, my final writing assignment is a culminating project that asks students to craft original statements or declarations. After spending the semester writing about other texts and engaging in the research process, they refine their writerly voice by crafting an original position that shows a consideration for audience, tone, and purpose. The primary goal is to communicate something about their own personal, professional, or social commitments. While the structure is flexible, they are asked to include with their statement a description of their process and methods. Part of the inspiration for this assignment came from the activism of the Student Government Association (SGA) at Hostos that resulted in a statement regarding [“Racial injustice amidst the Covid-19 global pandemic across the nation and New York City.”](#) I wanted my students to have the opportunity to apply the writing skills they learned in my course to create something that could have broader use and significance beyond my class and the semester.



## TEACHING TIPS



**LAUREN WOLF**  
Associate Professor  
Mathematics

## Teaching in Difficult Times

I think there is one thing we can all agree on and that is that this has been an incredibly complex year for teaching. We have all had to adjust our pedagogies to make the semester as positive and educational as possible. It has been a time where being present for the students is extremely important.

As soon as we were told to go home, we exchanged numbers and I created WhatsApp groups for my students. I had originally thought this could not be real. I'll see you in a week. It was real and affected our students in ways that are incomprehensible. The WhatsApp group kept our sense of community alive. In my particular pedagogy, we as a class get to know each other. I rely heavily on care and connection.

During the pandemic, I managed to continue research with the CRSP research students as well as serve as a mentor to two student clubs. In general, this fits perfectly into my teaching style. I believe, as seen in my office at any given moment, that connection is the most important way to engage your students.

In this particular pedagogy, it is also important to show genuine care and concern for your students. During the pandemic, I taught mostly gateway courses, which the students need to enter into rigorous math, engineering, science, or medical degrees. These courses are foundations for all the courses that follow.

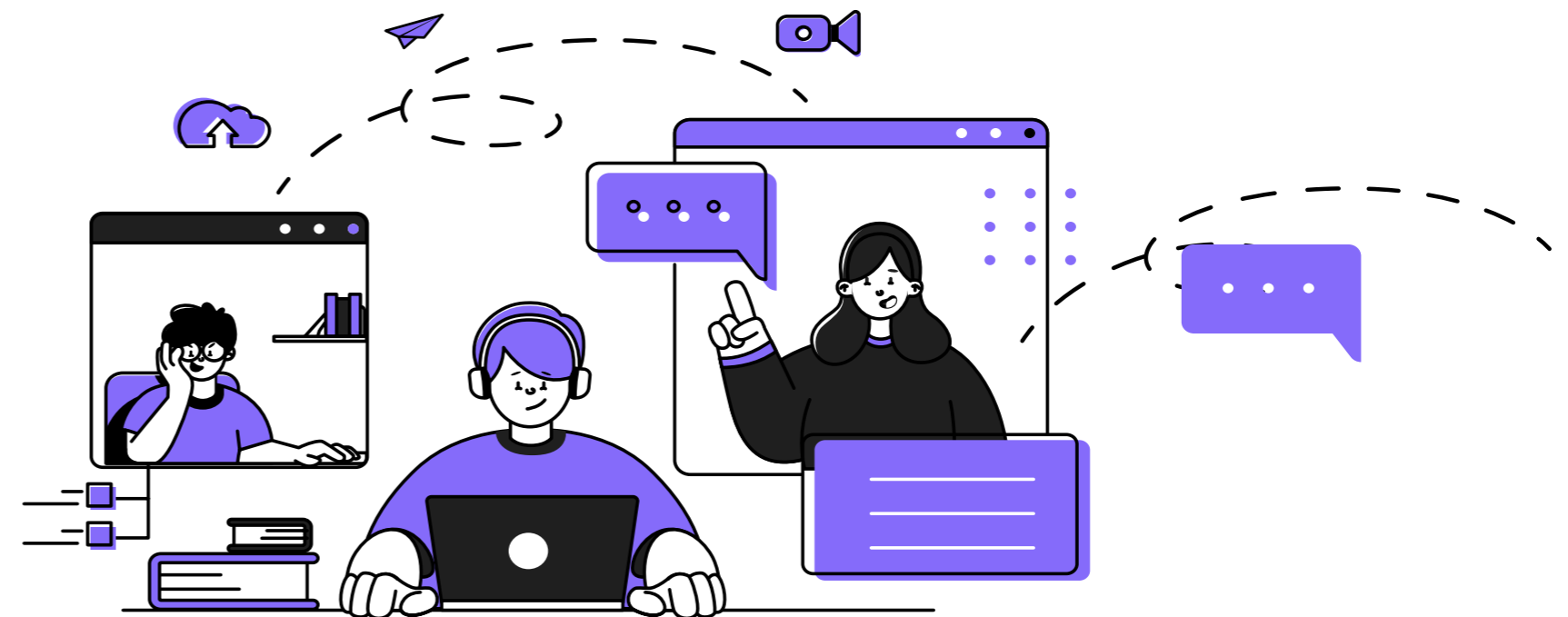
In this pandemic learning process, I learned probably as much, if not more, than my students. I learned how to do so many technical things as well as decipher what worked and what did not work. I immediately started teaching with Zoom as Blackboard Collaborate was not working well for me. I realized that all students could not make

class time because their living and daily schedules had also changed. At that moment we as professors do what we do best: adapt. I decided to record my classes so those who couldn't attend could review them later, or so those who needed extra help at difficult hours could use them as tutorials. The first semester I didn't really know how to share the videos, so each time my Zoom video is finished, I would send it to the students. During the summer semester, I figured you could post them via a Dropbox or Google Docs on Blackboard. It wasn't until this fall semester that I realized you could post them directly onto Blackboard and that you could even post them in their own folder and that would be much easier for the students to navigate. The organization of Blackboard was difficult for me because I'm the type of professor that picks up from where the students and I left off. I'd like to not move too fast or too slow and work at the pace the students are comfortable with and we always manage to cover the entire course.

My classroom is one of respect and nurturing, and in this environment, the students not only blossom but they work well together. The idea of care extends to group work and helping one another achieve. There were times I had wished I had created more personal boundaries. For instance, I had students texting me at 11 on Saturday night and 8 on Sunday morning.

While there are more technical ways of describing how to teach with care, the bottom line in my classroom is building trust. Trust to try something that in a more intimidating environment wouldn't be inviting. Math is tough and we have made it acceptable to be timid in a math class and not trust your abilities. It is the ability to take challenges and with that grow the confidence to succeed. If you can make someone who doesn't like to read an avid reader or someone who started in developmental math a math major then your teaching style is working.

While I made lemonade with the sour lemons of this year, and we managed to achieve high retention rates, I am wholeheartedly looking to return to being in the classroom



## TEACHING TIPS



**MARCELO D. VIANA  
NETO**  
Assistant Professor  
Humanities

## Ungrading

Game designers spend a lot of time thinking about points and rewards. We know that they are powerful motivators, but we also know they have their share of issues. Extrinsic motivators keep players doing what we want them to do but don't necessarily result in better player experiences or are hallmarks of good game design. Massively popular so-called social games like *Candy Crush* and *Clash of Clans* employ expertly-crafted extrinsic motivators to keep players hooked and consequently, entice them to spend money on the game. They are not particularly well-designed games, but they have acquired a very large player base in large part because of this (purposefully-designed) "addictive" quality.

Points in games, like grades in the classroom, can motivate players (or students) to do tasks, especially boring, repetitive ones. But they can also hinder creative thinking, foster competition over collaboration, and undermine intrinsic motivation. We know, for instance, that if we offer the player a reward for the completion of a certain task, they won't repeat it unless the reward is offered again. Removing the reward also removes the player's motivation to perform the task, regardless of how interesting or fulfilling the task was in the first place.

In many games, as in learning, there is a certain amount of rote work necessary to achieve progress. For those tasks, points and rewards can work. For sustained engagement however, players must find the act of playing the game to be intrinsically worthwhile, for instance, by being presented with an interesting challenge that tests their skills, or content that is relevant to their interests, or because playing is a vehicle for connecting with others. We know that adding point systems or rewards to any of these intrinsically rewarding expe-

riences is not only unnecessary, but will fundamentally alter their character.

Grades in education share similar issues to rewards in games, but have additional drawbacks in their particular context: they are blunt and imprecise measures of learning, they undermine qualitative feedback (students tend to focus only on the grade itself), and can create an adversarial relationship between professor and students. Like points in games, grades are seen as a fundamental component of educational settings, but they are both tools and are, therefore, open to critical questioning.

### Enter Ungrading

Over the past few years, a growing community of educators have been challenging traditional grading structures and creating alternative ways to assess learning. Much of this work has been documented in the recently-published book *Ungrading* edited by Dr. Susan D. Blum, and discussed at-length in Jesse Stommel's excellent collection of articles on the topic (<https://www.jessestommel.com/tag/ungrading/>). They provide accounts of a variety of new and exciting assessment models that can fundamentally transform our practices. I have been experimenting with alternative assessment for a few years and implemented a fully ungraded course for the first time last Summer with very encouraging results.

### My First Ungraded Course

I started by removing points from assignments and provided qualitative feedback instead. Final grades were determined by the students themselves via 3 self-assessment forms, spread over the course of term, using as main criteria their level of effort, consistency in turning in assignments, and contributions to the class (e.g. participation in critiques, answering other students' questions, sharing resources). The final grade was modulated by their special circumstances (e.g. health or financial issues). As a show of trust, they were told their self-assigned grade was final: I was not allowed to lower their grade, only raise it.

### Results:

Out of 53 students, only 3 grades seemed too high. Over 1/3 of the class (19 students) graded themselves too low and required a bump up. After adjustments, the overall curve was virtually identical to the year before. Students reported feeling a much lower level of stress, but equal motivation to complete coursework, and I noticed a marked improvement in the quality of submissions when compared to the previous 2 years of the same course.

## Challenges:

The main challenge was the initial time investment in creating an assessment and feedback structure that was as clear to students as a point system. With this particular approach, timely and high quality, individualized feedback was even more critical, which, depending on the size of the class and amount of assignments, may require some curriculum adaptations. There was also a considerable amount of emotional labor early on to be able to trust students with a task we tend to reserve to ourselves. This process only works if there is real mutual trust which is hard to build but very easy to break. Removing grades is only one component of a more humane pedagogy which, if implemented in a vacuum, may not yield positive results.

Here's a Twitter thread where I reported on this experience: <https://twitter.com/manyweare/status/1303381331787816960?s=20>

## Current Approach

I have since been iterating on this approach and have settled on a hybrid that values effort, iteration, and demonstrable growth. None of my courses in the last 2 semesters were graded. My current assessment model looks something like this:

### 1. Assignments

- Receive qualitative feedback, not grades
- Can be resubmitted at any point of the term

### 2. Personal Goals Document

Students set personal goals at the beginning of the course, adjusted at the midpoint of the term in one-on-one meetings with the instructor. They must con-

sider, among other items:

- How many assignments they intend on turning in (above the minimum required)
- How many absences they will allow themselves (up to a maximum)
- Their level of participation in class (introverts are asked to step up, extroverts to step back)
- Previous educational challenges they they've dealt with that they will work on (e.g. procrastinating on assignments)

### 3. Bi-weekly Progress Checks

Students are given periodic access to a checklist showing progress on course assignments, including which are incomplete or need revision.

### 4. Self-Assessment

At the end of the term, students fill a self-assessment form and assign themselves a grade. This grade can be raised by the instructor, but not lowered.

Criteria:

- Time and effort put into the coursework;
- Accomplishment of personal goals;
- Number of assignments submitted successfully (i.e. not requiring revision);
- Overall grade is modulated by hardship faced during the term (e.g. health or financial issues);

The pandemic's heavy toll on our students (and ourselves) inspired us to implement more a humane pedagogy. Ungrading can be another powerful way to respond to this challenge in a lasting, transformative way. In the resources below, you will find a variety of alternative assessment models that may be applicable to your discipline or your teaching style. I hope you consider ungrading your own courses! Feel free to contact me with questions or to share your approach: [mviaaneto@hostos.cuny.edu](mailto:mviaaneto@hostos.cuny.edu)

## Resources:

- Ungrading, a Bibliography, by Jesse Stommel (<https://www.jessestommel.com/ungrading-a-bibliography/>)
- Ungrading, edited by Susan D. Blum (<https://wvupressonline.com/node/844>)
- Beyond the Curriculum Podcast, Season 2 focused on ungrading (<https://beyondthecurriculum-podcast.com/season2>)



## ACHIEVEMENTS

### **Jorge Matos, Assistant Professor, Librarian**

Prof. Jorge Matos recently served as a guest panelist for the Eunice Kennedy Shriver 100: A Legacy for Inclusion Celebration. During the panel, he spoke of then-New York Senator Robert Kennedy's surprise visit to the Willowbrook State School in Staten Island and how it played a significant role in exposing the abuse and segregation found at Willowbrook that was a catalyst for future advocacy addressing systemic abuses across the developmentally and intellectually disabled community. [READ MORE](#)

**EdCast," the CUNY TV program** produced, written, and hosted by Hostos Professor Linda Hirsch, is the recipient of two 2021 [Bronze Telly Awards](#) in the Television General-Education category for excellence in television broadcasting. "Returning to Campus During Covid-19" and "Powerful Voices: New Approaches to Stuttering," featuring Hero High School Student Noel Mullings, were the winning episodes.

In "[Returning to Campus during COVID-19](#)" Dr. Linda Hirsch speaks with six college students about their decision to return to campus during Covid-19. Dr. Hirsch holds a frank conversation about safety, social distancing and college life during the pandemic with guests Isabella Bohner (NYU); Azalea Danes (Lafayette College); Frankie Florman (University of Maryland, College Park); Tom Mckillop (University of Edinburgh, Scotland); Anna Park (NYU); and Hridesh Singh (Williams College). [READ MORE](#)

### **Ann Genzale, Assistant Professor, English**

On April 7, the Hostos English department presented a virtual book release celebration of Hostos English Professor Ann Genzale's book "Nationhood and Improvised Belief in American Fiction" as part of their Spring 2021 Faculty Series. [READ MORE](#)

### **Tram Nguyen, Assistant Professor, English & Moise Koffi, Assistant Professor, Mathematics**

Congratulations to Professor Tram Nguyen from the English Department and Professor Moise Koffi from the Mathematics Department. They have been selected by CUNY Central to serve as CUNY Mindset Fellows in May-June 2021. They along with four other Mindset Fellows were selected based on their great contributions in the Motivating Learners Course in January, and we expect them to continue to be leaders on their campuses and CUNY to promote growth mindset, purpose and relevance, and sense of belonging. Professors Nguyen and Koffi belong to the second cohort of CUNY Mindset Fellows, whose primary tasks are to design and lead the kick-off event of the mindset mini-course on June 11, 2021 and facilitate discussions among the course participants through June 24.

## HOSTOS TEACHING DAY

In coordination with National Teaching Week, Teaching Day has been an event that seeks to recognize and highlight the different facets of teaching and learning. This year adjusting to the new normal, this initiative transitioned to an online environment. Last year, the World Health Organization presented evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being. A scoping review assures us that the arts can positively impact both mental and physical health. Creative works are an excellent way to alleviate stress and keep ourselves connected to our creative side.

The Center for Teaching and Learning continued with this successful initiative that began at the Day Zero event at the beginning of the semester. We collected examples of creative works, such as poems, works of art, images, pictures and videos. The goal is to share our creative works to strengthen our community and inspire others. During the National Teaching week, examples of creative work from faculty, staff and students were shared with the college community. A website was created where faculty can see the submissions, leave comments, ask questions, or post compliments to the authors.

### **Call For Submissions: Creative Works**

We will be collecting examples of your creative works, whether it's a poem, a piece of artwork, a sketch, a song or a knitted sweater! By sharing our creative works, we're strengthening our community and, perhaps, inspiring others as well.

You can upload the file to a Dropbox folder by clicking on the button below:

[Website](#)



**Congratulations to all of you!**

## TEACHING TIDBITS

## SPA DAY FLASHBACK

The Center for Teaching and Learning recognizes the challenges of finding time to research, plan, and execute new ideas. As a result, we created short videos that serve as a resource for tips, reflections, tools and new teaching strategies. The goal is to create an environment where faculty can watch, share and learn new teaching strategies. In each episode of Teaching Tidbits, faculty share pedagogy tips, hands-on activities, or other teaching strategies.

Similarly, the Teaching Moments series showcase reflections from faculty, staff and students about circumstances and moments that have changed their perspectives and offered the opportunity to try new approaches.

### TEACHING TIDBITS



PROF. SEAN GERRITY  
TEACHING TIDBITS

LINK



PROF. DENISE CUMMINGS-CLAY  
TEACHING TIDBITS

LINK



PROF. ASRAT AMNIE  
TEACHING TIDBITS

LINK



PROF. JUNO MORROW  
TEACHING TIDBITS

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PRESIDENT DAISY COCCO  
DE FILIPPIS  
TEACHING TIDBITS

LINK



INTERIM PROVOST CHARLES  
DRAGO  
TEACHING TIDBITS

LINK

Visit our website to view more content:  
<https://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/ctl/teaching-tidbits/>

The Center for Teaching and Learning hosted its Annual Professional Development Day (a.k.a. Spa Day) on Wednesday, May 26, 2021. The event was graced by the presence of Dr. Cocco De Filippis, Interim President of Hostos Community College and Dr. Charles I. Drago, Acting Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, who both delivered a message of acknowledgment and encouragement for the Hostos Family for its remarkable accomplishments since the 2020 Spa Day.

The theme of this year's event was "Imagining a Brighter Future Through Rediscovering Teaching and Learning." The event was dedicated to the late Prof. Isabel Li, to celebrate her life and the countless contributions she made to the Hostos family for almost 40 years, and a tribute was presented in her honor. This event was not only a time of reflection but also an occasion to look forward to the academic future that we all need to create together. The CTL believes, through it all, we have emerged stronger, more resilient, and better prepared for the future. The event included a number of sessions with both reflective and prospective engagements such as creative cloud making, the application of the growth mind set, prevention of burnout, Collaborate Online International Learning (COIL), Hostos Reads, and Kognito with breakout sessions held to enhance in-depth conversations on some of these topics. The audience was briefly introduced to Kognito, an online, interactive tool which will help build awareness, knowledge, skills, and confidence talking about mental health issues, preparing faculty and staff to make use of it and to be a resource for students in need when implemented. There were more than 60 people in attendance and the presentations and the discussions both in the main and breakout sessions provided an opportunity for faculty to share their experiences, challenges, and strategies going forward.

The Spa Day concluded with an afternoon session which consisted of a Round Table Discussion on one important topic: **Speaking up for AAPI at Hostos Community College**, with focus on addressing violence against Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, placing it within the broader sphere of violence against communities of color, and discussing the history of and opportunities for allyship. Several state dignitaries, Hostos Community College leadership, and a number of faculty members participated in this round table

Website

This past year Touchstone has continued its mission of documenting and sharing the work and the ideas of the Hostos community. Touchstone accepts essays from faculty and staff on any aspect of academic life. Not only does publication in Touchstone help faculty move a project closer to publication in peer-reviewed journals, but it also helps faculty share their work with the rest of the community at Hostos.

The upcoming issue, for instance, represents a range of topics, from the use of language by native speakers to a lesson plan that uses the New York Times application. Along with the help of the entire Center for Teaching and Learning Council, Touchstone is grateful to its editorial board whose hard work has helped the upcoming issue come together.

In linking the power of teaching to a broadening of our vision, Eugenio María de Hostos affirmed the power of education. In honor of our namesake's belief, Touchstone, a journal devoted to the scholarship produced by the community of Hostos, was created. The journal is published yearly by the Magda Vasillov Center for Teaching and Learning.

The goals of Touchstone are to increase awareness of the scholarly and creative work of the faculty at Hostos and provide an outlet for work that is on its way to external publication. In accordance to these goals, Touchstone publishes a diverse range of scholarship from the Hostos Community. This diversity of imaginative and creative work represents the many talents of the faculty here at Hostos.

Touchstone accepts works in English or Spanish on any of the following:

- Original scholarship on teaching and learning
- Scholarly articles from any discipline
- Best practices
- Conference Presentations or Reports
- Classroom-based research
- Teaching challenges, experiences, and lessons
- Personal Essays or Editorials
- WAC and beyond
- Book reviews
- Creative works



In addition to the above criteria, Touchstone would be interested in receiving scholarship, essays, or pedagogical material connected to Hostos Reads.

Send your articles using discipline appropriate citation to Dr. Jason Buchanan ([jbuchanan@hostos.cuny.edu](mailto:jbuchanan@hostos.cuny.edu)) by December 31, 2021.

This semester we are hosting a series of virtual discussions involving a variety of short readings of different genres that relate to our times.

The CTL Advisory Council has planned a number of activities for this semester that will be open to faculty, staff, and students, and invites you to be part of any or all of them. Please participate and encourage your students to share thoughts and ideas about these texts.

The goals of this project include:

Community Building

Highlight Campus and University Resources/Student Talents

Cross-Institutional and Multidisciplinary Connection

Shared Intellectual Experience

Promote and Enhance: Critical Thinking, Self-Awareness, Diversity and Global Issues, Cultural



### Hostos Reads schedule and the Zoom link for all sessions

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>September 29, 2021 - 3:30-4:30</b><br/> <b>b.b. free (graphic story)</b><br/>                     Gabby Rivera &amp; Royal Dunlap<br/> <a href="#">LINK</a></p>                            | <p><b>October 20, 2021 - 3:30-4:30</b><br/> <b>Archives in Common (poetry)</b><br/>                     Marco Saavedra<br/> <a href="#">LINK</a></p> |
| <p><b>November 17, 2021 - 3:30-4:30</b><br/> <b>Excerpt from Dominicana (novel) &amp; Dominicanas (Instagram) / discussion</b><br/>                     Angie Cruz<br/> <a href="#">LINK</a></p> | <p><b>December 8, 2021 - 3:30-4:30</b><br/> <b>Positive Obsession (essay)</b><br/>                     Octavia Butler<br/> <a href="#">LINK</a></p>  |

[Join Zoom Meeting - Meeting ID: 845 7554 7885 Passcode: 591812](#)

Hostos Reads Schedule (Wednesdays 3:30-4:30)

Stay updated on all things Hostos Reads!

Visit the Hostos Reads website and Libguide for additional resources, information, Community Reading events, and much more.

Hostos Reads site: [commons.hostos.cuny.edu/hostosreads](https://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/hostosreads)  
 Libguide: <https://guides.hostos.cuny.edu/hostosreads/2020>

All are welcome!

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