

Good evening and thank you to our newly sworn in Board of Trustees and to Chancellor Yong for the opportunity to address you all this evening. I can't tell you how long I've mulled over how to give the last MJC Academic Senate report of 2020.... what a year. So I thought maybe I'd approach a summation by offering a glimpse into our everyday, a sort of "day in the life of the MJC Academic Senate" that might give insight into the meetings and musing of a college work day under Covid-19.

Every workday now begins at home, with my family urging, sometimes screaming at one another, to not be late for virtual school and work. We rush to feed the goats and chickens at sunrise--more on animals later--and there is a flurry of toast-making and pouring cereals. While I skip a bit on the personal hygiene this year, as I'm trying to beat David Letterman's beard, I still require what's essential from the pre-Covid routine--in particular a good amount of coffee before 8am. Even my 11-year-old helps to make sure Daddy has his coffee before he puts on headphones and starts to zoom. "It's his mood maker," she claims. Yes, like many of us, getting me to work in 2020 is now part of a much larger family operation.

The caffeinated workday itself is a full slate, an engaging line-up despite the physical remoteness. I never feel alone. If it's a Monday, there is an Extended Cabinet meeting with President Houpis, VPs Jennifer Zellet, Florida Arias and Sarah Schraeder and Foundation Executive Director George Boodrookas. We collaborate on a wide range of projects, including several Academic Senate priorities this year—the operationalization of a permanent teaching and learning center, how to progress on the nascent incarcerated teaching program with the county's REACT facility, or redesigning our college-wide shared governance model through participation and input from all constituencies. Thanks to President Houpis' insistence, we've also read "The Five Disfunctions of a Team," and are, therefore, constantly reminded of our desire, and need, to work together to solve the many issues that come up at a California community college each day.

Yes, it's sometime difficult to extricate one's self from the household drama that is constantly unfolding simultaneously. In my own case, the neighbor's cows often get out and begin to eat our front yard, so I might show up a few minutes late to a Student Success meeting with Florida Arias, Ashley Griffith and Jonathan Sarhadi because I've been shewing a herd of hungry bovine from the smoke tree. If it's Friday, there is a New Faculty Community of Practice gathering and I am inspired by our vibrant, new instructors, like Allison Sampson, who works with her colleagues in Nursing to take students to Modesto Gospel Mission so as to better understand the community we serve; or, there is Erin Thompson, Biology faculty, who approaches teaching remotely with a creative flare by asking students to make and share their own videos explaining the processes of mitosis and miosis. They give a renewed energy to the day.

Then there is what is worthy of becoming an emblem for faculty dedication under adverse conditions, watching Barbara Adams give a Curricular overview of Carnegie Unite values from a smartboard adorned with an American flag...live from a barn. A meeting with Chancellor Yong, Graciela and Kimberly about a recommendation to a board policy is something to look forward to as they are always warm and encouraging, taking time when there is so much they need to accomplish each day. Occasionally, I'll gnaw on a PBJ while catching up with a Trustee or faculty colleague. Afternoon brings a meeting with the State Chancellor's Office and MIT to craft a prototype invention education program for the entire California Community College system with Jeremy Wilson and Debbie Gilbert at the helm. Or there is a prison education meeting with Ashley Griffith, Glen Stovall and Ulises Ochoa Diaz as well as the faculty who are stepping up to teach to the incarcerated during a pandemic through correspondence.

Often times, by mid-afternoon, something has come up and needs addressing. So I'll call and bother Pam Guerra Schmidt or Shelley Akiona or multiple members of our Senate Executive—Shelley Circle, Gisele Flores, Aishah Saleh, Hans Hauselmann, Stella Beratlis, Allan McKissick, Rob Stevenson or Curtis Martin—for wisdom and guidance, which usually saves my bacon and just in time. Kathy Haskin is always there, ready to help get things done. Occasionally, it's true, I'll be having a not so good day and their friendship and encouragement gives my attitude the tune-up it needs.

There are countless other highlights, like working with an array of amazing deans at MJC or Tiffnie Versola, who has been an exceptional CSEA president and will be sorely missed. It was a good day when the Senate passed resolution recognizing the sacrifice and hard work of classified professionals during the pandemic. And there are zooms with Jennifer Novoa and ASMJC leadership as we look for projects that students and faculty can work on together to weather the storm of 2020.

Then, it's time to check in on my classes. Sometimes I'll get a student email like this: "My mother passed away 2 days ago and we have been praying for her since then. I wasn't able to do my assignment, can I do it tonight and submit it in the morning if that's okay with you?" My heart breaks a little before offering a flexible, compassionate response.

I'll admit, there are days it's all a bit much, and I'll stare out the window for a few minutes while my boys fight over a video game they shouldn't be playing or my daughter is torturing the felines with yet another cat sweater they seem to detest. And I'll allow myself to muse a little bit. Often, its about the other creatures I now share my day with--our "domesticated" animals. Sometimes, I swear they are listening to my phone calls, I haven't yet turned to the dog for advice on academic and professional matters, but more than once I've been tempted. I also happen to be reading Mama's Last Hug: Animal Emotions and What They Tell Us about Ourselves by Frans de Waal and so I've taken additional care to pay more attention to those around my house who are even furrier than I am these days.

It's been instructive. For one, I'm beginning to think that I'm the one who's domesticated given their seemingly constant feeding schedules and unique tastes for specific treats at certain times of day. I wonder what the animals will do when we go back to work and school. Will the dogs be depressed and go back to digging holes? Will the cats miss their sweaters and midday treats or will they be relieved to have the place to themselves again? Then I realize I might be a little crazy from quarantine, talking to the animals in all, so I pick up a book for a few minutes to clear the mind and focus.

I've also learned from reading Mama's Last Hug, that animal research really does help us understand humans better. For instance, the term "alpha" is often misunderstood. The term dates to the 1940's and wolf studies, but it is a complicated idea once you start looking around the animal kingdom. In the primate world, for instance, being an alpha is much more complex. De Waal reminds us that "the alpha in a chimpanzee community...(is) not necessarily the biggest, strongest, meanest ones around, since they often reach the top with the assistance of others." In fact, the smallest chimp can become an alpha with the right supporters, and because of this, most chimp alphas strive to "protect the underdog, keep the peace, and reassure those who are distressed" while acting "as the healer-in-chief." As soon as a fight breaks out, the true alpha is "intent on restoring harmony" and will "stand between screaming parties, with...arms raised, until things calm down."

I think you see where I'm going with this. So, thank you to every one of you in this virtual meeting for being part of the Academic Senate's everyday this year, despite our strange circumstances. Thank you for being true leaders at our college and in our district. Thank you for being part of a team with common objectives, although we sometimes have different ideas of how to get there. Thank you to all those faces and friends that populate my computer screen each day and take my calls. You are always there to help, solve problems and get along to go along. You are true alphas.

So, yes, I've spent a lot of time with, and thinking about, animals this year. But I've learned even more from each of you. May you all have a rejuvenating holiday season, it's well deserved. I look forward to continuing these relationships next year and also introducing you to our just elected next Academic Senate president at MJC, Professor Aishah Saleh. Until then, I'm not going too far over the break. I'll just be in the garage listening to classic rock with my 12 year-old chocolate Labrador...for some reason the two of us get along smashingly.