Introduction:

Three questions were sent to the full Brandeis Faculty in October, 2020. The questions were:

1. What issues would you most want your faculty senate to prioritize this year? *(Open ended question)*
2. Many faculty members are balancing child care or elder care challenges with their teaching, research, and service responsibilities. Please select the responses that apply to you. *(Closed ended question, with “other” option)*
3. Shifting to remote and hybrid instruction has challenged the way many of us assess student learning, especially when it comes to administering exams. Changes to the length and calendar of the Spring semester may bring additional opportunities to address these challenges. Please select the option that most closely echoes your experience, plans, and needs in this area. *(Closed ended question, with “other” option)*

Responses were received from 182 faculty, though not all responded to all questions. The responses to question 1 and the “other” option for question 3 have been sorted into categories, with illustrative responses provided and the overall distribution indicated. Examples of the “other” responses to question 2 are also provided, but they are not sorted into categories. In the interest of completeness, most responses have been included (with some duplicates not included). Note that parts of some responses have been sorted into one category, with other parts in another (where they were very different priorities). Where names appeared in the comments, they were removed.

The categories in used to classify the response to question 1 are listed here as an overview (note that some categories may have only generated fewer responses than others, but are skill worthy of full consideration by the Faculty Senate):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories for Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19, Work Load, Health, Stress, Child Care, Compensation for Extra Work</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Support, Student Support</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandeis as a Whole, Administration, University Finances</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Policies, Practices, Pay, Benefits</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Rights, Academic Freedom, Faculty Senate</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Racism, Faculty Diversity</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior, Part Time, Adjunct, and Rabb Faculty</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion, Tenure, Standards</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-COVID Planning</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Bullying, Dignity at Work</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Comments</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the responses are worrisome – reflecting levels of stress that is more than individuals should have to handle on their own. Thus, along with this report we also reprint here information on mental health resources for faculty provided by Joy von Steiger, PhD, Director of Mental Health Education and Racial Justice Educator, Brandeis Counseling Center and ODEI, jvonst@brandeis.edu. (781) 736-3782

Online Resources:

- **New Directions: Brandeis Employee Assistance Program** offering online health and behavioral health assessments as well as resources for immediate behavioral health care, online counseling, stress management, financial management, legal resources, and referrals.
- **Tufts Health Plan Provider Directory**: This directory allows you to search for a behavioral health specialist by location, specialty, and credentials. If you have opted for an HMO plan and would like to use your insurance, you will need to choose an in-network provider. If you have a PPO, you are able to choose out-of-network providers but are reimbursed at a lower rate.
- **Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective**: A collective of practitioners and activists devoted to Black mental health and healing. Virtual therapy with Black clinicians, videos, and other resources.
- **Psychology Today**: A provider directory with search features for location, therapist demographics, and specializations as well as a blog about mental health topics.
- **Zencare**: A directory of providers who have been vetted by a team that values clinicians who sharing their models of care as well as their own identities, allowing for greater confidence in the therapist match. Free consultation appointments can be booked with providers directly through the Zencare website.

Handouts:

- **Psychological First Aid Manual**: Information about disasters, traumatic responses, stress relief, and relaxation as well as tips for supporting yourself and others during or following a disaster or crisis.
- **COVID 19: Managing Stress in This Anxious Time**: The Institute for Disaster Mental Health at State University of New York at New Paltz published this tip sheet on managing stress during times of crisis.
- **Safety, Predictability and Control in the MIdst of COVID-19**: The Riverside Trauma Center provides mental health resources for responding to COVID-19.

Information for Families:

- **Psychological First Aid for Children and Parents**: “Listen, Protect, and Connect” helps you and your child negotiate times of disaster.
- **American Red Cross Virtual Care Center for Families**: Virtual care for children and families who are in need of information, resources or referrals.
**Question 1 on what the Faculty Senate should prioritize for this year**

**Note:** Individual responses that contained multiple related priorities have been kept as combined responses. Individual responses with very distinct priorities have been separated into the relevant categories (which loses the power of a combined listing by one person, but accurately represents that strength of views on a single issue).

**COVID-19, Work Load, Health, Stress, Child Care, Compensation for Extra Work (n=26; 23%)**
- Ongoing negotiation of the Covid crisis takes priority over everything else.
- Work-life balance in the context of the pandemic (students need more support, online teaching is more time intensive, etc.).
- Faculty mental health and workload.
- Child care and pressures for untenured faculty.
- Additional responsibilities due to Covid-19
- Compensation for all the extra work that faculty have done in the COVID crisis.
- Continued fair treatment of all faculty and staff in one of the most challenging times faced by the university.
- I don’t know that the faculty senate can help with this, but just for me personally, I think my biggest other issue is mostly for my own mental health and emotional okay-ness during this shutdown and virtual working situation we’re in.
- Flexibility to teach online due to health risks & vulnerabilities.
- Faculty workload.
- Recognition of extra time needed to teach in covid, and way to recognize it absent. money, e.g. Acceleration to earned sabbatical or course release.
- Work/life balance in the time of covid.
- Supporting vulnerable faculty/those with care responsibilities. Most faculty are working at a pace that is simply not sustainable.
- 1. Give a course relief to faculty with kids at home. It is to require faculty with kids at home to teach 3 courses in the spring instead of the 2 courses that I was meant to teach (and these are not small classes. These are classes with 45 students each, and lots of work). I was just forced to commit to teaching 3 courses, and I am not even sure this is legal. It's unfair. You can't possibly expect us to function well when teaching 4 days a week starting 8:00 AM in the morning, when we also need to cater to kids getting ready for 'school' on zoom at the same time. 2. Non tenure-track faculty are expected to work on research while teaching more courses than tenure-track and at a lower pay. At least stop the publication clock for us, the way the clock stopped last spring for tenure-track faculty.
- How to balance the health and safety of older faculty members and student preference for in person classes
- It seems to me that additional childcare responsibilities during COVID will take a toll on my research and publication. Faculty with small children do teaching and service that is
mandatory but since progress in research is more on the voluntary side, it has become an unaffordable luxury. This is very, very frustrating and unfortunate and frustrating.

- Managing the mental health and physical health and safety issues of the staff, faculty and students.

**Teaching Support, Student Support (n=20; 18%)**

- Better support for students with financial needs who are struggling.
- Ensuring that graduate students are adequately funded and supported.
- An improved course evaluation form.
- Discussion about the core curriculum.
- It is very important to retain as many students as possible in these difficult times. There must be good communication between the faculty, Staff and the University leadership about how to modify the academic programs and student experience on campus to prevent a significant drop in enrollment. A sharp drop in enrollment will harm the financial health of the university.
- Prioritizing student needs in the midst of the pandemic. I worry about conflicting priorities placed on tenure-track faculty when they already have many pressures on them (including home life obligations).
- Certainly there are continuing issues around refocusing our teaching and mentoring to the limitations of largely remote contexts. While this is already foregrounded in our discussions, I think it should remain front and center.
- Resources to support faculty for teaching from home (if it will be continuously the case in the Spring): for example: not every faculty has a big house (enough rooms), particularly for those with children learning from home; competing the internet sources/usage, sound/voice interference?
- I almost want to say how to most get extra financial and other help to our students, both grad and undergrad. There is so much difficulty for them in so many ways, and I can only do so much without being able to help them financially.
- Prioritize a student lock down tool to allow for decent testing in exams. These tools have been available at other universities for several years now - we should be able to lock students computers while taking exams. 2. LATTE specialists are beyond capacity, and are not providing the help we need with designing exams. More resources should be allocated to someone to replace [name deleted] and to strengthen the LATTE specialists team.
- The failure of the CTL to support faculty re: online teaching (i.e., teaching online is so time intensive, in part, because we didn't get the support we needed through the HTI and needed to seek out supplemental information and support)
- Increasing interference in teaching on the part of the administration (too many prescriptions, too much oversight). CTL.
- One thing I would like to see is collaboration between the faculty senate and the CTL to figure out what teaching should look like in this remote/hybrid environment. This is no longer the temporary situation we thought it would be and we should be planning more intentionally. The teaching we are doing is neither in person nor is it online teaching. It
is truly a hybrid in between those two and I don't think we've figured out how to teach in such an environment. This will have huge consequences on enrollment as well as faculty and student burnout.

- The effectiveness of the CTL in addressing the widely differing teaching needs and priorities within the university.
- Disastrous waste of CTL. Totally useless, expensive, irrelevant. Brandeis is a research university (perhaps was a research university); 99% of the faculty found all this totally idiotic and, at best, useful for K-12.
- Supporting faculty through this period; mediating the increasing burdens being placed upon all of us amidst the threat of decreasing pay; helping balance the rhetoric of the CTL with the realities of teaching.
- Teaching remotely puts more strain on faculty to have state-of-the-art computer equipment for hosting classes via Zoom (laptop, camera, mic, IT support, etc.) and access to databases, formerly accessible only on campus.
- Ways to address how teaching has been utterly changed this year.

**Brandeis as a Whole, Administration, University Finances (n=15; 13%)**

- Stabilizing the long-term financial well-being of the university
- Working with administration to minimize the impact of the financial strain on faculty, students, and enrollment numbers and quality.
- Getting clear information and fair policies about any furloughs, lay-offs, or pay cuts we may be facing.
- Full divestment from fossil fuels.
- Ranking: Avoid our national ranking (US News and World Report) from further declining.
- My sense is that business model of universities is changing. Tuition revenue, especially from foreign students, is likely to decline; and the appeal of high cost of in-person, high-touch, education is falling. What will Brandeis do to diversify its revenue sources as revenue from these traditional sources declines and the demand for current products falls?
- This will fall on deaf ears I am sure -- but the longer I am here the more committees, subcommittees, reports, even now a plan for a plan. I've seen this movie. We are are too self-satisfied with moving at a snail’s pace while our competitors run circles around us.
- Getting thanked one more time for my willingness to work overtime and all summer is sounding like "thoughts and prayers". Instead of happy talk - how about talking about our retirement plan, our performance reviews, our raises, our hours.
- Administrative bloat.
- 1. University budget, especially the bloated staffing and endless hires. How has the administrative staffing and budget changed under the current admin? 2. Decline in Brandeis ranking - from mid-30s to mid-40s. Why?
- I hope that transparency around the university's financial standing can be fostered--and particularly how some financial decisions are being made (e.g., when the decision to end
payments into faculty retirement was taken, how were those funds then re-allocated, and were faculty part of that discussion around re-allocation?

- I want the Senate to get the Dean to be more respectful of faculty time. Why is it suddenly necessary to put caps on every course? shouldn't Departments be prioritizing DEI plans? Although what is the point of making plans when there are no resources to implement them? for that matter, why have external reviews of programs? these things are a waste of time for everyone involved.

- Incentives for chair. Good that standardized in arts and sciences among depts. But need much more to make it attractive. E. G. 1-1 or 1-0 load depending on size of dept and curricular teaching needs and summer salary, three months.

- Seeking full transparency regarding the financial situation of the university going forward, with various short and middle range scenarios explicitly confronted, along with projected possible adjustments of the university operations.

- There seems to be no end to the expanding number of committees at all levels of the university. When will Brandeis ever take this issue seriously?

**Supportive Policies, Practices, Pay, Benefits (n=11; 10%)**

- Compensation and benefits, especially retirement contribution.

- Faculty salaries.

- Enabling faculty to concentrate on research and teaching and reduce the many distractions.

- Better leave policies; better support for research.

- I would very much like to see the Senate continue to push the university to restore the 403B retirement match. This is not an issue for me personally, but I am very concerned for our junior faculty, who are losing significant sums and will continue to do so, if things do not change.

- Maintaining focus on long term goals as much as possible given the pandemic. Faculty pay, salary equity, better working conditions for all faculty.

- Minimizing bureaucratic and committee work for faculty, especially minority and contingent faculty, allowing them to concentrate on research and teaching. Prioritizing budget expenditures on faculty not software and technology.

- Restoration of retirement match; availability of conference funding (online conference often require fees).

- Sorting through the teaching and research balance in our Covid online teaching mode. Less time for too many things that were part of our "normal lives."

- This may not be the right year, but we will need to address the fact that Brandeis Faculty are underpaid compared to our peers. This is demoralizing the Faculty who decided to stay and is an incentive for people who are considering moving to other places.

**Faculty Rights, Academic Freedom, Faculty Senate (n=8; 7%)**

- Faculty rights. The admin has summarily dictated all kinds of things (change of block system, calendar, review of syllabi, TF staffing, TIAA-CREF contributions, and no doubt salary reductions soon to come).
Discussion over current administration decisions and procedures. In the midst of rapid changes, there is hardly any room for debate among faculty, any instance in which president, deans, and provosts have to hear what faculty need to say. Decisions are taken hastily and faculty is assumed to accept passively. Faculty meetings have become a place for the administration to congratulate themselves about how well are the managing the current crisis. And many many faculty are very unhappy.

- Academic freedom.
- Balance of power so faculty are not treated as less than the board or administration
- Ever increasing administrative demands on faculty time. The primary purpose of the faculty is not answering emails, attending meetings, or responding to surveys. This year is even worse for obvious reasons, but this is a problem that gets worse continuously
- I would like to see is accountability for ALL faculty under a department. Some faculty work in interdisciplinary programs. This makes it difficult for them to access important information from the school that may be shared in departmental faculty meetings. Faculty who work in programs should have affiliations in disciplinary programs and be able to participate in those communities, including faculty meetings, so they can have access to all the information they need as faculty. This is particularly important during this time when so much important information is being shared almost daily. Can the faculty senate move towards making sure that all faculty are appointed to a department even if that department is not their budgetary home and they do not have voting rights in the department, so we can ensure all faculty have access to all the information needed to fulfill all their responsibilities as faculty?"
- The pandemic has sent us all home and disrupted the normal practices of faculty interactions and consultation. I am deeply concerned that the faculty's isolation may permanently damage our governance structures. The channels of power and influence have shifted.
- Last year I felt that the Faculty Senate needed to be more available to the faculty, more of a resource helping us manage all kinds of day-to-day issues. You have taken care of this - thank you. The open town-hall type meetings are great. I think more faculty are seeing how the Senate can be an advocate in these trying times.

**Anti-Racism, Faculty Diversity (n=7; 6%)**

- Anti-racism, anti-blackness
- Continue antiracist work, with a focus that includes the disproportionate burden in terms of time and energy, including emotional labor, that faculty of color have for supporting students of color and for service to the university.
- Anti-racism, DEI, contract equity and measurement and recognition of teaching, research, service, leadership, and contribution to overall institutional advancement.
- Clarity about social justice plans.
- Faculty renewal - ensuring in the current we continue to diversify the faculty via new hires, even if not all tenure-line
- Racist faculty attitudes toward international students from poor counties at the Heller School.
- The faculty senate must also prioritize the university's continued investment in racial justice, and in not losing the momentum that arose over the summer.

**Junior, Part Time, Adjunct, and Rabb Faculty (n=6; 5%)**
- Equity for junior, non-tenure track, and adjunct faculty and academic staff. These people are the backbone without which Brandeis cannot function, and we don't treat them very well at all.
- Having online and/or part-time faculty feel more like a part of the community.
- One way that the university's finances are presented is on a 2 x 2 table in which the axes are contribution to mission and contribution to finances. The Rabb School, our totally online money-maker, is in the grid low contribution to mission and high to finances. At the Rabb, 100% FTE is 8 courses (rather than the max of 6 in any of the other 3 schools). This in and of itself is unjust. Add to that the fact that no Rabb faculty member, with the possible exception of administrators who also teach, is EVER hired for enough courses to reach 50% FTE, so none are eligible for benefits. This is unconscionable for a university devoted to social justice. The Senate should address the Rabb situation and work to change it.
- Comparing course loads: OTS and Tenure
- I know it is not a priority during the pandemic right now, but my experience as an adjunct has been very mixed.
- Role/compensation of non-tenured faculty, including research staff who teach part-time. Issues related to centralization of services (e.g., CTL, Diversity) and branding. Budgets for central services are growing, while responsibilities are being pushed down to Depts.

**Promotion, Tenure, Standards (n=4; 4%)**
- Revising promotion and tenure statements to address and recognize digital scholarship, public scholarship, and contributions to DEI efforts
- Making community engagement a criterion of reappointment, tenure, and promotion decisions. 2. Rethinking the single-authored monograph as the only acceptable publication for tenure, to bring scholarly research in line with our contemporary collaborative, multimodal world
- So far as I can tell, our approach to "service," the third leg of the academic stool, is entirely unsystematic. We don't know how to evaluate it. We don't know how to give credit for it. We don't know how to compare one kind of service (attending a few meetings of a committee) to another (leading the committee, or writing important documents, or developing new initiatives, or working on behalf of the University on admissions or development). We don't even know what we mean by it (does it mean serving the department, the University, the field, the community, or the world?). And yet, every time we hire, every time we promote, we claim that it's central to our academic work. This, I would suggest, is fundamentally irresponsible.
- Maintaining standards.
**Post COVID Planning (n=4; 4%)**
- Plans for the future of the university -- What is the status of the Framework for the Future? What are plans for a capital campaign? How will Brandeis position itself in a post-Covid world?
- In preparation for our post-COVID world, maximizing the long-term lessons we can glean from the current challenge re teaching, creating flexible curricular models for our current and future students that are more accessible not only across time and space but also across class, physical ability, etc.
- Expanding online learning for future, post (I hope) covid
- The Faculty Senate should, in my view, collaborate with the senior administration to create a strategic plan for the post-pandemic university.

**Anti-Bullying, Dignity at Work (n=2; 2%)**
- Implementation of university anti-bullying policy that doesn't leave tenured faculty essentially exempt--that is, the university needs a policy wherein tenure does not protect faculty from ramifications of bullying that pertain to all other employees.
- The Dignity at Work proposal that needs to be advanced this semester without fail.

**Additional Comments (n=11; 10%)**
- Trying to feel a part of community is really tough.
- Making sure vulnerable members of the community have adequate material support.
- Climate change, covid 19, and anti-racism.
- Be innovative.
- Life is short, enjoy it.
- Stop whining.
- I'm new and not sure.
- Workplace culture
**Question 2 on the work/life matters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do have child care or elder care responsibilities and they are sufficiently addressed without significant cost or impact on my university responsibilities.</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do have child care or elder care responsibilities and they are sufficiently addressed but at significant material cost and/or impact on my university responsibilities.</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do have child care or elder care responsibilities and I need additional help in order to address them.</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to be part of Brandeis community dialogue on additional options.</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have child care or elder care responsibilities that need to be addressed at this time.</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>182</td>
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**Illustrative responses to “Other” (n=12):**

- My children are in middle and high school, so I do not have child care per se, but need to assist them in remote learning
- I have elder care responsibilities out of state. No significant material cost. But difficult to handle on top of university responsibilities.
- I have other family health care issues that take a great deal of energy. The expectations that we can handle the pandemic AND the normal running of the university AND our increased family issues is deeply unrealistic.
- I don't have child care or elder care responsibilities, but they are an important issue.
- Lemberg Children’s Center has reopened for now. If it closes again, I will have child care responsibilities and will need additional help in order to address them.
- I have child care and elder care responsibilities that are addressed okay now but could change on a dime and become enormous, costly, and upsetting issues.
**Question 3 on the student assessment**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am teaching a course in the spring semester in which I generally administer a final exam, but am unsure of how to effectively administer the exam.</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am teaching a course in the spring semester, in which I generally administer a final exam, and do not plan to require an exam.</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like more assistance in designing exams and assessments for my courses.</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not teaching in the spring semester.</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Illustrative responses to “Other” in categories:**

*Other comments that there is no exam (n=42; 65%)* – *Illustrative examples:*
- No final exam administered for Spring course
- I assign papers, postings and other assignments based on group work.
- No exams for my courses in general.
- I only assign paper assignments, and am considering shifting from the many short-term assignments model to one with longer papers a bit more spread out (given the recent student feedback poll).
- I am teaching a course in the spring semester in which I will require a final paper or project and have made allowances for conferencing and feedback for students before the final submission during the "exam" week.
- My students make art and don’t take exams.
- I am teaching to courses in the spring semester and have decided to replace the final exams with alternative, creative options
- Teaching a new course in the spring semester and will not require a traditional final exam.

*Other comments that adjustments in exams will be utilized (n=13; 20%)* – *Illustrative examples:*
- I do have exams, but have adapted the format of the exam by giving them more time, and by making it take-home
- I teach in the spring grad students and replace exams with other assignments
- I am teaching a course in the spring semester and I am confident in the effectiveness of the final exam I plan to administer.
- I am teaching in the spring and devised a good way to administer my final exam that I plan to use again.
• I am teaching two courses in the Spring, but I do not administer a final exam. However, I administer two tests in each course and I have a well-developed system how to administer these tests online.
• I have figured out an alternative way to administer my exams remotely for my Spring courses.
• I now use open book online assessments instead of closed book proctored exams and plan to continue that in the spring.

“Other” comments on work load, calendar, and stress (n=4; 6%) – Illustrative examples:
• I am teaching a new class in the spring semester. I understand why vacation blocks have been removed and the semester shortened but for small classes without grading assistance those breaks were useful for getting extra writing not possible during the rest of the semester done.
• The addition of fall summer semester makes the overall situation much more complicated. Especially if the summer semester ends just about a week before the fall semester starts.
• Teaching online is very time consuming. Research, writing, raising grants, and working with students on independent project have become impossible.
• The stress has been placed on assessment and not on ways to manage the classroom, online tools, etc. This has created great frustration that started at the so-called Hybrid Institute and that continues in this survey.

“Other” Comments that help is needed (n=2; 3%) – Illustrative examples:
• I usually will have one exam (not final exam though) in one spring course, but am unsure of how to effectively administer the exam.
• I need more time/help to deal with technology issues and the need to find time outside of scheduled classes to engage with students. CTL has not been helpful.

Additional “Other” comments (n=4; 6%) – Illustrative examples:
• Assessments in the arts are deeply impacted by distance learning
• The quiz tool in Latte is not sufficient
• I think I am okay in terms of this spring semester. Both classes I’m teaching (one of which I was teaching last spring, so that I did half of it online already) have either final papers or take-home exams, and so I feel alright with their design and implementation. (FWIW, it’s one of my Fall classes underway now that has been the largest struggle, but I’ve learned a lot and am managing with it -- though with tons of extra work and learning on my part each week, as each thing comes up.)
• I do not yet know if I am teaching in the spring semester