

Dear Sociology Community,

Welcome back to the 2020-21 Academic Year! This has certainly been one of the most remarkable, anxiety-producing, and memorable summers that I can remember. Whether it is the challenges of living with the ups and downs of the ongoing COVID pandemic, the profound sadness in witnessing still more instances of police brutality, the death of long-time U.S. Representative and Civil Rights leader John Lewis, or the hopes for success and real change in the ongoing struggle for racial justice, I think the summer of 2020 will be one none of us ever forgets.

This has been an exceptionally busy summer in the department as well. Much good work has been accomplished to prepare us for a new academic year, even in the face of many uncertainties. For those of you who will visit our offices on the 9th floor, the renovations of 904 and 939 are nearly complete and the new furniture and technology has been installed. We will be creating new training materials so everyone can use the new technology in the coming weeks. Thank you to those of you who participated in the design workshops several years ago! It is great to see many of those ideas finally come to a reality. There is, of course, still more we can do to make our immediate physical work environment more inviting and conducive for our community. These are issues we will take up again, hopefully when the pandemic is under control.

For the time being, most of us, including our stellar staff, will continue working remotely from home to help slow the spread of COVID. Most of our fall courses will be taught online, and most of our interactions with each other will be limited to phone and video conferencing. You also should be aware that all three of our staff members have been asked by the Dean's Office to pick up additional duties to help out the department of Anthropology through the fall especially. Please be especially patient and supportive of them in the coming weeks and months. We will share more details about our fall office plans in the coming weeks.

This coming year promises to be a very busy one. We will need to continue to manage significant public health and budgetary challenges, and we also must complete our required formal Academic Program Review (APR) as well as many other more routine issues necessary to managing the department and our academic programs.

The most important work this summer, however, occurred in the many crucial conversations on how to make our department more intentionally antiracist and work together to address the legacy of white supremacy at GSU more generally. We have to thank the graduate students, and in particular the SGSA Board, for their courage in asking some tough questions and demanding action that we reflect more carefully and critically on how we go about our work.

To ensure that these conversations continue and that we work through the many interrelated issues, I have charted a tentative workplan for the coming year (see attachment). The plan takes ideas from the Accountability Committee, Executive Committee, and department leaders and lays out a series of topics to be addressed in a coordinated way. Specifically, it lists issues for our standing committees to discuss and then allocates time during our regular department meetings to consider specific proposals for change. Please know that this plan is intended to be a living document.

The specific topics and timing of particular conversations may need to change. My hope is to move away from our long-standing practice of using department meetings as reporting sessions to being more deliberative. Consequently, I will shift my practice to sharing critical updates via email, and I will ask our

administrative team to do the same this year. Of course, we may require additional meetings this year or next to make our department more deliberately antiracist.

The attached document also provides the dates/times of all of our department meetings for the coming academic year. Webex meeting invitations for the fall semester will be sent separately soon for you to add the department meetings to your calendar. As previously announced via email, we also have cancelled our traditional all-day summer retreat and replaced it with a series of three meetings in August (the first meeting will be on Friday, August 14th).

In closing, let me simply say thank you for the extraordinary work each of you have done this summer! I continue to be impressed by our dedicated students, staff, and faculty, and I very much look forward to working with each of you this coming year.

Best, Eric