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Subject: Social Media, Compassion and Self-Care

Hello Lawrentians,

I hope your first week back on campus for Spring Term has been a good one. In order to foster a more inclusive campus community and set the stage for us truly to be loving large at Lawrence as we finish the academic year, I would like to ask you to consider a different approach to social media. This technology has tremendous potential to help us connect to each other in positive ways. However, that potential is not being fully realized. We are connecting with each other but often in ways that are detrimental to our community and to our individual wellbeing. Given the reach of the internet, the effects are pervasive. For example, according to a recent Pew Research Center study 41% of adults surveyed indicated that they had been harassed online while 66% witnessed it. The majority of this harassment occurs on social network platforms.

Contrary to the impression left by our current social and political acrimony, we are social animals who thrive in cooperative groups. Consequently, we are hard wired biologically for compassion. Compassion is the sympathetic understanding of the suffering of others while also being moved to act to relieve that suffering. When we engage in compassion the pleasure centers of our brains are activated and soothing hormones circulate in our bodies.

Why then are we finding it so difficult to show compassion when using social media? One factor is the physical distance online. This causes us to miss many of the visual and tactile cues that signal compassion or the need for it. Another factor is anonymity which means that there are few immediate negative consequences for bad behavior. Likely the most significant reason why negative behavior fostering a culture of contempt persists on social media is because we reinforce it by liking it, disliking it, resending it and responding to it any number of ways. Currently, the more outrageous and extreme the content the more popular the post.

How can we do a better job of maximizing the positive potential of social media to help us connect while minimizing the negative? And how do we show greater compassion for ourselves and others in the process?

Don't feed the trolls

Attention is a powerful reward. Consequently, ignoring an online trouble maker is usually the most effective response. However if you feel like you must respond, share a clarifying fact or two and move on. This is a way to show compassion and to avoid becoming a troll yourself. It allows you to bask in the warm glow of the hormone oxytocin rather stew in the stress hormone cortisol.

Unplug regularly

Routinely plan time away from social media for an extended period, perhaps a few hours or even a day or two. This gives you a break from the stress of keeping up appearances, comparisons and the constant barrage of drama that can often live in these spaces. Practicing this type of self-care is important because becoming more compassionate, like any change, begins with you.

Know the rules

Learn the rules associated with use of social media and other technology at your school and workplace. You can find Lawrence University's social media policy here:

http://share.lawrence.edu/offices/human_resources/employee_handbook/Pages/employee_policies/social_media_policy.aspx

Also know how to report inappropriate behavior if you become a target or witness online harassment. At Lawrence you can report it using the bias incident reporting system, the Dean of Student's Office if you think it is a violation of the Social Code, and Campus Safety or the Appleton Police if it involves possible criminal behavior or someone who is not a member of our campus community.

For a more in-depth (and fun) look at strategies for maximizing the positive potential of social media I recommend Grace Bonney's *Modern Etiquette: Social Media Do's and Don'ts*. And to learn more about the science of compassion I suggest you read Dacher Keltner's *The Compassionate Instinct*. Both of these are available online.

Finally, I would like to bring to your attention two important upcoming events. First, our next Cultural Competency Lecture will inspire you to show compassion for the planet. The lecture is on April 9 at 11:15am in the Hurvis Room (225). Jason Brozek, Associate Professor of Government, will present "**Environmental Justice – Global Movement, Local Actions.**" The environmental justice movement is built on the idea that negative environmental consequences are disproportionately felt by vulnerable, marginalized communities. Therefore, to understand key environmental issues like climate change, deforestation and freshwater scarcity we need to understand its intersections with race, gender, and class. This discussion will explore the origins of the global environmental justice movement and connect it to local projects from students in the ENST 300 Environmental Justice symposium.

In addition, we are continuing our Truth and Reconciliation initiative with a panel discussion, "**Black Face on Campus,**" on April 16 from 7:00 to 8:30pm in the Warch Cinema. Panelists include faculty members Erica Scheinberg and Erin Dix, and student leader Shaun Brown. The panel will examine the history of minstrelsy, archival information regarding this practice at universities across the country including Lawrence, and current student reaction to related recent events. This panel is an opportunity to better understand a practice that ensconced many of the stereotypes we know today regarding African Americans in our national collective consciousness. To learn more about upcoming events and nominate someone for the 2019 Diversity and Inclusion Champion award visit our website: <https://www.lawrence.edu/info/offices/diversity-and-inclusion>.

Wishing you all the best!

Kimberly