

Editorial Introduction: Challenging ourselves for challenged times

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Introduction

2020 has indeed presented its challenges to all of us in the Communication Center community, as it has for most, if not, all. In fact, 2020 has itself become a cliché, a trope, a mantra, a scapegoat. For what did 2020 bring us within the United States? A global pandemic, police brutality and murders as symptoms of structural racism, Presidential elections, Zoom, virtual learning, facemasks, fake news, continued budgetary and resource crises within higher education, isolation, alienation, and so many seemingly unnecessary deaths. At the time of this writing, it is predicted that the United States will approach nearly half a million deaths due to COVID-19 by February 2021. And that number is more than that – that number is people, our friends, our relatives, our loved ones, our neighbors, and our strangers.

But 2020 is more than a number, a year, a time, a cliché. As communication educators, practitioners, and scholars we know better than to ascribe such agency and power *alone* to 2020. Each of the events, tragedies, deaths, are affective feelings are not isolated, but connected. Connected through structures of governance, connected through symbolic actions and inactions, connected through us. Importantly, these connections and what we did (or did not do) during 2020 did not impact everyone equally. Particular members, nations, communities, and eco-systems experienced the challenges of 2020 differently and more traumatically than others. Black, Indigenous,

and people of color have died at higher rates due to police brutality, climate change, and COVID-19. They have experienced more intense poverty, voter suppression, and education inequities. Furthermore, for many of these very same Black, Indigenous, and people of color, the brutality and differential treatment did not *just* begin in 2020. While what has occurred during 2020 challenged many for the first time or for the first time with such extreme intensity, the challenged times of 2020 delivered to most what Black, Indigenous, and people of color have experienced daily.

These challenged times call for challenging ourselves. We must move beyond the 2020 clichés, platitudes, and curses. We need to understand what role(s) we have played in making possible the challenged times that have become our collective mantra and scapegoat. We must utilize these challenges with care, reflection, patience, and grace as we move forward. We are grateful that the authors (and their work) in this volume help us, call us, and demand of us to do just that. As editors, we have been moved and pushed by the authors, reviewers, and editorial leadership.

The essays in this journal challenges us in several ways. First, we must intentionally, actively, and publicly commit to anti-racism within our individual centers or labs and as a community. It is both shocking and not surprising that very little has been discussed, shared, or published about our own roles in perpetuating anti-Blackness or our actions toward anti-racism.

Second, we need to strategically plan how to be more inclusive across different populations, to groups with different needs, and by leveraging different resources. This might mean adapting or designing programming for English-language learners, collaborating with university partners to increase accessibility for students with disabilities, or experimenting with different modalities like telephone tutoring and instructional interventions like yoga. Third, communication centers and speaking labs should rethink how we engage students, disciplines, and partners beyond the center and campus community. How can we position our centers as bridges to other disciplines (like science), to diverse communities and publics, and to our own campus communities. Finally, a thread throughout all of these challenges is how do we train, develop, and work with student tutors, consultants, and peer educators differently. Any meaningful change, every productive engagement, all challenges must go through, be implemented by, and championed for the student workers who tutor, consult, and educate.

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continuation of some and the beginning of others. We are thrilled and humbled to follow the work that these voices and ideas provoke.

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Finally, we owe our families an incredible debt for supporting us and sacrificing during already challenging times so that we could contribute to the publication of this volume.