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The Teaching and Learning Center is pleased to present the *Ten Questions For Faculty* series. The series is dedicated to helping faculty to stay connected with one another while working remotely. Every week, a faculty member will have the opportunity to answer ten questions about themselves and about navigating the changes brought about by COVID-19. This week, we are pleased to feature Dr. Cara Minardi-Power, Professor of English



Dr. Cara Minardi-Power
Professor of English

Where are you from?

I grew up in southern New Hampshire, but have lived in NH, MA, CT, TX, NJ, CA, IN, NV, GA, and FL, as well as overseas (South Korea). I consider Boston the home of my heart (not in the winter though!)

Which college or university did you attend?

The University of Massachusetts at Boston, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (BA 2001 and MA

2005/English Literature) and Georgia State University (PhD 2011/English Rhetoric and Composition)

When did you begin teaching at FSW?

I married and moved to Florida in 2017 and I started at FSW's Hendry/Glades campus in the fall of 2018. FSW was my first choice for employment. I feel lucky to be surrounded by colleagues on Hendry- Glades and on all campuses who care so much about teaching well.

What is your favorite food?

I am a foodie. I love food, shopping, cooking, reading recipes, kitchen gadgets, cooking shows, you name it. I just learned how to make gyros and it is my favorite thing for the moment (tzatziki sauce is just a wonderful thing because it is easy to make, tastes wonderful, and is healthy). We also recently bought an air fryer so I have been experimenting with it.

If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be and what would you ask them?

There are so many historical people I would love to meet for dinner and conversation. After thinking seriously about this, I would want to meet Plato because he has had such an impact on the world. I don't have one question I would ask him, but I think I would want to discuss the *Phaedrus* with him (to start, dinner would go very early into the morning, if I get to choose), particularly the parts about the soul.

What is your favorite local restaurant?

Izzy's in downtown Fort Myers. Great seafood.

What new things have you learned or done as a result of COVID-19 & working remotely?

We live in a condo, so we do not have the space for a garden and I miss growing vegetables and herbs. After doing some research about gardening in small spaces, we decided to start growing microgreens and, well, it is super fun! I planted radish, broccoli, peas, and a mixed lettuce blend and had shoots after just a few days. There is something about watching seeds turn into plants that is exciting and magical. I also find it very life-affirming and joyful (and of course, I cannot wait to cook with and eat them).

I am also doing as much online professional development as I can because I love learning about how to be a better professor, there is always so much more to learn. Doing summer professional development is pretty typical for me, although usually I spend the summer reading pedagogy; it is nice to have so much available through the TLC this summer online. I am definitely learning how to create better online courses and having the opportunity to work with colleagues synchronously or asynchronously is really a benefit, especially right now.

How do you think COVID-19 has changed the way we do things or has changed your outlook on life?

I think it has become clear to me that being grateful for little things is really important. Quarantine and social isolation have made me aware of how much I take for granted that I can do what I want when I want. It is not a given. I also tend to rush through life to get everything done that I think needs to be done. I suspect I will do less of that in the future by prioritizing the most important things and letting go of unimportant things. I want to be more mindful.

One thing I realized is that I am more of an ambivert than an introvert, so that was a bit of a surprise. I love teaching, but find teaching online a real challenge. I am so dependent on seeing students' faces to gauge their understanding and I work very hard to make my classes little communities. Since this pandemic has forced so much change, I expect we will be teaching online more overall and I want my classes to be engaging, fun, and helpful for students. It requires a lot of thought, knowledge, and planning to do well. I will need to learn a variety of ways to assess student performance online so that I can better understand their needs and be responsive.

In all, I will probably prioritize connection more than I have in the last few years and plan to be more proactive about reaching out to others, particularly in my personal life, which I tend to neglect.

What are you doing (exercise, cooking, reading, etc.) to take care of your mental and physical health during social isolation?

I perform better when I have a schedule, so I am maintaining some schedule regularity. I am determined to make a habit of working out so that when we return to campus, it will be a solid habit—so far, so good.

I like having quiet time, but it actually didn't take long for me to miss people. One of the ways I have taken advantage of so much quiet time is by calling people more regularly. We get so busy it can be hard to stay in touch with colleagues and friends from around the country, so I have enjoyed catching up and hope that I will maintain that habit over time. My closest friends and I are in regular contact and support one another as much as we can. It is helpful.

I also craft a lot. I just discovered alcohol inks. It is absolutely blissful to watch the ink move and bloom on a surface; I find it is meditative.

What advice do you have for your colleagues on how to navigate social isolation and changes from COVID-19?

I don't think I have any special wisdom on this topic. Figure out what you need and how to get it, be creative about options and possibilities. Don't be afraid to reach out. Find or make fun. Remember this won't last forever. Be patient and kind with yourself.

If you would like to be featured in the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*, please contact Kelly Westfield, Coordinator for the Teaching and Learning Center: kwestfield@fsw.edu

