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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 Jamie Votraw, Professor of Communication Studies.



**Jamie Votraw**  
**Professor, Communication Studies**

***Where are you from?***

I am from Malta, N.Y. – a town in upstate New York.

***Which college or university did you attend?***

I attended the State University of New York College at Oneonta for a B.S. in Communication Studies

and

a B.A. in Political Science. I earned my Master's Degree in Communication at the University at Albany,  
and I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Communication at the University at Albany.

***When did you begin teaching at FSW?***

I started teaching at FSW in Fall 2020!

***What made you become interested in your academic discipline?***

I have always had an interest in politics and law, and I worked as a Legislative Director for the New York State Legislature immediately after completing my bachelor's degree. I enjoyed researching and drafting legislation and working behind the scenes to help turn bills into laws. The experience amplified my interest in the role of women in politics, and so I pursued graduate studies in political communication.

***What jobs or positions have you held that were formative for you and from which you draw experience that shapes your approach to teaching?***

I teach communication courses, including public speaking. There was one professional experience early in my teaching career that had great influence on my approach to teaching. Before becoming an instructor of record, I spent one semester as a teaching apprentice, where I shadowed another public speaking faculty member. Too often, this Instructor made students feel uncomfortable in the classroom - in an environment where it seemed so obvious that encouragement was needed. Knowing that most students (and most people) are anxious about public speaking, I found this upsetting. I realized that student success in a public speaking course largely depends on a positive, supportive environment, where students can build confidence.

***What is your favorite food and favorite local restaurant?***

My favorite food is a good steak! Choosing a favorite local restaurant is hard as I've only lived in the area for 6 months, but of the restaurants that I have tried, I really liked Cantina Laredo and Thai Star.

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

I would have dinner with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a women's rights and suffrage movement lecturer and activist, and following her marriage to abolitionist, Henry Stanton, she became an anti-slavery activist as well. She was born in Johnston, N.Y., which is only about half an hour from my hometown. I would love to ask her about the challenges she faced while trying to advance the role of women in society. I'd like to hear, first-hand, about how she (and others during her time) coped with living in a world where women were not afforded the same fundamental rights as men. I would like to ask her, "Reflecting on the social issues we face today, what would be your next move?"

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

As a result of COVID and working remotely, I have come to realize how much I underestimated the value of the morning commute. My commute to campus was 15 minutes with no traffic, but easily an hour during the morning "rush hour". I used to think that it was such an inconvenience, thinking about the work I would get done if I could skip the drive or the extra time I could sleep if the traffic wasn't so bad. Now, I miss sipping on my coffee, having some quiet time to myself, laughing at the "Phone Tap" segments on the Elvis Duran and the Morning Show radio show. In some ways the drive was therapeutic, so COVID and working remotely have led me to appreciate something I previously viewed as a problem.

***COVID-19 has increased online learning, and as a result, the need for promoting inclusivity in virtual learning environments. What ideas can you share with your colleagues about how to ensure inclusivity in the virtual classroom?***

I think it's important to be flexible when it comes to online learning. I have 125 fully online students this term, which essentially means I have 125 classrooms. Students are learning from different locations, at different times, with access to different resources. To support students, I believe it's important to work

with them to find a pathway to success that aligns well with their personal circumstances. I do not believe that online teaching and learning is a one-size-fits-all deal. So, with the challenges brought on by the pandemic, to me, being inclusive means being adaptable.

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

The pandemic has certainly brought about new levels of social isolation. The social isolation first started for me back in March (in New York) when my work went fully remote, local businesses shut down (those open had restricted hours and/or designated hours by age group), quarantining was required, even in the event of potential COVID exposure (the local DOH would do daily home visits to check temperatures and verify people were home and not violating quarantine orders). That was an intense time. It was hard not seeing close friends and family.

After several months, my immediate family and a few close friends decided to create a small, safe social circle. I think some refer to this as a “quaranteam”, quarantine circle, or quarantine bubble – where a small group forms a closed social circle and essentially quarantines together. Even though there are still many activities that we are unable to do, having a safe, small social circle for support made all the difference.

If you would like to be featured in the *Ten Questions for Faculty Series*, please contact Kelly Westfield, Coordinator of Marketing & Technology for the Teaching and Learning Center: [kwestfield@fsw.edu](mailto:kwestfield@fsw.edu)



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