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To: [TLC](#)
Bcc: [Sarah Lublink](#); ["ryost@fsw.edu"](#); [mlaremont@fsw.edu](#); [Eileen DeLuca](#); [Martin A. McClinton](#); [ADMIN_CHA](#); [ADMIN_COL](#); [ADMIN_HNL](#); [ADMIN_LEE](#); [eLearning](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_CHA](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_COL](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_EOL](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_HNL](#); [FAC_ADJ_CR_LEE](#); [FAC_EOL](#); [FAC_FT_CHA](#); [FAC_FT_COL](#); [FAC_FT_HNL](#); [FAC_FT_LEE](#); [Lucas Center](#); [Melissa Rizzuto](#); [Rachel; Rebecca Yost](#)
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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 Katie O'Connor, Professor of Speech Communication.



Katie O'Connor
Professor of Speech Communication

Where are you from?

I was born in Fort Myers, FL but was raised across the river in Cape Coral. My whole family is from the northeast though so I guess that makes me a first-generation Floridian. I love the beach so southwest Florida was a great place to grow up!

Which college or university did you attend?

I received my BA in Communication (with a minor in Interdisciplinary Studies) from Florida Gulf Coast University in 2010. I then completed my MA in Communication with a concentration in Public Service from Monmouth University in Long Branch, NJ in 2013. I am currently a Doctoral Candidate at Antioch University where I am finishing up my Ph.D. in Leadership and Change with a concentration on Communication and Community Engagement.

When did you begin teaching at FSW?

I started teaching at FSW in Summer 2014 in a part-time capacity. I joined the full-time faculty this past year in Fall 2019. Being from southwest Florida I have seen the incredible impact that FSW has had on this community so I was thrilled to be here full time!

What is your favorite food?

Is it appropriate to say dessert? I have a bit of a sweet tooth.

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

This is a prompt I use in my Introduction to Public Speaking course for impromptu speeches so I have thought long and hard about my answer. While it changes often, I would have to go with Ida B. Wells. Wells was an American educator, journalist, and activist who was instrumental in the civil rights movement. She spent her life advocating against violence, sexism, and racism. She traveled the world as a public speaker enlightening people about civil rights issues. Considering all that is going on with the world today, I believe we can learn a lot from the wisdom of Ida B. Wells. I would love to ask her for advice on how we as a society can move forward to become more just and inclusive. What can educators do to further support our students? How can we inspire our students to continue to change the world?

What is your favorite local restaurant?

I'd have to say The Gathering Place in Fort Myers. The owners Tony and Shawn are wonderful and I love how involved they are with the local community. Not to mention their white chocolate raspberry cheesecake is heavenly.

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

Flexibility! I learned quickly that to get through this pandemic I needed to be gracious with myself and others. I learned to plan and to have multiple back-up plans. I have a one-year-old at home so the time with him has been wonderful. That being said, I thrive with structure. Learning to adapt and create a new type of structure for myself and my family has been very important!

I also have learned some amazing tips from my colleagues here and through various ListServ groups and online communities that I am a part of. Simple things like examples of discussion prompts, rubrics or apps to use in my classes have helped tremendously!

Lastly, I would say that I learned just how resilient our students are! I was blown away with their willingness to complete the spring semester online. Not only did they attend the optional zoom sessions, they learned how to complete their presentations in a digital format with little to no formal training. I was so inspired by their perseverance and tenacity!

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

I think COVID-19 has made me look at connections in a very different way. As a communication scholar, I love human connection. I was also a little "old school" in terms of using technology to communicate. Quarantine has allowed me to explore new methods and modes of communication that I would have never tried previously. I am finding value in apps and honestly, I think it has given me some better insight into Generation Z. I have found some really amazing virtual volunteering opportunities as well!

It has also solidified my outlook on the importance of family, friends, and community. I am so grateful for the time that I have had with my small family unit, but the pandemic made me miss my

larger extended family and friends so much! I was blown away as I watched people in Italy coming together by singing from their balconies...it made me realize just how important community is!

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

I took a huge leap and invested in a Peloton spin bike! I am pretty addicted to it. I have always loved spin class but haven't done it since having my son in March 2019. I have been able to catch up on some of my great dissertation research! I also started gardening! My son loves to be outside so I thought it could be a fun thing for us to do together.

Oh and I baked the obligatory Quarantine Banana Bread...that was a requirement, right?

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

My advice is to care. Care for yourself. Care for others. Connect with those around you in whatever way you can. Talk to your neighbors (while social distancing, of course). Whether it is a zoom meeting with a friend, or playing games via House party, make the connections that you are missing! Acknowledge that life looks different now and learn to adjust to the differences. We are all in this together!

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