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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 Mark Massaro, Professor of English.



Mark Massaro
Professor of English

Where are you from?

Danvers, Massachusetts. It was, originally, part of Salem, and all of the witch hysteria actually happened in present-day Danvers. It is about thirty-minutes North-East of Boston. We used to take the train into the city when we were younger. It was an amazing town to grow up in because it was such a small community. We had one high school, so there was a lot of town pride. We also had block parties, bonfire gatherings in the woods, deep seasonal weather, and very close friendships. That area

of Massachusetts is known as the North Shore.

Which college or university did you attend?

I was a bit wayward in my twenties, so I went back to school at twenty-nine, receiving my BA in English from Florida Gulf Coast University in 2015. Before that, I was convinced that the “open road” was my education, which meant that I worked a lot of customer service jobs and attended many music concerts. Then, in 2017, I completed my MA in English with a focus on 20th Century American Literature. It was a very tough decision because I appreciate literature from all cultures and eras, especially 18th Century British literature and Haitian literature.

When did you begin teaching at FSW?

After I graduated, I was an adjunct instructor at FSW and FGCU concurrently. I joined FSW’s full-time faculty in Fall of 2019 was excited to join such a talented and passionate group of people. I made some great friendships since then.

What is your favorite food?

It’s probably the New Englander in me, but any and all seafood, especially shrimp and lobster. Also, in the North Shore, roast beef sandwiches are a cultural staple. There are roast beef shops everywhere, selling different takes on seafood, burgers, and roast beef sandwiches. A North Shore roast beef uses very tender beef, American cheese on the bottom, and topped with mayo and a secret barbeque sauce. It’s the first food I seek out when I visit home, and the last meal before I have to leave.

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

Max Perkins. He was the literary editor at Scribner’s during the Lost Generation literary movement and the Jazz Age. He was the editor for Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, Rawlings, and many other writers. I can’t imagine what American classics would look like today if it wasn’t for Max, and not many people are even aware of him. He steered the writers to becoming the best that they could be and became a father figure to many of them. Sometimes he kept them financially afloat with his own money, particularly Fitzgerald, who tended to spend his money frivolously. Being able to cultivate those writers must have required a tremendous amount of patience, a deep empathy, and an astute, critical eye. I’d ask him his opinion on the current literary landscape and the overwhelming saturation with commercial fiction. In the last decade, it seems like there is a pattern of one book receiving success, and then being followed by many copycats. Even book covers look similar most of the time. It’s heartbreaking to see creativity lacking and a sudden abundance of writers mimicking a trend.

What is your favorite local restaurant?

La Casita on McGregor. It’s a quaint, little restaurant with authentic Mexican cuisine. They have very fresh ingredients, and we tend to order a little of everything: shrimp ceviche, guacamole, queso, tacos, and fajitas. They also have amazing chicken soup and seafood soup. And fried ice cream for dessert? Come on.

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

Luckily, I already had extensive experience teaching remotely, so it wasn’t a difficult transition for me. Although, I did learn how much support FSW provides for its professors. It seems like there has been an overwhelming amount of sharing. Every day, my email is flooded with technology tips, teaching pedagogies, TLC sessions, or file sharing. My lesson plans, assignments, and teaching pedagogies are always evolving, so I was very grateful to have the support.

Also, I was so impressed with the way my students adapted to the transition. It was seamless. We didn’t lose any time together and picked right up from where we left off from before the break. They all thrived academically, despite the emergency conversion.

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

I was very anxious for the first month or so. It was heartbreaking to watch the numbers of those effected continue to rise. Plus, seeing individuals attempt to profit by buying basic necessities in bulk broke my heart. It's a scary part of culture, witnessing people fighting over soap and toilet paper, stealing and scamming, or claiming that the disease was targeted at America, as if part of the planet's population was sacrificed in order to affect our nation somehow. It's 2020 and we're a first-world country. When I was younger, I hoped that mankind would be thinking globally and empathetically by now.

Because of that, this experience has solidified my belief that education is so important because of all of the misinformation and propoganda that is being passed around as credible evidence. The ability to assess, critique, and analyze information is vital, more now than ever.

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

I've mastered chicken noodle soup, chocolate chip cookie brownies, banana bread, and cinnamon, blueberry, and banana muffins. Honestly though, my wife and I have a one-year old baby boy and a ten-year old golden retriever at home, so it's hard to get bored. Both of us don't have much time to do anything other than take care of them during the day. I'm really appreciative of the fact that my wife and I can work from home while we spend time with them. We're lucky to have this time together. We watch *Sesame Street* in the morning, go for walks around the community lake, play games, Facetime with family, and read many *Berenstain Bears* books.

But my stack of unread books still looms large, and the blank page still stares. Working from home, taking care of our baby, cooking meals, and cleaning doesn't leave enough time for me to sit down to read or write. By the time the house is quiet, I'm staring at Netflix, exhausted.

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

There is always a good side of situations. Aside from being concerned for my family's health and safety, I realized that this is, probably, the only time in my life that I can stay in pajamas all day and still work. My son has been able to have both parents home, all day, every day, and this time together is irreplaceable. My advice for my colleagues is to stay positive and remain connected to their support system, even when these days look differently. Perception is everything.

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