



## College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences

January 13, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

Last Monday, I sat down to make my January to-do list. I went old school, writing down all that I hoped to accomplish, big and small, on a piece of lined paper. At the top of that list was the spring 2025 welcome back letter to CLASS. I carefully listed all the information I wanted to provide to you as a sort of “syllabus” for the semester. However, today doesn’t seem like the time for that letter. As we read statistics about the destruction caused by the fires, I am thinking about our colleagues and students for whom those 7000 lost structures includes their home –the couch they retreated to after a tough day, the kitchen where birthday cakes were baked, that door that sticks when it rains, and the driveway that was the center of their neighborhood of friends. The loss is unimaginable, except for those for whom it is reality. As I always do, in the face of feeling powerless to solve every big problem, I turn to those problems that are closest to me. In this case, I reflect on our CLASS community and our collective ability to help. I embrace the first goal that CLASS articulated:

***CLASS will be a community that welcomes, includes, and inspires trust. CLASS will be a working and living environment that centers belonging, transparency, access, and inclusion through clear and equitable processes, respectful communication, and recognition of contributions to our CLASS community.***

In writing this goal, the word “community” was chosen with great intention. Not just a workplace, not just a set of offices and hallways, not just a schedule of meetings, CLASS is a community of caring, striving, frustrated, frustrating, and brilliant students, faculty, and staff. In social psychology, we use the word entitativity to describe the degree to which a group is perceived as a cohesive unit, and research has found that identification with a highly entitative group alleviates existential fears and creates feelings of belonging and accomplishment. In other words, being part of a community enhances well-being. That is our shared goal for CLASS.

Right now, there are many sources of fear and uncertainty on the horizon. A new US presidential administration, budget cuts from the Governor’s Office, survival and recovery from the horrific fires that have decimated the lives and neighborhoods of our colleagues and students all loom. What we can do as a community, right now, is to come together to support one another. We can check-in on our colleagues, provide certainty, clarity, and stability for our students, and remember that everyone is doing the best they can with the best of intentions. I have already seen emails from faculty offering their homes to one another, seen collections taken up for colleagues who lost

homes, and people reaching out to help. It is uplifting to see this community come together. When it comes down to it, it is the people we see in those hallways and meetings that create the fabric of our lives. Let's continue to honor and build those relationships.

That letter full of updates and reminders will come later this week. It will include links to articles, dates of key events, and updates on important initiatives. I remain certain that we will do great things this semester, we will help our students get across the stage in May, we will applaud our colleagues, and we will take on new goals of our own. As the folks in the Dean's Office have often heard me say "We'll get there". I'd just add, "We'll get there, together."

Kindest regards

Cami