Hello everybody!

I hope your social distancing is going well. I wanted to make sure to let you know that JMU faculty and staff are here to support you during these scary times. I’ve talked to colleagues today, and—just as probably you are—they are also frightened and exhausted by the news and by their fears for their own families and friends. We do understand that the Corona virus chaos can interfere with our best-laid plans. So, we hope you are patient with your professors, but also that you’ll be in touch if things don’t work out smoothly with your online class participation, completion of assignments, and the like. Also, keep in mind that the JMU Counseling Center is still open for business. They have moved much of their work online, which I think makes it even easier to connect with them. I’ve posted the link to it on our front page in Canvas.

With all the mess that’s happening, I find it actually quite comforting to be able to work on something meaningful. So, here are some updates on class, and two activities that I’d like you to complete until next week.

First, we will focus on Supreme Court decision-making for the rest of the semester, as I had announced already on Monday. The focus will be on the following question: State and local governments interfere with civil liberties to prevent the spread of the COVID19 virus. Examples: I just read that the North Carolina Outer Banks have been closed for tourists. In New York City, restaurants are only allowed to provide take out, not sit in, service. What do the courts—the Supreme Court and the federal appeals court—have to say about this. What cases are there that deal with such emergency rules, and how far can governments go?

Second, since we are moving online, we should take the opportunity to improve our online working skills. Going forward, these will be important skills to have in today’s employment market. So there will be some instruction on how to be successful in online classes, and these are things that directly translate to other online environment.

Third, we need to be focused on maintaining some degree of community in this class. In online learning environments (woo, fancy word) it is easy to just work on one’s own and losing touch with others. This is a particular danger when one is in social distancing.

So, how do we work on these goals?

First, I will include a number of interactive activities in our class. To start with, I’ve created a virtual clubhouse on Canvas, a discussion board where we can talk about anything that’s interesting, relevant, remarkable, important, or just funny. You can find the clubhouse in the Canvas Modules.

Second, next week, you’ll find a number of activities about how to be an effective participant in online classes.

Third, here is an activity that will be due next Wednesday but that you can get started on already. What court cases (in the US Courts of Appeals or the Supreme Court) are relevant if we want to know to what extent the government can restrict civil liberties in times of disaster? Post your answers on a discussion board on Canvas (again under Modules).

I will upload short lectures like this every Monday and Wednesday until the end of the semester. If you have questions or comments, email me or stop by during my online student hours, Mondays 1:30-2:30, Tuesdays 11-1, and Thursdays 10-12. See you then!