

## A few thoughts as 2021 draws to a close

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on behalf of

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Dear Colleagues,

One of my favorite things about this time of the year is hearing your stories about how you make us *the most sought-after place to be a part of*. I love reading your award nominations. I am so impressed that despite everything you have going on, you still find time to write such detailed nomination letters. Thank you for doing this.

I attended a luncheon earlier this month in honor of our outstanding graduating seniors and teaching assistants. This year was especially moving as those in the room heard our faculty recognize our most outstanding students--and our most outstanding students recognize our faculty and staff. I don't think there was a dry eye in the room, along with riotous laughter.

For some, perhaps almost all of us, this break is critical as we are facing a severe risk of a pandemic of burnout. The walls are closing in, and many are frustrated. No matter what you have heard, burnout is real, it is important, and it has been "a thing" for decades. Psychologist Christina Maslach categorizes burnout within three modalities: exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of ineffectiveness, and she even has the Maslach Burnout Inventory for educators.

For many of you, this holiday season is one of long-awaited reunions with loved ones. Now, at the last minute and on top of everything else, we have the shadow of the Omicron variant hanging over us. Please remember that this highly infectious virus is at most as disease-causing as the Delta variant, and the best current evidence is that COVID caused by the Omicron variant causes fewer cases requiring hospitalization. The caveat is that many more cases of a disease that is less often severe on average can overwhelm hospitals, too. Our best defenses against this extremely infectious SARS-CoV-2 variant virus are to be as vaccinated as possible and to follow good hygiene practices. If we can all do these two things, we will be in the best pandemic position for the new year.

Whether or not you are feeling burned out, we all now have the opportunity for true respite. Please try to take this holiday season as true break. I will be doing so for the first time in over a decade. My holiday wish is that you will take the best chance you can during this closure to rest, relax and enjoy our gift of time.

Best wishes,  
Shane

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