



HONORS COLLEGE

DESIGN CULTURES CREATIVITY

Makers and Thinkers Transforming Society Through Digital Technologies

10 June 2022

Dear students,

Welcome to the 2022-2023 year in Design Cultures & Creativity (DCC)! As the interim Director of the DCC living-learning program, it is both my pleasure and delight to mark this exciting occasion alongside you. As you prepare to embark upon your first or second year at the University of Maryland, College Park, you may find that these days and experiences may be invigorating and exhausting, inspiring and overwhelming, affirming and confusing. Through it all, I am hopeful that I can be an effective instructor, mentor, supporter, and cheerleader to you.

I write to you today with the realities of our current world—on campus and beyond—at the forefront of my mind. Your university and DCC journey will begin in a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to steal the lives and livelihoods of so many people we love and care for, not only by the work of a quickly mutating virus, but through the tremendous failure of our institutions to disseminate accurate, reliable, and impactful information or deliver much-needed resources. Many among us are also members of communities who are increasingly targeted by racist violence, not only in our physical worlds, but in the digital spaces we inhabit online, where we are bombarded by images of Black, brown, and indigenous people being brutalized or murdered, or are subject to arguments and retorts that minimize or dismiss the consequences of systemic racism in our lives. Legislation being proposed and passed around the nation also seek to eradicate trans people from our society and, in doing so, diminish the protest and power of queer pride on jubilant and defiant display in so many of our cities and communities during this month of June. With each of these seemingly individual and local battles to fight, our society continues to struggle to band together to face the ever-present peril of climate change and the destruction of our planet. This is sadly and surely not an exhaustive list; at almost every turn, humans' rights to their own bodies and futures are being threatened.

Despite all this, everyone around you in these coming months will press you to be joyful, carefree, excited, and present in these moments. Doing so will be more difficult for some than others, and I want to acknowledge the confusion of what you may be feeling. Your generation is embarking upon your adult future while so much surrounding you is crumbling, is hostile, is uncertain. It may be hard to be hopeful, to feel optimistic, or to feel powerful about your own abilities to enter into this world and make your life meaningful.

You're not alone in this feeling. I share in this sensation with you. However, I also have the gift of perspective and can tell you now that *you were selected to join this program because you have already demonstrated the desire and capacity to be a powerfully creative person*. Among many, many competitive applicants to DCC, you stood out beyond measure. Your potential to bring forth a positive, impactful contribution to the world was undeniable. There may be many moments throughout the next few years where you have cause to doubt that; but, I will not. You—who you are, who you could grow to be, what you could create in the world—are the reason I, and so many other members of DCC's staff and faculty, show up to work every day. You inspire us, you give us hope, you give us a reason to believe that things will one day be better.

As much as we chose you, you chose us, too. I applaud you sincerely for choosing DCC as your living-learning program, because it means that we share a common belief: that creativity is a fundamentally important life skill. More than a hobby, a distraction, or decoration, **creativity is the critical impulse to imagine the world differently as it currently exists, bolstered by the capacity to develop skills and methods to make it so**. Whether in the realm of technological innovation, architecture, historical analysis, public health, graphic design, business, or the many other fields this cohort aspires to, you wield an appreciation for the power of creation and creativity—of making things anew. Your commitment to this fundamental belief is what will bind us all together—not only in DCC, but as we all move forth into the world in different and unpredictable ways.

I hope you can return to this letter in quiet or dark moments when you doubt yourself, and I hope you will soon find that your DCC community is a place where you, too, can feel supported and affirmed. I hope DCC will be a home for you—in all the ways a home should be safe, warm, and reliable.

I'm so looking forward to getting to know each and every one of you better. Until we meet at Summer Orientation or in August, when the semester begins, I wish you well. I hope you have a restorative, safe, peaceful, and happy summer. If there's anything I can do for you before you arrive on campus, please don't hesitate to reach out.

With much warmth and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jessica Lu', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Jessica H. Lu

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