Challenges Our Students Face

This week colleagues around campus offer us glimpses into the challenges that some of our students are facing.

First, from several colleagues in Student Life: Some of our students are suffering from Text-Fatigue. A lot of information is coming at them in written text form, even more than usual, and without any audio, in-person re-enforcement, or reminders of what is most important. Please consider if and how you can create some alternative or additional ways to disseminate or emphasize important information to students in addition to detailed written texts.

Second, it’s important for us to know that some of our students—and perhaps especially students of color—are truly struggling, facing challenges that are less common among majority culture students. I asked some colleagues in student life for examples. Here are three:

- Some of our students do not have stable or appropriate homes to return to. They are moving from place to place.
- In the state of Michigan, African Americans comprise about 14% of the population. Recent data indicate that among COVID deaths for which we have race identity information, around 40% of those deaths are African American.
- One colleague reported that she is getting a call about every other day from a student of color, about a death of someone in their circles of care, family, or friends.

As sociologist Robert Sampson of Harvard University said, “All the ingredients are in place for there to be sharp racial and class inequality to this ‘pandemic’.“* We are all facing stresses we didn’t dream of a few months ago. But now as much as ever, we need to be aware of how current events affect our students of color, and how our current crisis exacerbates racism and racial disparities. While the COVID-19 crisis is a trial for all of us, it is a cultural trauma for some of us.

- What the Racial Data Show
- Why Coronavirus is Killing African Americans More Than Others
- Stop Blaming Black People for Dying of the Coronavirus
- Why African-Americans may be especially vulnerable to COVID-19 *

* Pennylyn Dykstra-Pruim, associate dean for diversity and inclusion

Shout-outs – We’re all pulling together; let’s celebrate each other!

- Laura Champion and William Corner heeded the call to help the Grand Rapids police department and Spectrum Health. The Prince Conference Center, which is closed to the public, has opened its doors to medical personnel and police officers in case they need to quarantine from their families or are traveling from far distances in between shifts. The university is providing the rooms free of charge and is also allowing guests to order from Calvin Dining Services with free delivery.

- The whole Calvin community stepped up to make 500 cloth face coverings to ensure that every student who is still living on campus and every essential staff member who is regularly coming to campus has access to at least one face covering. The goal was met and exceeded in quick fashion. Thank you for keeping our Calvin community safe!
Dan Wells and other Hekman library staff developed and enhanced a technology in order to continue the work in the Calvin Prison Initiative in a digital format. The program is grateful for this groundbreaking work.

Katie Kunnen, a faculty member in the nursing department, headed to New York City in late March to help one of the areas with the greatest need for health professionals to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. She prepared online coursework for her students the week before she left, continued to check-in with them online, and modeled for her students the justice-driven, servant leadership values that infuse her classrooms and labs at Calvin.

Email any shout-outs about your amazing colleagues to Betsy Jacobsen (bij2@calvin.edu) for inclusion in a future Academic Bulletin.

Faculty, staff, and students Awarded External Grants and Contracts

Something to celebrate! Nine external contracts, grants, and fellowships were awarded to several colleagues and students(*) in March.

- Adejoke Ayoola (Nursing) for Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program, $15,000 from Institute of International Education.
- David Dornbos (Biology) & Andrew Vander Tuig* for Physiological Competitiveness and Management of the Non-native Invasive Shrub, Rosa Multiflora Thunb: $8,500 from Pierce Cedar Creek Institute.
- Keith Grasman (Biology) for Assessment of Population, Reproductive, and Health Impairments in Colonial Waterbirds Breeding in Michigan’s Areas of Concern and Grand Traverse Bay: $236,920 from United States Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Gail Gunst Heffner (Community Engagement) & Dave Warners (Biology) for GLRI Grand River Rainscaping Partnership: $202,390 from Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE).
- Retief Müller & Nellie Kooistra (Nagel Institute) for Engaging African Realities: Integrating Social Science within African Theology: $2,384,583 from Templeton Religion Trust.
- Carl Plantinga (Communication) for Screen Stories and Moral Understanding: $234,364 from Templeton Religion Trust.
- Ana Singh* & Deanna Geelhoed (Plaster Creek Stewards) for Michigan Sea Grant Intern 2020: $5,000 from Michigan Sea Grant (MiSG).
- David Martinez Vasquez* & Dave Warners (Biology) for Michigan Sea Grant Intern 2020: $5,000 from Michigan Sea Grant (MiSG).
- Brent Williams (Center Art Gallery) for Collection Assessment Program: $7,000 from Foundation in Advancement in Conservation.

Coming Up on Campus

Monday, April 20–Friday, April 24

- Daily chapels are posted here
- Cultural Competency Professional Development opportunities are posted here
- Faculty Senate meeting, Tuesday, April 21, 4:30 p.m. Senate meetings are now being held online, using Webex Events. If you would like a link to attend, contact Steve Kline (Office of the Provost), slk7@calvin.edu.
- President LeRoy Virtual Office Hours, Thursday, April 23, 4:00–5:00 p.m.