Week's-End Newsletter, October 16, 2020

Office of the Provost

Messiah University

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Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah University is a Christian university of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.

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Twenty-Twenty has been a year of firsts and here’s another first to add to the list: a Provost’s Office Newsletter from the Provost and Associate Provost. The purpose of this newsletter is to be informative in areas pertinent to educators (faculty and curricular & co-curricular educators) and to stay in touch with you through various updates and highlights. It isn’t meant to be comprehensive or to replace official communications – but it will be informative and a manageable length to digest! Typically, each newsletter will have four main parts: Informational updates, including those related to COVID-19; good news from around campus; highlights from higher education more broadly; and closing comments from Randy or Alison. So, sit back (masked and distanced of course!) and enjoy a short read from the first issue of “Week’s-End.”

Informational Updates

Provost’s Update from the Fall Meeting of the Board of Trustees Committee on Education

The Education Committee of the Board of Trustees met for its annual fall meeting on ZOOM on the evening of October 8. The primary focus of the meeting was to highlight what the educational division did to accomplish a successful start to the year and remain open for F2F residential education this fall. Emphasis was placed on a realistic assessment of the successes and challenges that we have and continue to experience. The committee was very impressed with the comprehensive and thorough nature of our summer preparation and ongoing response to the challenge. At the end of the meeting, the board members asked me to convey to all educators their support and deep appreciation for the hard work, vision, and resilience that has been demonstrated toward fulfilling the mission of the University during this trying time of the pandemic.

“The response of our campus community to COVID-19 has revealed resilience, adaptability, togetherness, creativity, and compassion. These responses have been responses of faith and a testimony to the deep commitment of our community to our calling as Christian educators.”

- Alison

In other news:

- Did you know? The University has a COVID Dashboard – if you’re curious about COVID-19 on campus, check it out. It’s updated every weekday by 5PM. We’re doing well at keeping numbers low on campus – keep up the good work!

- We heard some questions and some anxiety around quarantine housing on campus. We have several spaces on campus, and if things get too tight, we have backup plans with local hotels. Want to learn more about how Messiah cares for students in isolation or quarantine care? You can read the University’s FAQs or watch the video.

- On October 8 & 9, the University conducted the first set of population sample COVID-19 testing for on-campus undergraduate students. This helps us stay healthy and open for in-person instruction. Any related COVID-19 positive test results will be added to Messiah’s COVID-19 online dashboard on a rolling basis.
In a normal spring, the theater department’s Spring 2020 production of *As it is in Heaven* would have opened a week and a half after students and faculty returned from spring break. As it was, the word that classes were shutting down came on Thursday before spring break, giving director Daniel Inouye one final rehearsal before everyone left campus. “I made sure,” he said, “that we had one final run through of the complete play that evening, so at least the students would have that.” It was heartbreaking after so much work to leave the play with no performances before an audience.

As the department began to plan for the fall, they realized that the season they had planned before the shutdown would no longer work. While acting was not as dangerous as singing, actors projecting their voices in a large theater still emitted more particles than in normal speaking. It was clear that actors would need to wear facemasks and social distance, both in class and on the stage. Normal acting does not allow that, but the department found a solution in Greek theater, which was originally performed with masks, and which allowed for more separation between the actors. A fall season was planned with a tragedy, *Antigone*, and a comedy, *The Birds*.

Not only would the actors need to distance and wear masks, but if an audience was present it would be very small, and also distanced. To have any sizeable audience, the department would need to live-stream their performances for the first time. This meant learning new technologies, and designing sets and staging for cameras and camera lighting, not for a live audience.

It was only fitting that the first show to be performed would be *Antigone*, with Daniel Inouye as director. He had not directed to show in over a year because of the cancellation of *As it is in Heaven*. He was joined by Katie Phykitt, a senior music theater major who already planned to co-direct a different show for her senior project, a requirement for all dance and theater majors. Katie says of *Antigone*, “Every time I returned to *Antigone*, I noticed how the headlines I was reading and the dialog of the show continued to get closer and closer together, and even though it has been almost 2500 years, the similarities were just absolutely impeccable. It…inspired us to do a modern production of that and see how we could contribute to the conversation in a way that - because most of the arts and theater industries are shut down right now - how we could contribute our voices in that conversation that was kind of dead at the moment.” Thus, the production would open with chants of “No justice, no peace,” recorded from the summer’s protests. Katie said, “A timeless question, and a timeless demand. The way it translated so well to the show is both beautiful and terrifying.” Terrifying because so little has changed over 2500 years. The show was performed live for an online only audience for seven nights the first week in October. The result was a streamlined, powerful performance of the ancient, yet contemporary, tragedy.

### Higher Education Highlights

- Creativity and a sense of humor: [KGNS.TV reported](https://www.kgns-tv.com/) that at Laredo College in Texas, students performed a musical about the Covid-19 pandemic (which audiences watched from their cars!). Appropriately, the cost of a ticket was... $20.20.

- The Nobel Prizes for 2020 have been announced. Find out who won, and enjoy this Nest Video, tweeted out by Stanford University, [capturing the moment](https://twitter.com/stanforduniv/status/1297955776797190785) that winner Robert Wilson alerted his hard-to-reach fellow awardee, Paul Milgrom, in the middle of the night.

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Do you have something you’d like to see in the newsletter? We’d love to hear from you. Email provost@messiah.edu.
Higher Education Highlights, continued...

- This spotlight article of nearby Muhlenberg College gives insight into the questions being faced across higher education: it’s a process of embracing hope while confronting reality.

- The MacArthur Foundation announced this year’s 21 Fellows, recipients of the so-called “Genius Award.” Check out the bios and see how many you already know… and some interesting work you might want to learn more about!

Closing Thoughts

Contributed by Associate Provost, Alison Noble

Perhaps I should have taken it as a sign when January 2020 opened with a helicopter crashing in the backyard of a house on our street – just 6 houses down – with a portion of the tail propeller slicing through trees just feet from our living room. It was certainly a frightening event and a tragic one. Amidst the confusion and loss, families and neighbors came together to reassure one another, act as first responders on the scene, share information, help local police, and somehow try to make sense of it all. In many ways, COVID-19 has similarly fallen upon us unexpectedly and gives rise to many of the same feelings – disbelief, uncertainty, anxiety, and loss – though in a much more extended way than that night in January. And also like that event in January, the response of our campus community to COVID-19 has been similar – it has revealed resilience, adaptability, togetherness, creativity, and compassion. These responses have been responses of faith and a testimony to the deep commitment of our community to our calling as Christian educators. I believe it is, at least in part, because we are a community of people who has seen, time and again, the power of Christian higher education in transforming the lives of our students. Each morning that we log our temperatures and don our masks, we are saying together, “This is worth it” and to our students and to one another, “You are worth it.” This time we are living through is filled with uncertainty. But it is not uncertainty without hope, nor is it uncertainty in solitude. After tragically losing her father in 1865, the Swedish hymn writer Lina Sandell penned the now well-known hymn, “Day by Day” (Blott en Dag), a hymn of reassurance. While the first verse is better known, I’ll close my reflection today with the second verse – and with it my prayers for comfort and encouragement for each of us this week.

Ev'ry day the Lord Himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He whose name is Counselor and Pow'r.
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid;
"As thy days, thy strength shall be in measure,"
This the pledge to me He made