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Week's End Newsletter, November 14, 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.
It’s common practice around the world (though not-so-common in the USA) to reference week numbers to mark time. This weekend brings the end of Week 46 2020 and with that, we have just one more full week of classes before Thanksgiving Break. Enjoy this week’s updates as you recharge for the final days of fall semester.

### Informational Updates

- Educational Technology Services, in partnership with Faculty Development, gave an excellent and timely presentation on preparing for remote finals. If you haven’t checked out the resources yet, take a look before students head home for the break. Thank you to these teams for support throughout the summer and fall!

- If you’re a frequent checker of the Messiah COVID-19 Dashboard, you’ll see that we had an uptick in student cases over this last week. The outstanding employees at the Engle Center as well as the Messiah contact tracing team have been working diligently this week to care for those impacted and keep the community healthy. Thank you to faculty and staff who have reached out to assist students at this time.

- Information went out to students this week as a resource for departing campus ahead of the break and returning home safely. During the recess, similar information about returning to campus for spring semester will be provided.

### Good News on Campus

**Contributed by Dean of the School of Humanities & Interim Dean of BESS, Pete Powers**

In the mad rush we have come to call “COVID-time,” I’m used to describing my own life or hear others describe their lives as “busy” or “frantic.” We’re all “dog-paddling” or keeping our collective “nose out of the water.” Always rushed during the school year, COVID seems to have added an extra gear that gets the wheel of our days spinning yet more rapidly, even as we wait endlessly for a Thanksgiving, a day that seems, like a point in Zeno’s paradox, to be ever closer and yet just as far away as ever.

Even so, when I’ve had a minute to pause and observe in the middle of all piles of things I must get done, I’ve also been struck by the ways our lives seem to be continuously marked by two other, less frantic words: creativity and connection. Although COVID has been an experience of tremendous and widespread loss—of our normal ways of doing things at which we excelled, of our usual times of rest or worship, and even for many of us the loss of friends or family—it has also given opportunities for newness and, surprisingly, for connection. As I observe faculty and students at work I
am constantly impressed with adaptability and creativity in their finding new things to do or their efforts to do old things in new ways. In the Department of Communication, faced with the inability to cover sports events in his photojournalism class, David Dixon, co-chair of the department, has assigned his students to cover seasonal changes and campus beauty as a different form of journalism. In English, students in Young Adult Literature are using digital tools to explore the moral universe of Young Adult texts, and in Writing for Social Change students are developing digital writing campaigns to promote learning about issues such as mass incarceration, immigration, and gender in the church.

I've perhaps been most impressed with the ways in which faculty and students have creatively promoted human connection and community even in the midst of a world of social distancing. Kudos to Valerie Lemmon, Professor of Psychology and Assistant Dean of Business, Education, and Social Sciences for working with Stephanie Patterson to develop an alternative form of a school meeting so that faculty can greet each other, talk with each other, pray for one another outside the normal confines of a business meeting. The Department of Education has celebrated the new book just published by Obed Mfum-Mensah via zoom. The Messiah Council on Family Relations from HDFS sponsored a cooking show featuring student Tariah Rozier demonstrating her skills at cooking Halloween treats. The COMM department bridged the curriculum and social connection by having the Event Planning class create virtual events for students and faculty that would promote community in the department. Education students have been stepping up to fill critical substitute teacher needs in the region, an effort that helps our local schools and their students and teachers while also enhancing their own experience as teachers.

There are, to be sure, so many ways in which we may find COVID-time constraining, preventing us from doing what we might otherwise prefer to be doing. But I also discern enabling constraints, all the ways in which the difficulties of our moment are pushing us to a creativity, and to a community, that we might not have otherwise realized. In all these ways and many, many more, I see faculty and students responding to constraints with creativity that sustains community. A blessing even in the midst of busyness.

Higher Education Highlights

- On Monday, President-elect, Joe Biden’s COVID-19 task force was announced. It is notable that eight of the members are affiliated with academic institutions. (Stat)

- News this week from Guilford College, a school in North Carolina that has roots in the Friends tradition, details the elimination of almost half of its academic majors. (News & Record)

- Federal data show a notable contraction in the higher education work force this year, with losses correlated with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. (The Chronicle)

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