A Bright Future

LGBTQ graduates remain hopeful despite turbulent times.
Pride In Who You Are
And Where You Belong.

At Texas A&M University, a reputation for friendliness is a source of pride. Along with honoring his dad's Aggie legacy, it was a big reason Bradley Matthews found himself here.

What forever changed his perspective on camaraderie and community was finding Aggie Allies, a group dedicated to creating a place of belonging and acceptance. Started in 1993, the group has played an integral role in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender advocacy and education.

As a student and in his current role on campus as assistant director and instructor, Bradley has witnessed a change taking place – evolving from tolerance to celebration. Together, he's proud to positively impact the lives of others by helping them reach their full potential through self-reflection, empowerment, and acceptance of who they are.

**Pride On Every Front.**

Bradley Matthews
Assistant Director
Career Center

[Image of Texas A&M University logo and diversity.tamu.edu]
THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

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Experience Counts

From hosting the first R&B radio show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to establishing her own consulting business, Shaashawn S. Dial has undergone several career changes. However, higher education was an area that she always returned to.

Upon graduating with her master’s degree from Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, her first experience working in higher education was as an adult basic education coordinator at Harrisburg Area Community College. She taught subjects for the GED test as well as supervised other teachers.

“That’s where I realized that so much of education is being a cheerleader for folks, it is identifying how they were failed or what they need a second chance at,” says Dial, director of diversity, equity and inclusion at Stephens College. “And teaching to that and then the actual academic material is really second. It’s about people and connecting.”

After feeling burned out, Dial shifted to radio. She became the program director of Harrisburg’s WTCY1400 AM “THE TOUCH” as well as created and hosted “The Shaashawn Dial Show: A Dial Movement,” which was broadcast during the week.

“My physical voice] was something people have complimented me on my whole life,” says Dial. “They’ve either said you should sing or do radio and you don’t want to hear me sing.”

After five years, the radio station downsized and Dial returned to higher education full time as an adjunct professor at Central Pennsylvania College. Over an almost five-year span, the job turned into a peer mentoring position and she eventually became director of advising.

“That’s definitely where I knew I loved higher
education] and would always love for it to be part of my portfolio,” she says.

As someone who is Black and queer, Dial says it is “imperative” that she always has multiple strings of income and that her career should always be thought of as a portfolio.

In 2015, after leaving the institution, she launched her own consulting business named Voycetress Media, LLC. The name was inspired by women who speak their mind in any situation.

“I still have that to this day and love it but it was just difficult for that to be my only revenue at that time,” says Dial.

While working at her consulting business, she was approached to serve as director of equity and affirmative action for the city of Harrisburg.

However, as an alumna of Stephens College, an all-female institution, Dial always found herself searching for similar women empowerment environments in her career.

“I’ve wanted little ecosystems where women could explore themselves mentally, physically, spiritually, academically, economically, sexually,” she says.

In September, she received the opportunity to go back to her alma mater to serve as the director of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

“The opportunity to actually go back and immerse myself in [Stephens] 20 years later, knowing the positive impact it had [on] me as an 18 to 22-year-old undergrad, is just too good to be true,” says Dial.

She has enjoyed being back in an environment that holds the goal of “unapologetically educating women.”

“I think that mission has always been needed and I think it will always be needed but we also [are] up against the reality that we are only one of 32 women colleges left in the country,” Dial says.

With this only being her second DEI position, Dial “believes” that she brings a different set of skills to the job.

“I think it’s the fact that I can identify the seams and thread through broadcast radio, through human social services, through higher education, through entrepreneurship with running your own small business,” she says. “That informs a lot of my work.”

Among her first actions when she assumed the position of DEI director at Stephens College last fall was attending around 40 different events on campus. She will continue to document every fall and spring event moving forward.

“Stephens is trying to be everything for everybody like most institutions and so events was a very central way for me to begin to make change around diversity, equity and inclusion,” she says. “We can’t make change if we don’t know what we already do.”

Additionally, she is working to put a more formal facilitation training program in place as well as working to increase faculty and staff diversity, continuing discussions about women and non-binary folks on campus and building more aspects of community.

“So much of my work is in building core [community] and building trust,” Dial adds.

Alongside her current position, Dial is working towards a doctoral degree from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. This fall, she will defend her dissertation which is focused on documenting queer and transgender people of color’s experience in the workforce.

– Sarah Wood
spectrum

Choosing Equity Over the SAT/ACT

The University of California (UC) will scrap the SAT/ACT standardized exam requirement for undergraduate admission by phasing it out through 2024 and completely eliminating it for California students by 2025, reported the Los Angeles Times and The Mercury News.

UC has been debating the use of the SAT/ACT for a while now, even as there has been growing opposition to standardized tests by advocates who say they put vulnerable students at a huge disadvantage given their socioeconomic inability to prepare for them. The decision by UC, one of the country’s top public university systems, is expected to have a ripple effect across the higher education landscape.

UC president Janet Napolitano, too, has talked about “the correlation of the SAT and the ACT to the socioeconomic level of the student, and in some case[s], the ethnicity of the student.”

In fact, the decision by the UC board of regents appears to have been informed by an earlier recommendation of Napolitano’s. In an ‘action item’ memo to members of the university’s board, Napolitano had earlier recommended the suspension of SAT/ACT as a requirement for admissions until 2024. She also recommended the institution create a new test “that better aligns with the content UC expects applicants to have learned and with UC’s values.”

“It is an incredible step in the right direction toward aligning our admissions policy with the broad-based values that the university has identified,” said John Perez, chair of the UC Board of Regents.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, UC has already removed the SAT/ACT requirement for fall 2021 admissions.

HBCU Becomes Little Richard’s Final Resting Place

Rock and Roll legend Little Richard, who died of bone cancer on May 9, has been buried at his alma mater, Oakwood University, a historically Black institution in Huntsville, Alabama, reported the Associated Press.

Little Richard was born Richard Wayne Penniman. He grew up in Macon, Georgia, and rose to fame in the 1950s, according to an obituary of the artist in People magazine. He studied theology at Oakwood University in the late 1950s, said his close friend Pastor Bill Minson.

Peterson Hall, the men’s dorm on the Oakwood campus, was Little Richard’s home when he first arrived in Huntsville, said David Person, spokesman for the Penniman family, to WAAY 31.

“Oakwood University or Huntsville may not have been Richard’s, I’ll say, familial home, but I would say in many ways, it was his spiritual home,” said Person.

Little Richard was cited as an influence by several artists including The Beatles, Elvis Presley and The Rolling Stones.

“The Beatles were opening for him at one point, not him for The Beatles. I mean you realize that when he said that he was the architect of rock and roll, I think he was right,” said Person.

poll

The following are results from our latest online poll:

In light of what you’ve learned about the pandemic so far, how does your college or university plan to conduct Fall 2020 classes?

- online 17%
- on campus 12%
- a mix of both 30%
- undecided 41%

Visit DiverseEducation.com to participate in our online polls.
Members of the class of 2020, their families as well as faculty and staff members from colleges and universities across the country gathered online May 23 for a virtual national Lavender Graduation ceremony.

Given the cancellation and postponement of commencement ceremonies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Campus Pride and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) National decided to host the virtual ceremony on social networks such as Facebook and YouTube as a way to honor the achievements of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) students and allies.

“During these difficult times of physical distancing, it is wonderful to have colleges and universities nationwide come together remotely and celebrate our LGBTQ+ and ally graduates,” said Fanny He, assistant director of student activities and inclusivity programming at Marymount Manhattan College. “We hope students and community members watching the virtual Lavender Graduation feel a sense of pride, accomplishment and solidarity.”

Shane L. Windmeyer, founder and executive director of Campus Pride, said that graduation, especially for someone who identifies with the LGBTQ+ community, is a “unique time” because each day of their existence can be a challenge on a college campus.

“So our goal [was] to really create a digital milestone that people can look back on or watch and really feel like, ‘Wow, this is something special and I’m glad that I was able to create a memory through this digital graduation,’” he said. “That’s ultimately what graduation day is all about, creating memories with your family and friends.”

Diego Sanchez, director of advocacy, policy and partnerships at PFLAG, began the ceremony by discussing how his life started with uncertainty. At the age of five, he found the courage to tell his parents he was born “wrong.” His parents both left the room and his mother came back with a magazine that featured Christine Jorgensen, who is recognized as the first individual to undergo sex reassignment surgery in the U.S.

“My mother said, ‘I don’t know if there are others like you who are born a girl and know that they are a boy,’” he said. “But this woman was born a boy, grew up to be a man and then eventually became herself. So, it’s okay for her and it’ll be okay by the time that you grow up.”

Additionally, as a first-generation college student himself, Sanchez recognized the importance behind a graduation celebration.

“While this may be a moment of unprecedented certainty, there is no bigger time or opportunity for you to embrace the creativity that is highest when you’re young than right now,” he added. “It is okay to worry but it’s also okay to be creative and fearless. You have been educated now in a way that lets you celebrate yourselves. Your PFLAG family also celebrates you and joins you in this journey.”

This year also marked the 25th anniversary of the...
Lavender Graduation, which was established in 1995 at the University of Michigan (U-M) by author and LGBTQ+ historian Dr. Ronni Sanlo. “It astonishes me that something that I created 25 years ago still exists and has grown across the country,” she said. “Not only are colleges and universities around the country hosting Lavender Graduations, but high schools are now beginning to do the same. So are community centers and other social organizations.”

In the spring of 1994, Sanlo was hired by U-M to be the director of the then-Lesbian and Gay Male Programs Office. When she arrived, it was commencement season and she noticed many African American and Native American students wearing kente cloth over their graduation gowns. “I asked about the beautiful cloths and learned that African American and Native American students celebrated graduation ceremonies that were designed just for them, to honor their history and their time at the University of Michigan,” she said.

After having discussions with LGBT students on campus, Sanlo found that many felt “miserable” on campus due to discrimination and isolation. “It saddens me to know that students felt that way about their college experience,” she added. “I had graduated from my undergraduate years in 1969 and remember those years, in spite of the fact that I was closeted, as among the best of my life. And then I remembered my lesbian and gay students. I envisioned them wearing rainbow tassels and Kente cloths and celebrating their lives and their sexual identity as part of their graduation.”

Now, 25 years later, Sanlo gave remarks and told her story during the virtual commencement ceremony.

When Sanlo came out as a lesbian, she lost custody of her two young children in 1979. “By 1995, though I no longer had my own children, I did have other people’s beautiful LGBTQ children for short periods of time,” she said. “I had not been invited to my children’s graduations, so I threw my own, called it Lavender Graduation and celebrated the lives of my precious students, you. To honor your lives and achievements and scholarships, your gifts to the academy.”

The Lavender Graduation’s name was inspired by the colors black and pink, which were the colors of triangles that lesbians and gay men were forced to wear in Nazi Germany’s concentration camps. She originally thought that black and pink combined created the color lavender. “It doesn’t as it turns out,” she said. “But my intention was to celebrate the memory [of] our lesbian and gay foreparents who died in the Holocaust in World War II.”

During her speech, Sanlo encouraged graduates to pay attention to their dreams and ignore those who tell them they can’t change the world. Additionally, she stressed the importance of knowing LGBTQ+ history, being an ally of all, supporting schools’ LGBTQ centers and Campus Pride and opening a 401k to plan for retirement in light of the uncertainty.

“As an activist and an educator, I thank you for the gifts you have given to your campuses,” she said. “I celebrate you for your scholarship, your campus engagement, your tenacity and your efforts for making your communities richer and more welcoming. I am incredibly proud of you and I want you to be proud of yourselves as queer people, as allies, as lavender people graduates.”

In addition to speeches from Campus Pride partners, higher education officials and prominent figures in the LGBTQ+ community, congratulatory messages continued to pop up on the screen. Additionally, around 20 schools, such as Napa Valley College and Marymount Manhattan College, sent in videos from faculty members and students to share their stories and messages of hope for the class of 2020.

“We hope students hear from people around the country” regarding “how much we admire their courage and bravery as well as their academic achievement as noted by their graduation from college,” said Greg Miraglia, acting senior dean for career education and academic pathways at Napa Valley College. “We hope students will feel part of a large community with lots of support.”
Dr. Delia Fernandez — an assistant professor of Latinx history at Michigan State University — teaches her online classes and works on her book manuscript during the three hours a day her one-year-old son takes a nap.

After her partner left for army reserve duty, she suddenly found herself single parenting while working toward tenure during a pandemic. She was relieved when Michigan State University announced it would extend junior faculty’s tenure clocks by one year.

It’s “one of the most basic things universities can do to support their junior faculty … because the idea of research productivity, or any productivity at this time, is kind of absurd,” she said.

More than 240 universities are offering tenure clock extensions to junior faculty to ease the pressure as the coronavirus upends research and routines.

But some faculty are concerned about whether extensions alone account for academia’s disparities.

Minority scholars are underrepresented, especially among tenured faculty. People of color made up 27% of junior faculty in fall 2017, but only 19% of tenured professors, a 2019 Pew Research Center study found. Meanwhile, Black and Hispanic faculty comprised 4% of assistant professors but only 2% of full-time professors overall that same year, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Dr. Patricia Matthew, an associate professor of English at Montclair University, is in favor of tenure clock extensions, but she’s concerned junior faculty of color may face an extra layer of setbacks during the pandemic. A yearlong pause may not be enough, said Matthew, the editor of Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure, a 2016 book in which she explored the inequities of the tenure system.

“COVID is disproportionately affecting Black people and people of color,” she said. “Black faculty are not exempt from that. People will be mourning, people will have increased responsibilities and less of a support network … I think once universities are safe and people can live something like their normal lives, you can start the clock again.”

Dr. Tacuma Peters, an assistant professor of philosophy at Michigan State University, and his partner have already lost members of their families to COVID-19. “As a Black man from Spanish Harlem, New York … I know that the outsized impact of the first wave of the pandemic is really going to affect the people I know and love,” he said.

Meanwhile, he and his colleagues can feel “re-traumatized” when they turn on the news, he added. “The news is not just the news that people have died,” Peters said. “The news is … that a disproportionate amount of people have died because of the racial structure of society and the inequalities and the violence within it.”

To him, that feels like an old story — one he’s seen over and over again — but “it’s always disappointing,” he said. “It’s always surprising, it’s always traumatizing, it’s always hurtful, it’s always angering. It brings out a host of emotions that are continually there or reactivated.”

With that as the backdrop of daily life — and a fraying academic support network as mentors confront challenges of their own — he fears it’ll be even more difficult for junior faculty of color to be productive over their yearlong extensions, worsening existing biases in the tenure process. In this crisis, he thinks there needs to be “even more targeted, thoughtful, community-oriented, back-and-forth dialogue about how faculty of color can be supported” along the tenure track.

In addition to that challenge, Matthew worries that the kinds of work that tend to attract minority faculty will be hard hit by the crisis, putting their job security at risk.

For example, she pointed out that, for many univer-
Noteworthy News

Universities, areas like ethnic studies, African American studies and Latinx studies are programs, not established departments, so these disciplines could be cut if schools tighten their budgets, she said, at a time when the country “needs that work more than ever.”

Dr. Ebony O. McGee, associate professor of diversity and STEM education at Vanderbilt University, added that qualitative research about racial inequities often involves “face-to-face” fieldwork with underrepresented groups, work that can’t easily be done at home.

“Sometimes you can’t replace that,” she said. “It may impact, through no fault of their own, the quality of the research they’re getting through these interviews and focus groups and counternarratives.”

At the same time, universities are already freezing internal research grants, and McGee worries junior faculty of color will lose their funding. She finds that external funders can be reluctant to sponsor work related to race, so faculty of color doing that kind of research rely more heavily on the types of grants universities are currently suspending.

In addition to tenure clock extensions, McGee recommends universities also extend funding to make sure junior faculty of color can continue their work to whatever extent possible during that time.

She also advised that departments put more weight on service in tenure cases. In general, junior faculty of color spend more time mentoring students than their peers, which takes away time from research, she said, and that dynamic hasn’t changed; it’s just moved online with minority faculty virtually counseling their students.

For Fernandez — as she juggles research, teaching and childcare responsibilities alone — the most important thing is that departments have clear expectations for junior faculty, and those expectations can’t be heightened productivity during the yearlong pause. While some might be able to use the extra time for research, the most impacted faculty won’t have that luxury, and she believes “if you help your most vulnerable populations, you help everybody.”

Universities need “to be clear that during this one-year delay, we’re not expected to produce more,” she said. “This is a real stop. This is a real freeze, as if this year didn’t exist.”

BY PAREENA G. LAWRENCE

There is both hope and important lessons we can glean from the experience of the Antonine Plague that nearly ended the Roman empire 200 years ahead of schedule. Roman society, however, under Emperor Aurelius rebounded after the Antonine Plague of 165 CE, the exact nature of which remains unknown. The empire under Marcus Aurelius, according to historian Edward Gibbon, was a time when “the human race was most happy and prosperous,” even though it encountered enormous and enduring human misfortunes. There are important parallels between the Roman Empire of the second century CE and current U.S. society as both enjoyed superpower status when it came to military might and dominance with respect to culture, economics, and politics. The success of the Roman empire was attributed to good governance that emphasized community, planning, and working together to rebuild. So, which lessons are transferable as we navigate through the present global pandemic and crisis?

As leaders and members of the higher education community, we have an important role to play by drawing from these lessons and implications, from rebuilding community outreach and partnerships, engaging in new research with an increased emphasis on fiscal and social responsibility, to providing lessons in wide-ranging broad-based planning and coordination. In this essay, I could focus on the financial implications and the decimated business model or the new modes of more effectively delivering education from online learning to stackable micro-credentials. Nor is this article about the wrap-around services that are necessary for our students to succeed in college, services like advising, tutoring, access to technology, a support structure of friends and other members of the community, healthcare and counseling, and basic needs such as food and safe spaces.

Here I focus on one critical question that is relevant to the future of higher education institutions: what can you teach me that specializing in my discipline/major cannot? Or the bigger question, why should I attend a traditional college that was founded on the principles of a liberal arts education? What will I learn that is so different?

A recent article, The End of Economics, by Fareed Zakaria, reminded me of how academic specialization and the division of various academic fields by subject matter have impacted the academy, research programs, policymaking, and the workplace. My discipline, economics, typically studies the allocation of scarce resources with prices serving as the primary signaling mechanism, and the construct of markets and economic organizations. Disciplines can also be defined by methodology or approach; for example, economics could be defined by how it approaches decision-making, centered on models of rational optimization. However, as one might suspect, subject matter and methodology do not perfectly intersect or line up together.

As an example, for the past 30 years, behavioral economics has established an increasingly strong foothold in understanding the role of human behavior in economic decision-making. Leading research in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, and sociology, among others, influence our understanding of the behavior of consumers, producers, workers and investors as economic agents and question the dominance of the rational optimizing model as the primary framework to study economic problems. Methodologically, economics has learned a lot from the use of randomized control trials that first originated in the field of early medicine and then psychology. These connections across disciplines are easier to make if one is intentionally exposed to different approaches across the curriculum, and we purposefully spend time on reflection and making meaningful connections across the core
And that is a good thing for all of us, especially those of us that have argued that disciplinary boundaries are human-made and they must be questioned and crossed to better understand the messy world we live in and to address the complex problems that we face that are not solvable within the domain of a single discipline. The often-maligned liberal arts core curriculum — also called the general education program when done right — offered by universities and colleges in the United States, offers the best solution to train our minds to think creatively in holistic ways that are not confined to disciplinary thinking and a single way of knowing. This curriculum is founded on the principle that there are multiple ways of knowing and developing an understanding of how human knowledge allows us to step outside of our disciplines and our familiar methodology of addressing problems to think outside our disciplinary box.

The coursework that makes up the core liberal arts curriculum develops breadth of knowledge and perspective as students explore how the study of history helps us to understand the human experience and evaluate and conduct historical research. A course in science helps us better comprehend the natural world and the processes of scientific experimentation to create scientifically literate citizens. This approach is precisely what we need if we are serious about addressing complex real-world problems that do not nicely fit into one of the human-made disciplinary confines we have created.

However, the all too typical smorgasbord approach to general education that we currently have, where students take required courses from a list of alternatives “to get them out of the way,” is the wrong approach. At many schools, students must take anywhere between 30 and 60 credits of core curriculum coursework. That is a full one to two years of coursework. What a shame if we treat it as something to get out of the way, which keeps them from learning what they came to college to learn. We must be more intentional in our approach as we craft a core curriculum that delivers on developing breadth in knowledge and exposes our students to how different disciplines approach the pursuit of knowledge and understanding issues in their respective fields. It is not enough to introduce our students to the different disciplinary dots, we must help them to connect these dots in a coherent way.

Further, it must go beyond coursework. As we re-envision pedagogy and engagement and blur the boundaries between the academic world and the world that surrounds us, how can we intentionally help our students understand and untangle complex problems in our communities? Can we develop community-based learning projects that engage students with their communities and ask them to use their multidisciplinary skills to better understand and seek creative solutions?

Perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic will serve as a great reminder that we need an integrated multidisciplinary lens to create better models, predictions, and policies to understand, prevent and contain the pandemic. The global economic and other consequences of this pandemic and policy responses can be best understood via the lens of philosophy (utilitarian theory), history (past plagues), geography (spatial human interaction patterns), politics (government and power structures), science (understanding scientific research methodology and protocols) and the limitation of technology (assuming it will solve all our problems) to list a few interconnected disciplines. I cannot think of a better way to prepare leaders, change-makers, and professionals of the future than grounding them in the foundational principles of the liberal arts curriculum that’s built on intentionality, seeing connections and understanding diverse disciplinary perspectives and traditions, understanding ambiguity, confronting the fact that we do not know and do not understand, and integrating that knowledge when solving complex problems or confronting messy conundrums. We must reclaim who we are, even as we adapt and lead in meeting current and future societal needs. We are more than a credentialing center, we are first and foremost a learning and a knowledge creation center, serving the greater good, that is intrinsically connected to our surrounding communities and region which makes standardization in higher education both difficult and undesirable. Reclaiming our larger diverse purpose is critical as the very future of higher education depends upon it.

Dr. Pareena G. Lawrence is a visiting fellow at the MacMillan Center at Yale University. She is the former president of Hollins University.
On the Sidelines

College sports stakeholders preparing for a COVID-19 new normal.

By Lois Elfman

Athletic directors, coaches, conference commissioners and student-athletes await a clear vision of what the future holds. Campuses throughout the U.S. are closed except for essential staff and, in some cases, a limited number of students who are allowed to remain in the dorms due to lack of anywhere else to go. Classes are being taught online and no athletic competition is taking place. Student-athletes are trying to follow workout regimens provided by coaches. Everyone involved in intercollegiate athletics wants to know what’s next, but no one has the answer.

“There has to be an economic plan as to how we sustain ourselves through this period, but we don’t know how long this period is going to be,” says Kery Davis, director of athletics at Howard University, which competes in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC), made up of all HBCU schools. “We’re trying to cut as much as possible with the idea that we have to keep an eye on how we look when we get to the other side of this. We don’t want to decimate our department … so that we can no longer compete.”

One thing known for sure is that the annual disbursement of funds from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to Division I institutions based on revenue from the Men’s Basketball Tournament has been drastically reduced. In late March, the NCAA announced the distribution to Division I conferences and institutions would total $225 million, which is less than half of what was anticipated prior to the cancellation of the tournament.

“None of our budgets really have a lot of fat in them,” says Teresa Phillips, director of athletics at Tennessee State University, the lone HBCU in the Ohio Valley Conference (OVC). “When you lose $300,000 or $400,000 from your NCAA distribution — even if it’s just for this year — you have to think, ‘Where are we going to get this $400,000 from?’”

By the numbers

Athletic departments are trying to figure out...
budgets, but there are many questions, the primary ones related to football. For those HBCUs that compete at the Division I level and play football, a huge source of revenue is guaranteed games against high profile opponents early in the season. Both Davis and Phillips estimate the loss of those games if football season is pushed a month later will be around $700,000.

“We’d be dealing with the cost of football without any of the revenue that we would normally get,” says Davis. “We’d get some revenue from attendance and things like that, but the bulk of our revenue comes from those guaranteed games. That would be the worst-case scenario for a school like ours.”

One of the first cost-cutting measures Phillips instituted is cutting non-essential travel when planning schedules for all sports. This includes team travel for non-conference competition, such as taking the track team to Florida for spring break and participating in a meet or two while there.

“What do we cut and still meet all of the minimums for Division I,” says Phillips. “A couple of conferences have put in a legislation request [to the NCAA] to give us a one-year moratorium on some of these rules to play a lesser schedule and not be punished for it.

“Once we find out that those things are being approved, then we can decide within the conference if we will lower the number of conference games we play,” she continues. Other budget conscious ideas include playing conference championships on member campuses rather than neutral sites. The OVC is currently conducting an in-depth study.

**Student-athlete needs**

Joli Robinson — assistant athletic director and assistant women’s basketball coach at Johnson C. Smith University, a Division II HBCU institution — says the athletic department is carrying on as if everyone is returning to campus in August. As of now, they know they’re facing at least a 10–15% cut in budget. What remains unclear is what that will look like.

“We don’t know if we’re going to do a full schedule or will it be a conference schedule only,” says Robinson. “Are we going to have to do the six-foot [social distancing] in the locker rooms? Will we put people in the stands? The unknown is unknown.”

JCSU coaches for every sports team are responsible for being in regular contact with their student-athletes. This goes on at Howard and Tennessee State as well. There are Zoom meetings, Skype, Facetime and phone calls. Tutors and academic advisors are also working with student-athletes. HBCU Heroes, a non-profit organization that provides support for HBCU student-athletes, donated 25 laptop computers to JCSU’s athletic program for student-athletes who didn’t have home computers.

At present, there has been no word of NCAA cuts to the Accelerating Academic Success Program (AASP) grants. These grants assist eligible schools in creating programming that advances academic success. While there have not been any recent meetings of the HBCU and Limited-Resource Institutions Academic Advisory Group, which has helped develop strategies to assist AASP-eligible institutions, members have been speaking informally.

“We’ve gotten money to improve our study labs and to support academic advisement,” says Dr. Larry McDaniel of Alabama A&M University, a member of the advisory group and his university’s faculty athletics representative. “If this situation continues as it is, a big question is how much support are we going to get in terms of grants to support those areas going forward.”

Alabama A&M plays in the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC), which consists of all HBCU schools. McDaniel says the SWAC office indicates funds from the conference to its member institutions will decrease, but hopefully academic support won’t be impacted.

Attorney Tim Nevius, a former student-athlete
who now represents athletes and works as an advocate on issues pertaining to student-athletes, says it is essential student-athlete support services, such as tutors and learning specialists, not be reduced with budget cuts.

“There has to be flexibility with respect to academic performance and progress during this time,” says Nevius, who has already been retained by several people with respect to scholarship cuts and transfers. “Remote learning could have a significant impact on their ability to perform academically.”

What’s next
Dr. Mark Emmert, NCAA’s president, and other senior NCAA management will be taking a 20% pay cut and vice presidents will take a 10% pay cut. USA Today reported that in 2017 Emmert received a base salary of around $2.1 million.

The NCAA announced that student-athletes in spring sports, such as softball, baseball, golf and outdoor track and field, are going to have another year of eligibility.

Non-revenue-generating sports are feeling extremely vulnerable and fear being cut. The Division I Council has been having ongoing COVID-19 discussions. The NCAA is considering issuing a blanket waiver that allows D-I institutions time to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic but is holding firm on no blanket waiver allowing removal of the sport sponsorship minimum. Schools can request sport sponsorship requirement waivers on an individual basis.

“I hope that there are not knee-jerk reactions to cut those sports because there’s a lot of value to those non-revenue sports, not only to the students participating in them, but also to the schools themselves,” Nevius says. “Cutting non-revenue sports will have unintended consequences … from the standpoint of being able to fulfill the values that institutions [profess] they stand for while also attracting new students.”

Irma Garcia, director of athletics at St. Francis College, a small private Catholic institution that competes at the Division I level, says as a low resourced institution she and her staff are used to getting by on what they have. The president of St. Francis, Dr. Miguel Martinez-Saenz, has not expressed any interest in dropping sports.

“I think it’s a mistake to cut sports,” says Garcia. “Athletics play a big part in enrollment.”

The college competes in the Northeast Conference and most conference travel does not require overnight stays, which keeps costs down. “If I had a choice between dropping a sport or getting less money for that sport, I’ll take less money and I’ll make it work,” says Garcia.

Health issues must also be carefully monitored, especially in contact sports, when sports resume. Student-athletes have been able to access psychological support during this time of sheltering in place. Nevius says that will also be crucial at such time students return to campus.

“There’s likely to be a psychological component as we attempt to return to normalcy in college sports that will require some sensitivity and attention to the mental health of the athletes, which is always an important concern, but perhaps is heightened because of this crisis,” Nevius says.

There is talk of fulfilling television and sponsor commitments to football and basketball, but not having spectators in the stands. Davis says that makes him very uncomfortable. As the father of four, he would have serious qualms about letting his children compete if someone had determined it wasn’t safe to have fans in the stands.

The unknown continues to confound people in athletic departments, which is why Robinson advocates proceeding slowly when reactivating athletic programs. “I feel if we rush it, we’re going to find ourselves right back where we started.”
Safe Space

When Brigham Young University leadership reiterated a campus ban on “same-sex romantic behavior” on March 4, John Valdez wasn’t surprised. He’s the executive director of The OUT Foundation, a nonprofit that supports LGBTQ students and graduates. It was founded by three gay alumni of the Utah institution.

He and his board immediately released a statement in support of the campus’s LGBTQ community, expressing frustration about the decision.

“The OUT Foundation is most concerned with the safety of the LGBTQ+ community at BYU,” the statement reads. “This troubling reversal is a breach of trust that leaves queer students with targets on their backs.”

Brigham Young University, owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, previously had a student honor code that explicitly banned “all forms of physical intimacy that give expression to homosexual feelings.” So, when that section disappeared in the updated honor code on Feb. 19, LGBTQ students celebrated. Some took the opportunity to come out or to openly share previously hidden relationships.

Valdez and his team at The OUT Foundation felt “a skeptical hesitancy” about what seemed like good news, he says. “We were kind of waiting for the other ball to drop.”

And it did. Two weeks later, Elder Paul V. Johnson, commissioner of the church educational system, wrote in a letter, “Same-sex romantic behavior cannot lead to eternal marriage and is therefore not compatible with the principles included in the Honor Code.”

Brigham Young University tweeted that there had been a “miscommunication” with the updated code. “Even though we have removed the more prescriptive language, the principles of the Honor Code remain the same,” the university posted.

The reversal was a blow to the school’s LGBTQ students.

A junior, who spoke to Diverse and chose to remain anonymous, came out to his parents after the honor code change in February. He wasn’t at a point where he was ready to date — that still felt “kind of scary,” and he wasn’t out to most of his friends — but it gave him and other LGBTQ students more room to “be open and figure out that side of yourself.”

“It just made me feel safer,” he says. After, he felt like “a bit of a mess.” He applied to transfer to the University of Utah but ultimately decided to stay at Brigham Young. The costs of moving to a new campus didn’t seem worth it, and he was worried he would have to graduate a semester later than he expected, delaying his plans to go to medical school.

Still, the incident made him eager to reach graduation.

“I definitely want to graduate as soon as possible,” he says. “… You’re supposed to enjoy college and have fun. But I kind of want to get it over with.”

A helping hand

Stories like this left Mormon writer Meg Conley feeling “bereft.” So, she set out to “remove as many roadblocks as possible” for any LGBTQ students...
who may want to leave Brigham Young University.

She put out a call on Twitter, offering to edit application essays for students who wanted to transfer. 

Her message — signed, “a Mormon mother who loves you” — was retweeted over 1,300 times.

Hundreds of college students reached out — but not just Brigham Young students and not just students who wanted help with application essays.

Some Mormon LGBTQ students contacted her to talk theology. In Mormonism, salvation is a “community project” — Mormons believe the whole community is supposed to end up in heaven together — so feeling on the outskirts can be a theological minefield for young LGBTQ Mormons.

“A lot of these 18-year-old kids, they literally feel like they’re losing access to eternity with their families because of their sexual orientation,” she says. “And that’s just bulls**t. God wants all of us.”

LGBTQ students from other faiths also got in touch with Conley, many sharing experiences at other religious higher education institutions. Some told her they didn’t feel comfortable bringing up LGBTQ issues on campus at all.

Going forward, she hopes higher education professionals will ask, “As a professor, teacher or administrator, how are you centering queer students’ actual voices?”

It’s important to “announce yourself as an ally,” she says.

In response to her tweet, many did. More than 500 people asked how they could help Brigham Young University’s LGBTQ community.

Dr. Rose Judd-Murray — a Mormon professor in the School of Applied Sciences, Technology and Education at Utah State University — was one of them.

Brigham Young University’s reversal was “gross negligence,” she says. So, when she saw Conley’s tweet, she felt compelled to join, especially as an educator.

“We are here to help you and support you,” she says. “That’s the role of higher education.”

And as a Mormon, “I’m disgusted and I’m tired,” she added. “It’s really emotional for me.”

**Changing times**

In recent years, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has made some efforts to be more LGBTQ-inclusive. Reversing a 2015 decision last April, the church now allows the children of same-sex couples to be baptized. A statement by church leaders at the time called gay marriage a “transgression,” but clarified that “it will not be treated as apostasy for purposes of Church discipline.”

While she wants them to have the option, Judd-Murray doesn’t expect many students will transfer. It’s a “monumental task” in and of itself, she noted. And it’s even harder for some students to transfer from Brigham Young University because “generations of their family have attended the university and supported the university,” she says.

It’s also expensive. For members of the church, Brigham Young University tuition is subsidized, costing a mere $2,895 per semester. If LGBTQ students want to go elsewhere, they’ll likely take on a sizable tuition increase.

Cost is especially a concern now amid the coronavirus and an impending economic downturn. But, according to Valdez, some students have been making concrete plans to leave the school. The OUT Foundation has been in communication with other universities in the state, like Utah Valley University’s LGBTQ student services, to prepare them for potential transfers.

When the university doubled down on its policy, the foundation created a GoFundMe campaign, raising about $40,000 to help students with the cost of transferring. In the end, 14 students applied for funds, and 12 received grants.

Valdez wanted to give students the option to get out of “the precarious situation a lot of students were in,” he says, as they came out to friends and family “under the impression they would be able to date and be accepted.”

When Valdez began studying at the university in 2007, identifying as gay was grounds for expulsion. He was out to some friends, but not his family. By the time he graduated, that policy was revoked, “a big step in the right direction.” As an alumnus, he wanted to focus on “giving back to the queer community at BYU.”

With the events of this past semester, plus the fresh challenges posed by the pandemic, his advice to LGBTQ students at Brigham Young University is to “prioritize your own safety, health and wellbeing at this time, whether that’s getting access to mental health services that you need or making sure you’re surrounding yourself with a safe environment, if it’s possible,” he says. “Once you’ve been able to secure safety for yourself, that’s the time to start focusing on others and helping others secure that same safety.”
By early March, SARS-CoV-2, a novel coronavirus, had touched off a pandemic. Those studying the virus stoked the claim that COVID-19, the respiratory infection the virus causes, is indiscriminate in whom it tackles and kills. Looking across racial and ethnic groups, and moving from Hollywood A-listers to seniors in nursing homes, to shelf stockers at the local Walmart — no one is immune.

But the coronavirus is not the “great equalizer.” In the early days, as the U.S. stared a grave and unprecedented public health threat in the face, it wasn’t clear who was getting tested, who was infected and sick, who was hospitalized and who has died. But Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, who in 2017 launched the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, had “a hunch” that the COVID-19 outbreak wasn’t affecting all groups the same way. No doubt, Kendi, a historian of racism, considered that race and racism would be at the root.

COVID-19 has cast an old story of health disparities in a new light. Decades before the coronavirus outbreak, physicians, researchers, advocates and experts concluded that social determinants of health and health disparities are real. That’s why in April, Kendi, “a student of health disparities,” pointed to those as likely causes for COVID-19’s unequal toll. Although data was limited, worrisome to Kendi was what the numbers were beginning to show about the vulnerability of African Americans and other people of color to the virus.

“We anecdotally began to see sizeable numbers of Black and Latinx people dying and being infected,” Kendi remembers. These were people who likely didn’t have the luxury of staying safely at home and social distancing in the workplace. Blacks and other people of color were also likely suffering with pre-existing health conditions and chronic illnesses and confronting other vulnerabilities that put them
at higher risk for infection and death from this coronavirus compared to other groups.

Kendi’s hypothesis proved true. And the evidence is mounting. African Americans are being pummeled the hardest by the pandemic. Although 13% of the population, African Americans account for 25% of COVID-19 deaths where race is known, as of May 2020. This means Black people are dying at a rate nearly 2 times higher than their population share, he revealed.

This is a tragic reality that hits home for Kendi who is surviving metastatic cancer. “I know what it’s like to suffer from an extremely debilitating disease and to wonder whether you’re going to live another day,” he told Diverse.

As Kendi recalls, governmental agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initially didn’t post racial data for COVID-19 on its website. And at the time, neither did national, high-profile systems tracking the virus outbreak in the U.S. Likewise, in April, few states, public health officials, or private labs were releasing their data by race.

The urgent call for race data
A contributor to The Atlantic, Kendi became an early, unwavering voice on the need for COVID-19 demographic data and transparency. He used the magazine platform and a series of essays, some personal, to respond to the silence and data gap.

Soon, Kendi’s voice was among an urgent, national chorus that included political, Black, legal and community leaders. They demanded that federal and state governments and public health departments release racial and ethnic data collected on COVID-19 and make testing, diagnosing and care for Blacks and other people of color a priority.

The failure of the CDC and other federal agencies to be a needed repository for comprehensive, racial demographic data on COVID-19 has frustrated Kendi, and so has the growing impact of the virus on communities of color.

Without such data, “the federal government can’t step in and partner with those local areas to provide relief, to create policy, to stem the tide of infection, and end death rates. When they sit back and allow racial disparities to persist,” Kendi urges, “they are being racist.”

Tracking COVID-19’s racial impact
That’s when Kendi got proactive, developing in April what didn’t exist: a national racial data tracking system to develop, record, analyze and regularly update racial data on the pandemic in the United States. The result is the COVID Racial Data Tracker, a collaboration between his Antiracist Research and Policy Center and the COVID Tracking Project housed at The Atlantic. For nearly three months, the COVID Tracking Project has been a go-to source of national testing data that’s been used by Johns Hopkins University, the White House and others.

“We want to collect the most comprehensive data sets available so that we can report and analyze that data and transform it into story form so that people can understand COVID-19’s impact on people of color,” says Kendi of the tracking system and the data that he hopes will “impact public health policy, transform local communities, help create health equity in real time, and live on, even in the aftermath of this pandemic.”

Racial data reporting is on the upswing, wrote Alexis Madrigal, a staff writer at The Atlantic and founder of the COVID Tracking Project, which is partnering with Kendi’s center. “When we began, fewer than 10 states and zero territories reported any race or ethnicity data related to COVID-19 testing or outcomes,” Madrigal wrote. As of May 2020, according to the Project, 48 of 56 states and territories are reporting cases by race and ethnicity and 42 of those states and territories are reporting racial and ethnic data on deaths.

At the same time, Kendi says, “there are still some states that haven’t released infection or data on deaths. And for others, state race and ethnicity data are limited to Black and White people, not ‘Latin X, or Native people, Asian or Native Hawaiian people. What we are also finding is that the overwhelming amount of case data that has been released by states is unknown, meaning that in 80% of the cases, they don’t know the racial demographics of those who test positive for COVID-19. They are only able to release 20% of the data and that 20% shows racial disparities,” Kendi adds.

“For me, what racial data has long been able to demonstrate has been racism itself. I’m hoping that this [COVID-19] racial data tracker will be able to show where there are racial problems that need to be solved in real time, during this pandemic.”
College campuses can provide lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual and ally (LGBTQA+) students an outlet to find or become more comfortable with their identities and sexual orientation, especially if they’re from households with unaccepting family members.

However, the coronavirus pandemic, which shut down colleges and universities across the country, has forced those same students to go back into the closet after returning to their hometowns.

“For LGBTQA+ people in particular, they get a lot of their support from the community itself,” says Dr. Pat Tetreault, the founding director of the LGBTQA+ Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). “So not being able to connect, I think that’s just a challenge for everybody.”

Those students living in unsupportive households are less likely to access LGBTQA+ specific resources offered by their institutions online, according to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)’s LGBT Resource Center director Leslie K. Morrow. For example, students might not feel comfortable talking on the phone to on-campus support systems due to fear of being overheard by family members or being concerned about their internet history being monitored.

“Clearly, as great as technology is, there are some things that you just can’t substitute with regards to in-person interaction,” says Morrow.

To support students in unsafe home environments, Andy Cofino, director of the LGBT Campus Resource Center at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), says it takes the help of an entire campus.

Resources need to be highlighted in a transparent way and campus organizations should include the experiences of LGBTQA+ students in their own messaging outlets to reach a broader audience.

“I think if a student is in an unsafe home environment, they’ve had to move out of their home really quickly or had other very high risk factors that are happening or are in survival mode, they may not be thinking about the virtual programs that are being offered for students,” he says. “That might not be their first thought. So, I think also just reminding students of what’s available is also very helpful.”

Despite campus closures, institutions are still able to offer counseling through telehealth networks or provide one-on-one check-ins for students struggling to cope with the mental and physical impacts of the coronavirus.

“I know not only my center but other centers are trying to simulate as best as we can this online space, using a variety of different social media channels and networks to be there to provide some sort of community,” says Morrow.

She acknowledged that it is normal to occasionally have bad days during a period of increased stress. However, if the bad days are seen on a more regular basis, Morrow says it is important for students to seek the available counseling.

LGBTQA+ centers at UCLA, UNL and UIUC, for example, have developed their own campus resources to help students feel supported through the current changes brought on by the pandemic.
“Even though we can connect with people by phone or by Zoom, that doesn't necessarily mean people don't feel isolated,” says Tetreault. “And I think if they don't have privacy and don't have personal support or affirmation, that makes it even more challenging to manage all of the changes that people are having to manage given the current situation that we're in.”

For student staff at the LGBTQA+ Center, Tetreault scheduled weekly check-ins on top of the regular staff meetings to access needs, feelings and stress levels. Additionally, the school has also offered free or low-cost webinars to the student staff that address topics such as mental health or LGBTQA+ resources during this time.

“I think that this is a challenging time for a lot of people because even with all the connection available, it does create an aspect of isolation that people aren't necessarily used to having to manage,” Tetreault adds. “But at the same time, I think it also has provided opportunities for people to really show how much they care.”

A helping hand

At UCLA, the LGBTQ Resource Center has continued to offer access to weekly discussion spaces that originally occurred on campus as a way to create the feeling of a community.

“Our weekly programs have been very successful,” said Cofino. “We were slowly continuing to maintain a lot of presence in those spaces. And we've heard repeatedly from students that having those virtual programs available [has] been really critical.”

Additionally, for vulnerable populations, such as students in unsafe home environments, UCLA launched a series of online videos and resources that students can access on their own time and discretion. One feature of the online resource offered by UCLA is a safety button in case students need to exit out of the browser quickly.

“I think often times, especially when we're isolated, we don't initially think that there are people that are actually there and available as a resource,” says Cofino. “So, I would say to students, if they have questions, if they have concerns, please seek out the many resources that are available on your campus.”

At UIUC, the LGBT Resource Center worked with campus counseling services in order to offer virtual workshops and networks to build strategies to develop ways to cope with the impacts of the pandemic, according to Morrow.

In addition to the center’s resources, Morrow has found that students have taken the initiative to stay connected with one another through their own creative ways, which include hosting movie watch parties, game nights and study groups during finals week.

In addition to campus-wide resources and initiatives, there are also national resources that aim to support the mental health of LGBTQA+ youths and students including the Trevor Project and Trans Lifeline.

The Trevor Project, for example, is a suicide prevention organization that helps LGBTQA+ people under the age of 25. There is a lifeline, which can be reached at 866-488-7386, as well as confidential messaging boards available through chat or text messages. The organization also offers suicide prevention training and workshop sessions.

The Trans Lifeline is a 24/7 hotline for transgender people to connect with the LGBTQA+ community and find support for identity or mental health issues. Students can reach the organization at 877-565-8860.

For those LGBTQA+ students who have had thoughts of self-harm, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can be reached at 800-273-8255.
Rachel Dunifon has been named the Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean of the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University. A professor of policy analysis and management at Cornell since 2001, Dunifon holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Davidson College and a Ph.D. in human development and social policy from Northwestern University.

Stephanie Dance-Barnes has been appointed dean for DePaul University’s College of Science and Health. An expert in cancer biology and toxicology, she was most recently interim associate provost and dean at Winston-Salem State University. Dance-Barnes was the first African American female to receive a Ph.D. in cancer biology and toxicology from Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

Tatum Thomas has been named dean for DePaul University’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Currently senior associate dean of student affairs at Columbia University’s School of Professional Studies in New York City, Thomas holds a bachelor’s in psychology from Marymount Manhattan College, a master’s in higher education from Baruch College and a Ph.D. in organizational leadership from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

Erika K. Davis has been appointed vice president for enrollment management at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Previously an assistant vice president for online and graduate enrollment at Mary Baldwin University in Staunton, Virginia, Davis holds a bachelor’s degree in communication from the University of Pittsburgh, a master’s in professional writing from Carnegie Mellon University and a Ph.D. in community college leadership development from Morgan State University.

Darvis Griffin has been named director of information technology for the Division of Student Affairs at Texas A&M University as well as assistant chief information officer. Previously assistant superintendent and chief technology officer for the Waco Independent School District in Texas, Griffin holds a bachelor’s in business administration from Texas A&M University and a master’s in information security and assurance from Western Governors University.

Ronica Smucker has been appointed associate vice president of development at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Currently associate vice president of development at the University of San Francisco, Smucker holds a bachelor’s degree in French and foreign affairs from the University of Virginia and a master’s degree in creative writing from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Brian Lym has been appointed director of library services at Napa Valley College. Most recently dean of libraries and chief librarian at Hunter College in New York, Lym has more than 25 years of experience as an academic librarian. He holds a bachelor’s in humanities and two master’s degrees, in wildland resource science and library and information studies from the University of California, Berkeley.
WILLIE SMITH has been named chancellor of Baton Rouge Community College in Louisiana. Having led the college on an interim basis for the past 10 months, Smith holds a bachelor's degree from Tulane University in New Orleans, a master's in public administration from Troy University in Alabama and a Ph.D. in educational leadership from Argosy University.

PAMELA L. ALDERMAN has been appointed president of Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College. Most recently dean of the Bert Bradford School of Health Sciences, chair of the Department of Nursing and professor of nursing at the University of Charleston in West Virginia, Alderman holds bachelor's and master's degrees in nursing from West Virginia University as well as an educational Ph.D. from Marshall University.

SUSANNA BAXTER has been named president of LaGrange College. She is the school's second woman president in its 190-year history. Recently president of the Georgia Independent College Association, Baxter holds a bachelor's in Christian education and religion from what is now Pfeiffer University and a master's and Ph.D. in higher education leadership from Vanderbilt University.

PAULA GROVES PRICE has been appointed dean of the College of Education at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro. Currently professor of cultural studies and social thought in education and associate dean for diversity and international engagement at Washington State University, Price holds a dual bachelor's in social welfare and interdisciplinary field studies from the University of California, Berkeley and a Ph.D. in social foundations of education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

BAISHAKHI TAYLOR has been named dean of the college and vice president for campus life at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Currently vice president for student affairs, dean of students and an assistant professor in gender, sexuality and feminist studies at Middlebury College in Vermont, Taylor holds bachelor's and master's degrees in comparative literature from Jadavpur University in Kolkata, India. She also holds a master's degree in women's studies from the University of Northern Iowa and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Kentucky.

STEFANI GOMEZ has been appointed director of the Cressman Library at Cedar Crest College in Pennsylvania. Previously assistant professor of library instruction and research services at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania, Gomez holds a bachelor's degree in English language and literature from Pennsylvania State University as well as a master's degree in library and information science and a Ph.D. in communication from Rutgers University in New Jersey.

NORMA GUERRA has been named interim associate vice provost for faculty diversity and inclusion at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Currently associate professor of educational psychology at the school, Guerra holds a bachelor's degree in education from Trinity University in San Antonio, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Texas at San Antonio and a Ph.D. in educational psychology from Texas A&M University.
To stabilize enrollments and help students during the COVID-19 pandemic, 16 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) will receive a total of $1.76 million in emergency grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Each HBCU will receive $110,000. The 16 HBCU recipients are Claflin University; Clark Atlanta University; Dillard University; Fisk University; Hampton University; Howard University; Johnson C. Smith University; Lincoln University; Morehouse College; Morgan State University; North Carolina A&T State University; Prairie View A&M University; Spelman College; Tougaloo College; Winston-Salem State University; and Xavier University of Louisiana. The Mellon foundation said HBCUs already faced chronic funding challenges before the pandemic. “The COVID-19 epidemic has increased these challenges, which are affecting students’ ability to pay tuition, travel to and from school, and access the internet, thereby jeopardizing their continuous enrollment,” said the foundation in a statement.

The University of Pittsburgh (UP) and Penn State University received portions of a $7 million grant from the Heinz Endowments intended to address racial inequity and criminal justice reform. The grant comes after Pennsylvania’s Allegheny County Council passed a motion declaring racism as a public health crisis. In the same vein, Heinz Endowments President Grant Oliphant recently stated that the current pandemic is “exacerbating issues of poverty and racial inequality in our community.” The University of Pittsburgh will receive a $350,000 portion of the grant to research disparities in the Allegheny County criminal justice system. Meanwhile, Penn State University will receive a $400,000 portion of the grant to fund its Project Giving Adolescents Meaningful Experiences, an initiative that supports youth leaving juvenile probation who want to transition to pursue a job or a college degree. “We will never be able to create the resilient community of the future that we strive for unless we address directly the deep issues of inequity that afflict our community and our nation,” Oliphant said.

Jackson State University (JSU) has been awarded a $390,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to increase the number of African American women who breastfeed their newborns. While studies have shown that breast milk shields newborns from infections in the first year of life, African American women breastfeed at lower rates than do other demographics. Disparities persist by “race/ethnicity, socioeconomic characteristics and geography,” notes Dr. Mohammad Shahbazi, a professor in the Department of Behavioral and Environmental Health at JSU, who added that breastfeeding rates for Black infants were 50% lower than those for White infants at birth. The three-year grant will support a consortium of HBCUs and community groups who are working to educate and reverse the trend. Shahbazi said the expected outcome is that 70% of African American mothers who participate in the JSU consortium will breastfeed their children for at least six months.

An anonymous donor has donated enough money to buy laptops for all incoming freshman at the historically Black Fayetteville State University in North Carolina. “The pandemic caused us to revert to online learning for the rest of the school year,” said Jeffery Womble, associate vice chancellor for communications, to ABC News in Fayetteville. “We discovered many of our students didn’t have access to computers. So, this will enable our students to continue their academic endeavors in the event something like this happens again without any interruption in learning.” Though the anonymous owner requests the total amount of the donation be kept secret, Womble said it is the first time the university has received a donation of such magnitude.
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To succeed, they must trust that their president believes in them. If I believe in their dreams, actually and not just rhetorically, then never has my call to servant leadership been more timelier than now, during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you believe, then never has your responsibility to rise to the challenge of leading been more urgent. Never will we need to focus more clearly on one skill — empathy — for without it, we will not remain relevant to our students.

I don’t want to be an unapproachable figure separated by multiple doors and assistants, a detached representation of the “other,” wearing the college medallion at commencement and not knowing any of the people to whom he is awarding degrees.

I want to hear their stories. For them to be willing to share, I must simultaneously step off of my pedestal of privilege while lifting them up to it, if only for a moment, if only to give them a glimpse of what hard work and the sacrifices of the elders created in my own life, a first-generation student born into multi-generational poverty. I have to humanize myself, to become a realistic role model, a role model not only of things done right, but of things done very wrong and the lessons learned in failure.

To students who are losing loved ones and fearing for their own lives during the COVID-19 crisis, I say that I was a gay man coming of age in a rural, conservative state in the middle of the AIDS crisis, that I lost friends who died before their lives ever really started and that there but for the grace of God go I. What some might hide in shame, I must never get in the way of the single most important gift I can give my students — the imperfect, yet persistent and unvanquished example of my own life.

I understand the academy’s desire for students to be better prepared academically, but I also understand the many reasons why they are not. Some are hungry. Worse, some have hungry children. Some take public transportation. Some are homeless. Some work two jobs. Some are addicted to drugs or recently in recovery. Many have mental health issues. Some are transgendered. Some are veterans. Some are afraid of being deported, or racially profiled or stabbed because they look vaguely like someone from a nation blamed for starting COVID-19. Yes, this really happens in America, and the list goes on.

It is past time that we put away the fantasy of the students we want to teach and confront the reality of the students we are called to teach. It is less their job to be college-ready than it is our job to be student-ready. I speak with authority as a survivor of gay prejudice who has proudly served three historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), a non-traditionally focused online university, and now an Appalachian community college/university hybrid. Few leaders have been privileged to observe the struggles of our most vulnerable students, and often our most determined ones, from more diverse perspectives.

On the other side of this crisis, we have the opportunity to practice my mama’s advice for achieving greatness: “The only way to be great is to try to be good, all day, every day. And when you fail, and you will, to get up the next day and try again.”

We hear a lot about making America great again. If we apply my mother’s definition, we have problems because America has stopped doing good. Certainly many individually display amazing acts of goodness, but as a nation, I worry. That said, I hope too.

I hope the mirror this global crisis causes us to hold, individually and collectively, will force us to hear what Mama told me all those years ago. There is still time for us to help our students live into the worthiness of their dreams.

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