

Weekly Update: June 19, 2020

Over the past month the Summer Work Task Force has taken on the mission of collaborating with various College departments in coordinating jobs for on-campus students to offset their room and board costs for the summer months. The summer work program also provides an opportunity for students to work with various staff, while practicing physical distancing, and learn new skills that can be applied in the workforce. Danielle Dougherty Durham, Summer Work Task Force Chair, states “we now have 108 students working for their room & board. Our team has been phenomenal. Thank you, Adrienne Barber, Arnoldo Hernandez, Jennifer Riddle, Lauren Schilli, Mike Shines and our HR team for making this happen! Working with the campus community in finding jobs for on campus students has been both purposeful and rewarding. It also serves as a great way for students to gain important skills to help them prepare for a successful transition from college to career.”

Several students are working tirelessly to earn wages for sustenance. They’re often times the first members in their families to earn a college degree. This achievement undoubtedly provides opportunities for upward mobility, and not just for the graduate, but the entire family. Their stories are often heartbreaking. Families that may have been living on the edge prior to this pandemic, are now experiencing the severe health and financial impacts of COVID-19, and are doing all they can to survive. Some of our students have even lost family members to COVID-19, and many have not been home for months, and in some cases, years. Their work ethic, resilience, and commitment to their own education during these exceptionally challenging times is inspiring.

One of the lessons of COVID-19 is in finding new and effective ways to use technology. This led to the creation of a new job this summer - student Virtual Ambassadors (VA). These students are doing groundbreaking work by virtually building relationships and a sense of community with our incoming class over the summer. While this is the first year of doing this, we are combining with the student government’s Whelp mentoring program and intend to continue this in the future as a new way of connecting with our students over the summer. Our goal is to have incoming students arrive in the fall having already made a few friends and a mentor.

Abel Gulbet, a VA team member and sophomore from Eritrea, shares “I am really enjoying my work as a Virtual Ambassador for The College of Idaho. I am a person who enjoys talking to people and listens to the different experience, views and ideas of each person. This work also helps to polish and improve your communication, time management, teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership skills. The work is going well, and I got to meet a couple of students. I am really enjoying my job.”

Another team member, Wangu Mvula, a sophomore from Zambia, says “working with the incoming class has reaffirmed the importance of sharing stories for me. It’s given me the chance to own my authenticity and embrace that of others. I have also been glad to share in the excitement of the incoming students as they prepare to move here in the fall.” The outreach is also helping to put new students at ease who may be anxious about starting their college career.

Team member Konjyok Lama Tamang, a sophomore from Nepal, states “I enjoy working as a Virtual Ambassador very much. Connecting with the incoming freshmen reminds me of the excitement, confusion, and nervousness I felt when I was leaving home for the college.”

So much of the Virtual Ambassador position stems from the importance of culture and diversity on campus and a strong campus community. Laura Staropoli, a junior working as a volunteer from her home in Portland, Oregon, says “this Virtual Ambassador program is a great way to reach out and introduce ourselves to incoming students. It helps support our ‘pack’ mentality that is so important to the culture of the College. Through this program we are able to answer questions and provide resources that aid incoming students during their transition. I personally enjoy being able to meet new members of our school and welcome them to the YoteFam.” Over the summer, we will work to connect in small group virtual meetings with every new student.

Other students are working a wide range of jobs. Their efforts will be visible as we return to classes this fall. They all have staff supervisors/mentors and students who help lead each team.

We have also provided some training in college to career skills. Akshay Kulkarni '05 was the College's first United World College student, served as student body president, and is now working at Citi in New York City. He has been offering a great workshop on the importance of networking and other essential job skills he has gained over the years. He is giving up a part of his Saturdays for several weekends and the training has been well received by our students. Sandzi Mkhonta, a senior from The Kingdom of Eswatini, says “thank you so much for organizing this and having Akshay speak to us on the importance of networking. Hearing his story/experience was inspiring and motivating too. To me personally, it was a wake-up call because that is something I am lacking and I should probably start connecting with people before it is too late. All along, staying in the U.S. hasn't been part of my plan, but this forum helped me realize that even back at home, it is still necessary to network/connect with people in whatever culture that is used there. I wish we could have more of such forums throughout the four years in College and especially from alumni that are Internationals/UWC. It just comes across as more relatable.”

In addition, Akshay's wife, Sarah, is working with our return-to-fall planning task forces. She is doing important research on COVID-19 and what they have learned from one of the hotspots, NYC. She is a Davidson grad, but loves the Yotes. She and Akshay are grateful that unlike many other schools, the College provided a place for our students who had no other place to go. Thank you, Sarah and Akshay!

These work experiences and trainings have a direct effect on the employability of our graduates. Two of our students who were Bob Miller Albertsons interns in the summer of 2019 are now working full-time for Albertsons. The internship program was just created last year and is already yielding results. The College's applicant pool was so strong for this summer's internships, Albertsons increased the number of positions they accepted from three to four!

Having over 100 students on campus has given us an opportunity to learn and practice safe behaviors which will form the “social compact” for our campus when 1000+ students join them. From grab-and-go meals, to wearing masks, living together in residence halls, and practicing safe behaviors, our students have done well and helped us learn and have more confidence that we can safely return to in-person classes. We are encouraged by the fact that none of the students who are living on campus this summer have tested positive for COVID-19.

Professor Rob Dayley has volunteered to teach a class this summer as a way to test some of our protocols for the fall with a lower density of students. He is a world-class professor, so this is a great opportunity for our students and a way for us to continue to learn best practices.

Today is Juneteenth, and we hope all of us will take time to reflect on our history of oppression and the work we have ahead of us. We attended a moving vigil on campus last Friday that was led by our students with the support of our Inclusion & Intercultural Engagement Department. Our students have taught us a lot during these challenging and historic times. In particular, our students of color and our LGBTQ students have all experienced varying degrees of implicit and explicit bias, micro-aggressions, harassment, and even violence. We know we have work to do as a society, and as a College, and it starts with all of us listening, educating ourselves, taking action, and displaying empathy, love and kindness. We cannot be silent, but it will take more than words. It will take sustained commitment from all of us. We are committed to inclusion and equity on our campus. For it to be a place of belonging and safety, we will need everyone's help.

Our next update will share the key components of our plan for returning to in-person classes this fall.

In closing, we would like to share a [link](#) to a story about an '87 alum, Bret Arsenault, who is the Chief Information Security Officer at Microsoft. It is a great article and makes a clear case for the power and value of a liberal arts education, and the lessons learned from his early work experiences.

Stay well.

Doug and Jim