



ALLIANCE STUDENT SUCCESS NEWSLETTER

Your connection to all things student success at Cambridge College.

Cambridge College's student success initiatives continue to grow, and much of this change is the result of our Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant. Each issue of *Alliance* will include messages from students, faculty, and staff across the College to highlight these initiatives' ongoing efforts and far-reaching effects.

Welcome to the December 2020 issue of *Alliance*. We weren't sure if we would be able to field this issue, but our Student Success Team felt it would be great to have the December Newsletter as we finish up 2020 and enter the holiday season. We hope that you all enjoy reading it over the break and reflecting on your own year as we move into 2021, hopefully a better year and a clean start!

In this issue, we begin by reviewing some of the key results of our student remote learning survey. We then conducted interviews with student and staff assistant Celestina Jones-De Jesus and Online Student Success Coach Daniel Piercy. We're also sharing an overview of our Title III Student Learning Outcomes assessment project including an interview with Core Faculty members Lucilia Valerio, Rebecca Heimel, and Gitte Wernaas. Finally, we'll leave you with a few ideas for managing the stress of 2020.

We hope you enjoy this edition and have a wonderful (socially distant) holiday!

THIS PUBLICATION IS
BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE TITLE III TASK FORCE AND THE
OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Designed by Leili Ansari

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ACADEMIC SUCCESS NEWS & TIPS

FALL STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

Cambridge College has been remote for two full terms. In an effort to better understand how we could support our students, we recently administered a student remote learning survey. Roughly 800 students across all Cambridge College schools and regional centers responded to this survey.

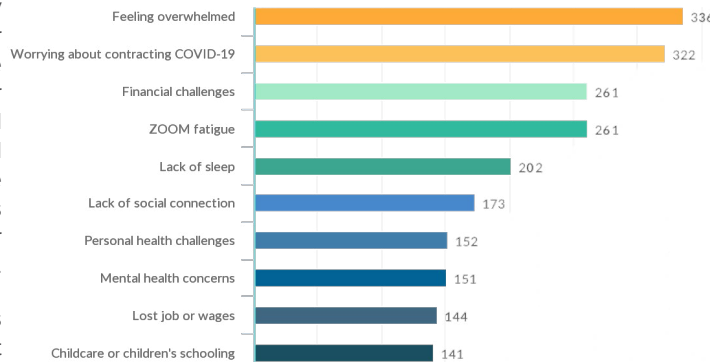
The overwhelming majority of students consider the College's remote instruction to be either good or excellent, and similar trends were found for students' rating of the College's communications with students and their rating of coaching/advising.

We also asked students what their greatest concerns are. Almost half of respondents reported feeling overwhelmed and feeling worried about catching COVID-19, and over a third reported financial challenges.

While not surprising, these findings suggest that our students continued support. College faculty, staff, and leadership are charged with approaching students with sensitivity and understanding, and coming up with tools and resources that can assist students who are struggling.

Students are also a source of inspiration. When asked what coping strategies they use, over half of respondents reported exercising and connecting with loved ones. These are indeed the most helpful strategies any of us can employ to combat stress, and we hope these findings encourage others to engage in these activities as well.

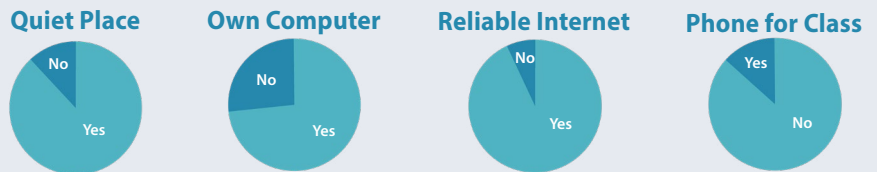
PERSONAL CHALLENGES



Top 7 strategies students report using to cope with the impact of the pandemic:

1. Exercising
2. Connecting with loved ones
3. Spending time outdoors/ connecting with nature
4. Cooking/baking
5. Practicing gratitude
6. Meditating
7. Religious practices

Of all student respondents, **7%** do not have reliable internet and **13%** do not have a quiet place to complete coursework or study. **26%** share their computers and **12%** attend class on their phones.



HOW TO CHECK YOUR GRADES

As the semester concludes, students will be looking to check their grades for the term. While more and more instructors are using the course gradebook in the course portal, the course portal is NOT the best place to check your semester grades. To check your fall semester grades:

1. Go to the Registration tab on MYCC
2. Choose the Grade Report at the bottom of the first column
3. Make sure to select the correct term
4. Click "View Final Grade Report"

Students should note that grades may not be updated until after the semester break. The deadline for grade submission can be found on the academic calendar.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY WHEN PROFESSORS SEND KUDOS

As it turns out, students appreciate being recognized for their hard work. We compiled student feedback and pulled the most often-used words.



STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

A TITLE III INITIATIVE

Under the Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant, the School of Undergraduate Studies has committed to improving student learning by reviewing the learning outcomes for all of its programs. Student learning outcomes are important because they describe exactly what knowledge and skills students are expected to have mastered by the time they graduate from a particular program. Once defined, these outcomes allow for the development of focused curricula across all undergraduate programs.

To help better understand how well students are learning, several of our programs are currently embarking on a project of reviewing and revising our program learning outcomes, asking what students should be learning, followed by an analysis of the curriculum to ensure that students have adequate opportunity to practice and master the agreed-upon outcomes. This work included the creation of assignments, designed to allow our students to demonstrate mastery of the outcomes in their coursework, as well as common rubrics used to evaluate these assignments. Ultimately, this work aims to ensure that all our students learn better, not just in individual courses, but in our programs as a whole, and that, by the time they graduate, they have acquired the skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

Professors Lucilia Valerio, Rebecca Heimel, and Gitte Wernaa spoke with Associate Provost Tracy McLaughlin about the review of the General Education program, which began during the fall 2019 semester.

Tracy McLaughlin: From your perspective, what is so important about having clearly stated goals for both our programs and the courses you teach?

Students really appreciate knowing what the destination is

Attaching an assessment process to these outcomes is part of how we ensure that the commitment is in place and is functioning as intended.

Lucilia Valerio: Awareness of learning outcomes creates a set of shared expectations that ensures that both students and instructors are working toward the same goal. It allows the students to see, for example, that I am expecting them to develop a particular skill, and that everything we will do in class will be in support of that goal. When I then create an assessment for my course, the outcomes help me be clear about what I want students to produce and how I expect students to demonstrate understanding.

Gitte Wernaa: For every class I taught this semester, I was very clear on which learning outcome we were focusing on. In every single class meeting, I told my students what the goal was, why they should care about a particular goal, and how the content of the class aligned with the stated outcome.

As a result, the students now understand much better what skills they are learning and have a much stronger sense of ownership of their knowledge.

Rebecca Heimel: Students respond so well when we allow them to see, very clearly and transparently, what it is we are working toward. When they see the value of these goals, they become more invested in working toward them.

Lucilia: Students really appreciate knowing what the destination is. Awareness of the course outcomes reminds them that they are doing work that is helping them acquire skills that they will be able to demonstrate.

Gitte: I tell my students to look at how much better they have become at a particular skill,

and point to the things that they can do much better now than at the beginning of the term. It is really exciting when students are able to articulate their learning.

Tracy: What seems to be so valuable is that a focus on, and awareness of, the course goals helps make the learning visible to the students. And being able to see our progress is really exciting because it allows us to feel that we are growing, and it allows us to feel that we are in control. It gives students a real sense of accomplishment when, at the end of the class, they can articulate what they have learned and how they have grown.

Do you feel that you have become better educators as a result of participating in this work?

Gitte: Absolutely! It helped me make the connection between the classes I teach and the goals of the larger program. I wish that our academic work provided more opportunities to do this kind of work, because it has certainly made me a better educator.

Lucilia: The best part of this whole project has been that it has enabled me to think about my teaching more broadly. It allowed me to think about the syllabus, and how to ensure that assessments are aligned with the course outcomes and the course outcomes to those of the general program.

It has also prompted me to think about what kind of instructor I want to be, and what kind of communication I want to have with my adult students about their own learning process.

The most meaningful part of the project was that it provided me with an opportunity to think about my teaching practices and how to adapt those practices that are working well and make them more equitable. I wanted to make the goals of the assessment tool, as well as the process by which students will be assessed, so clear that any student, regardless of skill level, would be able to understand what was expected of them and how to demonstrate a particular skill.

Learning outcomes represent a commitment the College is making to the students regarding what they can expect to learn



Rebecca Heimel: Learning goals or outcomes represent a commitment the College is making to the students regarding what they can expect to learn in a program or an individual course.



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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: CELESTINA JONES-DE JESUS

STUDENT & STAFF ASSISTANT AT THE REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

What do you like about working with students?

I love the energy of working on a college campus. Being both a staff member and student gives me a unique perspective at the college. I learn something new every day and I am constantly blown away by our students. I know that the issues, questions, and concerns I deal with on a daily basis will each be different and challenging, and I put in a lot of time and effort into thinking of all possible solutions for the best outcome for our students and my coworkers.

What is the nonprofit that you recently started?

My Village Links is a small community diaper bank started due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the socioeconomic disparities brought on suddenly by the pandemic. The My Village Links Mission is threefold in scope:

1. To ensure that families living in financial crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic have an adequate supply of diapers for their infants and toddlers.
2. To increase awareness of the lack of resources within inner city communities and call members and leaders to action in providing diapers, wipes and other overlooked resources to families as a basic human need in the Greater Boston area. (Ultimate GOAL: monthly diaper distribution to households in need)
3. Educate families and residents about and improve their access to community resources. Work to alleviate diaper needs and increase awareness about the role diaper needs play in the poverty cycle.

What or who inspired you to start this business?

2020 will always be remembered as the year no one could find toilet paper but did you know it was even more difficult to find and buy diapers? When the pandemic hit, we all scrambled to stock up on essentials, myself included. Weeks in, I quickly realized how empty the diaper shelves were (and stayed) so when I was lucky enough to find some, I bought them quickly and stocked up. I was fortunate enough to be employed throughout this year so I have the money to be able to do this for my son. In April, I

began volunteering for a local food bank and saw that the need for diapers and other baby essentials was a much bigger problem. Many families in my community were not fortunate enough to remain employed, or have a car to be able to store-hop until they found essential items like I was.

Has COVID-19 affected the progress of your business?

Absolutely! The entire world is struggling, so fundraising and donation drives are the most difficult. My family and friends on Facebook, as well as my local Hyde Park and Roslindale Communities have stepped up, but in order for this program to grow and reach the goal of having a monthly diaper

distribution to households in need, I have to find a way to obtain capital. COVID-19 left us all in a state of exasperation, but I aim to create a program that will be around and available to my community even when the pandemic is behind us.

How do you envision your business growing in the next several years?

I am wishful for MVL to have a space of its own and to not live in my kitchen, pantry

and every closet in my home; a community-accessible space for storing diapers, wipes and other baby basics from which we can safely distribute supplies to households in need. MVL also aims to get a van to make deliveries—MVL has a small unpaid group of community volunteers for diaper distributions all over the City of Boston, and deliveries are also made by myself or family on nights and weekends. A van dedicated to deliveries will increase the amount of families we can help.

What advice would you give to CC students who are thinking of starting their own business?

Plan and ask for help. My Village Links grew fast with the needs that arose with the pandemic, so I am learning as I go. I am grateful to my co-workers at the College who I could reach out to with business or financial questions. Also to the wonderful faculty of Cambridge College for sowing the seeds of knowledge that made me realize that I have what it takes to start my own non-profit organization. Very importantly, don't ever think that because someone else is doing something you want to do, that there is no room for you in the market or that the market is saturated already. Rihanna didn't let Victoria secret super success stop her from creating the Savage X Fenty Lingerie line.

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CELESTINA JONES-DE JESUS
MY VILLAGE LINKS
COMMUNITY DIAPER BANK

To donate, request help, or learn more about My Village Links, visit <https://tinyurl.com/myvillagelinks>

MEET DANIEL PIERCY

ONLINE SUCCESS COACH

What is your favorite thing about working with students taking online courses?

Conceptualizing how schoolwork is going to fit into a student's busy life and helping them develop the tools to be successful, then seeing that come to fruition, is the most rewarding. I get to live vicariously through my students' successes. Even though it is not my success, I only enable it, I like being part of that process and sharing their excitement.

Has your work been affected by all of CC's classes having moved to a remote format? If so, how?

With all classes moving to the remote format, many students who have not considered taking online formatted courses are now taking them. I review the courses and support students who might be having trouble early in the session. Since there are more new students to the format, I have gotten to meet some students I otherwise would never have encountered.

Also my online students have more options with remote (zoom) classes. In a couple of cases this has been very helpful to students who might not have been able to take a class that they wanted when they wanted to.

Overall though, I think my role and experiences have likely changed less than most. We didn't need to make any large changes online to adapt.

What are you most looking forward to at CC?

Our next in person graduation ceremony. There are many students who have worked very hard to be successful, whom I have had the privilege to be part of their educational journey and yet, I have never had the opportunity to work with them in person. I look forward to seeing them get recognized for their hard work and being able to do so myself, in person.

What are the biggest challenges you face in your work?

Usually this answer would be scheduling. All of our students have busy lives, but the online population maybe more so. This year, the biggest challenge has been supporting students, in the meager ways I can, as they struggle with being underemployed, caring for sick family members, or being sick themselves. This has been a tough year. I have been inspired by the toughness and perseverance that many of my students have displayed in these difficult times.

In your work with students, what have you found the most surprising, interesting, or inspiring?

I always ask students in registration meetings about their current or last session. I love to hear about the things that they learned and how it is being applied in their work and lives. When I hear students talk about their courses, I can see how the goal of gaining their degree also becomes coupled with their desire to learn. I am not sure if this falls under interesting or inspiring, likely both.

For me, it gives me a real sense of value in the work we do.

Any advice for students and instructors as we wrap up the term and prepare for the spring?

This is a little cliché, but, plan and prepare. Luck favors the well prepared, or so my father always said! I can't tell you how often I talk to students who have gotten behind, and there is almost always one commonality: they did not plan out how they were going to be successful in advance. If you find yourself behind, understand what you need to do to catch up, and then do that by focusing on the next small thing that moves you in that direction. We so often get paralyzed when we have a big problem and try to figure out how to solve the whole thing at once. A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.

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ABOUT DAN PIERCY

Dan Piercy has worked as a Success Coach for Cambridge College for just over two years. He has a Master's in Education and Bachelor's in Political Science and History all from the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

What strategies do you use to manage your own stress?

There are a couple things that I do to manage stress. I get up well before work so I can relax and meditate in the morning, I do not do well when I start my day off feeling like I am hurrying right from the beginning. The other is I plan times to do the things that I love like reading, being physically active, and doing projects with my hands. If my stress is acute, I find a strenuous workout is almost always a cure.

And finally, what are you grateful for?

It might seem strange to say with all that is going on now, but I am grateful to be alive today instead of other times in history, even recent. Crime, poverty, violence, hunger, and war are all at or near all times lows. I think we lose sight of that. We lose sight of the medical miracles that keep our parents with us longer and save our children. Technology has never given us more options or areas to learn about. Not to say there are not things that can get better, but this is a pretty great time to have been born into.

MANAGING THE STRESS OF 2020

2020 was unlike any year most of us have ever experienced. We lived through nine months of a horrible pandemic that will likely have claimed over 300,000 Americans by January. If that was not enough, the disparities highlighted by COVID and George Floyd's murder have brought systematic racism and inequality to the forefront of American consciousness. We are reconciling with a pandemic and the repercussions of 400 years of oppression of black, indigenous, and people of color. If that wasn't enough, we Americans just lived through four years of political turmoil and just concluded one of the most contentious elections in history with the country deeply divided on politics.

Many Americans are undoubtedly stressed and need support. Here are some things to do that can help us to recenter and bring things into perspective:

1. Exercise – If you already have a regular exercise routine, keep it up. If you don't have one, consider trying these aerobic activities: running, yoga, biking, hiking or walking, snow-showing, or using a rowing

machine, stationary bike, or stair climber. Aerobic activities burn calories and help to strengthen your heart, cardiovascular system, and metabolic system. The CDC recommends 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week.

2. Meditation or Religious Practices – If you have established religious traditions, continuing with those can help to create a sense of routine. It can also help with stress by maintaining connection to others in a time of social distancing. Similarly, meditation can help with the body's physical stress levels. Research has found that meditation reduces stress, controls anxiety, and enhances self-awareness.

3. Connecting with Nature - Try finding a park or trail system close by. Go out for a nature walk, hike, or exploration. There are so many great conservation areas nearby; take advantage of them as you make your plans. Research shows that being outdoors gives us vitamin D. It is also rejuvenating being in fresh air, and the experience is grounding. As an additional perk, most parks and trails are low risk for COVID transmission, but you should wear a mask.

4. Connecting Virtually or Safely with Loved Ones - While we should avoid physical contact with people outside of our immediate social bubbles, we can still leverage ZOOM and other technology to interact virtually with loved ones, even those in different states or countries. It is not the same as in-person, but it can help. If you need more, consider arranging outdoor, socially distant visits with masks.

5. Trying a Hobby – If you have time on your hands, try a new hobby. Journaling is a great low-cost hobby. Try writing down what happened to you each day, as well as your feelings and impressions of the day. In addition to writing, reading is another great hobby that also builds your intellectual skills. If you are more of a logical thinker, consider puzzling, crosswords, or board games like chess. There are so many great hobbies to occupy our time and our minds.

6. DIY Projects - Consider a Do-It-Yourself project. If you have good DIY skills, try remodeling a room or making over a yard. If you are dabbling in DIY, try painting a room or fixing small projects.

STARTING CLASSES THIS SPRING? WAIVE STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE & SAVE!

Students who are starting classes at a Massachusetts campus this spring (undergraduate students enrolled in 9 credits and graduate students enrolled in 6 credits) are required by law to have health insurance. Students should waive the College's health insurance if they already have their own to avoid being charged.

Go to www.universityhealthplans.com/CambridgeCollege to complete the online waiver by:

Tuesday, January 26th

Contact the Health Insurance Manager, Amrit Athwal at amrit.athwal@cambridgecollege.edu with any questions or concerns.

If you completed a waiver in the fall for the full academic year, you're all set!

'TIS THE SEASON TO SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITIES

It is hard to reconcile that we are entering one of the quintessential American happiest times of the year, the holiday season, during one of the worst periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. The irony is that we love our families and the people who are close to us, but we are told we cannot see them. Science tells us that community spread is real and that the thread of the pandemic has shifted from super-spreader events to much smaller, living room spreader events as we enter a particularly dark winter.

We are all fatigued. We are social creatures and need human contact with those we love, but we should keep the big picture in sight. The vaccine will likely be available in the spring. This is just a few short months away. All of us are weary and do not want to continue in isolation with remote work and remote learning, but we can't give up yet!

We encourage you to keep your holiday celebrations small with nuclear family and cohabitants only. Please limit interactions with those outside of your bubble to small, safe, outdoor gatherings only. A vaccine will come along shortly; let's remember that the spirit of the season is one of giving and helping those most in need. Let's do our part now to protect those who are most vulnerable.