Allegheny College Community comes together during pandemic

Sara Holthouse, News Editor|April 4, 2020

In the midst of the country and the world being in the middle of a pandemic and on lockdown, the Allegheny community has been working to make the transition to remote learning as easy as possible during this uncertain time.

In an email to the college on Friday, March 20, 2020, President Hilary Link described the difficult decisions having to be made by Allegheny administrators due to the spread of COVID-19, as well as the continued support from everyone in the community.

“I have been heartened by the many ways I have seen our community supporting each other — the faculty who are pouring their energies into reworking the format of courses on short notice, the staff who have dedicated hours to helping students navigate a very challenging time, the families who have been so understanding when asked to change plans suddenly, and the alumni who have offered to help in any way that they can,” the email read.

A separate email from the Dean of Students Office, sent on Tuesday, March 24, 2020, provided the community with updates. All students still on campus will be moved into the North Village buildings, and those not on campus are not allowed to return to clean out their dorm rooms at this time. The email also provided information regarding other campus activities that are being moved online, including the 2020 housing selection.

The email continued by encouraging everyone to be patient and flexible during this time.

“We will continue to update you as we have more information from campus,” the email read. “I am hopeful that the return of classes this week will provide us with some much-needed normalcy in a moment when nothing seems normal. Connecting with classmates and faculty may be the best thing we can do for each other this week. I wish the very best for students and their families as we all work together to stop the spread of this virus.”

Remaining faculty and staff on campus have been working on helping students through this stressful time. This includes holding drop-in hours at the library for LITS faculty to teach professors how to use Google Suite tools to help with remote learning.

Infodesk Manager Kirsten Hauser said the drop-in hours focused on helping professors learn how to hold face-to-face online meetings and how to record their lectures for students.

Additionally, Hauser said Google Suite training sessions, similar to the previous drop-in hours, will be held for campus employees to be able to facilitate some online work.

“Even though most of us are working remotely, we are dedicating all of our time to helping faculty, students and other employees get connected to the tools that they need to make the successful transition to online learning,” Hauser said. “We are expanding our reach, and starting this week we will be holding G Suite training sessions for campus employees. … The end goal of this new program is to identify individuals that are interested in receiving G Suite Certification.”

Hauser said that LITS staff miss students being on campus, especially those who worked for them and that, since she began her job in February, there has “never been a dull moment.”

“My job is working directly with and helping the student workers who are employed by LITS,” Hauser said. “I want to thank all the student workers for their willingness to help out and dedication that they have to the library. All of us in LITS want you to know that we miss you deeply and hope that you are staying safe and healthy at home.”

Another way that some faculty members are working to help community members during this time include online meditation sessions being facilitated by Professor of English and LGBT Minor Coordinator Jennifer Hellwarth.

Hellwarth is Co-Owner of Meadville Yoga along with Associate Professor of Psychology Sarah Conklin. Hellwarth has been offering live streamed meditation classes online for the past few weeks since Meadville Yoga closed due to the pandemic.

“The faculty and staff at the college are encouraging students to take care of themselves in whatever way they can, and they are working hard to not only keep the academics going to the best of their ability, but they are also encouraging students to reach out for whatever support they need,” Hellwarth said. “Meditation and Yoga are great ways … to work with stress and anxiety.”

Hellwarth said that while this is a stressful time for everyone, it is important to find ways to cope with that stress and stay connected even when working from home.

“I do think that our current situation has left a lot of us — students, of course, included — to feel isolated and disconnected,” Hellwarth said. “Some have expressed sadness or grief at the loss of their class time and experience, the academics and the social. I think that having a time and a space to show up in a community is an important part of staying connected. And the practice of meditation can be quite helpful to finding a moment of peace and groundedness in this unsettling time.”

Spiritual and Religious Life also sent an email to the student body on Friday, March 27, to those who receive their weekly email updates, detailing ways to fight stress and anxiety. The list includes

acknowledging fears and anxieties, taking time to breathe, staying healthy, staying connected to the community and practicing qualities like gratitude and hope.

“Remember you are not alone,” the email read. “Ever. You are surrounded by care and support. Reach out. … Practice hope. Trust in the future and our power to endure and persist, to live fully into the goodness that awaits.”

In another email from Link sent Wednesday, March 25, 2020, announcing the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Crawford County, she described each day as bringing about a new reality for everyone, adding that she has seen the continued support coming in from the community.

“Each day has called on us to confront a new reality and adjust in ways that might have seemed unimaginable just a few weeks ago,” the email read. “I’m so proud of and humbled by the many members of our community who have stepped up and those who have joined together to support one another. Know that the work of the College continues even throughout these challenging days; we are Allegheny Strong, and we will emerge from this and move forward as the stellar College we know ourselves to be.”