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All Together Now

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All Together Now



Staff at Chicago's Norwegian American Hospital received self-care snack packs through a COE initiative.

“Just doing a little something for yourself each day can make a huge difference. We wanted to show we appreciate them, make their day and make them feel good.”

–Mara Pollard (MEd '20)

As the pandemic alters lives, COE devises solutions that benefit others and build community

COE's preservice teachers nearing graduation normally undergo 10 weeks of student teaching in a Chicago-area classroom as the final learning experience before they take charge of their own classrooms. COVID-19's arrival deprived many students of that critical in-person training last spring. To help teacher candidates from the 2019–20 academic year transition into their professional careers during a pandemic, the college has provided them with ongoing one-to-one mentoring and instructional tools and resources.

“Student teaching is the ultimate culminating and empowering experience,” says Barbara Rieckhoff, associate dean of curriculum and programs. “Students look forward to the opportunity to spend time in a classroom learning from a veteran teacher, getting to know a group of students and being part of the routines of each day of teaching.”

While the college was able to pivot to online learning with most courses, rethinking student teaching presented more of a challenge.

“While some of the candidates were able to get into classrooms virtually, in most cases this was not possible, and candidates used video clips to learn from watching others teach,” says Rieckhoff. “Knowing that student teaching represents such a critical piece of a teacher's preparation, Dean Paul Zions offered to provide support for this group that missed out on it.”

COE surveyed graduates to identify areas in which they thought they needed the most help, with topics such as classroom

management, lesson planning and supporting underserved students at the top of the list. Graduates were invited to participate in a mentoring and coaching program, Teaching Strategies and Resources 2020, starting with online, self-paced modules to review the fundamentals in those identified areas of need. Each graduate was partnered with a COE faculty mentor for weekly, virtual mentoring sessions throughout the fall term. They've also been invited to join monthly, online, workshop-style sessions that faculty present on additional topics. Sessions such as Beyond Classroom Management and Thinking and Teaching About Race have also provided opportunities to network with fellow new teachers.

The Education and Counseling Center (ECC) has also been a hub for programs connecting the college to people in need.

Shifting all sessions online has enabled the ECC to expand its counseling and tutoring services, provided by graduate students and supervised by COE faculty, to clients far beyond campus.

Mara Pollard (MEd '20) epitomized COE's community-engagement ethos with Fueling Our Frontline Heroes, a GoFundMe initiative the counseling program alumna organized through the ECC last May before she graduated. Pollard distributed nearly 1,000 snack packs containing a 30-day self-care challenge card to health care workers at three safety-net hospitals. Activities listed on the card, from “listen to your favorite music for 15 minutes” to “choose a positive affirmation to carry with you throughout the day,” offered the workers simple-to-practice mental health activities.

“Just doing a little something for yourself each day can make a huge difference,” says Pollard. “We wanted to show we appreciate them, make their day and make them feel good.”