COE advances inclusive education through antiracist initiatives. See page 4.
In September, we welcomed back our students, faculty and staff to our College of Education home on Halsted. While we were eager to return, it was certainly not the same campus that we left in spring 2020. Clearly, much has changed. We all faced unprecedented personal and professional challenges as we transitioned to working and learning from home. I believe that we are stronger for it.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we’ve learned, worked and cared for each other in line with our Vincentian mission. The rubber hit the road, and we did very well indeed. Teaching took on increasingly complex forms and formats. We learned to quickly transition by sensitively responding to the needs of ourselves and others.

This past academic year, “back to school” took on a new meaning for us all. The unparalleled situation required our faculty and staff to prepare for face-to-face instruction, hybrid, flex, asynchronous, synchronous and remote delivery models. Change can be difficult for us all, but we were up to the task. In fact, student evaluations were equal to or better than pre-pandemic scores. We should be proud of our accomplishments. I believe we have yet to see the potential that remote learning affords educators and students. I cannot emphasize enough how crucial and precious the time spent teaching and learning together is for faculty and students.

We must be mindful of our new transition “back to school.” More challenges and changes face us as we return to more traditional styles of teaching. I am confident that we will successfully navigate these challenges. Fall enrollment for the college improved this year over last with incoming students answering the call to pursue careers as educators, counselors and leaders. We also welcomed new members to our faculty and staff, whose perspectives and support will breathe new life into our halls, our campus and, yes, our computer screens!

DePaul has kept the health and safety of our students, staff and faculty at the forefront. The university has taken the utmost caution within national guidelines for all its stakeholders, and continues to monitor ongoing COVID-19 changes locally and nationally. From the onset, the pandemic’s effects have been ever-changing, requiring rapid and sometimes seemingly conflicting responses due to the latest scientific findings. I am grateful for the patience, support and empathy that members of the COE family have consistently shown one another.

As always, our educators and counselors adapted in real time to successfully reach students and meet their needs. Many took the time and energy volunteering to help fellow Chicagoans in need. After months of "togetherness" requiring ethernet cables and laptop screens, the feeling of having our COE family back under one roof together is indescribable.

Welcome back, students, staff, faculty and partners of the College of Education. We’re grateful to have you in our corner.

Dean Paul Zionts
Antiracism training

A team at DePaul is helping Catholic high school students and teachers identify challenges and find solutions to racial justice issues in a series of workshops called “RISE: Catholic Students Rise for Racial Equity.” Launched online in February, the series grew out of the RISE: Racial Equity program developed by COE’s Office of Innovative Professional Learning. It is facilitated by Assistant Professor of Counseling Deanna Burgess, Instructional Assistant Professor Donna Kiel, Adjunct Professor Tina Curry and doctoral student Stephanie Bennett, and will continue throughout the 2021–22 school year.

Counselor preparedness study

Associate Professor of Counseling Melissa Ockerman, Special Education Professor Eva Patrikakou and Associate Professor of Counseling Alexandra Novakovic have been working with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to better understand school counselor perceptions of their preparedness and the importance of college and career readiness counseling. Last spring, the team received approval for a follow-up study that will survey all school counselors in CPS with the goal of improving higher-education training for school counseling students on this topic.

Student Appeal Fund established

The pandemic disrupted life as we know it and left many COE students grappling with how to pay for certain education-associated expenses, such as licensure exams, registration fees and other costs. Under the leadership of Dean Paul Zionts, a scholarship called the COE Student Appeal Fund Scholarship was established last spring to support students in dire financial situations. In total, 62 students received assistance.

Congratulations!

In recent months, awards and accolades for faculty and staff have been pouring in.

Associate Professor of Counseling Rebecca Michel was awarded the National Career Development Association’s Diversity Initiative Award this past summer. The award recognizes individuals who demonstrate a high degree of cultural responsiveness within the domain of career-related activities. In 2020, Michel worked with DePaul students and alumni to develop two initiatives—DePaul WORKS and the Career Digital Equity Project—to provide more equitable career development for diverse and marginalized members of the university community.

Leadership, Language and Curriculum Chair and Professor Sonia Soltero is the first faculty member of color to be elected president of DePaul’s Faculty Council. Professor Hilary Conklin was chosen by American Educational Research Journal as an Outstanding Reviewer for 2020. Assistant Dean for Assessment Jordan Humphrey was named Penn State’s Alumni Council president. A full list is posted online here.

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Horace Hall, professor of education policy studies and research, helped lead a forum last June for students following the murder of George Floyd.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) have become intrinsic to some of the antiracist work happening across the country. At COE, faculty, staff and students are working to ensure that here, those efforts are not simply a trend that speaks to the moment, but a commitment that actually leads to lasting change.

A recent 16-page report, compiled by Executive Assistant Erin Rice and shared online as “2020-2021 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Report,” details the college’s activities and initiatives aimed at challenging systemic racism. “We are committed more than ever, as faculty, staff, and administrators, to making ourselves accountable for and actively raising awareness of the racist beliefs, behaviors, and policies that sustain discrimination and prejudice in all forms, especially in our own curriculum and practices,” reads the report.

Following is an account of how these efforts came together and where they’re headed.

The catalyst

On June 4, 2020, students who were shocked by the murder of George Floyd and the resulting civil unrest met to vent and process their emotions in a safe space provided by COE.

“Students were expressing very thoughtful stances on racial discrimination they were subjected to inside and outside of DePaul, ideas around antiracism, and community-building ideas for BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and people of color] students,” says Horace Hall, a professor of education policy studies and research, who led the discussion.

On June 5, Darrick Tovar-Murray, associate professor of counseling, led a discussion for faculty and staff to talk about racial equity. “The question was not ‘What will we do?’” says Tovar-Murray. “It was ‘What must be done? That is the Vincentian question.”

The two discussions planted the seed for the real labor to begin. “We recognized that we’ve still got some work to do as human beings,” says Tovar-Murray.

The work

Energy and motivation were sky-high after those initial talks, recalls Rice, who is a member of the coordinating council for the college’s DEI efforts.

“We decided we wanted to have more discussions and be more focused and active in addressing all of these concerns about racial justice and social issues,” says Rice.

A number of new groups formed. The Advancing Antiracism, Equity, and Inclusion Organizers (AAEIO) group invited Ann Russo, director of DePaul’s Women’s Center, and Mycall Riley, LGBTQIA+ Resource Center coordinator, to facilitate regular discussions about systemic racism. The Supporting Students with
Antiracism Group met monthly to discuss ways to work with students in addressing antiracism. The Curricular Conversations and Tools group, led by Associate Professor Christopher Worthman, is focused on bringing more diverse voices into curriculum development through workshops and instructional practices. The Coordinating Council consolidates and publicizes DEI events and activities and publishes reports. Importantly, to ensure the work will be ongoing, COE created a racial justice committee as part of the faculty council.

In addition to these groups, there were discussions centered on violence against the Asian American and Pacific Islander community; all-COE mandatory monthly meetings to discuss racism; podcast, book and film discussions that centered on race; and the formation of white and BIPOC racial affinity groups for discussion.

In March 2021, the inaugural DePaul Student Festival/Forum on Freedom, Justice and Dignity was broadcast on YouTube Live, giving students a platform to present works. “The basis of the work was to express real-life personal and political views on justice, dignity and freedom within the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and police killings,” says Hall, who was one of the organizers of the festival. “The sudden change in America’s political climate, I think, was the inspiration for many students’ artistic offerings.”

Dean Paul Zionts, faculty, staff and students also reflect on the college’s DEI efforts in this video.

Looking forward

When we think about DEI at DePaul, it’s important to consider its potential impact on future generations. “We teach how we were taught,” says Hall.

As DePaul students graduate and find jobs as teachers, counselors, principals and administrators, many will work in public schools, including Chicago Public Schools, with low-income students who may be from marginalized and under-resourced communities. Associate Professor Amy Feiker Hollenbeck, a member of Supporting Students with Antiracism and AAEIO, hopes that by learning to address issues of equity head-on, these future DePaul alumni can make a difference for generations to come.

“The Chicago Public Schools system is such an inequitable school system with such divergent outcomes for students who are from different races and socioeconomic backgrounds,” she says. “It’s our responsibility to work to dismantle some of that.”

When Tovar-Murray reflects on the ongoing conversations at DePaul, he says he’s proud of the way COE rose to the occasion. It hasn’t been easy, he admits, and the work has just begun. But it gives him hope for the future.

“For faculty and staff to come together and be in conversation during this time of racial tension, I have to say that was very brave of us. I think we have demonstrated what we need to do in order to move our society to a place where we can truly begin to start addressing these differences,” he says.
School, Meet Pool

How teaching water safety became the mission for these COE alumnae

The path to a career in teaching can take many twists and turns. For childhood friends Liz Huber (MEd ’10) and Anna Biggins (MEd ’09), that path took an unexpected—and literal—plunge. They left their positions as elementary school teachers to instruct children ages 6 months to 6 years on water safety and swimming at a nonprofit Huber founded in 2018 called CAST Water Safety Foundation.

The mission of CAST is to prevent childhood drowning and develop safer swimmers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, three children die each day as a result of drowning, which is a leading cause of death for kids ages 1–4. Using a method called Infant Self Rescue (ISR), CAST teaches infants and children how to float, swim and rescue themselves in water during daily 10-minute lessons.

“One-on-one with the instructor and through sensory motor learning and stimulus response techniques, we teach them to roll to their backs, find air, float and wait for help to arrive,” says Huber. “Once they are running and coordinated in their movements, then they are strong enough to learn to kick and coordinate a swim.”

Huber learned about ISR when she registered her own children for a class. She was impressed with how quickly they learned, and realized that with her education background, this could be a viable—and fun—path for her. She loved the idea of starting a nonprofit that could save lives. “I quit my amazing career and put on a wetsuit,” she says.

Biggins heard about CAST and signed her three children up for lessons in 2019. For years, she’d enrolled her kids in swim lessons, and she was frustrated that they still didn’t seem safe in the water. After just a few weeks at CAST, however, they were confident swimmers. Professionally speaking, she, too, was ready to dive in. “I was like, ‘Let me just do 20 hours a week and see,’” says Biggins. “I loved it, and now here we are two years later.” She’s now CAST’s assistant director.

CAST was a dream that Huber and Biggins never realized they had. The two met while attending Willard Elementary School in River Forest, Ill. Both went on to attend DePaul and work together at Longfellow Elementary School in Oak Park, Ill., following graduation. After having kids, they’d muse over late-night calls about starting a business that would allow them to spend more time with their families.

It took those early ISR classes to realize where they were meant to be, and now, neither can imagine doing anything else. “We can never quantify whether or not we’re saving lives, because a lot of it is just one little tweak in the water safety strategy,” says Huber. “But we really believe that we are helping.”
Agents of Change

Examining the impact of Facing History and Ourselves on teachers’ professional development

When Associate Dean and Associate Professor Barbara Rieckhoff and Associate Professor Melissa Ockerman reflect on the turbulence of the last year, with the pandemic, violence and racial unrest, their minds go to Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO). The global, nonprofit, teacher-preparation organization helps participants better understand modern-day hatred and bigotry by examining past injustices.

“The only way we can change is if we look at ourselves and each other with compassion and try to create a better world for ourselves and our children,” says Ockerman. “That’s what this curriculum and professional development is designed to ask us to do constantly.”

The impact of that curriculum as part of a collaboration between DePaul University and FHAO is the subject of a recent article, “Building Teacher Empathy and Culturally Responsive Practice Through Professional Development and Self-Reflection,” published in the Journal of Vincentian Social Action and written by Ockerman, Rieckhoff, Associate Professor Amira Proweller and James Wolfinger, who was the founding director of DePaul’s FHAO collaboration and now serves as dean of the College of Education at Illinois State University.

The four authors sought to understand the influence of the professional development program, which began at DePaul in 2011, on pre-service and in-service teachers, counselors and school leaders in combating prejudice and promoting social justice. FHAO participants explored historical events and topics such as the Holocaust, the eugenics movement, the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, the civil rights movement and immigration in the United States, often reading firsthand accounts to better understand the experiences of others and cultivate a sense of empathy.

Among the most significant findings was the way the professional development programming empowered participants to see themselves as agents of change. “It wasn’t just, ‘I’m a social studies teacher, I’m a teacher of this subject, I’m a content expert.’ It was like, ‘Wow, I have this obligation to make sure things are right in the world,’” says Rieckhoff. “They really saw they were impacting students and helping them understand some of these big issues.”

The study ended in 2019, and many of the COE students who participated in the program have gone on to take jobs as teachers, counselors, curriculum developers and administrators. Ockerman and Rieckhoff take comfort knowing those participants had the context, experience and empathy to help students talk through the racial, social and political unrest of 2020 and 2021 and become agents of change themselves.

“The ripple of all of this, I think that’s what makes our hearts go pitter-patter, and makes us wake up and want to continue to do this,” says Ockerman, “to think about the impact this work has on students, who can then go on to make a positive and lasting impact, too.”
The Finish Line Fund provides critical, immediate-use funds to DePaul students who need financial assistance to complete the final requirements they need to graduate.

Help a student cross the finish line today at give.depaul.edu/finishline