Higher Education: The New Landscape

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly been a challenge that has tested each of us—our families, our communities and the country—in new and often painful ways. Our resilience in addressing these challenges is worthy of both praise and gratitude. We have all seen firsthand that we can achieve remarkable things, even in the midst of dislocation and loss.

As we emerge from this crisis, we are faced with a new landscape that offers both change and opportunities. Times like these call upon us to act boldly to do what needs to be done and to seek new horizons of possibility for our university and our community.

We should feel called to address the long-standing inequities that the pandemic has revealed in dramatic ways. In this area, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (LAS) is developing a holistic diversity, equity inclusion and anti-racism action plan for the college. It is imperative that we fight against racism, and offer models for how to sustain that fight over the long haul.

We should feel called to acknowledge the strength of our Vincentian community in asking and responding to the question “What must be done?” It takes courage to teach and learn in ways we have not experienced before. It takes courage to stand up to demand truth, transparency and accountability. It takes courage to stand united in condemning racism.

We should feel called to the task of opening ourselves to the opportunities of a new context around us.

The “Little School Under the ‘L’” can now reach everyone in the world with the distinctive message that education is a social act and that DePaul embraces this responsibility for building a better world.

We know that our alumni are responding to these same calls every single day. In your actions and support for others, you amplify and extend DePaul’s mission wherever you may be. It is my hope that as you read this new issue of Insights you will find stories that resonate with you and inspire you to greet this new landscape with renewed energy and purpose.

We would like to hear back from you. Please make use of the feedback button found at the end of every story. Thanks for joining us at our virtual Spring Alumni Event, “Meeting the Moment: LAS Responds to an Unprecedented Year” this past April. We look forward to seeing you in person sometime soon.

May the liberal arts be with you!

Guillermo Vásquez de Velasco, Dean

Comment on this story

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Fulbright Scholarships

In the 2020-21 application cycle, a record 45 students submitted applications to the Fulbright US Student Program, according to Associate Political Science Professor Phillip Stalley, DePaul’s Fulbright Scholarship program advisor. The applicants, 67% of whom have a major or minor in LAS, come from eight colleges and schools.

An impressive 17 DePaul students were selected as Fulbright semifinalists in the current cycle, breaking the record of 14 from last year. Awardees will be announced by May.

Students in the News

Gisselle M. Cervantes, a senior in LAS, was named a student laureate by the Lincoln Academy of Illinois. Every year, the governor of Illinois bestows this prestigious award to top students chosen to represent participating Illinois colleges and universities.

Faculty Publications


- “The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Philosophy Professor Elizabeth Millán Brusslan’s collection places the German Romantic Philosophy movement in its historical context. The volume includes scholarly contributions by DePaul alumni Elaine Miller (Philosophy PhD ’98), Nathan Ross (Philosophy MA ’02, PhD ’06) and Karolin Mirzakhan (Philosophy MA ’12, PhD ’16).

- “Mary Mills Patrick’s Cosmopolitan Mission and the Constantinople Woman’s College” (Lexington Books, 2020). Carolyn Goffman, senior lecturer in the Department of English, sheds light on one of the most influential institutions of higher learning for women in the Middle East in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire.


Donor Gifts Fuel Student Dreams

Three Hay Challenge donors contribute to humanities education

For 45 years, Laz Rice worked at DePaul. Now he’s giving back to the next generation of students. Rice made a generous donation through the Hay Endowed Scholarship Challenge, a fundraising campaign matching any endowed scholarship gift of $25,000 or more with a $25,000 gift from the estate of William E. Hay (MBA ’66, DHL ’06). The challenge, which ended December 30, 2020, and raised nearly $6.6 million in new and matching funds, created more than 100 new scholarships at DePaul, 15 earmarked for LAS.

An avid photographer, Rice established The Laz Rice Endowed Photography Scholarship, the first such scholarship for The Art School at DePaul. “This is a way to help boost DePaul’s facilities, in particular, the photography program, and to say ‘thank you’ to DePaul for being so good to me,” says Rice, who retired in June 2019 after a long career in classroom technology on the Lincoln Park Campus. He was also a founder of the DePaul Black Metropolis Project and the curator of the DePaul Faculty and Staff Photography Gallery Project.

Another generous donor answered the call to support the Hay Endowed Scholarship Challenge.

Susan deCordova, a longtime friend of DePaul whose late husband, Richard deCordova, was a beloved professor of Film, Media and Cultural Studies, has established The deCordova Family Endowed Scholarship, which supports students majoring or minorin in Women’s and Gender Studies and LGBTQ+ Studies. “The first reason I [endowed] this is personal: my younger child, who went to DePaul, identifies as nonbinary,” says deCordova, a member of the LAS Advisory Board who endowed a memorial scholarship in her husband’s name in the American Studies Program after his untimely death. Her second reason is more global, and dates back to a conversation she had with former DePaul President Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M. “He really was an early champion of the value of putting your students’ needs first. I think he also very clearly saw the importance of representation and inclusivity for all members of the DePaul community. That, to me, is such a DePaul characteristic,” she says.

Lastly, the M.R. Bauer LAS Endowed Scholarship for Success is an endowed fund created to provide recognition and financial assistance to undergraduate students enrolled in LAS who demonstrate financial need.

According to M.R. Bauer Foundation Director Mitchell B. Goldberg (LAS ’96, JD ’99), a partner at Lawrence Kamin Saunders & Uhlenhop, “One of the really important things that DePaul has focused on is promoting scholarships and fostering the ability of students to achieve their dreams. The insecurities resulting from COVID have really emphasized the importance of creating these types of scholarships, because it could be the make-or-break for somebody’s educational path. We could lose the potential doctors, scientists, historians, world leaders of tomorrow because of a financial issue.” “This created an avenue of participation for donors to really maximize impact,” adds Goldberg, who is also chair of the LAS Advisory Board.

Comment on this story
Taking Civics Education to New Heights

Civics education just got a whole lot more innovative.

“This class is being designed to be taught by different faculty across different disciplines to bring in many interesting perspectives. That’s what makes it creative and different.”

–Ben Epstein

To frame civics around the idea of the social contract and to probe what it means to live with others in community is dear to our hearts,” says Associate Political Science Professor Molly Andolina. Along with Associate Political Science Professor Ben Epstein, Andolina spearheaded a new civics class funded by a grant from the Teagle Foundation. Elements of the class are being piloted this spring quarter.

The class explores the Age of Enlightenment theory that individuals have consented to surrender some of their freedoms in exchange for protection and maintenance of the social order. Its approach is interdisciplinary.

“This class is being designed to be taught by different faculty across different disciplines to bring in many interesting perspectives. That’s what makes it creative and different,” says Epstein.

The course also incorporates a relatively new theory in civics education dubbed “lived civics.”

“This approach acknowledges that young people come to the classroom having experienced civics in their daily lives. We can build upon this as an entry point to help them connect to politics and government,” says Andolina. “Since students have experienced civic life in such diverse ways, this approach immediately allows for multiple perspectives to shape the discussion of the course materials and ideas.” Ultimately, the focus is on how we live together in community.

“We have an opportunity to help students not only understand what the civic process is, but that it’s a relationship. Ultimately, we need to be able to work with each other, talk with each other, think about big issues and figure out how we can work through them together. These are skills that are especially needed right now,” says Epstein.

The long-term plan is for this class to transition into a standing course in the LAS curriculum.

The class is “incredibly timely, but also, in many ways, timeless. This is not a class that we designed for the craziness of 2020. This is a class that is geared toward empowering our students to go out into their communities and understand how their experience comes into [the social contract],” says Epstein.

“Our goal is to help students reframe the way they think of political problems,” adds Andolina. “Instead of thinking about them from a partisan perspective, they think about what it means to live in community with other people.

“Whether that community is your dorm room, your university, the city, the state or the world, what do we owe to each other because we live in community together?”

Comment on this story
Diversity Lessons

LAS is offering a unique course for foundation and nonprofit staff taught through the prism of critical ethnic studies

While teaching Introduction to Critical Ethnic Studies last year, Professor Lourdes Torres got to talking to one of her students, Patricia Novick, a reverend, clinical psychologist and Egan Fellow in the Egan Office of Urban Education and Community Partnerships.

“We decided the material presented in the class, which is part of DePaul’s Critical Ethnic Studies Program, would be very useful to broader audiences,” says Torres, Vincent de Paul Professor of Latin American and Latino Studies and Critical Ethnic Studies. As for her part, Novick has decades of experience developing programs and working with nonprofits.

The result is a unique online course on diversity for foundation and nonprofit staff supported by DePaul’s Academic Growth and Innovation Fund (AGIF) grant.

“Even before the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, over the last decade there has been an interest by organizations, corporations and institutions in developing staff familiarity with and sensitivity to issues of diversity,” says Torres.

The only problem is that most of these trainings only go so far. “We are trying to offer a deeper dive into issues of intersectionality, identity and social justice,” says Torres.

While the original model was to offer workshops at DePaul, COVID-19 restrictions derailed this plan. Through a collaboration with the Chicago-based Goldin Institute, which helps grassroots leaders around the world lead community-driven social change, the program shifted to a dynamic peer-to-peer online platform, Gather.

Novick says the online approach does not take away from its depth. “In addition to the multiple interactive Zoom-based sessions taught by Professor Torres, there are extensive required readings. It is a serious ‘academic’ undertaking with a pragmatic purpose, and it is impressive that so many busy nonprofit and foundation executives are willing to make this kind of commitment to deepen their understanding, apply it, and pass it on to others,” she says.

Launched in April, the online experience offers two tracks—one for foundation staff and the other for executive directors of nonprofits—via regular sessions over a three-month period. Upon completion of the course, participants are given the tools and guidance to teach the materials to their colleagues and staff.

With assistance from DePaul graduate students, the course places some of today’s most pressing social issues in historical context. For example, a critical ethnic studies perspective frames the Black Lives Matter movement as part of a historical continuum by looking at what predated the movement, how it has developed and how is it connected to other social justice movements in the past, according to Torres.

Queer identity, transgender identity, and the pronouns and language used to refer to nonbinary people are also discussed in academic context. The next step is for executive directors of organizations to develop action projects around the course curriculum. “This will take it from a theoretical to a practical level,” adds Torres.

Comment on this story
HumanitiesX was formed in 2019 to reimagine teaching in the humanities by supporting faculty and community partners in co-designing project-based courses on pressing issues facing our communities.

When COVID-19 put on hold the launch of the first set of co-taught courses, director Lisa Dush went to work to see how to adjust HumanitiesX’s goals to the new reality. Her solution took the form of two initiatives committed to documenting our pivotal moment in history: Speaking in This Moment and Documenting This Moment. “These initiatives prioritize the humanistic approaches, interdisciplinary inquiry and engaged practice that are at the core of HumanitiesX,” says Dush, an associate professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and Discourse.

Supported by a generous grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, HumanitiesX connects faculty and students from DePaul with community partners from Chicago-area arts, cultural and civic organizations to demonstrate what can be accomplished in the world.

For Speaking in This Moment, humanities faculty participated in a workshop called Humanities NOW led by TEDxDePaulUniversity speaker and coach Deborah Siegel. “While we aren’t frontline workers in this pandemic, so many of the academics in LAS have expertise with pandemics in some way, such as understanding historical patterns or understanding how people make sense of the moments of social change. This workshop gave faculty a reflective space to think about how their work connects to this moment so that they could begin to do some writing for public audiences,” says Dush. The resulting essays were published on Medium.

Humanities NOW also presented a virtual speaker series that is open to the public. The first guest was Agnes Callard, an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago.

Documenting This Moment, a partnership between the HumanitiesX collaborative and DePaul’s Special Collections and Archives, offers a new internship course that teaches students oral history and documentary practice. The hands-on course gives students the opportunity to conduct, transcribe and edit interviews with DePaul-connected stakeholders. “By interviewing students, scholars, alumni and community partners on topics such as the pandemic and the fight for racial justice, these students will become key witnesses and historians for this crucial time in the 21st century,” says Dush.

HumanitiesX will launch its inaugural year of community-engaged co-teaching fellowships, all on the theme of immigration/migration, in fall quarter 2021.

“These initiatives prioritize the humanistic approaches, interdisciplinary inquiry and engaged practice that are at the core of HumanitiesX.”

–Lisa Dush
As a sophomore at DePaul, Drew Edwards (International Studies ’13) enrolled in Introduction to Nonprofit Management.

Having volunteered in a refugee camp in Uganda, he and fellow Blue Demon Kevin Oh (Education ’13) decided to organize a student volunteer trip to Uganda to continue the work. That’s when Edwards realized he could parlay this trip into a bona fide organization to have students help rebuild a war-torn country. The introductory class would give him the tools to make this happen.

“We didn’t know a ton about starting a nonprofit,” recalls Edwards with a laugh. “We bought ‘Nonprofits for Dummies’ books and we started our 501(c)(3) application in class,” says Edwards. A major influence was the class’s faculty member, Adjunct Professor of Public Service and Community Service Studies Melinda Wright.

Nearly a decade later, this fledgling nonprofit is flourishing. While its focus has changed, its name, Pangea, a reference to the ancient supercontinent that means “all the earth” in Greek, remains the same. Today, the organization works in Uganda and other East African countries to foster literacy through everything from a publishing venture to mobile libraries.

“Literacy is the underpinning for any form of meaningful learning,” says Edwards. “Here we have all these apps that exist in the world and yet, in places like Uganda, multiple banks have told me that their greatest obstacle to getting people to actively use mobile banking or to use the internet is to be able to read. I think we take that for granted in the West,” says Edwards. By focusing on local language publishing, Pangea gives teachers the resources they need to be culturally responsive. For a country with 47 million people that is the size of Oregon, which nonetheless has 54 different official spoken languages and 12 languages of instruction in elementary school, this is no small task. “We’re trying to provide a sufficient number of books [per classroom] by language, which is 48 different children’s books in each of those languages, as well as teaching guides, with the hope that we’re going to stimulate authorship and illustratorship in the economy,” he says.

A Michigan native, Edwards was a Steans Community Scholar at DePaul and captain of the men’s track team. Vincentian teachings have stayed with him through the years.

“One of the things I love about DePaul is its mission, and I love this idea of learning through service. That’s honestly why I chose DePaul,” he says.

DePaul has remained a partner to Pangea. Edwards’ former teacher, Wright, has continued to be a mentor to him and serves on the Pangea board, while Edwards is a regular guest lecturer in her class. In addition, hundreds of DePaul students have volunteered with Pangea in Uganda throughout the years or interned in the organization’s Chicago office.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the publishing arm of Pangea produced a book series to present important public health information in a culturally sensitive way.

Such books are part of Pangea’s larger mission to connect us all. “If we can help shift the narrative on how we see other people, we can become a more cohesive and diverse world that embraces its diversity,” says Edwards. Check out the books here.

Comment on this story
Music and Memory

Loss, world travel and the redemptive power of music. These dizzying themes play a central role in Francesca Royster’s next book.

A professor of English and Critical Ethnic Studies, Royster was also a 2021 Carnegie Fellow nominee—a distinctive fellowship awarded to exceptional scholars, journalists and public intellectuals. To be considered for this fellowship, Royster had to be nominated by LAS. Her application centered on her latest book project, a memoir/musical analysis inspired by the untimely death of her mother.

“My mother was an arts administrator who passed away around 20 years ago in Bahia, a state of Brazil, where she was attending a conference,” says Royster. “She spent her last day traveling the city of Salvador and then died of cardiac arrest unexpectedly. After her death, we received her suitcase full of rolls of overexposed film, which offered some clues as to how she spent her last day.”

Royster’s classes cover a wide variety of subjects, from Shakespeare and early modern drama to popular culture, with an emphasis on African American music. “There’s a whole genre called ‘mixtape memoirs,’ which is basically like a ‘mix tape’ [of old] where you select two or three songs that are connected to key moments in your life, and you use it as a prompt for writing,” she says.

Her latest book project reflects her teaching philosophy. “The same way I am approaching writing this book is also what I try to teach in the class—strive to help students find their way to writing critically and reflectively about sometimes difficult things in their lives. Music is a really important tool for accessing those moments and for connecting to history and issues of power,” says Royster, the author of two previous books, including “Sounding Like a No-No: Queer Sounds and Eccentric Acts in the Post-Soul Era.”

Royster hopes to be able to travel to Brazil to retrace her mother’s footsteps and to explore Salvador, the site of a former slave port and the home to a “really alive Black culture,” she says.

Royster received a PhD in English from the University of California, Berkeley, and began teaching at DePaul in 1999. She has served as director of the Department of African and Black Diaspora Studies and was the recipient of the prestigious 2017 Cortelyou-Lowery Award from DePaul.

Royster’s scholarly work initially focused on Shakespeare. “I was really interested in performances of racial difference in Shakespeare. Later, I focused on Black resistance and creativity, which took me to music,” she says.

DePaul has been a happy home for her these past two-plus decades. “Something that I really love about DePaul is the way that we aren’t locked as much to traditional disciplines and that we’ve been permitted to approach teaching and scholarship in a way that’s connected to each other and the world,” she says.

Although Royster did not win the fellowship, her work remains an inspiration to DePaul. “I am honored that I was considered for this distinctive award and will still be bringing many of the fruits of my research back to my students” she says.

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