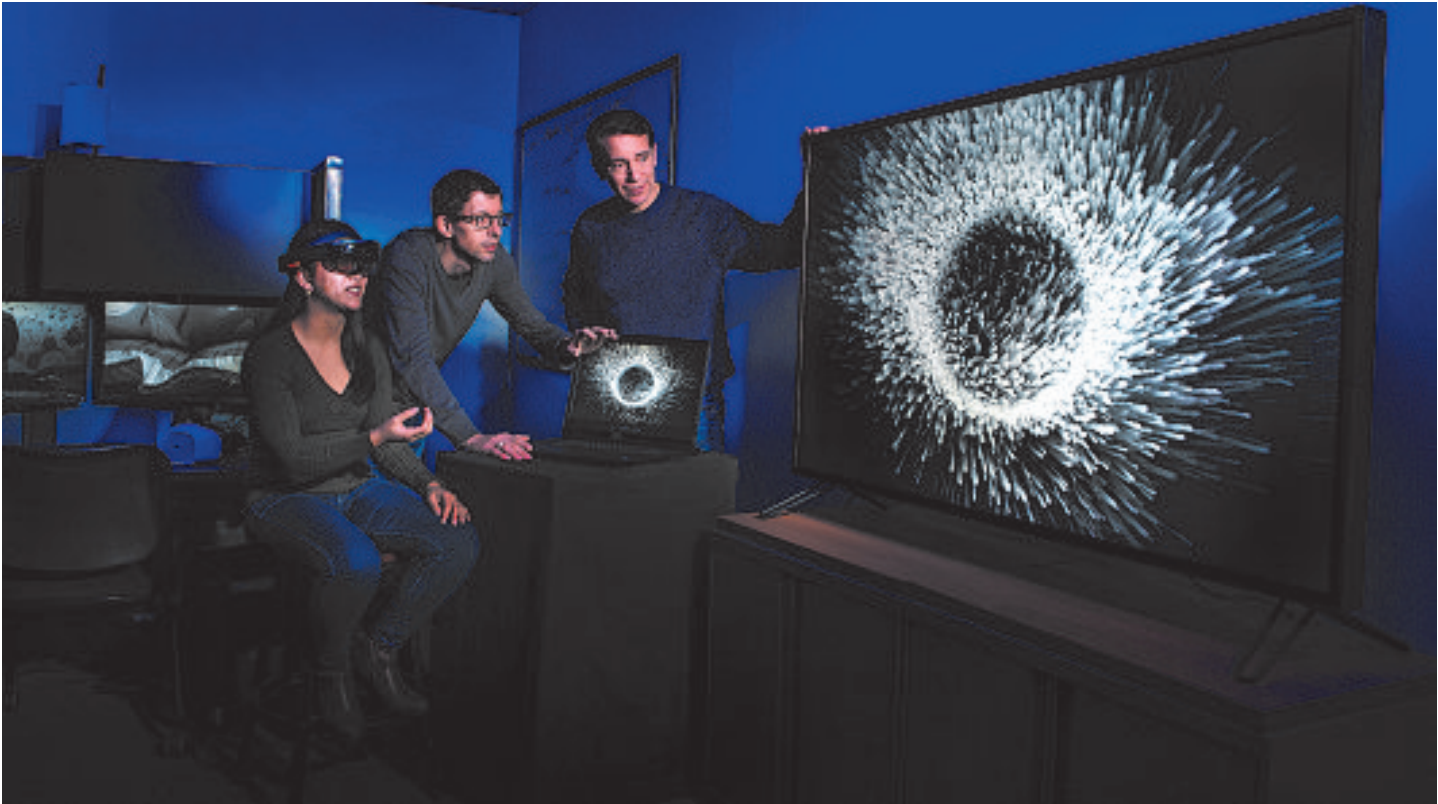# EDUCATION

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Emily Gong, currently a master's student in computer science and past president of the University of Maryland XR [Mixed Reality] Club, Brandon Morse, professor of art, and Matthias Zwicker, professor of computer science, collaborate on a project in the immersive media design degree program. Photo by John T. Consoli / University of Maryland

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New degree programs launched at area colleges and universities

Opportunities unveiled in immersive media, construction and education

By Emily Parks, Contributing Writer

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an unusual start to the fall semester as virtual continued to replace in-classroom learning. However, within this new normal, area colleges and universities continue to roll out new degree programs for students.

The University of Maryland launched a new four-year undergraduate immersive media design (IMD) degree program. This dual-track program is co-taught by art and computer science faculty to prepare students to design, develop and produce immersive media. Immersive media involves the viewer with sight, sound and other sensory experiences to allow interaction with the surrounding digital environment. Two common examples of immersive media are augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR); however, projected displays as well as tactile or audio platforms are also components of immersive media.

Students choose one of two tracks, innovative coders or emerging creatives, to focus on the technical or artistic side of immersive media. Innovative coders will graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree while the emerging creatives will earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. The major allows art students to capitalize on their artistic talents while strengthening computer science skills to bring a new dimension to their work. Computer science students gain an artistic perspective while using their skills in programming languages, calculus and algorithms to collaborate with art students to develop and design forms of immersive media.

According to Roger Eastman, Ph.D., IMD director and professor of the practice in computer science, being well-versed in immersive media provides artists with marketable job skills while the computer science students thrive within the forefront of new technology. "Virtual reality allows an immediate and emotional impact in a way that screens do not," he adds.

Brandon Morse, associate professor and chair of the department of art at the university, notes the collaborative nature of the degree program is one of its biggest benefits. "The design of the program allows students the ability to communicate across technical and artistic lines, preparing them for future collaborative workplaces," he says.

Sophomore Dani Feng of Rockville, is energized by the role immersive media plays in her art. She is on the emerging creatives track and is looking forward to using tools such as Adafruit Playground Express in her projects. Adafruit is a circuit board she will connect to her computer with a USB cable to receive or give input using code. She codes in the language CircuitPython and uses the Mu text editor. Artists can use Adafruit to interact with buttons, LED lights, and light and temperature sensors on the circuit board to create interactive objects or environments.

She feels immersive media will provide many

Above: CCBC's new state-of-the-art Carol Diane Eustis Center for Health Professions benefits students. See article on page 5.

Ask Margit

By Margit B. Weisgal, Contributing Writer

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Managing your digital education

With the massive shift to digital education for just about every student in every school – elementary through high school and most colleges and universities – kids are floundering because it is such an unfamiliar and uncomfortable way to learn. Teachers are also being pushed into a different way of teaching most never planned for. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students had a choice between face-to-face classes and one of the online forms. Now these types of classes are mandated.

There are a lot of different types of digital learning, all of which come under the heading of Learning Management Systems (LMS). One definition found on www.oxagile.com, says, "A learning management system is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of electronic educational technology (also called e-Learning) courses or training." Therefore, depending on where you are getting your education, the LMS will vary. The most popular platforms are Backboard, Moodle and Canvas.

If you've taken an online class, then that particular LMS is familiar to you and you may think they are all alike. They aren't. Since I started teaching online, I've used three different systems. As technology changes, so do these platforms, incorporating more bells and whistles to provide you with a robust online education.

The platforms differ by school. Even if you are in a face-to-face class in a real live classroom, odds are your class includes computer assisted learning. This means a part

A focus on student engagement

With students learning remotely, schools create programs to stay in touch

By Gregory J. Alexander, Contributing Writer

The majority of college students are taking classes remotely, some from their parents' basements, some from an on-campus dorm and others from out of the country. And while they may be fulfilling their academic duties just fine via a virtual environment, students may be missing out on college football games, Greek life activities, hanging out with friends after class or participating in fun activities organized by one of the many student-led organizations. However, local colleges are utilizing technology in innovative ways to help fill the gap.

Like many schools, the majority of Harford Community College's classes are offered remotely – some of the health care classes and laboratory components necessitate on-campus learning – so the college had to find new ways to engage with students.

"We've utilized Microsoft Teams to develop more web chat capabilities, live webinars with speakers and virtual open houses and have focused on using technology to create meaningful experiences and engagement opportunities for our students," says Patrick S. Elliott, Ed.D., associate vice president for enrollment management at Harford Community College. HCC also held a virtual event focused on Civil Rights called "Uncomfortable Conversations" that was moderated by a faculty member who is a Civil Rights historian. Elliott says the school brought in faculty, students, members of the faith community and members from the Harford County Sheriff's Office to discuss the current issues surrounding criminal justice.

The Welcome Week boxes that incoming students received at UMBC. Photo by Marlayna Demond for UMBC.

"We have 35 Registered Student Organizations that are student-led organizations. Research shows that the more engaged students are the more successful they are in academics. We also had orientation for new students and held a pep rally where students got cool Harford Community College gear and a 'survival guide' with tips such as how to get involved and

dispelling myths about the college experience," says Elliott. He adds that HCC also had an ice cream social for students who wanted to come to campus and see their classmates while maintaining proper social distance protocols.

Salisbury's Sea Gull Fund gives students real world experience investing real money. Photo courtesy of Salisbury University

Experience counts
Learning opportunities that build on experience

By E. Rose Scarff, Contributing Writer

Salisbury University's Sea Gull Fund has been intended from its beginnings to give the student participants experience in investing real money and also growing the endowment.

"We have gone through a lot of different market cycles," says Herman Manakyan, Ph.D., professor of economics and finance, who oversees the program. "When we started in 2000 we experienced the dot-com bust, then 9/11, so like many other funds at that time, we experienced losses." The fund has had its ups and downs, most recently the COVID-19 health crisis.

"But our style is consistent," says Manakyan, "We use a top down approach. With sector analysis we try to identify which sectors will outperform and which will underperform based on our economic forecast. Then we select individual stocks that fit those profiles."

Students who apply for and are accepted into practicum course are divided into teams. Each team will handle the analysis of two or three sectors of the Standard and Poor's global industry classification system.

Another team of students oversees them as lead analysts. "These are students who have management responsibilities," says Manakyan. "They have participated the prior semester and come back as leaders to help manage portfolios, so they provide continuity from one semester to the next." Jack Annitto, Daniel Czajkowski and Michael Yenca are three seniors participating as lead analysts for The Sea Gull Fund this fall.

As a finance major, Annitto was interested in gaining experience managing real money. "It was a lot of work, but an overall great experience,' says Annitto, "I'm happy to come back as a lead analyst and take a leadership role."

As part of the same team as Annitto last year, Czajkowski is back as a lead analyst. Both of them had to navigate the changes caused in mid-March when everything shut down due to the pandemic. "Classes were on Zoom," says Czajkowski, "but trying to work around everyone's different schedules was difficult." Most of their research gathering could be done online, but not all.

Yenca had these shared experiences as well, but he has already been interviewing for a job after graduation. "They were always impressed that I had experience managing real money and experience working with teams," says Yenca.

Both skills are valued by employers.

Opportunities for real life experience are also available for students at Loyola University Maryland. Because of the positive experiences he had as an undergraduate doing volunteer tax preparation, J.P. Krahel, associate professor of accounting, was eager to provide a similar experience for his students when he came to Loyola.

He used Beta Alpha Psi, the accounting honor society, to recruit participants. "Students who volunteer must go through training and pass an IRS exam," says Krahel. "Our undergraduates do the basic tax preparation and we are planning to have graduate students trained as advanced level tax preparers."

"I could not have asked for a better experience," says Stephanie Kolpien, an accounting major who graduated last year and is now pursuing a graduate degree at Loyola. "By the end of the return I felt as though I knew each person a little better."

"The transaction is fairly simple, people get their taxes done," says Krahel, "but it's the humanity of it that is such an intersection of

Building on experience

At Salisbury University the first goal for The Sea Gull Fund is to provide the opportunity for students to gain experience in financial markets research, decision making and working as a team. Students research Standard & Poor's 10 sectors: industrials, consumer staples, consumer discretionary, energy, financials, health care, information technology, materials, telecommunications and utilities. They decide which stocks to buy or sell within the different sectors, vote for their choices and answer to an advisory board which oversees their work.

The other goal is to grow part of the university's endowment through long-term capital growth. Beginning with $286,000 in 2000, the Sea Gull Fund has now grown to $1.6 million, including additional donor funds over the years. They have outperformed the S&P 500 during that time.

At Loyola University Maryland accounting students in Beta Alpha Psi have the opportunity to prepare income tax returns for low income clients through Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) located in the Loyola Clinical Centers at Belvedere Square. The training is usually provided on campus by CASH (Creating Assets, Saving and Hope) Campaign of Maryland. Through the Sigma Society at Loyola, business students engage in professional development in sales, marketing and management. Their signature event is a "Night of Networking," which gives students the opportunity to hone their networking skills. They also volunteer their time with a different local charity each year.

The Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland plans to offer a new Flex MBA program in the fall of 2021 geared toward professionals with five to eight years of business experience after their bachelor's degree. It is planned as a mix of online and in-person classes to meet the schedules of working professionals. •

Mental health has become a major issue during the pandemic, which is why Loyola's master's degree in school counseling is even more critical. Photo courtesy of Loyola University Maryland.

Addressing workforce and community needs
Post-baccalaureate study attracts students to various fields

By Linda L. Esterson, Contributing Writer

With COVID-19's mental health impact on families, including children, the role of the school counselor garners increasing importance. Loyola University Maryland's master's degree in school counseling degree helps future counselors learn to prioritize self-care to better serve their students during a pandemic and any other crisis that may arise.

The program's distinction from others is its incorporation of Jesuit values, with a focus on caring for the whole person.

"Recognizing that to be a counselor, you are giving so much of yourself, we really do promote wellness within the program," says Jennifer Scaturo Watkinson, Ph.D., LCPC, program director and associate professor of school counseling in the school of education at Loyola University Maryland. "We talk about what's going to give [students] the best balance. We want our students to be very successful, and we want to make sure that, when they're in our program, they're setting realistic boundaries, and they're also taking care of themselves." The courses are infused with mindfulness practice, and many begin their sessions with mindfulness meditation.

The program is intent on helping students focus on balancing the six key aspects of life: physical, intellectual, occupational, social, emotional and spiritual health.

Accredited through the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), the program also prepares students to be critical thinkers with a growth mindset, through learning from curriculum developed from evidence-based practice.

"We teach our students to fish as opposed to always giving them fish," says Scaturo Watkinson. "That comes out through our supervision. We tend to lean a little bit on social constructivism, a supervision approach, which is basically working with students and helping to guide them to particular solutions." Students learn not only with coursework, but through practicum and internship experiences, during which they receive support and feedback that spurs their individual growth.

"We want to make sure our students are well prepared to do the work they need to do for K through 12 kids and adolescents," Scaturo Watkinson explains. This includes the knowledge and skill sets to work with families, children and teachers to best support the students, whether they need support to feel connected, deal with a traumatic past or work through a current situation that is causing a hardship. "It's also about being human beings to connect and be relational, empathetic, good problem solvers."

Students enroll from various undergraduate and employment backgrounds including psychology and family studies, and complete the 17-course program in full-time study over two years or part-time up to five years.

A new dual master's degree program at the University of Maryland joins study in the school of architecture with the iSchool, the college of information studies, to educate the next generation of urban planners to include analytics to emphasize "Smart Cities."

"The Smart Cities movement reflects a recent change in the scope and complexity of information and its potential widespread applications," says Casey Dawkins, Ph.D., director of urban studies and planning and Ph.D. programs at the University of Maryland. "There's a niche for a new kind of professional that combines both planning and its emphasis on improving community wellbeing with the emphasis on data analytics and information management."

The community planning and information management (CPIM) master's degree program resulted from a collaboration of the two schools with the National Center for Smart Growth, a research center located on the College Park campus that offers educational programs on topics related to smart growth, defined as urban planning and transportation theory concentrating in compact urban centers. Students in the dual degree program will earn master's degrees in both community planning and

Mindfulness component basis of Loyola master's program

During her internship and studies to become a high school English teacher, Tori Kovelman realized the challenges involved for students to focus as they read classic novels. It was during a teaching internship that she had second thoughts.

"I wanted to teach them and support them on the life skills side," Kovelman says.

She felt pulled, and instead of teaching, became a yoga instructor. The mindfulness aspect of her yoga training helped her to become grounded and she realized she wanted to support other people, she explains. That led her to Loyola's school counseling program.

"They bring a strong focus on discovering your purpose and your 'why' as a person to then bring that forward in kids," she says. "It also felt like life training. I was learning these skills to care for and support myself, and it confirmed everything previously, that this is what I want to do."

Kovelman completed internships at New Town High School and the Crossroads Center, a Baltimore County Public Schools alternative program for grades seven to 10, and earned her master's degree in school counseling from Loyola last spring and passed the certification exam. She now works full time at the Crossroads Center, serving about 45 seventh-grade students at the White Marsh school. She considers herself lucky to have landed a role that can make a tremendous impact on adolescent students who are given a "fresh slate" and need support. She provides that for each student through multiple meetings each week in one-on-one and group sessions.

"They say I am the best part of their day, but they got it backwards," she says. "They are absolutely the best part of my day. •

information management. The program, which begins accepting applications in January for a launch next fall, will allow some overlapping core courses and electives to enable its completion in three years of full-time study as opposed to the traditional four years if done separately. Students will spend a significant amount of time learning basic data analysis skills and expand to learn how decision making is affected by the availability of data in community planning, often referred to as geographic information systems. Students complete a capstone project at the end of the program.

"This degree program tries to train people to make use of that large amount of information

Adapting to a changing world
New programs help students adapt to new learning environments

By Carol Sorgen, Contributing Writer

n the midst of these unsettling times, Maryland's colleges and universities have adapted to educating their students in a virtual environment as well as helping them keep an eye firmly on the future.

Harford Community College Adapts to Online Environment

As Harford Community College has shifted to a virtual experience for now, the Office of Student Life (OSL) has found creative ways to engage with students both on and off campus, says Griselda Flores, Ph.D., director of student life and chair-elect for MD Community College Activities Directors' Association (MCCADA). These include virtual town halls, online meetings for student organizations, virtual activities such as caricatures, scavenger hunts, yoga, etc., online forums with nationally-known speakers, online student conferences, and drive-in activities such as welcome- back events.

According to Flores, Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) will continue to meet virtually to ensure that students feel a part of a supportive community at HCC, since online education can make students feel isolated. "As a means to bridging the gap of student engagement and remote learning, many RSOs are planning to meet regularly, hosting guest speakers and artists, creating virtual plays, engaging in social hour, and other innovative online interactions," says Flores, noting that through student clubs, many students form social networks that contribute to their sense of belonging at HCC, which ultimately enhances their college retention and experience. For this reason, the college has incorporated various online apps such as Flipgrid to keep students engaged and connected.

Pivoting to a virtual environment was daunting at first. "The challenge that we initially encountered was finding ways to keep students engaged and interested in online events," says Flores, but she observes that so far student participation has been steady, and many students are eager to reconnect with other students and HCC staff. "The OSL team looks forward to adapting and finding creative and inclusive solutions to better serve all of our students," says Flores.

University of Maryland Prepares Students for Future Careers

A $4 million gift from University of Maryland alumni Joel and Kim Feller to the college of behavioral and social sciences has established The Joel and Kim Feller Advising and Career Center, which opened this fall in Tydings Hall. The center will support academic and career-related programs, with a team of dedicated staff members. The gift is the single largest donation the college has ever received.

"The gift will allow the college to leverage academics, career advising and alumni support and resources," says Katherine F. Russell, Ph.D., associate director for undergraduate education, who notes that once students are back on campus they will be able to visit the advising center, which will be newly renovated and expanded. Students will have increased access to career-related events and opportunities. "Our inside-the-Beltway location gives our students a huge advantage when it comes to internships and meeting people in their field," says Russell.

The Fellers met as students at UMD and have maintained a connection to the university. Joel has served on the university foundation's Board of Trustees and the couple has donated more than $2 million in the past five years. Those gifts were earmarked to recruit and retain faculty members and create a lecture series in the department of government and politics, where Joel studied, in addition to establishing a dean's level professorship in the college, and an endowed scholarship in the MLAW program.

Students will be followed closely throughout their academic stay at UMD to offer them assistance in their career planning, particularly in the behavioral and social sciences. The Feller Center will also partner with the University's Career Center, making it a "one-stop shop" for academic and career planning, according to Russell. "We want to help students understand that the behavioral sciences are a good career path."

There are approximately 5,000 undergraduates in the college of behavioral and social sciences. "With the help of the Fellers' generous gift, we hope to touch all of those students," says Russell.

Goucher Dance Department Develops Innovative Teaching Strategies

Last spring, Goucher College's dance department entered a "virtual reality." Early days were challenging, for teachers and students alike. "At first I was very upset," says Natalie Fitch, a dance and Spanish major who will graduate in 2022. "Dancers like to move and take up space," says the Baltimore resident, an alumna of the Baltimore School for the Arts. "Once I wrapped my head around it though and accepted that this was the new reality for the time being, I was OK," says Fitch, adding that dancers are, in general, a resilient lot.

Though students were expected to return to campus this fall, the department had to quickly pivot when on-campus classes were once again canceled. Now, however, the department has hit its stride, says Elizabeth Ahearn, professor and dance program coordinator for Goucher's center for dance, music and theatre and founding director and certified instructor of the college's Pilates Center.

How can you move in space when space is limited? Instead of "flying across the studio," Ahearn has had to modify the instruction to take into account the students' individual environments. "Some are dancing on wood floors, some on carpet, some on their lawn," she says, remarking that the different surfaces can affect how a student moves. Ahearn has to take all this into account so the students can not only progress, but not get injured.

This semester, Ahearn has been able to teach from her studio on Goucher's campus, and with the use of webcams, projecting screens and computers she's able to see the students individually and give them feedback. In addition, a pianist has joined Ahearn – from a social distance, of course – giving the students more of a sense of being back in the studio. "Having live music has made a big difference," says Ahearn.

Through Zoom technology, Ahearn can dialogue with an entire class as a whole, as well as in small groups. She also records her classes so if a student is ill or is having technical difficulties, the class can be accessed at a later time. "This is also a way for me to assess my own teaching," says Ahearn.

There have been unexpected benefits to online teaching. Fitch is enjoying more time at home while Ahearn is pleased that the faculty has been able to get the students engaged in different ways, such as creating podcasts, preparing for an online performance that can be viewed free of charge, and taking online master classes by renowned dancers and choreographers.

"Thanks to the support Goucher has given us, we are able to offer effective and compelling instruction," says Ahearn. "We've learned to be malleable, flexible and patient. We're doing our best."

"Goucher has done a great job of keeping our community informed and safe," adds junior Berea Whitley from Prince George's County. "The dance department has also done a great job updating us on everything pertaining to classes and other requirements. All of the dance professors are extremely understanding of how are lives have changed and they are very supportive at all times. I am happy to be a part of a college with professors and staff members who care about me outside of class."

And, as any artist knows, "The show must go on," says Natalie Fitch. "We're making it go on." •

Like many classes, Goucher's dance program had to be innovative in using Zoom to teach.
Photo courtesy of Goucher College.

The value of college career services

If you're going from student to working professional, your college or university's career services center can help you make that transition.

According to monster.com, there are several ways in which your Career Services office can help you:

1. Find your passion. You don't have to know what you want to do as soon as you get to college. Developing a career plan can evolve through the years as you develop new interests, skills, and values. A career center can help you explore career options that will reflect all those things.

2. Sharpen your networking skills. A career center can help you expand your network through alumni events, internships, online tools and more. It often is "who you know" that can help you get the right job.

3. Help you get work experience. Career centers can be instrumental in helping you secure an internship, which can lead to job prospects. A National Association of Colleges and Employers study of the class of 2019 found that 57.5% of students who had an internship reported receiving a job offer.

4. Help you perfect your resume. A career services counselor can help you organize your experience and skills and create a resume that will stand out from the crowd. •

Prospective college students take advantage of virtual offerings

High school seniors utilize virtual content to navigate the admission process

By Emily Parks, Contributing Writer

An on-campus tour of a prospective college or university is a rite of passage for high school seniors during the college application process. But what happens when the COVID-19 pandemic limits the in-person tour? How can students get a sense if a school will be a good fit for them if the on-campus presence is limited?

In response to the pandemic, college fairs quickly pivoted from in-person to virtual. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) announced in July that all fall programming would be presented online. NACAC is an organization of nearly 14,000 professionals from around the world dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing postsecondary education. It is also considered the governing organization for college counselors.

A press release from NACAC noted how the virtual fairs are designed to replicate much of the experience of in-person college fairs. The association has offered college fairs for more than 45 years, and had to cancel them this year because of the coronavirus pandemic and ongoing health concerns surrounding large gatherings. In their place, NACAC's virtual fairs, powered by VisitDays, provide a dynamic, new digital meeting space for students no matter where they live or what their situation.

"NACAC Virtual College Fairs help even the playing field by offering access," says Angel B. Pérez, chief executive officer of NACAC. "All students can log in using their phone or computer to attend sessions offered by hundreds of colleges, ask questions, and even schedule a time to meet one-on-one with an admission counselor. It's a way for students to explore their options and find the best fit for achieving their college dreams."

Students may attend the free NACAC Virtual College Fairs as often as they like, and parents are invited as well.

In addition, as a result of social distancing recommendations due to the pandemic, colleges and universities have stepped up their virtual content offerings to students. Ann Marie Strauss, director of college counseling at The Bryn Mawr School, an independent, nonsectarian all-girls school for grades PK-12 in Baltimore, recommends that students take advantage of all the virtual experiences colleges and universities have to offer to prospective applicants.

"There is an enormous amount of virtual

Photo courtesy of The Bryn Mawr School.

content colleges and universities offer, such as virtual tours," she says. "In addition, thanks to virtual platforms like Zoom, applicants can talk to professors directly, sit in on a class or talk to students who are studying a major that student is considering to study."

The virtual information session, either through the school or as part of a virtual college fair, is the best place to start for students to obtain a good overview about the college or university. Strauss advises students to also follow the school's Twitter or Instagram account to get a feel for the school. Students should also look into activities they are considering at the school. "If you think you'd like to take part in the school's Model UN, follow their social media account; if you might want to play rugby, follow the rugby team," she advises. "It's a good way to take the pulse of the activity you might want to be involved in at the school."

When it comes to choosing a virtual college fair, Strauss recommends choosing one that supports a wide variety of colleges as well as the student's schools of interest. NACAC is a good place to start to find one. She also encourages applicants to be thoughtful with their questions to the admissions counselors. "All schools offer study abroad, a psychology major, or opportunities for research," she says. "A better question would be asking, 'What are some special aspects

of the school's psychology program?'"

Terry St. Laurent, director of counseling and school counselor (college) at Notre Dame Preparatory School (NDP), a private, Roman Catholic, independent, all-girls school for grades 6-12 in Towson, also encourages her students to take advantage of resources provided by colleges and universities. In addition to offering a great virtual tour, she notes Johns Hopkins University offers college essay writing workshops for potential applicants. "Students can look at their application and maximize what they can do to be a competitive applicant," she says. Just as important are opportunities to establish a relationship with the college representative.

"Having the relationship with the college representative will be vital in getting to know the student," she says. "It's an important part of the process of what the student is looking for in a college, what the college can offer and how the student can contribute to the college."

St. Laurent encourages students to sign up for one-on-one Zoom meetings with college representatives of which parents can also attend. NDP also hosts virtual panel discussions of former students who are in college to discuss their experiences. College representatives also present virtually to NDP students on topics such as the college interview, social media and the transition to college.

Some colleges and universities are still hosting small on-campus tours with social distancing measures in effect. St. Laurent notes the University of Richmond as an example of one university that offers the on-campus tour with social distancing and capacity restrictions in place, but with a twist. Visitors can go on a self-guided tour by scanning QR codes at certain buildings to learn more about the campus.

Sunil Trivedi, of Baltimore and a senior at Towson High School, appreciates the vast virtual content offered by colleges and universities. While he and his family were able to visit a few colleges before the pandemic, they do not plan on any more on-campus visits and have been utilizing the virtual tours and information offered by the schools.

He is applying to a greater number of colleges this year since he won't be able to visit them in-person. "The pandemic has caused me to visit fewer colleges in person and increase the amount of virtual tours," he says. "I don't think I would've done any virtual tours if not for the pandemic. It's also caused me to base where I'm applying to more strictly off of academic merit, size, location and the availability of sports because I can't visit the campuses and get that 'gut feeling' that may have drawn me to one college more than another."

Anna Melchionni, a senior at NDP, agrees and appreciates the virtual content offered by the schools. "I think the hardest part about the application process regarding the pandemic is not being able to visit schools and seeing the students go about their day." But that doesn't damper her excitement over applying to college. She has a favorite college in mind and likes that she has a number of virtual experiences available to her.

"I think the pandemic has made me more excited about college," she says. "I am able to go to virtual information sessions about once a week (they have different ones every night about the opportunities they offer), go on a virtual tour whenever I want, and talk to the admissions counselor via Zoom."

Joanna Jeyachandran, also a senior at NDP, agrees, adding "I have missed the in-person interaction with people during this virtual experience. However, colleges have posted much useful information on their websites, making it more accessible and helpful." •

Above left: Students Eva Farroha (left in yellow) and MyCo Le (right in blue jacket) walk with Anne Marie Strauss, director of college counseling.

Impacting communities on different levels

From tackling the coronavirus to increasing access to technology, schools are making a difference

By Gregory J. Alexander, Contributing Writer

"Our students are working on real world problems and applying what they learn in their programs for the work they do here at the Imaging Resource Center," says Lee Boot, Imaging Resource Center (IRC) director and affiliate professor, departments of visual arts and computer science and electrical engineering at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). One of the more important projects Boot and the IRC are working on – in conjunction with UMBC's Emergency Health Services and The Hilltop Institute – is a series of 3D maps to help researchers and policymakers better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Marylanders.

Boot says that technology has advanced to a point where it makes sense to look at data, charts and graphs in a 3D model. "When you look at data, charts and graphs slide by slide via PowerPoint, for example, you can't see the connections within the data. If you pick any issue, public health or national security, policymakers are realizing that the big challenges we face are made up of many different factors," Boot says. "It's also important to show the personal stories to illustrate how an issue affects people directly. We can do that with 3D maps."

At the IRC, students, faculty and staff construct maps when stacked on top of each other can show different data points – number of COVID-19 cases, hospital visits and deaths – and compare them ZIP code to ZIP code, while also illustrating important information such as how the number of hospital visits compares to a particular neighborhood's access to health care.

"We can show individual blocks in Baltimore and include videos of people in that block to tell their individual stories," Boot says.

Using the surge in cases this summer in the 21224 ZIP code in Baltimore City, which contains neighborhoods such as Canton, Patterson Park and Highlandtown, to illustrate how the 3D maps can show the connection between different factors, Boot explains that three socio-cultural factors contributed to the spike in cases. "That ZIP code has a large population of young people who at that time were returning to the bars and indoor dining. You also have a large working-class older population who tend to be politically conservative, along with a large Hispanic population who may live in multi-generational homes and work as front-line workers, delivery people and Uber drivers."

Boot adds that the COVID 3D maps also show the impact of access to health care, income inequality and education level on the health disparities in Maryland.

Photo courtesy of UMBC.

The Importance of Technology

As a Jesuit university, Loyola University Maryland is committed to the development of the whole person – mind, body and spirit – and urges its students to look for ways to improve their communities. With this in mind, Loyola's Master of Education (M.Ed.) in educational technology focuses on not only improving student's technological skills, but also having graduates become educational leaders at their schools and improve their individual school district. "Many of our students want to become technology leaders in their school districts and educate their colleagues through mentoring. During their internship, they develop a plan or project that they implement in their own school or district to advance technology," says Marie Heath, Ed.D, assistant professor of educational technology at Loyola. The 36-credit program is offered completely online to accommodate working teachers' schedules and location.

The program also examines how technology can be helpful as well as harmful in the classroom and everyday life. "The challenge is that there is no gatekeeper for information online. It's great for students to have access, but we worry when the truth can become malleable, so we have an emphasis on digital citizenship," says Heath. "We analyze the technology and the society that is using the technology, as there is an imbalance of power and inequity in access to technology that must be addressed."

With many students learning remotely these days, Loyola's educational technology program is more relevant than ever. "Energy comes from the exchange of ideas and experiences, so we encourage teachers to

have their students chat with each other through apps such as Flipgrid or Microsoft Teams. When teaching remotely, there is an opportunity for students to get to know their teachers. For example, a teacher can create a Bitmoji (a personal emoji) that reflects your personality and shows what's important to you, such as your favorite authors or a photo of your garden."

Study Abroad for All

When I was attending college in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were few study abroad opportunities available, primarily for finance students to study in London, foreign language majors to hone their language skills abroad, or for fine arts students to paint in Italy. Now, study abroad is much more popular; however, access and affordability remain a challenge.

"I've always wanted access to study abroad opportunities for as many students as possible, but I realize that not everyone can afford it, so I want to intentionally create strategies to increase access," says Liz Shearer, director of study abroad at Towson University. Shearer appointed liaisons for specific groups on campus to better understand their needs and conducted targeted outreach to Black students, Latino students and other underrepresented students.

Then, Shearer was able to secure grant funding through the U.S. Department of State's Capacity Building Program for U.S. Study Abroad, also known as IDEAS (Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students), which is designed to increase and diversify American student mobility in support of U.S. foreign policy goals, according to the U.S.

Increasing access

When Christina Oliver was mulling over what type of master's degree she wanted to pursue, the elementary school band teacher was excited when she discovered Loyola University Maryland's Master of Education in educational technology. "I love technology and being able to learn new skills that are useful for my content area was great," Oliver says.

"I've been able to revamp my lesson plans to incorporate technology in meaningful ways and add more interactive elements for students. The program also focuses on making learning equitable for different demographics and becoming technology leaders in our school districts," she says. Oliver says that when she enrolled two years ago (she graduated in May), she did not know at the time that the COVID-19 pandemic would force all classes to be conducted remotely. "I definitely had an upper hand compared to some of my colleagues when we switched to remote learning, so I tried to help my colleagues as much as I could." Oliver says that she has utilized Flipgrid, a video program, and SmartMusic, which helps teachers track student progress in music.

"I teach in Washington County, so access to technology and Wi-Fi can be challenging. The county was able to get a device for each student, and we surveyed parents on access to Wi-Fi. One student in a rural area had no access, so we secured a Wi-Fi hotspot for him. Another student was walking all the way to school just to access Wi-Fi. It was heartbreaking, but we got him a hotspot, too," Oliver says. •

Department of State's website. The primary goal of IDEAS is to increase the number of U.S. undergraduate students studying or interning abroad for credit. Shearer says the grant helps offset much of the cost to send underrepresented Towson University students to Brazil to study, which she hopes can be done in 2021, dependent on whether it's safe for students to study abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In Brazil, they will take a course called 'Introduction to Metropolitan Studies,' which satisfies a core requirement at Towson," says Shearer, who adds that scholarships and financial aid are also available to help students fill the financial gaps that the grant funding does not fulfill. "In Brazil, we will also have guest lecturers from the local community, and students will visit nonprofits and connect with local Brazilian students," she says.

"This experience will be very helpful for their careers. Data shows that students who study abroad find jobs quicker, are promoted more quickly and earn higher salaries," says Shearer. •

Above left: The IRC main production area at UMBC allows for collaboration between teams.

Area schools building the future
Student-focused facilities await return to campus

By Lisa Baldino, Contributing Writer

CCBC's Eustis Center simulates real-world situations for students. Photo courtesy of CCBC.

When students return to local college campuses to resume some normalcy, they will discover new buildings that defied the pandemic of 2020. From high-tech simulation labs to student idea centers, three local schools have built facilities designed to bring students together and enhance the overall college experience.

Shawn McNamara, Ed.D., dean of the school of health professions at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), says the completion of the Carol Diane Eustis Center for Health Professions, located on the Essex campus, will further emphasize CCBC's stature as the largest school of health professions in the state of Maryland. The 120,000 square-foot facility simulates real-world situations for students so they can learn to perform efficiently in any environment. "The center is a place where our teams of health care students can work together," McNamara says. "It's a place for collaboration, growth and learning. Students can practice in a safe environment to help build their skills and confidence to be prepared for the real world."

The new facility supports the college's health care degree and certificate programs that include radiography, nursing, EMT, massage therapy, histotechnology and medical laboratory technology. CCBC is the only school in Maryland that offers radiation therapy and anesthesia technology. The new center features state-of-the art labs with equipment found in actual clinical settings. It also includes medical exam rooms, patient hospital rooms and a full operating suite. EMT candidates can practice in an apartment setting with furniture and doorways to replicate working in the field.

The labs have computer-controlled human patient simulators that mimic symptoms found in real-life illnesses. The simulators react to the student's treatments and questions. Instructors debrief with the students and critique performances on the recorded video of the lab session. McNamara explains, "Through the use of simulations and hands-on learning, we can assure all students have the best opportunity to care for patients with varied conditions."

CCBC also offers a physician assistant program in collaboration with Towson University, in which candidates can earn a physician's assistant certificate and master's degree in physician assistant studies. "We focus on stackable credentials," McNamara says. Noting that the average age of students in the health care program is 32, they have a great deal of life experience. "Our faculty build on a student's current knowledge, and students have the ability to use one credential as a foundation for other programs."

"At CCBC, we change lives. The jobs these students achieve are life-changing – not only for their earning potential but also in the ability to touch the lives of others," McNamara notes.

At McDaniel College, students were welcomed back with the unveiling of the Roj Student Center, a newly renovated building to replace the previous student center that was built in 1978.

According to Cheryl Knauer, director of public relations at McDaniel College, the space was an $11 million renovation that included a $5 million leadership gift from Mary Lynn Durham and her husband, Bill Roj, both 1970 McDaniel alumni. "'This renovation was a much-needed effort to modernize the student center," Knauer says. "It is truly the heart of campus for students."

Located in the middle of the 160-acre college grounds, the Roj Student Center features a completely new space that is currently being used by the school's 1,200 residing undergraduates for meetings, entertainment and meals. McDaniel College has a total of 1,800 undergraduates, and its graduate program is currently online with 1,200 students enrolled. Knauer says the Roj Student Center will be open to all students upon their return to campus.

The building houses the Center for Experience and Opportunity (CEO), the Student Engagement Office and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, all in the same location with easy access for students to find support and research internship and career opportunities. In addition, the Center offers student work space, including an innovation lab, a student lounge and recreation area and a new College Store. The Roj Student Center Forum, a space that will feature larger college events, can also be rented out to public groups when available. A new quick-service casual restaurant, Hilltop Pub, offers a new campus take-out option with a variety of healthy choices. Orders can be made via an iPad ordering system or through the mobile app. Knauer says this flexibility is appreciated now, due to dining hall restrictions and required reservations.

McDaniel sophomore Hailey Grzemkowski says the new student center is amazing. "The Roj Student Center is very futuristic-looking now, but they also kept some of the old charm that the Decker Center had to offer," she explains, referring to the former student center. "I also really appreciate the lounging and study spaces that the Roj Center now has for us, and I utilize them the most often. With all our social distancing rules and COVID precautions, the Roj Center is definitely becoming the new hang-out spot on campus."

Similarly, Loyola University Maryland's largest academic building project in 10 years, the Miguel B. Fernandez Family Center for Innovation and Collaborative Learning, is scheduled to open in fall of 2021. Terrence Sawyer, J.D., senior vice president at the school, says, "We are on track for a wonderful new facility. We did not lose a day of construction to COVID."

Sawyer says the school began planning for the 2021 opening in 2016. The new building is centrally located, adjacent to Beatty Hall, one of Loyola's historic academic buildings that is also being renovated. The Fernandez Center is a 35,000-square-foot addition created by architects Shepling Goldfinch, designed for interdisciplinary, collaborative learning. It is the only building on Loyola's Evergreen campus that faces outward, not inward. "It reflects the Loyola way. It's a modern, contemporary expansion, and it symbolizes the school's adaptable thinking," Sawyer says.

The Fernandez Center features active learning classrooms, an Idea Lab, the Dan and Kelly Rizzo

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Getting "real" at CCBC

Starr Faster says she always had an inkling that she wanted to be in the health professions. After starting out at a four-year private college in a competitive nursing program, she decided that in reality, the program wasn't right for her. She turned to the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) and its wide variety of choices in health profession majors, and she is glad she did. Not only is she in her last semester preparing to receive her certificate in critical nursing, her mother also actually graduated last year from the college.

Faster has had the pleasure of completing her lab work in the new Eustis Center. "I love the open layout of the building, the tall windows and the light," she says. "The study rooms are spacious and comfortable."

Her best experience? "The simulator and skills practicum," Faster says. "The mannequin simulators do everything except walk! They have breath sounds, blood pressure, vitals, and they tell you about their illnesses. There's even a baby mannequin." That's a plus, because Faster says she hopes to work in pediatric nursing after earning her certificate. She currently works in the ICU at Mercy Hospital. •

Career Center and a common area, all intentionally connected to foster innovative, collaborative interactions among students. At the heart of the center is the Forbes Idea Lab, named for Loyola Chair of the Board of Trustees Jim Forbes. The Idea Lab gives students the opportunity to innovate and problem solve in a unique, in-the-round space. It features movable, collapsible furniture, and students can write on every surface of the Lab.

The Dan and Kelly Rizzo Career Center is also located in the new building, offering a solution to the student quest for career opportunities, entrepreneurial guidance and "design thinking initiatives" under one roof. It will give students access to alumni for continued career development. Sawyer says it will also ensure that Loyola graduates continue to be well prepared for the workforce. "There's something about a Jesuit education that appeals to businesses. Our graduates are not just ready, they're Loyola ready." He notes that the school is ranked in the top six percent of the country for graduates at mid-career salaries.

The new building promises to be a distinctive space where innovators will congregate. Sawyer says that in the midst of a most challenging year, the promise of the Center "represents hope, strength and vision for the future. It's a connection to our future in the sea of this pandemic." Indeed. •
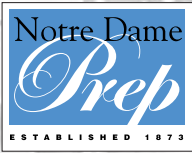
Delivering a different kind of dining experience
College dining halls pivot to ensure safety as students return to campus

Photo courtesy of Morgan State University.

By Tracy M. Fitzgerald, Contributing Writer

As the world began shutting down in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 global health pandemic, colleges and universities followed suit, closing campuses and quickly transitioning all courses and learning experiences to a virtual format. It wasn't long before leaders at those institutions began thinking about all of the steps required to eventually re-open; to bring faculty, staff and students back onto campuses in a way that would be safe but also efficient and practical. Determining how to structure classrooms and labs so that students could come in and maintain social distance from others was one thing. Determining how students could return and actually live on campus, and use critically important amenities such as dining halls, was another.

"We had to think about every aspect of the dining experience on campus and what changes we could put in place to give our students options and access," says Cheryl Knauer, director of public relations at McDaniel College. "We knew that all students would not return to campus at the same time, but we wanted them to have the option."

That goal resulted in a long list of operational adjustments at McDaniel's Englar Dining Hall, its new Hilltop Pub and its Caseys' Corner Starbucks coffee shop. Tables and chairs have been reconfigured in the dining hall to reduce seating capacity by 50% and plexiglass barriers have been installed in high-traffic areas. Tents were pitched near the student center on campus to offer outdoor dining options. And new technologies such as a contactless card scanner and an interactive mobile app, designed to accept seating reservations and to-go orders, have been introduced.

"The mobile app allows students to choose the time they plan to visit the dining facilities and order what they want to eat," says Knauer. "It's been an especially useful tool for the new Hilltop Pub, which was designed to be a take-out only option, even before COVID-19. Students can order burgers, quesadillas, chicken tenders, pizza, rice bowls, flatbreads or salads, using the app, and then they receive a notification when their food is ready for pick-up."

New technology-based tools are proving to be helpful in dining facilities at Salisbury University, too. The school had been gearing up for a significant dining services upgrade and the onset of COVID-19 expedited those plans. In preparation for the start of the fall semester, touchless kiosks were installed in The Commons, the main dining hall on campus, to facilitate grab-and-go and made-to-order processes at the omelet, wok and deli stations. A new partnership with Grubhub makes it possible for students to use their phones to place orders from retail restaurants that have a physical presence on campus – Chick-Fil-A, Hungry Minds, Cool Beans (offering Starbucks coffee), and Chesapeake Bay Roasting Company. Additionally, the dining services team uses a text messaging platform to share information, menus and other notifications to students.

"We can text students to let them know if the dining room is busy, which helps those who want to avoid crowds understand when the best times are to come in," says Owen Rosten, Salisbury University's director of dining services. "We also have a "text and tell" system in place, that allows students to provide comments to the dining services team about their meals. We truly want to know what's good and what's bad. We take that feedback and use it so we can constantly improve our services and keep our students happy."

During the fall semester, Salisbury University has accommodated 1,850 students on campus, with nearly 27% of courses being offered in-person and another 29% following a hybrid approach. Rosten stresses that in some ways, the dining services experience on college campuses is more valuable now than ever before.

"The students here on campus this semester are not in a rush the way they usually are. There are no athletic events. There are very few extra-curricular activities or events or meetings to get to," he says. "The dining hall is about more than a place to get food these days. It creates a communal experience where you can stay and socialize, safely."

Safety has been the driver for other changes apparent in Salisbury University's dining facilities in recent months. Seating capacities are reduced to 35%. All self-serve stations have been replaced with pre-made, pre-wrapped, grab-and-go items, or are staffed for service. Silverware has been packed away and disposable forks, knives and spoons are dispensed throughout the dining hall. Serving and seating areas, as well as other high-touch spaces are sanitized around the clock. Take-out options are plentiful. And special programs have been implemented to assure that students who are sick or in quarantine can receive daily meals, with help from a designated "food buddy" or delivery service, managed by university dining services.

"At a time when students are expecting to see limited options and choices, they are actually getting the opposite from us," says Rosten. "We've worked hard to offer them more, just in a different way."

Doing things differently is a clear theme at Morgan State University. Kevin Banks, Ed.D., who serves as the school's vice president for student affairs, says a lot of time and effort has gone into creating a safe and positive dining experience for the 313 students who have been back on campus during the fall semester. Seating areas in the dining hall are spread out, buffet lines are eliminated, and a new app called "The Bite" has been unveiled, making it easy for students to order and pick up to-go meals 24 hours per day.

However, the biggest changes at Morgan State University are yet to come. Over the summer, the university announced a new partnership with SodexoMAGIC, a Gaithersburg-based food and facilities management company led by basketball superstar Earvin "Magic" Johnson. With support from SodexoMAGIC, Morgan has a vision to transform dining facilities, services and meal plan options on campus over the next five years.

"We believe that dining is an important experience for college students and are committed to making capital investments to cater to student needs while also making food more accessible," says Banks. "We are renovating our dining facilities, integrating new technologies, and diversifying our menu options and locations. A lot of really positive changes will start taking place this spring."

While the health pandemic has resulted in some timeline modifications for Morgan's dining services plans, Banks says it's important for the school to plan for the best-case scenarios in thinking forward about upcoming semesters.

"We are all still learning about COVID-19 and obviously, there are a lot of unknowns," says Banks. "But, we are trying to move forward, full force. We all want to be back on campus, so we are planning as if we will be." •

Above left: A rendering of a future dining hall at Morgan State University, which announced this summer a new partnership with SodexoMAGIC, a company led by basketball superstar Earvin "Magic" Johnson.

Experience counts, from page 2

need and important talent and good skills." Students must write a reflection of their experience and it is the human element they reflect on most.

The Sigma Society at Loyola gives business students opportunities to develop real life skills. "One of the key skills you need in sales, but you also need in life, is networking with other people," says Marie Yeh, associate professor of marketing at Loyola. "How do you approach a stranger, how do you start a conversation, how do you keep it going, how do you gracefully exit?"

The "Night of Networking" event was created to give the students real life practice doing this with 40-50 friendly professionals. "We do a 'how do you network' workshop first," says Yeh. "It helps students know what to expect and to do some role playing." Although it can be intimidating to the students, they get the opportunity to meet professionals from companies and non-profits of all sizes in the area.

This year, because of the pandemic, the event will take place online. Yeh is excited about not being confined to inviting professionals who are local and plans to invite alumni who are out of the area.

Designed for business professionals who have five to eight years of experience after their undergraduate degree, the Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland will offer a Flex MBA starting in the fall of 2021. This new program has been developed to meet students' needs and the fast pace of change in the current business environment.

"Students over the years would ask if we could have a course on X, Y or Z," says Wendy Moe, Ph.D., dean of master's programs, dean's professor of marketing and co-director of the Smith Analytics Consortium, as she pointed out that if they added all those courses the MBA would take too long to complete. Then she started to think that not every course needed to be a full semester in length. "Some topics only need to be a few hours," says Moe, "and we need more flexibility with that."

Of course, there will be the core courses in marketing, operations management, statistics, leadership, etc., but added to that would also be shorter, smaller current topics of interest and value to the students.

For example, last year they were talking about data tracking and privacy and students were really excited about hearing the latest research. "I think students really value and want that type of knowledge," says Paulo Prochno, Ph.D., assistant dean, part-time MBA and online programs. "It's our duty to find ways to translate that into ways that make sense."

The hope is that by the fall of 2021 classes in the Flex MBA can be in person. "There is a need for flexibility for a seamless integration between online and face to face," says Prochno. "We have the capability to offer both." As working adults, the students will be able to choose what best suits their schedule.

"For the electives there will be some variation to offer more alternatives," says Moe. "Some are only online, some that are face-to-face, so they will have more options with those two formats."

No matter which format they choose, these MBA students will be building on the experience they have already acquired in the working world. •

Photo courtesy of Salisbury University

Above: The Sea Gull Fund gives students leadership opportunities as lead analysts.

Workforce needs, from page 2

Loyola's school counseling program is centered on Jesuit values. Photo courtesy of Loyola University Maryland.

to improve people's lives, orienting primarily around public policy and a government focus," Dawkins explains. The program will yield graduates who will become city planners trained to do data analysis, taking advantage of large information data sets gathered through new sensing technologies available in urban communities in components like street lights, for instance. It's an expansion of the term "the internet of things," which describes the data available in appliances and everyday products, to transcend it to the public sector's application of information technology.

Employment in the information science of community planning field spans in the government sector and in research centers. For example, researchers at the National Center for Smart Growth currently are using analytics to evaluate stormwater flow on the College Park campus with an eye toward large flood events and small impacts on environmental quality. The field also extends to the private sector, including such businesses as Amazon, which relies heavily on data analytics and requires these skills for employment.

With many pulls in today's society, be it working full or part time, supporting online workers and students in the household, and managing other demands, many individuals don't have the time to commit to a full master's program. Many who look to advance their education without a big commitment turn to certificate programs as a starting point.

"Graduate certificates can be embedded as part of a pathway to a master's program," says Dana Burr Bradley, Ph.D, FGSA, FAGHE, dean of UMBC's Erickson School of Aging Studies, one of just three schools of aging in the U.S. "They allow people who are leading complex lives to taste work at the graduate level that has meaning and application in their workplace and in their professional and personal development."

UMBC is leading the way in aging innovation and leadership. UMBC offers three certificate programs aimed at advancing care for the aging population, delivered through the Erickson School of Aging Studies and designed also to meet the needs of the longevity economy, an $8.3 trillion industry supporting people over age 50, according to Bradley. A bachelor's degree in any field to enroll and the completion of four courses, all of which are offered "at a distance," to earn the certificate. Scholarships and financial aid are available.

Two have been relaunched – certificates in senior housing administration and principle and management of aging services. The senior housing administration certificate offers four courses specifically related to senior housing and care and how the industry is regulated, licensed, managed and developed. The principle and management of aging services touches on the core of the school's master's program, focusing on the three pillars of aging, the business of aging and policy, regulation and politics.

A new certificate, currently pending final approval from the Maryland Higher Education Commission in the spring, is management of dementia care services. With 200 recognized types of dementia, there is more need to enhance the lives of people who may have dementia, Bradley says.

"It's an exploding area of opportunity – the first thing they would learn is that not all dementia is dementia," she explains.

Each certificate includes a policy context, covering politics, regulation policy and the environment, and all touch on the COVID environment and this most vulnerable population. Many of the instructors are practitioners and they share the challenges and concerns in the classroom and incorporate challenges and solutions in discussions, case studies and assignments. •

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www.umbc.edu/gradschool

University of Maryland
Flagship institution of the University System of Maryland
Visitor information:
www.umd.edu/admissions/index.cfm/
Main Switchboard: 301-405-1000
Undergraduate Admissions:
301-314-8385 or 800-422-5867
E-mail: um-admit@umd.edu
Graduate Admissions:
800-245-GRAD (4723)
Registrar's Office: 301-314-8240
www.umd.edu

University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Princess Anne
410-651-2200
www.umes.edu

University of Maryland Global Campus
Adelphi
855-655-8682
www.umgc.edu

University of Phoenix
Columbia Campus: 410-872-9001
Timonium Campus: 410-560-0055
www.phoenix.edu

Washington College
Chestertown
Admissions office: 410-778-7700
www.washcoll.edu

Washington Adventist University
Takoma Park, 800-835-4212
www.wau.edu •

New degree programs, from page 1

career opportunities for her, especially in the animation industry. "It will be invaluable to have a strong technical knowledge and background in immersive media to be able to enhance the creative process," she says. "I'll be able to elevate my creative side using my immersive media skills in my work."

A new degree program at Capitol Technology University in Laurel also allows students to use computer science skills to enhance an industry – the construction industry. The Bachelor of Science in construction information technology and cybersecurity undergraduate degree covers topics such as cybersecurity, critical infrastructure, program languages as well as technical electives. Coursework centers around programming in C++, database management, introduction to UNIX, construction software and much more. Not only is the degree new to the school, but it is the first of its kind in the nation.

Students will learn optimum methods to define resources, risks and threats in order to ensure the protection, safety and profitability of construction sites. Students who complete the program learn to solve problems in the construction industry surrounding managing and protecting vast amounts of information. According to Capitol Technology University President Bradford Sims, Ph.D., the construction industry is the third-largest employer, coming in behind only the government and the military.

"A broad spectrum of communication exists between and amongst job sites, corporate and satellite offices with vast amounts of data shared to develop estimates, billing and supplies," he says. "In addition, there is a great need to manage the programs used in estimating, scheduling, project management and modeling software as well as the cybersecurity behind it all."

Graduates of the program will be ready for entry-level positions such as assistant project manager or IT assistant manager. "This new degree program is all about our commitment to building critical careers within the construction

Photo by John T. Consoli / University of Maryland

industry," he says. "At the same time, we are providing students with the skills and the marketability to be successful in the construction field."

The current teaching landscape is one of a mix of virtual learning or a hybrid of virtual and in person learning. Due to this ever-changing learning environment along with anxieties due to the pandemic, educators need to be well-versed in the needs of today's learner.

This fall, Stevenson University is helping educators build upon their teaching skills through their new degree program, an online Master of Education in integrative learning. Information about the degree program notes graduates of the program will be well-grounded in the social and emotional development of learners; rigorous problem-based active learning approaches; emerging digital technologies and media; and community engagement and leadership. Courses

are taught in eight-week sessions, which allows teachers to work full-time while enrolled in the program.

"It is critical to develop educators who can support the needs of students while navigating the complexities of today's society," Lisa Moyer, Ph.D., and director of graduate education at Stevenson University says. "Just being well-versed in the 'three Rs' is not enough as educators need skills in social, emotional and digital literacy to meet the needs of their students."

As part of their capstone project, students in the program identify and examine a real-world issue within their classroom and school and use their skills to create and implement solutions. Educators will work with stakeholders to propose and test solutions, collect data and make tweaks in an effort to benefit students and the school at large.

Well-paying jobs

The online Bachelor of Science in construction information technology and cybersecurity at Capitol Technology University provides the essential knowledge to enter into the construction IT and cybersecurity industry careers, such as:

- Construction Information Technology Specialist – average salary $88, 293[1]

- Construction Cyber Operations Team Leader – average base pay $39,174[2]

- IT and Cybersecurity Supervisor – average base pay $55,782[2]

- Construction Information Specialist – average salary $45,599[3]

- Cybersecurity Analyst – average base pay $86,643[2]

- Construction TI/Cyber Strategist – national average salary $28,237 / D.C. area average $30,322[2]

- Construction Cyber Security Consultant – average salary $81,297[2]

1 Salary based on 2020 Paysa salary data
2 Salary based on 2020 Glassdoor salary data
3 Salary based on 2020 ZipRecruiter salary data •

"In addition to being better able to meet the needs of their students, the degree program will provide an amazing professional network," Moyer adds. "Having this strong network allows them to continue to learn from this close-knit community of educators." •

Above left: Brandon Morse, professor of art, and Roger Eastman, professor of the practice in computer science, were instrumental in developing the curriculum for a new four-year major in immersive media design at the University of Maryland.

Student engagement, from page 1

Elliott says that HCC recognizes that not all students who are learning remotely have the same technological resources and that a "digital divide" does exist. "As a community college, we pride ourselves that accessibility must be equitable. Not all students have devices or high-speed internet. We've been able to lend students devices and hot spots through federal funding available through the CARES Act. We also point students to resources such as discounted Wi-Fi," says Elliott. Recognizing that some students may be dealing with isolation and depression, HCC also reaches out to students to let them know that health and wellness counselors are available as a resource.

Events Go Virtual

Like HCC, the majority of University of Maryland, Baltimore County's (UMBC) classes are being held virtually, and various offices at UMBC are stepping up to create creative programs to engage with students.

"We held a virtual Welcome Week where 50 of our 'Woolies' – student leaders who are assigned to freshman and transfer students – checked in daily to discuss how to get involved at UMBC, learn about resources and now to build relationships with fellow students," says Brittini Brown, Ph.D., assistant vice president for student affairs at UMBC. Brown says that UMBC utilized Webex Teams to create groups for each "Woolie," and even after Welcome Week ended, the groups remained intact so that students could continue communicating with each other. We also have a program called 'Interact' where students engage in difficult conversations and share different life experiences, languages and cultures."

UMBC also shifted "Involvement Fest" to a virtual format. The event allows the 200-plus student organizations to inform students to their offerings. Each organization had a description posted online, and interested students could also click on a chat feature to chat with a member of an organization's leadership team to ask questions. Brown says that the four-day event drew over 4,000 unique visits by students.

To combat the isolation that some students may be feeling, UMBC also has hosted some on-campus events, such as bingo and movie nights with snacks, all while adhering to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. "Our commuter population has boomed so we are also looking at ways to hold events geared toward them such as drive-in movies," Brown says. "We are constantly doing assessments with students to see how they are doing, if they are experiencing loneliness and if they need help or counseling."

"Usually we would have five to seven events per week on campus, but that has changed. The funding and support by UMBC to allow us to shift events to a virtual environment has been amazing," says Danielle Nyamsi, president of the UMBC Student Events Board. "We always want students to be involved, so we do things such as ask on Instagram what movies they would like to watch together and post recipes with videos and have students comment if they have tried the recipe and how it turned out. During this time, we are more focused on the quality than the quantity of events."

A Focus on the Student Experience

"We are focused on assessment and the pulse of the student body," says Aisha Rivers, director of student engagement at Goucher College. "We want to produce opportunities for students to engage and grow and are always asking for feedback to ensure that we are accomplishing this."

One of the events that Rivers and her team created was a movie night where students streamed the same movie and then commented. "We've also held workshops on topics such as energy alignment, political organizing and activism, and the dehumanization of Black lives in America," she says. Rivers adds that with the virtual format of campus activities, she and her team recognize that while some students will desire to engage in online activities, others will experience what is called "Zoom fatigue." "For some, after spending four to six hours online to complete classwork, they do not want to participate in another virtual event, so we are always getting feedback from all students to ensure that we are providing programs of interest. Interestingly, some students who identify as introverts actually enjoy these virtual events as they can participate quietly." •

Politically engaged

Political activity on college campuses is nothing new. However, rallies and debate parties were not feasible this year due to the pandemic. With this in mind, UMBC shifted its political functions online. Tirzah Khan, an intern in UMBC's Center for Democracy and Civic Life, says that the school shifted to virtual debate watch parties and hosted "Change Makers Dinners" where students could ask questions to panels of local leaders. "It's great for students to be able to ask questions such as 'How did you get involved in politics?' 'What path did you take?' 'What issues are meaningful for you?'"

In addition to debate watching parties, Khan says that UMBC also hosted "healing space" events after the election, recognizing that for many students, this year's presidential election was the most meaningful one in their lifetimes.

"With the times we are living in with a global pandemic and social unrest, students are physically isolated and feeling alone. If I can affect one person's life in a positive way, it's so rewarding," Khan says. •

Ask Margit, from page 1

of your class will require access to a computer and/or the internet. In addition, most textbook publishers now provide their products online with additional information, case studies or supplementary readings to the text, only available through their portals. For educators, there are also ways to assess performance, such as quizzes on the information provided or the means to set up exams.

Next, your class may be either synchronous or asynchronous. A synchronous class, used more for elementary through high school students, has a fixed time when the students and teacher get together. It means you are all online at the same time using some sort of conferencing software and can interact, ask questions and receive real-time responses. The educator may give a lecture, provide a video, hold a discussion – a beneficial two-way street – that most closely mimics face-to-face classes.

Asynchronous learning is more self-directed and more flexible. You probably have a syllabus that details what you need to do to complete the class, but it's done, for the most part, at your convenience. Required assignments have deadlines and many of these classes will have chat or discussion rooms where you get together with a team or group of fellow students to discuss specific topics or work on projects.

The independence afforded you by taking an asynchronous class can be both a plus and minus. You are more socially isolated from your fellow students and are rarely providing or receiving communications at the same time. It's also more difficult to develop relationships with them or the professor. On the other hand, you work when you choose. If you're employed, you can work around your schedule to participate in the class.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Sander Tamm is the founder of E-Student (https://e-student.org/) and an avid e-learner. "Online learning should replicate, as closely as possible, one-on-one learning. It shouldn't detract from the student's education. Although many educational institutions try to replicate the classroom using Skype or Zoom calls, there are almost no verbal cues and no connections with the teacher."

Tamm talked about other issues caused by the shift to online education. "Students are not clear as to expectations. With COVID-19, 40 to 50% of students were stressed because of uncertainty regarding assessment methods and the learning process. Then there are technical problems – slow internet, for instance, because not everyone has high-speed access – that cause additional frustration. Most important is students need to know that digital learning requires a high degree of self-motivation in order to focus on learning goals and homework because there's no teacher physically in front of them to prod or constantly remind them."

In classrooms, students can develop emotional connections to the instructor and fellow students. Converting these relationships to occur and evolve in a digital world requires communication skills they often lack.

Teachers, too, struggle, trying to figure out how to be creative with the content they're providing. They also find it difficult to connect and then generate a spark of curiosity, inspiring students to take advantage of the breadth of knowledge available to them in this format.

Tamm also discussed other issues that cause anxiety for students. "In addition to feeling isolated and not having good communication skills, students receive limited feedback. If they are not good at managing their time, they can fall behind and/or miss deadlines. And if their computer skills are questionable, there is not enough support."

"MOOCs, massive open online courses, are wonderful," Tamm continues. "Many bring world-class, high-level education to the masses, but earning a certificate is different than earning a university diploma, and it doesn't have the same value when it comes to employment. And, sadly, a certificate doesn't guarantee the quality of the education received or that the student learned anything."

What can educators do to make online learning effective? Be creative; be involved. Teaching online is so much more difficult than an in-person class because every iota of planning must be done well in advance. They cannot sit back and assume the students will be fine on their own.

When I was finishing graduate school, the last class was online. I reached out to the professor about a foreseeable problem with the hope he would work with me. He told me to drop the class, something I couldn't do. Then, throughout the semester, not one of the students heard from him. As far as we were concerned, he could have been a robot. No feedback, no commentary on our work, no input to show he was equally involved in helping us learn the material.

Today, teaching online, I constantly interact with my students, pushing them to think differently or develop a different perspective. Consequently, they start caring more because they know I'm there with them. But developing proficiency in teaching online takes time, an investment in providing an environment to students that enables them to succeed. Whether you're a student or teacher, don't be passive, don't sit back. Figure out ways to make the most of your education despite the challenges being online brings. Get involved, speak up often and set an example of what good interactivity looks like. Is it tough? Certainly. But aim high. Learning, gaining knowledge, is one area of your life that will last your lifetime. You'll be glad you did. •