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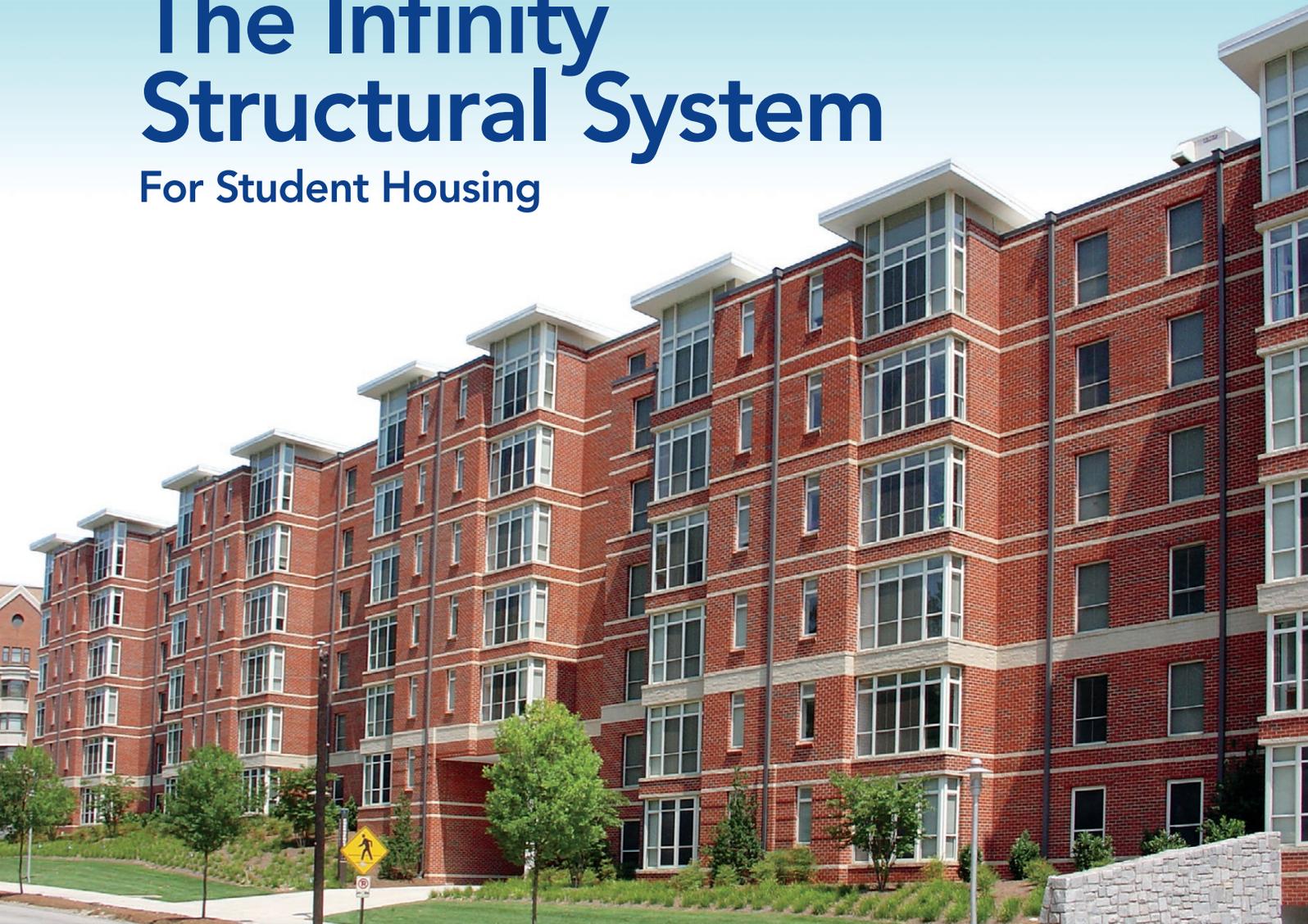
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COMBATING STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN THE SAFE SPACE OF CAMPUS-BASED RECREATION & WELLNESS CENTERS

In the midst of exploring the ways in which private universities and colleges are working to combat students' anxieties, my thoughts shifted to literary representations of anxiety, and specifically to Lemuel Gulliver, whose Whiggish aspirations for social mobility and wealth lead to a series of doomed adventures, each more traumatic than the next.



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THRIVE LAB PROMOTING THERAPEUTIC TECHNOLOGY IN HOME SETTINGS

Developed by Dr. April Bowling, Lab Director and Assistant Professor of Health Sciences at Merrimack College, THRIVE lab aims to understand what factors can be addressed to improve the driving forces of health behaviors; this includes studying areas such as physical activity, nutrition, sleep, practices of mindfulness, and screen-time in this population. Through studying these drives and triggers, Bowling, her team, and the clients can work toward improving the clients' mental and physical health needs.



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DANCE EDUCATION CAN ENLIVEN DANCE DEPARTMENTS

In the 80s, I attended a small, private liberal arts college in Alabama, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance. The curriculum was fairly standard for a performance-focused program: we had ballet class every day, modern, jazz, and folk dance twice a week each, and we typically presented a major production each semester.



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COLUMNS



SPOTLIGHT / ON OUR COVER

08 WORSHIP LEADERSHIP AT MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE

Soon after a program revamping by the Music department at Mississippi College, Dr. Will Bishop was named the first director of the newly established Worship Leadership Program. With musical tastes that ran the gamut from the blues to church hymns from the Renaissance, Bishop brought an eclectic and varied musical background to Mississippi College.



ON-CAMPUS

14 ALIGNING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EMPLOYABILITY

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EDITOR'S LETTER

By any standards or measures, I have a wonderful life. My daughter, who is nearly 27 now, lives just a few miles away; I see her every week, and we talk almost every day. I live with my husband (who I both love and like) and our two remarkable pups in a lovely home within a safe community. I'm even lucky enough to enjoy most elements of my job, and I'm well compensated for my work and efforts. For years now, I haven't been kept awake with worries about money, and that in itself is a gift beyond measure.

Most of my family members live in Mississippi, so I have opportunities to see them often and even travel together, so my brother's young children are a significant part of my life, and I know that many aunts do not have that luxury; though my younger sister has been in California for years, she's strongly considering a move to Birmingham soon—which means I would have all the people I love most in the world within easy driving distance. Though I once assumed everyone naturally adored their siblings, I've learned that is not the case in many instances; my siblings are incredible, brilliant, interesting people. No matter how accomplished they are as highly successful adults in their fields, they are also (always) my "little sister" and "little brother."

I have the luxury of getting to choose the people I work with—and one of them has become a close friend, a strong woman who is a blessing in my life in every way in addition to helping us to grow our company with her talents and energy. In short, I have everything a person could need or want—everything a person could even hope to have. But, despite all of that, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by life. There are days, here and there, where I wish I could stay in bed and pull my blankets over me to hide from the stresses of the day—moments where I wish I could just turn off my brain.

A natural result of having so many blessings—at least for someone with my personality—is that I worry, quite a lot, about how much I have to lose. There are so many people who I dearly love that at any given moment one of them is experiencing something difficult: a medical emergency, a stressful week at work, or a difficult emotional problem. Sometimes I can help; more often, there's nothing to do but worry, or pray, or just set my shoulders and keep moving.

I remember being stressed sometimes as a college student—but in a way that was pretty common across campus. We would stay up too late, sometimes choosing fun with friends over an assignment; then, we would be cramming for exams or pulling all-nighters to meet deadlines. Most of the stresses I brought on myself with immature choices, but at 18 years old, I wasn't expected by the adults around me to always make smart choices. Luckily, my mistakes born of immaturity were not dire ones.

College students, even ones with privileged backgrounds and supportive parents, are different now. They have all the typical stressors facing any kid-becoming-an-adult, but they are constantly under a microscope; their lives are streamed live across media platforms. Their mistakes can go viral. Their poor choices might follow them for a lifetime because nothing dies on the Internet.

Even if they are the straightest of arrows, they are glued to their phones, and everyone seems to be doing a better job at "adulting"; they read about their friends' successes, see the photos that accompany lives that always seem to be going more smoothly: here's one friend heading overseas for a second time; here's another, holding up a perfectly manicured hand with a new diamond; here's yet another, posting about an internship that offers career possibilities likely to end in financial security and personal fulfillment. Everyone seems to be living perfect lives because the carefully cultivated digital lives are not the ones we are actually living.

Of course, these students are anxious. Of course, they are stressed. And they may not yet have the tools they need to understand that these stressors are temporary, and they will survive them. There has never been a more pressing time to do what we can—to do all we can—to help them learn to cope with their fears and worries, to be proactive in helping them adjust to a world that is confusing and frightening. When they are on our campuses, we become a surrogate for their families, and that is both a burden and a blessing.

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Soon after a program revamping by the Music department at Mississippi College, Dr. Will Bishop was named the first director of the newly established Worship Leadership Program. With musical tastes that ran the gamut from the blues to church hymns from the Renaissance, Bishop brought an eclectic and varied musical background in addition to his passion for the new program that blends both traditional and contemporary church music with ministry studies and biblical studies. He also radically expanded the ensemble offerings, including the MC Worship Collective, whose original songs have now been shared worldwide with thousands of listeners.

PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT

Worship Leadership at Mississippi College

Constructing a Degree in Worship Leadership

In 2015, Mississippi College launched a new bachelor's degree in worship leadership, along with a curriculum designed to meet the challenges of the 21st century music ministry by incorporating skills needed for adapting to contemporary styles of music and advances in worship technology.

The curriculum includes music courses, music technology, and a course on popular music and society. In addition, the program includes conducting, a seminar in worship leading, and a required internship at a local church. The worship studies minor includes classes such as church administration, music education techniques for young children and teenagers, youth ministry, and biblical hermeneutics.

In their revamping of its degree program, the MC Music Department was working to reflect the changes they saw in trends affecting churches across the nation. They wanted to ensure their graduates were fully prepared to serve in any worship setting upon graduation.

As a response to the needs of a changing church, Bishop understood that what's "best for your church" can change from season to

season. He also knew students must build their social media skills in order to promote church activities and share their messages, while blending musical, ministerial, and biblical/theological training.

Shepherding Through Song

In addition to serving for seven years as associate minister of worship at Mobberly Baptist Church in Longview, Texas—and leading over 100 students at Mobberly's Academy of Performing Arts—Bishop was a faculty member of East Texas Baptist University for several years. He was the perfect fit to take the Workshop Leadership Program to new heights.

While most of the students in the program have a musical background, Bishop explains that being an effective worship leader is about more than being a gifted musician or vocalist. "At its core," he explains, "worship is the act of loving God." Thus, worship leaders must love God and also love people in order to effectively shepherd those they lead.

Filling a Unique Space

The program is built around three key concepts: First, the most important part of the program

is for students to recognize that submitting to God is the only way to use all of their potential; secondly, knowing and following God's word is crucial, for the theology of a church is set by the music as much as the sermon—with worship leaders as "gatekeepers for the theology of their church"; finally, the program emphasizes servanthood, so they stay focused on serving each other rather than seeking personal affirmation or ego boosting.

Because he views worship as always about God first and foremost, Bishop doesn't focus on the style of music, for that's not what matters most. The idea is not to encourage people to focus on the greatness of a song, but to encourage the performers and their audience to focus on the greatness of the God they are serving.

He tells his students, "We need songs that are full of God's word...and interesting...and creative." So, he encourages them to be "different" or even be "weird," as long as they are approaching the song with an open heart and a desire to share the gospel. "You don't have to be like everyone else," he tells them, challenging them to write and produce songs that are "filling a unique space."



Bishop believes worship leaders learn best through practice, which is why—rather than investing in travel as many schools do—he asks his students to volunteer their time and talents to local churches, or at their home churches during breaks and vacations, or to seek out events near the college where they have an opportunity to serve.

The MC Worship Collective

The primary worship music ensemble of Mississippi College, the MC Worship Collective—which represents students of many majors—is focused on both performing music and developing original songs.

With a passion for songwriting himself, Bishop wanted that creative, personal element to be a hallmark of the program, so he met with any students interested in learning more about the art of writing music.

In 2018, he organized a retreat for a dozen budding songwriters, and—though he expected

Dr. Will Bishop of Mississippi College tells his students, “We need songs that are full of God’s word...and interesting...and creative.” So, he encourages them to be “different” or even be “weird,” as long as they are approaching the song with an open heart and a desire to share the gospel.

maybe one or two songs to result from their collaboration—the students wrote ten outstanding pieces of music. Within just three months of sharing seven original songs to streaming services, they had more than 40,000 downloads with listeners from ten countries.

Authentic Worship

In their performances on campus or at local churches, The Worship Collective is sharing the gospel, balancing their faith and music in a way that is unique to Mississippi College.

Bishop wants them to create music that’s “biblically rich and musically interesting.”

In October 2019, the Worship Collective released their third album, “Portrait of Grace,” with nine new songs—following up on “Glory’s Streets” in 2018 and “All For Thee” in May of 2019. Their fanbase has been expanding quickly. Currently, their songs have been streamed over 85,000 times in nearly 40 countries.

One of their fans, in fact, is the new president of Mississippi College, Dr. Blake Thompson, who invited The Worship Collective to perform



at his inauguration. Perhaps even more importantly, President Thompson has worked with Bishop to reinvent “Chapel” meetings, a requirement for all MC students, so they could bring music, joy, and a much-needed diversity to the events to ensure all MC students felt welcomed and embraced.

Open Ears and an Open Heart: Appreciating All Styles of Worship

Dr. Bishop made it a priority when he came to MC to increase the racial diversity in the worship ensembles that he leads. One of his students, Maya Thompson, told him that non-white students were not involved because the music program and the Chapel services did not seem to be about them.

In particular, Thompson noted that during the Chapel services, the speakers, musicians, and singers were almost unfailingly white. Thompson states, “I remember other black students coming up to me saying, ‘Why aren’t you pushing for songs that we can worship to?’” She felt terrible, she adds, because she knew she needed to be a voice for them, but she didn’t know how to be heard until Dr. Bishop asked her directly.

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She recalls, “We talked for maybe an hour and some about incorporating gospel into Worship Collective and it happened. It’s amazing to see the different faces of worship collective and the different styles of singing. Dr. Bishop’s open ears and open heart has brought a true meaning to ‘Worship Collective.’”

As a result of that conversation, Bishop developed another worship ensemble—the MC Gospel Collective—which currently boasts a membership of twenty-five students, twenty in the choir and five in the band. The students are a mix of races: Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic.

The MC Gospel Collective performs some of the older gospel pieces, some modern gospel, and are currently working on a few songs in Spanish to share with local Spanish-speaking churches.

Quite deliberately, Bishop produced a gospel group that would blend the lines between “White Church” and “Black Church” to create something whole and full—people connected by a common purpose.

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Reinventing Chapel Services

In 2019, Mississippi College hired Cassidy Crenshaw, the worship pastor at Pinelake Church in Clinton, Mississippi, as an adjunct music professor. Crenshaw coaches the newly formed Chapel Band, training students for

musical performances and offering encouragement on their song selections.

Crenshaw first met Bishop in 2013, both students at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and they reconnected in Clinton a few years later when Crenshaw became

Pinelake's worship pastor. Bishop had been thinking of ways to strengthen the chapel programs and the worship on campus when he reunited with his old friend, and he saw the ways he equipped the young church-goers at Pinelake to become effective leaders.

Crenshaw shares that one of the aspects of Bishop's character he loves most is the way he operates within an academic world while his scope of influence reaches beyond any constraints of academia. He notes that Bishop has "a pastor's heart," in that while he works to inform the mind, he's "far more concerned with the soul—with the shepherding and shaping of people."

Bishop's history is pastoring, Crenshaw states, and he remains actively involved with local churches, whether he's leading with his students, subbing for another minister, or serving in an interim role. "Will never stops learning," he explains. "I love grabbing lunch with him or spending time with him because our conversation is always a two-way street: there's mutual challenge and encouragement in every encounter."

Having grown up in Mississippi, Crenshaw has long-hoped to see a prestigious, respected program developed for worship leaders within his home state, and he believes Bishop is the reason he can be part of this movement now. He shares, "There's no doubt about it: this program has seen its success because of Will's God-given vision and his gifting to recruit, develop, and lead the pastors of today and tomorrow."

In planning for the upcoming fall, Bishop has been asking himself, "What kind of needs can we meet?" He wants the ensemble to serve as a campus ministry and a "force for good," as they continue to grow. He is not concerned with their majors—all are welcome to participate—because he tells them he wants them to also be leaders in their churches one day, wherever their lives and careers may take them, and wherever God may place them.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Rachel James

Clevenger earned her M.Ed. degree from

Mississippi College. After finishing her PhD

in Composition and Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham.

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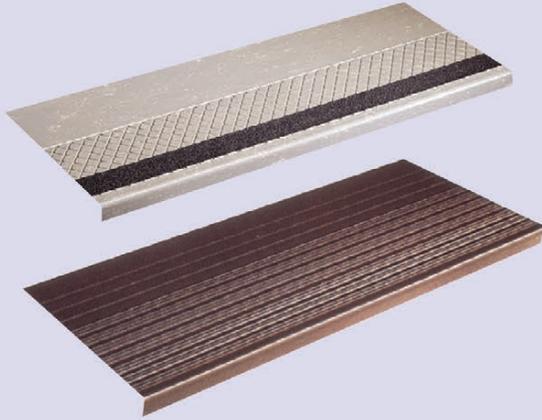
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Aligning Student Learning Outcomes and Employability

Today's universities measure student learning outcomes (SLOs) through in-class assessments targeting the micro and macro level of a learner's knowledge acquisition. At the micro level, these assessments take the form of quizzes, mid-term and final exams, and evaluations of assignments submitted by students.

At the macro level, SLOs feed into what administrators expect every student, regardless of specific curriculum, program, or major, to master in order to graduate. These are not skills-specific necessarily; they are ideals. These are the outcomes that students should be able "to know, think, or do across all courses" by the time they graduate.

A University's Macro-Level SLOs

The success or failure of a university's macro-level SLOs is later assessed (voluntarily) during the accreditation process via one of the nation's six regional accreditors. This assessment is something that the vast majority of the colleges and universities in the United States undertake currently to earn and maintain campus-wide accreditation.

What's the point of elaborating on how faculty measure learning as it pertains to the interests of students? Well, professors and—by extension universities—already assess students' attainment of micro and macro-level SLOs. They lead to what administrators believe is the end goal—graduation. But is graduation the end goal we should be focusing on? I would say no.

When student learning outcomes (SLOs) align with skills that employers seek from new hire candidates, recent graduates can achieve the ultimate outcome: employability.

Employability and the Awareness Gap

I've written before about the Awareness Gap, the inability for students and recent graduates to align the skills learned in the classroom with those that employers seek in job openings from entry-level employees. There is a broad range of skills and aptitudes students develop, learn, and acquire in the classroom and through their co-curricular activities, yet fail to recognize as such and how it connects to the workforce. Why? Students are extraordinarily busy



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attempting to achieve the SLOs of coursework, co-curricular activities and the broader objectives of the university in which they attend, while faculty closely measure the outcomes based on rubrics.

We must ask ourselves: why is there not a formal link between the attainment of SLOs at both the micro and macro-level over the course of a student's educational journey and the competencies that employers desire?

Recognizing a Broken Connection

To not foster this link formally represents a lost opportunity for universities and inhibits a student's successful transition into the workforce. Academic institutions that recognize this broken connection and then solve it successfully will unlock the intricate puzzle between addressing the needs and concerns of their students' and graduates' employability.

What are some of the skills learned in classrooms and co-curricular activities that far too frequently get snared by the Awareness Gap within the few precious moments between when educators provide these learning opportunities and when students acquire them? Critical thinking, leadership, communication, professionalism, teamwork, career management, digital technology, global fluency, just to name a few.

These skill outcomes—competencies if you will—are taught throughout students' entire educational journeys whether they know it, like it, or not. These hard-earned skill sets derived from their curriculum can help them become gainfully employed upon graduation. Colleges and universities rarely measure skills' outcomes adjacent to the coursework that produces them, but they should. Here's why.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) collaborated extensively with employers and, through much



research, identified and defined the eight “competencies associated with career readiness.” The eight competencies that define a college graduate’s career readiness are the same eight skills I listed above.

Fusing the Connection Through Data

These are the skills that employers seek (in addition to the macro and micro-SLOs learned by students). They are skills already taught by educators in and out of the class. Fusing the connection through data between skills attained throughout a curriculum and the expertise today’s workforce requires will help students become career-ready and employable from day number one of graduation.

Ironically, such data exists now. It merely needs to be collected so that it can support and strengthen data sets already being tracked today by universities to help match the evolving requirements of the workforce more powerfully.

By embedding and tracking a learner’s career readiness into an existing curriculum, graduation will no longer be the finish line for either universities or students. It will have been replaced organically by the ultimate Student Learning Outcome for new graduates—employment—and the Awareness Gap will cease to exist. That is how the universities of tomorrow will hit a highly targeted bullseye in the eyes of both students and the employers who recruit from them.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Troy Markowitz serves as Sr. Director of Business Development at Instructure. He was previously the

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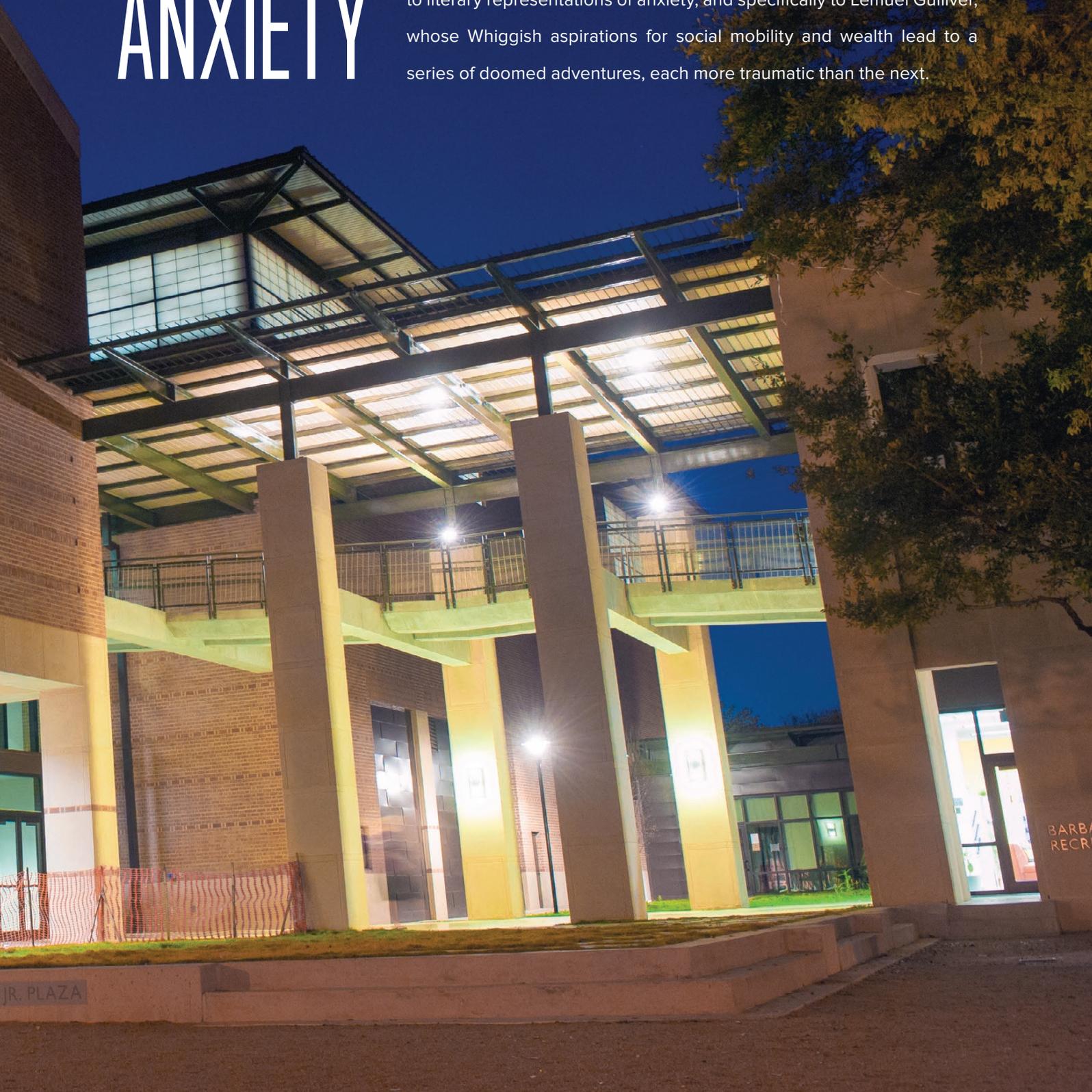
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COMBATING STUDENTS' ANXIETY

IN THE SAFE SPACE OF CAMPUS-BASED RECREATION & WELLNESS CENTERS

by David Vinson

In the midst of exploring the ways in which private universities and colleges are working to combat students' anxieties, my thoughts shifted to literary representations of anxiety, and specifically to Lemuel Gulliver, whose Whiggish aspirations for social mobility and wealth lead to a series of doomed adventures, each more traumatic than the next.





The most iconic scene in Jonathan Swift's incomparable *Gulliver's Travels* is that of Gulliver on his back, bound by rope and immobilized as tiny Lilliputians maraud the landscape of his body and threaten him with arrows and cannonballs. Gulliver's expression is a mix of confusion and curiosity, for he knows the natives cannot truly injure him.

The scene is depicted on countless paperback covers and featured also in advertisements for film adaptations, among them a television miniseries with Ted Danson as Gulliver, and most recently, a family-friendly comedy starring Jack Black. While hilarious in parts, the original 1726 text offers much more than comedy; in fact, its conclusion is tragic, with Gulliver finally returning home to Britain, only to discover his estrangement from family, country, and the human race at large.

Alienation, Anxiety, and Estrangement

Gulliver's fate compels readers to consider how estrangement from home, amplified by the daily stresses of cultural assimilation, can result in alienation, anxiety, and even a rift in one's sense of self.

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It would be silly to suggest that higher education poses challenges for students akin to what Gulliver endures. But the comparison is not entirely far-fetched. For one, like Gulliver, students leave home for the promise of adventure, to explore and make discoveries; and also, like Gulliver, students are actively invested in the pursuit of a fulfilling and secure life.

The separation so common among first-year students is itself a major source of anxiety. Overnight, students are distanced from their traditional support system of family and friends. They must adapt to new roommates, manage heavy workloads, and contend with an evolving identity, one brought on by their newfound independence.

According to a study in 2015 by the American College Health Association, 57.7% of college students in the U.S. felt overwhelming anxiety over the course of that calendar year. In the same survey, 17.3% reported being diagnosed or treated by a mental health professional for anxiety. The findings indicate a steady and alarming rise in the role that anxiety plays in the daily lives of students. As of Fall 2018,

The separation so common among first-year students is itself a major source of anxiety. Overnight, students are distanced from their traditional support system of family and friends. They must adapt to new roommates, manage heavy workloads, and contend with an evolving identity, one brought on by their newfound independence.

63% reported overwhelming anxiety, while 23% sought treatment for it. As of Fall 2019, findings were again higher at 65.7% and 24.3% respectively.

Sleep Disruption, Loneliness, and Mental Health

Studies have shown that anxiety in college students is aggravated by a variety of factors. Jack S. Peltz et al. contend in “Bidirectional Associations Between Sleep and Anxiety

Symptoms in Emerging Adults in a Residential College Setting” that a correlation can be found between anxiety and sleep disruption caused by drinking excess caffeine and pulling all-nighters.

Other studies have explored the relationship between loneliness and issues of mental health, anxiety among them. Academic factors such as school-related stress and disengagement from studies likewise have been associated with psychological distress and anxiety among

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As of Fall 2018, 63% of college students reported overwhelming anxiety, while 23% sought treatment for it. As of Fall 2019, findings were again higher at 65.7% and 24.3% respectively.

college students. Scott E. Caplan, in his “Relations Among Loneliness, Social Anxiety, and Problematic Internet Use,” has linked anxiety to Internet use, and has flagged the negative impact of social media on the evolving identities of college students.

Anticipating and Treating Anxiety's Impact on Students

What are private colleges and universities doing both to anticipate and treat the increasing impact that anxiety has on the student body?

Mental health services are widely available on campuses, and they play a vital role in combating students' anxiety. Additionally, institutions like Rice University, St. Mary's

College of California, and Northeastern University have adopted an innovative strategy for contending with the steady rise of anxiety experienced by their students.

All three institutions are using campus-based recreation and wellness centers as sites for addressing anxiety by way of physical exercise and relaxation-oriented amenities and programs. The effect is to cultivate a safe space for students who suffer from anxiety, and in turn to assure them that anxiety is nothing to be ashamed of.

Leslie R. Rith-Nanjarian et al. have argued in “A Systematic Review of Prevention Programs Targeting Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in University Students” that the de-stigmatization

of anxiety (and mental illness more broadly) is especially key for male students, who are less likely than their female counterparts to seek help.

That anxiety can be treated in a familiar and “non-clinical” environment makes the pursuit of such treatment all the more appealing for students reluctant to seek help. On-campus proximity to a community of peers who share in the goal of physical and mental well-being is another key benefit to treating anxiety within the space of recreation and wellness centers.

Nirvana and Yoga Breaks at Rice University

Rice University is home to the Barbara and David Gibbs Wellness Center. It is a beautiful facility, one equipped with large windows for natural light, state of the art weight and cardio equipment, a 50-meter competition pool, racquetball and squash courts, as well as an outdoor training park. Nirvana Sessions are also offered twice a week. These are described as “25-minute guided meditation sessions,” and the goal is to promote “becoming a calmer, more healthy individual.”

Students in attendance either sit in the pews or grab a mat for the floor. Each session begins



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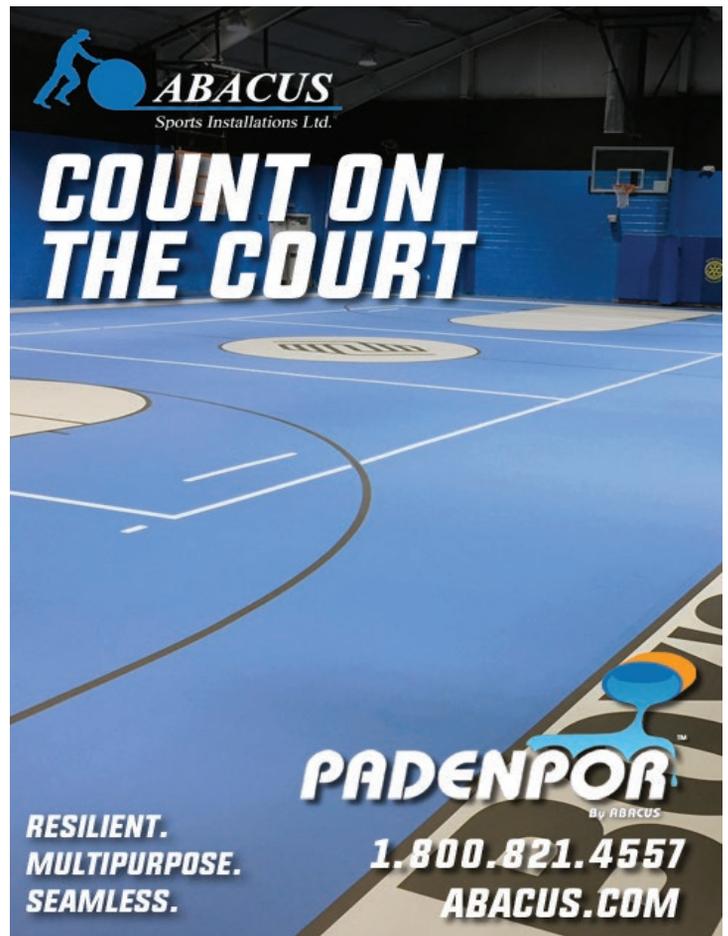


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with an inspirational quote, and the class is guided sequentially through a meditation consisting of multiple parts, with priority assigned to relaxation and breathing. A topic is also introduced, and these may vary from self-acceptance to the pursuit of gaining new perspectives on daily life.

According to Dr. Elizabeth Slator, Associate Director of Programs at the Rice University's Wellness Center, the Nirvana Sessions work "as a powerful antidote that can counterbalance the stress and challenge of everyday life."

In addition to the Nirvana Sessions, the university offers "yoga breaks" through its Lifetime Physical Activity Program. These are free yoga classes held monthly in the residential colleges. One can also take a class called "The Art of Relaxation, Introduction to Yoga and Discovering Personal Wellness."

Hydrotherapy and Spinning at St. Mary's College

At the Joseph L. Alioto Recreation Center, the students of St. Mary's College of California have access to a 60,000-square-foot facility with fitness equipment, multiple gymnasiums, a spin room, a climbing wall, an outdoor aquatic center, among other amenities. They can also enjoy a hydrotherapy spa.



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Research suggests that hydrotherapy can help to reduce anxiety. Applying water of different temperatures to one's skin can alter physiology and mood. A cold swim is often invigorating, while a warm one makes vessels vasodilate (relax).

Decreases in stress hormones like cortisol have also been linked to hydrotherapy, thus aligning with the experience of many when taking a bath—a wave of calm. The de-stigmatization of anxiety for students will require a collective effort, and like Rice University, St. Mary's College of California is doing its part.

Vinyasa Yoga, Tae Kwon Do, Capoeira, and Hip-Hop at Northeastern

The recreation facilities at Northeastern University are diverse, ranging from weight and cardio equipment to courts used for squash, volleyball, basketball, badminton, futsal, and roller hockey. An indoor aquatics center protects students from the harsh Boston winters, and a sauna keeps them warm and relaxed following a workout. The university offers instructional programs such as Tae Kwon Do, capoeira, hip-hop dance, and vinyasa yoga.

It is vinyasa yoga that stands out in the context of treating student anxiety. Vinyasa can be translated as “arranging something in a special way.” This is apt, for it teaches the arrangement of the body via a sequence of different poses, and the desired effect is to “arrange” the mind in accordance to one's well-being. Students can use vinyasa yoga to develop strength and flexibility, but also as a technique to address anxiety.

Creating a Culture of Empowerment

Around the country, private colleges and universities are using their recreation and wellness centers to create a culture of empowerment. Students are given the tools to confront their anxieties openly and with the assurance that they are supported by their campus-based community, their home away from home.

We all want our students to be healthy and confident, and to graduate knowing that their time with us has played a role in their evolution as adults. Our students need to know that struggling with anxiety is normal, and that we are here to help.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: PUPN staff writer

Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, husband, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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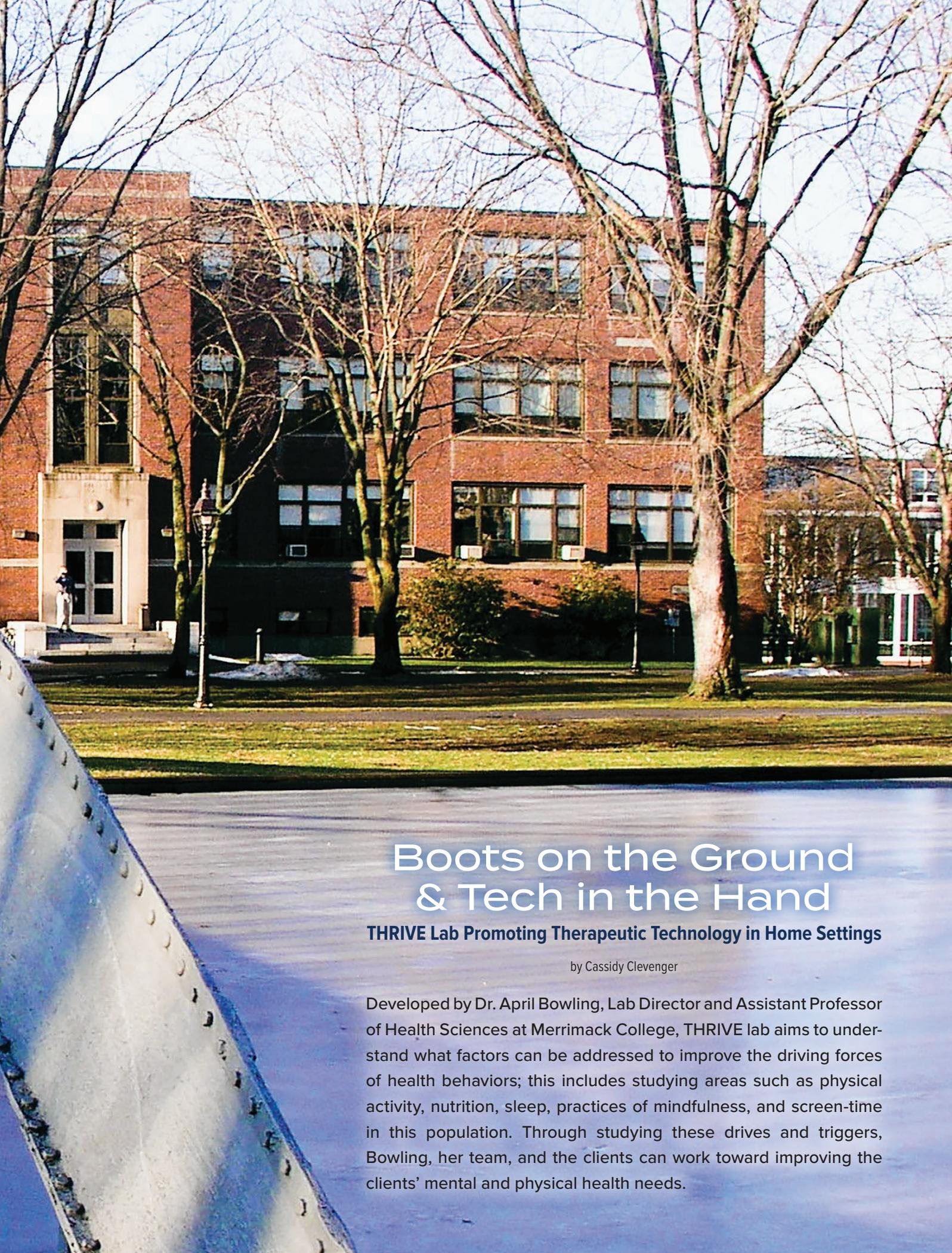
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Boots on the Ground & Tech in the Hand

THRIVE Lab Promoting Therapeutic Technology in Home Settings

by Cassidy Clevenger

Developed by Dr. April Bowling, Lab Director and Assistant Professor of Health Sciences at Merrimack College, THRIVE lab aims to understand what factors can be addressed to improve the driving forces of health behaviors; this includes studying areas such as physical activity, nutrition, sleep, practices of mindfulness, and screen-time in this population. Through studying these drives and triggers, Bowling, her team, and the clients can work toward improving the clients' mental and physical health needs.



The Purpose of THRIVE Labs

THRIVE, which stands for Translational Health Research and Innovation for Vulnerable Children, seeks to take advantage of burgeoning innovations in technology, paired with evidence-based practices, to make tangible improvements to health and behaviors in children and teens living life with neurodevelopmental and mental health diagnoses.

Bowling's Inspiration

Bowling and her family grew up in an economically disadvantaged area. Bowling was aware from a young age how social determinants can affect one's health and functioning. Early in her academic career, Bowling became interested in the emerging research that explored the connections between health behaviors—such as exercise and nutrition—to brain health and lifespan development.

Furthermore, excellent mentorship provided by Dr. Kirsten Davison during Bowling's doctoral studies at Harvard further cemented her passion for the field. While in the program, Bowling received a grant to investigate how exercise can improve classroom behavior and academic function in children.

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She focused her studies on those who were enrolled at a therapeutic day school. Bowling noted how grateful she is for her advisor, Davidson, in the role she played in setting Bowling's career trajectory.

A Four-Fold Approach to Evaluate Intervention Strategies

When initiating THRIVE, Bowling and her team planned a four-fold project to evaluate the feasibility of an intervention that could increase health behaviors, such as physical activity, nutrition, sleep, and screen-time attitudes among teens. The clients also received special education services for social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.

Bowling explained, "This involved installing Xboxes in their houses and training kids and their parents to use a variety of exergames and fitness trackers to move more, and then virtually meeting with a live health coach remotely via the Xbox."

Graduate students involved in the project would then be involved in various tasks, including troubleshooting issues related to the

When initiating THRIVE, Bowling and her team planned a four-fold project to evaluate the feasibility of an intervention that could increase health behaviors, such as physical activity, nutrition, sleep, and screen-time attitudes among teens. The clients also received special education services for social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.

video gaming equipment, collecting clinical data, training parents, and working with health coaches to encourage participant adherence to the study. Albeit challenging, the students learned incredible problem solving and client interaction skills.

Interdisciplinary Work That Benefits Teams, Students, and Institutions

Due to the nature of the research, the projects pursued at THRIVE are deeply interdisciplinary; the projects involve expertise from

the following fields: exercise science, nutrition, behavioral and developmental psychology, pediatric psychiatry, education, biostatistics, and implementation science. For these reasons, ever since its inception, THRIVE has embraced interdisciplinary approaches to research and development.

By working as a team, each member is able to bring his or her discrete discipline into a broader framework of research to benefit the families of those who use the behavioral adaptation technology. Bowling expressed how working

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THRIVE regularly has graduate students in exercise science working alongside their peers in education, or undergraduate public health majors working in tandem with psychology majors. When students work collaboratively, they build skills in developing a common language, improving flexibility, and practicing more succinct critical thinking.

with a team whose locations span across the United States—though challenging—ultimately offer more benefits to the community, clients, and students, compared to the alternative to working individually or within silos.

In addition to having professional partners with varied backgrounds, THRIVE also includes student researchers from various majors. THRIVE regularly has graduate students in exercise science working alongside their peers in education, or undergraduate

public health majors working in tandem with psychology majors. When students work collaboratively, they build skills in developing a common language, improving flexibility, and practicing more succinct critical thinking.

Digital Partnerships in a Shrinking World

As the world “shrinks,” and more work is increasingly done through digital partnership and international connections, it is critical for

students to become accustomed to working with professionals who may have a fundamentally different approach to solving the same core issues.

For instance, at Merrimack, this interdisciplinary practice allows for faculty integration and community partnership developments, which ultimately benefit not just the students and clients, but also the university and other community partners.

For these very reasons, Merrimack created an Interdisciplinary Institute, directed by Dr. Simona Sharoni, which aims to foster more interdisciplinary pedagogy and research. According to Bowling; goals such as these lay the foundation that destroys research isolation and generates a greater sense of unity across the university and community.

Challenges of Using a Virtual Lab

THRIVE is a virtual lab which has the primary goal to connect researchers, clinicians, community partners, and families of young people living with neurodevelopmental and mental health issues. This is done with the hopes

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of improving the clients' daily lives via therapeutic tech integration. Through this practice, THRIVE intends to accomplish two key tasks: cultivate high quality research and ensure the technologies and therapies end up in the hands of as many clients as possible.

In short, the research is being collected with the intent of provoking real changes in people. A great deal of research is designed to be interesting and theoretical—and therefore likely to be published—though it may offer little in the realm of real-world application. By using means such as the virtual lab, where participants engage researchers from their own homes, students and professionals are better able to serve research participants and adjust their practices to the feedback collected.

Getting in the Community

The students working in the THRIVE program who go into the field are getting real-world application experience with the clients and their family. This is something Bowling and her team see as essential to teaching the students. Research is critical to ensuring best evidence-based practices are being honored by being active in the field;



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however, THRIVE is also ensuring that the student and the clients have opportunities to see the immediate benefits of being an active participant in research projects.

Research does not serve its purpose by sitting on a shelf. This is why Bowling and her colleagues strive to put the research in the palms of the participants, while also allowing the students to experience every level of the research/application development process.

THRIVE is working to meet the needs of the students and grants, while still honoring the intention of the research—which is to help families of adolescents or young adults with neurodegenerative behavioral issues navigate their mental and behavioral health.

This is no easy task, so by integrating students, community, and partnerships in the development of these interventions, Bowling and her team make accommodations as needed to ensure the clients and their families receive the best interventions and therapies possible.

The Future of Thrive Labs

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that are in development for the public. For example, as the THRIVE team started expanding their research for GamerX—as a therapeutic approach that involved therapies with the Xbox—VR/AR tech started becoming a household possibility. What does this mean for THRIVE?

As anyone who is experienced in grant writing knows, it is a long, arduous process, and therefore staying abreast of the most recent tech development can be challenging—but not impossible. In the future, THRIVE may even begin using augmented reality applications within their interventions to better suit the needs of the clients. As THRIVE takes in feedback from their clients, students, and partners, they develop interventions that are accessible and user-friendly to the adolescents and their families.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Cassidy Clevenger is a Samford University alum. She is currently in graduate school at Samford in the MSW program, while working as a staff writer for Flaherty Media.

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Dance Education

CAN ENLIVEN DANCE DEPARTMENTS

by Cynthia Mwenja

In the 80s, I attended a small, private liberal arts college in Alabama, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance. The curriculum was fairly standard for a performance-focused program: we had ballet class every day, modern, jazz, and folk dance twice a week each, and we typically presented a major production each semester.







The program assumed that all of the students would become professional ballet dancers, even though most program graduates became dance teachers instead. The department ended up being completely eliminated a few years ago, when I was still teaching dance full time.

This move to close the program has made other alums and me feel cut off and disconnected from our alma mater. I feel as if I do not have an undergraduate institution anymore.

How a Dance Department May Have Been Preserved

While the department was closed for a variety of institutional reasons, I do wonder—as a graduate who taught dance for years—if the degree program could have instead been preserved by the addition of a dance education track.

College dance program graduates, then and now, typically have four career choices: performer, choreographer, studio owner, or dance teacher.

While all of these careers are options, dance educator Doug Risner writes that most dance graduates do become dance teachers. Despite these realities, most dance programs today still solely focus, as mine did, on preparing students for the career path of performance.

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A dance education degree which aligns with state education standards can help to fill this gap. In such programs, students learn not only dance content but also education standards and approaches. Everyone benefits—students who will go on to perform gain the skills they need, and those who will become teachers learn how to teach in addition to content specific to various dance styles.

Dance teacher and researcher Dr. Lisa Gibbs explained to me that students in such programs finish their degrees with experience in performance craft but little information about effective dance teaching strategies. In other words, students in these programs learn the least about the career they are most likely to have.

Gibbs discusses the misalignment between performance-focused college dance programs and the requirements for dance teachers in K-12

schools. She says that the 2001 version of the “No Child Left Behind” Act (NCLB) moved dance from the category of physical education, establishing it as an art and part of the core academic curriculum.

The NCLB requires “highly qualified teachers” to teach academics, and a “highly qualified” dance educator is one with a dance education degree. Sadly, every private university in Alabama with a dance program had closed it by 2010, and the few state universities with

dance programs have largely continued to focus on developing performers. Alabama reflects the national trend; most schools offering dance programs focus on performance skills.

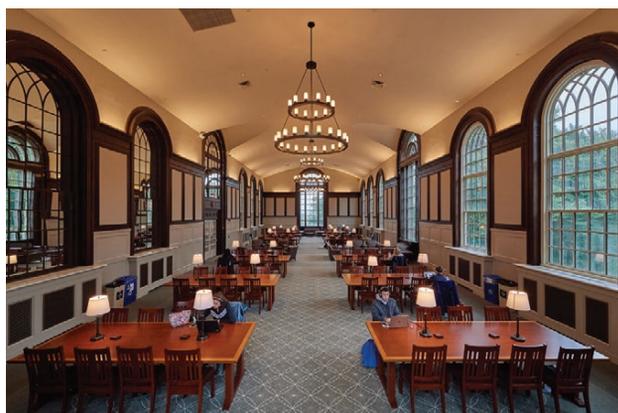
Like many other states, Alabama has only one institution of higher education offering the dance education degree required of K-12 dance educators in the state’s public schools. In fact, about a third of US states have no college or university dance education degree program at all.

Dance Education Degrees

According to the Dance Colleges website, the schools that have dance education degree programs are spread fairly evenly around the nation, with almost half of the top ranked dance education program are at private institutions.

The schools that do offer dance education degrees tend to roll them together in a combined drama and dance education program. As Gibbs points out in her 2019 article, “Dance Education Certification in Alabama,” however, “If the arts are nationally seen as core academic subjects for public school education, dance faculty [and

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their institutions] have an opportunity, perhaps even a responsibility, to offer an additional career track for their undergraduate students.”

One reason that dance departments don't offer dance education programs is that many dancers and dance program administrators dismiss dance education as an inferior, less prestigious degree option.

Dance educators, however, contribute to the academic successes that the arts as a whole can provide to students at all levels of schooling. The 2014 South Arts study points out that arts education has been shown to strengthen a wide variety of seemingly unrelated issues: graduation and attendance rates, academic success, and test scores.

In defining “the arts” as academic, though, the NCLB and related state standards allow any art— theater, music, visual arts, or dance—to fulfill the requirement. Perhaps because dance education degrees—and thus, certified dance educators—are sparse in many parts of the nation, K-12 schools often choose to include music or visual arts in their programs rather than dance.



Photo courtesy of Hofstra University



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Photo courtesy of Hofstra University

In our conversation, Gibbs pointed out that Montgomery County, Alabama, lies directly between both Alabama and Mississippi's only dance education degree programs. Perhaps not coincidentally, Montgomery County also employs the highest number of dance educators in the state.

More dance education programs nationwide could bolster the presence of dance educators alongside their music and visual arts colleagues in K-12 schools nationwide.

Just as dance educators benefit their students academically, physically, and culturally, dance education programs benefit their graduates, too.

When dance programs assume their graduates will become performers, those graduates aren't prepared for the whole array of jobs they might do after graduation, and they often lack a clear path to employment.

A dance education degree which aligns with state education standards can help to fill this gap. In such programs, students learn not only dance content but also education standards and approaches. Everyone benefits—students who will go on to perform gain the skills they need, and those who will become teachers learn how to teach in addition to content specific to various dance styles.

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Hofstra's Dance Education program is just one of the tracks available in the Dance Department; students can also choose to pursue the more performance-oriented BFA or BA tracks instead. By offering this variety of degree options, Hofstra has developed a vibrant and strong dance program.

Training Students to Excel in Multiple Settings

Students with dance education degrees have the qualifications to teach in all settings, including private studios, institutions of higher education, and K-12 schools. Gibbs outlines the coursework for such degree programs: not only dance technique, dance history, and choreography, but also "classroom management, lesson planning...and knowledge of the body."

One way for dance departments to provide dance education programming is to partner with the education department at their institution.

For one example, Hofstra University employs this strategy for their dance education degree; their undergraduates are prepared to be teachers, dancers, and choreographers working with students of all ages and skill levels, both within private studios and public schools.

The Dance Education program coordinates with Hofstra's Education Department, requiring specific education courses as part of the degree plan. The combined requirements ensure that the program's graduates can become certified dance educators in the state's K-12 schools.

Hofstra's Dance Education program is just one of the tracks available in the Dance

Department; students can also choose to pursue the more performance-oriented BFA or BA tracks instead. By offering this variety of degree options, Hofstra has developed a vibrant and strong dance program.

Expanding a Program Rather Than Closing a Department

In the future, I hope that colleges and universities which may be considering how to strengthen a struggling dance program might follow Hofstra's model, expanding the degree programs rather than closing the department.

That might not have been possible in the case of my alma mater, but I would feel more connected to and proud of my school if it had been able to take this route.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Cynthia Mwenja teaches Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Montevallo.



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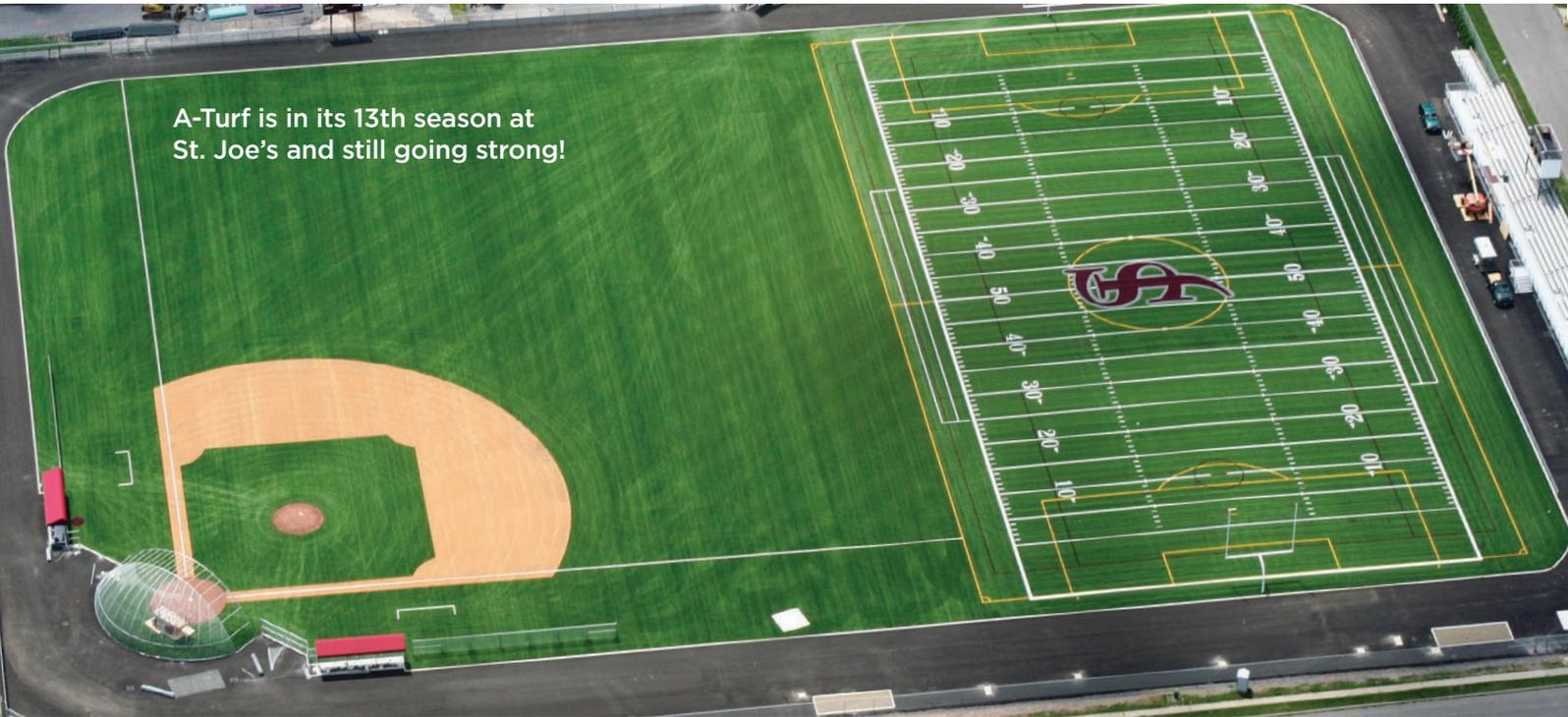
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Emily Turonis (vocals), Jenna Conti (guitar), and Tim Burney (drums) use Hear Back PRO Mixers to hear precisely what each wants during a recording session at Mercy College's recording studio. (Photo by Leslie Kahan)

CASE STUDY

Mercy College: Hands-on Learning in a Modern Recording Environment

Mercy College takes a hands-on approach to learning, and their Music Production and Recording Arts department is no exception. They previously used the original **Hear Technologies** 8-channel mixer system in their studios. In planning their new recording studio to replicate a modern recording environment, they needed to accommodate much larger recording sessions. Enter the **Hear Back PRO**.

Since Hear Technologies systems serve professionals and schools around the world, Mercy College reached out to us to discuss the best way for our gear to fill their personal monitoring needs.

They chose a Hear Back PRO system, installing 16 PRO Mixers throughout their new studio spaces, along with a PRO Mixer Distro and a Virtual Mixer Card. With two headphones on each mixer, this setup enabled the school's studio space to accommodate up to 32 artists at once.

As the Hear Back PRO system is expandable, the occasional even-larger recording session is no problem, said Sam Stauff, Mercy College studio manager.

"We have had the need to record a choir with more than 40 singers," Stauff said. "When this happens we add an analog headphone amp with 16 more headphones out and take the line outs of the Hear Back Mixer into the headphone amp. This gives us a total of 48 headphones. It doesn't happen all the time, but it is nice to be able to accommodate that."

Mercy College found that upgrading to personal monitoring improved not only efficiency but performance, too.

"Before ... we had to make each mix in Pro Tools," Stauff said. "The time the Hear Back system saves us is amazing, plus it sounds great."

Stauff explained their setup: "In overdub sessions, we send all the music to Channels 1 and 2 Left and Right, Stereo linked. Then have the artist that is overdubbing on the third channel. Usually Talkback on 15 and click on 16 as a default. If it is a vocal session, we would do a similar setup and maybe add a fourth channel if they want to do doubles or harmonies.

"The second main way we use it is for tracking live. For instance, Drums on 1 and 2

Stereo linked, Bass on 3, Guitar on 4, Stereo keys on 5 and 6 linked. 7 Vocal. Then we may add whatever else the band needs depending on the session. Usually Talkback on 15 and Click on 16 as a default. We have two Avid I/Os 16x16s so our I/O is normalled into our 16 channels of the analog input to the Hear Back Hub. We have the ability to use ADAT as well."

Mercy College is also eyeing future Hear Technologies tools, such as our in-development Hear Back PRO Digital Overlay, which will enable saved channel labels on mixers to switch between one group of artists to the next.

Hear Technologies helped Mercy College reach their performing arts goals and can help your school reach its goals, too.

ABOUT MERCY COLLEGE:

An independent private college based in New York, NY, Mercy College boasts a diverse student body and places high value on learning outside the classroom with real-world experiences.

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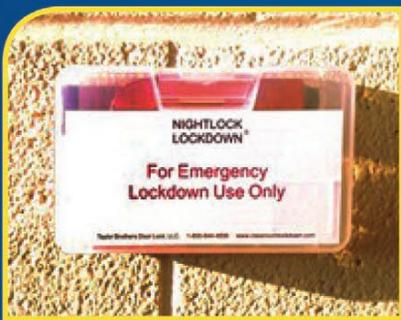
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