

# The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

## PREVIEWS



### Abroad in England

The Mount is working on, among other things, an international agreement with a London university that would be the first of its kind for a Massachusetts community college.

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### Zooming Through Life

Lauren Ferris, a student at Bay Path University studying in a master’s program for Applied Behavior Analysis, is a woman ahead of her time and has been managing her work life via Zoom since last fall.

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### Computer Crazy

Contributors weigh in on their experiences in an increasingly technology-centric learning environment.

For the full spread, see pages 8 & 9

### Mosh No More

Being part of a crowd is a feeling that can’t be replaced by the soft glow of a screen and a good pair of headphones, and COVID-19 has forced us to abandon that sense of oneness, at least temporarily.

For the full article, see page 10

## Federal Funding for College Considered

Several MWCC employees give their opinions on federal funding

By Alexander Ruehlicke  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

In recent years, the debate over free college has been at the forefront of the American political scene. Now, as this proposal gets closer to the enactment, students and faculty are among those who will feel the immediate effects, and the first to know whether this policy benefits them.

As the Biden administration works towards possibly passing its tuition-free community college policy, many are wondering what this policy will facilitate. With these changes in policy comes a new question for both students and faculty alike: will we benefit from more funding?



Photo courtesy of MWCC

### Mount Wachusett Community College

Robert LaBonte is the Vice President of Finance and Administration here at Mount Wachusett Community College.

“Roughly half of the money that funds the college comes from the state [of Massachusetts], and half comes from tuition

and fees,” LaBonte explained regarding the current operations

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“Federally Funded College” >>>

## Is Spring Break Finished?

The opinions of faculty and students on 2021’s new take on the vacation



Photo by koalasandco from flickr

By Alexander Ruehlicke  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Colleges across the country have moved to eliminate spring break from the 2021 academic

calendar in exchange for a one-week extension to winter break as concerns about student and faculty safety rise.

As these decisions are being

made, many students may be concerned with how college committees are making these decisions and how it may affect their academic future.

Spring break in the time of COVID-19 has become a hazard to schools with large dorm populations, mainly due to the risk of students contracting the virus while traveling during the one-week break.

Among the colleges affected is Fitchburg State University (FSU), whose academic affairs department announced the changes to their 2021 academic calendar on November 12, 2020. FSU fears that this mass movement of the student population would result in an outbreak at the campus when they all eventually return from their spring break vacations.

“In October, I think, is when we got serious,” said Dr. Alberto Cardelle, Provost at FSU, when asked about the timeline of the decision. “I am very hopeful that we will be in-person in the fall,” Dr. Cardelle added.

In regard to the national models at the time, Dr. Cardelle said that “Over the summer *The Chronicle of Higher Education* sent out ‘fifteen different scenarios for the academic year’ and all of that discussion, as well as what our sister institutions were thinking, definitely influenced our decision”.

Dr. Cathy Canney, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at FSU, described how the proposition

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“Spring Break” >>>



# Federally Funded College

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Photo by Gage Skidmore from flickr  
President Joe Biden

at MWCC. He went on to say that “on top of that we get federal funding in the form of federal grants, however, these grants are currently in place to enhance that main core business.”

“For them to increase those [grants] would be great because it would allow us to offer more innovative programs to help students,” LaBonte said, “but it would not affect the current business model,” i.e. tuition costs.

When asked about the effects the Biden administration’s proposal will have on the college, LaBonte said, “now that is something that would help lower the tuition cost.”

LaBonte says that a new policy isn’t the only way the administration can lower tuition costs, explaining that, “there’s an indirect form of federal funding in that the feds pay for the Pell grants, and that goes not to the college but to the students in the

form of tuition.”

“If they were to increase the amount that students are eligible to get under a Pell grant, that might help drive students into the college which would allow us to keep tuition fees down,” LaBonte explained.

On top of the changes the policy will have on students, it’s equally important to ask what changes the faculty at MWCC will undergo if it were to be enacted. Increasing the amount of federal funding towards

community colleges may have unintended consequences for teachers and administrative employees alike.

Candace Shivers is the Department Chair for Human Services & Social Sciences, and the Union Chapter President for the faculty and professional staff at MWCC. She enforces contracts that are negotiated with the Massachusetts Community College Council on behalf of all the faculty and professional staff at the college and serves as the

spokesperson for the Union at the chapter.

On the topic of debt-free college for all, Shivers said, “at least 70% of our classes are taught by contingent faculty [i.e. instructors yet to be conferred tenure].” She went on to explain that, “if there was more federal funding there’s a possibility that there would be more full-time faculty at the college.” This means that some of the teachers who are hired on a temporary basis would either have to be taken on as full-time teachers at the college or find work elsewhere.

Shivers says that the college actually financially benefits from adjunct, or contingent, faculty because currently “in a class of thirty, the adjunct faculty gets paid for [teaching] twelve students. The other students in that class, the college gets to keep that money.” This means that 40% of the tuition the students in that class pay goes toward paying the adjunct teacher, and

60% goes directly to the college to help with overhead costs.

“It costs the college more for me to teach full-time than it does for me teaching part-time,” Shivers said. “For me to teach part-time they’re not paying my health insurance, they’re not paying any benefits. They’re just paying me to teach the class.”

On the topic of student debt, Shivers gave her opinion on the matter, saying, “give people more Pell grants.” Shivers then added that Pell grants are “helping students not take out loans that are going to crush them. You can fix this other thing [college funding] by giving more money to Pell grants.”

“Students need to understand that this is going to be their fight,” Shivers said when asked about the future of higher education. “This is stuff that they’re going to have to stand up for because eventually people are going to stop listening to the talking heads.”

# Spring Break

>>> continued from page 1

first came to light, saying, “We were getting that question from community members—whether we should make a formal adjustment to the calendar”.

“There were mixed opinions on [the proposition], so that prompted us to want to hear from more students,” said Dr. Canney in regards to the reaction from students, going on to say, “so we created a survey that we sent out

to students, faculty, and staff.” Dr. Canny then added that the survey had over 900 responses from students.

In addition to the one-week extension to winter break, FSU has also opted to include four ‘wellness days’ throughout the spring semester, giving students a much-needed break from classes as well as a chance to catch up on assignments.

While the changes do not directly affect them, the

possibility of no spring break at FSU plays a role in the decisions made by students who plan on attending there in the future, many of whom currently study at Mount Wachusett Community College.

One such student is Kristopher Madden. Madden was a communications major and attended classes at MWCC for two years before transferring to FSU in January.

“Frankly, I’m okay with it,”

Madden stated when asked about the calendar change, going on to say, “I feel like spring break is kind of an antiquated tradition that we do.”

Madden described his specific situation as being rare, saying, “I go to school using the post-9/11 GI bill, meaning I get paid to go to school.” He explained that, “if I take a break halfway through the semester, I don’t get paid.”

When asked whether spring break has ever played an

important role in his school year, Madden simply replied, “It’s mostly an inconvenience. I’d rather just knock it all out and get it done.”

Madden finished by saying, “Perseverance is really what’s going to get a lot of people through the foreseeable future because COVID-19 made for some really weird circumstances.”

## CORRECTIONS

**Due to some factual errors and misinterpretations in an article in our previous issue regarding the LACE program we are running clarifications and corrections.**

LACE is a degree program at MWCC that is one of the concentrations within the LAS degree. The LACE degree is a transfer degree that can be valuable in any major program that a person decides to transfer into after graduation. The Brewer Center is a part of MWCC that coordinates with the LACE degree program. According to Professor Daniel Soucy, the former Chair of Civic Engagement at MWCC, “the LACE program blends the know that of textbook knowledge covered in the classroom, and know-how of being civically engaged.”

# Abroad in England

## MWCC has big plans for the future in studying abroad

By Aidan Lane  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Mount is working on, among other things, an international agreement with a London university that would be the first of its kind for a Massachusetts community college.

Tracey Betts Sarefield, the head of the Study Abroad Office, spoke of their primary goal: a partnership with the Metropolitan University of London. Such a partnership would mean that students of the Mount could apply not only for semesters abroad but transfer outright to the Metropolitan University in a very similar manner as to any university or college here in Massachusetts. This would be a monumental first for community colleges in Massachusetts, as it would be the first time any such institution has made such an agreement with a foreign university.

“One of the big projects we’re working on right now is the transfer articulation agreement between Mount Wachusett and London Metropolitan University,” said Betts Sarefield, in an interview. While many details have yet to be set in stone, there are a few details known. This program would be a 2-plus-2 program, of which the Mount has with many other, more local, institutions. This essentially means that students can start a program at the Mount, and then



Photo by Andrew Dunn, Wikimedia Commons

The graduate centre of the London Metropolitan University

seamlessly finish them at the other institution.

While regular applicants to the London Met would have to pay anywhere from £12,700 to over £14,000 (\$17,000 to \$18,800) a year, there is a provision for a

professional writing tracts.

Professor Kara Roche, who in addition to being a veritable staple of the Mount Wachusett campus, is helping the foreign reach of the Mount as the faculty liaison to the Study Abroad

writing tract. Roche also has another project, one which may allow students to go abroad—without the need to travel.

“We’re working on encourag[ing] professors to think ‘outside of the box’ when

**“We’re working on encourag[ing] professors to think ‘outside of the box’ when thinking about what study abroad means.”**

– Kara Roche

discount of a reasonable amount for transfer students being hammered out. Currently, the main focuses for programs of study are the business and the

office. Roche has been working very closely in the aide of the 2-plus-2 agreement with the London Met, and is especially happy about the focus on the

thinking about what study abroad means,” Roche said in regard to the project. Namely, an exchange course with a professor at the London Met, focusing on

literature, and in Roche’s case, poets. Much of such a course would be conducted through videos and vlogging, where the professor may conduct the lessons in a local appropriate to the lesson. Roche gave this as an example, “Reading Sylvia Plath outside of Smith College or reciting Jack Kerouac in front of his statue.”

The other famous program that the Mount has is the study abroad service-learning trips offered by the Brewer Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement, or simply the Brewer Center. Many of the students from before the pandemic will remember seeing the donation jars for these trips while they were paying for their mozzarella sticks and sandwich wraps in the Green St. Café. While these trips have been put on hold for the time being, Shelley Errington Nicholson, the Director of the Brewer Center, is busy planning for the future.

Previous trips went to Costa Rica and Peru, where students would service the communities in any way that was required: farming, environmental work, reforestation, etc. As for current plans, “Right now, we have a pin in everything because we know we won’t be traveling any time soon.” Plans usually intend to set off at the end of the spring semester, in order to make things easier for students with summer

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“Study Abroad: London” >>>

# An Important Meeting

## The SGA unveil new plans for online outreach and discuss bookstore woes

By Daniel Dow  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Student Government Association took steps on February 10 to vote and approve a virtual student government booth.

This virtual space can be accessed at [www.kumospace.com/mwccstudentcenter](http://www.kumospace.com/mwccstudentcenter) and can hold up to 25 students at

one time. Those who wish to participate will need to enter their student email address to gain access to this space.

In tandem with this project, the association created a new form that can be accessed through the Contact the SGA hyperlink on the Student Government Association web page. This form, according to Advisor

Kathy Matson, will allow Mount Wachusett Community College students to directly message the association with “any comment, question, or concerns”. This new communication system will also allow students to send anonymous messages and to indicate whether or not they wish to be contacted by SGA. The association voted to

confirm Jennifer Garipey to the role of Student Liaison. This new role will be responsible for monitoring, reporting, and responding to the submitted forms.

Both the virtual student government booth and the “Contact the SGA” hyperlink went live on Monday February 15th.

The Student Government Association President Aidan Lane addressed the importance of these new systems during the pandemic and the need “to Aggregate and collect the collective will on issues.” His hopes are that these new systems will create better accessibility

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“SGA Meeting” >>>



# Sparing a Minute for Mental Health

## Melissa Manzi's YouTube series is short but very sweet

By Megan O'Dell  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Melissa Manzi, the mental health counselor at MWCC, has uploaded some "one-minute mental health" videos on the school's YouTube channel geared toward students, where she discusses an assortment of mental health topics, such as time-management, depression, anxiety, sleep, and even joy.

In one video entitled "Depression," Manzi discusses depression and offers advice on how to recognize the symptoms. For example, Manzi said, "Students often ask me 'how do I know if I am depressed or just in a bad mood?' and it's a great question and there is a difference."

After explaining how there is a difference between being upset or depressed, she discusses the signs of depression, which include having a hard time

sleeping, changing eating habits change, feeling unhappy while doing things that may have been pleasurable before, and experiencing a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness.

In another video called "Thoughts," Manzi states that "thoughts aren't facts." Manzi says, "Every semester students come into my office, and they are sure they failed the exam. Then they come back a week later and they didn't fail." Manzi explains her point that "thoughts aren't facts" and urges people who may have these thoughts to take a breath and realize there are no facts to prove these thoughts are correct.

Manzi ends her video by saying, "Why not go for a more positive thought? Cause it just makes you feel better."

Although you may be feeling depressed and having not pleasant thoughts, they are both



Image captured by Thomas Hill Jr.

Melissa's Mental Health Minute #1

common and treatable. Manzi adds, "depression is highly treatable, so reach out for help; you don't have to go through this alone."

Manzi plans to reupload some her videos and post one or two

more at some point this semester. In addition, she plans to put out a video regarding suicide prevention training around April.

Manzi provides the audience with a link to schedule an appointment with her and she

says that she can also give students additional resources for help or further treatment. For more information, watch the YouTube videos or contact Manzi at [m\\_manzi@mwcc.mass.edu](mailto:m_manzi@mwcc.mass.edu).

# SGA Meeting

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to the association and to be able to bring student issues to the president or board of trustees.  
The association also addressed

the issue of student textbook shipping delays. Student Advisory Council Member Cody Nathanson attended a meeting with the bookstore to address

student concerns and to seek answers.

According to Cody, the bookstore delays were due to COVID-19 and shipping delays.

To prevent any future issues the bookstore is in the process of creating a new program that will allow professors to post books for their specific classes, allowing the bookstore to better advise on student needs. There is also an overall push by the campus to have professors use eBooks as their preferred text.

Due to COVID-19, President Lane called for a motion to continue a change in the bylaws that require seven signatures to be nominated for an executed board member position instead of twenty-five. With this motion he also called for elections to be held April 5th through the 9th. The Association stressed the importance of holding a weeklong election to try and improve voter turnout. This motion passed unanimously.

Student trustee committee member Vanessa Hill called for the board to enact a Community Building Day that would be held every third Wednesday of October. This is an event taking place on college campuses across

the Commonwealth in an effort to, according to Hill, "bring the campus together by engaging the campus community and team building exercises geared towards celebrating diversity among the student body and improving the relationships between students."

The council tabled this movement and will vote to enact Community building day once the campus opens back up.

The Student Government Association addressed the following measures as ongoing: Creating a Student Trustee Handbook, sending a letter to Attorney General Maura Healey addressing Comcast's enactment of data usage restrictions, conducting strategic planning, setting goals, and timelines for Student Advisory Council, and advocating to Massachusetts State Representatives and State Senators to increase funding for line item 700600, which funds Open Educational Resources for students.

# Study Abroad: London



>>> continued from page 3  
jobs. Unfortunately, things are looking like no travel will be possible at the end of the current semester. The plans for a trip to Iceland were unfortunately iced by the current pandemic.

Once she gets the go-ahead from the powers that be to start setting up a new service-learning trip in earnest, she hopes to begin initiating foreign trips again, with a possible start date of 2022. However, Nicholson sees a few paths forward for the service learning trips; in a perfect world, she would like to see a winter and a summer trip. However, other ideas involve working with the Study Abroad

office- the possibility of credit-bearing courses. "I think there's a lot of opportunities out there, once we reset with travel," Nicholson said.

One idea in particular was a domestic service trip, namely to a Native American reservation, especially during the age of travel restrictions. Nicholson said of the trips that the cultural aspect is the most important. "We could do agricultural work here; we could do environmental work here," Nicholson said. "It's the cultural piece of it that students weren't getting [before the service learning trips], figuring out what it means to be a person from the United States, functioning in an environment that is not yours."

# Zooming Through Life

## One local student describes her successes in translating her life online



By Stephanie Pope  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

As the pandemic falls into its second wave of destruction, more and more people are realizing that they must find new and innovative ways to navigate how they do business, as well as how they interact personally with friends and family.

Lauren Ferris, a student at Bay Path University studying in a master's program for Applied Behavior Analysis, is a woman ahead of her time and has been managing her work life via

Zoom since last fall. With a head start, she has managed to perfect this new platform is run but is no stranger to video platforms on a grand scale.

Ferris uses multiple video platforms such as Skype and Telehealth but stays true to Zoom to connect with her clients (children with autism or angelman syndrome), at Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) because Zoom is just an easier application to navigate.

Ferris said how simple it is to

connect with friends and family as well, both long distance and locally. She also explains how she has tried the platform for kung fu but says she "would rather be in a gym, or place like with others."

Regardless of her use, she goes on to praise the platform as it has helped ease her ever growing anxiety, expressing, "[...] as someone who has anxiety, this has been a great way for me to be more comfortable in situations where if I were in-person, I

would be extremely anxious." lake in Ayer, Ferris is happy to use Zoom as much as she does. Being able to sit in the coziness of her own space and snug on her couch, she feels more comfortable seeing people this way, especially with larger groups. Ferris has said that with

**"[...] as someone who has anxiety, this has been a great way for me to be more comfortable in situations where if I were in-person, I would be extremely anxious."**

- Lauren Ferris

to connect with family who live across the country, to be so nice. I otherwise would not be able to see their faces [...]"

Ferris said that she uses Zoom for school three times a week and sees, "one friend about once a week on Zoom for coffee dates, and about every two weeks to see my brother and his family."

As a homebody living on a

the direction technology is migrating, it's been a lot easier to be more productive. Connecting with others from her computer while also being able to do her daily tasks has created a good flow for Ferris. And although she has run into some challenges, such as shorter sessions due to lost attention with her clients, she has been making it work.

# Mind the Gap

## A student discusses her gap year and how it drastically altered the path of her life

By Justin Tralongo  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Both an artist and a college student, Anneliese King changed the course of her career after a gap year. As King reached the end of high school, she had everything lined up, including scholarships, to attend the University of Maine with the intentions of becoming an art teacher or an artist. However, before King could begin this new leg of her journey, a sudden change in living circumstances altered all her plans.

Unexpectedly, King had to leave her birth state of Maine and move to the state of Massachusetts. Amidst the change in home, community, lifestyle, and life direction, she thought it might help to take a



Photo submitted by Anneliese King

Anneliese King

gap year. In high school, she had been advised multiple times against risking the dangers of a gap year. Despite what she had been told, King trusted her gut and took a year to work full time at minimum wage.

King believes this gap year was an important part of her life. It gave her an early glimpse of the reality of life, work, and money. She realized that she would not be able to depend on art to support her, and that she wanted a more stable form of employment so that she could live life the way she wanted to and experience art as something she loved rather than a full-time occupation.

King, at the age of 20, is finishing up her prerequisites to enter the dental program at MWCC. Now having the security

of pursuing a stable career, she began to find ways to incorporate her love of art into her life. Although she had always loved all kinds of art and preferred to create things for pleasure rather than demand, King decided to challenge herself by drawing portraits for people.

Along with enjoyment, these portraits have brought her money as well. Last month she sold a portrait for \$100, and her current and upcoming projects have been agreed upon at \$150 and \$175.

King believes that she will continue selling portraits as an enjoyable side job for the rest of her life. In her own words, "I can do something I enjoy, (...) it gives me money, other people love it and enjoy it."



# Altruism in the Face of Adversity

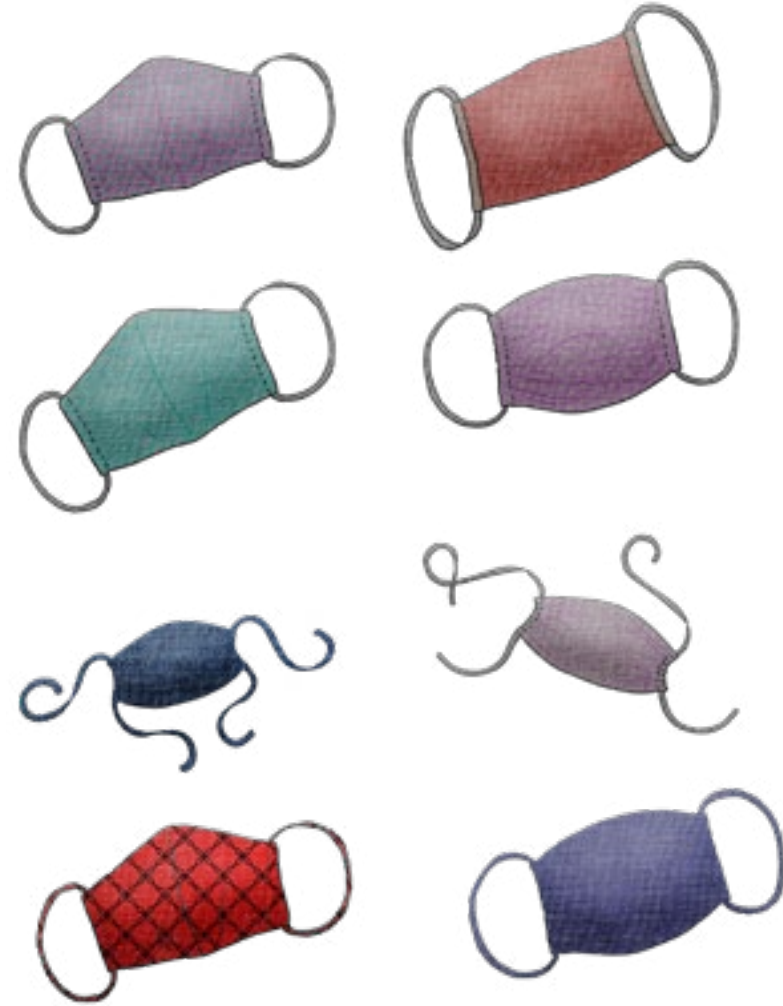
## A Retired MWCC Professor Takes Action Against COVID

By **Stephanie Pope**  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

As the pandemic of COVID-19 rages across the globe, many people in America, and likely all over the world, have remained holed up in their homes with nothing to do. Overstimulated from technology and overwhelmed with energy and nowhere to store it, young folks have struggled to find an outlet to combat their boredom.

Maryann Kane, a 66-year-old retired professor at Mount Wachusett Community College, has been helping keep the younger generation of adults from going stir crazy.

A quilter by nature, Kane has been applying her 40+ years of crafting to helping those in need of masks by putting her vast knowledge of sewing to use.



Kane said, "One of the things I did most during quarantine was making masks. I've probably made, at this point, over one-thousand masks."

This skill has come in handy, especially towards the small group of people she has taken under her wing to help them gain the skills needed to pay it forward, as Kane has been doing over the course of seven months.

**Excited, the members of the group have happily said they have "never done anything like this" and how it is "so much fun."**

Kane has managed to direct her new mask brigade, consisting of her daughter and her daughter's friends, in a once-a-week crafting session which she safely holds at

her house. Excited, the members of the group have happily said they have "never done anything like this" and how it is "so much fun."

As communities continue to see a rise in COVID-19 cases, Kane continues to direct those who want to get involved in making safe personal protection equipment, or PPE, for all. This stems from Kane's

influential determination with creating masks for a vast number of communities. Kane said that **continued on page 7 "Making Masks" >>>**

# Making the Best of a Bad Situation

## One MWCC student reprioritizes her life during the pandemic

By **Daniel Dow**  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Ellie Burton, a mother of three, wife, passionate writer, and practicing Norse pagan, took major steps this year to focus on the education of her three boys and to keep her family safe as COVID-19 cases grew progressively worse.

Burton first left her job at

arrangements, which was another business that occupied the shop.

Burton may have only been employed for a year, but her decision to depart was upsetting for herself and store ownership. As upsetting as it was, the owners understood, and she was told she would be "welcome back with open arms" if she decided to

**"I've been able to see them grow so much over the last year in a way that parents don't normally get to."**

**- Ellie Burton**

Tintagel's Gate, specializing in metaphysics, where she was the sole employee. While working there she was responsible for managing shelf space, reading tarot cards, and creating floral

wrangling them is no easy task according to her.

Although supporting her boys could be difficult, Burton said

**continued on page 7 "Best of a Bad Situation" >>>**



Photo submitted by Ellie Burton  
Ellie Burton (left) and family

# A Commotion About the Ocean

## One MWCC student pursues a career involving her passion for nature

By **Shaye McKeen**  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Claire Matusiewicz, a Natural Resources major at Mount Wachusett Community College and self-described lover of nature and animals, will be following her passion for the outdoors by working as an intern with Seven Seas this summer.

Matusiewicz's infatuation with the ocean begins with its place in being the beginning of all life and its prominent place in the circle of life. According to her, all things somehow connect back to the ocean in some way, shape, or form.

Upon being asked about her career aspirations, Matusiewicz responded brightly, naming both marine environmental and biological conservation as being extremely important and interesting to her.

Matusiewicz also detailed her excitement with being out on the open water all day, constantly learning more about the ocean environment, and the animals which inhabit it. She expressed excitement for her internship, regarding it as a favorite memory



Photo submitted by Claire Matusiewicz

Claire Matusiewicz

in her life, as she had dreamed about the opportunity for a long time.

Seven Seas Whale Watch

guarantee of whale sightings per trip. Claire is working as an intern during the month of August of 2021, where she will be documenting research data on each whale that is sighted during the cruise, which she then relays to the passengers aboard as their guide. She described herself as

first job growing up was working as a dog walker/pet sitter, satiating her love of animals thoroughly.

But as much as Matusiewicz loves animals, she shares the same passion for nature as well. Her favorite place to travel she described as "Mount

**"Ocean work specifically interested me because of how important it is."**

**- Claire Matusiewicz**

Washington! There's so much unique nature there, and the views are unreal! The fact you can drive up the mountain yourself and be above the clouds...I'd recommend anyone

When asked about where her passion for the ocean came from while growing up in a landlocked state like Illinois, Matusiewicz said, "I've always absolutely loved animals. My dad was always taking me to different animal related activities, engaging in my interests. I also had a ton of pets growing up,

which definitely helped. Ocean work specifically interested me because of how important it is."

She also mentioned that her

runs from the shores of Cape Ann and boasts a 4th generation sea captain at the helm of each ship, with a one hundred percent

During her favorite season, summer, Matusiewicz tries to stay as close to the water as she can. She talks about always being in one of three places during the warm season: in the water swimming, walking the shoreline in search of seashells, or crossing the sea channels and inlets over boardwalks.



# Making Masks

**>>> continued from page 6**

she has made masks for "five different hospitals, [a] hospice, the residential program for adults with disabilities, and Head Start." National Head Start Association is a nonprofit organization committed to the belief that "every child, regardless of circumstances at birth, has the ability to succeed in life" according to their website.

Kane was a professor at

Mount Wachusett Community College, teaching early childhood education courses and courses centered around teaching children with special needs. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education and a master's degree in Young Children with Special Needs from Fitchburg State University. She earned her Ed.D. degree from Nova Southeastern University.

# Best of a Bad Situation

**>>> continued from page 6**

that she has no regrets about her decision. "I've been able to see them grow so much over the last year in a way that parents don't normally get to," she said. She also spoke about how well they have been doing in their classes, how great they are handling remote learning, and how proud she is of them.

"It's better if they are home today so they can be home tomorrow instead of risking it and possibly losing them to COVID-19 because then tomorrow wouldn't be an option," Burton said.

While working with her sons she has also found the time to focus on her own education.

After some hesitation in choosing an area of study, she saw The Mount Wachusett Community College's professional writing track. According to Burton, she "had an epiphany" and decided to take her hobbies of reading, storytelling, and poetry to the next level.

She now plans to pursue a master's degree in creative writing at the University of Southern New Hampshire.

Burton reflected on milestones she has missed with her family due to COVID-19. She spoke about her great grandmother turning 88 this year and missing her birthday. She discussed the birth of her niece and missing her sisters-in-law's pregnancy.

She had regrets about missing the simple things, just seeing family, and hugging loved ones.

Burton does see light at the end of the tunnel and discusses plans at the end of Coronavirus. Her eyes lit up as she talked about visiting the Adirondack Nationals in New York. "It's a yearly family tradition!" she said. "The Adirondacks is a nice area by itself, going to the Nationals you also have a car show to top it off!". She knows the sacrifice she makes now will be worth it in the end.



## The Tight Rope of School and Work

By *Angela Risotti*  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Attending classes, working a full-time job, and managing the schedules of students and employees during this time is a mission that is achieved by balance, and without finding that balance, it will leave one struggling to pinpoint their true priorities.

One student currently in the midst of this battle is MWCC student Alyssa Johnson. Johnson has been juggling her classes alongside two jobs. When Johnson is not involved with class work, she is working full-time at the preschool located within the YMCA in Athol. There, she is an assistant teacher but is soon to be promoted to lead teacher. When she is not teaching, she is a customer service associate at the Cumberland Farms in Templeton.

And with all of this going on, she is able to balance her busy work schedule and extensive classes so that she completes her work on time and does not have to adjust her work schedule based around her classes.

"It was a little difficult to balance things when we first went remote, but I have a strict schedule that I follow every week," Johnson said.

Johnson said she is grateful that her classes have been moved online; because of this, she has had more time to seriously focus on her job at the preschool.

# COMPUTER CRAZY

Contributors weigh in on their experiences in an increasingly technology-centric learning environment

## Press Pause for Remote Learning

By *Suzanne Eglington*  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Students from all departments felt the missing community aspect of college. MWCC Art student Alex Ramos is one such person. "I didn't feel connected to the class as I found myself procrastinating in my work," said Ramos.

Ramos also said that she's faced some extra difficulties as an art major in remote learning. "The big [change] I guess would be getting used to taking art classes online, especially sculpture and painting."

Ramos explained that, "It wasn't as hands on, it was a lot harder to understand the information and assignments."

Students are not the only ones with challenges to the new normal this fall semester.

Professor Little, Media Arts Department Head, explained his adjustment this Fall. "I did three courses this semester. One fully in person, one hybrid and one totally online." While the three courses brought their own special challenges converting to the new safety rules, he was surprised but worked through each challenge. Little explained, "The in person one was much more difficult than I thought it would be, because of the restrictions to stay safe. Having two bodies in a studio where I'd normally have ten really slowed things down."

The challenges didn't stop with the student numbers. The other hurdle was, "We also had to figure out how to demonstrate and teach studio equipment through video conferencing between the studio and the classroom," said Little.

Students and Professors experienced this across the career tracks. Little added, "From the teacher's point of view, I can say that it must be so nice for the student to take lectures that have detailed explanation, visuals, demonstrations, and examples, whenever it is best for them to watch/listen."

With this very positive reminder, that the MWCC teaching staff has made every effort to make it through Fall 2020 semester with 100% success for the student; Remote learning, hybrid learning and on campus learning has never adjust so well for the needs of the students at Mount Wachusett Community College.

## Online Schooling Survival Guide

By *Kristopher Madden*  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Online classes aren't just a gas saving alternative to sitting in an uncomfortable desk in a packed classroom anymore. They're the standard for most classes nationwide. From kindergarten to graduate programs, everyone has had to adapt to online classes. As frustrating as they can be sometimes, students everywhere are in the same boat together.

Dylan Quigley has been a student at Mount Wachusett Community College for three semesters, with the Fall 2020 semester being his first full-time, online semester. "I made a strict weekly schedule because a lot of my classes are self-motivated." Said Quigley. "On certain days of the week I'll come home from work and make sure I crank out a certain amount of math homework or writing homework." Scheduling his homework with his daily activities is key to his success. "If I plan ahead for it, I remember to do it," said Quigley.

Jacquelynn Boyd, a Liberal Arts major, has experience in distance learning. "I was homeschooled when I was a kid, so this wasn't my first rodeo," says Boyd. "I make sure I don't have any distractions on my desk, not even a snack, because it'll distract me. I don't do anything that isn't homework at my desk, and I don't do homework anywhere else." Boyd stresses that distractions will inevitably prevent you from doing what's important- homework. "If I have a dedicated workspace, then I know I'll be focused on homework, not video games, or posters or whatever else. It sounds boring, but you really shouldn't be looking around that much anyway. When I'm at my desk, I'm working, and I'm only working at my desk."

Danielle Lohler, a business major, uses her syllabus to plan her homework. "I make a calendar with all of my assignments for all of my classes," said Lohler. She looks at her syllabi at the start of the semester and fills in all of her homework and assignments onto it. "If you can visualize all of your assignments and when they're due, you get to visualize them going away," she said.

Stephanie Brunnel, a humanities major, stressed the importance of eating healthy and on schedule. "I felt like I was always sluggish toward the end of my class day, and it got harder to focus as the day dragged on and I realized it was because I kept forgetting to eat," Brunnel said. Brunnel stressed the importance of both eating healthy and eating on time. She said that a breakfast at the start of the day, time for a lunch break, and a well-rounded dinner really can't be skipped. "You need to make sure you feed your brain; it's your most active organ. Even if you're sitting in online classes, you need to eat," she said.

Michael Holmes, who starts his first college classes in the Spring 2021 semester, said that his biggest challenge with online classes is familiarity with the platform. "When I first started [online classes] in high school, I had no idea what I was doing," said Holmes. He said that he felt that the more familiar he got with the programs, the easier taking online classes became. It could also save a lot of time spent troubleshooting down the road.

Online classes are a reality for students for the foreseeable future, and the key to success is finding the tools and practices that work best for you. Most importantly, no one is doing this alone, no matter how far away your group partners might be. Ask for help if you need it, and if you're already familiar with online courses, offer help to one of your fellow students that might not have as good of a grasp just yet. School has always been a place for students to grow and thrive, and digital classrooms will introduce a new generation to the digital workspaces of the future.

## Simmering Frustrations

By *Angela Risotti*  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Colleges across the country have been dealing with pandemic policies in different ways that have students scrambling for coherent answers. Some colleges have taken this as an opportunity to implement new rules and regulations that leave the students stuck and feeling as though this semester is only digging them into even more debt without progressing with their education. From campus housing restricted to freshmen only, to expensive equipment that benefits the students going unused for months, it is understandable why these students are calling for tuition cuts and refunds.

Shannon St. Onge from Baldwinville is dealing with this situation at Regis College in Weston. Regis, a predominately nursing and health sciences school, is currently allowing students from four majors to live on campus, out of the forty-six that they offer. Regis is located conveniently near Boston and offers the students the opportunity to intern and study in some of the best hospitals in the country.

St. Onge, a senior majoring in Neuroscience, had an internship at Beth Israel Hospital fall through due to her major being transferred to online classes and the distance to travel every day into the city from Baldwinville was just unrealistic. This set her studies back immensely, especially with a field as serious as Neuroscience. It is very hands-on and for a long time, her work has been anything but.

St. Onge said that Regis has not offered any tuition cuts or opportunities to get involved with lab studies to remote students yet, and even their choice of majors to keep on campus was questioned severely by the student population.

"I feel like I'm a freshman all over again," St. Onge said. She also said that this is a huge set back and will postpone her graduate school plans for the future.



# Mosh No More

## Local bands struggle to stay afloat with COVID and independent venues dying

By **Kristopher Madden**  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

An important part of human culture is our need and desire to congregate and form masses, where our voices can be heard as one. In protest, in celebration and in song, people have come together since the beginning of time to mingle and merge, creating a unique and intense

“How are you supposed to separate a crowd of people from the band, let alone each other?” said front man Luke Catterton. “Part of a lot of rock shows is spit flying, sweaty crowds, moshing and people touching each other. That’s what the metal experience is, and there’s just no feasible way to do that and socially distance at the same time.”

sound quality might not be very good and camera angles are for the most part going to be terrible,” he said. While venues do their best to follow social distancing and slow the spread, it remains to be seen when the local music scene will be able to heal from the blow of the pandemic. Katherine Holcomb, manager of

**“Part of a lot of rock shows is spit flying, sweaty crowds, moshing and people touching each other. That’s what the metal experience is, and there’s just no feasible way to do that and socially distance at the same time.”**

– **Luke Catterton, Dark Was the Night**

electric charge that gives us power in numbers. Being part of a crowd is a feeling that can’t be replaced by the soft glow of a screen and a good pair of headphones, and COVID-19 has forced us to abandon that sense of oneness, at least temporarily. The impact is felt by both musicians and fans alike.

Local metal band Dark Was the Night has had to cancel all of their shows due to COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing.

While many performances nationwide have moved to online venues, Catterton said that that’s not always feasible to local bands. “A lot of people literally do play out of their basements or garages at home.” One of the major issues with playing online, according to Catterton, is spotty internet. “In a lot of places, like Worcester or Gardner, people might not have very reliable internet and livestreams may be interrupted,

Wasting Away, a punk band that played their first and only show two weeks before the initial lockdown in February, expressed dissatisfaction with Governor Baker’s mandates. “You can pretty much say goodbye to the whole scene until the governor is willing to put some teeth behind his mandates,” Holcomb said. “We need to get this under control or we’ll never see the end of it, and if we don’t see the end of it, I don’t think a lot of people

and listen to music, I want to go see a show. It’s not just the music that people go to shows for, it’s the energy in the crowd—that electricity that flows when there’s good music and good people together.” Still, Hustus refuses to go to shows during the pandemic. “You absolutely cannot socially distance at a punk show or a metal show. It’s either a metal concert or it’s socially distanced. It can’t be both.”

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