

The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

PREVIEWS



The Voice for the Students

Vanessa Hill is a wife, mother of four, and a full-time student at Mount Wachusett Community College. She’s also a student trustee, deciding to use her limited time left over to be the voice for the students.

For the full article, see page 7

Tutoring Troubles

In an era that seems like so long ago, the people of America used to roam around free with each other. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic flipped American life on its head, forcing many of our previously in-person interactions to now happen over Zoom.

For the full article, see page 2

A New “Addition” to MWCC

MWCC’s new full-time math teacher Stephanie Pollard uses her teaching experience to not only add to her student’s online experience but to also help master the transition into her new job during the lockdown.

For the full article, see page 7

No Mandatory Vaccines for MWCC “At This Time”

President Vander Hooven Comments on College Refraining From Mandating Vaccines



Image by fifo, Wikimedia Commons

By Alexander Ruehlicke
ASSISTANT EDITOR

In recent months, the debate over whether to mandate vaccinations for students and staff has been at the center of academia. Now, as the fall 2021 semester fast approaches, colleges and universities are issuing their stances on this controversial policy. Among these are Mount Wachusett Community College and Fitchburg State University.

On April 26th, FSU declared its stance on the subject in a letter from the president, Richard Lapidus. In his letter addressed to all students, the president announced that as per a unanimous decision made by the nine presidents of the

state university system, FSU would require all students and faculty to be fully vaccinated prior to the start of the fall 2021 semester.

James Vander Hooven, President of MWCC, wasn’t so eager to cement the college’s policy on the subject, saying “there’s a phrase in the college’s press release that I think is getting overlooked a bit, and that is ‘at this time.’” As of May 5th, MWCC will not be mandating the Covid-19 vaccine for students and faculty next semester, but Vander Hooven stresses that this policy is subject to change.

“I cannot emphasize enough how much I want everyone to get vaccinated,” Vander Hooven

stated. “But there are reasons not to get vaccinated, whether they be medical reasons, religious reasons, or it could be a trust issue.”

Vander Hooven shared the unfortunate experience he had with the virus back in February, saying “I actually had Covid, and it wasn’t fun,” going on to say that “I wouldn’t wish it on anyone.”

Most colleges and universities that plan to mandate vaccines will allow exemptions for students upon request. This includes medical or religious reasons, or students enrolled in fully remote classes.

Vander Hooven also

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“MWCC Vaccines” >>>

New Abolitionist Park at FSU

Some MWCC Students’ FYE Assignment Becomes a Reality

By Josilyn Straka
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

What started out as a First Year Experience (FYE) student assignment at Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) in 2017, that stemmed from reading the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, turned into the creation of a park that celebrates the history of abolitionists connected to the Fitchburg area.

David Thibault-Munoz, FYE professor at MWCC and co-chair of Friends of Fitchburg Abolitionist Park (FFAP), whose FYE class started this entire

project, said phases one and two will be completed making the park ready to open Juneteenth (June 19th). Juneteenth is the date that commemorates the end of slavery in the United States.

Phases three and four will be worked on throughout the next year or two. He said, “It is important for the community to be aware of the history of local abolitionists that fought for the rights of people.” Phase

three will include an interactive outside classroom. There will be busts of abolitionists and, once a specific phone app is downloaded, people will be

able to listen to the abolitionist’s story through their phone.

In 2019, while originally looking for a space for the project, Fitchburg State University (FSU) offered the FFAP, the organization that heads the project, permission to develop the park on FSU property. Now constructed at 42-50 Snow Street, serving an area of 10,000 square feet, it will become a piece of history.

Deb Perrault, an architect once involved in designing the Frog Pond in Boston Common,

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“Abolitionist Park” >>>

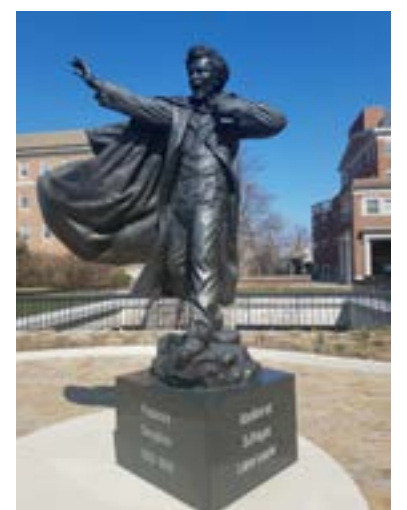


Image by Thebrycepeake, Wikimedia Commons

A statue of Frederick Douglass, one of the inspirations for the creation of the park.

MWCC Vaccines

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mentioned how the differences between dormitory universities and community colleges played into the decision; the latter having significantly less potential for contagion. “For me, it’s a

Burton said.

When asked whether MWCC should mandate vaccinations, Burton replied “I believe it will be the safest option for everyone — so they are able to keep themselves and others safe and healthy.”

“I actually had Covid, and it wasn’t fun...I wouldn’t wish it on anyone.”

– **President James Vander Hooven**

residential vs. nonresidential decision,” Vander Hooven said.

While the administrative faculty of these institutions debate what their policy will be, it’s in fact the students who hold significant persuasion over their final decision. After all, the decision of whether or not to enroll is up to them.

Ellie Burton is a student at MWCC and is planning on transferring to Southern NH University next semester. “I believe that it is very important for everyone to get the vaccine, so we are all able to stay healthy, safe, and are able to get back to normal life sooner than later,”

“I would not object if the school mandated me to get the vaccine,” Burton said. “I would support other students who opposed it for justifiable reasons like religion or an allergy.”

Regarding the influences in making both past and present decisions, Vander Hooven explained that “I need to follow the guidelines from both the State and the CDC.”

Currently, the State of Massachusetts does not have any guidelines in place for colleges and universities regarding mandatory vaccinations. For them, it’s on a case-by-case basis.

Abolitionist Park

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also planned the landscape design for the Abolitionist Park. Included in this landscaping design will be a flagpole, stage, a perennial flower garden, three benches, and lighting.

Beginning in the 1830’s, Fitchburg residents participated in antislavery movements. There were several homes in Fitchburg that were used as depots on the Underground Railroad; this includes Benjamin Snow’s home. Snow was a prominent figure in the fight to abolish slavery and helped establish the Trinitarian church and the Fitchburg Athenaeum therefor, for these contributions, the park will honor him.

Another famous abolitionist connected to the area is Frederick Douglass. Douglass helped and supported the antislavery movements and held a high rank in the United States government. He traveled to Fitchburg and was a featured speaker for the abolishment of slavery. When he

visited, he would stay at Snow’s home. To honor his work there will be a bust on display in the Park, along with the telling of his story.

The Trinitarian Church was established when the church that Snow and other abolitionists were attending supported slavery which caused them to disband from the church. This new church held antislavery meetings while members supported the abolishment of slavery. It was also home to the 800-pound plantation bell that was brought to Fitchburg from Mississippi. The bell symbolized freedom and the end of slavery and rang for the first time after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. This church’s history will also be a part of the park.

To learn more about FFAP and other projects in the future, visit the website, www.abolitionistpark.org, and their Facebook page, Friends of Fitchburg Abolitionist Park. The organization is still raising funds for current and future projects.

Tutoring Troubles

Tutors Are Adapting to the Constraints Placed Upon Them by the Pandemic



Photo by Vanessa Garcia from Pexels

Online tutoring has become the norm.

By **Justin Tralongo**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

In an era that seems like so long ago, the people of America used to roam around free with each other. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic flipped American life on its head, forcing many of our previously in-person interactions to now happen over Zoom. This change has had a huge impact on the way tutors and advisors are able to support their students.

Tutoring has always been a critical service of the Visions and Rx programs at Mount Wachusett Community College. It gives students a home base where they can go to ask questions, get help, find out who they should be talking to, or even where to find things on campus. Beyond that, it is a supportive friendship to help a student through the stressful seasons of college.

According to Mary Roth, the professional writing tutor for the Visions program and supplemental instructor for the Visions-section English classes, “tutoring is one of the front-line resources we offer, but it’s also the gateway to other resources either through Visions or through the college. It’s huge; it’s a really huge advantage.”

The pandemic environment has brought many challenges to students, and Roth said the demand for tutoring has gone up considerably. Yet the change of having tutoring appointments and classes over Zoom has brought on some serious

challenges for tutors.

Roth explained that the odd atmosphere of Zoom meetings has made it more difficult to help her students with their work. When in person, these meetings would flow much more like a comfortable conversation. Roth believes that students’ “best ideas came out of these conversations.”

Unfortunately, between home distractions, Zoom lag, and students not always turning on their cameras to show their faces, this relaxed informal exploration of ideas is much harder. Zoom simply does not bring about the same energy that working with someone in person does and, consequently, students are less interactive over this platform.

To make up for some of the lost success of previous methods, Roth types out notes and sends students emails with ideas for their assignments. She also emails them links leading to information that helps them explore an idea or helps them begin developing their idea to fit the assignment. Along with emailing ideas and links, Roth will also have students email her various stages of their work so that she can constantly give them new ideas and suggestions as their work develops.

Facing either the distracting environment of having lectures on Zoom or the even harder asynchronous format that lacks Zoom lectures, students have, more than ever before, had a

difficult time understanding material. Roth has adjusted to this difficulty by familiarizing herself with students’ class material and having “class” discussions with them.

Along with these discussions, she will often read the material aloud to students and ask them questions as she goes along that will spur them to think in new ways. This helps students understand the material better, complete their assignments more effectively, and actually feel like they are learning.

Another major struggle has been students’ inconsistency with attending Zoom tutoring appointments and Zoom classes. Roth said that students have just lost track of days because “every day for people right now feels the same...people sleep through appointments...and everyone’s schedule is upside-down.”

Adjusting to this challenge, Roth found a method that works well for students. Since many students are constantly using their phones for various aspects of their lives, she has encouraged them to create a calendar on their cell phones with built in reminders and to add alarms shortly before scheduled Zoom meetings.

Tutoring has been impacted a lot by the COVID-19 pandemic, but tutors, like Mary Roth, have found effective ways to keep supporting the students at Mount Wachusett Community College.

LaChance's Efforts to Meet Students' Needs

MWCC's Library "Reimagines" Itself in the Time of COVID-19

By Daniel Dow

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Like many of Mount Wachusett Community College's services, LaChance Library was forced to close due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 in March 2020, but the services available and the push for library staff to meet the needs of students and faculty has never been stronger.

Jess Mynes, the Assistant Dean of Library Services and Technologies, spoke about how the library already had some systems in place to assist students who are afar, which allowed the library to meet the needs of the community when the coronavirus first closed campus. He discussed how the closing of the library gave Mynes and his staff the extra push to further invest in new technologies and resources to better meet the new requirements of student and faculty needs. The Library's staff has made it

their priority to improve their services by providing new systems that build relationships with students and staff through this difficult period. Mynes stressed the importance to properly meet the new demands of the campus and to be able to go "where [students] are."

Two new resources the library added to meet the students' requirements and build relationships. The first of which is the "Text a Librarian" program. It allows students to text the library for support during operation hours. The second program added is called "ring central" that alerts all staff's computers when a student or faculty member contacts the library for support.

Mynes spoke about how the library further "honed their virtual presence" by expanding their e-book collection, adding databases, providing one-on-one research help appointments

through Blackboard Collaborative or Zoom, and offering curbside pickup by request.

These new online services have given the staff access to robust data, allowing the library to evaluate its services and to ensure the library is effectively meeting the campus' needs. This data will continue to allow the library to be more impactful as the library reopens and in-person services resume.

Mynes explained how these times have "made us reimagine ourselves", as well as the possibility for the campus to offer evening virtual library hours to provide better assistance to students who may be working on coursework at night. He suggested that expanding evening hours would allow the library to better collaborate with Student Services.

The plans for reopening the library's in-person services have



Photo courtesy of MWCC LaChance Library Facebook Page

yet to be determined but would most likely fall in line with the campus' reopening timeline. Mynes stressed "how much the team missed the students".

The library, According to Mynes, has been looking at its values and reflecting on "a mantra that we've been saying — the library is here, that we're online with you, and here to help". Mynes went on to explain

"I always try to get the idea across that we're at your fingertips whether it's texting us, emailing us, calling us — we're here for you" and that "as librarians we either know the answer, how to find the answer, or who knows the answer". Mynes concluded by saying "if you're not sure where to start, start with us."

Back to the Classrooms

MWCC Students and Staff Express Their Views on Returning to the Classroom

By Daniel Dow

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

New guidelines issued by the Massachusetts Board of Education required students from grades K-8 to return to full-time classroom learning in April. Student and staff reactions at Mount Wachusett Community College have been overall positive and in agreement for the need for their children to return to five days per week in-person learning.

Nicole Proctor is a student at MWCC and a mother to a fourth-grade student at Turkey Hill Elementary in Lunenburg who has been participating

in hybrid learning. Although hybrid learning has allowed some in person and hands on education for her son, it has not met his overall needs. Proctor emphasized how her son "wants to be back in school" and "for him to not have that interaction with other students and other adults — on a weekly basis, is affecting him".

Michel Cocuzza, a Clerk in The Office of Advising: Career & Transfer, has two children attending Toy Town Elementary in Winchendon and has also been facing difficulties participating in hybrid learning herself. She spoke about the inconsistencies her children have faced. She

stated that her children are "having a hard time focusing" and are "struggling with the lack of contact with their peers."

Proctor stated that the hybrid model has left students at a disadvantage and she thinks the school is planning to issue a summer school program for students based on teacher recommendation. It is her understanding that students required to take summer school classes will not have to pay additional fees.

Cocuzza stressed the additional support her children now need due to the lack of full time in-person learning. She discussed the idea of extending

in-person schooling throughout the summer, saying, "I would definitely be interested in that; I think the kids also need a break — or possibly starting the school year earlier. Because I think they're all going to struggle."

Proctor and Cocuzza both reflected on the isolation their children have faced. Proctor stated, "I do feel there are going to be a lot of kids that are not socialized the way children usually are socialized — that's concerning." Cocuzza shared similar feelings.

Cocuzza stated that returning to five day in-person learning is "fabulous" and that this is going to make a "tremendous

difference" in the support that her children receive.

The statements of Cocuzza and Proctor echoed very similar themes, that the damages of Covid-19 isolation are going to have lasting effects on their children that have yet to be seen.

Cocuzza stated that a lot of parents are struggling with the balance as well, and that "we are all suffering and there really isn't an outlet." She said that returning to school will create a better balance of life for parents and children alike by preventing some of the stressful situations that covid isolation has created and give families some sense of normalcy.

Stressed? Overwhelmed? Feeling Down?

If current events are leaving you feeling hopeless, or you just feel you need to talk, for any reason, feel free to contact
Melissa Manzi at m_manzi@mwcc.mass.edu

Food for Thought

MWCC's Food Pantry Program Trudges on Through the Pandemic



Image courtesy of MWCC

By Josilyn Straka

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Students experiencing food insecurity may find some help with the expanded hours and locations of the MWCC Food for Thought Campus Pantry.

By the end of the spring 2021 semester, the Leominster campus will be housing a branch to distribute food. In addition, the pantry program on the Gardner campus will be open throughout the summer.

“On average, there are about 100 students utilizing the pantry at any given time, and we have the capacity to have even more students use the program,” said Shelley Nicholson, director of

the Brewer Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement.

Nicholson explained that there are “customized bags of food to accommodate students who may have food allergies or dietary restrictions.” Nicholson also added that “according to a student’s needs, toiletries will be given, as well as disposable diapers and baby food.” Thanksgiving baskets are also made available on the occasion.

Nicholson said that “it is important for students to know [we] are still open during the pandemic.” Students are informed about this program through open houses, course

registrations, and orientations. Information is placed in student packets, announced on social media, and published in the student newspaper, the *Mount Observer*. Nicholson said she “encourages faculty to add this information to their syllabus.”

“Students can go to the MWCC website and fill out an application; there is no income verification required” Nicholson said, going on to describe “then an appointment is made for students to pick up a pre-packaged bag of 40 items at a designated door on campus” and that “students may utilize this service every three weeks.”

Internships are still being run

out of the office, according to Nicholson. She explains that “the office is working with less partners due to Covid-19 but with just as many student interns participating.” Some of the partners just cannot accommodate students not being in person so internships have moved to virtual and hybrid. With hybrid, there is a specific checklist with Covid-19 safety rules.

The college has had a partnership with the Worcester Food Bank (WFB) for the past three years, who supply the pantry with an unlimited amount of food. MWCC is the first college to partner with

them. “It went so well,” said Nicholson, “that now WFB has partnered with other schools.” They have also been supplying the pantry with mini grants and gift cards for food. The mini grants contributed to the opening of the Leominster campus food distribution branch and also allowed additional food items in Thanksgiving baskets.

“In 2017, the school saw an increase in food insecurity, and we wanted to come up with a service to accommodate students by opening a food pantry on campus,” Nicholson said.

The Future Now

The SGA's New Kumospace Is Helping to Connect Students Virtually

By Cody Nathanson

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

MWCC'S Assistant Director of Student life Kathy Matson and Student Government Association (SGA) President Aiden Lane speak about the new SGA virtual booth, Kumospace, as a fundamental piece for student communication.

Kumospace, according to Lane, is a “video game-ified chat room,” implemented in February as a sort of “virtual representation of a student center.” Intended to emulate the once-staffed SGA booth at MWCC, Lane said that Kumospace, “tries to adopt and

emulate some of the benefits of a physical space.” The virtual booth achieves this by allowing students to move and interact with others around a virtual area with a bird’s-eye view, such as a park, classroom, or a vaguely office-looking office.

Although some might view the Jimmy Neutronesque 3D-styled rooms as silly, Lane stated, “once you have used it for a little while, the gimmicky(ness) wears off and you see how useful it is.”

Digitizing the SGA booth onto Kumospace has allowed students to have “an ear” of an SGA member “anytime they need to have a conversation,”

said Matson. She said, “whether they are bored or sitting at home, they can look up Kumospace and decide to meet up with an SGA member.” The idea that students should have a direct line for their thoughts is such a crucial part

“Whether they are bored or sitting at home, they can look up Kumospace and decide to meet up with an SGA member.”

– Kathy Matson, Assistant Director of Student Life

of the student government “that (it) is basically the only way that the SGA will be able to function without becoming a bi-weekly Zoom meeting of people who fancy running a little arc,” said

Lane.

The loss of the physical booth will allow students who couldn’t or who were uncomfortable to meet in person an avenue to still get in contact with the SGA. “It’s a backup we didn’t have before,

which is great,” said Lane.

While the SGA booth currently lives in the digital world, both Matson and Lane stated a desire to see Kumospace stay relevant in a post 6 feet apart world.

Matson said that she would also be making the presence of the virtual booth a future topic in student orientation.

And for those sitting on the iConnect fence about connecting with someone in the virtual booth, Matson urged anyone to show up at any time, whether to air some grievances with the college or share the air with a member of the SGA. Lane added, “and if the member isn’t able to help you, they will do their best to point you to someone who can.”

Visit the SGA page at the MWCC website for links to Kumospace.

What's the Sneeze?

In the Heart of Seasonal Allergies, It's Hard to Tell Exactly What You're Feeling

By Angel Marcano

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

'Tis the season for watery eyes, nasal congestion, and lots of sneezing.

It's Spring and the CDC has updated information regarding Covid-19 symptoms, as it relates to seasonal allergies caused by pollen.

Noelani Washington, who has been a Registered Nurse at Hampden County Sheriff's Department for 4 years, suggests education and self-awareness are key in determining the cause of symptoms and when one should seek testing. "Know your body," Washington said. "If you know you are allergic to pollen and your eyes get watery or you start to sneeze when your outside, then you don't necessarily need to get tested," she said.

Furthermore, there are other symptoms that are prevalent in seasonal allergies that have been observed in Covid-19 positive patients, namely: nasal congestion and a runny nose. "These two symptoms have been observed in positive patients and have since been updated to the CDC website," Washington said.

While there is, indeed, an overlap in symptoms for both Covid-19 and seasonal allergies,

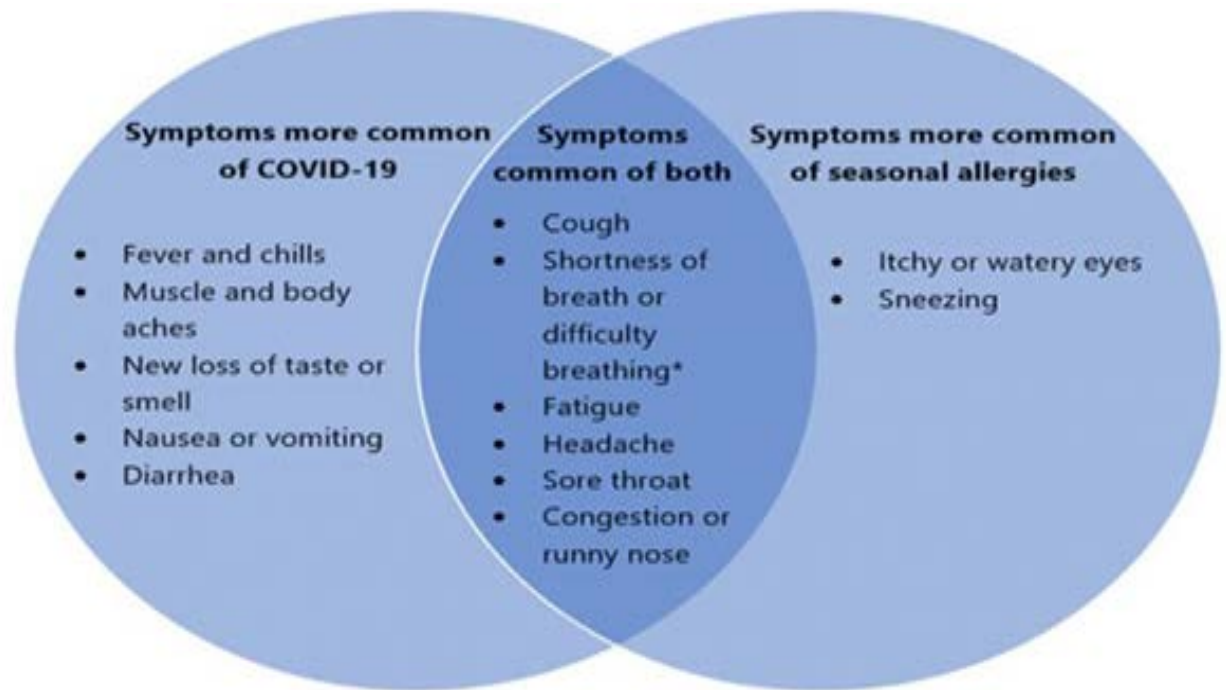


Image from the CDC

Venn diagram of Covid-19 and seasonal allergies

there are key differences. The main difference, according to the CDC, is that "COVID-19 is a contagious respiratory illness caused by infection with a new coronavirus," while seasonal allergies "are triggered by airborne pollen."

The Venn diagram from the CDC depicts an overlap in symptoms, as well as those attributed mostly to coronavirus or allergies due to pollen.

As shown in the Venn diagram, there are several symptoms that can be attributed to both conditions. Coughing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, runny nose and fatigue, are

among the most common symptoms in both ailments. Distinctions range from fever, chills, muscle aches, loss of taste and smell, to nausea and diarrhea, which can be telltale of COVID-19. Itchy or watery eyes and sneezing are attributed mainly to seasonal allergies.

These are some of the more obvious symptomatic distinctions and similarities between Covid-19 and seasonal allergies. With spring in full gear and the pandemic still making headlines, there is to some a grey area concerning when someone should get tested.

You could simply get both.

According to the CDC, "there is not enough scientific information at this time to know whether having seasonal allergies puts you at higher risk of contracting COVID-19." Although evidence regarding this is insufficient, the possibility of both contracting the virus and suffering from seasonal allergies is something that Washington cautions.

"You can one hundred percent get both," she said, adding that one of her patient's suffered from both Covid-19 and allergies simultaneously. "So, wear your mask and get vaccinated if you can."

The United States is getting

close to vaccinating 3 million people per day, but that is no reason to deviate from state and federal guidelines. Vaccination does not make you impervious to infection.

"You can be fully vaccinated and still get sick," Washington said. She encourages social distancing and hand-washing—and the use of masks.

It's Spring. A snuffle or a sneeze is usually nothing too worrisome and watery eyes are likely caused by pollen. But when symptoms fall within the grey area of Covid-19 and seasonal allergies...

Stay home—and get tested.

Lesser-Known Fallout

A Student Relays Her Difficulties in the Wake of Catching COVID-19

By Jessica Jablonski

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

A lot of people think COVID-19 is just an amplified version of a cold or the flu, when in all actuality it can lead to long-term effects on your health, even if you're an average college student with no underlying health issues. As stated on the CDC's website, "While most persons with Covid-19 recover and return to normal health, some patients can have symptoms that can last for weeks or even months after recovery from acute illness."

MWCC student Sarah Glodgett, nursing major, was one of the unfortunate students to catch COVID-19. Glodgett said that when she had it, she experienced "really bad shortness of breath, a sore throat, cough, stomach issues, and was tired all the time." The symptoms she had lasted about two weeks, and it made it hard to do schoolwork (and much of anything, really).

"Although my symptoms weren't the worst thing in the world, it was really hard to

get anything done," Glodgett said. "I was so tired; no matter the amount of sleep I got, and I couldn't even think about schoolwork."

She has since now recovered but this has not stopped her health issues related to COVID-19.

Although she has gone back to her normal life, she has still been struggling to regain her normal health. "Sometimes I wake up and have real difficulties breathing," Glodgett said. "I've gone back to work and I'm out of breath just from walking up

the stairs."

Glodgett also said that she's still struggling with chest pain. "I constantly feel as though someone is sitting on my chest, and it really hurts," Glodgett said. "I don't want to get out of bed sometimes because it feels like it's restricting me."

Since her experience with COVID-19, she has felt constantly tired, no matter how little she's done that day. Glodgett said, "Sometimes I wake up in the morning, and I get dressed and get ready to go do

what I'm doing for the day and I already feel overwhelmingly exhausted."

Beforehand Glodgett had no underlying health conditions or illnesses but she is still suffering from long-term effects.

With these complications due to Covid, Glodgett has had a rough time with her classes. Once she started to feel better after her two weeks of being fully sick, she tried to jump back into her classes, but it proved to

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“An Open Mind and Heart”

New Salem Public Library is Holding Discussions on Racism and Awareness



Photo from newsalempubliclibrary.com

The New Salem Public Library

By **Cody Nathanson**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The New Salem Public Library is hosting a two-part zoom event, “Let’s Talk about Racism”, with the first one held last month on April 20 and the second one to be held on May 11 from 7:30 - 8:30 p.m. They are each facilitated by two long time social justice activists, Jade Barker of Hadley and Cate Woolner of Northfield.

The event has emphasized helping people become more

mindful of unacknowledged or camouflaged racial bias, attitudes, and beliefs within themselves and within the nation’s history with honest and open conversation. While the first half of the discussion has passed, both Woolner and Barker will continue the conversation in May with a discussion of the book, *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad

“This is not just a presentation; it’s a chance to have conversations with people, and I

think that’s rare, unique, unusual and transformational,” Barker said.

Although awareness might be the first step to a personal transformation, Barker said, “there is a framing in our country that disappears as stories of a number of us who walk around with visuals that are not European.” A storied awareness is all the more poignant following the media politicization of the riots in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, and the death of Dante Wright.

Woolner admits that Saad’s

beliefs that you might not want to look at,” said Woolner.

The importance of self-examination was echoed in the challenges Barker faced during her anti-racism work as a person of color, “that white people don’t see themselves as part of the story, they see themselves as like, neutral, you know, not a color, and the colored problem is a problem of people of color ... Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

When it comes to facilitating racial issues, Woolner brings up

a bad person, but instead about “trying to uncover what has been easy to cover up.”

Even before Woolner and Barker collaborated with the New Salem Library, both have been dedicating their lives working with non-profits, co-ops, and other anti-racism workshops. Woolner founded her own non-profit in Greenfield called the Collaborative Resolutions Group.

For those who might be on the fence about attending or concerned over missing the first session, not only can the May

“This is not just a presentation; it’s a chance to have conversations with people, and I think that’s rare, unique, unusual and transformational.”

– Jade Barker

book doesn’t outline how to “dismantle systemic racism,” the combination of framing and self-awareness is present. “It sure gives you a blueprint for unpacking your own unconscious bias, your own attitudes, and

the concept of Good and Bad Binary, or the idea to separate the attitude and beliefs from the person. She explained that the event from the beginning was not about blame or finger-pointing at someone for being

session stand on its own, but Woolner said if people show up with an “open mind and heart,” then maybe they will walk away from the event feeling more comfortable approaching those feelings in the future.

Virus Fallout

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be difficult.

“I had to do all my catch-up work on top of the new assignments I had coming in, plus I was going back to work,” Glodgett said. “It was overwhelming, and I was still trying to gain my motivation back; it felt impossible. Luckily, my teachers were all understanding and gave me extra time, but even then, it was difficult.”

New data, though, has shown that the vaccine itself has helped some people recover from long-term effects. In an interview with CBS on March 19, Dr. Jason Maley, program director of the Critical Illness and COVID-19

Survivorship Program at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, said that a third of his patients who had Covid who got the vaccine has reported they had improved.

Another doctor in the same article, Dr. Bradley Sanville, a pulmonologist at UC Davis who treats long COVID patients at the facility’s Post-COVID Clinic, reported that 50% of his patients had seen improvement after getting the vaccine.

Glodgett has been planning to get the vaccine. “I’ve been meaning to get the vaccine for a while, and I plan on doing so as soon as possible,” Glodgett said. “I have hope that maybe my symptoms will get better.”

Let Your Voice be Heard!

Send your stories, poetry, artwork, photography, or other content to mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu

Have your own thoughts on a TV show, film, book, or video game?

Write a review and send it to

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It may just end up in our next issue!

PROFILE

The Voice for the Students

Vanessa Hill Describes Her Experience as a Student Trustee

By *Kezia Vazquez*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Vanessa Hill is a wife, mother of four, and a full-time student at Mount Wachusett Community College. She's also a student trustee, deciding to use her limited time left over to be the voice for the students.

Hill first heard about the student trustee position by doing a summer leadership program offered by MWCC. In that leadership program, she learned that she could believe in herself and that she was capable of doing more by taking up a leadership role, a role where she knew she could make a difference not only for herself but other students as well.

"I saw an opportunity so I took it," Hill said, going on to say, "I do believe that there should be a voice for the students that is strong, understands cultural diversity, and understands different situations for different students and not everybody's the same." Hill explained that she "wanted to be that voice".

The meetings are held every other week for student government, every month for the student advisory council, and between every one to three months for the student trustees.

"I didn't know how much was involved when I was elected, so at first it was exceedingly difficult," Hill described. "As time went by and I had dates

for meetings ahead of time, I was able to get organized and prioritize."

Hill explained her learning curve, saying, "I took a few weekends to organize my personal life, school life and working as a trustee. Now I enjoy greatly what I do. I have learned a lot from students and I'm glad I'm able to be their voice."

With this position, Hill has several voting rights, such as in the Student Government meetings (SGA) and the Student Advisory meetings, as well as the Board of Trustees. One example of the difference Hill is making while being a student trustee is about what type of students are eligible to run for office.

"Before it was just for full time students and we were able to change that [policy], for it to become where part time students can actually become trustees now," Hill said. She fought for this cause with student trustees in other schools in Massachusetts.

Hill is also working with the other student trustees to write a guide for new trustees to help them understand what they need to do and how to do it, saying "the hardest part being a student trustee right now is not being able to see the students physically."

"I enjoy being able to help them, I enjoy being able to do this work that makes a difference," Hill said. Although Covid has made some things difficult, Hill



Photo courtesy of MWCC

Vanessa Hill

has been able to remain positive.

Hill concluded by saying "the advice I have for student trustees is to go in, do it, don't be fearful, be that voice, and fight for everyone including yourself."

A New "Addition" to MWCC

MWCC's Newest Math Faculty Member Discusses Her Experiences



Photo from <https://www.lowell.k12.ma.us/>

Stephanie Pollard

By *Cody Nathanson*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

MWCC's new full-time math teacher Stephanie Pollard uses her teaching experience to not only add to her student's online experience but to also help master the transition into her new job during the lockdown.

Despite the continued lockdown of the Mount and the "weird" feeling of applying to a new position during a pandemic, Pollard explained how "thoroughly happy" she was to have applied to the position. She said that she was already kind of acclimated to such a situation.

"Moving online was not scary or unusual, it was sort of, I do this every day anyway," Pollard said. And although the campus halls might resemble an Egyptian bakeshop to students, desert, it's also where Pollard said she was able to physically meet her other full-time math colleagues.

"I'm really enjoying my time at the Mount," Pollard said. "I think it's only going to get better once I get to see more students and meet more people in person."

Even though Pollard might be new to teaching math at MWCC, she said that she has been teaching math for nearly 14 years after getting her master's in mathematics from Boston University. Pollard also listed some of the colleges where she worked, such as Marian Court College, Wentworth Institute of Technology, and Bay State College. Having taught around Boston for many years, she then mentioned how she would eventually scale down that commitment, instead of working part-time as a tutor for the public school system and as an adjunct for the next several years to better focus on her family.

Eventually, though, Pollard said that she wanted to go back to teaching at a two-year school, a community college in particular. She said she enjoyed working with students who are not "math people." Although she did immediately clarify, "I like

my math majors, don't get me wrong, but I really like working with that population of students to hopefully give them a positive outlook on math and give them that good experience that they might not have had before."

Pollard added, "If you have trouble with numbers and the math of the world, then you just have trouble with the world."

Pollard explained that initially she was determined to not end up as a teacher. She said that she initially entered college to become a marine biologist and that it was only after finally entering a laboratory that she learned just how much she "absolutely despised it." It was in that the moment that Pollard had a literal course changing epiphany, switching from a biology major to a degree in mathematics.

For those students who take one of Pollard's classes, she urged them to think of her as an "approachable math nerd" and said that you are always "welcome to come and say hi."

Free College Will Cripple International Enrollment

Community Colleges, State Colleges, and Universities Will Suffer the Consequences

By Alexander Ruehlicke
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Note: The opinions expressed in this commentary are those of the writer and do not necessarily align with the views of Mount Wachusett Community College.

The Democratic Party's goal of providing tuition-free community college to students across America may finally be within reach as the Biden administration moves forward with its agenda. As free college for all becomes increasingly feasible, one question remains unanswered: How will it affect international students?

Robert LaBonte is the Vice President of Finance and Administration here at Mount Wachusett Community College. "The school is funded partially by the State [of Massachusetts] and partially by the tuition and fees we charge," LaBonte stated. "On the State side, they set the tuition rate and we send that tuition back to the state."

On the topic of the State's tuition rates for in-state, out-of-state, and international students, LaBonte explained there is a

"resident in-state tuition of \$25 per credit" and that as per an agreement with the New England Board of Higher Education, out-of-state students from any State in New England pay a rate of "\$37.50 [per credit]." LaBonte then went on to describe the "very high out-of-state or foreign

tuition rate" of "\$230 per credit." Regarding this alarming number, LaBonte clarified that "on the non-state supported side, where we get to set the tuition rate, we do not make a difference for in-state, out-of-state, or foreign [rates]." These lower tuition rates are offered on the non-state supported side of MWCC's offered courses, and are otherwise known as DCE, or Division of Continuing Education, courses.

These DCE classes are taught by adjunct, or part-time, faculty

at the college. The revenue the college makes from tuition and fees for these courses is used to pay the adjunct faculty who teach them.

As a result of the alarming rate of tuition, international students may feel that they have no choice but to take strictly DCE

"The school is funded partially by the State [of Massachusetts] and partially by the tuition and fees we charge...On the State side, they set the tuition rate and we send that tuition back to the state."

— Robert LaBonte, Vice President of Finance and Administration

courses, thus missing out on any learning opportunities offered in the regular courses.

When asked if the tuition and fees from DCE courses would still enter into the college's revenue if the tuition-free policy were passed, LaBonte replied by saying "No, I don't think it would."

With less access to these DCE classes, and the benefits of studying in the US dwindling, international students will no doubt seek other means of acquiring their education.

With over 1,000,000 international students currently residing in the US, and their nearly \$50 billion contribution to the US economy according to the Institute of International Education, their impact on the higher education system is undeniable. Seeing their

American-citizen classmates receive an identical education at no cost to them, Foreign students may be tempted to fraudulently acquire the same privilege — or perhaps worse yet, decide not to attend at all due to frustration over this disparity.

In addition, according to a recent study conducted by the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Economics, an offer of a federally paid for college degree would entice a large portion of Americans to divert away from obtaining a traditional

four-year degree at a private educational institution. Consequently, as regional demand for private university education falls, international demand is likely to follow. With increasing costs and lower demand, private universities will not be the only institutions

affected by the policy either. When students veer away from private universities, they will be ultimately drawn toward the economic benefit of attending free community college.

For community colleges, the tuition-free college plan is a Pyrrhic victory. It will lead to overall higher enrollment but has the potential to compromise the college's ability to offer as many DCE courses, as well as pay the adjunct faculty that teach them.

Knowing that their employees receive this level of training gives them 5 out of 5 stars in that department. When it comes to following up on whether their employees are utilizing this training and are correctly caring for the animals while they are in their care, they receive 0 out of 5 stars. The livestock are consistently covered in their own feces, lacking food and water, and dead livestock can commonly be spotted in their enclosures with their live animals, exposing them to disease and sickness. These observations make

Co. and Purina on how to care for and handle the livestock correctly and must pass all tests with 100% before they are able to care for and handle the animals. Knowing that their employees receive this level of training gives them 5 out of 5 stars in that department.

Every year in the Spring, Tractor Supply Co. sells poultry livestock in their retail stores. Their stock typically includes chicks (baby chickens), ducklings (baby ducks), poults (baby turkeys), and keets (baby guineas) of multiple varieties in most stores. These livestock are kept in-store in brooders to be sold to customers and are cared for by employees in the meantime.

Timothy Langevin is Tractor Supply Co.'s District Manager for Western Massachusetts. According to Langevin, their employees receive training developed by Tractor Supply

Is Tractor Supply a Livestock Graveyard?

A Student Weighs In On The Controversy Surrounding Tractor Supply Co.



Photo by JJBers from flickr

Tractor Supply Co.

By Ellie Burton
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Livestock sales are done across the globe and depending on the company or farm, the conditions that these animals are living in before being bought vary. Some

companies have strict guidelines and training for employees with strong follow up on the animals' care in the stores while others provide little to no training and no check-ins on the animals' care while in the stores; Tractor

Supply Co. falls in the middle of this scale.

According to their website, Tractor Supply Co. has been in business for over 80 years with more than 1,900 stores in 49 states across the United

States. They are made up of over 42,000 team members. All team members who work in the retail stores receive training to work in the stores and additional training to handle and care for the livestock they sell each year.

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Co. and Purina on how to care for and handle the livestock correctly and must pass all tests with 100% before they are able to care for and handle the animals. Knowing that their employees receive this level of training gives them 5 out of 5 stars in that department.

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"Livestock Graveyard" >>>

The USA Is Dropping the Ball on Mental Health During the Pandemic

One Student Expresses Her Concerns with the Current Climate of Mental Health Care in the USA



Photo by Ekrulila from Pexels

By Josilyn Straka
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The United States needs to offer more services for people suffering with mental health related issues as a result of living with the pandemic for over a year. The lack of services and accommodations has put people in a desperate situation. I would like to see more mental health advocates and counselors hired in the hospital emergency rooms across Massachusetts to help seek the services these patients need and to do follow-ups with them as well.

Stress, anxiety, grief, depression, and a mixture of other mental health issues are experienced daily. However, with the pandemic, people will see a higher rate of mental health services needed, according to Massachusetts College of Physicians (MACEP) in an article on www.WBURNews.org from February 3.

A patient needing mental health

services can go to the emergency room to request help, but it could take many hours or even days before being admitted or to secure a bed at a mental health facility. According to MACEP, on the chosen date of January 18, 2021 for the survey, there were 244 people “boarding”, waiting for an in-patient bed at a mental health facility, in hospitals across Massachusetts.

According to Aryana Williams, a local resident and MWCC student, due to Covid-19, she has observed an increase in mental health issues in children. Williams has custody of her younger sister who has recently been diagnosed with a mental health issue.

Due to the pandemic, many in-home services like in-home Behavioral Health Services, Intensive Care Coordination, and in-home therapy have all either been switched to zoom or phone calls until roughly September 2021 pending any societal changes. Williams said this has increased the behaviors

in her sister due to not receiving her regular services.

Children are at an even greater risk due to the lack of facilities that will take minors. A child can be subjected to a far lengthier wait than an adult. “My sister had to wait 3 days for a bed in a mental health facility,” Williams said.

As adults may spend on average 53 hours before a bed will open up, for a child it may be about 59 hours, said Dr. Jesse Rideout, President of MACEP.

Those who are supported properly and given the services they need and are under the care of their mental health advocate and or counselor are often able to sustain a normal happy life. We are the greatest country in the world, and yet, as a collective unit, we still fail those suffering with mental health issues.

We as a country need to stand together and demand better mental health services by writing to congress and the legislation. The land of the free, yet not for the mentally ill.

Livestock Graveyard

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it clear that corporate is not checking on the welfare of their livestock while they are located at their retail stores. These conditions are unsafe, unhealthy, and obviously deadly for the livestock in their care. This is neglect and abuse by the employees who are responsible for the care of the livestock.

I have been a witness to these conditions myself at the Orange location when going in to buy food for my own chickens and when I brought it to the attention of employees who were working at the time, I was brushed off and told “they’ll be taken care of later.”

After bringing the problem to

the attention of other chicken owners across the United States, I was flooded with photographs and reports by other chicken owners. They all stated that their local Tractor Supply Companies are having the same issues with the conditions and care for their livestock, and they were also treated the same way I was by the employees.

The corporate body of the company really needs to step up and become more involved in the care of the animals, whether that means making surprise visits in the store, requiring photos or videos each day or week showing the condition of the livestock, or by other means.

The employees, on the other hand, need to put down their

cell phones and start utilizing the training they received to take care of the animals.

Tractor Supply Co. has lasted over 80 years in service, but if they keep going at the rate they are with the care of their livestock, they will probably not see the year 2025. They have earned the nickname “Livestock Graveyard” due to their livestock care and only earn a 2 (out of 5) star rating from me. The two stars that they do have are earned by the training the employees receive and their non-livestock products but they lose the three other stars due to the lack of care provided to their livestock by their employees and corporate’s lack of follow-up on the livestock’s care.

The Status of *The Mount Observer* Going Forward...

With the future of the Fall semester uncertain, we at *The Mount Observer* are currently unable to determine the precise format in which we will be delivering the latest in campus news to you. We can confirm that regardless of whether physical copies of the paper return to campus or not, we will continue to make the *Observer* available online.

If you would like to keep up with us and any articles, announcements, or issues that we have planned, feel free to check out our social media platforms:

- Website: www.mountobserver.com
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Inspiration Salvation

A student's take on season 2 of *The Chosen*

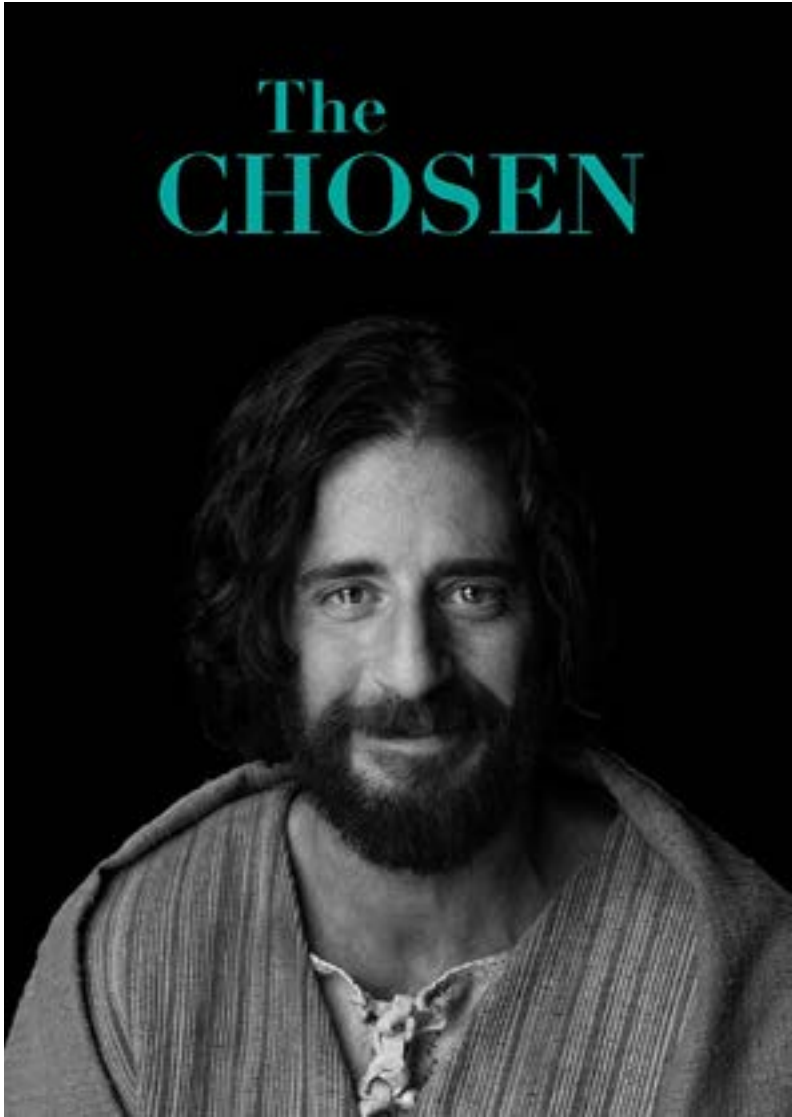


Image from movieguide.org, copyright Loaves & Fishes Productions/Angel Studios

By Justin Tralongo

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

On Easter Sunday, Season 2 Episode 1 of *The Chosen* was broadcast through livestream to mark the beginning of the new season. *The Chosen* does more than just tell people a story; it helps them feel the culture of a bygone society from the perspective of a group of people who changed the world.

The Chosen is a TV series based on the historical accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. Directed by Dallas Jenkins, *The Chosen* was meant to stand apart from previous depictions of Jesus. Although it takes people through the same stories they have heard throughout their lives, it still manages to help them see things that they have never seen before.

The show takes viewers through many different locations

that are not generally shown when telling the story of Jesus. The scenery used for these locations is incredibly vivid. Not only does the architecture match the style and technology of the time, but the layout of the structures and the choices of what structures should be displayed tell the culture of the time period.

Along with the scenery, the appearance of the characters is very well portrayed. Although all of the characters wear clothing accurate to the time period, the distinct difference in attire used for those in different communities and walks of life helps viewers see the society's hierarchy and how each character fits into society.

One of the greatest examples of this is the difference in attire between Mathew and Simon Peter. Most images of the disciples show them as all dressed incredibly similarly, yet *The Chosen* shows Simon Peter dressed in the clothing of a fisherman and Mathew in the clothing of a tax collector. This visually helps to indicate the two incredibly different walks of life the men come from.

The combination of fantastic scenery and character appearance gives the entire show a very immersive feel. This sets the stage quite well for the unconventional angle Jenkins uses to tell the story.

Unlike many previous

depictions of Jesus, *The Chosen* does not focus on simply showing the great miracles and highlighted moments of the life of Jesus Christ. Instead, it focuses on the relationships between Jesus and his 12 followers. This gives viewers a much more intimate experience of who Jesus truly was.

In order to do this, Jenkins adds in some events and conversations that were not in the Bible. This slightly takes away from the overall accuracy and believability of the storyline. However, this one issue seems to be greatly outweighed by the power of Jenkins' new approach to the story.

Jenkins moves very slowly through events taking his time to go above and beyond with details. Not only does this allow for a lead up and follow up to each event, but a true experience of the lives of those whom the events affect. Through this, we truly see more than just what Jesus did for people, but how he changed them and what he meant to them.

For example, Jenkins helps viewers see the character of Mary Magdalene, played by Elizabeth Tabish, in a whole new way. Instead of just seeing the moment of her healing, viewers truly get to see the transformation of Mary Magdalene from a demon-possessed prostitute to a loving follower of Jesus. Jenkins and Tabish do an incredible job

of showing how Mary's view of the world and interactions with people were laced with her love of Jesus and reflected the grace he had shown her.

Jenkins also highlights the stories of Matthew, Simon Peter, Nicodemus, and the Samaritan woman.

The depiction of the life of Matthew, played by Paras Patel, is truly shocking, yet it makes perfect sense once viewing it. The common view of Matthew is the man who was a follower of Jesus and was honored with the privilege of writing the first gospel. Jenkins helps people see Mathew as he truly was: a tax collector who was considered lower than a criminal and hated not only by society, but even by others who were chosen to be part of the twelve in the beginning.

Jenkins shows how Simon Peter was a broken man, living a broken life, who found purpose in Jesus Christ. Yet he shows that after turning to Jesus, Simon Peter still does not have it all together and continues to have his unstable moments at times. This lets us see how much love and patience Jesus truly had for Simon Peter.

Overall, *The Chosen* gives a fresh, insightful view into the lives of those chosen by Jesus.

Night at the Art Museum

The Art Club Hosts a Panel on Museum Careers

By Claire Matusiewicz

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The MWCC Art Club recently hosted a panel on art museum careers, with guests from the Fitchburg Art Museum.

Before the panel began, Nick Capasso, the museum director, made a few points. He said the Fitchburg Art Museum was a small museum, which meant they had their own unique challenges, and that it's also a

non-profit organization. He then said that all MWCC students get free admission to the Museum. They mentioned that the number of paid positions at the museum depend directly on how much they're making.

The first speaker was Susan Roetzer, who is a sponsor for the board of the museum. The board's responsibility is to consider what policy is important to them and guide the museum towards those goals. One of

the things important to them is diversity, as well as community, which is where they draw their inspiration from. The board is all volunteer work and done by a mix of professional careers: doctors, teachers, and retired lawyers such as Roetzer. She ended by saying, "You won't be the president of the board until the end of your career."

The next speaker was Laura Howick, who oversees lots of the programs for the general

public such as lectures to art classes, tours for school groups, and programs for teachers. In her own experience, most people start in museums as unpaid interns, and that the industry is very competitive. She states you need a master's degree to work in a museum of art in certain roles.

After Howick was Lauren Szumita, the museum curator. Her job is exhibitions, the public side of art, but she also does a

lot of work before the art goes on the wall. A curator's job is to filter all the art that's out there and find a story to tell. To be a curator at a large museum you need a PHD; however, at a smaller one you'd need a masters. Many artists become curators, and a curator needs skill in organization, multitasking, and communication to be successful.

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Going Places

One MWCC Student Tells of Their Success in the Art Industry

By *Angel Marcano*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Reading. Cooking. Art. These are some of things sophomore Alexandra (Alex) Ramos enjoys the most. As a Fine Arts major, Ramos has an amazingly creative future ahead of her—a future that her time here at MWCC has helped foster into reality.

Ramos is set to graduate this coming May, but not without an impressive resume. She was selected as the candidate to intern at the Open Pixel Studio. She said the process of applying was straightforward.

“I met with Professor Miller [Joyce Miller at MWCC], discussed my qualifications and what the job would be and then she recommended me” she said, noting that she was “nervous and excited at the same time.”

Regarding the job, Ramos stated that her role was to do whatever their clients asked of her. “I help clients with their projects,” she said. Without getting into specifics, she said that once she was tasked with creating a character for a particular client.

“It was pretty cool,” she

said. “I can’t share much more because I don’t know if I am allowed to,” she said. “I would love to continue to work with them [Open Pixel Studios].”

She encourages others to pursue to their dreams and creativity, something she has learned and loved to do while at MWCC. “Be courageous and confident in your own creativity,” she said, a piece of advice that she wholeheartedly offers to those studying in fields such as her own.

Ramos plans to further her artistic education after

graduation. She plans to transfer to Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. “I plan to pursue illustration there,” she said.

Whether studying to hone a craft in a creative realm or a more practical career space, Ramos feels that she is a perfect example of having the confidence to pursue dreams. To her, confidence and courage, in part, account for her success while at MWCC.

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Art Club Panel

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Next was Dylan Safford, who works in visitor services, and he’s usually the first person you see at the museum. You don’t need a high-level degree to do this, he said, you mostly just go around and make sure everything is okay. He does a lot of different things, from helping put the art up on the walls to cleaning the bathrooms. He says he always makes himself available to do any job, as opportunities always pop up. Volunteers are always needed and can easily turn into

something else. Although you won’t make a lot of money in this job, the rewards lie in the experiences according to Safford.

On some final words, Szumita mentions her philosophy of “Always say yes.” Roetzer mentions the importance of getting involved early on. Capasso mentioned hireculture.org, which lists jobs in all the cultural institutions in MA. NEMA employment opportunities was also mentioned and focuses more on just the museums of New England.

SEE YOUR ART HERE!



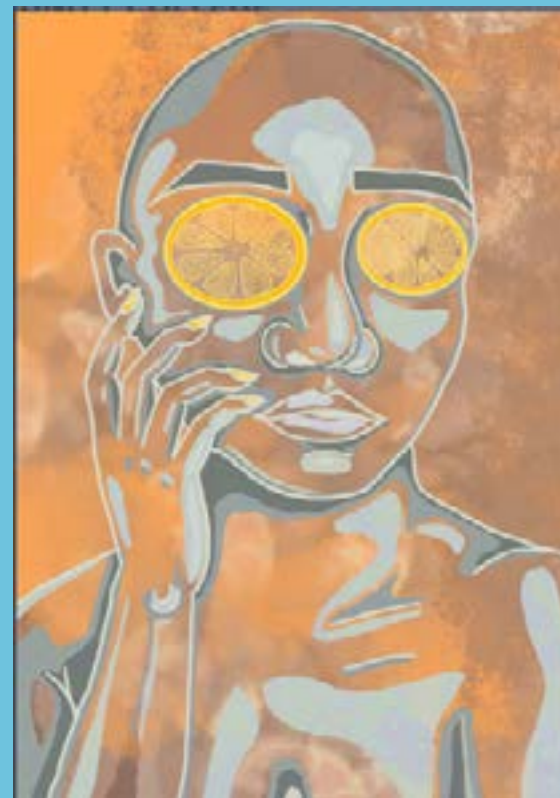
ROBOT by Thomas Hill Jr.

Story of Student Success

This has been a challenging year for students and faculty alike, so both Tom Matsuda and I thought it would be nice to share some truly positive and wonderful news about one of our art students’ recent successes. We are so proud of our graduates; their persistence and determination while dealing with the pandemic has been impressive.

Bethany Chase, Class of 2021, has just been accepted to the University of Hartford Art school, in the honors program, with a \$23,000 renewable annual scholarship.

Furthermore, her work was chosen to be featured in the annual Silpe Gallery, Hartford Art School’s Community exhibition, which features the work of talented and inspiring community college art students. A virtual awards reception to congratulate participating students and scholarship award winners to Hartford Art School for fall 2021 is held in conjunction with this exhibition.



Tangerine by Bethany Chase