

The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

PREVIEWS



Places to Visit in Old MA

Massachusetts is a beautiful state with many natural wonders to visit any time of the year, and with the travel limits in place due to COVID, I would like to share some of my favorite places.

For the full article, see page 9

Feeding the Hungry, One College at a Time

Food insecurity continues among college students. The need for food pantries on college campuses, like the one at Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC), is a growing necessity and expanding to other local colleges.

For the full article, see page 3

Poetry with a Purpose

David Wyman, an English Professor at Mount Wachusett Community College, recently published his second book of poetry called Violet Ideologies, with a theme of capitalism.

For the full article, see page 5

Tilting the Scales of Mental Health

Staff and Students Weigh in on the Importance of a Balanced Life

By Maddie Willigar
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Finding the balance between academic success, a social life, and a healthy mental state is a battle that college students often feel like they can't win. Professor Ted Mann, Student Justin Tralongo, and Mental Health Counselor Melissa Manzi advise students on how to survive the semester by staying organized, managing time, communicating with professors, and creating opportunities to take care of yourself both physically and mentally.

Manzi suggested that when starting a semester, students should look at it as if they were “preparing...for an athletic event.” She explained that if you were running a marathon, you would make sure your body had the correct fuel, sleep, and

training ahead of time. Manzi also recommended that students view taking care of their mental health as they do their physical health.

However, Manzi said that students may put their mental health on the back burner because they don't realize it impacts their academics. She said that often students feel like there is not enough time to take care of themselves; when self-care is what could help them get through a semester. She also stressed the importance of sleep, and how sacrificing sleep for studying will only end up hurting you.

Manzi noted that “[If] you're not doing anything that replenishes you, you will get burned out,” and said that deciding not to take breaks isn't the smartest choice.

She explained that though time management is an important skill as a college student, it can cause stress for students who aren't as strong at managing their time. To manage time wisely, Manzi suggested that students plan their days ahead of time, structuring exercise, and breaks into their schedules so time doesn't slip away. “When we start to lose the time, that's when students get in trouble...they run out of it,” said Manzi.

Though balancing school and free time is challenging, Tralongo said that getting up early and knowing his friends' schedules has helped him maintain balance. By waking up at a consistent time each morning, he is able to schedule his work better and knows what time of day he will get the most



Photo courtesy of Melissa Manzi

Melissa Manzi and her two pups with a reminder for all MWCC students and staff

done.

Tralongo shared that remaining connected to his faith, family, and friends helps him get

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“Mental Health Balance” >>>

Mount Wachusett Welcomes Back Students

Faculty and Students, New and Old, Meet for First Time Before Classes

By Daniel Dow
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Mount Wachusett leaders from across campus addressed the student body, welcoming new and returning students on what they can expect from the 2021 Fall semester.

Jason Zelesky, the Interim Vice President of Student Affairs, launched the orientation, welcoming approximately 240 students that attended the orientation.

Zelesky shared that one of the purposes of this meeting was to ensure students felt “comfortable and confident starting the academic year on a positive note.” It was also noted by Zelesky that MWCC realizes the past seventeen months have been “incredibly challenging”

for everyone, and that he hopes that attendees of the orientation will be “ready and prepared for the fall semester.”

Zelesky noted that most of the students attending the orientation were new, and used the opportunity to introduce the first speaker, President of Mount Wachusett Community College, Doctor James Vander Hooven.

President Vander Hooven highlighted the advantages of attending Mount Wachusett, passionately sharing that students had “Set your-self up to succeed by coming to the Mount. You've set yourself up to save money over other options that are out there, and you set yourself up to come into a welcoming community.

A welcoming educational environment, where we value each other, where we support one another, and we help each other be as successful as you possibly can.”

After speaking on the culture of the college, Vander Hooven indicated that the most important part of the orientation is “what comes after me,” sharing that the collection of the people across campus are the individuals that “will allow you to be successful.” Vander Hooven emphasized that students should “build relationships” and that “asking for help and seeking support is the biggest sign of strength you could show.”

Doctor John Eisler, who was hired in January and is now

the Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs, spoke next.

Eisler spoke about the return to campus, on how “energizing” it was, attested to the Covid-19 safety precautions being demonstrated on the college campus, and noted his initial experiences with MWCC is that “the student centeredness of this college is bar none.”

The highlights of Eisler's presentation included some of his own experiences, sharing a message from a former teacher, “be aware of the illusion of free time.” Eisler elaborated that “planning” for deadlines that can appear to be far off is key to success, and to “stay organized and that way you can really

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“Welcome Back” >>>

Mental Health Balance



Photo courtesy of Ted Mann

Professor Ted Mann, Guitar teacher

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through the stress a semester can bring, and that this is something that he should prioritize. Even if that means not getting a perfect GPA. He said that “sometimes the things that we want get in the way of the things that we value” and found that in his first semester, though he was getting everything he wanted in college, he was miserable. “Although I was achieving everything that I wanted to achieve...I just realized that it wasn’t worth it because all the things that I really cared about, the reasons why I was going to college in the first place, were slowly fading from my life, and it was driving me crazy,” Tralongo said.

From a professor’s perspective, Mann said that to set up a semester for success students should carefully read the syllabus and ask questions if anything seems confusing. He further explained why communication between students and their professors is important. “The teacher is supposed to be mentoring or helping the student achieve success, but we can’t guess, we’re not mind readers,” Mann said.

Based on the advice he was given by his father, Mann suggested that students make themselves known to their professors and ask about the expectations they may have for each assignment. Mann said

he hopes that the quality of work he receives from students is their best and thinks that most professors probably think similarly.

When starting a semester, Tralongo said he tries to get to know his professors, whether that’s staying after class or, in the case of our online environment, emailing them to let them know that he is looking forward to their course. By emailing them he thinks that it helps “set the precedent that [he is] going to be in communication with them.” Within the first month of classes Tralongo said that he tries to gauge the workload of each course individually, focusing on where he should spend the most time and what areas he can spend less.

Though students may become frustrated if they are trying hard and not getting grades that reflect it, Mann said that perseverance is key. “There has been some great students and very successful people that didn’t do...well in school to start...just keep working at it,” Mann said.

Tralongo suggested students who get overwhelmed should plan out all their assignments, how long it takes for each one, and that they reach out to their professors if needed. He explained that he has had experiences with professors allowing extensions or helping him with assignments after he communicated his circumstance or struggle.

Manzi recommended breaking things into smaller chunks, reaching out to a college counselor or MWCC faculty member and not procrastinating. Noting that being overwhelmed can cause us to put things off, she suggested doing the harder things first and at a time of day that you know is most productive for you.

Welcome Back



IMPORTANT INFO FROM THE STUDENT LIFE OFFICE

For each item, simply follow the link or scan the QR Code for complete details. If you have questions or need more information contact Kathy Matson, Assistant Director of Student Life at kmatson1@mwcc.mass.edu.



Student IDs

IDs are currently being processed remotely and mailed to students. Cost is \$10.
<https://mwcc.edu/campus-life/student-life/ids/>



InvolveMOUNT

The place to go for all campus events, student organizations, Marty’s Mountain Paths, and more. Simply activate your account to get started.
<https://mwcc.campuslabs.com/engage/>

Student Organizations

MWCC has a variety of Student Organizations to help you get involved and meet other students. Simply click on the “Organizations” tab to see what is available and then click “Join” for any that you would like to join.

Marty’s Mountain Paths

Follow any of the four paths to acquire knowledge and skills, get connected with others, earn MWCC Swag, and have a chance to win cool prizes.

- **Leadership** – Attend workshops, complete tasks, and connect with the SGA.
- **Wellness & Mindfulness** – Create an attitude of wellness for yourself and others, enjoy stress relief programs, stay healthy.
- **Cultural & Diversity** – Learn about the world, experience other cultures, appreciate differences.
- **Fun & Games** – Remember to unwind and disconnect from school and/or work to enjoy a bit of relaxing fun.

Campus Events

Events such as workshops, speakers, fun games, comedians, stress relief activities, and more are scheduled throughout the semester to help you get involved with your campus community.
<https://mwcc.edu/campus-life/student-life/events/>



Virtual Student Center

Be sure to stop by the Virtual Student Center that is open 24/7. Hang out while doing homework or studying and see who else might pop in to say hello. The Campus Activity Team for Students (CATS) will be staffing the center periodically and will be more than happy to answer all of your questions about student life at MWCC. When you set up your account be sure to register using your MWCC student email address because the center is only open to MWCC students.
<https://www.kumospace.com/mwccstudentcenter>



Your Student Government Association (SGA) is here for you! They serve as the voice of the student body and you have an opportunity to be part of that voice. The SGA will be holding elections in late September and nominations are open now. Stop by the SGA Booth on the Gardner campus or the Virtual SGA Office to speak with a current SGA member.
<https://mwcc.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/sga>

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make the best use of your time and hopefully find some balance in your life.”

Eisler’s final words of advice were to ensure that all students take the time to become comfortable with the necessary technologies (blackboard). He also encouraged students to take advantage of student activities and study groups.

The Dean of Academic Affairs, Missi Sargent, was the third keynote speaker, she is a graduate of Mount Wachusett, and a twenty-nine-year employee of the college.

Sargent focused much of her time discussing the Academic support center or tutoring center, which is offering in person and remote tutoring at this time. It was recommended by Sargent that although the center does offer walk-in service, she recommends students schedule a time for tutoring by calling or emailing the center.

She stressed that students study their syllabus, understand what is expected of them, and communicate with their

instructor if they have questions/issues.

With her final words, Sargent spoke about personal responsibility, “we need kindness, and we need empathy, with each other; and that includes the staff and the faculty.”

Sargent was followed by the fourth keynote speaker, Student Government Association President Stephanie Barry, and Student Trustee Cody Nathanson.

Barry shared that SGA elections are held in September and urged new students to run for positions. She also encouraged students to “drop by the virtual SGA to say hello.”

Nathson, spoke about his role as a voting member of the board of trustees and stated that his goal as a member of the board is to “act as a liaison for the student body.” He elaborated that “as a member of the board of trustees, technically I am President Vander Hooven’s boss.”

Although Nathson “does not have his (a) personal office” he is a member of the SGA and can be found on the virtual SGA board and at the campus SGA booth.

Kathy Matson, a two-time graduate of MWCC and Assistant Director of Student Life, was the final speaker. Matson discussed Students IDs, campus events, InvolveMOUNT, Virtual Student Center, and Student Government Association.

Matson also shared that to those who are in a club or join student life an email will be sent every Monday morning containing information on MWCC events.

Zelesky concluded the Orientation by sharing that the Student Orientation Websites are available to assist with a student’s individual needs and is a great resource for “building connections.”

He also made all students aware that all campuses are open to students Monday-Friday, 8-4, and invited all students to campus to take advantage of the school’s services.

For students and staff interested in viewing the orientation, the Fall 2021 New & Transferring Student Virtual Orientation Recording is available on <https://mwcc.edu/orientation-fall-2021/>.

For more counseling/mental health resources, visit:

<https://mwcc.edu/current-students/counseling-services/>

or reach out to

m_manzi@mwcc.mass.edu.

Have a Story to Tell?

If you’ve got the scoop on the latest community news, feel free to contact our editors about adding your voice to the *Observer* crew! To reach out, send an email to:

mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu

Feeding the Hungry, One College at a Time

College Food Pantries and the Growing Need for Them



Image courtesy of MWCC

Food for Thought, Campus Pantry at MWCC

By Josilyn Straka

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Food insecurity continues among college students. The need for food pantries on college campuses, like the one at Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC), is a growing necessity and expanding to other local colleges.

Nearly one-third of students said they have experienced food insecurity within the pandemic. According to a 2016 survey by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, there is a 34% increase in students being served by food pantries and a 38% increase in students living with food insecurity.

On average, there are about 100 students utilizing the pantry and they have the capacity to have more students use the program, according to Shelley Nicholson, director of the Brewer Center for Civic Learning and Community Engagement at MWCC and head of the food pantry, Food for Thought. Nicholson said there are customized bags of food to accommodate students who may have food allergies or dietary restrictions. According to a student's needs, toiletries will be given as well. Thanksgiving baskets are available, as well as disposable diapers and baby food.

According to Cody Nathanson, MWCC student, he has been using Food for Thought since 2019, and it has been helpful to him. The office also referred Nathanson to an outside resource

for additional assistance as well. He was asked if he had any advice for students in need and said, "Reach out, they will do what they can to assist you."

When asked if any improvements need to be made, Nathanson said that although he is grateful for what the pantry already provides, he would like

to see fresh fruits and vegetables available.

MWCC has had a partnership with the Worcester County Food Bank (WCFB) 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 WCFB has partnered with other schools. They have been supplying the pantry with mini grants and gift cards for food, according to Nicholson. The mini grants have contributed to the opening of the Leominster campus food distribution branch and was also able to provide additional food items in their

Thanksgiving baskets.

According to Jean McMurray at WCFB, they started partnering with colleges to provide food to their food pantries. They heard about food insecurity on college campuses and became involved with a statewide coalition. WCFB currently partners with three colleges. The first college they partnered with is MWCC, and then Worcester State University (WSU) and Quinsigamond Community College (QCC). They are working with Fitchburg State University (FSU) about possibly partnering with their food pantry.

McMurray said the benefits of having these partnerships with colleges help students stay in school and achieve their academic goals. In addition to providing food to the college pantries, WCFB provides information on a range of food and nutrition resources including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Healthy Incentive Program (HIP), and the Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Nicholson said a student can visit the MWCC website and fill out an application; there is no income verification required. Then an appointment is made for students to pick up a pre-packaged bag of 40 items at a designated door on campus; students may utilize this service every three weeks. Food gift cards are also available.



Donation Shopping List

- microwavable meals (non-perishable)
- nonperishable snacks
- rice (5lb bags or less are best)
- rice blend boxes (pilaf, etc.)
- spaghetti sauce
- crackers (saltines, etc.)
- cereal, oatmeal & instant oatmeal packets
- canned meat & canned seafood
- apple sauce & canned fruit
- peanut butter & jelly
- shelf-stable milk
- personal hygiene items (shampoo, soap, toothpaste, etc.)

Thank you for your donations!

*A donation bin is located in front of the pantry (Room 192 - Gardner campus).
Monetary donations are also accepted and appreciated in Room 152 - Gardner campus.

Image courtesy of MWCC

A suggested list of items to be donated to the Food for Thought Pantry, as found on the MWCC website.

Mindfulness Across Massachusetts

Activist Dialogues Continue to Increase Amongst Our Community

By *Cody Nathanson*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

There is a bridge between awareness and activism that is being built across Massachusetts and it's crossing over through the speakers of Zoom meetings, college campuses, and once-vacant lots of local towns. By local activists and community leaders start the conversations that lead to the awareness of social justice issues.

While Massachusetts has a long path of social justice movements from the abolitionists in the 1850s, Civil Rights in the 60s, and the recent Black Lives Matter movement in 2013, it is more recently that many are experiencing an awareness awakening across the state. In part due to unavoidable broadcasted racial unrest and also in part due to the deliberate work of many activists contextualizing such events. With efforts like New Salem Library's "Let's Talk about

Racism", the work of the Friends of Fitchburg Abolitionists Park, and MWCC's student life hosting events like "Social Code or Social Crisis." There is now an abundance of opportunities for self-reflection and to bring thoughts and feelings into the foreground.

It is sponsored programs like Dr. Jodi Merriday's "Social Code or Social Crisis" that give people the tools and much-needed sense of direction when it comes to social justice. MWCC's Student Life Assistant Director Kathy Matson said that she brought Merriday to speak at the college with a goal of opening up that often tough to initiate dialogue surrounding equity and social justice. While MWCC is just one college, Matson said that any college can benefit from similar events as it "provid(es) the opportunity for students, staff, and faculty to gain a better understanding of the issues...."

Although Merriday's time

at MWCC was over in just an hour, her goal of open discussions aimed at "enabling understanding, tolerance and appreciation of difference" is in tune with an increasing desire for mindfulness across Massachusetts.

With a sense self-awareness comes the ability to not only understand others but a chance at examining our own biases, which is exactly the angle Jade Barker's and Cate Woolner's "Let's Talk About Racism" was centered. The event, facilitated by lifelong activists Woolner and Barker, also delved into the deeper conversation of the history of racism in the United States and what our own roles are in that history.

The spillover of this dialogue is a part of furthering social issues, as Barker said, "that's how we learn and grow, that we hear from other people and their experiences." She added, "And where all involved are

in the race conversation, and that's the thing." People with similar realizations, whether facilitated by Barker, Woolner, Matson, or watched footage of BLM rallies over the news, might also becoming to the same conclusion as Woolner, saying "we are the people who make up our communities."

Although awareness might be a tool for personal growth, it was also a catalyst for community change for the MWCC students in David Thibault-Munoz's FYE (First Year Experience) class, shown in their efforts on the upcoming construction of an Abolitionist Park in Fitchburg. Thibault-Munoz, an experienced activist himself, as well as the Resource Specialist for Gateway to College, turned an assignment on Frederick Douglass into a 4-year effort to construct a park in honor of the city's rich history of abolitionist activism that started during the 1830s.

The 4-year journey not only

ended up with locals donating \$13,000 for the project in just three weeks, but it also energized the residents of the community and got them thinking 'we have a voice, we can do this,' said Thibault-Munoz.

"When anybody does a self-reflection or self-exploration, really get a true understanding of who they are as a person, why they feel the way they do, and why they do things or don't do things like activism will hopefully be that spark," Thibault-Munoz said.

A common link between the efforts of Munoz, Matson, Barker, Woolner, and other social awareness efforts is the idea of understanding one another. The hope is to see that sentiment reach and connect other movements together as it makes them stronger, Thibault-Munoz said.

Are HyFlex Classrooms the Classrooms of the Future?

Students and Faculty Discuss the Newest Hybrid Teaching Model

By *Ellie Burton*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) is now implementing a new learning option: HyFlex classrooms, but this new classroom style comes with pros and cons. While this new style makes learning more accessible for students, it could potentially be more difficult for some teachers to effectively teach all students.

Many colleges already utilize HyFlex, including Northern Illinois University, who describes it on their website (niu.edu) as "a course design model that presents the components of hybrid learning in a flexible course structure that gives students the option of attending sessions in the classroom, participating online, or doing both. Students can change their mode of attendance weekly or by topic, according to need or preference." Cameras would be utilized in the classroom so

students could watch the in-class lectures from home either live or as a recording at their own convenience.

MWCC student Sierra Harris of New Salem believes that "A HyFlex classroom would be a great idea; it would make it a lot easier for people who

Harris said that "There are great benefits that would come with HyFlex classrooms due to their flexibility" and added, "I think this will help students be able to attend class more often and it would be helpful to be able to look back on the lecture if they missed something or just need a

never see a student at all is just as bad as all the regular remote learning we have been doing" and "it allows for flexibility for [students], but continues to allow for lack of engagement with actual humans in person, which has been already [been] negatively affecting the mental

to do is record their lecture that they already plan on doing."

On the other side, as a teacher, Conn believes that "it is a lot to keep track of -trying to teach, engage, and get all students to participate while in the classroom is a challenge as it is. Trying to not 'forget' about those that are remote would add another level and the challenges that come with trying to get both groups able to work with each other is another challenge especially if not all students in class have a laptop, etcetera."

Overall, the call on whether to offer HyFlex classes will have to be made on whether the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Harris said that "I think there are way more benefits than drawbacks. As long as students don't just miss class and never go back to watch the lectures it seems like it would help students and staff a lot" while Conn is still "not sure" as to where the scales lie.

"A HyFlex classroom would be a great idea; it would make it a lot easier for people who either do not have a reliable form of transportation, have a long drive, or just an extremely busy schedule."

- Sierra Harris, MWCC student

either do not have a reliable form of transportation, have a long drive, or just an extremely busy schedule." While others, like Heather Conn, Associate Professor of Biology, are more apprehensive about the idea. Conn said this is because "I have never taught a HyFlex classroom so I can't really have a solid opinion."

reminder on a certain lesson. I also think it's great that you can choose what option works best for you and your schedule at any time which would be really beneficial for students with children."

With benefits come the drawbacks. On this subject Conn said, "I like the flexibility of this for students, but the fact I might

health of our students across the country."

Students are not the only people who would be affected by this option; teachers would also be directly affected since they would be the ones running these new classes. From the outside looking in, Harris said, "I don't think it will affect faculty very much because all they will have

PROFILE

The Visions Program and their Vision

COVID Has Not Slowed the Program's Ability to Assist MWCC Students

By Maddie Willigar

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Though MWCC offers many programs, the Visions Program stands out, offering its services to those interested and eligible, setting students up for success. The Visions Program offers students a place of community, tutors, and resources to help students succeed.

Sarah Pingeton, Transfer Counselor, described the Visions Community as a "supportive," welcoming environment where students are given opportunities to meet and connect with others while figuring out what they want out of college.

Though this program embodies a sense of belonging and community while on campus, Pingeton said that it transitioned exceptionally well to this virtual space, running almost identically to the way it was in person, with the exception of a physical community.

Pingeton explained that the goal of this program is "to get students to graduate and move

on to their next goal, whether that's transferring to a 4-year school, or finding a job in their field."

Specifically, Pingeton said that she has seen students develop skills concerning studying, time management, self-advocacy, and communication when taking advantage of what Visions offers, like seminars and FYE class.

An example of a student who's taken advantage of what the Visions program offers is Justin Tralongo. Coming from being homeschooled, Tralongo said he was looking for people who would help and support him in his transition to college.

"To be honest, I think they really did a great job...and then even went beyond that and were able to...help me after I got through that transition," Tralongo said.

Tralongo explained that in his first semester, the pressure of balancing work and a full class load left him contemplating

dropping out. However, he said that the Visions community was a big reason he made it through that semester.

"Everything has gone so much smoother because of them," Tralongo said.

Tralongo said that the most significant help in Visions has been tutoring, especially during his first semester. Pingeton said these weekly sessions are about 45 minutes with the same tutor each week for those who sign up at the beginning of the semester.

Tralongo also mentioned how smooth the transfer process has been for him, noting that his friends who weren't in Visions seemed to have a much harder time.

Though the Visions Program is currently accepting applications, Pingeton explained that a lot of people may not even know it's there. This is interesting since Pingeton said that "about 75% of students at the Mount would technically qualify for the

Visions Program."

To be eligible, Pingeton said that students need to meet at least one of three requirements: a first-generation student (meaning neither parents has a bachelor's degree); a low-income background (based on the most recent filing of family taxes); or a documented disability.

When asked why students should apply, Tralongo said that sometimes it's hard to deal with the confusion of college on your own.

"To have the Visions staff there

with you...caring about you, supporting you... it's definitely something that's worth it," Tralongo said.

On the same note, Pingeton encouraged students to apply because "a little bit of support goes a long way in terms of making students successful... and you can find that with us... You can find the reliability and accountability and someone to check in with for anything throughout your semesters, and it makes a difference."



Image courtesy of MWCC

MWCC Visions Program

Poetry With a Purpose

A MWCC Professor Hopes to Inspire Change Through Writing

By Josilyn Straka

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

David Wyman, an English Professor at Mount Wachusett Community College, recently published his second book of poetry called *Violet Ideologies*, with a theme of capitalism. His first book, *Proletariat Sunrise*, included poems with a concern of global warming and apocalyptic issues that most people are not willing to confront, and he said he felt the need to write about them.

Soft spoken, wearing a light blue polo shirt, Wyman said, while chuckling, that he "doesn't always write poems people can understand". He described his poems as being convoluted. Wyman said it took him ten years to write his first book, seven

years for his second collection, and he is currently working on his third collection of poems. He said his first collection took so long because he was trying to find his style of writing.

Wyman discussed a poem called "Evaporating Rivers," containing the concern of rivers not flowing into oceans as they used to and just ending and becoming mud. He grew up near the Nashua River and ice hockey was the sport to play at that time. He and the neighborhood children wanted to ice skate on the river, however, it was polluted, smelled bad, and was full of trash. A local organization from the area helped clean it up. So, with this poem, Wyman was comparing that time of the 60's and 70's to the present;

back when people were willing to clean up these areas and face these issues.

Wyman said he has been busier during the pandemic than teaching in person due to having to learn the online system; he

he would like it to in the sense of completing work.

Wyman said that literary success for him is just being happy with his work; he said he has achieved a good measure, such as being a published poet,

handful of copies of his book, and he passes them out free of charge at readings. He said he likes the idea that someone would want to read his book and he likes when someone grabs his book and he sees them reading it.

Wyman wanted to pass along some advice for beginner writers and poets. He said, "read a lot, and more importantly, start writing, keep going, and do not give up." He said at one point, earlier in life, he could not write because he felt anything he wrote sounded terrible compared to other authors, but later he came back to his writing and realized he just needed to continue to write; a strategy that led to him becoming a published author.

"Read a lot, and more importantly, start writing, keep going, and do not give up."

– David Wyman, MWCC English Professor

said that he misses the in-person classroom time. But he said the pandemic, in some ways, has not changed his ability to make time to write, and in other ways it has, explaining that the pandemic sometimes interferes more than

and he has made sure that he is satisfied with his success. He said it is more of an internal value, though.

When discussing the best money spent regarding writing, Wyman said he likes to buy a

Perseverance in Education

Inspiration From an Inspirational Author



Image from CAST.org

Amanda Bastoni

By Yamari David

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Amanda Bastoni, 37, who resides in Peterborough, NH, has dealt with many struggles in her life. From family issues, changing jobs, and different educational paths, Bastoni learned the importance of education and perseverance, which in the end led to her grand prize: a doctorate degree.

Bastoni was able to hurdle through her journey due to her firm belief in education. She has read many books throughout her life, but there is one book in particular that really intrigued

her. It was by an author named Viktor Frankl, who said, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

She lives by this quote and applies it to her everyday life. “I believe part of education is educating yourself” Bastoni explained, going on to say “when I would have to take a hard math class as an undergrad, I immediately would sign up for a tutor before I even received any homework or a test because I knew I was going to have to learn to get better at the subject.”

Bastoni attended a four-year college in 1998 where she received her bachelor’s in psychology child investigation upon completion. She was involved in multiple writing opportunities that spanned from freelance writing to full-time journalism. In 2007, Bastoni returned to college to further her writing skills. She attended Antioch University in California and earned a master’s degree in Creative Writing Non-fiction. She then taught University-level writing at Franklin Pierce and Keene State University.

Bastoni’s ability to persevere through her journey even when things got rough paid off for her in the end. She heavily believes in the phrase “internal locus of control,” the belief that you have control over what happens in your life. Her first book was rejected 30 times, but she was okay with that because she didn’t really want that book to be published anyway. She ended up co-writing and publishing a book this summer called *From*

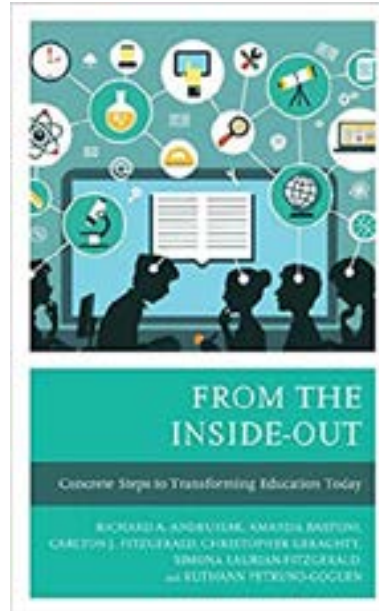


Image from amazon.com

The book Bastoni was inspired to co-author

the Inside-Out, Concrete Steps to Transforming Education Today.

She always knew that she was going to be successful wherever she ended up in life and that is what allowed her to keep pushing. In her journey to acquire a doctorate degree, she focused on building what was her definition of family, but when she went through a divorce with her first husband, she decided to focus her efforts on

achieving financial success. She went from making 12k a year to 110k a year in just a five-year timespan before even receiving her doctorate.

She said she never felt bad about trying and it never seemed like a risk to try, “I like to think I will always be successful but my career as a wedding photographer and a child investigator were just not the right paths, but I still was able to gain skills I can take along with me through life because of those paths.”

Bastoni gave advice to those starting or in the middle of their college journey, saying, “do not let the rejections in your life discourage you from pursuing the right path and always continue to educate yourself even when you think you know enough.”

Bastoni now works as an Educational Work Research Scientist and writes grants through the National Science Foundation. She does educational research primarily to help low income or stem rural youth.

Helping Those Who Help Others

Student Describes his Experience with Campus Food Pantry

By Josilyn Straka

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Keeping up with food insecurity and college students is a daunting task, but that hasn’t stopped Food for Thought, the campus food pantry, from accomplishing this goal.

Cody Nathanson, a MWCC student, said he has benefited from the campus food pantry before via a card given to him with a certain number of points for him to use. Nathanson cares for his two younger siblings, so utilizing the pantry doesn’t just help him, but the whole family as well.

Food for Thought helps students with food insecurity, providing food and hygiene products, along with baby items like food and diapers as well. They also provide Thanksgiving baskets and food gift cards. According to Nathanson, Food for Thought also referred him to an outside resource for other services as well.

Nathanson said he found out about the food pantry through his academic advisor. A student can visit the MWCC website and fill out an application; there is no income verification required. Then an appointment is made

for students to pick up a pre-packaged bag of 40 items at a designated door on campus; students may utilize this service every three weeks. Nathanson said he found this to be an easy and convenient process.

Cooking is a passion for Nathanson. He said that because he is a father figure to his siblings, he needed and wanted to learn how to cook for them. He used to just pop a frozen pizza in the oven and call it dinner, but he soon realized he wanted to provide for his siblings the best he could by learning to cook nutritious and filling meals.

Food for Thought helps him by way of providing some of the ingredients to cook these nutritious meals.

Nathanson has attended MWCC for three semesters. Being a first-generation college student, he said that he has an amazing support system from his family. Without it being a team effort, he said that he would not have the opportunity to attend school.

Nathanson said that he appreciates the fact that he can live in his family’s home and instead of working at an outside job, going on to say that he trades-off by doing the

housekeeping, cooking, and homeschooling the children, while his family members handle the bills. This way, he can focus on his education and pursue his goal of getting a college degree.

Nathanson plans to pursue a Journalism degree at Emerson College in Boston or University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMA). He said he would like to attend school in Boston because he has never lived in the city and is looking for the fast-paced feel, but he also said he would attend UMass to stay close to his siblings.

Acknowledging Trauma

Mourning the Lost and Reconnecting with Those Still Here

By Daniel Dow
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Throughout the struggle to combat the coronavirus, many Americans have had to say goodbye alone, have had to die alone, and have had to grieve alone. This nation, that has had to do so much alone, can now start to share the collective traumas that it has faced and begin to heal.

We have only just begun to mourn. As we gather and see family, attend weddings, birthdays, and holidays, we will witness the empty seats once occupied by the ones we loved, and in that moment, the true cost of what we have lost will be apparent.

As I write this, the death toll

has surpassed 628,000 American citizens in just over a year's time, and until January 19, there has been no national sense of mourning to acknowledge these tragic losses.

President Biden landed in D.C. on the eve of his inauguration to deliver a speech before the Lincoln Memorial, acknowledging the significant loss the country has faced from COVID-19. This message not only brought much needed recognition to those that have lost loved ones, but also signaled a newfound tone of responsibility from the government and a long-awaited acknowledgement of the lives lost to the Coronavirus.

On February 22, our nation surpassed 500,000 COVID-

related deaths. President Biden recognized this milestone with a day of mourning, a day that displayed compassion and emotion as federal buildings were ordered to fly flags at half mast for five days, and 500 candles were placed on the White House steps memorializing those lost.

President Biden addressed the nation, speaking directly to Americans who have lost loved ones, "We often hear people described as 'ordinary Americans.' There's no such thing; there's nothing ordinary about them. The people we lost were extraordinary. They spanned generations. Born in America. Immigrated to America. But just like that, so many of them took their final

breath alone in America."

This sense of unity and compassion had long been absent on a national level. This signified a moment of unity for the Americans to honor those that have died and to mourn with those families that have lost loved ones.

Over the past year Americans have watched the death toll climb and many have become numb to the lives that have been lost to the pandemic. We regularly honor those that have died in war with monuments and patriotic ceremonies, the lives lost to the pandemic should be honored the same way.

The country's control over COVID-19 now seems to have lessened, and the stranglehold

the Coronavirus once held is seeing a resurgence. Americans must not take the sacrifices of those we have lost in vain; we have a responsibility to each other as Americans, a patriotic duty.

For too long the United States has had an absence of compassion and unity. It is time we follow President Joe Biden's lead and return to these values and honor our dead as one nation. We must unite and honor those who have died, we must stand together now as Americans, so that all our sacrifices may not be in vain, and beat this unseen enemy once and for all.

Magnet Fishing: The Fishless Fishing

A Way to Clean the Environment While Having Fun



Photo from Wikimedia Commons, taken by Marian.kabele

Neodymium magnet for magnetic hunting, magnet fishing, double-sided with eye and polyester rope tied, with a piece of old iron attached after pulling out of the water.

By Ellie Burton
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Normal fishing is seen by many as a fun outdoor activity that can be fun and safe for the environment, but for others normal fishing can be seen as either simply boring or harmful to the fish that are caught even if they are released. As a person who does participate in normal fishing also, I believe that an alternative to normal fishing that

does not harm the wildlife or environment is magnet fishing.

Magnet fishing is defined by wideopenspaces.com as "attach[ing] a strong magnet to a rope and toss[ing] it into different bodies of water to see what metal objects [can] be dredge[d] up from the bottom."

The magnet is tied to the end of a rope that is also tied to the shore or the belt of the fisherman. The magnet, while still connected

to the end of the rope, is then thrown into the water and pulled back in with the hopes of making contact with something made of metal.

By doing this magnet fisherman are able to clean metal pollution from lakes, rivers, streams, and even oceans. According to magnetfishingadventure.com, "metal has a way of polluting the aquatic ecosystem and contaminating our food and water supply. By removing that metal, the [chemical leaching] will stop and the ecosystem can begin returning to normal."

The removal of metal pollutants is not only beneficial to the people who utilize these bodies of water, but also for the wildlife that live there. The water becomes cleaner for the fish and other aquatic/semiaquatic life that live in it and any other animals that drink or swim in the water. By removing these metal debris, the risk of animals, and people, injuring themselves on them is also removed.

This not only makes the water cleaner, but it also makes the

water clearer which again makes it safer for people and animals who enter the water. "Typically, heavily polluted waters are dark from the rust" (detectingschool.com) therefore by removing these metals we are able to slowly dilute these pollutants until the water is once clean and clear again.

Magnet fishing is also not only environmentally friendly, but extremely fun. Every time the magnet is thrown out into the water there is a rush of excitement because you never know if you will catch anything and if you do, what is it? Even with a small catch of a nail, piece of obscure metal, or spoon there is still a feeling of excitement and at least that is one less piece of metal in the water. The big catches like signs, whole items, etcetera is a feeling that you should just go out and try for yourself.

Some animal activists do argue that magnet fishing can also be harmful to the environment because "what if the magnets hit an aquatic animal?" The

chances of this happening are very slim and after the first cast most aquatic animals will leave the area because their instincts will tell them that there is a predator there at the moment; these animals then return once the coast is clear.

Another reason why magnet fishing is environmentally safe is that there is no waste, pollution, or chemicals going into the water. While fishing normally many people will lose their manmade baits, lures, line, bobbers, etcetera, but with magnet fishing there are no losses most of the time. There is a very slim chance of losing a magnet to a huge metal object (car, motorcycle, etcetera) that is submerged in the water, but the chances of this are extremely rare and has personally never happened to me in my multiple years of magnet fishing.

These are three website that I recommend for beginners to learn more about magnet fishing: detectingschool.com, magnetfishingadventure.com, magnetfishingpros.com.

Review: *Marvel Studios' What If...?*

The Entertainment Giant's First Foray Into Animation...and the Multiverse



Image copyright Marvel Studios and The Walt Disney Company

By **Thomas Hill Jr.**
OBSERVER DESIGNER

NOTE: This review covers the first three episodes of *What If...?*

Have you ever wondered how events would have transpired had skinny Steve Rogers not become super soldier icon Captain America? Or if rather than the Black Panther, Prince T'Challa was destined to become a Guardian of the Galaxy? What if the Avengers...never became the Avengers? *What If...?* This titular question is the premise of Marvel Studios' current ongoing

Disney + television series, their fourth after *WandaVision*, *Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, and *Loki*.

Based on the comic book series of the same name and premise, *What If...?* is an anthology series that takes the well-known stories of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and tweaks them to create entirely new stories with the same casts of characters. Each episode is based on changing one single element, and extrapolating how that one change, big or small, could have impacted the story going forward. As an example, the

first episode, *What If...Captain Carter Were the First Avenger?*, posits what could have occurred had Agent Peggy Carter (Hayley Atwell) stayed in the lab while Steve Rogers was being given the super soldier serum, rather than leaving the room. As it happens, it would have led to a series of events that ended with her taking the serum instead and becoming the super soldier Captain Carter.

I have always been fascinated with this idea, of seeing how tiny changes could so tremendously affect the plot of a story; the *It's a Wonderful Life* Effect. Whenever a show or movie or comic or what have you, takes the time to explore that question, "What if...?" it usually leads to interesting results that further explore character dynamics and growth and all those wonderful things. So an entire series based on the concept is a welcome one to me. However, there is a drawback: *What If...?* heavily relies on the audience having seen the other Marvel movies to recognize the changes being made to certain characters and storylines. A newcomer may find themselves a bit lost in this lore-heavy world, and unlike something like, say, *WandaVision*, which at least had an underlying mystery to try to keep new viewers interested, the only through line in *What If...?* so far is the Watcher (voiced brilliantly by Jeffery Wright), the mysterious cosmic entity who serves as the Rod Serling-type host of this *Twilight Zone*. Not to say a newcomer couldn't enjoy the show, just be aware

and prepared that there isn't a lot of backstory as to what is going on in each *What If...?* tale.

On top of its interesting premise, *What If...?* also sports the distinction of being Marvel Studios' first foray into animation. As first attempts go, I would say they've pretty well nailed it. The style is very interesting, mainly consisting of cell-shaded, 3D computer animated characters and settings, but with almost a "sheen" of more traditional 2D animation applied in some areas; it is hard to describe exactly, but it reminded me a bit of a cross between the art styles of Telltale Games (*The Walking Dead*, *The Wolf Among Us*, *Batman: The Telltale Series*, and, funnily enough, a *Guardians of the Galaxy* game) and 2018's *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. It is very fluid, especially in the fight scenes, and allows for choreography that would otherwise look too odd or be too challenging to pull off in the live action setting of the movies and other shows. Outside of the occasional overly stiff or out-of-place facial expression, the show is very pleasant to watch.

Having addressed the visuals, let's now discuss the voice acting. I have somewhat mixed feelings on this element of the series; some of the voice acting is great, some less-so. One of the neat aspects of the show is the fact that Marvel was able to get most of the actors from the movies to return to voice their characters in animated form. Those actors who have not returned have been replaced with professional voice actors doing

pretty spot-on imitations (i.e. Josh Keaton does a very good job sounding like Chris Evans as Steve Rogers, ditto with Lake Bell voicing Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow). The returning actors seem to vary in quality from line to line, and the ones who do the best seem to be those who have either done extensive voice acting before (Samuel L. Jackson) or previously voiced their characters in other media and have experience (Hayley Atwell as Peggy Carter and Clark Gregg as Phil Coulson, for instance). There were quite a few times characters spoke and their voices didn't really match the animation; someone might shout at another character sitting a couple feet away, or inflect a completely different emotion than the one shown on their face (if I had to guess I'd say that all the actors weren't in the same room together voicing their lines, and therefore didn't have each other to bounce those inflections off of, but I don't know for sure; it's just a theory).

Overall, I have very much enjoyed *What If...?*; I think this is the most I've anticipated new episodes of a Marvel show since *WandaVision*. Despite a rough corner here and there, I think *What If...?* is on its way to being a truly great detour into the wild and wacky multiverse of Marvel stories and will allow the creators to truly flex their imaginations in this playground of infinite possibilities.

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Places to Visit in Old MA

Student Recommends Locales to Explore This Fall Season

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Photo by Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism from flickr

Doane's Falls in Royalston, MA

By *Shaye McKeen*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Massachusetts is a beautiful state with many natural wonders to visit any time of the year, and with the travel limits in place due to COVID, I would like to share some of my favorite places. Central MA. is a much less urban neighbor to the likes of Boston and its suburbs, and thus offers a trove of natural landmarks for its residents to explore. The many villages and small towns pocketed in the rolling hills and wooded landscape hide many unknown beauties, which can be found only by those who search for them.

One such place of interest includes the old stone house,

which sits on a peninsula of Long Pond in Rutland. The stone house is what remains of the summer home of Edward Cross, yet stands just as tall as it once did in its prime. The roof, glass windows, and wooden features are all that is missing, as the stone walls, floors, and chimney still stand strong.

The view of the pond through the pines as well as the scenic hike along the shoreline which takes you through a small graveyard and past several rope swings makes this location very attractive for those seeking to get out of the house or spend time swimming during the summer.

In the same town lies the ruins of a prison camp used in

the early 1900s. The Rutland Prison Camps consist of several still standing structures which each served a purpose in the compound in 1903-1934. The most remarkable and noteworthy of them include the cell, the tunnel, and the cold storage.

Each site sits decimated with breathtaking graffiti, inviting visitors to explore inside. The cell features six rooms with the hinges still attached to the door frames, as well as a rooftop which can be accessed by climbing through a caved cell top. The cold storage lies carved into a hillside, supported by pillars and welcoming its guests with a massive, gaping entrance.

Lastly, the tunnel is located

behind the cell and is dug out about 100-150 feet long and lies about 6 feet underground. It does not lead anywhere but to a smooth cement wall, with a strange 8x8 inch chute continuing on further. This mysterious location is accessed at an intersection of Intervale and Prison Camp roads, along dirt paths.

Now, reaching up to the Massachusetts and New Hampshire border, all the way up in Royalston, hides a breathtaking set of cascading waterfalls. Doane's Falls crash underneath a bridged road and flow through a dense forest and feeds into Tully Lake. The falls stretch on for around a quarter mile hike; the trails follow the coast of the river atop cliffs, with several points where visitors can venture down to the waters to explore.

One of such points lies at the last large waterfall, sectioned off by a cable fence. But what you'll find at this point is not what you'd expect; you'd find both locals and visitors alike hopping the fence and jumping off the cliffs into the 10-20 foot deep pools below. Cliff diving, an extreme summer activity, is frequently engaged in at this beautiful oasis. Alternatively, you can always just swim around in the pools and enjoy the scenery while the sun beams through the gaps in the trees.



Photos by Shaye McKeen

The graffiti-covered ruins of the old Rutland Prison Camps