

# Muhlenberg

Magazine



FALL 2020

## A Collective Effort

How the Muhlenberg community has shaped the evolution of the campus climate surrounding race

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### **Strong Sciences**

The College's reputation for scientific excellence continues

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### **That's Entertainment**

Public relations pro Jennifer DeGuzman '93 reflects on her career

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### **President's Report**

Muhlenberg is constantly evolving and this year has been no different



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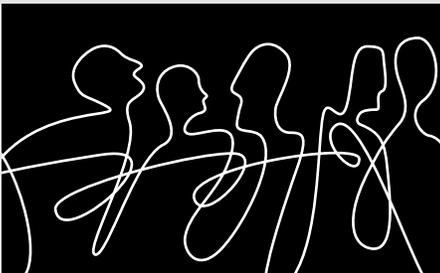
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**FEATURES**



**A Community Effort** 30

What does it take to change the campus climate surrounding race? True transformation starts with individuals who push themselves, their peers and the College toward anti-racism, equity and an understanding that this work is never finished.



**That's Entertainment** 42

Jennifer DeGuzman '93, vice president of communications at the National Geographic Channel, reflects on a 25-year career in public relations that began at MTV.



**Science at Muhlenberg** 46

The College has a long-standing reputation for scientific excellence. Learn what makes Muhlenberg's programs so strong and the scientists those programs produce so successful.

**Profiles**

Frederick Wright Jones (art)	10
Alex Denning '09	16
Kyle Ropski '22	24
Stephanie Wiese '93	54
Julia Burns '16	54

**Departments**

Letters to the Editor	3
News & Notes	4-9, 13-14, 23
Creators & New Releases	12
From the Archives	15
Mules on the Move	18
Perspective	20
10 Questions With...	22
President's Report	26
The Last Page	64

**Alumni**

Alumni News	52
Class Notes	55
In Memoriam	60

## From the Editor



In my three years as a writer at Muhlenberg, my impression has always been that a sizable number of students are passionate activists. I've interviewed students and alumni about their work to raise awareness of or to solve problems related to climate change, opioid addiction, distracted driving, partisan gerrymandering, youth bullying, immigration policy and mass incarceration, among other issues.

So when I set out to write "A Community Effort," a feature about diversity at Muhlenberg that starts on page 30, I was surprised to learn that student activism related to racial justice was not widespread a decade ago. The issue gained traction in early 2013 with a group of students who called themselves the Diversity Vanguard.

"At that moment, for the most part, our students were not activists or politically engaged in the way you might find on college campuses today," Roberta Meek '06 P'14 GP'20, a lecturer in media & communication and Africana studies, told me.

Before the group formed, student conversations about race largely took place within the College's affinity groups (such as the Black Students Association and Comunidad Latina) and inside the Multicultural Center. The Diversity Vanguard brought the conversation to the entire campus community, including the administration, which responded to the group's activism by launching the process of creating the College's first Diversity Strategic Plan. That plan laid the foundation for the racial justice work taking place at the College today, work that has a commitment to anti-racism at its core.

"The Diversity Vanguard changed Muhlenberg," Meek says. "Muhlenberg would not be Muhlenberg as we know it today without it."

The story that describes how Muhlenberg has evolved on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion over the past seven years is a long one (4,700 words) with many voices (16). But take the time to read it and you'll learn about some of the people who've pushed the institution to progress as far as it has and how critical it is that an even broader coalition of individuals—one that includes as many faculty, staff, students and alumni as possible—continue to drive the work forward.

In this issue, you'll also find an article on something with an extensive history at the College: its reputation for scientific excellence. "Science at Muhlenberg" (page 46) outlines what makes the physical science programs at Muhlenberg outstanding and distinctive among those offered by small, liberal arts colleges. Breaking up the lengthier features, you'll find "That's Entertainment" (page 42), which details the 25-year career journey of public relations professional Jennifer DeGuzman '93 from MTV to the National Geographic Channel.

**Meghan Kita**  
Managing Editor

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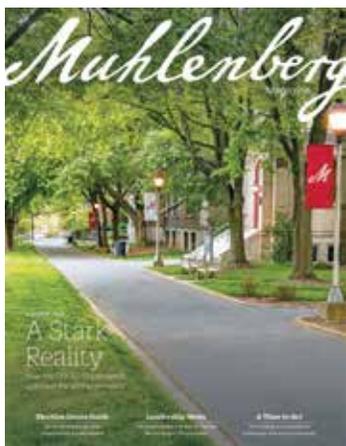
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### Cover to Cover

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the Summer 2020 edition of *Muhlenberg Magazine* from cover to cover. Usually I just skim the articles and head to the Class Notes section, but this issue was different. From the President's Forum on "A Time for Action and Learning" to the well-outlined and enlightening "The COVID Chronicles" with its informative timeline spanning the bottom of the article's 17 pages, and finally the all so timely and relevant "2020 Election: Issues Guide," this issue filled my day with information and thought-provoking questions. I would also add that the two-page, wide-angle picture of campus for "The COVID Chronicles" article brought both a note of reality and sadness since it showed a portion of the campus devoid of any activity, befitting how this once-in-a-lifetime event has affected us all. Finally, lest I miss saying so, there were at least a dozen other articles in this issue worth reading as well, including a profile on my classmate, Lee Seras '68. I will not be so quick to skim future issues as I have done in the past.



*Joe Kloss '68*

### No Escape

Call me shallow, but I like my magazine to be filled with profiles of alumni and their interesting careers and life experiences, plus Class Notes, weddings, births of babies and the like. If there is one thing that I absolutely do not need from *Muhlenberg Magazine*, it is a "2020 Election: Issues Guide" (Summer 2020). I am sick to death of it all. I can't escape it anywhere, and now apparently, the alumni magazine is just one more media experience.

*Mari Gingher Corson '72*

### A Familiar Face

I am intrigued by the large photo on page 17 of the Summer 2020 *Muhlenberg Magazine* ("The College's First Alumna"). I understand that the article is written about Mabel Knecht, who graduated from Muhlenberg in 1920. However, I'm writing about the woman on the left in that larger photo. She is Nellie Sloyer, who was my seventh grade English teacher at Northampton Junior High School in 1960-1961. She was also a member of our church, Holy Trinity Lutheran, where she taught Sunday School for many years. It was a real pleasure seeing her again in that photo and learning of her connection to my own undergraduate alma mater.

*Tim Hinkle '70*

Share your thoughts about stories in the magazine. Email your letters to [magazine@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:magazine@muhlenberg.edu).

## ONLINE STORIES NOT TO MISS

Check out these features on the Muhlenberg website.

### A Semester Like No Other

This fall, the bulk of Muhlenberg's students continued their studies remotely. The College worked to ensure robust academic, co-curricular and extracurricular experiences to foster a strong sense of community regardless of a student's location. To learn more about Muhlenberg's preparations and offerings, visit [muhlenberg.edu/fall2020semester](http://muhlenberg.edu/fall2020semester).

### From Knowledge Comes Power

Because of an internship opportunity the College offered in the wake of COVID-19, Karla Sagastizado '21 is considering a career in law. Read about the work she did with Professor of Psychology Katherine Richmond '00, who directs an iteration of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program at Muhlenberg, at [muhlenberg.edu/insideoutinternship](http://muhlenberg.edu/insideoutinternship).



PHOTO BY PAUL PEARSON

# Muhlenberg Receives Major Gift to Aid Premedical Students, Improve Campus



RENDERING BY BROWN DESIGN CORPORATION, ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Muhlenberg College has been named the recipient of a major gift from alumni Drs. Thomas Burkholder '70 and Judith McDonald Burkholder '71.

The Burkholders have allocated a substantial portion of their donation to provide financial aid for premedical students who are residents of the Lehigh Valley and who come from traditionally underserved populations.

"Privilege is a very real thing," says Thomas. "A lot of people don't have the chance to attend college or to attend and graduate medical school. Hopefully, this gift will enable some people to fulfill that dream."

The Burkholders' gift will also be used in support of an expansion to Seegers Union that will provide additional space for pre-professional advising and the Career Center, among other improvements.

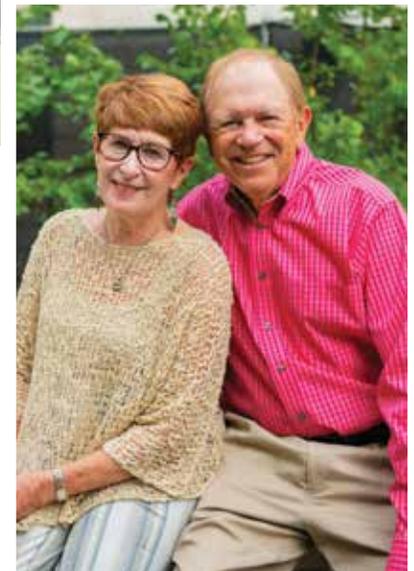
"I chose Muhlenberg [for my undergraduate studies] because of the College's reputation for medical school admission," says Judith. "The premed education that Muhlenberg has provided for decades is excellent, and medical schools were aware of their rigorous program

and the quality of the students graduating from Muhlenberg."

Thomas and Judith Burkholder both earned degrees in natural science from Muhlenberg College. Thomas attended Temple University School of Medicine and Wills Eye Hospital, retiring after a career in ophthalmology in Allentown. Judith attended Hahnemann Medical College, now Drexel University College of Medicine, and retired after a career as a physician specializing in internal medicine.

In recognition of the gift, Muhlenberg will dedicate the Burkholder Quadrangle this fall; a seating area and landscaped garden will occupy the area formerly known as the Brown Mall, an area that Thomas has described as a "quintessential college gathering space."

Construction on the Burkholder Quad began this summer. A formal dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony will be announced at a future date. —Bill Keller



*Drs. Judith McDonald Burkholder '71 and Thomas Burkholder '70*

# Muhlenberg's New Graduate Programs Are Underway

This fall, the first class of 22 graduate students entered the new Muhlenberg College School of Graduate Studies, which offers master's degrees and graduate certificates in applied analytics as well as organizational leadership.

Though launching these programs during a pandemic has been challenging, results have exceeded expectations, says AJ Lemheney, vice president and executive director of graduate & continuing education. Recruitment began only seven months before the semester started, a short timeline in any circumstances, and COVID hit shortly after. Lemheney says the mid-career professionals the School of Graduate Studies was working to attract largely pulled back due to pandemic-related uncertainty. Instead, most of the students enrolled are young professionals—almost 80 percent of them Muhlenberg alumni.

Between the short lead time, the pandemic, the recession and the general climate, “we way outperformed,” Lemheney says. “This says so much about who Muhlenberg College is, how we are perceived, the integrity of our brand, the caliber of our faculty and the robustness of the two new programs.”

The master's of applied analytics program has one student pursuing a graduate certificate and 15 pursuing a master's degree. Of those, five had previously earned a data analytics certificate from Muhlenberg and are on a special one-year path to complete the full master's degree. There are six students who are pursuing master's of organizational leadership degrees.

Lemheney expects continued uncertainty and difficulty enrolling students that may have enrolled under different circumstances in the year ahead. However, he believes the School of Graduate Studies will remain an attractive option for those looking to be proactive.

“The young professional and mid-career professional will both be using this time to evaluate their career trajectories and watching industry sector performance as they consider their futures,” Lemheney says. “The ones who aren't going to sit on the sidelines are thinking about what is next. They will use this unusual time to build their personal competencies and readiness.” —*Meghan Kita*

## Psychology Professor Katherine Richmond '00 Wins Three National Awards



In March, Professor of Psychology Katherine Richmond '00 received the Florence Denmark Distinguished Mentoring Award from the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP). Denmark is one of the founders of AWP and a former president of the American Psychological Association (APA), and, according to the announcement, the annual

award is given “to a feminist leader who continues in Florence's footsteps in providing mentorship and inspiration to all women.”

On August 8, Richmond learned she had received the 2020 Emerging Leader Award from the Committee on Women in Psychology of the American Psychological Association. Given in recognition of her “outstanding contributions in the areas of scholarship, teaching, public interest and service to women in psychology,” the award underscores Richmond's work as a pro-

lific scholar in the field of feminist psychology, which includes 32 articles and book chapters, many of which include undergraduate student authors, and 58 presentations at national and international psychology conferences.

Then, on August 11, the AWP informed Richmond that she had received the 2020 Distinguished Publication Award, along with her co-authors, for their 2019 textbook, *Psychology of Women and Gender*. The Distinguished Publication Award is given “in recognition of significant and substantial contributions of research and theory that advance our understanding of the psychology of women and promote achievement of the goals” of the AWP.

Richmond says her work is typically done collaboratively, “so when I think about Florence's work and work I've published or advocated for, it is almost always done in community with other people. So the recognitions are really for these collaborations and particularly for the pioneers who came before me—but also about the students working with us for the next generation.” —*Kristine Yahna Todaro '84*

# Spanish Professor Trains Poll Interpreters for 2020 Election

Associate Professor of Spanish Erika M. Sutherland has been training bilingual poll interpreters to work presidential elections in Lehigh County since 2004. She says about a third of each training session revolves around Election Day

details—how polling locations are set up, how the machines work, what is and isn't allowed—while the rest is “more about the sociologistics of it all.”

For example, Hispanic voters often have two last names, and if the poll worker checking the registration looks up the wrong one, they may erroneously turn the

voter away. Sutherland says Hispanic names are also subject to frequent typos on official identification—Vs and Bs are transposed, or Ss and Zs.

“An interpreter is trained to be attentive to that possibility, to step in and say: ‘The addresses are matching up. You just have a

typo,’” she says. “They’re trained to recognize when there’s a debate so they can intervene.”

The Voting Rights Act requires all precincts in which more than 5 percent of registered voters are of limited English capacity to provide poll interpreters bilingual in English and that population’s language. Ninety-seven of Lehigh County’s 161 precincts have enough Spanish speakers to require poll interpreters.

While Lehigh County recruits and trains interpreters along with its other poll workers, Sutherland’s training has historically met a good portion of the demand—in 2016, she trained 82 interpreters. (A final tally for 2020 was not available at press time.) Approximately 30 of those were students from Muhlenberg and other local colleges; the rest were immigrants Sutherland connected with via El Grupo de Apoyo e Integración Hispanoamericano, the support group for Hispanic immigrants in the Lehigh Valley, which she’s been running since 1999.

“When voters come into the precinct, the first thing they’re going to see is someone in a bright red shirt that says something in Spanish,” Sutherland says. “They’ll know immediately that this is someone who’s friendly, who’s an ally and who speaks Spanish. That friendly presence is really of incalculable value.” —MK

**“When voters come into the precinct, the first thing they're going to see is someone in a bright red shirt that says something in Spanish ... That friendly presence is really of incalculable value.”**

—ERIKA M. SUTHERLAND

*Sutherland in 2018 with two poll interpreters. Her trainees receive these red T-shirts that say, “I speak Spanish. I can help!” to wear to the polls. Below right, Karla Sagastizado ’21 at the 2018 training.*



To learn more about this initiative, visit [muhlenberg.edu/pollinterpreters2020](http://muhlenberg.edu/pollinterpreters2020).

## Six New Full-Time Faculty Join Muhlenberg



**Assistant Professor of Business Gregory Collins** holds a doctorate in education policy analysis from the University of Pennsylvania and four master's degrees. His areas of study include organizational efficiency, school finance and applied quantitative methods.



**Assistant Professor of Education Mark Emerick**, formerly a visiting assistant professor and a part-time lecturer at the College, completed his doctorate in education at Temple University in 2019. He has a Master of Education in curriculum and instruction from Kutztown University.



**Assistant Professor of Computer Science Joseph Helsing** was previously a lecturer at the University of North Texas, where he earned both his doctorate and master's degrees in computer science and engineering and he taught undergraduates in computer science, computer engineering and information technology.



**Lecturer of Biology Jennifer Richardson** has a master's degree in biology from Portland State University. She was previously an assistant professor and lead full-time faculty of anatomy and physiology courses at Northampton Community College, Monroe Campus.



**Assistant Professor of History Sarah Runcie** was previously an assistant professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She earned her doctorate in African history from Columbia University. Runcie's research focuses on the entanglements of modern West and Central African history and global histories of medicine.



**Assistant Professor of Media & Communication Harry Simón Salazar** has a doctorate in communication and a master's degree in Latin American studies from the University of California, San Diego. He published the book *Television, Democracy and the Mediatization of Chilean Politics* in 2018.

## First-Year Students, Few Others on Campus for Fall Semester

On July 30, after the Summer 2020 issue of *Muhlenberg Magazine* went to press, the College announced it would invite only first-year students and a select group of upper-classmen to live on campus this fall. Even for the College's 590 residential students, most learning is taking place virtually to protect the health and safety of the Muhlenberg community. At press time, 657 tests had been completed on campus since the start of the fall semester and three COVID-19 cases had been identified. To learn more about what the fall semester looks like, visit [muhlenberg.edu/fall2020semester](http://muhlenberg.edu/fall2020semester).

## Muhlenberg Announces Institute for Religious and Cultural Understanding

Muhlenberg is building on the strong legacy of the College's Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding by expanding its mission to consider the many religious traditions in the world. The Institute for Religious and Cultural Understanding emphasizes the importance of broader religious and cultural literacy to better understand and embrace the diversity of the campus, the region and the world. Professor and Chair of Religion Studies and Director of the Institute William Gruen says the Institute's mission is to provide the opportunity, for both the Muhlenberg campus and the wider community, "to learn about the many religious traditions we encounter and, more importantly, to learn how to examine, analyze and publicly discuss these traditions productively and without judgment."

# ***New Sustainability Studies Scholarship, Research Grants Expand Student Opportunities***

This summer, two new awards launched to enrich the experiences of sustainability studies students: The Barry Weshnak '66 and Carol Anne Cawley Weshnak Endowed Scholarship Fund in Sustainability Studies and The David C. Rabold Fund for Interdisciplinary Research in Sustainability.

“Our program in sustainability integrates broad areas of study, including environmental science and policy; business and economics; and innovation and technology within the con-

text of social justice, since we know that climate change and other environmental problems disproportionately impact marginalized people,” says Rich Niesenbaum, professor of biology and director of sustainability studies. “These new gifts reflect the generosity of people who care deeply about these issues. Both of these awards are also consistent with the overall mission

of Muhlenberg—they’re supporting interdisciplinarity and integrative learning, and they’re empowering our students to make the world a better place.”

The Weshnak Endowed Scholarship provides an annual scholarship for one or more high-achieving students who qualify for financial aid and who major in sustainability studies. It was Barry’s interest in sustainability and concern about climate change that spurred

the scholarship, which is given in honor of his parents. The first major sponsor of the Sustainability Studies Program, Barry was a social science major at Muhlenberg and is the owner and principal of Barrymor Enterprises of New Jersey, a real estate development and property management company he co-founded more than 40 years ago.

Prior to his retirement in 2019, David Rabold championed significant campus sustainability efforts in his role as Muhlenberg’s capital projects manager. The Rabold Fund, a retirement gift from his daughter, is the first designated gift for student research in this field and embraces Rabold’s passion for sustainability. The grant is given to students with a major or minor in sustainability studies or to students conducting research in the field regardless of their major under the direction of a member of the College faculty.

Niesenbaum says the interdisciplinarity of sustainability studies is its strength because it addresses crucial issues from a variety of perspectives, which leads to more effective problem-solving. “My goal is for our students to go out and be changemakers in the world,” he says. “These awards provide them the opportunities and experiences to do so.” —KYT

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***“My goal is for our students to go out and be changemakers in the world. These awards provide them the opportunities and experiences to do so.”***

—RICH NIESENBAUM

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*Rich Niesenbaum, professor of biology and director of sustainability studies, and Cole Geissler '21 collaborate on a research project in summer 2019.*

# FALL VIRTUAL EVENTS

## ***Advocating for All Black Lives in the Era of Social Media: A Conversation with the Muhlenberg Community About Inclusive Activism, Social Media and Racism Online***

This conversation served as a space for students to share the ways that they use social media as a transformative tool for racial justice and to discuss their experiences with the racist vitriol they have faced on digital platforms in response to their inclusive activism. Co-facilitators included the Black Students Association executive board, Emanuela Kucik (English and Africana studies) and Roberta Meek (media & communication and Africana studies).

## ***Exit West as a Form of Speech and Action (Center for Ethics)***

After Mohsin Hamid's Spring 2020 campus visit was postponed due to COVID-19, the College decided to again use his novel *Exit West* as the common read for this academic year, with the hope that his visit can take place in Spring 2021. In the first of two events, five faculty panelists discussed the novel from the lens of this year's Center for Ethics theme, "Engaging in Speech and Action." An open discussion for the rest of the campus community took place the following week.

## **Asanni Armon**

### ***In Celebration and Support of Black Trans Lives***

Armon is an activist who founded For the Gwols, a collective for Black transgender communities. They joined the Muhlenberg community for a discussion of their work celebrating and advocating for Black trans lives.

## **Javier Ávila**

### ***The Trouble With My Name***

Ávila's one-man show examines the struggle of many Hispanic Americans to find their place in an environment that is often hostile. Ávila, an author, artist and educator, confronts issues of racism and social injustice with wit.

## **Teng Biao**

### ***From 1989 to 1984: The Formation of China's High-Tech Totalitarianism (CFE)***

Biao is a human rights activist, academic lawyer and former lecturer at the University of Politics and Law in Beijing, China. Following Biao's lecture, Casey Miller (anthropology) and Jeff Pooley (media & communication) led a guided Q&A session and discussion.

## **Zachary Binney**

### ***COVID-19, Sports and Public Health***

What does it mean to create a "bubble" for professional athletes? What are the public health risks of fans attending games? What about high school and college sports? Emory University epidemiologist Binney discussed the complex challenges found at the intersection of athletics and the pandemic.

## **Mary Anne Franks**

### ***The Constitution and Free Speech Fundamentalism (Election Series)***

Franks, professor of law and dean's distinguished scholar at the University of Miami School of Law, spoke as part of the Department of Political Science's eighth Election Series since 1992. Franks serves as the president and legislative and tech policy director of the nonprofit organization Cyber Civil Rights Initiative and is the author of *The Cult of the Constitution: Our Deadly Devotion to Guns and Free Speech*.

## **Keneshia Grant**

### ***The Politics of Black Migration: Questions About the Past, Present and Future (ES)***

Grant, an associate professor of political science at Howard University, studies the political impact of Black migration from 1915 to today. She is author of *The Great Migration and the Democratic Party: Black Voters and the Realignment of American Politics in the 20th Century*.

## **David Hopkins**

### ***Party Politics in the 2020 Election (ES)***

Hopkins, an associate professor of political science at Boston College, is an expert on American political parties and elections. He is author of *Red Fighting Blue: How Geography and Electoral Rules Polarize American Politics* and co-author of *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats*.

## **Terry Madonna**

### ***The 2020 Elections: The Politics of a Divided America (ES)***

Madonna is director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College, where he directs the Franklin & Marshall College Polls. Madonna assessed the Trump presidency, the Trump/Biden presidential election, the politics of a divided America and aspects of Pennsylvania politics.



# Exploring Through Art

Living in Allentown when the College is in session and in Hamburg, Germany when it is not gives Assistant Professor of Sculpture Frederick Wright Jones a broader perspective on his work and his teaching.

**T**he viewer of the art installation “Confusion of Terms” enters a renovated barn and first sees what artist Frederick Wright Jones describes as “a small tar figure with a huge white grin, hair of toothbrushes and an American flag dress.” To the left, a wall of unfinished wood divides the room in half. Three vertical slits cut into the wall allow viewers to see what’s on the other side—rudimentary wooden workout equipment and a looped video of Jones using it while dressed head to toe in red, white and blue.

Jones, an assistant professor of sculpture at Muhlenberg, drew inspiration from former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick and “the political troubles he had gone through by speaking instead of ‘simply playing his game.’” The ideas driving “Confusion of Terms,” which was on display near campus in the fall of 2018, included incarceration, violence and national identity.

“A lot of the themes I’ve been thinking about are coming to a head right now,” Jones says, referring

to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations following the death of George Floyd. “The frustration—of course there has been progress, but it’s always one step forwards, one step backwards.”

Jones splits his time between Allentown, about an hour north of where he grew up, and Hamburg, Germany, where his wife is from. When he’s abroad, his work often explores what it means to be an international citizen. In the United States, he focuses more on themes of history, politics and belonging, including “finding myself in America, coming to terms with that identity, with being African American,” he says.

Raised in a creative environment—his mother was an artist—Jones primarily drew throughout his childhood in rural Pennsylvania. As an undergrad at the Rhode Island School of Design, he took a woodcarving class, and that became his primary medium. His work includes objects that are completed and exhibited as well as idea-based projects, which include multiple elements and could be revisited at any time.

For example, he recently resurrected a project he started in 2008 as a master's student at the University of Buffalo: the NRAACP, or the National Rifle Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Two events in the news at that time—the “Obama gun run,” in which firearm sales spiked after Barack Obama’s election, and the fatal police shooting of Oscar

**“I was thinking, ‘What is the reason for an arts requirement?’ It’s about ways of thinking and problem solving. Art and making should be a process and an exploration.”**

—FREDERICK WRIGHT JONES

Grant III, an unarmed Black man—shaped Jones’ thinking about the project when it began. He carved puppets of American political figures, including Obama, Thomas Jefferson and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and exhibited a “meeting” of the puppets at a gallery in Buffalo, New York. He created T-shirts, hats and bumper stickers with phrases like “guns don’t vote for racists, racists do.” He launched a blog and a website.

When Jones moved to Hamburg in 2011, the project went dormant. He started at Muhlenberg in 2016, living in Allentown during the semesters and returning to Germany for winter and summer breaks. This spring, amid pandemic and protest, he relaunched NRAACP.org.

“There are a lot of things going on, and it’s an election year,” he says. “It’s sad to watch but still hopeful with all the momentum. Publicity does change something, and people are starting to think differently. I don’t think art can save the world, but it’s a way of participating in the dialogue.”

Jones received a Faculty Rising Scholar Award in May, which offers select tenure-track professors who’ve completed their third-year reviews a course

release and funds to hire a student assistant. He’d planned to have a student help him prepare for a January 2021 exhibition in Buffalo, but the pandemic has left the exhibition in limbo, and he does not have a student assistant. Still, he’s using the

course release to complete a new piece, which he describes as “a large gear machine that lifts a hammer up that in the end will destroy the user.”

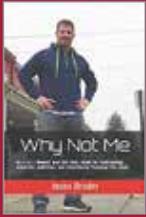
He’s teaching a first-year seminar as well as Sculpture I, the latter of which is being conducted entirely online. When courses transitioned online in the spring, he was focused on sculptural production—he would give students an idea and they would execute it. This fall, his assignments are more about how students might draw inspiration from their experiences or surroundings, how they might go from nothing to an idea to a work in progress to a finished product.

“When I consider a liberal arts education, all students, no matter what their discipline, they’re going to get the idea that you need to work and you need to produce. That’s something I don’t think I need to stress,” Jones says. “I was thinking, ‘What is the reason for an arts requirement?’ It’s about ways of thinking and problem solving. Art and making should be a process and an exploration.” —MK

*Assistant Professor of Sculpture Frederick Wright Jones works in the sculpture studio on his latest project, “a large gear machine that lifts a hammer up that in the end will destroy the user.”*

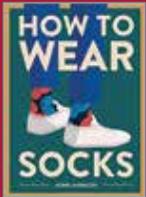


| NEW RELEASES |



**Jason Brader '99**  
*Why Not Me: An A-to-Z Memoir and Self-Help Guide for Overcoming Adversity, Addiction and Relentlessly Pursuing Life Goals*  
 Independently published, 207 pages

Brader is an entrepreneur, inventor, coach and motivational speaker who shares his life's story as well as strategies that helped him overcome the loss of both his parents while in high school as well as addiction and pursue his goal of becoming a collegiate strength coach (a position he holds at Albright College).



**John Jannuzzi '07**  
*How to Wear Socks*  
 Harry N. Abrams, 128 pages

Fashion editor Jannuzzi provides all you need to know about socks—their history, the variety of styles and how to

choose the right pair to accompany your shoes and clothes.



**Richard J. Meagher '93**  
*Local Politics Matters*  
 Lantern Publishing & Media, 152 pages

Meagher, an associate professor of political science at Randolph-Macon College, takes the knowledge that

scholars have gathered from half a century of studying local politics and translates it into clear action steps for citizens.

# A Virtual Collective of Artists



Both Alison Cummins '21, a sociology major with English and creative writing minors, and Sarah Gordin '21, a theatre major, had their spring semesters abroad cut short due to COVID-19. They continued to create—both are writers—but they missed the workshopping opportunities that come with physically being around other artists. Together, they decided to launch a virtual substitute, and Berg Originals was born. Since May, they've hosted 11 Zoom sessions for students, alumni, faculty and others to share their work.

**Muhlenberg Magazine** How did your first event, a play reading and workshop, go?

**Alison Cummins '21** We received seven play submissions from Muhlenberg students and alumni and put out a call for Muhlenberg actors. At the event, the actors read the play for the first time aloud together. Then, the playwrights received feedback in the chat. The turnout really surprised us—we had 50 people show up to have their plays performed, act in a play or watch and provide feedback.

**MM** Which event are you most proud of and why?

**Sarah Gordin '21** Our Pride event, which we co-hosted with S.Qu.Ad. (Students for Queer Advocacy) and MTAC (Muhlenberg Trans Advocacy Coalition). We were able to have a guest speaker come and talk about their artwork and experience. Additionally, the event had original plays, dances, short documentaries, art and poetry, all surrounding Pride. It was such a great way to celebrate people's identities and experiences through creation.

**MM** What have you heard from participants?

**SG** Feedback has been really good. The best comment we received was from a playwright who said, "I would not hesitate to trust Berg Originals with my art again." It is very vulnerable to put your art into the world. This comment let us know that we are creating a safe space in our events.

**MM** What have you learned about your own art from Berg Originals?

**AC** First drafts are not as bad as you may think they are! Berg Originals has helped me be kinder to myself during my writing and editing process. Audience members ask questions that really make you think about what you've created and how you can improve. I think the best way towards improvement is support and generosity, and Berg Originals has shown us just how many artists, in the Muhlenberg community and beyond, embody these ideals.

## Theatre Professor James Peck Receives Prestigious Teaching Award

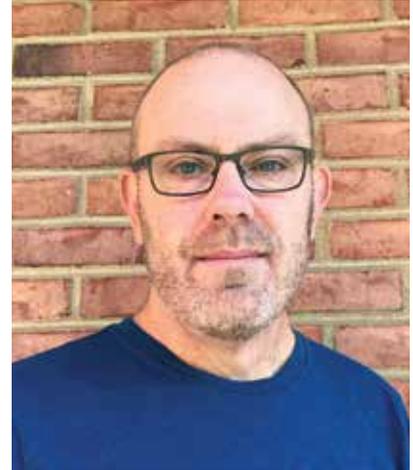
The Association for Theatre in Higher Education presented Professor of Theatre James Peck with the 2020 Oscar Brockett Award, which is given annually to an outstanding teacher of theatre in higher education who has had “a tremendous impact on students” as scholars and artists.

“I am eternally grateful for the cohorts of students I’ve shared space with at Muhlenberg and had the privilege to work with and learn from,” Peck says.

A member of the Muhlenberg theatre faculty since 1999, Peck served as chair of the Department of Theatre & Dance from 2006 to 2013. He has received several awards at Muhlenberg, including the Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching and the Award for Outstanding Advisor to First-Year Students. Peck holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre (directing) from the University of California at San Diego and a doctorate in performance studies from New York University.

“Jim is an extraordinarily dedicated, conscientious teacher and mentor,” says Kelly Howe ’03, an associate professor of

theater at Loyola University Chicago who nominated Peck for the award. “He inspires creativity, curiosity, specificity, rigor, ethical self-reflection and attention to nuance and complexity—not only in classrooms and on stages but also in his work as an administrator, editor and scholar. He engages as a teacher in the same way he moves through the rest of the world: with kindness, genuine care, warmth, self-examination, attention to detail and a profound generosity of spirit.” —*Scott Snyder*



## Lauren Kenney '17 Wins American Psychological Association Award



Lauren Kenney '17, who studied neuroscience at Muhlenberg and conducted research with associate professor of neuroscience and psychology Gretchen Gotthard, has been researching how Parkinson's disease can affect cognition and how to better

determine who might be at risk for cognitive impairment.

Her work as a graduate student at the University of Florida gained national recognition when she was awarded the Blue Ribbon in translational neuropsychology from the

American Psychological Association earlier this year.

The award, Kenney explains, was specific to a retrospective study she conducted—reviewing the outcome of existing clinical studies and drawing conclusions from them—in which she found four cognitive profiles of people with Parkinson's disease.

“Four groups emerged from my findings that included those with normal cognition, mild executive function impairment, prominent executive function impairment and prominent memory impairment,” Kenney says. (Executive function is responsible for certain cognitive skills, including judgment, decision-making and problem-solving.)

The goal of her research is to determine which of these cognitive profiles are most at risk for developing dementia. —*Heather Mayer Irvine*

# Three Virtual Event Series Encourage Community Dialogue

Exploring differing viewpoints is essential to Muhlenberg's mission and values. Three speaker series this fall support the College's principles by promoting civil debate, cultivating civic values and fostering critical thinking.

"Engaging in Speech and Action," the 2020-2021 Center for Ethics (CFE) series, kicked off in September. Its first events for the Muhlenberg community included a faculty panel discussion and a live webinar on this academic year's common read, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*.

"This year's program is oriented toward the question of what it means to engage in speech and action in the present socio-political moment," says Marcia Morgan, associate professor of philosophy and CFE program director. "Our program includes multiple perspectives from numerous contemporary scholars around the globe (from China, Turkey and the U.S.) working in philosophy, history, law, political science and more—scholars whose work directly engages speech and action in the public sphere."

"From the Ashes of Relentless Racial Crises Amid COVID-19: Creating a New United States of America," co-sponsored by the

Africana Studies Program and the Office of Multicultural Life, grapples with our nation's current moment, in which various marginalized racial and ethnic groups are facing a range of crises rooted in the systemic racism that has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to addressing the relationship between COVID-19 and contemporary racial crises facing Asian American, Black American, Latinx and Native American communities, the four-event series explores the historical roots of these devastating predicaments.

"2020 Vision: Contested Political Futures" is the eighth nonpartisan election series coordinated by the Department of Political Science since 1992. The series included five events, beginning with an interview with David A. Hopkins, associate professor of political science at Boston College, in September, and ending with a panel of political science professors in discussion a week after Election Day.

For more information on some of the specific guest speakers who participated in these series, see "Fall Virtual Events," page 9.

## Why I Study ... sports-related brain injuries

Assistant Professor of Public Health Kathleen Bachynski



PHOTO BY TOM AMICO

When I was a junior in high school, I tore my ACL, MCL and meniscus playing soccer. I had to have surgery and physical

therapy. By the time I went on to my master's, I knew so many other people who'd been affected by sports injuries that I wanted to study them from a public health point of view.

Injury is relatively new to public health. There's a long history of treating injuries as random, and if things are random, you can't prevent them. In the '50s and '60s, the building of highways and an

increase in car crashes got people thinking, "Maybe we could apply the same methods we use to figure out patterns and strategies for prevention of infectious disease to car crash injuries." Then, that started getting applied to other kinds of injuries.

I was most interested in bone and joint injuries, but I couldn't find anyone to advise a thesis in that field. At the time, the University of Michigan, where I was studying, had a program that had just begun looking at sport and the brain and was eager to take on students. One of the neurologists advised me on my master's thesis on migraine headaches in athletes compared to non-athletes, and that got me more interested in brain injuries.

That's what I focused on when I went back to get my Ph.D. I chose to look at youth football for my dissertation because more than 95 percent of football players in the U.S. are 18 or under. There are about 1 million high school and 2 million elementary and middle school kids who play. When you're a kid, your head is bigger relative to the rest of your body, your neck muscles are weaker and your brain is still developing. There is worry that the physics of a hit could result in a higher risk for kids. When we're thinking about long-term harms, it's more about the accumulation of lots of hits over a lifetime. Starting to play as a child means many extra years of possible exposure to those collisions.

# A Lasting Legacy



Fifty years ago, on May 30, 1970, Muhlenberg College dedicated the John V. Shankweiler Biology Building, a fitting tribute to the architect of the science and premedical programs of the College. Almost exactly 10 years later, on May 25, 1980, Shankweiler died. To commemorate these anniversaries, the Muhlenberg Memories Project team (Assistant Professor of Media & Communication Kate Ranieri, Special Collections & Archives Librarian Susan Falciani Maldonado and Digital Cultures Media Technologist Anthony Dalton) brought together archival resources and student work to help tell the story of the legacy of “Doc” Shankweiler. Find the digital storytelling project at [muhlenberg.edu/shankweiler50](http://muhlenberg.edu/shankweiler50).

***If you have any items of interest to the Muhlenberg archives, please contact [susanfalciani@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:susanfalciani@muhlenberg.edu).***

# Right Down to the Bones

Alex Denning '09 oversees the University of New Mexico's Laboratory of Human Osteology, which houses the skeletal remains of between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals.

**A**mong the medical artifacts housed in Philadelphia's Mütter Museum are the preserved livers of Chang and Eng Bunker, twin brothers born in 1811 who were conjoined at the abdomen. (The Bunkers were Siamese-American, and out of their fame came the term "Siamese twins.") Their livers were their only organs that were connected, "which was unfortunate, because only one of them was an alcoholic," says Alex Denning '09.

*Denning consults an osteology reference alongside replica bones.*



Denning, who is currently the senior collections manager for human osteology at the University of New Mexico's Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, interned at the Mütter starting in 2014 as their first foray into museum work. Their role involved maintaining wet specimens such as the Bunker liver: replacing fluids, affixing specimens to new mounts and so on.

Prior to that experience, Denning had primarily worked as a field archaeologist. They had studied anthropology at Muhlenberg before earning a master's degree in human osteology (the study of the structure and function of the skeleton) and paleopathology (the study of the pathological conditions found in ancient remains) from the United Kingdom's University of Bradford

in 2012. They used that training to get a job with a cultural resource management company in Pennsylvania.

"If there is a construction project or power lines or pipelines going in, just like environmental studies, archaeological studies need to happen as well," Denning says. "It's mostly carrying lots of heavy gear through the woods and up hills."

Denning occasionally stumbled upon some small sites, but most of the work involved digging without finding anything noteworthy. That's why they contacted the Mütter—they knew of it from growing up outside Philadelphia—to see if any opportunities were available for physical anthropologists or human osteologists. When the Mütter offered an internship involving a slightly different skill set, Denning jumped on it and discovered something important.

"Working with more soft tissue as an intern at the Mütter, I was like, 'Okay, I have the stomach for working with this,'" they say. So, they took on a side job in a hospital morgue as a medical examiner assistant, which involves "preparing a decedent before an autopsy, assisting during the autopsy and collecting all the fluid and tissue samples they analyze for pathology and histology."

The Mütter and the morgue gave Denning the right experience for a long-term, project-based position at Harvard Medical School's Warren Anatomical Museum, which held about 900 wet specimens that hadn't been touched in 80 to 100 years. Starting in spring 2015, Denning worked through the specimens, researching how they came to be and doing preservation and documentation work. Meanwhile, they earned their graduate certificate in museum studies via Harvard's extension school.

After about three years, that project ended. They were working in Boston's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner when they got a call about the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology job, "one of those jobs that you dream about and never really comes around," Denning says. "It pretty much ticked all of the boxes."



Since June 2019, Denning has overseen the Maxwell's Laboratory of Human Osteology, which houses the skeletal remains of between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals. The lab has three collections: a prehistoric collection of archaeological remains, a forensic collection (of the

local medical investigator's "Doe" cases) and a collection from the lab's skeletal donor program. None of these collections are open to the public—they exist only for research purposes.

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***“You can get a fair amount of information even from just one bone, to start reconstructing someone’s life history just from that. While this work might not be for everyone, the collection that I care for is invaluable to the field and to researchers who are seeking to learn about humanity from a biological perspective.”***

—ALEX DENNING '09

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“One of the things I like about my job is there isn't really a standard day,” Denning says. They ensure that the collections are maintained and cared for, that researchers are able to access the material and that the donor

specimens are processed and documented.

Of the few body donation programs in the country that are specifically skeletal, the Uni-

versity of New Mexico's is the only one that does not utilize natural processes. Instead, the body is taken to the local medical examiner's facilities, where Denning removes as much soft tissue as possible before beginning the process of “wet maceration,” which takes about a month.

“We have a large kettle that we maintain at a certain temperature that will aid in removing the rest of the soft tissue,” Denning says. “We do that until we have a nice, clean skeleton.”

A winding career path brought Denning to a place where their focus is on their primary interest and area of expertise—bones. Bones stand the test of time, surviving centuries after the last bits of soft tissue have decomposed. By examining skulls, archaeologists can deduce which population a person came from. Archaeologists can see whether a person had diseases like syphilis, leprosy, scurvy, cancer or tuberculosis just by examining their bones.

“You can get a fair amount of information even from just one bone, to start reconstructing someone’s life history just from that,” Denning says. “While this work might not be for everyone, the collection that I care for is invaluable to the field and to researchers who are seeking to learn about humanity from a biological perspective.” —MK



# Face Masks: No Longer Just for Football

How coaches and athletes are navigating a fall season with major limitations on what can be done in person

PHOTO BY PAUL PEARSON

**K**eeping their teams connected during a pandemic, with first-years mostly on campus and returning athletes mostly scattered at their homes around the country, has required Muhlenberg's head coaches to show some creativity and flexibility. No one has displayed more of the latter than the softball team.

Once a week, the Mules gather in front of their computers to take a virtual barre class with

former women's basketball player and assistant coach Katy Mitton '14, who is an instructor at Barre3 Lehigh Valley in Bethlehem.

Head Coach Sarah Leavenworth came up with the idea after she started taking the class herself (virtually).

"I figured this would be something different and very unlike what they do with DT [Darin Thomas,

Muhlenberg's director of strength and conditioning], so I reached out to Katy, who connected me with the owner of the studio. We have a team membership through the end of November," she says.

Every Wednesday night, Mitton livestreams a 60-minute workout that combines strength and conditioning, cardio and mindfulness. Barre, which draws from yoga and Pilates, is designed to help increase strength (both physical and mental), reduce stress, build a mind-body connection and, yes, improve flexibility.

Both parties are enjoying the pairing immensely. In an Instagram post following one of the sessions, the softball team thanked Mitton, noting that "we really got to work muscles we didn't even know we had."

Whether Zoom is used to take barre classes or talk about academic work and mental health, the platform has become as much a part of sports team practices as pinnies and water bottles as coaches and athletes navigate this unusual semester.

The athletes on campus began in-person practices on August 31, one week after the start

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***"With a smaller team, the last month of soccer practices has been intense and productive, allowing the freshmen to adjust to our style of play."***

—CARLY SHAFFER '21

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of classes, following the NCAA's three-phased return to sports activity. Phase I was characterized by small workout/practice groups, no sharing of equipment and training sessions focused on individual skill work and conditioning. The permitted size of workout/practice groups increased in Phase II, which added shared equipment and organized group activities. Phase III allows for competition.

No intercollegiate competition, though—the Centennial Conference canceled competition through the end of the calendar year in mid-August, after the NCAA announced that there would be no fall championships in 2020.

With the possibility of the fall teams (cross country, field hockey, football, soccer and volleyball) moving their seasons to the spring, coaches are using the fall to work on individual skills with the newcomers while also keeping the returning athletes engaged through regular virtual meetings.

In addition to incorporating mask breaks, distancing and ball disinfecting, coaches also have needed to adjust their practice routines because of the available players. With a large class of 13 first-years, Leavenworth can field a complete softball team. By contrast, the first men's basketball practice of the year featured more coaches (three) than players (two).

The silver lining, of course, is that the first-year athletes are getting more individual attention, which should pay off for them in the long run.

"With a smaller team, the last month of soccer practices has been intense and productive, allowing the freshmen to adjust to our style of play," says Carly Shaffer '21, one of a handful of returning athletes approved to study on campus in the fall. "It has definitely been different without our upperclassmen teammates, and I hope that we will be able to reunite as a team in the spring." —*Mike Falk*



**LISTEN UP:**

***Muhlenberg Mules Podcast Now Available***

While Muhlenberg athletes began their fall workouts in pods (small groups that maintained distance from other groups on their team), Muhlenberg Athletics joined the world of podcasts.

The *Muhlenberg Mules Podcast* debuted in early September and features Mule athletes, coaches, staff and alumni speaking on a wide array of topics.

In the first episode, Director of Athletics Lynn Tubman talked about dealing with the uncertainties of the pandemic, from the perspectives of her role at Muhlenberg and as a parent with two children in college.

Other guests have included the two winners of the Athlete of the Decade contest, CJ Graetzer '14 (soccer) and Matthew D'Ambrosia '20 (baseball). Graetzer discussed her experience working with COVID patients in the ICU at Vanderbilt Medical Center, and D'Ambrosia gave his thoughts on the Major League Baseball rule changes for the 2020 season.

Sophie Chong '21, a member of the Mule softball team, was the first student guest after being elected chair of the Centennial Conference Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. Football Assistant Coach Kory David came on to talk about his experience as a Native American (he grew up on the Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation in New York) and issues facing the Indigenous community.

The *Muhlenberg Mules Podcast* is hosted by Podbean and is available on Apple, Spotify, iTunes and Google. You can ask Alexa to play it!



*Opposite, Lexi Siegel '24 shoots as Elisabeth Loisel '24 looks on at a women's lacrosse practice. At left, John Washington '22, one of a handful of upperclassmen practicing with the football team, runs sprints under the direction of Assistant Coach Brett Sawyer '98.*

# Community Engagement

Too many people overlook local politics, even though it's these leaders who are most likely to shape your day-to-day life.

By Richard J. Meagher '93

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By the time you see this column, you might feel tired of reading, hearing and thinking about the national election. This issue went to press before Election Day, but my fingers are crossed for a timely and clear resolution. Still, it is a good time to remember that the names much farther down the ballot—the races for which the results may have been almost immediately available—may directly affect your life just as much as the next president.

I'm talking about local elections. If you live in one of the cities across the country that held municipal elections this fall, or if you had a chance to elect a county commission, a school board or local officials from the sheriff to the register of deeds, hopefully you voted in those races as well.

It can be easy to overlook our local governments. Civics classes in high school and college most often focus on the national level. Our news media offers daily reports on the president's actions, but not always the local mayor's. The model we use to teach and talk about lawmaking most often is Congress, not a county board. (The "I'm Just a Bill" cartoon from *Schoolhouse Rock* is not about municipal ordinances.)

But it is at the local level where a lot of the action happens in American politics. County, city and town governments have dramatically expanded their roles in the past few decades. Traffic laws, building permits, zoning and marriage licenses are all concerns of local officials. Even elections rely on local government to work; it is your county or city registrar who makes sure your vote is counted.

The two national crises of 2020 have only made the importance of local governance more obvious. During the pandemic, mayors and county board members, along with school superintendents and health district directors, have stepped up to lead when federal officials

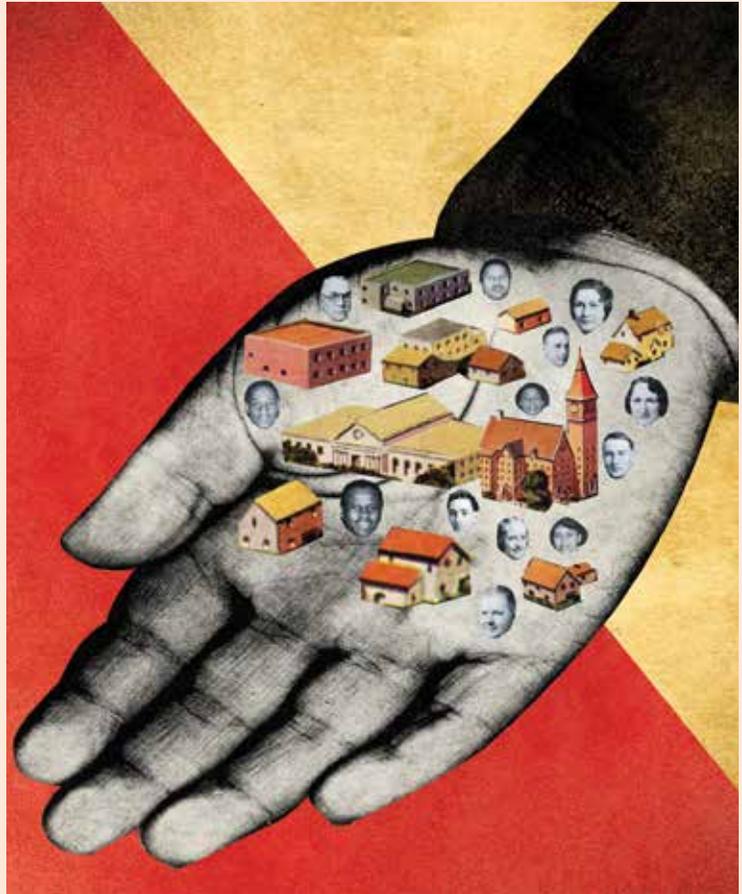
have not. Shuttered schools and libraries are appreciated more than ever in their absence, while city and county workers are picking up the trash and recycling, maintaining water and gas utilities and putting out fires, all under challenging circumstances. On the other hand, the Black Lives Matter protests that began in response to the actions of police—who technically are local bureaucrats—suggest that local governments are also central to some of our most challenging societal problems.

I do not mean to suggest that the national government is unimportant. Decisions made in Washington affect everyone in the United States on a host of vital issues, from health care to immigration to reproductive rights. But even these national decisions are often implemented at the local level. For example, while more than \$500 billion in federal money goes to public schools each year, these funds are administered by local governments and school boards. When Americans need a government service, it is most likely a city or county employee who will provide it to them. In fact, local government workers outnumber state employees three to one and federal employees by almost seven to one.

Thanks largely to the perception of isolated Beltway politicians losing touch with normal Americans, faith in government has declined dramatically, with a historically low percentage of Americans—less than 20 percent in recent polls—saying they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right. Belief in local and state government, on the other hand, is much higher, often ranging from 60 to 75 percent. Still, while we like local officials, very few people pay attention to participate in local government. Turnout in local elections remains incredibly low, with some studies indicating only one in five voters showing up to cast a ballot even in major cities.

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Voting is key, but if you have more time and resources, you could consider attending a city council, county board or school board meeting. Alternatively, you could join up with a local civic association, neighborhood watch group or homeowner's association.



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And yet it is at the local level where you have the most access. There are two United States senators from California, a state of 40 million people. By contrast, California's Alpine County (the state's smallest) has about 1,200 residents, so each of its five-person Board of Supervisors represents about 250 people. Which person—the U.S. senator or the Alpine County supervisor—is more likely to be available to hear a resident's concerns? It may take thousands of letters and emails to move a national official or try to affect the federal bureaucracy while just a handful of voices can make a huge difference at home.

Voting is key, but if you have more time and resources, you could consider attending a city council, county board or school board meeting. Alternatively, you could join up with a local civic association, neighborhood watch group or homeowner's association. Local officials often

love to talk to a collection of engaged voters—it makes communication easier for them, and you can more easily stay informed about important local issues.

If you did not get to vote for local officials this year, your chance will come soon. But you need to pay attention, because some local elections are in odd years or even in the spring. Thankfully, apps like TurboVote make it easy to stay on top of these dates. You should not overlook these elections. While voting is important for any democratic government to work properly, your vote simply counts more at the local level because the scale and scope of the election is so much smaller. When it comes to politics, don't forget to think—and vote—local.

*Richard J. Meagher '93 is an associate professor of political science at Randolph-Macon College and the author of Local Politics Matters (Lantern, 2020).*

# Q&A

## 10 Questions With... Brittany Reese '10

Middle school history teacher  
in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

3

**If you weren't a teacher, what would you be?**

A physical therapist—I earned my master's degree in health, exercise and sport science from The Citadel in 2014.

1

**Describe what you do in five words or fewer.**

Instruct, entertain, counsel

2

**When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?**

The minute I stepped into [Professor of Education Michael] Carbone's education class at Muhlenberg. I wasn't sure if it was for me at the time, but after one class with him, I knew it was what I was destined to do.

4

**What three songs best describe you?**

"Knee Deep" by Zac Brown Band  
"All These Things That I've Done" by The Killers  
"I Need Never Get Old" by Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats

5

**What is your favorite place?**

Clearwater, Florida. It's where my husband and I went on our honeymoon.

6

**What quality in others do you most admire?**

A strong work ethic. I believe it shows someone's character, and it's a quality I respect.

7

**What are you secretly good at?**

Word searches. I've always competed against my students and have only lost once in the last 10 years. (I'm still not over that.)

8

**What's the best piece of advice you have received and who said it?**

An old boss told us to live at home for as long as possible, drive your car until it's dead and save your money.

9

**What historical figure do you most identify with?**

John Adams. He stepped up to lead in uncertain times, and although it was hard, he never lost faith.

10

**Which living person do you most admire?**

My mom, another Muhlenberg alum (Janice Williams '78 P'07 P'10)



ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLIE POWELL

# Muhlenberg in the Media

**A lengthy piece highlighting Muhlenberg's enrollment efforts appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.**

The 7,000-word feature, "Enrolling the Class of COVID-19," details the collaboration between the enrollment team and the campus community to recruit and retain the Class of 2024 during a profoundly challenging year.

**Chris Borick (political science), director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion (MCIPO), and MCIPO's August 2020 Pennsylvania Presidential Election poll received coverage in dozens of outlets.**

CNN, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Hill*, *International Business Times* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* were among the outlets covering the poll. Borick was quoted extensively in an Associated Press article, which ran in 364 outlets nationwide, about the hazards of politicizing the coronavirus pandemic conversation. He was also featured in a *PBS NewsHour* segment about whether President Trump's economic messaging will work in a swing region like Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley in the 2020 election.

**Chrysan Cronin (public health) was interviewed by *The Washington Post* and the Philadelphia NPR station WHYI.**

Both stories dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic—the former about what parents should know as they consider allowing their children to see friends and the latter about what happens to contact tracing when positive patients can't be reached or won't disclose who they've seen.

**Kathleen Bachynski (public health) spoke with *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* about the challenges facing college and professional athletes during COVID-19.**

Each outlet interviewed Bachynski twice for four total articles that appeared over the summer.

**Roberta Meek (media & communication and Africana studies) appeared on two PBS39 programs.**

Meek was a guest on June's "Community Conversation on Systemic Racism: More Than Skin Deep" and July's "Courageous Conversations: Lynching in America."

**Dean for Digital Learning Lora Taub (media & communication), Jenna Azar (instructional design) and the digital learning team were featured in *Inside Higher Ed's* "We're All in This Together."**

The article put the spotlight on Camp Design Online, the College's open-source faculty online teaching program that enabled Muhlenberg to train nearly all faculty members this summer. Other institutions, including Middlebury College in Vermont, incorporated the model into their own faculty training.



PHOTO BY HUB WILLSON

## ***Board of Associates Undergoes Leadership Transition***

On September 1, Karen Shoemaker '83 (above) began her tenure as president of Muhlenberg's Board of Associates, which connects the business, professional and civic leadership of the community with the administration, faculty and students of Muhlenberg College for the purposes of fostering community understanding and support for the College.

The outgoing president, Tony Muir, joined the board in 1990 and led it for eight years. As president, he grew the board's membership each year, launched processes to better manage the board (for example, by enacting officer bylaws) and often spoke at the board's annual events. Throughout his tenure, he remained involved in all aspects of the board's work, from new membership nominations to funding requests for students to community outreach. This year, he helped develop a process by which the board could continue its work amid COVID-19. Muir remains a member of the Board of Associates.

Shoemaker, who was a sociology major at Muhlenberg, joined the board in 2009. She previously served as the board's vice president and as chair of its community engagement awards committee.

"The Board of Associates is an important link between the College and the Allentown community," Shoemaker says. "I am looking forward to leveraging the [board] as a valuable resource to the College and creating new opportunities for the [board] to work with President Harring and the trustees to support and partner wherever possible on the College's Strategic Plan." —MK

# Personally Speaking...



# Kyle Ropski '22

*Economics and sustainability studies double major, Ambler, Pennsylvania*

## **He sees his fields of study as inevitably interconnected.**

"Every environmental science class and economics class I've taken, they talk about each other. The only way that you're going to convince people to move to more sustainable sources of energy is money. With a lot of problematic companies, their infrastructure is so strongly built on nonrenewable resources like fossil fuels, and it costs too much to transition. When we're looking at solutions in my classes, we're saying, 'What is a sustainable yet cost-effective way to mitigate these problems?'"

## **He became president of the nonpartisan BergVotes club his sophomore year...**

"My father is involved in politics in my hometown, so I've grown up understanding the importance of voting. During orientation, all the students were walking out of the Center for the Arts to cross Chew Street, and there was somebody in a BergVotes T-shirt handing out forms and yelling, 'Register to vote!' A week later, BergVotes was dorm-storming in Walz Hall, and I said I wanted to get involved. After two or three months of going to club meetings, I ran for and became secretary. The entire rest of the executive board went abroad this spring, so I decided, 'Might as well run for president.'"

## **...and he's led the group through an election year like no other.**

"In February, the e-board and a couple professors attended the inaugural Eastern Pennsylvania Student Voting Summit in Philadelphia. We drafted a strategic action plan for how we were going to increase voting on campus and make sure all the first-year students got registered. We practically had to throw out the whole plan. This fall became more of a semester designed to make sure that everybody was registered to vote in whichever way was most convenient to them in their situation."

## **He's part of the Muhlenberg Scholars honors program...**

"The Office of Admissions selects a group of students, between 10 to 20 per class year, from all different majors and backgrounds, to be part of this honors program. You're put in a first-year seminar with the other new Scholars, and the group takes one course together each year. As our mission statement says, we're really about people from all different areas of knowledge working together. Two people I'm living with are also Muhlenberg Scholars, so I can thank the program for bringing me some of my best college friends."

## **...and he was able to turn current events into a compelling research project.**

"Last year, our required course was on fairness. When COVID hit, it made for a strong final paper. I worked with my roommates and fellow Scholars, and we focused on the topic of the fairness in distribution of waivers to allow businesses to stay open as essential businesses in Pennsylvania. There were cases where there would be two car dealerships on either side of the street, and one was allowed to be open while the other had to close. We wrote a lot about contractors and construction: Construction of medical facilities was allowed to continue, but in one case, it was a giant medical building that wasn't going to be finished until 2023. That crew was deemed essential. Meanwhile, an independent contractor working to finish residences for students to occupy at the end of summer was not allowed to continue. He was like, 'That project is higher risk because there are more people working there. With this one, it's just me.' We found there was a lot of inconsistency."

## **He and his fellow Scholars are working to create a more unified, supportive program.**

"Before the pandemic hit, we were trying to make the program like more of a family for all four classes of Scholars on campus. We hosted a fall meet and greet last year where we had apple cider and invited all the new Scholars. The week we left campus in the spring, we were supposed to have an event with the Allentown Symphony Orchestra. We want people to be friendly and brainstorm together, because that's when the best ideas come, and that's what the Scholars are all about. If you're a first-year student and you meet a junior at the fall meetup who's taken a 400-level psych class, and you have a question about your intro class, you should be able to ask. We want the Scholars to help the Scholars."

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## 2019–20

# Report of the President

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*Kathleen E. Harring*

This year has been a year of change. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to adapt to new ways of doing things. This is true of our College, our families and our communities.

The pandemic has also shined a stark light on the inequities in our society. This conversation has been with us for some time, but the issues have been exacerbated by COVID-19, which has had an unequal health and economic effect on communities of color. Muhlenberg has been working toward becoming a more diverse and inclusive institution for several years (see “A Community Effort,” page 30, for more about diversity at the College), but we became much more declarative and firm in our position this summer. We did this because of the fundamental belief that we have a responsibility to our campus and our community to change.

Between the public health crisis and national reckoning on racial injustice, there has been more communication and conversation with alumni and parents than at any point in my 36 years at the College. These discussions are important, since opportunities for dialogue and discourse are central to our liberal arts mission. In reflecting on these

exchanges, I keep coming back to one particular comment from a member of our community who was feeling unsettled by everything that was happening. They were concerned there was too much change at the College.

This stuck with me because Muhlenberg, like society, is constantly changing. Change, however, does not mean that we move away from our mission and values. In fact, it’s much the opposite. A strong college—a college that lives out its mission every day—is one that adapts and transforms to the needs and interests of its students and to changes in the world in which it exists. Muhlenberg’s history is replete with change.

More than 100 years ago, Muhlenberg added the Extension School to educate non-traditional students. We remain one of the few liberal arts colleges to offer this opportunity. In 1957, the College began to admit women while most other private men’s colleges would continue as single-sex institutions for another decade or more. The opening of the Baker Center for the Arts in 1976 signaled the beginning of the rise of the performing arts at the College. Our first computer lab opened in 1982 and would change the ways that students learn and work forever. Muhlenberg became the first liberal



arts college in the nation to receive Hillel accreditation and foundation status in 2006. And a year later, the opening of the Multicultural Center created an inclusive and supportive space to foster growth in the diversity of our College community.

Of course, these are major events, but there are changes that take place every day. Last fall, our campus became smoke-, vape- and tobacco-free—the result of an effort that began with student research. We launched a number of hardship initiatives to help our students, including the Muhlenberg Useful Living Essentials or M.U.L.E. Community Cabinet and emergency student grants. These efforts recognize our growing understanding of how to effectively support student success in today's society. The College was recognized for the second time in 10 years with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, one of only 119 colleges and universities nationwide to receive that honor. This recognition acknowledges our sustained efforts to build important connections between the College and the community while fostering a sense of civic duty among our students.

Two other initiatives at the College were recognized nationally last fall as well. The student organization BergVotes received a Silver Seal of

Excellence from the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. This is a result of nonpartisan efforts to increase student participation in the election process. It reflects the work of students and their faculty and staff advisors to grow student voter registration between the 2014 and 2018 elections. Finally, the College's ongoing efforts to become more sustainable and environmentally responsible earned Muhlenberg a rating as a top performer on the Sustainable Campus Index of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education.

All of these achievements reflect the constant and ongoing evolution of Muhlenberg College as a premier liberal arts institution. Most people understand that we are continually striving to be better at what we do, but some see the changes happening today and believe them to be extraordinary. But are they? Not in the context of the College's history.

When I was named a department chair many years ago, along with two other female professors, it

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*A strong college—a college that lives out its mission every day—is one that adapts and transforms to the needs and interests of its students and to changes in the world in which it exists. Muhlenberg's history is replete with change.*

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brought the number of female department chairs from two to five. That was in 1993. And six years later, the College promoted three women to the rank of professor—Joan Marx (Spanish), Jadviga da Costa Nunes (art) and me (psychology)—doubling the number of women in the highest faculty rank.

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*In order to address issues of social injustice in our own community, we must examine our culture, policies and practices. We want to be better. We want to live up to the ideals in our mission and values. We want to be a more diverse, inclusive and equitable institution.*

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Think about that. In 1999, there were only six female faculty at this rank and today 25 women have achieved this accomplishment.

Muhlenberg currently has only three tenured faculty of color, with 10 in tenure-track positions. There are many myths regarding attracting and retaining faculty of color: They are in high demand so

there are bidding wars, there aren't enough of them, the business world is pulling them away. Research on faculty retention, however, shows

that perceptions of belonging, support and community are more likely the reasons why faculty of color choose to stay at or leave an institution. Having a strong support network and a sense of connection to the College is essential for students of color as well.

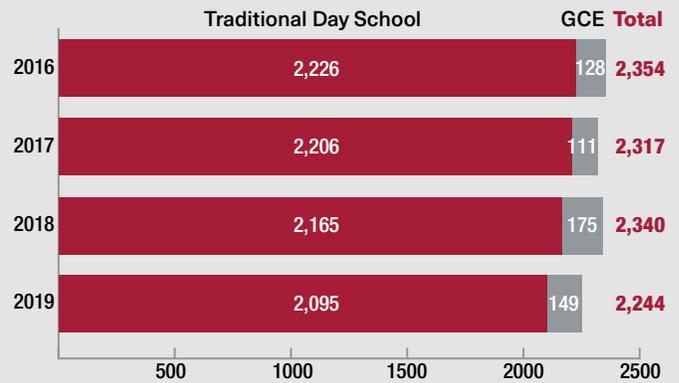
In order to address issues of social injustice in our own community, we must examine our culture, policies and practices. We want to be better. We want to live up to the ideals in our mission and values. We want to be a more diverse, inclusive and equitable institution.

The College's diversity plans and initiatives can be found at [muhlenberg.edu/diversityatmuhlenberg](http://muhlenberg.edu/diversityatmuhlenberg). I encourage you to review these plans and the progress made over the past six years. In a community message from June 16, I outlined actions the College was taking: approval of two tenure-track positions with joint appointments in Africana studies; increased funding for the Office of Multicultural Life; expansion of the Emerging Leaders Program from a two-year program to four years; working with the Allentown Police Department as well as our own Department of Campus



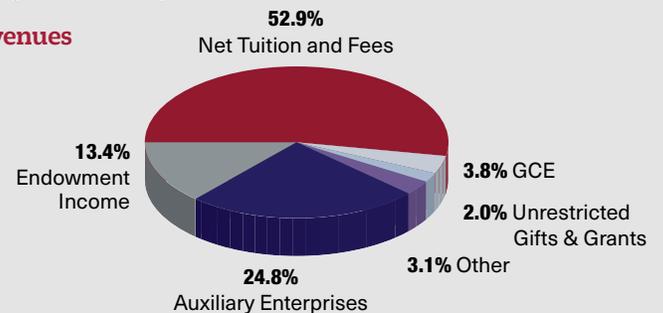
## 2019-20 BY THE NUMBERS

### Total Fall Enrollment

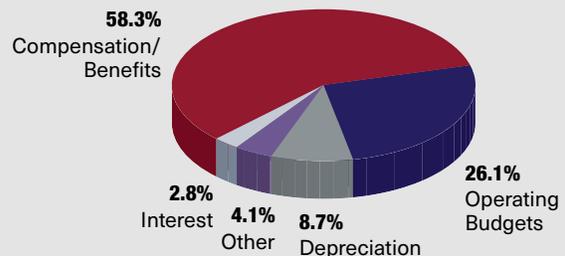


### Budget Summary

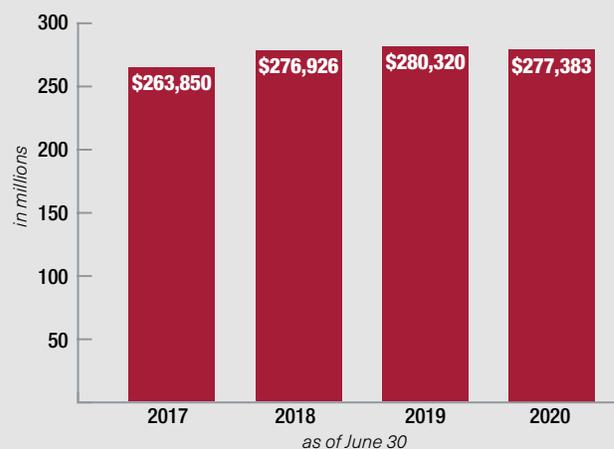
#### Revenues



#### Expenditures



### Endowment Summary



Safety and Police to improve our practices and ensure all community members feel respected and welcome; broadening the scope of Presidential Diversity Innovation Grants to provide funds for anti-racist programs; and adding more opportunities for donors to support areas that improve campus life for students of color.

These are not earth-shaking initiatives and they are not the sum total of what we will do moving forward. The fact is that right now, with all of the uncertainty we face, there will be a lot of change yet to come at Muhlenberg, the kind of change that will define who we are and what we do for our next 173 years. Everything from how we teach and integrate technology to how we build community will evolve much more rapidly than at any point in our history. One thing, however, will remain true—we are a community that cares. Despite all the changes the College has had over its history, Muhlenberg has always stayed faithful to its core values. We need to make sure those values are clearly expressed in the experience of every member of the Muhlenberg family. I look forward to working with all of you to achieve this goal.

BY MEGHAN KITA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
RYAN HULVAT AND  
ALAINA LUTKITZ

a  
community  
effort

**WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE THE CAMPUS CLIMATE SURROUNDING RACE AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION? TRUE TRANSFORMATION STARTS WITH INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF AND ALUMNI WHO PUSH THEMSELVES AND THEIR PEERS—AND BY EXTENSION, THE COLLEGE—TOWARD ANTI-RACISM, EQUITY AND AN UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS WORK IS NEVER FINISHED.**





**T**he speech began like any other, with Visiting Professor of Political Science and Africana Studies Justin Rose thanking the attendees and organizers of the 2013 Martin Luther King Jr. Day event at which he was about to speak. In fact, it took more than 10 minutes for Rose's speech to reach its turning point—the moment when it started to become clear that faculty, staff and alumni of the College might still be talking about his words more than seven years later.

"For those of you who don't know the term 'Muhlenberg Nice,' it refers to the behavior of the students at Muhlenberg College," Rose told the crowd in the Seegers Union Event Space. "It says, in short, that they would rather be nice than to engage in confrontation."

He went on to explain how he had tried to be Muhlenberg Nice and "a good Negro" during his first semester as a Consortium for Faculty Diversity (CFD) Fellow, a one-year appointment that left him feeling conflicted. How was he to respond, he wondered, at a predominantly white institution with predominantly white faculty when students of color sought him out as a mentor or confidant? (At the time, only 11 full-time faculty identified as minority.) How close should he allow himself to become to those students when he knew that his time at the College would be limited to the 2012-2013 academic year?

One thing his speech did was to inform students that he'd accepted a tenure-track job at another CFD

member institution, so he'd be leaving at the end of his one-year term with the College. Once students realized that, the speech became, in the words of Kayla Brown '14, "the greatest parting gift he could give ... He was so raw and truthful about what so many [students of color] were already thinking."

Rose's speech included statements like "I'm claiming that the College does not really care about diversity, but that its goal is only to appear to care about diversity" and "there is not one faculty member or administrator of color who is happy with the climate surrounding diversity here at the College." Roberta Meek '06 P'14 GP'20, a lecturer in media & communication and Africana studies and former lecturer in history, sat in the front row as Rose spoke. She remembers hearing "amens" and the like coming from students behind her and noticing the uncomfortable body language of administrators in the front row across the aisle.

When Rose finished, "the Black students in that audience, the folks who were part of the [Black Students Association (BSA)] who helped to put the celebration together, jumped to their feet," Meek says. "There was kind of a roar from them. It was just an incredibly powerful moment."

It marked the end of Muhlenberg Nice for some students in the audience. No longer would they allow race to be something discussed only within their affinity groups, inside the Multicultural Center or with a small, trusted circle of faculty and staff. Rose's speech began a chain of events that would bring together 13 student leaders, including Brown, in a coalition they'd call the Diversity Vanguard, which brought a list of demands to then-President Randy

*On previous page, top to bottom, left to right: Former Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Karen Green, Associate Director of Admissions and Coordinator of Transfer Admissions Eric Thompson '10, Assistant Professor of English and Africana Studies and Co-Director of Africana Studies Emanuela Kucik, Associate Provost for Faculty and Diversity Initiatives Brooke Vick, Zak Tanne '14, President Kathleen E. Harring, Director of Multicultural Life Robin Riley-Casey, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Allison Gulati, Cristina Perdomo '15, Lecturer in Media & Communication and Africana Studies Roberta Meek '06 P'14 GP'20, Former Senior Associate Director of Admissions and Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment Cindy Amaya Santiago '01, Emeley Rodriguez '15, Adjunct Professor of Women's & Gender Studies Mel Ferrara '15, Kayla Brown '14*



**“He was so raw and truthful about what so many [students of color] were already thinking.”**

*Kayla  
Brown '14*

Helm. The group's action directly resulted in the creation of the College's first Diversity Strategic Plan, which has achieved, among other things, an increase in resources for the Office of Multicultural Life, an expansion of the College's Emerging Leaders Program for students from historically underrepresented groups and an increase in hiring of faculty of color.

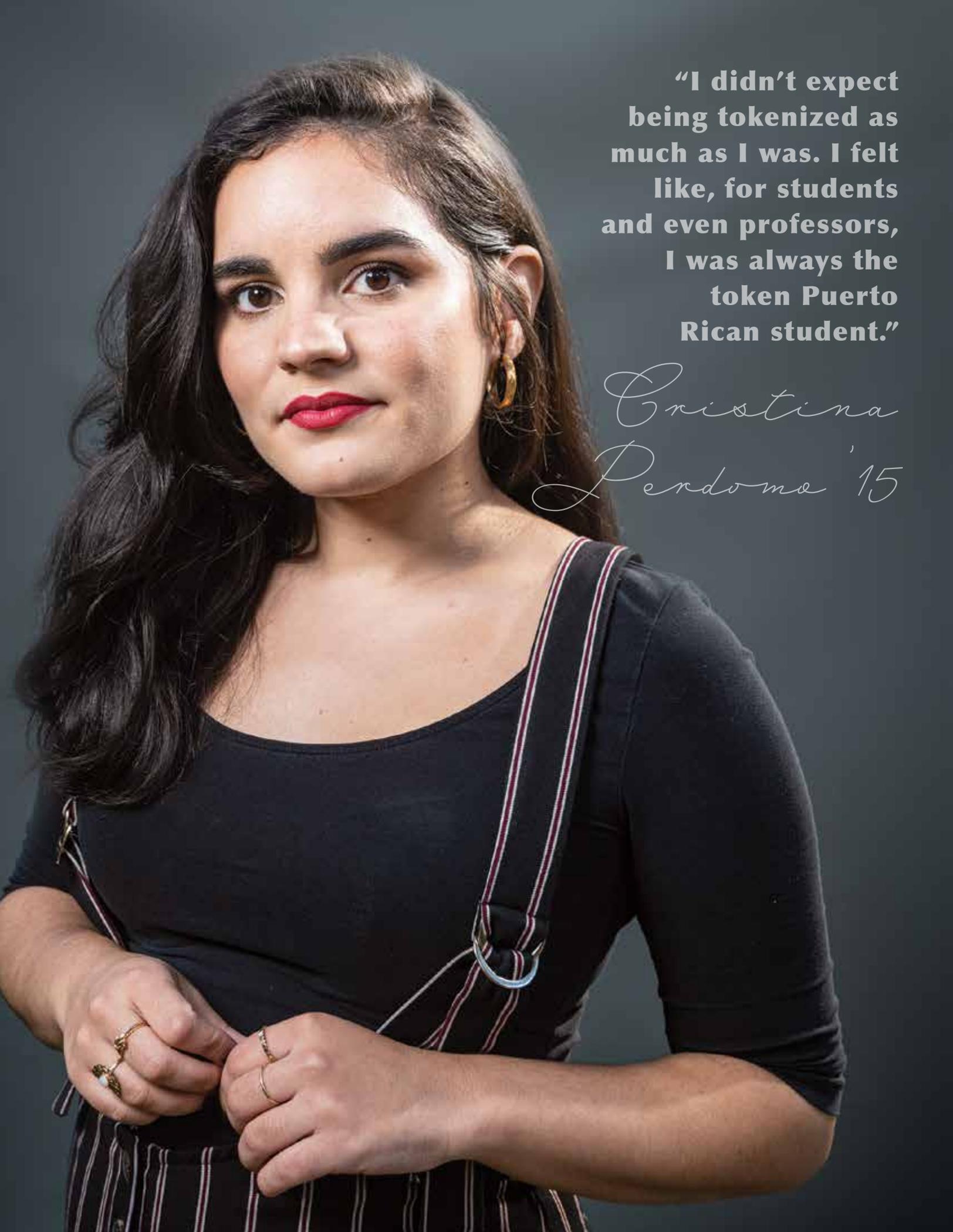
And yet, Muhlenberg has struggled to retain faculty of color—especially Black faculty—and in April 2019, concerns about bias in the College's judicial process inspired dozens of students of color and their allies to protest. While it's true that the Diversity Vanguard and the Diversity Strategic Plan helped the College take steps in the right direction, and that the plan built upon work that came before it, Muhlenberg has continued to be a place where some community members of color feel unsupported.

Current events demonstrate that this is far from just an institutional problem—the entire country is reckoning with issues of race. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated Black and brown communities across the United States, with Black people dying at more than twice the rate of white people. High-profile cases of

police brutality have sustained nationwide Black Lives Matter demonstrations that began in late May.

In June, a group of eight Black faculty wrote a letter and action plan to the Muhlenberg community with requests that were similar to those the Diversity Vanguard students made seven years before—more tenure-track Black faculty and faculty of color, a further expansion of the Emerging Leaders Program, a stronger diversity curricular requirement that would see all students educated on issues of race and power structures. This time, though, there seems to be a greater understanding of what it will take to generate a palpable shift in the campus climate.

“The College is committed to being open and transparent about what we've done and what work we still need to do *as a community*—and that's the key thing. I don't know if we have framed the work that needed to be done as community work in the past,” says President Kathleen E. Harring. “In thinking about how true transformation takes place, it has to be a community effort. In order to truly have authentic, meaningful change, everyone needs to be working toward the same goals. The bottom line is, the institution is our



**“I didn’t expect  
being tokenized as  
much as I was. I felt  
like, for students  
and even professors,  
I was always the  
token Puerto  
Rican student.”**

*Cristina  
Perdomo '15*

people, and in order for true change to occur, people need to be committed to making that change and to actually implementing it.”

# Conditions on Campus

In the semesters leading up to Rose’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day speech, Director of Multicultural Life Robin Riley-Casey remembers hearing from students of color on campus who were struggling. (They were also relatively few and far between—just 2.7 percent of students identified as Black and 4.3 percent as Hispanic/Latino, compared to 4.3 percent as Black and 9.2 percent as Hispanic/Latino today.) She says they would experience microaggressions—comments or questions from faculty, staff or fellow students that, while not overtly racist, made them feel singled out due to their race or ethnicity. At the time, the College lacked a formal reporting structure for any kind of bias incidents. Students would often bring their stories to Riley-Casey, who worked to handle these reports with then-Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Karen Green. It was “very ad hoc,” Riley-Casey says. And not all aggressions were micro: Rose recalls hearing of a then-recent incident in which someone had used the n-word on campus when he came for his interview in the spring of 2012.

Emeley Rodriguez ’15, who would go on to be part of the Diversity Vanguard, remembers a white student asking her how many people she’d seen get shot while growing up in the Bronx. “Some of the questions I’d get ... The ignorance was so prevalent,” Rodriguez says. “It was a bigger problem than just fellow students. I have stories for days.”

Her friend, roommate and fellow Diversity Vanguard member Cristina Perdomo ’15 was one of two students in her class recruited from Puerto Rico. She remembers hearing surprised comments like, “You don’t have an accent! You’re so articulate and intelligent.” She felt students and faculty treated her as the “token Puerto Rican student” and found a safe space in the Multicultural Center and its affinity groups. (She was co-president of Comunidad Latina when the Diversity Vanguard formed.)

Both were in the audience for Rose’s speech, which took place on a Sunday afternoon. As

the crowd mingled afterward, white students expressed shock at what he said—they largely did not know how students, faculty and staff of color were feeling—and students of color expressed shock that he’d said those things in a public forum. The discussion percolated on campus for a few days. Then, that Wednesday, Helm sent out a campus-wide email with the subject line, “Request for Comments: A New Draft of Muhlenberg’s Diversity Statement.” In it, he shared a recent revision of the statement, which had first been released in 2006, and invited feedback. He included no mention of Rose’s speech, the ensuing discussion or further action items to address diversity, equity and inclusion on campus.

“I think [Rose’s] speech was very powerful. It really motivated and energized the students on an important issue. Having said that, when the president is going to issue a call to the community to discuss something, I wanted it to be about the important issue,” Helm says of the email. “I didn’t want to be taking sides on a speech that raised the issue, because the speech itself was not the issue. The issue was the issue. Diversity and the campus climate was the issue.”

Some read the email differently. For example, Rodriguez describes it as “an attempt to put a Band-Aid over a small cut, and somehow he made the cut bigger.” Students came to find Riley-Casey in the Multicultural Center, and they were angry. She recalls marching with students over to Trexler Library, where Meek was teaching, and rapping on the classroom window. The students had drafted a letter of outrage, and they wanted Meek to sign it, and they wanted to hand-deliver it to Helm’s house that night. Meek met with the group after class and encouraged the students to slow down and think strategically.

Mel Ferrara ’15, who was co-president of Students for Queer Advocacy at the time and is now an adjunct professor of women’s & gender studies, remembers receiving a text from the other co-president, Luis Garcia, summoning them to campus. That night, Ferrara and the other affinity group leaders—now calling themselves the Diversity Vanguard—worked with Riley-Casey and Meek to draft an email to Helm requesting a meeting.

The next evening, the Diversity Vanguard hosted an open house at the Multicultural Center for all stu-

dents to discuss suggestions for improving diversity, equity and inclusion on campus. About 80 students showed up.

"I don't think I realized we had that many people who cared," says Brown, who was president of the Multicultural Council at the time. "First of all, 80 people couldn't fit in the Multicultural Center. We were hot and on top of each other, but it was really nice to see. Even though it was 80 compared to how big the campus is, it was 80 people we didn't even know we had."

The Diversity Vanguard helped whittle down the ideas that came out of that meeting into a list of 32 goals, most of which dealt with issues of race and ethnicity, that represented the overall spirit of the students' requests. Then, they set about preparing for their meeting with Helm, which would take place the following week in the Multicultural Center.

## A Plan Takes Shape

For some of the Diversity Vanguard students, the February 1, 2013, meeting with Helm and his senior staff would be the first of many they'd attend with him. The most tangible result of the meeting would be Helm's commitment to creating a strategic plan on diversity, with four students from the group to serve on the planning committee. That day, the students pitched their ideas to the attendees: the administrators as well as members of the faculty coalition that had announced support for the students and allies like Meek, Riley-Casey and Cindy Amaya Santiago '01, who was then senior associate director of admissions and coordinator of multicultural recruitment.

"I knew the students had been getting ready to be part of this conversation, but they impressed the heck out of me that day," Amaya Santiago says. "They came ready with their talking points and ready to engage. They came ready to not just say, 'You're wrong, as an institution,' but they came ready to suggest actionable items."

Soon, the Diversity Vanguard students were meeting again to determine who would sit on the diversity strategic planning committee. They wanted to represent as many affinity groups as possible with their limited number of slots and also acknowledge

that the committee would be a time commitment not everyone could manage. The group selected Brown (who was also a member of the BSA), Ferrara (who also belonged to the Feminist Collective), Garcia and Zak Tanne '14, co-president of Comunidad Latina. When Ferrara went abroad in the spring of 2014, Rodriguez, who was president of the multicultural sorority, Theta Nu Xi, and a member of Comunidad Latina, took their place on the committee.

The committee would meet 19 times between April 2013 and April 2014. In addition to the Diversity Vanguard students, its membership included six faculty members, a Student Government Association representative (Adelaide Matthew Dicken '14), nine staff (including Helm, who chaired the committee, and Haring, who was then dean of institutional assessment & academic planning), a trustee representative (Barbara Crossette '63) and an alumni representative (Adrian Shanker '09).

While the committee members had a shared objective in theory, in practice, even getting the group to agree upon how it should define diversity was a contentious, multi-meeting process. The Diversity Vanguard students and their staff and faculty allies repeatedly stated that issues of race and ethnicity should be the committee's focus; Helm repeatedly challenged them.

"I was pretty clear in my own mind that race, ethnicity and class were the central issues, but I also believed that to definitively exclude other marginalized groups would invite division and acrimony, distracting us from our important work and turning groups that should be natural allies against each other," Helm says today.

Ferrara recalls their attempts to explain the concept of intersectionality: that in working to dismantle racism, the group would simultaneously be working to dismantle sexism, homophobia and other types of bias.

"I think there's a danger in diluting the definition of diversity to not be addressing issues of systemic oppression and power," they say. "I felt like that was one place for me as a white, queer and trans student to try to leverage the privilege of my whiteness to try to talk to President Helm specifically: 'You're trying to say this isn't going to work for students who are experiencing homophobia and transphobia. I'm telling you it is.' There was a fundamental ideologi-

cal disconnection between certain members of the administration, students and faculty.”

Amaya Santiago characterizes the meetings as full of misunderstandings, difficult conversations and heated emotions. This was inevitable, given the subject matter and the diversity of the strategic planning group itself, but the administration recognized the importance of having these disparate voices at the table.

“You need to have a broad swath of the community, from top to bottom, because diversity should be woven through everything that is done at an institution,” Green says. “With a large group, the process becomes even more convoluted and slow, but that needs to occur. This group had not been together to talk about these very contentious issues, so we needed to unpack the uneasiness about talking about race ... Yes, it’s uncomfortable. Yes, people are defensive. Yes, people are speaking their truth to power. But if we’re going to make

a difference in an institution, these are the steps that must take place.”

The alumni who were students at the time recall feeling frustrated—at the pace of the work, that they were not feeling heard, and finally, by the scope of the plan, which would encompass some but not all of the original student demands: “As the process went on, it became clear that we’re really going to just be the first step,” Tanne says. “This isn’t going to be this massive change we thought it might be.”

“It was hard and sometimes contentious. And yes, I understand that some were not happy with the way things unfolded,” Haring says. “It didn’t pave the road the students wanted, but it did pave the road to change. The process was successful at creating a strategic plan to improve diversity and inclusion at Muhlenberg and the progress that the College has made over the past seven years—including our current commitment to anti-racism—is a direct result of those difficult conversations.”



**“I think there’s a danger in diluting the definition of diversity to not be addressing issues of systemic oppression and power.”**

*Mel  
Ferrara '15*

**“As the process went on, it became clear that we’re really going to just be the first step. This isn’t going to be this massive change we thought it might be.”**

*Zak Tanne '14*



## **From Plan to Action**

The Diversity Strategic Plan, approved by the Board of Trustees in October 2014, did have tangible effects. It created the position of assistant director of multicultural life (now held by Kiyaana Cox Jones) and expanded the Emerging Leaders Program. It established stipends for students who otherwise would not be financially able to participate in short-term study abroad and alternative spring break opportunities. It led to changes in hiring practices that have helped increase the percentage of full-time faculty who identify as minority from 6.6 percent in the 2012-2013 academic year to 13.7 percent in 2019-2020. It created the position of associate dean for diversity initiatives, which was later expanded to the full-time position of associate provost for faculty and diversity initiatives. Brooke Vick has held that position since July 2018.

“Part of my priority [when I started] was getting us organized and focused around what we have accomplished, what is left to do and what we should prioritize going forward,” Vick says.

One of her top priorities is ensuring the College retains faculty of color once they’re hired. For privacy reasons, the College does not disclose how employees identify in any specific racial/ethnic category; the public-facing Common Data Set uses the nonspecific term “minority faculty” to include those “who designate themselves as Black, non-Hispanic; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; or Hispanic.” However, the institutional data from 2016-2019 show a relatively flat number of Black faculty in particular—even as the College hires more, it loses them in roughly equal numbers. When Vick arrived, several Black faculty had recently departed.

“It wasn’t just that they left—they left and made a statement about why they were leaving,” says Vick, who has promoted connections between faculty

of color (via social gatherings, email listservs and a two-day retreat held in partnership with other Pennsylvania Consortium for the Liberal Arts institutions) to begin working toward greater retention. “I wish I could say, ‘In two years, I have solved this issue.’”

Other work to change the systems and processes that disadvantage students, faculty and staff of color has built off the work of the Diversity Strategic Plan. For example, the plan called for an outside consultant to review all College policies. That process led to a strengthening of the hate/bias policy and a clear, online reporting method for such incidents. Meanwhile, the College’s longtime director of Title IX was retiring, so Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Allison Gulati used the opportunity to expand that role.

“Students wanted to make sure our responses to hate and bias were equal to our gender violence response,” she says. Since June 2018, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Equity and Title IX Lin-Chi Wang has been the point person to field reports of bias, discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct.

Gulati’s office has also prioritized “supporting all students, but particularly underrepresented students, experiencing financial hardships.” Three main initiatives work toward this goal: the Muhlenberg Useful Living Essentials (M.U.L.E.) Community Cabinet, which provides food and hygiene items for students; Experiential Learning Grants, which support curricular and co-curricular experiences like conference attendance; and the Emergency Grant Fund, which launched in summer 2019 and has distributed \$80,000 to 230 students since.

“It is important that we’re always thinking about how to be more equitable and inclusive for students of all backgrounds and experiences,” Gulati says. “When we see one population hurting or being disenfranchised more than another, we need to focus our attention toward that in a more direct way.”

The continuation of student activism on issues of racial injustice on campus shows that, despite the progress the College has made, it still has more work to do. Associate Director of Admissions and Coordinator of Transfer Admissions Eric Thompson ’10 has witnessed Muhlenberg’s evolution since he started as a first-year student in 2006, but he hears today’s students of color talking about their experiences in the same ways he and his peers did.

“I’m a staff mentor for Emerging Leaders and I direct the Gospel Choir, which is a diverse group of students. When students are protesting that they don’t have resources or aren’t getting support, I know I’m out here giving support. It was hard to take,” he says of the April 2019 demonstration. “I love the student advocacy. It’s just frustrating that 13 or 14 years later, students are still feeling this way.”

## A Turbulent 2020

April 2019 feels like a lifetime ago, a time when the biggest health threat to Muhlenberg was a potential mumps outbreak that never materialized. In April 2019, campus was home to all four classes of Muhlenberg students (not just first-years), and faculty and staff were expected to teach and work in person. An individual walking down Academic Row wearing a mask would be the exception rather than the rule. Nationally, COVID-19 and the disproportionate burden it has placed on communities of color created an environment ripe for the Black Lives Matter demonstrations that have taken place across the country and generated an unprecedented amount of support.

“Part of what makes this movement different is it’s more widespread,” says Emanuela Kucik, assistant professor of English and Africana studies, co-director of Africana studies and one of the Black faculty letter’s co-authors. “There’s a larger number of people from a broad range of racial and ethnic backgrounds involved. That’s created a national moment that has urged schools to respond in meaningful ways.”

While the College did respond publicly—including several community messages from Haring and a statement from the Board of Trustees affirming the College “will do better and more to dismantle racism and injustice”—it also committed to actions that advanced goals shared by the College and Black faculty. Haring pledged to increase funding and resources for the Office of Multicultural Life and the Emerging Leaders Program. She also announced approval for hiring two tenure-track faculty positions with joint appointments in Africana studies to expand the program.

Kucik and Connie Wolfe, the other co-director of Africana studies and an associate professor of psychology, are using this academic year to enrich and restructure the program (by adding a community engagement component, beginning to build a Center for Anti-Racism and establishing Africana studies as a central vehicle for programming that responds to the current moment, among other things) and have chosen to conduct the faculty searches next fall. On the programming front, Kucik and Wolfe co-organized a number of racial justice events that were co-sponsored by the Africana Studies Program and held virtually (see page 14 for more information).

Harring also asked the President's Diversity Advisory Council (PDAC), which Vick chairs, to produce a list of diversity, equity and inclusion priorities for the current moment. PDAC drew upon previously discussed initiatives (including the incomplete items from the Diversity Strategic Plan) and discussed new ideas before making its recommendations. Of the six top priorities, three concern facilitating education on issues of white supremacy and structural racism to reach all members of the campus community—students, faculty and staff.

"What education does is give people the background and the context to understand what's happening around them, and it expands their perspectives," Kucik says.

For students, this educational component would take place via required courses in race and power structures and a proposed requirement in extracurricular activities related to racial justice to carry their education on the topic beyond the classroom. Muhlenberg's Academic Policy Committee and the authors of the Black faculty letter are collaborating to move this initiative forward. For faculty and staff, one of Vick's priorities for this academic year is to develop a curriculum about anti-racism, inclusion and cultural competency to be offered at least annually. She envisions a tiered system—people who are early in their learning could take a session tailored to beginners, with the opportunity to move on to intermediate and advanced sessions later.

"Without understanding the dynamics, institutions and systems that shape our individual experiences, we're not able to come together thoughtfully," Vick says, "and without that education, we're more likely to be harming one another out of ignorance."

But Muhlenberg students, faculty, staff and alumni are not just waiting for the College to present them with opportunities to learn more about racial injustice and to be part of the solution. The Alumni Board has committed to including diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in the strategic plans for each of its six committees. Riley-Casey says that requests from student groups for workshops on issues like implicit bias and making their facilities more anti-racist and inclusive have skyrocketed. Vick, too, says that academic and administrative departments have reached out to her for training and information on an unprecedented scale.

"What has changed is there is a lot more higher-level thinking about this. Previously, this work had been more siloed. There had been the usual suspects always doing this work," Vick says. "Now, everybody is feeling an increased level of responsibility to be accountable on these things."

## What We Stand For

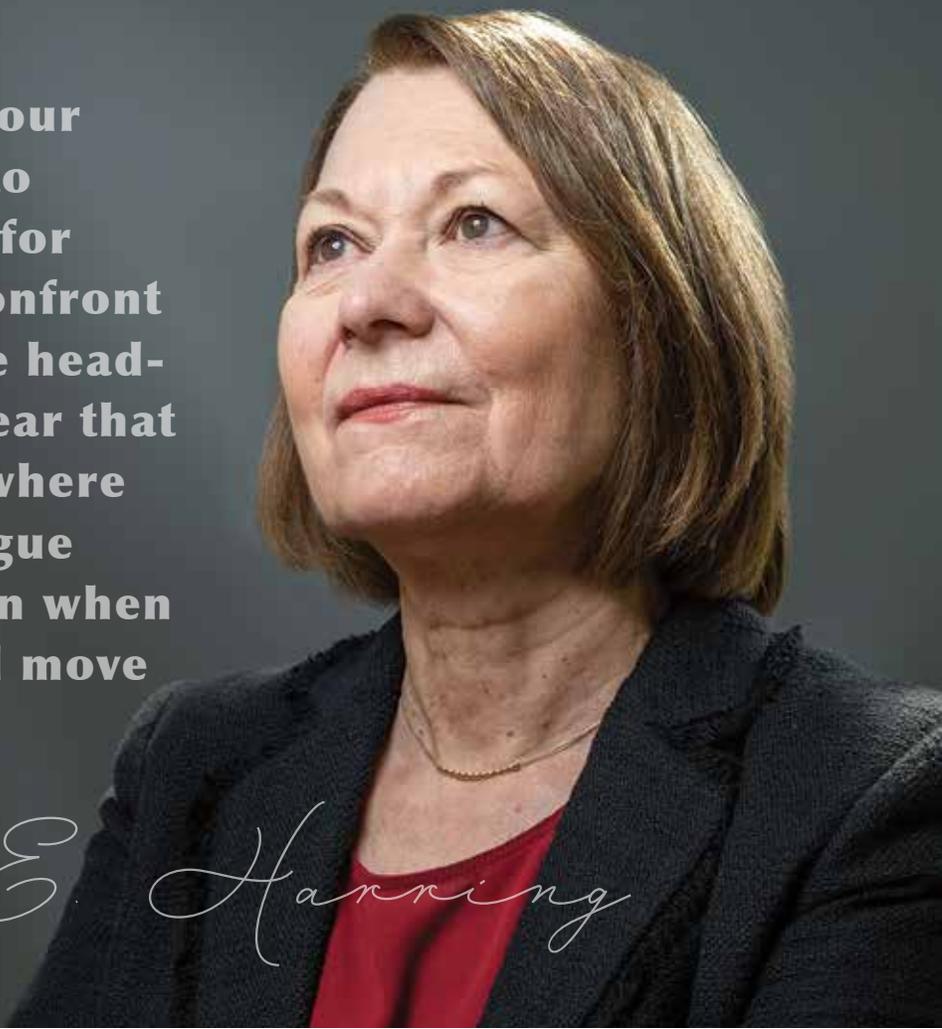
While that happens on a community level, what is happening on an institutional level is an intentional commitment to making the College's values abundantly clear and to having the difficult but important conversations—an attitude that is the antithesis of "Muhlenberg Nice."

"If we are going to live our values, if we are going to make this a community for everyone, we need to confront issues of racial injustice head-on. We need to make clear that Muhlenberg is a place where we will engage in dialogue about these issues—even when it's uncomfortable—and move toward action," Harring says.

This commitment was put to the test in late summer. Some students noticed that the 'Berg Bookshop was selling masks adorned with the "thin blue line" flag, which has been viewed as a symbol of solidarity with law enforcement but co-opted by groups that stand in opposition to the movement to address racial injustice and violence against Black and brown communities. The bookstore does not normally sell merchandise that supports any political or social cause, and when students shared their concerns, the administration ensured the product's removal. Chief Business Officer and Treasurer Kent Dyer sent a community message in mid-August addressing the

**“If we are going to live our values, if we are going to make this a community for everyone, we need to confront issues of racial injustice head-on. We need to make clear that Muhlenberg is a place where we will engage in dialogue about these issues—even when it’s uncomfortable—and move toward action.”**

*Kathleen E. Harring*



issue and detailing what would happen next, including further discussion of the incident.

A dialogue between the students and the 'Berg Bookshop manager took place in mid-September, was facilitated by Riley-Casey and Gulati and went well, says Riley-Casey. In October, Jones facilitated a meeting between Riley-Casey and Campus Safety; it was an opportunity for Riley-Casey to share why she asked for the masks to be removed and for officers to listen and respond.

"All our responsibility is to the students," she says. "That was my intent, to protect—as [Campus Safety officers] do—our students, when they called upon me. I have a duty to make the campus aware when controversial imagery or language weakens the bonds of our community. I think the officers heard that. They may not agree with the way I handled it, but they heard that and understood."

Riley-Casey says she is "really quite impressed with the College" for its handling of the mask situation. It acted to remove the product in question and to ensure students, faculty, staff and alumni understood what had taken place. It supported opportunities for community members with different perspectives to engage in dialogue and restore trust. And it did not back down, even in the face of aggressive pushback following national media coverage of the incident. This is the way forward, says Harring.

"We need to be open and transparent about our values and engage in community dialogue about how our values inform the work we do every day at the College," she says. "Communicating the initiatives, the actions and the community progress that align with our values is critical for not just our campus community but for the greater community to understand who we are and what we stand for." 





# That's Center to

By April Johnston  
Photography By Scott Gries

**O**n the night of February 1, 2004, Jennifer DeGuzman '93 huddled in the press tunnel under Reliant Stadium in Houston, Texas. Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake had just wrapped up their Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show. The performance was a euphoric haze of flashing lights, black leather and choreographed limbs, so it took several minutes for the yelping and



Jennifer DeGuzman '93, vice president of communications at the National Geographic Channel, reflects on a 25-year career in public relations that began at MTV.

# inmement

high-fiving MTV employees who had produced the show—DeGuzman included—to realize that something had gone terribly awry.

In the final moments of Timberlake's "Rock Your Body," he ripped away part of Jackson's costume, revealing more of the pop star's physique than broadcast television standards would allow.

DeGuzman watched as Timberlake's publicist hastily drafted a statement, penning the phrase

that would go on to permeate the culture and eventually make the pages of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: "wardrobe malfunction."

That moment is just one of the many in DeGuzman's career that made her pause and ponder, "Is this really happening? Am I really part of this?" Because when you work in entertainment for the better part of two decades, life can be a bit surreal.

“I had no idea what I was doing—none. I cut my teeth [at MTV]. I really worked hard to learn best practices and trends. I read all the trade magazines and asked a lot of questions, because you only know what you know.”

Jennifer DeGuzman '93

**D**eGuzman, a self-described introvert who grew up in northern New Jersey as the oldest of three children, chose to cross state lines and attend Muhlenberg because, despite visiting several campuses, it was the only one that felt like home. She earned a psychology degree from the College in 1993 and worked at a personnel agency before landing the job that would launch her into the entertainment industry.

She had just finished reading the best-selling self-help book for job seekers *What Color is Your Parachute?* and was inspired to apply for a spate of positions that aligned with her twin passions of music and television. Though she envisioned herself working at a record label, an opening in the human resources department at MTV seemed like a good alternative, so she sent her resume to the main office.

At the time, DeGuzman was convinced that human resources was her professional path. She'd majored in psychology because she'd always been curious about how people think and what motivates them. Those were questions she got to contemplate again and again as she helped employees navigate their careers. But human resources also offered a peek into the goings-on inside other departments, and she soon developed a fascination for communications.

After a brief stint in international marketing, she found her way into public relations, where she was hired as an assistant. It was a humbling experience. She was new to communications, and many of the top publicists were younger than her by several years.

“I had no idea what I was doing—none,” she says. “I cut my teeth there. I really worked hard to learn best practices and trends. I read all the trade magazines and asked a lot of questions, because you only know what you know.”

Her diligence paid off. She was quickly promoted, and thanks in part to short staffing and in part to an all-hands-on-deck attitude, the prevailing mantra in the office soon became, “Let’s just send Jenn.” She ended up landing assignments that other rookie publicists couldn’t fathom, including representing the network at a Seaside Heights Borough Council meeting during *Jersey Shore*’s heyday.

“I don’t think I could ever replace that experience at MTV,” DeGuzman says. “It really taught me how to be my own person and helped develop my voice. It made me who I am.”

It also launched a thousand stories. She was at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2001 when Britney Spears sauntered onto the stage with a boa constrictor draped over her shoulders and again in 2003 when Spears shared an infamous kiss with Madonna. She joined the production teams of *MTV Beach House* and *MTV Spring Break* on location, witnessing the music-fueled, all-day debauchery firsthand. She helped orchestrate the rise of the fantastically absurd hit *Jackass*, still one of her all-time favorite shows.

**S**he likely would have stayed at MTV and continued to rise through the public relations ranks—she peaked as the senior director of communications—if not for her husband’s job offer in Jakarta, Indonesia. Her husband had fully supported her career trajectory, and she felt he now deserved the same. The family, which by that

time included preschool-aged twins, packed up and moved to Asia in 2008. After 11 years of hustle and travel at MTV, DeGuzman, pregnant with her third child, vowed to use the time abroad to relax.

To no one's surprise, the promise didn't stick.

"Anyone who knows me knows that it wasn't going to last," she says. "I'm not built to stay home."

Instead, she took a job as a public diplomacy associate in the Public Affairs Section with the U.S. Department of State in Indonesia, where she helped to develop an English radio program and to track activities, initiatives and events. Once her husband's project ended and the family returned to the U.S., she joined Bravo Media as its vice president of communications and then moved to AOL to serve as the senior director of corporate communications.

The AOL role was her first foray into the fast-paced, quick-to-pivot world of digital communications. There, she managed consumer publicity for *The Huffington Post's* lifestyle hub and AOL's homepage. Even for someone accustomed to the clip of the entertainment industry, the AOL job was a trying task.

"I'm so glad I took that chance," she says. "It helped me to learn to shift gears at a moment's notice."

Unfortunately, it was a lesson she had to put to use when AOL decided to suddenly alter its strategic plan and lay off much of her department in September 2011.

Early the next year, on the referral of a former colleague, she applied for the role of vice president of communications at the National Geographic Channel. It was quite a departure in approach and tone from her past employers.

"I came from pure entertainment," DeGuzman says. "National Geographic is television, but it's not MTV; it's not Bravo. But I thought, 'It's a brand I can stand behind.'"

The networks' standards and practices offices offer an example of the dichotomy. At her previous channels, the moral guidelines were pretty simple: no foul language, no nudity. At National Geographic, every moment of every program must be fully authentic and based in facts.

"It's entertainment with a purpose," DeGuzman says.

But that doesn't mean the experiences are any less extraordinary. She worked with exec-

utive producers Ron Howard and Brian Grazier on the channel's first scripted television series, *Genius*, and then celebrated Emmy nominations with Howard. She flew from New York City to Washington, D.C., in a helicopter with General David Petraeus to attend the premiere of *American War Generals*. She promoted projects based on the research of giants like Jane Goodall (the famous primatologist) and Bob Ballard (the underwater archaeologist who discovered the remains of the Titanic). She traveled to France, Spain, Italy, Morocco, Hungary and the United Kingdom.

"I love being part of something bigger than myself," she says. "It's about the global power of storytelling to change the world."

Maybe because she is so immersed in the world's interconnected nature, or maybe because she's reached a point in her career where she can ruminate on its beginnings, she is quick to point out that her success has not developed in a vacuum. The experiences would not have been possible without support, both professional and familial.

At MTV, she worked for a series of women she describes as strong and powerful, and she credits them with providing a map to navigate her own career.

"They really showed me what was possible, that I could be me," she says.

But she reserves most of her gratitude for her husband and children, who have pushed her to take on challenges and encouraged her even when that meant long, hectic days and many stretches away from home. Overseeing publicity for a national cable channel is an all-encompassing effort.

"I have such an amazing family who allow me to have this," she says.

She hopes her hard-working example resonates with her children, who are now 17 (the twins) and 11. She wants them to have the courage to take their own risks and confront their own challenges when that time arrives.

"I hope they find their true passion," DeGuzman says. "I want them to appreciate that the world is a big place and they can do more. I will be supportive of their dreams as they were supportive of mine." 

DeGuzman with  
Ron Howard



The background of the entire page is a microscopic image, likely of cells, with a color palette dominated by deep purples, magentas, and bright reds. The cells are out of focus, creating a bokeh effect with soft, glowing spots of light.

# SCIENCE

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# MUHLENBERG

THE COLLEGE HAS  
A LONG-STANDING  
REPUTATION  
FOR SCIENTIFIC  
EXCELLENCE. LEARN  
WHAT MAKES  
MUHLENBERG'S  
PROGRAMS SO  
STRONG AND THE  
SCIENTISTS THOSE  
PROGRAMS PRODUCE  
SO SUCCESSFUL.

BY MEGHAN KITA



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ach year, about 20 to 25 percent of Muhlenberg's graduating class will leave the College with a Bachelor of Science degree. Many of those students will have participated in Muhlenberg's summer research program, which began in the 1950s (long before most small, liberal arts colleges offered such opportunities) and allows students to spend eight weeks fully immersed in a project. Many will have a minor or even a second major in a very different discipline like theatre, dance, music or a language. And some will be bound for medical school—over the past five years, 88 percent of all graduates who applied to medical school were admitted.

For nearly a century, Muhlenberg College has been known for the strength of its physical science programs. The College has offered a Bachelor of Science degree since the late 19th century, but

it was largely John V. Shankweiler, the biology department chair from the 1930s until 1962, who helped establish the College's reputation for excellence. (To learn more about Shankweiler, see page 15.)

Today, among the factors that make Muhlenberg's science programs distinctive are the aforementioned research program, which prepares students for several prestigious off-campus research opportunities as well as graduate school; the College's state-of-the-art facilities; and, of course, curriculums rooted in the liberal arts.

"The quality of instruction is very, very high," says Bruce Anderson, interim provost and professor of chemistry. "We are teaching first. That doesn't mean we aren't scholars or that we don't do research, but that even our research is an extension of all the excellent teaching we do in the classroom."

# AN EXEMPLARY EDUCATION

At this point, all of Muhlenberg's physical science curriculums are flexible enough to allow a student to double major in something completely different or to have the option to study abroad. The curriculum for biology, the largest of the science majors, was completely revamped for this academic year to make entry to the major more accessible and more consistent with innovative teaching practices.

"We want to hook people on biology from the minute they arrive on campus," says Marten Edwards, professor and chair of biology. "We've reconfigured our first year so it's a hands-on experience from the get-go."

Previously, the introductory biology lecture was the largest class on campus and it had no lab component. Now, far more biology faculty are teaching first-year students so the classes can be smaller hybrids between lecture and lab with ample opportunities to actually conduct science. The rest of the curriculum also changed to add greater flexibility, in part to better accommodate transfer students joining Muhlenberg. What hasn't changed is the department's commitment to rigor and its distinctive decision to teach the breadth of biology, from cell biology to ecology.

The major also offers a breadth of fieldwork options. For example, Edwards' Entomology course has a lab that takes place outdoors. Professor of Biology Erika Iyengar teaches several courses with field components; Field Marine Ecology involves travel to Maine to collect marine snails, her primary research interest. And Professor of Biology and Director of Sustainability Studies Rich Niesenbaum teaches field courses in botany as well as a long-running, short-term study abroad course with a research component in Costa Rica.

The College's newest physical science major, neuroscience (approved by the faculty in January 2004), is the sixth most popular major on campus, and its introductory course, open to nonmajors as well, is among the most popularly enrolled courses at the College. Mind & Brain engages students with questions like: What's the relationship between the brain and the mind? What does it mean for the mind to study itself? What is a mind, and who has one? Stanley Road Associate Professor of Neuroscience and Department Chair Jeremy Teissere says because neuroscience is a relatively new discipline, the faculty has been able to build a curriculum with fewer preconceived notions of what it should look like. The introductory course is therefore theory-centered rather than survey-based, which allows majors to

determine which perspectives within the discipline they find most interesting to explore in research and coursework beyond Mind & Brain.

The College offers an exceptional level of support to students within its science programs. In chemistry and biochemistry, this happens via immediate cohort-building: In the first semester of General Chemistry, the faculty group together the students who intend to major in either discipline into a single lab section.

In the second semester, those students take part in a project-based lab: The professor chooses a theme, and the students work together to conduct literature research and propose their own open-ended projects that they'll continue throughout the semester. In physics, faculty lean on the College's liberal

arts foundation to try and demystify the discipline, creating pathways for students to better understand and engage with the major.

"I don't think there's anything fundamentally different about figuring things out in the sciences than in the social sciences or philosophy or religion or psychology," says Associate Professor and Chair of Physics Adam Clark. "If a student can learn that what I want them to do is similar to what they do in some other class—one that's not as scary to them—they're more likely to succeed."

Muhlenberg's excellence has paved the way for a number of academic partnership programs. The oldest, an engineering partnership with Columbia University, allows students to earn Bachelor of Science degrees from both institutions. The College has an early assurance partnership with the Temple University School of Medicine and an early access program with the Boston University School of Medicine. And, the College offers 3-4 programs (three years of Muhlenberg, four of graduate school) with the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine and the SUNY College of Optometry.

**"WE WANT TO HOOK PEOPLE ON BIOLOGY FROM THE MINUTE THEY ARRIVE ON CAMPUS. WE'VE RECONFIGURED OUR FIRST YEAR SO IT'S A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE FROM THE GET-GO."**

**—MARTEN EDWARDS**

# A FOUNDATION IN RESEARCH

The College's summer research program has been ongoing for more than 65 years, says Professor of Chemistry and Co-Director of Biochemistry Keri Colabroy, who coordinates the program. This has created a culture that attracts faculty who appreciate the importance of offering robust research experiences to undergraduates and students who are eager to participate.

"The people who do science at Muhlenberg understand that teaching science is the process of doing science, and doing science means not knowing the outcome," Colabroy says. "Doing something no one's ever done before, solving a problem, that's what scientists want to do. There are many people in the world who think that's not possible with undergraduates, but it's baked into the way Muhlenberg operates."

For eight weeks each summer, students receive a stipend along with on-campus room and board, which allows them to focus on conducting research full-time. Alumni support is a major factor in making this possible. Faculty participation is another—professors are typically on academic-year contracts, so this work demonstrates their commitment to providing mentorship and guidance to students in summer research. Faculty also understand that research is a critical part of students' scientific education, and that it's hard to reap the full benefits without the uninterrupted time summer provides.

In addition to learning how to "do science," students often have the opportunity to be listed as co-authors on professors' published research. In non-pandemic times, they travel to present the research at conferences. And, students who participate in summer research after their sophomore year are well-positioned to land one of the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) opportunities through its REU Sites program. These opportunities often take place at large research universities and offer a preview of graduate school.

"Students get to be on the big campus and see what it's all about," Anderson says. "They can decide they love this—I want to go to grad school so I can spend time and dedicate myself to this'—or they might find they don't want to do that. This kind of experience is really important to students trying to figure out the next step."

Muhlenberg science students are able to choose from a wide variety of unique research experiences with faculty on campus. For example, Clark is a string theorist—a rarity at a small, liberal arts college. Associate Professor of Chemistry Sherri Young conducts research with medicinal implications on the synthesis of small molecules that may be able to cross the blood-brain barrier. Professor of Biology Dan Klem is an internationally recognized expert in bird-window collisions, and Assistant Professor of Biology Giancarlo Cuadra studies how vaping affects the microbiome of the oral cavity. The neuroscience faculty's labs span the breadth of the discipline, from Teissere's research on the molecular basis of anxiety and tranquility to Assistant Professor of Neuroscience Matthieu de Wit's on rethinking the role of different brain regions—or even if the brain is regionalized in the way it has become popularly understood—in the basis of behavior and cognition. Faculty are quick to collaborate across disciplines and students are encouraged to do as well—for example, neuroscience students sometimes pursue neuroscience-themed questions in chemistry or psychology faculty laboratories.



*All photos in which students and faculty are not wearing face masks were taken prior to the Fall 2020 semester.*

# MEANINGFUL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Students also benefit from recurring summer research opportunities offered off-campus. Since 2006, Professor of Physics Brett Fadem has been part of a research collaboration called PHENIX that uses the

Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (RHIC), one of only two hadron colliders in the world, at Long Island's Brookhaven National Laboratory. PHENIX's membership consists

mostly of large research universities. Students researching with

Fadem have the opportunity to travel to Brookhaven and work on the PHENIX experiment at RHIC. The PHENIX detector requires 24-hour monitoring, one thing students help do there, during RHIC operations. Among the contributions required of undergraduates to qualify as authors on PHENIX papers is the responsibility to help with the monitoring of the PHENIX detector during RHIC runs.

Iyengar has taken individual students who are really interested in marine ecology to the University of Washington's Friday Harbor Labs, which she describes as "one of the top marine ecology research stations in the world." Most of the researchers there are graduate students, postdoctoral researchers and professors, and Muhlenberg students have the opportunity to work alongside them and make

invaluable connections before applying to graduate programs. Plus, "living five minutes from both your laboratory and the lapping waves of the ocean is an amazing experience," Iyengar says.

The College has an ongoing relationship with the REU Site in Chemistry at the University of Michigan: Each year, Michigan saves one of its 10 available spots (for which it gets more than 300 applications per year) for a Muhlenberg student of the College's choosing. This relationship began thanks to Carolyn '61 and Robert Buzzard '62, both chemistry majors and long-time chemistry teachers, says Professor and Chair of Chemistry Christine Ingersoll. The Buzzards were visiting Ann Arbor, where they met with some of Michigan's chemistry professors. One of those professors visited Muhlenberg for a seminar and got to know the College. The Michigan REU was relatively new at the time, and the student Muhlenberg sent in 1999 (Christopher John '00) did amazingly well. After that, Michigan agreed to save one spot per year for a student selected by Muhlenberg's chemistry faculty. During this 21-year partnership, a total of 21 Muhlenberg students have participated in the REU program, and 15 faculty members from the University of Michigan's Department of Chemistry have visited Muhlenberg and given seminars on their research.

While that's the only direct REU partnership, Colabroy says that the College's science faculty have continued relationships with their own Ph.D. programs. Professors actively use their networks to support promising students who are interested in taking part in an REU in their field of study.



# EXCEPTIONAL FACILITIES

Not only does Muhlenberg foster a culture of learning through doing, it offers the tools required to conduct all kinds of science at the highest level. For example, the Department of Chemistry has purchased or received state-of-the-art instrumentation not often found at small, liberal arts colleges, Ingersoll says. Made possible through generous alumni contributions, donations from local industry and financial support from the College, these instruments include several liquid chromatography and gas chromatography instruments, mass spectrometers, liquid-handling robots and a laser lab. Chemistry students must learn how to use much of the instrumentation by junior year; students and faculty across the sciences also use some of the instrumentation for research.

The Department of Physics offers high-end TeachSpin instruments and a 3D printer as well as high-tech, low-cost custom apparatus developed on-site (such as muon telescopes, which detect the cosmic muons that bathe Earth). Assistant Professor Charles Collett is collaborating with students to develop a physics lab at 1.5 degrees above absolute zero for experiments related to quantum computing.

The Department of Biology has a state-of-the-art bird museum, the Research Museum at the Acoopian Center for Ornithology, and two locations for field research: the Lee and Virginia Graver Arboretum and the Conrad W. Raker Biological Field Station and Wildlife Sanctuary. Niesenbaum manages the Muhlenberg College Herbarium, a collection of 50,000 specimens a group of students recently digitized.

# OUTSTANDING ALUMNI

One thing Ingersoll tells prospective students and their families is, at Muhlenberg, “just because students are majors in chemistry or the sciences doesn’t mean it’s all they do. Many of our students study abroad. Many are athletes. Many are involved in the music or theatre productions or are double majors or minors, not only within the natural sciences, but in the social sciences, arts and humanities as well.”

Those who stick with the sciences after graduation find themselves well-prepared to continue their education and eventually pursue a career in research, medicine, teaching or some combination of the three. Read on to learn what four alumni built from the foundation of the Bachelor of Science degree they earned at Muhlenberg.



## DR. ERIC SMITH '02

*(neuroscience, self-designed)  
laboratory principal investigator and director of translational research, immune effector cell therapies at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston*

Prior to arriving at Dana-Farber earlier this year, Smith was at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, where he specialized in multiple myeloma and cellular immunotherapy. His research focused on developing an experimental treatment that had shown promise in patients with other blood-based cancers for multiple myeloma patients. The therapy involves modifying a patient’s T cells (a part of the immune system) to recognize and destroy cancerous blood cells via a protein they express. Smith designed and evaluated how to specify this therapy for multiple myeloma, in which cancer cells do not express the protein that’s common to other blood cancers. A Phase II clinical trial of a therapy stemming from Smith’s work reported a more than 90 percent response rate in multiple myeloma patients whose cancers had stopped responding to traditional treatment. Smith’s Dana-Farber lab will continue to work toward advancing cell-mediated therapies, including expanding to improve them for solid-tumor cancers, which have proven more difficult to target than blood-based cancers.



## DR. SUCHI PANDEY '99

*(biology)  
chief medical officer at Stanford Blood Center and clinical associate professor of pathology at Stanford University in Stanford, California*

After her residency, Pandey completed a fellowship in transfusion medicine, which involves collecting, storing and testing blood and consulting with physicians on transfusion patients. The combination of lab and clinical work drew her to the specialty. Since COVID-19 emerged, Pandey’s work has expanded to include facilitating the use of convalescent plasma (from patients who’ve recovered from the virus) as a potential treatment. Under Pandey’s leadership, Stanford Blood Center was one of the first in the country to collect plasma from recovered patients in early April. In spring and summer, Pandey worked with COVID-19 patients receiving convalescent plasma as part of a national expanded access program to gauge the experimental treatment’s safety. Now, Stanford is part of a clinical trial comparing the treatment against a placebo in COVID-19 patients who visit the emergency room but are not sick enough to be admitted. Pandey continues to work to collect convalescent plasma to support COVID-19 patients while simultaneously ensuring the Blood Center has adequate reserves of blood for the hospitals it serves.



## DANA TEDESCO '11

*(biochemistry)  
scientist in clinical immunology at Amgen in San Francisco*

Tedesco earned a doctorate in immunology and molecular pathogenesis from Emory University before entering the world of drug development, first via a postdoctoral fellowship at Merck Research Laboratories and now in her current role at Amgen. Today, she’s on the clinical side of the research, analyzing data from drug trials in patients, collaborating with bioanalysts and research scientists and writing regulatory documentation. She still spends some time in the lab, where her career path really began—she never considered going to graduate school before discovering how much she enjoyed conducting research under the mentorship of Professor of Biology Amy Hark.



## DR. BRYAN AUVIL '16

*(chemistry)  
internal medicine resident at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee*

Auvil earned his Doctor of Medicine from the University of Pennsylvania this spring and pursued an internal medicine residency at Vanderbilt partially because its close-knit, friendly atmosphere reminded him of Muhlenberg. His passion for his chemistry classes was such that he considered going to graduate school, until he conducted summer research and learned it involved more time alone in a lab than he’d like. He credits the solid science education he received at Muhlenberg as well as the time-management skills he built as a student-athlete on the football team for helping him succeed in medical school.



# AN ALUMNI WEEKEND FOR MULES NEAR AND FAR

▶ How this year's virtual programming opens possibilities for future engagement



**M**uhlenberg's Office of Alumni Affairs likes to plan early. As always, it started preparing for October's Alumni Weekend in January. Soon after, the global pandemic changed everything. "March came, and we started to question how the fall would go," says Senior Associate Director for Alumni Affairs Diana Tirendi '07.

By June, it was clear that, in order to ensure a safe Alumni Weekend, it was going to have to be a virtual experience. The alumni affairs team announced the news to volunteers first, including those who had reunions planned for 2020. Alumni reacted with a mix of disappointment and understanding.

Like with everything in 2020, people try to find silver linings. The upside of Alumni Weekend on Demand was the College's ability to welcome far-flung folks to an event they may otherwise have been unable to attend.

## WHAT WAS OFFERED

The alumni affairs team started with Alumni Weekend's normal programming as a baseline and enlisted campus partners to imagine what was possible. The most popular programs are the Lifelong Learning lectures, led by faculty.

"That was easy to pivot because the faculty has been teaching virtually to our current students," Tirendi says. "It was obviously a different experience, but it was easy to adjust."

Usually, a highlight of Alumni Weekend is a homecoming football game, but intercollegiate competition is on hold due to COVID. Instead, Director of Athletic Communications Mike Falk created videos to celebrate the history of every fall sport. Other homecoming programming typically includes student performances and a petting zoo; this year, the College offered an interactive session with the Lehigh Valley Zoo and performances from 14 student groups.

Alumni Weekend is also when the College recognizes alumni achievement during the Evening of Distinction gala. In order to make this event as memorable as possible, it was produced and edited in advance. Ruben Ortiz '00 co-hosted with Dana Iannuzzi '03.

"I have exceeded plenty of live events for Muhlenberg, and although this was entirely different, I really enjoyed the experience," Ortiz says. "Dana and I knew there were things you could play with on camera that you couldn't possibly do on stage. We hope the [award recipients] who couldn't be present to receive their awards felt like they were part of an elaborate and entertaining TV production."

To pull it all together, Tirendi contracted Socio, a company that specializes in supporting large conferences, to create a virtual venue. Attendees logged in and navigated the events and live-stream links and posted comments and photos.

## HOW IT WENT

Normally, Alumni Weekend would have about 2,000 attendees, including families and current students. Alumni Weekend on Demand had more than 900 registrants—an impressive number under the circumstances.

As for participation rates, Tirendi noticed that some of the most active alumni were those from the 1960s and '70s: "Maybe there was a novelty to participating [in alumni activities] this way," she says.

Diane Ladley '70 was chair for her 50th reunion. The gathering included a lecture by Professor of Media & Communication Jeff Pooley on the year 1968.

"It was such a tumultuous year while my class was at Muhlenberg," Ladley says, noting the similarities between that year and 2020.

While Ladley knows the in-person turnout for the 50th reunion would have been larger than its virtual counterpart, she says the group was able to chat

about school memories with Pooley and fellow alumni via Zoom.

Emily Schweighardt Bollinger '07, who lives in California, says Alumni Weekend on Demand made it possible for her to reconnect with her alma mater in a new way. She attended three of the weekend's events, including Professor of Political Science Chris Borick's lecture on the 2020 election.

"In a world turned upside down, it was comforting to see him still trading barbs with [Professor Moshin] Hashim, which has been going on for the better part of two decades," she says.

Although so much was different in planning and executing Alumni Weekend on Demand, the weekend's success, like always, was made possible thanks to the many campus partners who contributed their time, talent and expertise.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Tirendi is optimistic about providing meaningful virtual experiences for alumni thanks to the success of Alumni Weekend on Demand. The next big event is Toast Heard Around the World (THAW), slated for January 21, 2021.

"We haven't made any decisions yet" on how the event will be executed, she says. "We'll have to see how the world is going."

If the event can't be held as usual, there are opportunities to use Zoom for virtual gatherings and Socio (or a program like it) to share photos and toasts remotely—not unlike the event's existing "toast on your own" option.

"I hope this weekend gave people a touch of Muhlenberg in their life that may not have been there if we had canceled the event," Tirendi says. "We hope people felt connected to their alma mater in a new way. Looking forward, now that we've made Alumni Weekend virtual, I can't imagine going back and not having at least a virtual component."

—Heather Mayer Irvine

## Mentoring Mules, From Afar



A move to San Antonio two years after graduation meant that it was difficult for Stephanie Clark Wiese '93 to stay as connected as she would have liked with her alma mater. It took COVID-related changes to help that connection rekindle.

In light of canceled internships and other opportunities, the Career Center reached out to alumni asking if

they had any projects they could offer for students to fill that gap and get experience over the summer. Wiese, who works as the vice president of development and communications for Habitat for Humanity of San Antonio, typically hosts in-person paid interns every spring, which didn't happen this

year due to the pandemic. She had projects she could use student help with, and it didn't really matter where those students were located. Wiese was able to work with two Muhlenberg students, who did research on the importance of home ownership.

For Wiese, the experience was a revelation. Her connection with the College had been limited to alumni emails and reading this magazine. The current circumstances have offered her a way back.

"It's a tiny silver lining to all this," she says. "It was a nice way for me to meet students, mentor them and get that connection again. I hadn't realized just how removed I was from the College."

In addition to that work with students, Wiese has been taking advantage of other virtual programming from the Office of Alumni Relations, like Catch Up Over Coffee, a series of conversations with Muhlenberg faculty, staff and alumni.

When COVID hit, "Muhlenberg did a better job of trying to reach out to folks who are further away," Wiese says. "Going virtual meant that things that may have taken place on campus were suddenly available to me too." —Jeremy Fuchs '14

## A Future Doctor's Full Schedule

Growing up in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, Julia Burns '16 helped her family care for her younger sister, Rose. Rose was born with Prader-Willi Syndrome, a genetic condition characterized by intellectual and developmental disabilities. Medicine was always something that interested Burns.

At Muhlenberg, she studied biology and sociology and served as class council president. Later, she enrolled in the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM), where she earned a master's in biomedical sciences with a concentration in public health this spring. "I did a lot of community work at Muhlenberg and at PCOM," she says. "I really like the aspect of working with a patient population and being an advocate."

Her resume at PCOM has been impressive. She established the head teaching assistant program for anatomy students, co-managing 60 volunteers. She volunteered with No More Secrets, a Philadelphia-based organization that delivers menstrual products to those who need them. In her spare time, she illustrated a soon-to-be-released children's book, *Tiny or Tall, Mighty or Small—Music for All!*, which promotes body positivity.

Burns is continuing her education at PCOM, working toward a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine. Though there are COVID-19 restrictions in place and classes are mostly virtual, Burns is still itching to start her medical career. Though she hasn't decided definitively, she has thought about working in the emergency room or as an OB-GYN.

A passion for public health and helping others has been a constant in Burns's life. As she starts the next phase, that combination sets her up for success. "Combining medicine and health care with public engagement—this is the best alignment for me," she says. —JF



## What It's Like to Start College in the COVID-19 Era

We're still on campus and it's starting to get cold. I guess I'll need to buy a winter coat.

BY AJ HENLEY '24, AS TOLD TO MEGHAN KITA



PHOTO BY MARCO CALDERON

I'm from Georgia, and I hadn't heard of Muhlenberg—I found it when I was looking up the best college theatre programs. I went to the website and just felt really drawn to Muhlenberg. As soon as I got my acceptance, I was pretty much like, "This is where I'm going."

I thought I was being smart by planning to visit only the schools I was accepted to. Right before acceptances went out, the whole COVID thing started, and I actually never got to visit Muhlenberg. The first time I was on campus was in August, to start the semester.

In one way, COVID helped with making friends because none of us knew about Zoom before the pandemic. Once we were accepted and talking in our Facebook groups, some of us decided to have big Zooms to get to know everybody early. I ended up making a group of friends. There are about nine of us, and we've been really close since March.

When the semester started, we'd go to breakfast, lunch and dinner together. None of us had really seen anyone for six months. We were like, "People! We're seeing physical people, in real life!" That's worn off a bit. We'll normally all get together for dinner—we'll grab our food and go outside or down to the Red Doors. Sometimes my friends will go to the library and study together, but I'm a person who needs to study in my room. I spend a lot of time there, reading and trying to get caught up. It can be isolating.

Even though I have this friend group, I haven't really seen any of them in person without masks. When we're hanging out, we have to be very conscious of how we're hanging out—you have to be outdoors or very far apart indoors. We don't sit right next to each other or hug each other or anything like that. It makes it harder to make connections.

I have one fully in-person class, one hybrid class and three online classes. I definitely prefer learning in person. I find it's very hard to stay focused and engaged in the online classes. And when the professor asks a question and no one wants to talk, it's so awkward. At least in an in-person class, you're really only looking at the professor, but on Zoom, you're looking directly at every single person's face and all of us are just looking at each other, not saying anything. I'm excited for whenever all classes can be held in person again.

My only real COVID fear was that we were all going to come here and we were going to be idiots and it would spread through us like wildfire. I've actually been pleasantly surprised that a lot of us have the same views on this, that it's important that we social-distance because if we want to stay here, we need to make sure that we don't have an outbreak.

Something I've heard from a lot of my friends is that we didn't pack enough warm clothes. We thought, "We're going to be here for two weeks and then they're going to send us home." Even my family, when I left, they were all making jokes: "I'll see you in two weeks!" I've lived in Georgia my whole life, and down there, we wear coats for a little bit of warmth, but mostly for fashion. I've had to text all my friends that I've met up here like, "Hey, can y'all ask your parents where I should buy a winter coat from?" 

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**I reconnected with people in my own class who I didn't even know lived within walking distance from my apartment!**

— CLASS OF 2008, ASTORIA, NY

**Always fun to gather with fellow Mules. So glad we made it there!**

— CLASS OF 1981, PHOENIXVILLE, PA

**Nice opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones.**

— CLASS OF 1988, ALLENTOWN, PA

**Met two former Mules who live right in my hometown!**

— CLASS OF 2016, NEW HAVEN, CT

**Although we only see each other once a year, I really enjoy being with this group.**

— CLASS OF 1972, WILLIAMSBURG, VA

**Reminded me why I loved Muhlenberg.**

— CLASS OF 1991, WESTBOROUGH, MA

**Great hosts that fostered a camaraderie and sense of community.**

— CLASS OF 2022 PARENT, SCOTTSDALE, AZ

**Lots of fun and good memories.**

— CLASS OF 1973, ALLENTOWN, PA

**Fun! Fun! Fun!**

— CLASS OF 1961, NAPLES, FL

# THAW

TOAST HEARD AROUND THE WORLD

**01.21.21**



**Science in  
Action**

Lecturer of Chemistry Kate Herrera looks on as Leah Toomey '24 performs a chemistry separation technique. To learn about what's behind the success of Muhlenberg's physical science programs, see "Science at Muhlenberg." **p.46**