Witness of Gonzaga’s Will evident every day

Gonzaga Will. It was the University’s catch phrase for the last capital campaign, but it certainly applies to our current predicament. Gonzaga’s will is strong, demonstrated by faculty, staff and students throughout our community, finding ways to make the new normal work effectively. No doubt, Gonzaga will survive the collateral inconveniences dealt by this novel coronavirus pandemic.

Take this educational enterprise, with its many components – classroom instruction, housing, dining, co- and extra-curricular activities, student support services, health and welfare, and so many more – and set it on its ear, only to watch its people bring it back to life in new, albeit challenging ways . . . well, it’s simply remarkable.

Our Florence faculty and their 160 students were on spring break when they learned that Gonzaga was shutting down the Florence campus and bringing students home as the virus outbreak was in the beginning stages of overwhelming Italy. Florence professors, with some help from colleagues on the home campus, went to work learning Blackboard and online delivery in a week’s time, thanks to the help Instructional Design Director Justin Marquis and his crew in Instructional Design and Delivery.

That was the primer. Next these 7.5 IDD individuals had to get 450 Spokane campus faculty, a good number of whom had not practiced their Blackboard skills in recent semesters, prepared as spring break here extended an extra week to afford faculty time to convert their face-to-face classes to distance-delivery formats. Marquis said preparing that many courses would normally take a year in planning and production. Faculty successfully launched their approximate 1,400 courses in less than two weeks.

We saw story after story of people rising to help others. A funeral for Ella McKeirnan, a cancer victim and recent Gonzaga Prep grad, was planned for McCarthey Athletic Center, but 20 minutes before start time the building had reached 250 friends, the maximum assembly at the time for any public gathering. On a moment’s notice, folks in GUEST, ITS and Zag Dining jumped right in to set up appropriately distanced chairs, live streaming and a meal to accommodate the overflow crowd in the Hemmingson Ballroom.

Other examples of cura personalis in action abound. Throughout the last two weeks of March, many staff members shifted work schedules to assist families and students who were moving out of residence halls and boxed up essential items for students who could not make it back. Benefits manager Lisa Schwartzenburg had a stash of toilet paper in her trunk for employees who couldn’t get what they needed, and even drove one fellow employee to the store for food. Michael Whalen in ITS made a home visit to Jana Clarry’s house on a Sunday to establish the proper network connection to allow her to process Gonzaga payroll in the coming weeks – and she sent him home with a plate of freshly baked cookies.

The stories like these ring true to Gonzaga’s mission.

What about the Emergency Management Team, directed by Emergency Operations Center Coordinator Cassandra Stelter, fortified by section chiefs, and supported by scores of others? These individuals are working long hours seven days a week, sacrificing personal time to ensure all areas of the response are in good working order and communicated to the community.

All of these Gonzaga folks represent what it means to be an exemplary Jesuit, Catholic, humanistic university.

Following in this special COVID-19 edition of Spirit, we take a snapshot view of just some of the hero-like work being done by people across campus to ensure this home we call Gonzaga continues to move forward.
Thoughts of a pandemic first appeared on Emergency Preparedness Manager Cassandra Stelter’s radar in December, and on the folks in the Center for Global Engagement sooner as Gonzaga had two students studying in China.

Gonzaga’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC) opened Jan. 23 to address the COVID-19 issues in Italy, where 160 Florence students were enjoying their spring break, and on campus Feb. 28 to support our efforts domestically, Stelter says.

“The Emergency Management Team, with representatives from every major department and division across campus, is here to provide a collection of information to leaders on which they can base their response decisions,” Stelter says.

New Risk Manager Deb Donning took her baptism under fire, serving as point person on the coronavirus outbreak in Italy. She worked closely with Global Engagement Director Richard Menard, GIF Dean Jason Houston and Enrollment ManagementAssociate Provost Julie McCulloh in deciding to close down GIF and bring students home before the epidemic there worsened and travel was restricted.

“When we activated the EOC, our team worked seven days a week, long hours, and remained happy and ready to work every day, with grace and goodwill,” Stelter says. She listed her sections chiefs: Donning, Taylor Jordan, Angela Ruff, Mary Joan Hahn, Dave Sonntag, Steven Ponce, Wayne Shadd, Suzie Mize, Matt Lamsma, Eric Baldwin, Julie McCulloh, Ken Sammons, Deena Presnell, Kristiana Holmes, Lisa Schwartztenburg, Becky Wilkey, and the primary Policy Group comprised of Jim Angelosante, Deena González and Thayne McCulloh. “They deserve all the credit for this effort being successful,” Stelter said.

CALL CENTER
Beacon of Reassurance to Students, Parents

The Call Center, suggested by the EMT, created and continually supported by Angela Ruff and Deb Donning, has proven to be a source of calm for those seeking answers about Gonzaga’s response to the pandemic. Established in University Advancement’s telefund center, and staffed by employees from UA, the Center for Career and Professional Development, GUEST and a few other outposts, operators answer direct calls and make a point to call back everyone who leaves a message.

Callers are asking about lab classes, graduation, caps and gown orders and hotel reservations.

“We live in California and we’re under shelter-in-place orders. Do we have to be out of our dorm room by March 27?” No, Housing offers an extension opportunity.

“We heard Washington is not letting anyone leave the state. What if we gather up our stuff but can’t get home?” No, Washington has not implemented that directive.

“May I leave my car on campus?” Sure, work with Campus Safety and Security on what you need.

Many parents just need to talk and process. Every effort is made to return calls not answered by a person in the center. They’ve been very grateful. “Callers are wowed that our people are calling them back,” says Ruff.

Other offices handling large volumes of calls are the President’s Office, Housing, Benefits and the Parent and Family office.

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CUSTODIAL CREW
First Line of Defense

“Our attitude is to protect everyone,” says Custodial Manager Edin Jusic. “We had already started extra cleaning with the onset of the flu season in October, cleaning surfaces more often, using disinfectants. With the coronavirus outbreak, we intensified our efforts, including sanitizing all door handles and stair railings many times throughout the day.”

Jusic says his crews also responded to increased requests from faculty and staff for service in their personal spaces. Now, with few people on campus, they are taking extra measures, i.e. dusting high window casings, refinishing floors, deep cleaning classrooms.

“With coronavirus, we’re doing extra cleaning. We’re trying to make sure our customers are safe,” says Jusic.

Many of the custodians volunteered their time to assist students and parents with the move-out process.

IDD, ITS
Rudders in a Storm

Justin Marquis and the Instructional Design and Delivery team helped get most of the 450 faculty up to speed on distance delivery methods and 1,400 courses online in less than two weeks. There have been great advantages to this exercise in technology. For one, faculty may record their classes, post them on Blackboard and students can watch as often as they need to absorb the content.

Meanwhile, Information Technology Services has supported the effort while also working feverishly to make work-from-home a possibility for the campus community, thanks to our web conferencing solution, Zoom, our cloud-based collaboration platform, Office 365, as well as an improved virtual private network (VPN). It was Fr. Bob Lyons, S.J., in 2017 and the board of the Gonzaga Telecommunications Association, that released funds to pay for Zoom for the Gonzaga community. “Little did we know then what a difference that technology would make for us today,” says Chief Information Officer Borre Ulrichsen. ITS offers free laptop checkout to students, faculty and staff who might not have a computer at home. And they’re providing an abundance of tech support over extended hours, seven days a week.

“ITS and IDD have received a lot of responses from community members, appreciative of our staff’s care for fellow employees. We are humbled and grateful that users take the time to recognize all the effort that goes into moving us to this new reality,” Ulrichsen says.

“I can’t say enough how thankful I am for the technology we have,” says Nightmare on Elm Street, junior Holden Jeffries. “All of my classes so far this week have been run just like they were when we were in the classroom. My professors have been great.”

– Junior Holden Jeffries

CORONAVIRUS ROUNDUP

Ryan Mowrey is one of an army of custodial crew members stepping up efforts to make our workplace sanitary.

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ZAG DINING
What Happens When You Can’t Put Food on the Table? You bag it up and send it home with students.

Zag Dining Services planned for many different scenarios, depending upon the directives given by the University. “It’s our first pandemic, but not our first crisis,” said Sodexo District Manager Pat Clelland.

The Cog Team mobilized and remained open for take-out meals and the 360 Grill remained operational for hot meals to go. The Marketplace and Starbucks was an option as well, but with no self-service allowed. “Our primary goal was to make sure our students, faculty, staff and Sodexo employees were safe, well cared for and served,” Clelland said.

Clelland met an exchange student from Russia, hanging around Hemmingson by herself, unable to go home. “If she was going to be here, I told her we were going to be here with her,” Clelland said. Her facial expression went from sad to ‘I’m not in this alone, I’m going to be ok.’ “Here’s a person lost in the middle of all of this. Our team and the rest of the GU team will embrace her. That’s what we do, we take care of each other in times like this.”

HUMAN RESOURCES
Caring for Employees

Lisa Schwartzenburg in the Benefits Office hasn’t had much rest. “We’re in unprecedented times. We want to be flexible enough with employees so that they feel safe and Gonzaga is taking care of them, but the University is still operational,” she says.

Child care issues, care for elderly family members in high-risk categories, familiarizing employees with how to best use sick leave, vacation time and working on a job-shifting program are among her many tasks, and helping people to be aware of their multiple benefits, like Teledoc, SupportLinc and others. Go to www.coronavirus.eaptoolkit.com for an extensive toolkit of resources to assist faculty and staff through this pandemic.
As another whirlwind week of life in a COVID-19 environment winds up, a group of Mission and Ministry staff gathers to plan what student ministry looks like in a virtual campus environment.

Rev. Janeen Steer, Ben Goodwin, Ally Clapp, Meredith McKay and Daniel Dangca brainstorm ideas for the Lenten season through Easter. The goal is to figure out how to stay connected with students creatively on an emptying campus – all while practicing social distancing themselves in the common space of their Hemmingson Center office.

The team has pivoted its work from planning traditional in-person events and retreats to creating messages to share over digital channels, including the web, email and social media platforms. Instagram is the platform of choice for the majority of Gonzaga students, but content will also appear on Facebook, YouTube and (rumor has it) TikTok. Some discussions might take place on videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom.

The team’s brainstorming conversation ranges from moments of seriousness to lighter ones that allow the soul to maintain its space from the effects of heightened societal tension due to the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic.

They quickly fill out ideas on a calendar drawn onto the frosted glass wall of an office, then share their plans via an electronic calendar. By day’s end, they will also send a video of encouragement for students on YouTube and distribute an email to staff, faculty and students doing the same. The purpose is three-fold: to conduct outreach, offer comfort, and seek input about ongoing needs for support.

The format and themes of upcoming programming will vary, each designed to help the Gonzaga community navigate its way through some of the most challenging modern times. Thankfully, unlike prior eras, there is an unprecedented proliferation of technology to virtually connect with people.

“Our mission isn’t bound to the physical place of Gonzaga,” says Clapp. “That’s a lesson people usually learn after they graduate but that many are encountering now. Our work is to care for our community regardless of physical place and we are grateful to find new and creative ways for pastoral care and mission work.”

In doing so, they will lean on the inspiration and guidance of Aloysius Gonzaga, who died caring for those suffering in an earlier time. The office’s web page says it all with this simple request:

“Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, patron saint of young people, students, and plague victims, pray for us.”

- Jeff Bunch
“Nothing like a national emergency to get me over my fear of using technology in the classroom.”

Psychology Professor Anna Marie Medina’s sentiment was echoed by many of her faculty colleagues as they transitioned face-to-face classes to digital formats for distance delivery in barely two weeks.

“I’m proud of the way my colleagues have come together to support each other through this process. It makes me proud to be a Zag!” says Annie Voy, associate professor of Economics.

“I’m grateful for the generosity of my technically-skilled colleagues who have gone out of their way to support those of us who are technically challenged,” Medina says. “This enterprise wouldn’t have been as successful without their kindness and good humor.”

Some professors already had experience in digital course design, and the learning curve wasn’t so drastic. “Fortunately, I already used Blackboard to post notes, homework and quizzes. Most of my focus was on delivery of actual course content via Zoom meetings and recorded video lectures,” says Assistant Civil Engineering Professor Joshua Schultz.

Others had to start from scratch getting acquainted with a new tool box for course delivery.

Provost Deena González reports uninitiated faculty are learning to capture and share Ted-like talks on Blackboard, videos from Kanopy via Foley Library’s subscription, and use discussion boards that are easy in/easy out, among many other tools making distance delivery manageable.

She sent her students a short survey during the transition to assess their practical and emotional preparedness for the circumstances. She found many consumed with fear and uncertainty surrounding the outbreak, and she worries about her ability to gauge their well-being without physical interaction.

Easterling has heard students talk about their grief in losing their senior spring, intramurals and their community with students navigating academics and campus life together.

“Teaching is very hard work, but the payoff of interactions and conversations with students can be as rich as it gets,” she says.

Overall, the students are embracing this change, Edwards says. But she knows they are looking forward to meeting in person again to practice their skills.

Easterling was reminded what remarkable, humane and thoughtful human beings her students are. “They have been resilient, patient and more concerned about me, at times, than about anything else.”

“What has been very reinforcing to me has been the number of students I’ve connected with over the past week,” Medina says. “I’ve had more students in virtual office hours this past week than I had in the entire last year. What’s more, it’s been great to see them individually as people in their own particular contexts. They are very likeable people.”

Most agree that they will come out of this severe bump in the road better equipped as educators when they return to their conventional classrooms in the fall.
Angela Ruff had toyed with the idea of living in a tiny house, but never would have had room for all the hats she has worn at Gonzaga.

She has worked eight jobs and occupied 13 offices over her nearly 32-year career here, starting as a 20-year-old receptionist in the President’s Office, and now, juggling ideas for how to create commencement in these unique and interesting times, among many other assignments.

During that span and multiple jobs, she has been called upon for numerous special assignments, as well, most recently as a member of the Emergency Management Team. Ruff also is proud to have been one of the founding members of Staff Assembly, and served as its president 2010-11.

But the carrot that has kept her here over the years is the people.

"I had no idea how interesting it would be to work here, and always thought it was honorable to be working for this institution," Ruff says. "I don't need to be a teacher to feel like an active and integral part of what we're doing here in higher education."

For the most part, Ruff has been invited to partake in the succession of positions she has held, pulled by the confidence people had in her more than a particular interest in any personal pursuit.

Gifted with communication and organizational skills, she was bolstered by her on-the-job training each new opportunity afforded her, which she considers Gonzaga’s gift to her. But it was her Gonzaga degree, earned over 15 years culminating in her 2001 graduation, that set her mind on fire.

"The core courses helped me to better understand complex systems, which allowed me to spend more time in pursuit of practical applications of things in my job setting. My very last class was also the first hybrid online/face-to-face course that (Associate Professor) Mike Carey developed, and it gave me a taste of what was coming in online education," Ruff says.

You have to be a little resilient, quite courageous and very tenacious to take on eight different positions working for one institution. And her most gratifying job may have been one of the toughest: Gonzaga’s first Banner trainer. She encountered a community dealing with a new system that was very intimidating.

"Most of them had built their own systems, and were being asked to give them up," Ruff recalls. "I loved the job because I was able to whittle it down to something much less complicated for our people, and I got to know a lot of very nice folks I might not otherwise have met."

And she learned some important lessons along the way: “Curb my personal opinions a little and be a listener rather than a talker,” she says with her characteristic wide Ruff smile.

In her current job as academic events manager in the president’s office, where she began this memorable career run, she has initiated a number of improvements to commencement: moved from “keepsake” attire to rental gowns, saving grads money and focusing on sustainability; injected energy and a modern feel into the ceremony without losing tradition; and shortened the event, much to the appreciation of family and friends.

She’s not ready to hang it up yet, but as an empty nester, she is pursuing other passions outside of work. She loves to travel, listing trips to Italy, Vietnam and most recently Israel with her first boss, Jeannie Norton, who was celebrating her 75th birthday. Ruff looks to making her home highly efficient, one option being solar panels. She’s converting her entire lawn into a vegetable and berry garden. And she hopes to get more involved in her community.

“And I’m always working on myself.”
Gonzaga welcomes eight new Act Six Scholars this fall, all first-generation college students. The urban and community leaders from Spokane and the Tacoma-Seattle areas will receive full-tuition, full-need four-year scholarships as members of the latest Act Six cohort. These diverse student leaders were chosen for their commitment to service, passion for learning, eagerness to foster intercultural relationships, and willingness to leave their comfort zones. They are from Spokane Elizabeth Figueroa, Gonzaga Prep, R.J. McGee II, East Valley, Micah Bell and Sylvania Arwood, both University; and from the west side Carlos Nunez, Bellevue; Nisha Bk, Foster; Aaron Danh, Lincoln; and Analesa Ligon, Bellarmine Prep.

The First Destination Survey Report, released in March, shows a 95.5% success rate for GU students earning degrees between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019, based upon information collected from 1,725 of the 2,096 undergraduate and graduate students in this cadre. The report shows 79.7% are working either full time or part time. Another 10.8% are continuing their education, 3.2% are volunteering, 1.3% are working in armed services and about .5% are choosing not to seek employment (taking a gap year). The report is prepared annually by the Center for Career & Professional Development using guidelines developed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

U.S. News & World Report ranks Gonzaga’s graduate accounting program No. 25 (tie) in the nation, and part-time MBA program No. 55 (tie) nationally. The rankings are published at U.S. News & World Report’s 2021 edition of Best Graduate Schools.

In addition to offices highlighted elsewhere in Spirit, other student support offices continue to reach out to care for students while they’re away, including Cura Personalis, Health Promotion, Health and Counseling, First Year Experience, Academic Advising and Assistance, Involvement and Leadership, and many more.

Pandemic
A Prayer for Our Community

What if you thought of it as the Jews consider the Sabbath — the most sacred of times?

Cease from travel.

Cease from buying and selling.

Give up, just for now, on trying to make the world different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those to whom you commit your life.

Center down.

And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives are in one another’s hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils of compassion that move, invisibly, where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love – for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, so long as we all shall live.

- Lynn Ungar