Nursing program faculty, students are pandemic prepared

Some Bronson School of Nursing faculty are volunteering part time to help treat COVID-19 patients. Others could be tapped full time, alongside graduating nurses, to ease the strain on hospitals and medical personnel fighting the pandemic.

Caps off to our grads!

After years of studying and putting learned skills into practice, WMU graduates are heading out into the world. Career and Student Employment Services is helping students position themselves for professional success. Read about how some grads are confidently heading out into the future.
Help from all dimensions: WMU 3D printers producing face shields

WMU’s 3D printers aren’t sitting idle during the pandemic. Instead, staff and professors are using them to produce personal protective equipment for health care workers during the COVID-19 patient surge.
WMU employees can participate in Kalamazoo Marathon at no cost

The Kalamazoo Marathon and Borgess Run are now being offered virtually from May 1 through May 17. WMU employees who want to participate can register for free before May 10 using code: WMU. Finishers will receive a t-shirt and medal after campus reopens.

[Sign up]

Business professor earns second prestigious Fulbright award

Frontline for relief: WMU team helps small businesses survive COVID-19 impacts

Music challenge aims to build harmony, community from a distance
WMU in the news

**WMU professors develop prototype for extra level of protection against COVID-19**
A team of faculty members in WMU’s Gwen Frostic School of Art is getting creative to help mitigate some of the risk of COVID-19 in hospitals. They designed and developed aerosol boxes to stop the spread. [WWMT](https://wwmt.com)  [WZZM](https://wzzm13.com)

**The anxiety you’re feeling over COVID-19 can be a good thing**
Dr. Charlie Kurth, associate professor of philosophy at WMU, explores how some types of anxiety can lead people to make better choices. [The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com)

**West Michigan group helps small businesses apply for loans**
Housed within WMU’s Haworth College of Business, the Small Business Development Center is working with local businesses to provide needed direction and assistance in filing for government aid. [WOOD](https://www.woodtv.com)

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**WMU nursing program students, faculty are pandemic prepared**

Contact: [Joy Brown](mailto:joybrown@wmich.edu)
April 16, 2020

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—If Western Michigan University nursing student [Aubrey Reynolds-Erspamer](mailto:aubrey.reynolds-erspamer@wmich.edu) is given the opportunity to enter the workforce early to become a frontline COVID-19 health care fighter, she says she’s taking it.

“One hundred percent, I will join to help,” says Reynolds-Erspamer, adding that “2020 is the year of the nurse, and I chose this profession specifically to help others. I am ready to do my part in any way I can.”

Senior [Rebecca Stierley](mailto:rebecca.stierley@wmich.edu) has accepted a nurse intern position at a Kalamazoo-area hospital.
“It is heartbreaking to see what is happening in the world,” says WMU student and U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps member Katie Sypniewski, who intends to serve as an Army nurse after she graduates. “As a soon-to-be nurse, it is hard to watch what is going on...”

“The unpredictability and the unknown are the scariest parts,” says Stierley.

Reynolds-Erspamer, Sypniewski and Stierley all emphasize they’re aware of the pandemic-related risks, but their passion for nursing and preparation they’re receiving through WMU are equipping them with the mindset and skills to perform this vital job.

As the pandemic progresses, Reynolds-Erspamer, Sypniewski, Stierley, their classmates and WMU’s Bronson School of Nursing faculty and staff are facing the challenges head-on. They realize they are and will be key players in the nation’s health care response to the virus.

PROGRAM PIVOT

Bronson School of Nursing, which offers Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in nursing, shifted entirely to distance education delivery this semester like every other University program, but is forging ahead within the College of Health and Human Services to prepare students for work during one of the most challenging times in health care.

According to school’s director, Dr. Mary Lagerwey, hands-on learning via labs and clinicals has given way to online lessons with alternative assignments; the Michigan Board of Nursing recently eased licensing and regulations to accommodate those necessary adjustments, she says. Those receiving degrees can practice as a “graduate nurse” prior to taking the National Council Licensure Examination and receiving their Registered Nurse license, which will allow them serve patients in a limited capacity in the interim.
“This allows our graduating students to get a job and progress to the next level” without a pandemic-related delay, Lagerwey says.

Videos created by students and faculty have become essential learning tools, particularly for grasping fundamentals such as blood pressure checks, patient assessments and prioritization of care. Debriefings with students are essential.

Reynolds-Erspamer says she has been reading more in-depth from textbooks. PowerPoint presentations with voiceovers have been beneficial, and she has been taking online practice tests “to keep my brain in school mode,” too.

“I never expected to be in nursing school online, and it isn’t ideal, but my professors and the Bronson School of Nursing have been so supportive throughout this uncertain time,” Sypniewski says. “They really care for us and want us to succeed, which makes it a little bit easier.”

Sypniewski, from Ottawa, Illinois, was disappointed when her clinicals were cut short this spring; she was enrolled in a 12-hour clinical rotation at Bronson Methodist Hospital’s Neuro Critical Care Unit. But she says she learned from and was inspired by the nurses’ exemplary work.

“Although I was unable to finish my semester with them, the [Bronson] nurses on this unit really showed me what it meant to be a nurse. They went above and beyond to care for their patients and be there for them every step of the way. Being in critical care, they demonstrated selfless service and positivity every day. The nurses on this unit inspired me to want to work in critical care after I graduate,” Sypniewski says.

Since switching to distance learning, professors “have simulated clinicals well and put in a lot of work to make sure our assignments are real as they can be,” says Sypniewski.

Summer nursing courses, which primarily serve the master’s program, will continue to be offered online as they traditionally have been, Lagerwey says.
If traditional classes can resume in the fall, Lagerwey says faculty will provide more lab work and other hands-on learning to make sure students have acquired the necessary skills with distance education.

“Our faculty and staff have both just been amazing and have gone the extra mile” to teach students, Lagerwey points out, and have done the same to assist each other. Dr. Ron Cisler, dean of the College of Health and Human Services, has a virtual faculty and staff check-in two days each week, and those with online teaching experience have stepped up to assist those seeking more experience, she says.

Lagerwey says the nursing program has been approached by local agencies eager to recruit volunteers to help treat COVID-19 patients, which means undergraduates, recent graduates and seasoned faculty may be courted. Faculty members are committed to teaching through spring semester, she says.

“But some have volunteered part time, and when we wrap up the semester, I think many of the faculty and students will be volunteering to help,” says Lagerwey.

Lagerwey pointed out the nursing program is viewing the pandemic, though concerning for many reasons, also is a learning experience imparting valuable lessons about patient care and public health issues.

‘DOING THE RIGHT THING’

Reynolds-Erspamer, who is from Marquette in the Upper Peninsula, knows the risks when it comes to COVID-19.

“Of course, there is a chance that working in health care right now could expose me to the COVID-19 virus, but it’s the chance we take to help others that are suffering,” Reynolds-Erspamer says. “I definitely try to be extra safe by washing my hands more frequently and not touching my face, but my main goal is helping others while I can.”
Rebecca Stierley, nursing student at Western Michigan University

This semester, even amid distance learning, Reynolds-Erspamer has been working at Bronson Methodist Hospital as a patient safety assistant.

“I thrive on human connection on a day-to-day basis, so personally, this pandemic is hitting me really hard. My family is about seven hours away, and I am choosing to stay in Kalamazoo to work at the hospital to help. It can get lonely, but I feel like I am doing the right thing,” she explains.

Stierley says that, “some may think I am crazy for running into the fire, so to speak, while everyone else is running away, but my family knows caring for people is my passion and that is what I need to do.”

Reynolds-Erspamer’s reasons for wanting to enter the nursing profession are simple.

“To me, becoming a nurse means I get the joy of going to work every day and get the chance to make someone’s days a little better. Whether that means getting to hold someone’s hand in the tough times, keeping a patient stable, smiling as a patient recovers or taking time to listen to a worried family member, I have learned it can be the little things that make the biggest impact,” Reynolds-Erspamer says.
Katie Sypniewski, nursing student at Western Michigan University

Sypniewski expressed similar thoughts about the career field.

“Nursing is amazing. The career has always interested me since I was a little kid. It is such a selfless job that takes a special person. The people in this career have big hearts,” Sypniewski explains. "I want to become a nurse to be a part of something bigger than myself. I am very committed to being there to care and support someone when they are most vulnerable. I want to be that nurse who makes a difference in someone’s life by treating them like a human being when they need love and support in their toughest moments.”

“I want to make a difference, and if I can positively impact just one person in this world, I have done that. So, getting the opportunity to impact the lives of others on a daily basis is the most rewarding thing I could ever dream of,” says Stierley, a Jackson native.

All three students said they’ve already learned a great deal personally and professionally from the pandemic.

Communicating and staying connected with others are essential, Sypniewski has discovered.

“My family does a Zoom call every Sunday with about 25 of us. Technology is a blessing right now,” Sypniewski says.

She is also taking advantage of her reorganized schedule.

“I am learning that maybe this time is a moment for the world to slow down and refresh on the simple things in life. I know personally, I am lucky enough to be able to focus on my health more than ever,” Sypniewski says.
“The biggest takeaway from what has been happening is it is critical to be adaptable,” says Reynolds-Erspamer. Change comes whether you are ready or not, but how you carry yourself through it is what matters. Control the things you can control and don’t get too caught up in the things you can’t.”

Stierley agrees, saying that “nursing is a constantly evolving profession, and the ability to adapt to change is essential to succeed.”

“Personally, I have a strong faith to lean on and I’m proud of that,” Reynolds-Erspamer says. “I am also so proud to be going into nursing and potentially having the chance to help out sooner than expected when the world needs us nurses most.”

**Career and Student Employment Services ready to help WMU students, recent alumni navigate uncertain job market**

Contact: [Erin Flynn](mailto:Erin.Flynn@wmich.edu)
April 22, 2020

Graduating seniors are entering a unique job market. Follow the links under the photos in this article to read about how some outstanding WMU graduates are confidently heading into the future.

Business graduate Kordell Smith lined up an inside sales job weeks before graduation. [Read about his WMU journey.](#)

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—College graduates are entering a new world in the midst of a global pandemic. Many companies are consolidating operations and changing the way they do business—both internally and externally. Western Michigan University’s [Career and Student Employment Services](#) is available to help students and recent alumni position themselves for professional success.
“It’s more important than ever for graduates to be able to articulate their experiences, strengths and competencies through resumes, cover letters and answers to interview questions,” says Dr. Ewa Urban, interim director for career and post-graduation success.

Biomedical sciences graduate Alaa Sleymann is applying to dental programs. Read about her WMU journey.

The office, as well as the Zhang Career Center, is open virtually for students every day of the week, offering services such as resume critiques and career advising to create customized job search plans. Advisors are tailoring appointments to the unique reality students are facing right now, taking stock of their mental, physical and emotional health at the beginning of each appointment.

“All students are dealing with anxiety, confusion, and fear, and we want to assure them that we are here for them with all of their needs, not just job-related concerns,” says Sarah Hagen, career development specialist.

“Some students are reporting a job or internship offer being rescinded, which means they need to quickly pivot to a new search and secure new opportunities,” she says. “I’ve been very impressed with the resiliency and positivity that most students are displaying.”
Music theatre performance graduate Kobe Brown is ready for the spotlight at Tokyo Disneyland. Read about his WMU journey.

There’s also a new webpage created specifically for navigating the job search during the pandemic, which includes links to a number of helpful resources, including:

- Handshake, a job search platform;
- Big Interview, interview preparation software; and
- Career Resources Elearning.

Exercise science graduate Kassidy Davis is ready to pursue a doctoral degree in physical therapy. Read about her WMU journey.

A number of virtual job fairs are being planned to connect students with employers. The first, for education students and alumni, is a collaboration with other Michigan universities planned for May 11. Other opportunities will follow later in the spring and summer, and many employers are posting their own virtual events in Handshake.

“Now, more than ever, networking is going to be very important to students,” says Urban. “Students should stay connected with their mentors, professors, WMU staff and other professionals, and ask for recommendations as to how they can improve their skills, their resumes and who else they should be connecting with for potential job leads.”

Urban also says now is the time to take stock of their skills and make sure they're able to effectively articulate them. This includes career readiness competencies and transferable skills, such as leadership, teamwork, intercultural fluency, technical skills and problem solving—all necessary to be able to adapt in the changing job market.

“Being able to absorb new information and news, make adjustments or changes, and continue to move forward is critical,” Hagen adds. “Employers will be asking about their coping skills in interviews, including giving concrete examples of these strategies, and students must be able to describe their grit and resilience.”
WMU 3D printers producing face shields and masks for health care workers

Contact: Joy Brown
April 3, 2020

Learn how WMU faculty and staff are using 3D printers to make face shields.

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Western Michigan University’s 3D printers aren’t sitting idle during the pandemic. Instead, staff and professors from multiple campus departments are using them to produce personal protective equipment — specifically face shields — for health care workers who desperately need them during the COVID-19 patient surge.

Dylan Ledbetter, assistant director of Information Technology labs and the Help Desk at WMU, says his office is making face shields to go to the Sindecuse Health center as part of the ongoing WMU effort to provide materials to help protect health workers and share WMU resources. He and other staff members are using a 3D model created by 3DVerkstan, a 3D printing collective based in Sweden. The model is currently under review by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

To produce the shields, they are using plastic filament and transparency sheets similar to those used for overhead projectors. WMU’s information technology unit has enough material to create 1,500 shields, with more material on the way. Each shield takes about 45 minutes to produce.

“With eight printers running simultaneously all day, we expect to make upward of at least 70 shields per day,” Ledbetter says.

Shield material was donated from Kalamazoo-based company Fabri-Kal, and the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences will assist with cutting the shields to size.

“We made our first shields yesterday and presented them to (WMU’s) Sindecuse Health Center folks, who loved them,” says Thomas Wolf, WMU’s chief information officer.

The team also has reached out to WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine.

Faculty and staff at the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences are also working on a very similar face shield design; both groups began with the same design files. Engineering college Interim Dean Steven Butt says samples were recently presented to Sindecuse and WMed Health.
“Fabri-Kal recently donated transparent sheeting material to support both groups,” Butt says. “So, the shields are ready and being vetted.”

Machine shop specialist Allin Kahrl and faculty specialist Mike Konkel are doing the 3D printing, material preparation and assembly at the engineering college.

For more information about WMU's face shield 3D-printing project, visit the group's webpage.

Others involved in the production process include:

- Joshua Grant, IT associate director of faculty services
- Arnold Taylor, IT director of support services
- Travis Wendt, IT audio visual engineer
- Bill Feenstra, College of Aviation director of information technology and director of simulation technology
- Jeffery Nillson, College of Aviation chief aircraft inspector
- Jake Zoch, College of Aviation simulator and information technology technician
WMU employees going the distance, can participate in Kalamazoo Marathon at no cost

Contact: Megan Looker
April 28, 2020

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Runners are off to the virtual races! The 2020 Kalamazoo Marathon and Borgess Run are pressing forward amid restrictions due to COVID-19. Despite a cancellation of the in-person races on March 23, organizers are now offering the 5K, 10K, half-marathon and marathon virtually.

“This race is a tradition in Kalamazoo, and it needs to be honored by all of us out there to support it,” Western Michigan University Director of University Recreation Amy Seth says.

WMU employees who want to participate can register online for free through May 10 using registration code: WMU at borgessrun.com. This opportunity is only for WMU faculty and staff, any family and friends will need to pay the $25 registration fee. Anyone who previously registered for the in-person race will need to register again for the virtual race.
Runners can complete their designated race on their own time between May 1 through May 17. Race organizers have created 27 course maps in Kalamazoo County for each of the race lengths, or runners can create their own route.

Once the race is completed, runners will report their time to qualify for a t-shirt and medal to be distributed after campus reopens. Results for the races will be posted through the Kalamazoo Marathon and Borgess Run websites.

AN UNLIKELY RUNNER

Four years ago, WMU Occupational Safety and Health Specialist Clara Davis did something she never pictured herself doing: she laced up her running shoes.

“I never thought I would be a runner. I used to joke that when I saw people running for recreation that they must be getting chased by a bear,” she says.
Davis took part in a fundraiser in January for Forgotten Man Ministries where she was challenged to run one mile every day. Using that as her base, she created a training program, including intervals, hills and long runs. From one mile, to two and then three, Davis knew she was ready for more, she just didn’t know it would be in the middle of a pandemic.

“I was not planning on doing the 5K before it was canceled. Huge races like this intimidate me, so I prefer to run smaller races,” she says. “Getting free [registration] as a WMU employee, and the race being virtual made this an easy decision for me to participate.”

Now this May, Davis will lace up her running shoes and take on her race. For those thinking about joining her virtually in the 2020 Borgess Run, Davis has some advice.

“For first-time runners, I recommend a good pair of shoes. If your feet hurt, so will everything else.”

Davis says it’s been a journey learning to run, full of opportunities to quit along the way, but she found setting a goal and sticking to it allowed her to persevere and improve her health.

“This helped me to stay focused and motivated,” she says. “On those really tough days, it doesn’t matter if I am getting 10 seconds faster, but getting off my medication always matters.”

PANDEMIC PAIRING

Friends first, coworkers second, and now Kim Hemingway and Thomas Delves will be running buddies through the Kalamazoo Marathon virtual finish line.

“It is my first marathon and I am very excited,” says Delves, assistant athletic director of Bronco Productions. “[Kim] is the best training partner, and I couldn’t be doing this alone.”

With 30 years of running under her belt, Hemingway is no stranger to races. The coordinator for athletic insurance and medical insurance claims has celebrated accomplishments from 5Ks, half-marathons, a 25K and a marathon, with a second on deck.

Delves is more of a swimmer, with a competitive streak.
Thomas Delves (left) and Kim Hemingway (right) run through the Kalamazoo Mall.

“I haven’t really ever been a ‘runner’ per se,” he says. “The times I ran [previously] were usually when my brother and his wife were doing a race and I would join that race to try and beat them; I haven’t lost to them for the books.”

Now he’s extending far beyond his 10K history, with a 26.2-mile run on his horizon.

“It is for sure tough at times to be motivated to run in some of the weather, but overall it has been a great challenge.”

Starting his training in January, long before the Kalamazoo Marathon was forced to cancel the in-person event, COVID-19 threw a curve ball at him.

“I didn’t really know how to feel [when it got canceled]. All I knew was that I’m going to run 26.2 miles sometime in May, because there was no way I trained that much not to run it,” says Delves.

Socially distant but mentally in sync, Hemingway says she was determined to find a virtual marathon to take on. Then, she got her wish.

“Once [Borgess] Run Camp disbanded with the COVID-19 outbreak, I reached out to Thomas to see if he wanted to run together. I figured it would give each of us company,” she says.

“She is the best training partner of all time,” Delves says. “She is so positive and literally never stops running. Kim could run 20 miles and then be ready to go to a workout class. It’s crazy.”

Delves and Hemingway are planning to run the virtual Kalamazoo Marathon together—while observing social distancing—in early May. They say training continues throughout the week and weekend, and work schedule adjustments have actually helped them move forward.
“Now that my work day has changed because of the COVID-19 closures, I feel like I have more time to get my runs in during different times of the day and week,” says Hemingway. “I think right now with the Stay Home order from the governor, people are turning to walking or even running just to get outside to get fresh air and some exercise. It’s never too late to start running. Start out slow, and gradually increase your time. It’s all about time on your feet.”

A notion Hemingway has brought to her training time with Delves for his first marathon, fostering an accomplishment they can share.

“I am excited to be training and running with [Thomas] on our race day to see him achieve his goal.”
Dr. Kuanchin "KC" Chen

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—For an impressive second time, Dr. Kuanchin "KC" Chen, professor of business information systems, co-director of the Center for Business Analytics and John W. Snyder faculty fellow at Western Michigan University, has earned a highly competitive Fulbright Specialist Award from the U.S. Department of State and the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board.

Since the inception of the Fulbright Specialist Program in 2001, faculty from the Haworth College of Business have received this award three times in the business administration category. Chen received his first Fulbright award as an associate professor at the college in 2012.

With this award, Chen will complete a project at Warsaw University of Life Sciences in Poland that aims to exchange research experiences and establish partnerships benefiting participants, institutions, and communities both in the U.S. and overseas through educational and training activities within business administration.

"I am very humbled to join my fellow awardees, some of whom are also recipients of the Nobel Prize, Pulitzer Prize and other prestigious honors," Chen says. "This project will allow me to share my research, teaching and curriculum design experience in analytics and project management, which will help build analytics expertise at the host institution. The immediate impact will be the expansion of faculty interest and proficiency in data analytics..."
disciplines, such as business analytics, data science, business intelligence and machine learning, that are of interest globally in business and other fields."

Chen is a co-director of the college’s Center for Business Analytics, overseeing analytics research and industry collaborations. He is an associate editor of the Behaviour & Information Technology Journal, as well as a guest editor and board member of several journals and conferences. Chen championed the development of one of the nation’s 28 undergraduate business analytics programs at the Haworth College of Business. He has also received more than 10 research and teaching awards from multiple organizations in his discipline, scholarly journals, WMU and several other institutions. Chen’s work has been widely cited by authors from more than 60 disciplines, including business, engineering and science.

INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

Considered the world’s largest and most diverse international educational exchange program, Fulbright is devoted to increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. Chen’s previous Fulbright trip to Taiwan in 2012 helped develop faculty interest in business analysis, project management and analytics through lectures, research and mentorship, resulting in scholarship exchange, as well as research collaboration, which was included in reputable journals.

"As a longtime scholar of international cultures, I am sensitive to the subtleties of cultural differences and how they apply to pedagogy," Chen says. "Bridging differences to set mutual expectations in research and teaching are important to the success of my Fulbright mission."

Chen carries this mission into his teaching at WMU, emphasizing that his Fulbright experiences have had an immediate and long-lasting influence on delivering instruction. "My exchange experiences always impact my teaching," he says. "One area of focus is to facilitate faculty and student collaborations internationally. Observing teaching and learning within different cultures allows me to recognize the nuances that could easily influence the effects of one’s intended instructional strategies."

With international learning taking place largely online, Chen adds that understanding cultural differences in virtual instruction is especially important. "The dynamics of technology-facilitated interaction, such as computer-mediated communication, are quite different when participants come from different cultural backgrounds," he says. "In these instances, it is important to be aware of not just the country’s national culture, but also its relationships with digital norms."

Fulbright Specialist Awards are selected on the basis of academic and professional achievement and demonstrated leadership. The award recognizes Chen’s achievements in these aforementioned areas at the national level. Chen will be eligible for additional awards in the next three years.
ABOUT THE FULBRIGHT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government and is designed to build lasting connections between the people of the United States and other countries. The program is funded through an annual appropriation made by the U.S. Congress to the U.S. Department of State. Participating governments and host institutions, corporations and foundations around the world also provide direct and indirect support to the program, which operates in more than 160 countries worldwide.

Fulbrighters address critical global issues in all disciplines, while building relationships, knowledge and leadership in support of the long-term interests of the United States. Fulbright alumni have become heads of state, judges, ambassadors, cabinet ministers, CEOs and university presidents, as well as leading journalists, artists, scientists and teachers. They include 60 Nobel Laureates, 86 Pulitzer Prize winners, 74 MacArthur Fellows, 16 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients and thousands of leaders across the private, public and non-profit sectors.

More information is available on the Fulbright Program.

Frontline for relief: WMU team helps small businesses survive COVID-19 impacts

Contact: Megan Looker
March 30, 2020

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—In an unprecedented time of uncertainty, many small businesses throughout West Michigan are struggling to make ends meet. From lack of sales to growing needs of their employees, they’re relying on state or federal aid. However, preparing to secure disaster relief is no small feat, a detail the Michigan Small Business Development Center—SBDC—knows all too well.

Housed within Western Michigan University’s Haworth College of Business, the SBDC small business team is working with clients within the seven counties of southwest Michigan to
provide direction and assistance in filling out the various forms needed for government aid.  

“Prior to the start of COVID-19, a significant amount of our time was assisting our clients with starting and growing their businesses. ... Now, we are helping them to survive,” says Tamara Davis, regional director of the Michigan SBDC.

The list of institutions providing disaster recovery funding or loans grows by the day, including the Small Business Administration, Michigan Economic Development Corporation and local community organizations and government, like the city of Kalamazoo and Battle Creek Unlimited. The SBDC is urging small businesses to reach out to their regional office if they need assistance or visit their website.

In the last few weeks, the small business team at WMU was on the front lines of assisting Gov. Gretchen Whitmer with the recent SBA Disaster Recovery Loan program. Davis says they were responsible for getting impact statements from each county in southwest Michigan to demonstrate the need for the loans.

“There are so many programs coming into place and each is providing a variety of offerings for both employers and employees,” Davis says. “We are trying to stay abreast of the rather fluid environment we are finding ourselves in right now so we can best direct our clients.”

Direction from the SBDC includes daily webinars on topics like navigating the cash-flow crunch, sustaining businesses, available resources and how to file for relief loans. Their
goal is to provide small businesses and nonprofits with funds to cover essentials, such as utilities, payroll, and rent or mortgage.

While it’s short-term relief, Davis says the benefit of this aid extends far beyond the next few months.

“The impact to the Western Michigan University community is significant,” Davis says. “All of these efforts are being put into place in order to maintain our vibrant community long after the COVID-19 outbreak has passed.”

While the SBDC is focusing its efforts on helping local businesses, she says community members are also taking up the call.

“I’ve been so impressed with the outpouring of support and offers of assistance we have had from the business community. Every day, accountants and other business professionals are reaching out to see if they can be of assistance to our clients.”

Connecting bridges, Davis says, is well worth the tireless work.

“We know we are a critical resource to the community, and it makes me very proud to know we are able to make a difference.”

Music challenge aims to build harmony, community from a distance

Contact: Erin Flynn
April 8, 2020

Watch Blake Morgan (left) and Dr. David Loberg Code's rendition of WMU's alma mater.
KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Thousands of miles apart, a Western Michigan University faculty member and alumnus hope to bring people together—through music. Dr. David Loberg Code, associate director and coordinator of graduate studies in the School of Music, and Blake Morgan, now a member of the London-based professional ensemble VOCES8, collaborated remotely to sing the University’s alma mater.

"Although we cannot do it (in person), I wanted to show that we can still make music together," Code says.

He is now challenging the WMU community to join in, using the hashtag #wmuMakesMusic. He provides instructions online for downloading the Acapella app and recording music virtually with multiple people. The challenge gives the School of Music community a creative outlet to stay connected and engaged with one another, while also allowing the public to check out their talent by searching the hashtag.

"It is a good example of experiential learning with new technologies, but more importantly, I hope it will be uplifting for our community to share videos with each other engaged in what we all love to do—make music."

Kennedy Dixon, a senior majoring in viola performance as well as composition, took up the challenge with her roommates Gabby Lindhurst and Becca Spurbeck, who are also music majors.

Kennedy Dixon turns to music as an escape in uncertain times.

"Taking part in this challenge was important to me to show that music can help distract us for a moment from the pain that is happening in the world during this hard time, and remind fellow Broncos that music heals," she says. "I'm a social butterfly by nature, so this time has been really difficult for me. But, I'm thankful for the technology that we have, making connecting with family and friends so easy!"

STAYING CONNECTED

Living with fellow music students, Dixon has been able to stem the loneliness that comes with self-isolation.

"We’re all coping well and making sure that we are respecting each other’s spaces during online classes and virtual sessions."

The transition to distance learning is challenging for music students who are used to collaborating in groups. But the skills Dixon has developed through the School of Music have also given way to new opportunities—both academic and creative.
"When words fail, music speaks. As both a performance and composition major, I'm grateful for the ability to be able to express my feelings through both platforms when I'm at a loss for words," says Dixon, who grew up in Grand Rapids. "I've been seeing so many collaborative projects in the past couple of weeks from organizations throughout Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Chicago and beyond. So much creativity has come from this."

Code hopes the #wmuMakesMusic challenge will spur even more creativity within the WMU community. Dixon says if anyone can do it, Broncos can.

"I'm so proud to call myself a Bronco, especially in a time like this," Dixon says. "I've never felt more of a sense of community and understanding from those around me, and there's just so much support being spread."