The mold is back and it has spread

After a humid fall, buildings on both campuses are facing mold problems

By Chelsey Johnstone
Senior Reporter

Last fall mold was detected in a faculty office in the BS building. Now, there is mold again, this time in the MS building, the SC building, and on the JKCC Trenton Campus. Several professors say exposure to the mold is causing them to feel ill, and in a survey of 50 students, 30 percent reported feeling ill exclusively in the MS building.

“We’ve had issues with mold on the floor, the ceiling, the lab cabinets,” said Professor of Biology, Ellen Genovesi, who is allergic to mold and has faced a variety of symptoms including coughing, sore throat and headaches. For several weeks she wore a face mask while teaching, but has now been relocated to a different classroom.

Professor Genovesi is not the only professor reporting health issues due to mold. Physics and Chemistry Professor Michael Dornerman says he is getting headaches from working in his first-floor office in the MS building.

Students are also experiencing problems, possibly due to the high percentage of students with asthma on Mercer’s campus. In two surveys of 50 students conducted last fall and this spring, 25 percent said they were asthmatic, more than triple the national average of 8.3 percent according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Dasia Allen, a Biology major at Mercer, said, “I am a little concerned considering I do have asthma, and I’ve had a problem in the past where there was mold in my school. It caused my asthma to flare up really bad...The fact that I don’t know about [the mold here] means that I can’t seek help...I would like to know simply so that I can avoid it.”

- Dasia Allen, Biology Major

As reported in The VOICE in December 2017, Supervising Team Leader Fred Carella told the faculty members occupying the office that the mold was due to “a leak in the HVAC system in the hall outside the double doors on the east side of the business building. To determine the cause of the leak we removed the insulation from the piping. We then repaired the piping to stop the leak from continuing.”

Director of Facilities and Safety Bryon Marshall also told those occupying BS 137 that two rounds of “Mold Zap” were used and that the problem had been resolved, a fact that was confirmed by the company that tested for the mold- Whitman Environmental Consulting and Engineering. However, the problem recurred this year and is no longer limited to a single faculty office. Now it is classrooms like the biology labs in MS.

“We have problems with cleaning,” Professor Dornerman says, adding, “They don’t wash the floors. They don’t sweep the floor the way they used to. If this building is dirty we’re going to have mold, that’s all there is to it.”

A different reason for the mold was given by Director of Facilities and Safety Bryon Marshall in an email to faculty sent on October 9. He wrote, “This heightened and sustained humidity[ic] weather has caused a higher number of incidents of surface mold.” In the email, titled “Environmen- tal Challenges” he explains that several things are being done to address the situation including using bleach solutions, installing dehumidification units, evaluating the HVAC systems, and improving overall housekeeping.

College President Dr. Jianping Wang says, “Within the old buildings, the problem is not going to go away with a lit- tle tweak of HVAC...Unless you tear down the whole system, you can’t fix it.”

However, Dr. Wang noted, cost is an obstacle. “This college only receives anywhere between 2 to 3 million dollars a year to reno- vate this big of a campus. You can’t even touch a bathroom for less than $100,000,” she says.

She said, “Which building is falling apart will get the first makeover. The reason we want to add on to the old build- ing is because the trick is when we add on to an old building we can also replace the old build- ings HVAC system.”

Another concern that has held over since last year is the question of when and how students are notified about mold on campus. Last year stu- dents were never informed by the college about the problem. At the time, Bryon Marshall stated in an email, “The decision to not notify the student population was made, in part, due to the identifica- tion/location of the source, the nature and extent of the bio- logical substance/containment and relocation efforts that were undertaken to minimize expo- sure.”

This year students still haven’t been informed. Dr. Wang believes it is unnecessary to panic over the
By Jigna Milleliri

Mercer has a new full-time Professor of Biology, Ami Rivera. Rivera, who was previously a Teaching Assistant in the department, completed her undergraduate degree at Rider University and got her M.S. from Drexel. She is also a mom, a CrossFit coach and athlete, and a small business owner.

One of Professor Rivera’s former students, Joe Ville-gas, says, “The first day of class, my first impression was ‘Wow! She means business’. She’s not messing around.’ She was the kind of teacher that instills hard work ethics in her students.”

Another student, Tim Hughes, a 2016 Mercer Physical Therapy Assistant program graduate says, “Professor Rivera isn’t one of those people that does her lecture and goes home. She takes a personal stake in wanting people to succeed if she can help them.”

In an interview with Professor Rivera, she said, “As a personal level I hope I make an impact with students because I’ve been in similar shoes.”

Rivera, who is of Puerto Rican and Italian descent, lost both her parents when she was young. She was on her own by age 16, working through school to make ends meet and juggling different roles at the same time. Rivera says she understands what it’s like to be a struggling student.

Professor of Biology Ellen Genovesi says of her new colleague, “She finds a good balance between offering assis-tance but wants her students to figure things out on their own.” She adds, “She works very well independently, and she is a real asset to JKC [our Trenton campus]. She is bilingual; she speaks Spanish. That is a big advantage with the students we have downtown.”

Professor Rivera stayed for two hours after class to explain the diagnosis of ALS, also known as Lou Ghergi’s Disease, what it means on a biological level and on a practical one. The student went on to graduate and complete the nursing program. She was able to then take care of her sick father until his passing a year later.

“I was so proud of her, and to this day she’ll reach out to me every now and then and she’ll thank me. That’s the ultimate compliment to know that she delivered on her dream,” Rivera says. “She was healthy enough to still make her dreams happen and she lives that out through (her dad), and for him,” says Rivera.

Professor of Biology and Personnel Committee chair, Ron Smith told the VOICE, “Students are very engaged in [Professor Rivera’s] class, I feel that the students have a lot of respect for her; she is interactive, she gives a lot of good examples that ap- ply to everyday life, and I think that just allows students to con-nect to that information that could be difficult to understand.”

Genovesi says, “When we interviewed her, we were very impressed because we asked her to do a demonstra-tion on how to use a microscope and she seems to explain things in the correct technical terms but in a way that a student that never used a microscope would understand…..that is what im-pressed us most.”

Professor Rivera has a busy life outside the classroom as well. “The other thing that has still been the love of my life is sports,” she says.

Rivera is the former President of the Sons of Ben Major League Soccer boosters’ organization in Philadelphia, and the co-creator of a new company called Before90 Productions, that covers that Wom-en’s National Soccer League. The company focuses on the lives of female athletes.

“The salaries [women in the National Soccer League] get are abysmal in comparison to the men’s. They don’t train any differently. They don’t train any less, play any less and yet the conditions are way worse for them,” Rivera says. This issue inspired her and her business partner, Britanni Bartok, to give these women athletes more sig-nificant media attention.

Before90’s social me-dia describes what they offer as “Content that entertains, in- forms, inspires, & transforms the way you see players, teams, & the cities that host them before their next 90 minutes.”

Entertaining, inform-ing, inspiring and transforming are all words that describe Rive-ra herself, especially in the eyes of her students, friends and col-leagues.

Ph.D

Continued from page 1

As mold problem spreads, students and faculty worry about health

type of mold present at Mercer.

She said, “Most of us, fortunately, are healthy enough to say ‘Oh that mold, let me just wipe it off and clean it’.”

When asked why stu-dents have not been notified, Dr. Wang responded, “We all understand young generation people don’t like to read a lot of text….When we have a very long email we don’t know how many students will be interested in reading them.”

She noted that Dean of Students Dr. Diane Campbell would be the one responsible for any mass email to students. “Dr. Campbell says,’Every day there is all kinds of stuff that goes on here, and I don’t think that students have to be informed about everything.”

But if there is something that comes up that could be harm-ful, and we found that it could be harmful, then I think that students should be informed.”

She continued, “They put dehumidifiers over there. They are doing the clean up that needed to be done. As far as I was concerned they were taking the steps to fix the situation.”

Professor Dorneman asked the administration about increas-ing the airflow throughout the building to help combat the is-sue. He states, “They said they were going to put in de-humidifiers as a stop gap, and that’s okay, but you can’t run them in class all the time because of the noise. Noise pollu-tion is an issue. There are state regulations about that.”

As of now, all three floors of the MS building have dehumidifi-ers, five being on floor two.

Dr. Wang says, “It’s the extreme weather that is caus-ing this problem, it’s not Mer- cer’s problem. It’s the whole country’s problem. The ulti-mate goal is to combat climate change.”

Dorneman says, “I want to believe them when they say they’re going to fix it” He concluded, “I believe them when they say that the places they tested there were no patho-genic mold spores, I completely and entirely believe them when they said that this is a stop gap measure and we’re going to fix it. I now want to see their plan.”
Winning streak takes men’s soccer to playoffs

By Caitlin Clarke
Senior Reporter

The Mercer men’s soccer team closed out a weekend of play on Sunday, October 7 with a decisive 7-0 victory over non-conference opponent Georgian Court University. The Vikings have seen continued success throughout the season, winning each of the 6 games that they have played since September 26 to maintain a 16-2 overall record.

Stand out offensive performances came from Freshmen Yuhei Matsushita and Mattheus Martins, who scored two goals each, combining their efforts to put away half of the team’s seven goals during the October 7 shutout. Matsushita and Martins also supported the team with three combined assists.

Matsushita said, “I am very happy to help the team with goals, but this season hasn’t finished, so I will do my best to contribute to the team [throughout].”

Freshman Goalkeeper Eial Marzouk, who had not given up a single goal in the three games prior to Mercer’s match against Georgian Court, continued the streak with yet another shutout.

According to the Georgian Court athletics website, the team’s loss to Mercer comes just prior to Mercer’s match against Georgian Court, continued the streak with yet another shutout.

“What we do better now, and something that we keep doing every day, every training, every game, is trying to move players into different positions on the field to see where they fit better to help the team...and it seems to be working very well.”

The Mercer men’s soccer team is scheduled to face off against conference opponent Essex County College, the two teams generally play in entirely separate athletic conferences against different opponents. This particular match was for the purpose of development and for additional play, with both teams utilizing a wide variety of players from their respective rosters.

GCC Head Coach Dino Raso said, “We use our development squad to test out ALL of our players. We do not go into any game with victory as the main objective.”

Raso continued, “Our development games are used as a vehicle to give ALL players a chance to play which can mean that the start of our games can be a little disjointed, and I think that was the case against Mercer.”

GCC Assistant Coach John Adair said, “As a group, it showed [us] that there is always progress to be made...Our guys understand that while they have made positive steps in their development, there is always room to improve.”

Team Captain Diego Leite said, “We have a lot of talent on our team, but I think that the main point that has been leading us to victory is that we play for each other, as a family. I feel like we want the victory more than everybody else.”

Mercer’s last two losses came against Essex and Monroec. Mercer lost 3-0 to in-conference opponent Essex County in a September 22 home game. Mercer Head Coach Widmar Dalce said, “What we do better now, and something that we keep doing every day, every training, every game, is trying to move players into different positions on the field to see where they fit better to help the team...and it seems to be working very well.”

Diego Leite said, “We need to improve our communication on the field and play more compact, but we are working hard every day in order to achieve our goals.”

Region 19 playoff play began on Saturday, October 20. The NJCAA Division I Men’s Soccer National Championship game will be played Saturday, November 17 in Daytona, Florida. Seeding has yet to be determined.

New men’s lacrosse team gets ready for first season

By Caitlin Clarke
Senior Reporter

When the first players on Mercer’s inaugural men’s lacrosse team began practicing the month of October, there was a lot to be done to build towards becoming an established college program.

There was no proper field, essential equipment such as helmets, sticks, jerseys, and even balls had not arrived, and there was still the task of recruiting both players and coaching staff left up to newly hired head coach Rob Siris.

“They didn’t have a locker room until one was fashioned out of unused storage space in the PE building over the summer. The players adapted to the circumstances and could be seen practicing behind the PE building throughout the spring semester and into the summer and now early fall.

Today, a substantial amount of progress has been made towards establishing a new team on Mercer’s campus. Official practices began in early September, and several scrimmages were played throughout October.

“[Practices are] going well. They’re very up tempo. They look better than most community colleges I would say. For our first year it’s looking good,” said midfielder Brady Moore.

He continued, “Everyone is excited to come to practice every day, and that is a big thing.”

Kieran Murphy, a fellow team member said, “I think that [practices] are pretty fun, to be honest. They’re better than any high school practice that I have been a part of.”

The team’s Head Coach, Rob Siris, formerly led the nearby Hopewell Valley Central High School’s lacrosse team and currently serves as the U.S. Lacrosse Central Jersey Chairman, according to his profile on the Mercer Athletics website.

Mercer Athletic Director John Simone said, “[Siris] has had great contacts in the county, so it was easy for him to get calls. I think we have every high school in the county represented on the team...He definitely has a good reach in the area.”

Siris said, “Social media has been very helpful, and I think that once the word had gotten out there, [people know] we have a great athletic program. It’s a great option academically. It’s very affordable...I think that Mercer has sold itself, and the numbers speak for that.”

In fact, Siris said that his expectations for the first season’s roster size have already been exceeded. The goal was to get 30 players for the first season and that number has been surpassed.

The team’s coaching staff has also grown over the past months with the hiring of Nick Shriver as an Assistant Coach and the team’s Offensive Coordinator, as well as Matt Serfass as another Assistant Coach and their Defensive Coordinator.

Siris said of Shriver and Serfass, “We tried to find guys who are locals, who have had good experience, and connected well with the guys. They are a good fit.”

While the official first season of collegiate play will begin for Mercer men’s lacrosse in the spring of 2019, the team is scheduled to face off with established teams such as Delaware Valley University, Felician University, Delaware Tech, and Wilmington University in scrimmages throughout the month of October.
Local couple succeed with Latin fusion food truck

By Chelsey Johnstone & Jigna Milleliri

Passion often takes a leap of faith and a lot of dedication to pursue. Local couple, Andrea Pantoja and fiance Andrea Sanchez, finally realized their dream food truck, Arepa Express. The project, which was expected to take six months, ultimately took five years to complete.

“We’ve had a lot of people say ‘You don’t know how it will be done.’ That’s hard. When will it be done? I don’t think you guys will ever finish it,” Sanchez says, adding, “I kind of had to put ear muffns on and keep walking... that’s what you have to do sometimes.”

To accomplish it they survived a variety of adventures including selling an old mechanical bull to get the money for a refrigerator the picked up from a Philadelphia college. The food truck’s offerings combine both Pantoja’s Puerto Rican background with Sanchez’s Venezuelan heritage. The soon-to-be husband and wife have married their ethnic cuisines to create a fusion unlike any other in the area.

Sanchez, who says her family has always had a passion for the art of cooking and baking, is the mastermind behind some of Arepa Express’s most popular dishes.

“My mother is more of the sweet baking (background), and my grandmother is more of the savory,” she says.

One of their signature dishes, the Arepa, leans to the savory side and showcases the diversity, colorful, natural produce, and locally sourced ingredients in their refrigerator. Primarily grilled on the flat top then quickly flash fried, the Arepa is then sliced into a pocket-like pita and filled with hot, creamy chicken salad.

The couple says it is important that their food represents them, their passions, and the true nature of their cultures.

“People who are not able to go to those countries can enjoy it here...” Sanchez says.

The couple takes the truck to all kinds of events and has found Arepa’s most popular dish is their chickens and beef empeñadas. They can sell as many as 500 per festival. Between the half moon of flaky and buttery crust the team has found an excellent balance of textures and has successfully paired flavors of intense garlic, sweet bell peppers, and sauted white onions to complement the bold flavors of the chicken.

As for the beef empeñadas, it is mildly spicy, moist, not greasy, balanced, and overpowering.

Although Puerto Rican and Venezuelan food are the main cuisines of Arepa Express, Pantoja and Sanchez include the flavors of other cultures as well. “We have Mexican, South American, Asian, we even have middle eastern [flavors] with some of the dishes,” Pantoja says.

At first glance, the sounds of a peanut butter chicken in mayo may not sound appealing, but the combination of the warm, silky peanut butter with salty soy sauce fuses together with the nuttiness of creamy and tender chicken to evoke the traditional foods of Thailand.

Of course, no Latin food truck is complete without the addition of legitimate street tacos as well. With a quick sear of the corn tortillas and a fine chop of the cubed steak, two delicately prepared boats support the ripe avocado, raw onion, and vibrant green cilantro. These are served with Sanchez’s homemade salsa picante infused with a generous amount of fresh ingredients, blended garlic, onion, tomato, cilantro, and habanero added at customer request.

It seems as though Arepa Express not only has been able to keep a substantial following, they have recently announced their plans to open a new restaurant just 10 minutes away from Mercer’s West Windsor campus.

Pantoja says, “We are trying to create a spot where kids can come after school. [They] don’t have that anymore.”

Photo: Chelsey Johnstone

Andrea Sanchez, owner and cook, serves up her fresh chicken peanut butter fajita with an order of steak tacos and a smile.

Mercer alumnus serves up an unexpected taco success

By Caitlin Clarke

Senior Reporter

Some of the best tacos in town are made by a Chinese immigrant and Mercer alumnus named Sam Zheng, owner and manager of TacoRito in Robbinsville. He says his interest in Mexican cuisine started with a trip to Chihuahua.

Their food is very Americanized,” said Zheng. “I wanted TacoRito to have its own concept where food is made to order, and customers can have their own toppings, but at the same time offer many authentic dishes and keep the salsa and flavoring as close to Mexican as possible.”

These dishes include the Crazy Empanadas, Nachos, and Quesadillas.

“We try to keep our menu exciting by offering our dishes every year and removing dishes that don’t sell,” said Zheng.

He continued, “Every once in a while, I’ll work with the cooks to come up with new dishes and we will do a testing to see which customers like it.”

For not much money you can get a veritable mountain of food. If you are starting to feel the beginning of the fall chill, you’ll be happy to know that by the end of a typical meal, you’ll feel satisfied and warm. You may also be jazzed to know that you will probably leave with several Styrofoam boxes filled to their limit. A college student can never have too many leftovers.

The atmosphere is casual, comfortable, and modern with light, refreshing colors and an entire wall covered in southwestern cactus plants. Customers are greeted by a shelf lined with a wide variety of hot sauces, a fridge packed with sugary, flavorful Mexican sodas, and a display of emerald veggies, ruby salsas, and a rainbow of other sauces.

Every dish leaves you feeling warm and comfortable as if grandma is back in the kitchen whipping up steak burritos, quesadillas, enchiladas, and traditional desserts. The only difference is that you might not feel as guilty not finishing everything in one sitting.

The Taco-Rito Rito is as big as a baby’s arm, and is packed with crispy cabbage, a hint of lime juice, jalapenos spicy enough to scare those with weak taste buds, a slight dash of cilantro, some chipotle mayo, bright yellow rice, and enough steak to feed a village.

The Crazy Quesadillas are indeed, crazy huge.

The tortillas bulge with a wide variety of ingredients, including corn, cabbage, chicken, and chipotle mayo. It creates an overwhelming experience, but in the best way.

To top things off, the distinctly American Fried Oreos offered at TacoRito are the ultimate treat. They’ll remind you of treats at local food festivals, and the powdered sugar is pure comfort food.

Tom Smith, 61, a Robbinsville resident and fellow diner said, “I think I’ve been here about eight times, and I do like it... I like the Mexican style chicken.”

TacoRito is a good place to go if you have a big appetite, an ambitious mindset, a willingness to try something unique, or desire to feel the comfort of a more traditional dish.
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TWO YEARS OF PROTESTS

PROTESTS 2017

Largest nationwide protests of 2017 from Countlove.org

From the Boston Tea Party, to the Whiskey Rebellion, to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, vocalizing disagreement and protest has been a theme of American history. But in the Trump era we are at a frequency previously unseen. The question now is, what is the effect of voter turnout? And, secondarily, to what extent is youth participation propelling the movement?

Throughout 2017 there were an estimated 11,149 protests, according to Crowd Sourcing Consortium of protests at 11,149.

Reporter LA Kauffman said in an opinion article for The Guardian entitled "We are Living through a Golden Age of Protest," "this is certainly unprecedented before in the US. Even when you adjust percentage than took to the streets during the height of the vietnam and 1970's..." Maggie Carroll, a Liberal Arts major at Mercer for gun laws and marches for Black Lives Matter, asked me to become involved myself. Seeing so many marches, it was a really good feeling! Kauffman explains that "6,000 local resist groups, Indivisible, the advocacy protest group founded by all of these groups, are consistently active."

He continues, "This alone represents a unprecedented in American history. Many of these groups in their areas, hoping that this wave of street action in November 2018 midterm elections"

A Pew Research Center article titled 'Activism in the Social Media Age' states, "Engagement across social media has helped organizers to spread awareness about major issues. For example, the hashtag #metoo, used more than 30 million times on Twitter, it has become easier to spread activist messages across the nation. Social media has helped organizers to spread awareness about major issues."

With hashtags like #metoo, #blacklivesmatter, and #neveragain being used more than 30 million times on Twitter, it has become easier to spread activist messages across the nation. Social media has helped organizers to spread awareness about major issues.

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In order to make a difference you have to change policy, and you have to change who sets the policy. And that means voting. "Yes," Tommy Leung, a co-founder of Countlove.org tells the VOICE. "The protests help to..." Tommy Leung, a co-founder of Countlove.org tells the VOICE. "The protests help to..." Tommy Leung, a co-founder of Countlove.org tells the VOICE. "The protests help to..."

"From the Boston Tea Party, to the Whiskey Rebellion, to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, vocalizing disagreement and protest has been a theme of American history. But in the Trump era we are..." Tommy Leung, a co-founder of Countlove.org tells the VOICE. "From the Boston Tea Party, to the Whiskey Rebellion, to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, vocalizing disagreement and protest has been a theme of American history. But in the Trump era we are..."

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With hashtags like #metoo, #blacklivesmatter, and #neveragain being used more than 30 million times on Twitter, it has become easier to spread activist messages across the nation. Social media has helped organizers to spread awareness about major issues. This begs the question; does protesting affect politics?

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TWO YEARS OF POLITICAL PROTEST

Throughout 2017 there were an estimated 8,700 protests, and an estimated 5.9-9 million voter turnout? And, secondarily, to what extent is youth participation propelling the movement? The question now is: will the rallies have an impact on policy or to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, vocalizing disagreement with the government has been a theme From the Boston Tea Party, to the Whiskey Rebellion, to the struggle for civil rights, and opposition coming midterm election is yet to be seen, but on Election Day, November 6, we will find out.

The effect the past two years of street protests will have on voting choices and turn out this to register and vote. "

Professor DeRosa, a political science professor at Mercer explains, "I just think younger people don't consider [voting] as important as they should...They would be the key to this election, but...in terms of them showing up, I think that there is some evidence that younger people are more politically engaged than previous generations.

He went on to say "In order to make a difference you have to change policy, and you have to need to see if protests make a difference...it's very obvious they are not enough alone."

"Yes, " Tommy Leung, a co-founder of Countlove.org tells the VOICE. "The protests help to media has helped organizers to spread awareness about major issues. With hashtags like #Metoo, #Blacklivesmatter, and #Neveragain being used more than 30 million times on Twitter, it has become easier to spread activist messages across the nation. Social

A VOICE survey of 50 Mercer students shows 42 percent were registered and intend to vote, compared to the national average of 48 percent of millennials who voted in the 2016 election. Compare this to the national average of 38 percent who said that they were registered and did not intend to do so.

Fisher continues to say, "Participants were also more likely than those at recent marches to have recently changed their profile picture to show support for a cause (23 percent vs. 13 percent), or used hashtags related to a political or social issue (20 percent vs. 8 percent)."

As Sociology Professor Dana R. Fishe wrote for The Washington Post, "The D.C. protest was not the first time many of these young people had participated in political action. The Pew study does not break down or separate the millennials and the Gen Xers in terms of behavior. The vast majority of the organizing in the past two years has been lead by adults, but there is evidence that younger people are becoming more politically engaged."

"The protests help to this idea that you have to change policy, and you have to need to see if protests make a difference...it's very obvious they are not enough alone."

Kauffman explains that "6,000 local resistance groups have united with affiliations with all, of these groups, are consistently active. "

Most, if not Indivisible, the advocacy protest group founded by two former congressional staffers. Most, if not
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If I was to go off my own experiences, probably would have allowed me to go full-time at school instead of working part-time and going to classes part-time, which condenses the timeline of graduation.

- Jennifer Eng, Student Government Association President

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Students still need on campus daycare

I had been living on my own as a young twenty-something for as long as I could remember, so when I decided I would buckle down and finish school, I figured it would be something I could breathe through in a reasonable amount of time. Then I got pregnant at the end of my first year and knew that my timeline was about to change.

It was inevitable that I would have to re-adjust, but along the way I have had crucial support in the form of daycare, that allowed me to make the decision to continue on with my education. This isn’t the case with many student parents. I believe with the option for free to low cost childcare on MCCC’s campuses many more parents would be able to realize their dreams of earning their degree.

My first search for information regarding support for student parents at Mercer led me to the Office of Student Affairs at the West Windsor campus, where I couldn’t get a clear answer about what Mercer could provide in this situation. It took scheduling a meeting with Dr. Diane Campbell, Vice-President of Student Affairs, who was open to my questions and extremely knowledgeable about the school’s past, present, and potential and the possibilities with childcare for its students. According to Dr. Campbell, Mercer has tried a childcare campaign, with daycares in the community, and currently connects parents, specifically low-income parents, with Child Care Connection, which is a state agency, to help them obtain vouchers for childcare locations in their neighborhoods. She says there was once a child care facility on campus, “At one time we had a full-blown child care center with teachers, and assistants and everything that the law required...and it was run by Lakeview,” Dr. Campbell said. “The obvious issue was the cost.”

“The problem was that it was too expensive for our students, and we had planned that people in the community would use the center and we would use that money to pay for the center. We just weren’t able to make the financial part of that work, because our students couldn’t pay what the other people were paying, so that effort closed,” Dr. Campbell said.

Funding may be an issue, but the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program (CCAMPIS) may be a viable option for funding a new childcare center on campus. This program, according to the US Department of Education website, is a grant that supports low-income parents and students willing to provide campus-based child care services. Although it looked as if the funding might be cut under the Trump administration, the White House proposal for the 2019 fiscal budget requested 1.5 million for the program. A report published by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research says close to one-fourth of all college students are parents and according to Community College Daily, 45 percent of the student parents in post-secondary education are enrolled in community college classes. With education impacting earnings, providing funding for childcare would be an incentive to get parents, especially single parents from low-income areas, back to school. This impact can also predict their own children’s decision to pursue higher education according to a study by the American Psychological Association. It improves parent choices and behaviors. The college can look at the positive feedback and re-assess the childcare availability on campus.

Choosing to go back to school before I had my daughter and attending school while pregnant and after her birth has proven to be a world of its own. Without support in the form of quality childcare, my path towards getting my degree with a child would be much different. Having childcare has played a huge part in my work and school success. I am able to build my schedule around when I have a caregiver for my daughter. My partner and I have options, but for the parents who don’t and who have to figure out what to do when they desire to lift themselves up, providing a place for our children to be cared for while we care for ourselves would benefit the community as a whole.

Fortunately, I was born the year before that so I am one of the 6.9 million who, without this legislation, may have never gotten an education. Students like me, with Down Syndrome, were often taken out of school. People didn’t think we could succeed.

Fortunately, I was born the year before that so I am one of the 6.9 million who, without this legislation, may have never gotten an education. Students like me, with Down Syndrome, were often taken out of school. People didn’t think we could succeed.

Although academics are hard for us, we do have potential and the law made it possible for us to prove it.

I had early intervention attending a special education focused preschool. When my family moved to Massachusetts, I initially was assigned to a regular middle school, but with the help of some of my teachers, my parents went to court and the sight so I could go to a school with a special education program.

We ended up leaving Massachusetts for New Jersey where I continued my education, attending West Windsor- Plainsboro Middle School, and then West Windsor-Plainsboro High School.

There, I had a lot of help from my parents, teachers and some really good peer groups to help me achieve my goals and reach my potential. My parents and three siblings taught me to never give up. Here at Mercer, the DREAM program—part of Mercer’s Center for Inclusion, Transition, and Accessibility, directed by Arlene Sinzoni—helps people with disabilities to get as far as they can in higher education. It started in 2005 with a grant from the parents of a college student with Down Syndrome. Since then the program has grown and includes about 40 mentors and tutors to help students with their classes. I never thought I would go to college, but look at me now! Not only do I take classes at Mercer, but I am also a reporter/writer for The College VOICE, which I love so much. Everyone has a voice here.

One day I hope to have a family of my own and to become a writer of books and music. I love dance and theater, and these things are much more within reach because I have had access to education.

To all who read this article: please keep trying your best in everything that you do in your life. Be kind to yourself and others, and never give up—whether or not you have disabilities!

Written with support from VOICE staff.
The Education for All Handicapped Children Act gave me a future.

Dear Voice,

I hear the school is crawling with mold. I'm starting to feel sick and there's no health center. What can I do?
— Sneezey

Dear Sneezey,

Look on the bright side.

--- Sneezy

What can I do?

There's no health center. I'm starting to feel sick and I can't think of anything to do.

Dear Voice,

- cockpit by Squirrel

Squirrel, please... I need help. I can't concentrate and feel like I'm not doing anything well.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

Now is the time to shut out negative voices and give yourself some positive self-talk. If you can't think of anything good to say, try posting a few inspirational quotes in place where you can see them.

Dear Wooden Stake,

- The VOICE

Oh, there will definitely be a next time. This is a common occurrence on the West Windsor campus. We have found that eating a garlicky meal right before class can help you concentrate and feel more focused.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

Whatever you do, don't let the origins of modern antibiotics be a next time. This is a common occurrence on the Trenton JKC campus where classes are held. We have found that eating a garlicky meal right before class can help you concentrate.

Dear Wooden Stake,

- The VOICE

Sometimes it makes sense to spend more time with animals than people. This is a good time to sign up for a pet or visit a zoo or outdoor animal sanctuary.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

It's fall and you are suddenly feeling cooped up. Time to get out to a free fall festival or spend time in nature. It will help you concentrate and feel more free.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

You are going through a tough time. This is a good time to snuggle a pet or hang out with animals.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

Your stomach may be suddenly feeling better. This is a good time to get your work done, but you need to veg out. If the cineplex won't stop you from vegging out, try posting a few inspirational quotes in place where you can see them.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

It's okay to not always gather your strength. It's a good time to take a break and get some rest.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

The holidays are coming up and you are not 100% confident that something good is going to happen to you. Expect it soon.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

The last time you caught a lucky break was... um... never? Good news. Finally something decent is going to happen to you. Expect it soon.

Dear Voice,

- The VOICE

Between work, family, and Mercer you are stretched thin this month. Things may not look like they will ever ease up, but the good news is, you are making so much progress toward your goals!
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