Are we missing faces as class Zooms by? 

Having cameras off changes perception of remote learning

By Elijah Parkman-Williams
Senior Reporter

For a year now thousands of Mercer students have been taking classes remotely, logging on to video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Teams and Collaborate usually twice a week for each of their classes.

Virtual classroom experiences are very different depending on the requirements of each professor, and the biggest difference many students make is whether they turn their cameras on or off.

WHO CARES WHO IS THERE?

According to a VOICE survey, 67% of the 100 students who took the survey say they don’t care much or at all if other students have their cameras on, but almost the same number say they find it important or very important that their instructors do so.

For them, 92 percent of the 27 faculty members who were also surveyed say they keep their cameras on all the time. Just a few said they did not and indicated the reason was that it isn’t optimal for the field they teach.

Professor John Morello of Accounting is one of the few who do not keep their camera on. He told The VOICE in an interview, “The important thing, I think when your teaching Accounting is to show people examples.”

On the other hand, that 92% of professors that do use their cameras find them crucial.

Professor Dr. Terry Voldase who teaches Business and Computer Sciences requires that students actually keep their cameras on during the entire class. She says, “When you don’t see them, you don’t know them.”

The majority of faculty, 74%, reported that it was difficult or extremely difficult to “teach a class where you can see few or no student faces.”

WHY ARE CAMERAS OFF?

ARE STUDENTS DITCHING OUT?

For students who said they don’t turn their cameras on at all, the most common reasons given were not wanting people to video record them, that because I know it came at a cost to them” she says. Dr. Lynch developed a love of books and libraries at the age of 6 or 7 when she recalls spending a lot of time at the Rutgers Camden library where her grandmother was studying. It was not until later on that she learned the truth.

She says she thought her grandmother was going back to college, and “dragging me along with her, motivating and inspiring me to go to college.

Dr. Lynch, who grew up in Camden, New Jersey, credits her grandmothers for finding financial resources to send her to a private Catholic school in a city that, she says, “chews womans and black people up and spits them out for lunch every day.”

Speaking about her grandmothers’ efforts, she said, “I had a huge responsibility to make sure I didn’t squander that because I know it came at a cost to them” she says.

Dr. Lynch takes on every challenge

PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. ANDREA LYNCH

Dr. Andrea Lynch, professor of Business and STEM at MCCC at her desk moments after defending her doctoral thesis remotely in April 2020. Her thesis topic was: “Community College Internationalization: The Intentional Integration of Cultural Perspectives Into the Student Experience.”

Some remote learning classes require students to keep their cameras on, but when they don’t, 30% of students turn their cameras on rarely or not at all according to a VOICE survey of 100 current MCCC students.
MCCC vax clinic up to 1,000 shots a day

By Ben Levit
Senior Reporter

Adrianna Marin is a student nurse who has been volunteering to administer covid vaccinations in MCCC’s gym over the last few weeks.

She was one of the eight people administering shots at the most recent clinic, on March 12. Together they tipped up a little glass vial, inserted a syringe, pulled it back the plunger, and gave over 1,000 shots.

“I like giving them [the vaccine]. The day goes by fast and a lot of people feel grateful,” Marin says, adding, “I was afraid at first but afterwards I was comfortable with it and it was fine.”

MCCC started administering vaccinations during a single weekend clinic in January, but now it’s one of the biggest hubs in the county, putting over 1,000 shots in arms each day, one to two days per week.

Professor Elizabeth Mizerek, head of Nursing Education and chief organizer for the clinic says it is now being “run by the Mercer County Division of Public Health. They are the sponsoring agency. We at Mercer are assisting them by providing them with a physical location as well as assisting them in terms of staffing.”

According to Professor Mizerek, the clinic is open one to two days a week because the gym has other activities scheduled that they have to work around.

“Some students are very shy, some don’t have working cameras to be another digital window into the lives of students and can be too intrusive. When the camera is on in my home, you’re seeing a window into my life and to who I am that I may not want to reveal.” Dr. Ladson says.

On the other hand, equally as many faculty members—50%—think students who keep their cameras off may do it so they look present and then they go off to do other things, basically ditching class.

Of the 100 students who took the survey, only one claimed they have done so. They said they log in to class then turn their camera off and go help their mother with chores.

But many students said they log in and then turn their cameras off so they can just listen in, potentially missing presentations or other parts of class.

Further, it is possible students are unreporting the fact that they are ditching out since faculty members say there is evidence that students are abandoning class regularly, as one faculty member put it, “When ten percent of my Zoom class misses the end of class and the blank windows just sit there while I say ‘Hello! Hello! I’m all too keenly aware that’s the number of students who literally wandered off.”

From the 67% of faculty members that say they have discovered students who “wandered off,” they said it had a highly negative impact on their perception of the student.

TECHNOLOGY IS NOT THE ISSUE

Out of 100 students who took the survey, many said they turn their camera off because they find the class boring, but not a single student who said they kept their cameras off all or most of the time selected technical issues as a reason.

One faculty member responded to the survey saying, “Some students are very shy, some don’t have working cameras, and some don’t have the bandwidth to support cameras and staying connected at the same time. I don’t want working cameras to be another digital divide showing socioeconomic difference and making some students feel less able.”

However, many professors, 38%, said they require cameras on for some or all of their classes and many students say keeping their cameras on was a factor in their grade and that was why they kept them on.

Another faculty member who responded to the survey said, “I require cameras on. If a student does not have their camera on, I will remove them from the class to the waiting room. In on-campus classes, no one comes to school with a towel over his or her head so they cannot be seen. I don’t accept their excuses for being video muted. In my opinion, if cameras are off, they are ‘multi-tasking’ and partially engaged. It’s easy to do, I do it myself when I am video-muted during meetings.”

The same instructor said they make some exceptions. “Occasionally a student communicates that they have a broken camera, I will allow that exception, but the entire class knows that is the reason Suzie has her camera off and this reason does not apply to everyone.”

WHO IS ALWAYS ON?

Students who keep their cameras on all the time say they do so because it is either a requirement, because it makes a good impression on the teacher, or because it keeps them focused on their work.

“I think keeping it on helps you stay focused, you know the teacher sees you,” says Jermarie Madina, a Business Administration student. “It kinda helps you be in more of a class setting.”

Sixty-two percent of faculty members surveyed said they wished their students would have their video on more in class. But while 83% of students say they think faculty like it when they have their cameras on, only 9% think they should turn their camera on more.

One professor who requires students to be visible said, “I work hard to earn their respect of my camera-on rule. These are some of the ways I try to humanize this whole 100% experience.”
Student moms are balancing it all

By Beryl Zonese

Before Amandeep Sidhu started her courses as a Business major this semester, she reached out to her professors and told them she is a mom of three and in case she had an emergency at home, she may need an extension. So far she hasn’t asked for one.

“I realized that my opportunities are going to be limited if I don’t have an education and so for the longest time I was just waiting to come back to continue with my education,” Sidhu says.

Sidhu says that the transition has not been that hard because she is more than determined to complete her degree this time around.

“I was really motivated.” Sidhu explains, “I did go to college previously but I dropped out because I kind of lost hope, didn’t do too well and I gave up too quickly. I am not really finding it hard now because I am just so motivated.”

Heather Gray, a Nursing and Health major and mother of four, says the key is support.

“Luckily I have an excellent support system. My husband is wonderful. My mom is wonderful. My brother and my sister-in-law, they all help me out,” Gray says.

English Professor Edward Carmien, who has had several student moms in his classes every year says, “I do find new parents, especially mothers, have constraints on their time and are often tired. Taking college classes while parenting is hard!”

Before the pandemic lockdown, another Mercer mom, Amoria Downing, told The VOICE the problem for her was daycare.

“The problem with [some daycare] is that your income can disqualify you, and most of the places they offer do not have late night babysitting, so it’s a trouble with evening classes for me,” Downing said.

Now, instead of worrying about daycare student moms have to worry about helping their own children navigate Zoom classes while taking classes themselves, and they may not have anyone to look after their kids while they are trying to focus on class.

Sidhu says sometimes she has to attend lectures with her two-year-old who may make noise during lectures.

“There’s not much I can do but I am glad I am more mature. And if there is an emergency, she’s crying, I will just turn off my video for a little while.” Sidhu says.

With all the juggling things are still working at home and at school Sidhu is taking Honors classes and her 15-year-old son says, “[Mom’s] handling it fine because she is still doing stuff around the house like before, cooking and helping us with homework.”

So other than love of their families and lots of coffee what is keeping the Mercer moms going?

Moms with a college degree have higher incomes and more job stability than their non-degreed counterparts according to a study published by the Population Research and Policy Review, and the ability to move up in the world financially is a key motivator for many.

Gray says, “Having two incomes is always better than one and that was a definite factor for me. Also, I want to have a degree to know I finished something.”

First in her family to go to college, Dr. Lynch just finished her Ed.D.

Professor Lynch is one of the best things that happened to me in my first semester at Mercer. Her engagement with her students is just amazing, plus she is so helpful with any college subject matter.

—Vitoria Sgini, Student

a previous VOICE article, the committee has already worked to establish a plan focusing on areas that will look at hiring more diverse staff, reevaluating courses and curriculums, and working to better educate the community.

When asked about the lack of diversity in higher-level positions and jobs, and what needs to change in academia, Dr. Lynch says it’s not just academia.

“We see it in politics, we see it in government, we see it in businesses, higher ed. We see it in all of our society,” she says.

She emphasizes that there is a clear distinction between diversity and inclusion saying, “Diversity is the different characteristics that people bring with them, inclusion is participation, engagement, respect. Inclusion is about attitude.”

In order to bring about the kind of change the DEI is working on, Dr. Lynch says it is necessary to look at, “Who are the decision-makers? Who’s pulling the strings? Who’s controlling the purse? That’s inclusion.”

According to her colleagues, Dr. Lynch has the necessary skills to help make the DEI’s goals reality.

Dr. Bettina Caluori, Professor of English and Director of the Honors Program, adds that “Dr. Lynch is incredibly hardworking, she works to build consensus and common ground here.”

English Professor Carol Friend says, “She is a role model for many of our students and our fellow colleagues.”

With all her other activities, it’s in the classroom where Dr. Lynch seems to have a direct and immediate influence.

“I’ve only had Professor Lynch for a few weeks, but she makes it seem like I’ve known her for a lifetime,” says a current student Joseph Zisa.

Student Vitoria Sgini says, “Professor Lynch is one of the best things that happened to me in my first semester at Mercer. Her engagement with her students is just amazing, plus she is so helpful with any college subject matter.”

A former student Mally Muentes Messina says, “I really enjoy having Dr. Lynch as my professor. She challenges everyone to become better.”

That trait of challenging others traces back to her grandmother. She was her grandmother who encouraged her to keep going and get her doctorate.

Dr. Lynch laughs, explaining, “I’m like ‘Ma, can the ink dry on the master’s degree first? We are standing in the gymnasium of the graduation ceremony. Can we get out of the room before you push me to do more?’”

Twenty years later she fulfilled her grandmother’s dream.

Asked what advice she has for anyone who wants to pursue their career goals Dr. Lynch says, “Persist. There are a lot of distractions in the pursuit of excellence. Keep moving. Never give up.”
Views shift on race and casting

TV and Broadway hits challenge racial expectations

By Kayla Jonnetti

Facing a full-time student’s workload and juggling a part-time job, Ryan Manning, a Mercer Theatre major, says he loves to spend time watching Grey’s Anatomy and Criminal Minds. Like many other Broadway fans, Manning has also watched the Broadway hit Hamilton, about Alexander Hamilton’s life in a hip-hop telling.

Manning says, “I love how the cast was multi-racial especially for the main characters. It made the show more fun and interesting in my opinion. We should see that more often in this world.”

Hamilton, created by Lin-Manuel Miranda, and other recent Netflix series apart is that they often cast people of color in roles that were historically white.

Miranda told The New York Times, “[Hamilton] is a story about America then, told by America now, and we want to eliminate any distance. Our country looks. Then we found the best people to embody these parts. I think it’s a very powerful statement without having to be a statement.”

Hamilton was one of the first blockbuster successes in media to engage in such a controversial casting but has not been the last. Just in the last few months, Netflix has released two huge streaming hits Bridgerton and Lupin which also cast against typical racial expectations.

Bridgerton, made by Shonda Rhimes, is based in 19th Century London, focusing on the drama and intrigue of socialite life and romance. Lupin, created by George Kay, tells the story of an undercover thief and master of disguise. The leading men in both Netflix breakouts are played by Black actors, Regé-Jean Page, Duke of Hastings played by Regé-Jean Page. This choice is known as “colorblind casting,” which journalist Michi Frazer-Carroll at The Guardian, defines as the “practice whereby race isn’t specified overtly or considered during the casting process.” “Color-blind casting stands in contrast to the term “whitewashing,” the practice of casting white characters when the roles were written or historically other races/ethnicities.

Professor Haywood goes on to say, “Yet, the United States in the 21st Century still hasn’t come to grips with the ‘traditional roles’ it becomes rather controversial.”

Professor Haywood stresses how media controversy comes from not knowing just how diverse our history really is. Michael Griffith, another Communication professor at MCC, says in regards to the Broadway and Netflix hits saying, “They are hugely, hugely successful across many audience demographics. We get into trouble- by we I just mean as “we” a culture, everyone—we get into trouble if we look at Hamilton, if we look at Bridgerton and go, ‘that’s not history.’ Griffith says they are not meant to be history as we typically imagine it. Hamilton was meant to be history in an entertaining, boundary-pushing way. He puts Bridgerton in the same category.

By contrast, various reviewers have argued that these shows are still not without their faults in regards to race and casting. For example, Lupin has been criticized for its lack of Black women in the series. The Diop character has many traits but none with a Black woman. Amerley Ollenu, a journalist for Glamour, quoted Deborah Williams, as saying, “There is an erasure of Black women on screen, and this is all too evident as Lupin unfolds.”

Further, Bridgerton has faced questions about the choice to use lighter-skinned actors and actresses for leading roles, while darker-skinned cast members were in the background.

Megha Erockfor Ayuk, writer on Medium, says, “Casting only lighter-skinned Black actors in leading roles—except for Lady Danbury who serves as a typical no-love-life having dark-skinned fairy godmother—is a glaring example of colorism.” By “colorism” she is referring to being prejudiced to those with a darker skin tone even among actors of color.

When speaking with Professor Griffith about colorism he says, “That’s got to be addressed, but not by white people. We don’t have that right.”
Arts & Entertainment

Cobra Kai - Season 3 (Netflix)

Earth to kill everyone. Works show. "An alien comes to say "Oh, that should be a TV you have when you are sick. It's like one of those dreams you have when you are sick."

Behind the scenes, the show is a mystery. The big underlying theme and desire is to face. This is a coming of age story that explores dark themes and desires. Must watch!

Delia’s: come for the empanadas stay for dessert

By Elijah Parkman-Williams
Senior Reporter

Delia’s Empanada Cafe in Trenton, New Jersey may be the best hidden gem you’ve never heard of.

Founded in 2019 the traditional Puerto Rican restaurant is serving the best empanadas for miles.

Delia’s is run by Jose Pantoja, a retired Trenton Police officer, who was also a part owner of Li’s Smoothie Bar in Columbus, New Jersey. He says the food is inspired by his mother-in-law and her homemade empanadas.

The team at Delia’s knows the names of most every person that walks through the door, neighbors, regulars, fellow business owners down the street. Standing outside you can hear the Puerto Rican music, and smell the heavy scent of garlic and oregano.

Delia’s classic empanadas are not from the freezer section at ShopRite. Imagine for a moment, beef so succulent that its full-bodied flavor overwhelms your tastebuds, a flaky dough that soaks up every ounce of fat from the beef. The housemade sauce is a creamy mix of cilantro, salt, pepper, and oregano, and has undertones of acidic notes that wake up each corner there’s a new lie to discover and problems they will die of AIDS. In between you can enjoy the gay news you can handle and reassuring and the crises you witness.

There are also specialty empanadas. The chorizo and plantain empanada is chewy and salty. The chunks of the sausage pair with the sweetness of the plantain.

Another specialty is the chicken, sweet plantain and cheese empanada. Local professional motivator and trainer Shane West is a regular who likes to get his fix of chicken empanadas whenever he can.

"So many people are attracted or hooked on those empanadas because they’re delicious," West describes, "It’s delicious. I got to stay away from it!"

As you bite down into the empanada you are faced with wave after wave of flavor. Chicken and cheese, cheese and plantain, plantain and chicken, the taste continues to linger on the tongue. Soon you realize that the only aftertaste is that of the sharp cheddar, oh my!

In addition to the empanadas, Delia’s makes fine tostones. They are little discs of love that have been fried in oil and served with more of that housemade sauce. Be ready to devour an entire plate by yourself, because once you eat this you’re not going to want to share.

If you have never heard of mofongo it’s a Puerto Rican dish with plantains and can be served with fried pork. Delia’s pork is hearty and when combined with the plantains it truly makes this a better plate. A lone disappointment here is the lack of flavor from the plantains, especially after it was considered a favorite by their own kitchen cook Christian Torres.

The best is saved for last. Dessert. "There’s a reason people love the sweet empanada’s here, there to die for. The Apple Empanada was dense, but what lay within that deceiving flaky crust was liquid gold."

Break its shell and it’s glorious molten center spills out in its complete sweetness. And oh, do you smell that? It’s the most dangerous scent in the world, a combo of cinnamon, apple and chocolate.

Upon my first bite, I swear I shed a single tear. Upon my second bite, I realized I had already inhaled it in its entirety. While you swallow in the loss of a delightful sweet empanada only one thing can save you now, chocolate!

“I would have the Oreo and Nutella,” says local resident Majit Sekemeta. She is another regular at Delia’s and continues to check in to get this dessert. “It’s sweet and chocolatey.”

Fried Oreos and Nutella stuffed within the fried crackly crust. God bless Delia’s. Welcome to one of the best chocolate desserts in Trenton.

People come to Delia’s to eat fantastic classic empanadas, not every dish is perfect, but pretty close, and if all you want is dessert, that’s a reasonable choice.

Jose Pantoja says, “We want people to walk out of here amazed about the experience they just had with the food that we served them with.”

Spring TV Reviews

Addictive. You’ll be bingeing past seasons.

People are talking. Worth the watch.

Only good if you need something to help you sleep.

Worse than final exams.

Ginny & Georgia (Netflix)

Ginny and Georgia is about power, passion, and how to get what you want. Behind every corner there’s a new lie to discover and problems to face. This is a coming of age story that explores dark themes and desires. Must watch!

Cobra Kai - Season 3 (Netflix)

Season 3 will only make sense if you watched the first two. If you need some 1980s nostalgia without the bleakness of Stranger Things, you’ve found it. Get ready for wimps and nerds to kick ass in karate battles. The TV equivalent of a whole bowl of jell-o pudding.

All Creatures Great and Small (PBS)

If you’ve had all the bad news you can handle and just need to watch people trotting around the Yorkshire dales giving comfort to sheep in distress, look no further. The drama is reassuring and the crises relaxing.

Dickinson - Season 2 (Apple+)

No, no, no, no, no, no, no. If you ever cared about Emily Dickinson, this show will make you die inside. Death will come for you. Picture Emily as slyly as plucky and defiant teen apt to stare into the camera wide eyed and say things like “Austin, you are not a fraud. In fact, you are the most genuine person I know.”

It’s A Sin (HBOMax)

You’ll fall in love with all the characters and them some of them will die of AIDS. In between you can enjoy the gayity of these friends in London in the 1980s having all the fun you hoped you’d have in college. Includes the amazing Nicholas Patrick Harris and a top notch cast of newbies.

Resident Alien (Syfy)

It’s like one of those dreams you have when you are sick and then you wake up and say “Oh, that should be a TV show.” An alien comes to Earth to kill everyone. Works as a small town doctor and then gets roped into solving a mystery. The big underlying question: are humans worth saving? Is this show?
Chef Frank Benowitz with student Xadea Green demonstrating plating techniques for a simple but elegant burger.

While most MCCC classes are operating remotely, Mercer’s culinary programs, led by Chef Douglas Fee C.H.E., and Chef Frank Benowitz, M.S.C.H.E., have adapted new procedures and protections to keep classes in the kitchen.

The most significant challenge has been maintaining communication through their layered face masks and face shields.

Chef Fee, the coordinator of the Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management Program says, “We have the kitchen noise from pots and pans, from hood vents, from compressors for the refrigerators and freezers, and the general conversation. So when you get to that teaching moment, you really have to talk very loudly in order to be heard. By the end of the day I’m ready for a warm cup of tea, and to let my throat chill.”

But he adds, “If that’s what we need to do to be here, then we’re fine with that. We’re a flexible industry. We’ll do what it takes.”

Current Culinary Arts students in the Hospitality 102 Food Prep class prepare meals to serve to facility and maintenance staff members who remain on campus.

The regular Viking Cafe isn’t open, but they’re still preparing the same amount of meals they did pre-covid. Their class produced 42 meals on Thursday, March 11, plus a little extra for the chefs-in-training to take home and enjoy.

Chef Frank Benowitz pouring a carrot ginger soup that is both vegan and gluten free. Creating food suitable for all health choices is a key part of the culinary training.

Pulled pork sandwich comes with pickled onions and jalapenos with a side of cabbage and cucumber salad.
They are using new to-go containers that are microwave and freezer safe so that patrons can maintain social distancing by taking their meals home. But they still practice arranging or “plating” the food.

Chef Frank says, “We still do plate-ups as if we were doing [the campus dining] here so that students will know what it’ll be like. Even when they’re putting food in the [to-go] boxes, they’re trying to make it look good, they’re trying to keep it tasting good. It’s an important lesson.”

Among the foods the students are preparing there are gluten free and vegan options. A recent menu included items such as a vegan and gluten free carrot and ginger soup, pulled pork with pickled onions and jalapeños, gluten free confit potatoes, and a dessert of milk chocolate créme brûlée.

Xadea Green, a dual enrollment high school and Mercer student says, being in the kitchen “allows me to get ahead of the game. Because me coming in as a freshman in college, really I’ll be like a sophomore, I’ll have the mentality of a sophomore, so I kinda have the advantage of coming to college first.”

Chef Frank, himself a Mercer alumn, knows how valuable that in-person experience can be when training for the real thing.

“As the old saying goes, the show must go on,” says Chef Frank, adding, “We’re happy with what we’re doing. We’ve got a little bit smaller class size, but still the same high standards to sanitation, to safety, and to the quality of our food.”

PHOTOGRAPHY | ASHLEY JACKSON
What’s cooking?

We’re making dinner and you’re invited!

The VOICE food team brings you inside the college student kitchen. Here are ideas to whet your palate.

1.) Jalapeño fried rice! Using day old rice, pan fry with oil, spices, eggs, jalapeños, and tamari soy sauce until crispy and aromatic.

2.) Eating that jalapeño fried rice!

3.) Many hands make light work: preparing a charcuterie board with bread and spiced olive oil for lunch.

4.) Cast-iron pizza for dinner.

5.) This is ground turkey, onions, garlic and olive oil for a pasta with meat sauce!

6.) Bisquick and orn fritters.

7.) Making the fritters. Blend eggs, milk, and Bisquick together thoroughly. Finally add canned corn and fry them.

8.) Spiced minced meat with mixed vegetable. Recommended: add a side of eggs.
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Vaccination clinic upsizes

Continued from page 1

That’s why sometimes we have a little bit of a hold-up. Once that starts working properly you’ll see that work.”

One of these technology holdups was experienced by William Solarski, an 86 year old resident of Hamilton Township who got his shot at the March 12 clinic.

Solarski was originally at Station 1 to get a shot, but after technical difficulties with the computer not connecting, was moved to Station 2.

Solarski who first registered in the New Jersey system back in January said he started waiting in line at 7:45 A.M. to receive his shot, and finally getting inside at 9.

When asked how it went he said, “Except for the long wait [it was] all right. I got no problem taking the shot or anything.”

Professor of Photography Michael Chovan-Dalton, who is currently teaching his classes on campus, has volunteered at the clinic.

He says, “When the opportunity arose at the college where they sent out an email that they needed volunteers, I thought ‘let me get to know what’s going on first hand, and let me try to be a part of something that helps instead of just sitting around and complaining.’”

He added, “I really enjoyed volunteering to do this, which is why I’m doing it again because I did feel like I was really helping...It was gratifying to see the range of emotion and the gratitude of people that you’re helping get their vaccines.”

After spending a full day on his feet Professor Chovan-Dalton says he was able to get a leftover dose because if you are a volunteer, you fall under the category of ‘volunteer at a medical facility,’ which gives you eligibility.

He said that he would definitely get a shot when he was asked, and told the coordinators “just make sure whoever’s on the list who is higher risk gets it, and if there’s anything left I’ll gladly take it.”

Deputy Marvin Deleon from the Mercer County Sheriff’s office was at the clinic and said, “For the most part for the couple weeks we’ve been here everything’s been fine.”

He says people have turned in lost property from time to time. For example, some keys were left in a bathroom and a license plate was found in the parking lot.

Samira Sadqi, a Nursing student in her third semester who was working at the clinic told The VOICE, “I just want to contribute to what’s happening here. It is a great thing and I want to contribute as much as I can.”

MCCC Health Science students Alexa Cottrell, Adrianna Marin, and Geraldine Lopez at the vaccine clinic on March 12, 2021.
The night the lights--and everything else--went out in Texas

How one MCCC student has kept up with classes despite a natural disaster

Ashleigh Schleinkofer

I am a military veteran and I recently moved from New Jersey to Texas. I think I’m pretty flexible and I’ve been able to balance the time zone difference, my family life, and my four classes, including Honors sections pretty well, but then a massive storm hit Texas on February 13.

There was snow and record-breaking freezing temperatures. I know back in New Jersey there has been a sequence of snowstorms this winter, but the state is prepared for that. It was clear the state of Texas wasn’t prepared at all. There hasn’t been an arctic cold like this since 1989. There are no plows for snow nor salt to keep the roads from icing.

It started on Sunday night when the power went out. Fortunately I’m living with my sister and her family who had a fireplace that kept us from freezing. But we also had to keep my sister’s 3- and 6-year-olds warm by the fire, and little kids do not like to stay put.

We all slept in the living room and took turns sleeping so someone could keep the fire going. It wasn’t long before supplies ran low and we had to head out to try to buy more firewood.

On Monday the power briefly came back on for two hours, and I used that time to check in with my Anatomy teacher and take an exam. Trying to take a test in frigid temperatures made it hard to concentrate and the fear of the power going back out doubled the pressure.

By Tuesday, there was still no power and we had to get groceries. We also had to do cooking on the grill since my sister’s appliances are all electric. I was still trying to keep up with classes and luckily had phone service to be able to do the Zoom classes from my phone.

But by nightfall, the wind chill made the temperature outside -3 degrees. The temperature in the house dropped to under 40 degrees, and we realized we needed to get the children somewhere safer.

Since my sister’s husband is in the Army, he had friends that lived close enough that we were able to go there and stay a couple of nights. This was great for me as well because I had another exam to take on Wednesday.

It wasn’t until six days after the storm that our power came back on and we were able to go home. We still didn’t have running water and my sister’s pool pump cracked, but we were happy to be in our own house.

Facing these kinds of struggles tests your faith and the ability to push through them makes you stronger and appreciative. I appreciate being safe now, I appreciate the professors who worked with me, and I appreciate being able to do my school work in normal conditions now.

We also had to cook outside on the grill since my sister’s appliances are all electric. I was still trying to keep up with classes and luckily had phone service to be able to do the Zoom classes from my phone.

But by nightfall, the wind chill made the temperature outside -3 degrees. The temperature in the house dropped to under 40 degrees, and we realized we needed to get the children somewhere safer.

Since my sister’s husband is in the Army, he had friends that lived close enough that we were able to go there and stay a couple of nights. This was great for me as well because I had another exam to take on Wednesday.

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MAIL CALL

What do you think? Do you agree with the opinions you see here? Do you like our coverage of College and local issues? Is there a topic you really want us to cover? DROP US A LINE AND LET US KNOW!

Do you see a typo?
Good. Join the staff and help us fix it!
Mon + Thur 12-1 on Zoom!
Even $15 per hour isn’t enough in NJ
High cost of living demands higher wages to prevent poverty

Many Mercer County Community College students are living below the poverty line even though they are working, and most students rely on financial aid to take classes. On top of it all, they are facing food insecurity. When I sit down with my family to eat, I can’t help but remember that 11% of kids are facing food insecurity in Trenton according to the New Jersey Department of Health. I don’t need to be in their shoes to empathize with them.

The federal minimum wage is $7.25 an hour and it has not increased for over a decade. Governor Murphy signed a deal in 2019 that would see the minimum wage increasing by $1 each year for the next 3 years until it reaches $15 in 2024. Right now, the minimum wage is $12 an hour. However, $15 an hour is not enough. Rent has gone up, prices of food and other goods have gone up.

The problem is that New Jersey is the 9th most expensive state to live in. According to the Living Wage Calculator, in Mercer County, in a family with two kids, each parent would need to make a whopping $27.11 per hour just in order to stay above the poverty line. That’s a wage most Mercer students could only dream of at this point in our lives.

In early March, the $1.2 trillion American Rescue Plan stimulus package was passed, but the provision for the $15 an hour minimum wage was stripped out. Two-thirds of Americans favor raising the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour according to Pew Research. Well, that’s one thing that most Americans can agree on! President Biden promised he will make the $15 per hour federal minimum wage a priority, and he is now proposing a standalone bill. However, I am doubtful it will even pass. Small businesses however are opposed to increasing the minimum wage because they say doubling the salary of their employees will drive them out of business. On top of that the pandemic has brought additional economic hardships for them. Many small businesses have already disappeared. That’s why increasing the wage gradually gives the economy an opportunity to catch up to changes and to keep up with inflation. But you know what, the federal government needs to step in and help rescue small businesses. Saving small businesses should not come at the expense of neglecting the majority of the people in dire need. Federal incen-tives must pressure employers that adopt the $15 an hour minimum wage.

Still, $15 an hour is not enough in New Jersey. In a state with a very low cost of living, like Mississippi, $15 per hour will move people well above the poverty line, but as we all know too well, the living cost in New Jersey continues to go through the roof. And the pandemic has brought along increased hardships, including evictions.

If $15 cannot pass in Washington, it seems a real minimum wage is out of the question. We can not be silent. Our livelihoods are on the line because of corporate greed and influence.

Senator Bernie Sanders has been calling for the $15 dollar minimum wage for some time. He recently tweeted “I’d love to hear anyone in the Congress tell me they can live on $7.25 an hour. Guess what? They can’t!” He added, “A $15 minimum wage is not a radical idea. What’s radical is the fact that millions of Americans are forced to work for starvation wages.” And he’s right. These are starvation wages. We should take Bernie as an example. We should keep pushing for our right to a minimum, livable wage.

While we wait for the Bernies of the country to take over Washington, while we wait for everyone’s right to a minimum livable wage to be fulfilled, I’m feeling frustrated. I think most Americans are. A livable minimum wage is long overdue.

We can’t be afraid to speak up and say New Jersey is going to need more.
Dear VOICE,

Lunchin’ Larry

I do with the leftovers? I accidentally received an extra large pizza with my takeout order. What should I do with the leftovers? -Lunchin’ Larry

Dear Mike,

Write all of your potential majors on individual note cards and tape them to your wall. Take a dart, blindfold yourself, and take your best shot. Closest hit is your new major! -The VOICE

**NOTE: THIS FEATURE IS FOR ENTERTAINMENT ONLY. ANY RESSEMBLANCE TO ACTUAL ENTERTAINMENT ONLY. ANY NOTE: THIS FEATURE IS FOR ENTERTAINMENT ONLY. ANY RESSEMBLANCE TO ACTUAL ENTERTAINMENT ONLY. ANY**

Dear Larry,

MCCC Vikings aren’t quitters. Every pizza is a personal sized pizza if you believe in yourself. -The VOICE

Dear Mike,

Write all of your potential majors on individual note cards and tape them to your wall. Take a dart, blindfold yourself, and take your best shot. Closest hit is your new major! -The VOICE

Dear Larry, I’m confused. When exactly is our Spring Break? I keep getting different dates from well meaning professors. -Candid

Dear Danteus, Combine all dates received and take an extended vacation. Sure it’s still just to your couch, but may be Spring Break can be more fun next year. -The VOICE

Dear VOICE,

Fun next year. Spring Break can be more vacation. Sure it’s still just and take an extended -The VOICE

Dear Dateless,

Well meaning professors. Getting different dates from our Spring Break? I keep getting confused. When exactly is our Spring Break? I keep getting different dates from well meaning professors. -Dateless

Dear Patty,

Start a group chat with your partners. Last texters standing get to pick first. -Partnering Patty

Dear Tanya,

Try something Danish, with brooding maverick cops who join forces with criminal profilers who once quit the force and together they solve a string of murders. Brooding Danes are life goals. Seriously, there are a lot of these shows out there. -The VOICE

Dear Mike,

Brooding Danes they solve a string of murders. Brooding Danes who once quit the force and together they solve a string of murders. Brooding Danes are life goals. Seriously, there are a lot of these shows out there. -TV Tanya

DearVOICE,

- The VOICE

Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Prappe

**YOU KNOW, DEAR, THIS “STAY AT HOME QUARANTINE” IS CONSIDERED TO BE A PRECAUTION, NOT A REWARD.**

**ADVICE - ASK THE VOICE**

Dear Mike, I’ve been thinking about switching my major. What do you recommend? -Major Mike

Dear Mike, Write all of your potential majors on individual note cards and tape them to your wall. Take a dart, blindfold yourself, and take your best shot. Closest hit is your new major! -The VOICE

Dear Larry, MCCC Vikings aren’t quitters. Every pizza is a personal sized pizza if you believe in yourself. -The VOICE

Dear Voice, I have a partner project coming up, but I don’t really know anyone in my virtual class. How do you recommend I make friends? -Partnering Patty

Dear Patty, Start a group chat with your classmates and engage in a partner royale. Last texters standing get to pick first. -The VOICE

Dear Mike, Closest hit is your new major! -The VOICE

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 19

Too many people want a piece of you right now. The only thing you can do is start setting limits even though it’s not your natural tendency. You can do it! -The VOICE

Aquarius Jan. 20 - Feb. 18

Let people know exactly what is going on with you. You can’t expect people to just figure it out, especially since you can cover things up so easily. You’ll feel better if you are candid. -The VOICE

Pisces Feb. 19 - Mar. 20

You’ve had a birthday! It may have felt pretty lame if you were stuck in quarantine or got together with people but stayed six feet apart in the freezing cold. Next year will be better. Promise. -The VOICE

Aries Mar. 21 - Apr. 19

You are exactly the right person to bring in the spring! You are a breath of fresh air and sunshine. Get ready for some warm temps and good times.

Taurus Apr. 20 - May 20

March can be a lot of work but spring break is on the way. It may not be as much fun as the pre-covid spring break, but make the most of it. Head to the shore for an afternoon and take a walk. -Lunchin’ Larry

Gemini May 21 - Jun. 20

Before you know it’ll be your Gemini season and the school semester will be ending. You’ve got this. Start budgeting your time now and you won’t be stressed during exam time. -The VOICE

Cancer Jun. 21 - Jul. 22

Sing in the shower. That’s right! Belt out your favorite tunes like you are on stage at The Apollo theater. Let it all out because keeping your inner light from shining is a way to a heavy heart.

Leo Jul. 23 - Aug. 22

Can’t find your socks? You are not alone. It might be time for new socks. In fact, your wardrobe may need an overhaul in general. No money? No problem. Thrift store shopping is a great activity you can still do these days!

Virgo Aug. 23 - Sept. 22

Maybe this isn’t the first time you’ve felt chronically tired, but could tired be its own special kind of exhaustion. When you just can’t keep going, curl up in a closet where no one can find you and take a nap. Bring a blanket. -The VOICE

Libra Sept. 23 - Oct. 22

Does it seem like animals everywhere, on the roads, in the parks, generally surrounding your life? They are good luck for you this month, bringing in the spirit of the wild. -The VOICE

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

A transportation problem may afflict you this month, but fixing it may bring someone new into your life. Embrace that flat tire or bad spark plug or bus that is late. It’s hard to make new friends and this is your way in.

Sagittarius Nov. 22 - Dec. 21

Life is like a box of rocks lately. Where is the box of chocolate? Good news, you will find it, and when you do, do not hesitate to indulge yourself. Calories be damned! You need your chocolate.

Horoscopes

Virgo Aug. 23 - Sept. 22

Taurus Apr. 20 - May 20

Aquarius Jan. 20 - Feb. 18

Pisces Feb. 19 - Mar. 20

Aries Mar. 21 - Apr. 19

Leo Jul. 23 - Aug. 22

Virgo Aug. 23 - Sept. 22

Libra Sept. 23 - Oct. 22

Scorpio Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

Sagittarius Nov. 22 - Dec. 21

Autumn is almost here. It may have felt pretty lame if you were stuck in quarantine or got together with people but stayed six feet apart in the freezing cold. Next year will be better. Promise. -The VOICE

**SUDOKU**

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

**DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ****

- Moderate  **- Challenging  **- HOO BOY!

**FLASH GORDON**

Get Fuzzy