We find ourselves in a time of celebration, social distancing, and examination of inequities in so many aspects of our personal and professional lives. What a time! We will surely remember this commencement as the “time of COVID-19”. Let us remember, too, that for each graduate completing their degree, there are many supporters: family, friends, co-workers, supervisors, classmates, fieldwork preceptors and scholarship donors. Our students know it takes the expertise, too, of faculty and the wise counsel of staff to complete degree requirements and arrive at—graduation! Do enjoy reading about the accomplishments of so many—and stay well!

Sharon Gavin Fought, Dean

2020 Outstanding MN Scholar

Michelle Mitchell, MN ’20

Each Spring, the School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership faculty nominate Master of Nursing graduates to receive the Outstanding MN Scholar Award. The 2020 recipient was Michelle Mitchell, for her research on the association of childhood obesity and the incidence of cancer in Pacific Islanders. Michelle has presented this work at multiple national and international conferences.

Michelle received her award in the presence of her faculty chair, other members of her scholarly inquiry committee, and supervisor in her professional practice setting. She expressed her appreciation for the support of Dr. Kathleen Shannon Dorcy and her family.

Graduation numbers, 2020

RN to BSN
75

BA in Healthcare Leadership
43

Master of Nursing
28

2020 MN Student Speaker

Valorie Taylor, MN ’20

Valorie Taylor was selected by graduating Master of Nursing students to speak at this year’s hooding ceremony. She discussed her nursing legacy, starting with Mary Mahoney, the first black Registered Nurse in the US, and continuing with Valorie’s aunts and mother, Helen Fuller Murphy, and how they “held up the lamp that guided [Valorie’s] way in nursing.”

Valorie shared a number of inspirational quotes in her speech, including an aphorism of her own: “You know God can be everywhere, because He created nursing.”

Valorie earned her BS in Biology from Washington State University and her BSN from Montana State University. She is currently a supervisor at Western State Hospital.

Sharon Gavin Fought, Dean
2020 Sigma Theta Tau Honor Society Induction Ceremony

On May 18, nineteen undergraduate and graduate nursing students were inducted into the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the induction ceremony was streamed on YouTube in a first-ever virtual ceremony for Sigma. The UW Tacoma induction was planned and moderated by Assistant Professor Sunny Cheng and Associate Professor Susan Johnson, and the speaker at the event was Senior Lecturer Kathleen Shannon Dorcy. Dr. Shannon Dorcy spoke about the journey students took in the last few years, leading up to the global crisis that interrupted normal operations for students and nurses in 2020. She drew parallels between the world this class of Sigma inductees deal with and the similar one faced by the founding nurses of Sigma, which was established only a few years after the 1918 flu pandemic.

Additionally, the message from Sigma Theta Tau president Richard Riciardi emphasized the theme of “infusing joy” into daily lives. As explained by Dr. Johnson, this is composed of three elements: awareness, balance and purpose, and co-creation.

Virtual Celebrations at UW Tacoma

This spring the 145th UW Commencement Ceremony was held virtually, encompassing all three UW campuses. The ceremony was livestreamed on YouTube and featured animation and portraits of each graduating student in a simulated processional.

In his commencement address, Chancellor Mark Pagano described the class of 2020 as one that “will go down in history; resilient, proud, and undaunted.” He also extended an invitation to the 2020 class to walk at the 2021 UW Tacoma Commencement Ceremony.

Following Chancellor Pagano, staff and faculty from the various Schools and majors at UW Tacoma congratulated the graduating class of 2020.
Awards and Updates

Assistant Professor Sharon Laing, was awarded a 2020 Research Mentor Award. Mentors are nominated by students and awarded by a small committee of faculty and staff. Dr. Laing’s nominators all expressed gratitude for Dr. Laing’s expertise and guidance. One of the students, Yusra Iftkahar, said, “Dr. Laing is an amazing mentor because of her expertise in the field of research, sharing her experiences with students, and reaching out and checking on us constantly to see if we need any help.”

Assistant Professor David Reyes is a 2020 recipient of UW Tacoma’s Distinguished Community Engagement Award. He was recognized as a champion for using community-based participatory research (CBPR) to identify community priorities that translate into livable and actionable changes, particularly in East Tacoma. Through this work, Dr. Reyes has supported local residents in leading community-based assessment of the local food environment to address food security. The award committee noted Dr. Reyes’ impact of using CBPR with teaching and service were “impressive and evident by local, regional, and national recognitions” and that his experience-based approach reflected broad-ranging community benefits and outcomes.

At the end of spring quarter, Senior Lecturer Jane Cornman retired from her position with the School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership. Dr. Cornman wrote the following for this newsletter:

“Coming to UWT was a turning point in my teaching career where I discovered an incredible sister and brotherhood of faculty and staff who all truly care about the students and one another. Thank you so for welcoming me into your fold. As part of my emeritus status (thank you all for that vote of confidence) I will continue to work with Robin Evans-Agnew to support our students in their resilience. More than ever, in the current challenges facing our country and world, we can learn to change, to grow and support everyone equally.”

An additional retirement from the School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership is Lecturer Jan Runbeck. Jan says, “I’ll continue working to promote health outcomes in vulnerable populations. Partnership building needs a cheerleader. I will be rooting for the elimination of human trafficking and homelessness. I will advocate for wider use of community health workers. I’ll support efforts to increase immunization rates.” She also added, “Thanks for the ride at UW Tacoma School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership, a place that believes that nursing is a science and a passion, and that together we can make the world a better place.”

Welcome to the School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership new Program Coordinator, Jaime Mason!

Jaime comes to us from Bastyr University, previously working within their Natural Health Clinic as a coordinator. She recently finished her BA from Evergreen State College. She considers herself a life learner having a history working in academic institutions and being able to participate in a wide variety of courses. She loves mathematics, gardening, baking and her dog Samson.
Undergraduate Research Symposium and Population Health Awards

This May, four undergraduate Healthcare Leadership students and one Biomedical Sciences student were featured at the UW Undergraduate Research Symposium. The students are mentored by Assistant Professor Sharon Laing, who shared the following about these students and their presentations:

“The abstracts of four HCL students and one Biomedical student who worked with me all year on research were accepted to be presented at this year's UW Undergraduate Research Symposium. This annual event showcases the research of UW undergraduates across all three campuses. Though the COVID-19 crisis has disrupted things somewhat, the Undergraduate Research Program has decided to hold the meeting with students giving virtual presentations of their work and this will comprise of a 3-minute lightning talk and poster presentations that will be recorded and available to tri-campus wide communities.”

The students are: Yusra Iftakar (HCL Senior), Jamie L. Root (HCL Senior), Lucas I. Bjorkheim (Biomed Junior), Myai T. Nguyen (HCL Senior), Anna L. Howard (HCL Senior).

Additionally, of those, Yusra Iftakar and Lucas Bjorkheim received Population Health Recognition Awards. Yusra’s project dealt with “[identifying] the barriers that middle-aged and obese rural women face in terms of healthy eating.” Lucas’s research focused specifically on the barriers to physical activity among rural women. Congratulations to both students!

Healthcare Leadership Mary Gates Research Scholars

In addition, two of the above students, Myai Nguyen and Anna Howard, were selected as Mary Gates Research Scholars in winter quarter 2020! This honor included $5,000 to support their ongoing research work on community health centers. Both students were supported in their research by Assistant Professor Sharon Laing, and both completed the Healthcare Leadership program in 2020.

A number of School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership students received Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander scholarships, managed by the Office of Global Affairs Student Fellowship program. They included: Cindy Thao, Truc Tran, Kinza Mohammad, and Vincent Da.
Assistant Professor Sunny Cheng is one of the investigators for a project funded by the UW faculty fellows award. The title of the project is "Developing online resources and trainings on self-care for Catherine Place". The faculty fellows program aims to support faculty on interdisciplinary teams to develop and integrate community-engaged activities with scholarship for the public good.

In April, Professor Denise Drevdahl, with Associate Professor Robin Evans-Agnew, contributed an editorial to The News Tribune about the dilemma of nursing shortages during the crisis. They noted that “56,000 eligible applicants were turned away from US schools for lack of available slots” and argue that “expanding the nursing workforce should be part of [Washington state’s] commitment to shore up our preparedness.”

Associate Professor Robin Evans-Agnew co-authored an editorial for Morning Consult about the decades-long underfunding of public health initiatives, and the corresponding inequities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The article calls on the US to “mobilize our collective wherewithal to provide the social and health care safety nets and other supports to the people who need them most and minimize the gap of vulnerability.”

In addition, Dr. Evan-Agnew hosts Voices Unbound: The Enviro-Amplify podcast series, which is funded by the Earthlab Innovation grant. This podcast discusses environmental challenges and solutions, and includes partners Chris Schell, Tom Koontz, & Joel Baker (IAS, UWT) and two students: Healthcare Leadership Senior Sonja Duncan and Biomed Senior Alexandra Dogbe.

Assistant Professor Weichao Yuwen is part of a working group that joined with a broader collective of groups called CONVERGE. Her group and others are collaborating on a project titled Stigma, Fear, Discrimination, and Backlash in COVID-19. Publication of work from the project will be available on the CONVERGE website this summer.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lecturer Jan Runbeck continued her work with the Pierce County homeless population. Here is her description of her effort to help this population obtain shelter:

“Social distancing became challenging at a shelter for men living homeless. The [Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department] let me take the lead to set up a shelter in a church gymnasium to house those who needed to be quarantined. Within 48 hours, we were housing 20 men. We were able to close 25 days later, April 9, when a larger facility became operational.

It was an example of community partners coming together, united for a single goal: to reduce the incidence of COVID-19 among a most vulnerable population.”
Faculty Publications


Sunny Cheng, Uba Backonja and co-authors: “Facilitating pathways to care: A qualitative study of the self-reported needs and coping skills of caregivers of young adults diagnosed with early psychosis” in Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, DOI: 10.1111/jpm.12591


Sharon Laing, Kathleen Shannon Dorcy and co-authors: “Technology’s role in promoting physical activity and healthy eating in working rural women: A cross-sectional quantitative analysis” in Avicenna Journal of Medicine, DOI: 10.4103/ajm.ajm_175_19

Patsy Maloney: “Advancing our specialty: What a difference two years make” in Journal for Nurses in Professional Development, DOI: 10.1097/NND.0000000000000617


Educating from Home

Glimpses of the School of Nursing and Healthcare Leadership faculty and staff working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Susan Johnson’s home office, featuring Bailey

Faculty and staff on teleconference in April, 2020

If you have suggestions or questions about the newsletter, please click here.
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