I’ve taken to writing letters of late. Not just the kind that open a magazine, but the kind with pen and paper, an envelope and a stamp. Old fashioned letters. They feel necessary. They feel like proof of life. What is more human than the thoroughly illogical decision to write someone a letter? No algorithm is going to recommend the writing of a letter as a preferred means of communication. It just doesn’t make sense. A letter takes more time and is less reliable. You need a dedicated space, like a desk or table. It makes your hand hurt. Even when you’re done, you’re not done—it needs an envelope, an address and postage. Then, after all that, you just leave it in a lonely box on a street corner... and hope.

Utterly absurd. Completely impractical. And perfectly beautiful, isn’t it? A letter is so much more than the sum of its parts. More than ink and paper, when you hold a letter, you hold someone’s thoughts in your hands. It’s heartbeats and dreams and all the things a letter makes you feel without ever saying. It’s not just news from home. It’s a piece of home.

I think we all need that right now. I was recently speaking of Sacred Heart University Magazine with a friend. I described the publication as a letter from home. We’re eager to tell you what’s happened, of course, and what’s happening; we want you to see how we’ve grown and what we’ve accomplished, but really we’re just saying our heart is where it’s always been—home is still home, come what may. Everything else in these pages is that proof of life: the thoughts and feelings and dreams and curiosities that define who we are, the evidence that we are all greater than the sum of our parts.

Spring. We’re at the point in the year where the past transitions into the future and, emerging as we are this year from a March that was roughly 400 days long, it seemed appropriate to take stock of where we are, be honest about how we got here and—most importantly—look at where we want to go. In short, it’s time for another letter.

In Where Language Is No Barrier (pg 38) a daughter of immigrants builds a new community out of hope, while in Something Old, Something New . . . (pg 42) Saint Vincent’s College finds a new home and a very bright future. In our extended feature, The Day After Tomorrow (beginning pg 18), we speak with some friends on the frontlines of change—people wrestling as much with history as they are determining the shape of the future—to try and get an inkling of what lies ahead and what it’s going to take to get there.

It’s been a long winter in more ways than one. But I’ve always found the roughest patches make the best stories on the other side. They tend to inspire some pretty great letters, too. We hope you enjoy this one.
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ROLLING UP OUR SLEEVES ... AND YOURS, TOO!

Davis & Henley College of Nursing students immersed themselves in their public health clinical rotation by vaccinating hundreds of people at Nuvance Danbury Hospital Vaccination clinics. Meanwhile, here at West Campus, SHU and Hartford HealthCare have teamed up to open a mega vaccination site. The site is open Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Depending on the vaccine supply, the team at the clinic can vaccinate between 400-700 a day. Anyone who is eligible to be vaccinated can schedule an appointment.

PICTURE, IF YOU WILL, the perfect visit to a brewpub. For our purposes here, look past the mask mandates and social distancing guidelines—this is about something else. This is about the clink of pints, the shared laughter, the flannel-shirted bartender discussing varieties of hops and malts in geeky detail. This is about the joy of a small business that becomes its own small community at the heart of a larger one.
Take a moment and really see the scene. Notice anything missing? Craft beer is an undeniably welcoming space, and yet it’s almost entirely driven by white males. Only a very small percentage of brewery owners, or even employees, are Black.

Jamal Robinson is one of the exceptions. He began a career in the industry at the age of 18 as a distributor, and quickly found himself connected to the culture and its ability to bring people together.

After working for a few breweries throughout the region, Robinson, now 34, is director of sales at New England Brewing Co. (NEBCO) in Woodbridge, one of the state’s original craft breweries. Like many of us, Robinson found himself with a lot of time on his hands last year, forced home every other week due to pandemic restrictions. Added to that was a summer of unrest as the nation grappled with issues of systemic racial injustice and inequity. “I had a lot of time to think,” he remembers. “I was wrapped up in my emotions. I just felt this big call to action, knowing that we had come through so much progress as a country, but there is still a lot of progress to go.”

Robinson believed he had to help invoke change and provide more opportunities for Black people. He shared his thoughts with his NEBCO team, who eagerly agreed to form an internal equity committee. NEBCO is already involved in Sacred Heart’s brewing science program. The one-year certificate course teaches scientific brewing theory, ingredient and recipe design, sanitation and safety, brewing management and brewing law. Participating students also intern at top breweries throughout the state. During a brainstorming session with Robinson and his team, one idea that came up was to start a scholarship for Black students as a means of diversifying the industry and its culture. NEBCO approached Sacred Heart.

Scholarship opportunities help level the playing field, notes Geff Stopper, associate professor of biology and director of SHU’s brewing science program. They provide the training that sets people up to have long-lasting careers. The scholarship idea became a reality. Then, to ensure that scholarship support continues in perpetuity, the Connecticut Brewers Guild initiated an endowed fund with SHU—the Connecticut Brewers Guild African American Brewing Scholarship.

Building the endowment will take time, but the new scholarship will make an immediate impact by awarding a Black student full tuition to SHU’s brewing-science certificate program each year. The scholarship recipient also receives an internship at NEBCO upon completion of the program. NEBCO will allot proceeds from sales of its “Black Is Beautiful” beer to the cause.

It’s a perfect think-globally-act-locally scenario. As an industry, craft beer is already worth $82 billion annually nationwide. On the individual level, as Robinson points out, helping it diversify means more jobs, more consumers and an even bigger economic impact.

Most importantly, diversifying through education “brings Black people into beer in a qualified way,” Robinson says. “So when they get hired at a brewery, they have the ability to do well. “That’s what it means to be equitable.”

Eric Diaz ’14 calls the shots as an associate producer for ESPN.
following Curry—or that other face of Under Armour, football great Tom Brady—he teams up with his former SHU teammate Oudebenum “Ouse” Imesokparia ’17, ’19. While the pair were still students at SHU, they developed Golden Goals Productions, a freelance media company compiling highlight reels for their teammates.

Now Imesokparia is a video photographer/editor for the Oklahoma City Thunder basketball team. He has an interest in video since his mom, noticing he loved fiddling with her cell phone, sat him down in front of Spike Lee’s classic, Do the Right Thing. Now a work night means shooting “walk-ins” and locker room footage, scanning the court for the choice plays that light up the internet or packing his bags for an All-Star Weekend in Chicago.

Imesokparia echoes other alumni: A sports career often requires the nimble moves and personal fortitude of a seasoned athlete. That, along with a healthy dose of business acumen and some old-fashioned people skills. Former runner Nicole Cote ’17 knew nothing about golf when she started working at Eiger Marketing Group. Now a manager handling digital and social content publishing for the WNBA Finals, Tykera Carter ’18 at the 2019 All-Star Weekend in Chicago.

Carter is a self-confessed “realistic thinker.” She appreciated her education at Sacred Heart, but knew she had to keep her feet on the ground. “Basketball is not there and performance could do the same? It’s this possibility that’s inspired Tolga Kaya, a professor of engineering, and Chris Tabel, head sports scientist at the Pioneer Performance Center, to team up with SHU women’s basketball on a bit of a research project.

WHOOP Straps are wearable technology that collect a host of biometric data on the wearer, including the relationship between the wearer’s duration and quality of sleep and how it impacts their physical performance and recovery.

**Hat if** your dreams could predict the future? Okay. Fine. Not your dreams per se but rather, the fact that you are dreaming. What if your sleep could tell what would happen when you wake? It’s not so far-fetched. You already know the day after a poor night’s sleep isn’t likely to be overly productive, just as waking refreshed and recharged can set you up to feel as though you can accomplish anything. These are generalizations, of course, roughly the same as looking at clouds on the horizon and predicting rain.

But weather forecasting has come quite a long way from the red-sky-at-night level of predictions. What if sleep and performance could do the same? The day after a poor night’s sleep isn’t likely to be overly productive, just as waking refreshed and recharged can set you up to feel as though you can accomplish anything. These are generalizations, of course, roughly the same as looking at clouds on the horizon and predicting rain.

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WHOOP Straps are wearable technology that collect a host of biometric data on the wearer, including the relationship between the wearer’s duration and quality of sleep and how it impacts their physical performance and recovery.
That data—gathered from straps given to every member of the team—coupled with the athletic training and monitoring programs already in place should provide a treasure trove of information about how each athlete processes rest, recovery and physical training—and even, as it happens, the stresses of finals week.

This monitoring of life on and off the court might seem invasive to some young women, but sophomore guard Olivia Dabney immediately saw the potential benefits to her training. “I was more intrigued than anything because I wanted to know how my body recovers,” says Dabney. “This type of strenuous activity requires a ton of rest, and I wanted to better my habits and understand my needs.”

Dabney’s classmate, Jayla Davis, also a guard, was likewise interested in learning about her health and the way it might be impacted by sleep. “Most of the time, we just assume we get the right amount of sleep or our recovery is fine because we feel fine. Now I see how my ability to perform is different from the days when I do get enough rest,” she says. Similarly, the rest of the team agreed to participate in the study (after being assured that the tech was free of GPS trackers), and each was assigned her tech and an anonymous case number.

Currently, the experiment looks only at the recovery of the athletes based on past actions—did you stay up too late, did you go too far in training— but Kaya and Taber hope that, as the data bank grows and the algorithms get more precise, they will eventually be able to make predictions regarding an athlete’s performance in the future. Imagine coaches being in a position to predict with reasonable certainty that their third-best forward is the one who’ll be on fire tonight. That’s the sort of direction in which this research is ultimately heading.

The preliminary research conducted by the team will be showcased at the 43rd Annual International Conference of the IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society in July 2021, though the results, everyone hopes, will be evident long before then.
Nearly a decade after its doors were closed, and a century after they were first opened, the restored "Crown Jewel" of downtown Fairfield is reopening in 2021 as the new Sacred Heart University Community Theatre—a state-of-the-art cinema, performing arts and education venue lovingly referred to as "The SHU."

"The theatre was a staple of our downtown, of our entire community. It has been a significant impact, having it closed, for the town of Fairfield," said Brenda Kupchick, first selectwoman of the town. "We are looking forward to the rebirth of the Community Theatre. It's not just a physical community; it's a community in everyone's heart."

"Coincidentally, the original theatre opened under the shadow of a national pandemic," Bill Harris, director of the SHU Community Theatre, pointed out on December 22, just before the new marquee illuminated the night during a virtual ceremony. "And like then, the show will go on—both in the theatre as soon as possible and virtually, in the meantime, with online streaming events."

If the past is any indication, theatres play an essential role in restoring a sense of normalcy to the community post-pandemic. "One hundred years ago, the original Community Theatre helped usher in the recovery that became the Roaring '20s," Harris said. "We look forward to continuing that legacy."

Pieces of history had been left behind in the dilapidated remains of the original theatre. The last movie shown—which was found still "on the pan," still spooled on the second reel—has not been unspooled yet, meaning the title is still a mystery. The film will be on display in the new lobby as a testament to the theatre's past. Once the theatre is allowed to entertain live audiences again, Harris plans to open by showing that same title in an "As we were saying ..." event.

There are also plans for an underwritten after-school program with thematic schedules, Harris said. For instance, "Tuesdays are for theatre arts, Wednesdays augment the curriculum, STEM education on Thursdays and maybe some days for just fun."

"My message to the community is simple," Harris said. "Your theatre is back."

A photograph unearthed at the Fairfield Museum & History Center of three ushers in front of the original marquee in the '80s prompted a social media mystery. Harris shared the photo on Facebook with the post "APB ... CALLING ALL FAIRFIELD DETECTIVES ... Help us find these COMMUNITY THEATRE USHERS!" Community residents quickly identified Brian Cartwright (right), who confirmed the identities of Frank Dawd (left) and Scott Robbins (middle). Harris has contacted two of the three and dreams of recreating this iconic photo with the new marquee during the grand opening of the theatre.
CAMPUS IN THE CLOUDS

As SHU expands its online graduate offerings, the result is a striking win-win for the school and students alike.
THE TRACE RACE

Gary MacNamara and the Office of Public Safety have spent the past year running to keep one step ahead of an invisible foe.

Gary MacNamara served in the Fairfield Police Department (FPD) for 30 years, eight of them as chief. Over three decades, he saw it all: petty crimes, homicides, robberies, bomb scares—even natural disasters.

Retiring from the force in 2018 and joining Sacred Heart as executive director of public safety and governmental affairs in 2019, he reasonably assumed his detective days were behind him. Then 2020 happened. And COVID-19. And, as the pandemic has raged across the country, the concept of contact tracing became key to containing the virus.

As soon as a positive case emerges, residential life reaches out to ask if the student wants to isolate in a safe spot on campus or go home. Then public safety steps in with a contact tracer calling to ask a series of questions. “We’re asking people to remember where they have been, who they may have been in contact with,” MacNamara explains.

Per Centers for Disease Control guidelines, anyone who has been in contact with the positive case for more than 15 minutes, closer than six feet apart, is then notified and likewise advised to quarantine, either at home or at a safe place provided by the University. And if the contact tracer notifies the exposed individual and finds that person tests positive, “It becomes this circular process,” MacNamara says. “The first case was relatively simple, but it just evolved as more cases came up,” he adds.

MacNamara’s team—made up of former police officers—works as fast as they can, but they are only as good as the information they receive, and they must follow protocol. If the positive case fails to mention someone they came into contact with, it’s hard to stop the spread. Likewise, because students can communicate so quickly and efficiently through text and social media, MacNamara often found that “we’re chasing the message, and sometimes the message is out there already.”

MacNamara is quick to point out that handling COVID-19 on a college campus incorporates a lot of work by numerous professionals, with everyone playing a significant role in keeping students and the community safe.

“When we close the chapter on COVID-19, we’re going to remember the men and women from the University who helped us get through this,” he says. “There are so many heroes at this University, from health services, public safety, event planning, campus operations, communications and, most of all, residential life, who we all owe a debt of gratitude to for putting many aspects of their personal lives on hold for over a year to get us through the pandemic.”

Meanwhile, MacNamara knows firsthand what it’s like to quarantine for two weeks after being exposed to the virus himself. “It’s hard to imagine until you experience it,” he says. “[Then] you grow to appreciate how challenging that is for our students. We’re dealing with an unknown. On top of that, you’re telling someone they have to isolate or quarantine for 10 to 14 days. That’s really difficult. It’s difficult for the people on both sides of the phone.

“These are really hard phone calls to make,” MacNamara says. “This pandemic touches on every emotion.”
THE DAY AFTER

It can hardly have slipped anyone’s attention: things aren’t what they used to be. But isn’t that always the way? Change happens. 2020 wasn’t the end of the world. It was just the end of the world as we knew it. Now the question is: what comes next? What have we learned? What will we keep? What will never be the same again?
How do we turn the checkbox values of Diversity and Inclusion into real progress?

BY STEVE NEUMANN

One of the apprehensions surrounding diversity, in a company as in a country, is that it represents different wants, needs and interests that might put people at odds with each other. But precisely because the challenges of modern life are so complex, the benefits of viewing them from the multiple perspectives of a diverse populace greatly outweigh the risks. Besides, far from being combative, healthy debate is a boon for both business and democracy.

For a long time, corporate America seemed to ignore the fact that diversity could be good for both the organizational culture and the bottom line. However, thanks to the searchlights provided by the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements of the past several years, companies have begun not only to embrace diversity but to realize that it means nothing without inclusion, without employees from underrepresented groups feeling like they’re not just there, but that they belong there. In the words of educator and activist Verna Myers, “Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”

Companies are also beginning to discover that, when all members of an organization take responsibility for their own behaviors, educate themselves about racism and privilege and get and accept feedback from people in underrepresented groups feeling like they’re not just there, but that they belong there. In the words of educator and activist Verna Myers, “Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”

Aisha Lubin Losche ’07, senior vice president of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at marketing agency Hill Holliday, has been working within that crucible of diversity, turning the lead of difference into the gold of business success and interpersonal growth.

For Losche, one of the ways to retain the best talent is to shift the onus onto those who don’t have the explicit role of EDI—to become allies and advocates for change. EDI cannot be owned by one person or team. It is the work of every-one within the firm to move inclusion further. Without that accountability, the deck of cards that is the diverse workplace just gets shuffled around, preventing the organization from playing its strongest hand. “If the diverse talent is in the room but not being heard or rewarded by management,” Losche says, “then the equity of the underrepresented is going to remain on the plateau where it’s been for decades. “You will be hard pressed to find an EDI practitioner who hasn’t heard resistance from a small population of their talent,” she admits. “Some people don’t feel like it’s appropriate or that it’s political. However, we must uproot and update systems of oppression within corporate cultures. The business case for diversity has always been valid. Having an equitable workplace is the goal, and a beneficial consequence is that companies’ performance and profits increase due to the diversity.”

Brittany Brown ’11 is another Sacred Heart alumna working on education and accountability in the EDI space. In her role as chief of staff, Brown helps build EDI strategy with her leadership team for a global organization of 64,000 employees.

Brown cites the killing of George Floyd and subsequent protests this past summer as a catalyst for companies to approach the topic of race in the workplace and to reflect on how they support raising awareness of the effects racial violence has on its employees of color and how inequity is perpetuated within an organization.

“Those were conversations most companies weren’t even having,” Brown says. “How do we make sure your colleagues feel comfortable to even have those conversations and bring up those topics with their leaders? And how do you ensure that your Black employees aren’t the ones who are doing all the educating?”

Brown agrees with Losche that accountability has to...
accompany education about equity, diversity and inclusion. To that end, Brown believes that a promising way forward is for companies to have all members of the organization focus more on allyship.

As outlined in an article published in the Harvard Business Review this past November, the concept of allyship is “a strategic mechanism to become collaborators, accomplices and co-conspirators who fight injustice and promote equity in the workplace through supportive personal relationships and public acts of sponsorship and advocacy.”

The authors of the article go on to delineate some of the steps needed to shift the onus of responsibility that Aisha Losche believes is necessary for there to be actual, as opposed to theoretical, equity in an organization.

First and foremost, the authors suggest that employees educate themselves on the history of systemic racism and other types of exclusion in America. Then, if they benefit from any privilege because of their race, gender or other advantage, they should acknowledge it and use it to benefit others. They should also seek and accept feedback from marginalized groups, even becoming a confidant or sponsor of marginalized coworkers. Finally, they should actively work to build a community of allies.

Brown says allyship has to start with the acknowledgment that there is inequity. But looking honestly into the mirror can be hard, and so both Brown and Losche believe that bringing in external experts to start the process of education can help with that realization. Then, once a more honest assessment has been taken, employees can focus on the different types of ally they can be.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re an ally to somebody who’s disabled or somebody who’s Black or Hispanic,” Brown says. “It’s about putting yourself in the shoes of somebody who might not have had access to the same types of programs and opportunities that you have.”

THE PAST YEAR’S PERFECT STORM of racial violence and deadly pandemic—which has hit both people of color and women the hardest—has begun to force conversations in the nation’s cubicles and boardrooms about what makes an organization more inclusive and equitable.

Though researchers have struggled to establish a causal relationship between diversity and financial performance—especially at large companies, where the effects of any individual’s business decisions can be tough to quantify—a McKinsey & Company report presented evidence in 2015 that companies in the top quartile for gender or racial diversity are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians. Conversely, companies in the bottom quartile were less likely to achieve above-average returns. Additionally, a 2018 Boston Consulting Group study claimed that companies with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenues, which they attribute to an increase in innovation.

While the McKinsey report also included the caveat that “greater gender and ethnic diversity in corporate leadership doesn’t automatically translate into more profit,” the authors nevertheless concluded that “the correlation does indicate that when companies commit themselves to diverse leadership, they are more successful.”

So whether it’s a matter of attracting and retaining talent, improving responsiveness to the diverse needs of a diverse world or, more likely, a combination of the two, diversity is more than a moral mission—it’s also good for business.

Sacred Heart University alumni like Aisha Losche and Brittany Brown are in the trenches of those corporate environments, making sure those self-reflective conversations are taking place.

‘Having an equitable workplace is the goal.’

As we write this, the world is in the throes of a global pandemic and, sadly, our nation has not been spared. An enemy, a contagion, invisible to the naked eye, has already claimed far too many lives and quashed far too many dreams. It has in some way touched every community, though it has certainly not touched every community equally. Some feel the lingering effects of the disease daily, while others have seen their communities decimated. Ironically, the greatest danger is with those who experience no symptoms, feel no ramifications at all and so cling to the pretense of a status quo—all the while acting as silent vectors allowing contagion to spread unchecked.

Differing cultures and governments have attempted to address the problem differently. Some attempt to impose change from the top down, legislatively. Others have called for change from the ground up, demanding action where they’ve seen none. And still others have chosen to do nothing at all, either on the grounds that the disease is exaggerated or perhaps not even real.

But the truth is, it is real. And there is no one and nowhere that has not been affected by it, even if you personally appear to be symptom free.

We are speaking, of course, of racism.

This is going to be a difficult conversation. And that’s a good thing. It’s supposed to be. It needs to be.

We believe you are up to the task.

You can know that racism is wrong and still be racist.

One challenge facing us here, in a magazine article, is the constraint of space and time. In our work in the classroom, in the field as social workers, in our lived experiences, these conversations have the benefit of time, of nuance and even of nonverbal communication—you can see a person flinch when they hear something that sits uncomfortably with them. None of that exists in a magazine article. Here, short of time, we need to get to the point. Here, absent of nuance, we have to hope you will join us.

To do that, let us begin on common ground.

Let us agree that racism, by its very definition, is on every level—morally, socially, ethically, legally, spiritually—reprehensible. We trust that all who are reading this are at the very least agreed on this point.

Second, given this agreement, surely it follows that the dignity and worth of every human being demand that we live in an antiracist society.

However, we must recognize that knowing racism is wrong is not the same as being antiracist. The latter requires action; the former is passive—and to be passive in the face of injustice is to tacitly allow it.

Therefore, like Ibram X. Kendi, historian, author and antiracism activist, we don’t believe there is such a thing as a “nonracist” person. A person is either racist or antiracist, and it’s one’s actions—or lack thereof—that determine into which category one fits.

Are you a racist or are you an antiracist? What do your actions say?

Is this getting uncomfortable yet?

We know that inaction in the face of injustice is itself a form of injustice, but as a society, we avoid saying so in direct relation to racism. Instead, we ask the old, distant, passively enabling question of what should be done about racism. That must stop. We must face the real, immediate and actively engaging question of what am I doing about racism. Because when we do, there is nowhere to hide.

If that feels a little uncomfortable, that’s a good thing. Because it forces a next question: Why? Why does that question feel uncomfortable? Do those freshly considered definitions force you to admit something you’d rather not? Do you feel compelled to reassure us—or yourself—of how nice you are or of how you were raised to treat everyone?

The Conversation We’re Not Having

Speaking from the heart about institutional power, systemic racism, privilege and injustice has never been easy—but two professors in the School of Social Work are comfortable with getting uncomfortable.

By Crystal Hayes, MSW, and Jill Manit, Ph.D., MSW
equally? It would be understandable, but please don’t. Instead, be willing to remain uncomfortable just a little bit longer. Because (trust us on this) there is no greater threat to justice than comfort.

Consider, for example, your reaction to protest. One primary aim of protest is to make those in comfortable institutional power uncomfortable. That you don’t like protest is a sign, both that it is working and that you are the intended audience. What comes next, however, the way in which you comfort yourself, is what is most telling. Do you blame the protester for how they are protesting (noting, marching, silently kneeling), making your discomfort about their choices, or do you ask why they are protesting—a more uncomfortable, open-ended question that has the potential to lead in some way back to you?

These questions are difficult in the best of times. Even when people want to talk about racism, our own defenses and our sense of dependence on the system that takes care of us—in short, our internalized racism—can easily derail the conversation. Add in a global health crisis and political unrest, and you have people who are just too tired to take it on.

But what is the alternative? Tacit complicity in a system quantifiably unjust seems a lot to ask, too. Both are (or should be) uncomfortable. One has a clear moral imperative.

IN A DEMOCRACY, POLICY IS A PRODUCT OF THE CULTURE, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

It’s important to recognize that racism is not just about overt acts of harm or systemic injustice. In recent years, there has been growing attention to the terms “microaggression” and “implicit bias.” These terms fail to fully articulate the damage caused by the acts they represent, which are as egregious as overt acts of harm. Kendi rebukes the use of “micro” in describing racism, noting instead that such behaviors contribute to a “persistent daily low hum of racist abuse.” 1

But another way, they are the tiny threads that together form the fabric of systemic oppression. For the oppressor, they are simply “the way things are”—to challenge them is to challenge the very foundation of order. Thus shaken, white privilege resorts to white fragility, “a form of bullying,” as Robin DiAngelo, a facilitator in the areas of critical discourse analysis and whiteness studies, notes: “I am going to make it so miserable for you to confront me—no matter how diplomatically you try to do so—that you will simply back off, give up and never raise the issue again.” 2

It becomes a discomfort race, wearing down opposition to the point of systemic silence. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in education. As bell hooks, American author, professor, feminist and social activist, observes, “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained.” 3 In other words, that learning about the world in which we actually live might be uncomfortable.

The result is a student body—and subsequently a population—utterly unable to discuss or even recognize systemic racism and inequality, let alone confront them.

WE NEED TO EXAMINE THE MEANING OF DIGNITY AND WORTH.

We teach an antiracism course in the School of Social Work. In it, we constantly find ourselves balancing feelings of defensiveness amongst white students while validating the experiences of Black, Indigenous and other students of color. It’s challenging and uncomfortable. It’s also transformational.

At the end of the day, our work is about respecting the dignity and worth of every human being. It is about creating a just society in which Black, Indigenous and other people of color are as free in deed as they are in word and where all people experience equity of opportunity. It is about illuminating the way whiteness—an ideology born solely to protect the reprehensible notion of racial hierarchy—has been weaponized throughout history, not only against people of color but against any and every “other” of choice.

Most importantly it’s about action—and admitting that inaction is an active choice. It’s about recognizing that injustice, like all disease, thrives most in denial, complacency and deflection.

And racism is a pandemic. 4

CRYSTAL M. HAYES is a prison doula with more than 12 years’ teaching experience in human rights, policy and social justice.

JILL MANIT currently serves as the director of the MSW program in the School of Social Work.

REFERENCES


EARLIER THIS YEAR, TIMOTHY DEENIHAN had the opportunity to speak with some exceptionally talented people connected to Sacred Heart whose work puts them right at the doorway leading to tomorrow.
One of the perks of a university such as ours is the opportunity to ask smart people big questions. John Vazquez, for example, is on our Board of Directors. He’s also Verizon’s SVP of global real estate and supply chain where he wrestles daily with the rapidly shifting nature of today’s work environment. Jennifer Mattei is a marine biologist whose field of expertise plays a subtly direct role in 2021’s Great Solution. Franc Hudspeth is deep in the mechanics of how the mind responds to remote learning as he heads up SHU’s online masters of clinical mental health counseling program. And Bill Harris brings a lifetime of work in film, the arts and entertainment to his role as director of the newly renovated SHU Community Theatre in downtown Fairfield.

Their time, patience and thoughtful enthusiasm in our conversations are deeply appreciated.

A Rebalancing of Work and Life
It was the sort of year where one event sets a cascade of change in motion, and nothing will ever be the same again.

In 1913, there was nothing new about the assembly line. It had been around for ages in various industries. Even in car manufacturing, Ransom Olds had been running his Oldsmobile off the assembly line since 1901.

But in 1913, it changed. Henry Ford and his team tweaked the process, introducing the moving assembly line, and reduced the building a Model T to only 45 steps and 93 minutes. Suddenly you could build a car in less time than it takes paint to dry. It was a phenomenal achievement.

Almost immediately, a desire to tap into the perks of division of labor began showing up everywhere—even offices. “By around 1920 and right through the ’80s, departments in offices were siloed just the same as on an assembly line,” explains John Vazquez, SVP of global real estate and supply chain at Verizon. “As you’ve ever worked in an office, you know what he’s talking about—the marketing people all sit together in Marketing, the accountants in Accounting, the sales teams gather around their whiteboards, and IT is upstairs somewhere. It’s also the source of a complaint familiar to every corporate employee in the world: namely, that none of the departments really understand what the others are doing. Accounting and Marketing think Sales employees just spend their days expensing business lunches. Marketing and Sales think Accounting consists of soulless bean counters. Sales and Accounting have no idea what Marketing is even talking about half the time. And nobody understands IT, ever.”

Career trajectories, likewise, followed a fairly linear path. You got your job on the ground floor, then worked your way up over the next 25-35 years to better titles and offices until eventually you were given a watch and a retirement party and sent on your way.

Around the 1990s, that all started to change. A new model began to take shape. The division of labor became antithetical to innovation. It didn’t matter where you sat or, increasingly, even when you showed up or left. What mattered was collaboration. What mattered now was one’s ability to build a team and produce results. As employers came to realize that ideas don’t necessarily happen on schedule, their mission became to create an adaptive work environment to free up creativity in their best and brightest employees.

It’s an adaptation that began none too soon because, as evolution narratives go, 2020 was a comet-event year. “There are a lot of things we’ve learned these past months,” Vazquez says. “One surprise was productivity. Believe it or not, there’s really not a huge difference between working from the office and working from home. Sure, a lot of people work better in an office, but there’s also a lot of people who really suffer there. So in that sense, making everyone come to the office or making everyone stay home—those are just different sides of the coin.”

As costs and benefits go, this might sound like an either/or conundrum: how do the tangible expenses of real estate weigh against the intangible notions of corporate community, oversight and accountability?

Vazquez looks at it a different way. “What do people really need to do their jobs?” he asks. “And how do we give it to them?”

Indeed, there will always be some professions that require a physical presence—retail, construction, scientists in a lab, etc. Others only need a phone and a computer. “Call center personnel will never commute to work again,” Vazquez predicts. The rest, however, have very few real, physical needs. Plenty of people really need the freedom of a schedule that suits them, the ability to work from anywhere. And, as Vazquez notes, people are no longer as tied to an office to begin with. The modern employee works from home, from their car, from a coffee shop. They work the day before tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Their time, patience and thoughtful enthusiasm in our conversations are deeply appreciated.
of wants. Very few needs. And that's proving quite liberating.

"Why run 50 offices in 50 states with 50 different local bylaws," Vazquez asks, when instead you could establish a handful of highly amenitized campuses devised specifically to inspire innovation and collaboration in your employees? What he describes sounds a lot like a grown-up version of camp than what most would think of as a workplace. In Vazquez's future, corporate culture operates as hospitality at scale. Live and work wherever suits you best. When you're genuinely needed at the office, reserve a workspace and stay at the company hotel; avail yourself of concierge services so that your creativity isn't interrupted by life's mundanities.

"No one is going to get this right on the first try," he admits. Nor should anyone think 2020 has been a model for what working from home would look like in, say, 2022. "One reason people have been so productive working remotely this past year is the simple fact that they've had nowhere else to be," he says. "That will change as the world opens back up.

"But there's this idea that technology gets rid of jobs," he adds, "and it doesn't. It changes them. It's generational. 'Work' used to mean you got grease on your hands. Now it's about the value of ideas." Looking forward, the companies that thrive will be the ones that understand and adapt to this. The rest may just be dinosaurs.

CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER

If working from home is something new, schooling from home has been around as long as there have been children and parents and something to learn. Modern technology might have amped it up some, but long before Zoom the app, there was Zoom, the 1970s kids' show. Before that, summer reading lists. The quest to inspire and engage curiosity from a distance is nothing new.

What's new are the tools. And even they're not really new. They're just new to the purpose.

"We've had online tele-everything for a long time," says Franc Hudspeth, director of Sacred Heart's masters of clinical mental health counseling program. Even applications that may seem more like the stuff of science fiction—augmented reality, virtual reality, holograms and such—have had practical employment in business and higher ed for years. But that's how evolution works in education—incrementally, as practices adapt to a changing understanding of how people learn and how to employ the tools available.

2020 required a less finessed approach. There were successes and there were failures, and most people have at least one anecdote in each category. One thing is certain, however—the year resulted in a wealth of data educators might never have tapped otherwise, and already a few trends are becoming evident.

For one thing, however much we all may miss the social dynamic of in-person interaction, the younger kids seem to genuinely need it. Pre-K through second grade students in particular show markedly better progress when their learning happens in-person. Beyond that, however, the older a student gets, the more the data seems to indicate that remote and in-person learning show surprisingly similar results. That's not to say online learning should or even could fully replace the classroom anytime soon. Those like-for-like results are only really evident in students whose home life is stable and well equipped, both emotionally and technologically. Unfortunately, supportive family members and high-speed internet are not conditions to be assumed.

First, the tech. "Hardware is not the problem," Hudspeth says. "The problem is bandwidth." Notably, this is the same hurdle John Vazquez is looking to clear. "5G is the thing that unlocks just about everything we're talking about when we're talking about the future," Vazquez says. "Self-driving cars. Everyday applications of virtual and augmented reality. To really make working from home work? That's all 5G. All the tools already exist in carefully constructed environments like corporate R&D or university labs and workshops. As they become more broadly accessible and reliably supported, there's no reason why they can't be employed to more fully democratize education. Indeed, the opportunity to give a child growing up in deep rural farmland access to the same world-class education as their counterpart on the Upper East Side of Manhattan is, for all intents and purposes, one 5G cell tower away.

The other half of the problem is that eternal scourge of the internet: accountability—or, more specifically, the lack thereof. It's hard enough to get a child to embrace learning if it's not supported at home but, as Hudspeth notes, "at least a school bus takes you to school." Remote learning in an
underprivileged, or where education is undervalued or even treated with suspicion, or where the rewards of educational discipline are notably absent, can make it all but impossible for the teacher to connect with the student. But accountability in schooling is just the tip of the iceberg. After all, education is merely a largely sorted those concerns out. As a result, we have a mans have (comparatively speaking at least) largely sorted those concerns out. As a result, we have a lot of time on our hands for thinking and, thus, an instinctual thrust for information.

Quenching that thirst via the internet, however, is rather like drinking from a firehose. The democratization of learning facilitated by the internet is undeniably a boon, but it’s a boon with a very poisonous sting in the tail. That’s because the same technology that puts all the learning of human history at our fingertips, from Thales of Miletus to Hawking of Cambridge, doesn’t discern between the epiphanies of geniuses and the rantings of a street-corner alien-abductionist with a smartphone and a YouTube channel. That discernment falls to us humans and, unfortunately, we aren’t particularly good at it. What’s more, if you’ve ever wondered how can someone so smart be so dumb? the answer, rather ironically, is in the question. “Intelligence is not the same as reasoning capacity,” Hudspeth explains. Reasoning is the more complex approach to learning. It involves sourcing a deep and varied array of information and perspectives, then weighing them against each other and lived experience, and then finally—and perhaps most importantly—incorporating an intense scrutiny of one’s personally held beliefs and biases. It’s an exhausting process, but the result is that it’s hard to find someone who engages in such an exceedingly laborious approach to learning.

Sadly, it’s also hard to find them—particularly when there is the much easier approach of simply accepting what feels right. Intelligence, by contrast, is a very swift means of gathering information, specifically because it is so much less critical. Someone highly intelligent can skim a text and easily retain the salient points. That’s useful if you’re a med student—you don’t need to waste energy determining if your anatomy textbook is lying to you; you just need to absorb its contents. It’s significantly less so when fed a diet of disinformation ranging from the benignly laughable, such as flat-Earth theories, to the downright dangerous, like 2016’s “Pizzagate” or, indeed, the baseless claims of a stolen election that led to five deaths when the U.S. Capitol was stormed by an angry mob. Another key contributor to the propagation of conspiracy theories is perceived exclusion. Humans are pack animals. To feel left out, overlooked, unheard is brutal to our psyche, so we’ll believe almost anything if doing so grants us a sense of belonging. It’s a powerful urge that can easily overwhelm the arduous task of reasoning, and the internet’s capacity to exploit this inclination is exactly its most dangerous trait. Which is why, oddly, it’s entirely possible 2020 will someday prove to have been a blessing, accelerating education’s democratization while at the same time proving the need to cultivate reasoning as well as intelligence in young learners so that they are better prepared for the complex world they inherit.

For the world they are inheriting is very complex, indeed. It’s a species, horseshoe crabs have been around for hundreds of millions of years. They’ve seen the rise and demise of the dinosaurs, weathered ice ages, watched civilizations come and go. They have just a handful of predators—shorebirds, shore crabs and juvenile fish are fond of their eggs, while only a few adults are taken by sharks and sea turtles out in the deep. As a result, they’ve outlasted millions of other species. Just, perhaps, not us. And that’s really a shame, since our own survival may prove quite dependent upon them. You see, everything about the way we live—from the length and quality of our lives, to our social, cultural and geographic mobility and the global economy it drives—depends on vaccines. And if, anyone doubted it, 2020 proved a brutal reminder. But what does this have to do with horseshoe crabs? The answer is: everything. Because in addition to being captured for bait by the fishing industry, horseshoe crab blood is used by the pharmaceutical industry to test batches of vaccines for microbial contamination. Indeed, it is currently the only means of doing so. That means the safety of every vaccine out there, from measles and mumps to polio and flu and, yes, coronavirus—and everything in between—is to a very great extent dependent upon horseshoe crabs. And their populations are shrinking. Now before this becomes alarmist, let us clearly state that though their numbers are drastically reduced from what they once were, American horseshoe crabs are not an endangered species (or, at least, not yet—it should likewise be noted that, of the three Asian varieties of horseshoe crabs, one is endangered and the outlook for the other two is not promising). Rather, the immediate point here is that humans have a pretty grim record of addressing minor problems prior to their becoming major problems, and the horseshoe crab population is standing at the door. “Horseshoe crab harvesters push back against regulations and restrictions,” notes Professor Jennifer Mattei of SHU’s biology department and director of Project Limulus, a community-based research program using the study of Long Island Sound horseshoe crabs to engender and expand citizen science and science literacy in the region. “Their argument is, ‘They’re not going extinct.’ And while technically that’s true, it’s only part of the picture.” The species serves a vital role in both the ecology and economy of the Sound, Mattei explains, but only if they are abundant. “People complain about the decline of shorebirds and fish populations,” Mattei says, for example, “but it starts with the horseshoe crab population.” Fewer horseshoe crabs mean fewer eggs, which in turn mean less food to draw the birds and young fish. That, in turn, impacts everything else, from insect and pest populations to ecotourism and sport fishing, to the prices of homes. So it is with any campaign to protect any species. The issue isn’t the species itself (however photogenic polar bears and wolf cubs may be) but rather the irreplaceable role each plays in maintaining the proper balance of, for example, keeping a cascade of problems, like new and emerging infectious diseases, in check.
The same goes for the global climate itself. The issue isn’t how attractive glaciers and ice caps are, but what they do—cool the Earth, supply fresh water for millions of people and habitats—and how important it is for the entire planet that they keep doing it.

Just look at the pine beetle. Though a 1.5C-degree rise in global temperature is often referenced as a tipping point for climate disaster, even just a fraction of that has already allowed the pine beetle to invade the Pacific Northwest where, until recently, colder temperatures kept it at bay. Now the insect has a veritable smorgasbord of woodland with no established predators because it’s not supposed to be there in the first place. Unchecked, it is decimating entire swathes of forest, reducing thousands of acres of rich pine to kindling, fueling the sorts of wildfires that raged last summer from southern California to the Canadian border, destroying entire towns in minutes and keeping a quarter of the country housebound on account of poor air quality for weeks.

All of which brings us to the larger point. Could there perhaps be opportunity in this chaos, too? It may be that 2020 is the key to finally grasping that very simple truth at the core of life’s very complex mystery—that everything is connected.

Everything affects something—usually many somethings—either directly or indirectly. And each of those somethings is in turn its own everything affecting something else—again, usually many somethings else, in all directions. Life is not a single thread where every action has but one equal and opposite reaction. Rather, it’s a tapestry, where every thread is woven intricately throughout the picture, often anchored far away from where it surfaces to catch the eye; and every adjustment, every run pulled or knotted, changes not only the look of the whole but also its weight and balance and, more often than we realize, its very integrity.

Maybe, just maybe, a year that saw a record number of tropical storms, unprecedented wildfire devastation and a global pandemic—all at the same time—will finally inspire us to make some changes of our own before the changes are made for us.

T he re is one thing, however, one industry that seems uniquely likely to persevere.

Throughout history, the arts have been as integral to the fabric of the human experience as have been clothes. Ever since Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the snake and they both realized they were naked, we’ve been using the latter to hide our condition and the former to explore it. Styles may come and go, but from Oedipus Rex to The Queen’s Gambit, acting is still acting. Dance is still dance. Music is music, whether it be the lyre or the electric guitar.

If there is any part of the world from the day before yesterday likely to return in the days after tomorrow, it must surely be the arts, for the very simple reason that humanity just isn’t human without them.

Of course, when and to what extent that may occur remains something of a mystery, though perhaps for the obvious reasons. Set aside social distancing and public health guidelines for the moment—they are symptoms, not the disease. The costs of COVID-19 in lives lost and economies upended will be calculated and studied for years to come. In the meantime, there is a more immediate lesson to learn: the fragility of trust.

Rarely in history have we been in such need of trust and all its benefits as we are right now; yet rarely has there been more evidence to make us so wary of it.

That dilemma—the need to trust—the risk of it—is the
human condition in a nutshell, and precisely the raison d’être of the arts in the first place.

Take acting. Long before an audience gathers in the dark, actors gathered for rehearsal. Meeting as strangers, they trusted one another to perform feats of emotional and often physical danger most sensible people wouldn’t risk with friends they’ve known for years.

Long before that, a writer sat alone at a desk transcribing words in trust that there would someday be someone to give them life.

It’s not always perfect. Trust never is. Sometimes that trust is betrayed. A bad actor, like a bad magician, shows you how it’s done. He reveals the grown-up playing pretend, threatening people with toy knives, spouting words with no meaning and trying not to bump into the furniture. A bad actor ruins more than a play—he ruins the contract of theatre.

But a good actor creates something sublime. A good actor doesn’t put on masks—he takes them off. He peels his own identity out of the way to become a channel, a vehicle, for a relationship between the character and the audience that is practically that of lovers. It is risking the self to bare the self to find the self, so that between them, audience and artist, they may find what is most human.

Quite simply, there is no theatre without trust. No Oedipus Rex. No Queen’s Gambit. And no dance, for that matter. No concerts. Nothing, really.

From eating out to voting to cheering your favorite team, trust is foundational to everything we do in the plural sense. These things not only require trust, they teach it and exercise it. The quarterback launches a long ball 30 yards ahead of a wide receiver who isn’t even looking yet and when he connects, you’re chest bumping strangers you would never make eye contact with on the sidewalk. The arts and entertainment and everything social endure because time and again they remind us that being alive is an experience greater than the sum of its parts.

Ironically, for all the pain the pandemic has inflicted on the arts and hospitality industries, it may ultimately prove their greatest boon. After all, it’s true that you never really know what you’ve got until it’s gone. Which is why Bill Harris, director of the newly renovated SHU Community Theatre, sees now as the time for theatres like his to reassess and reassert their value proposition. “Theatres are part of the health of any community,” he says.

From the early days of the forum through the arrival of the blockbuster, theatres were the anchors of their communities. Towards the end of the last century, however, independent theatres found themselves unable to compete with the offerings and amenities of the multiplex. Then, as Harris points out, “Along came Blockbuster. Then streaming.”

And then 2020.

Now, as studios discover they can release a film straight to people’s home cinema, there’s no reason to maintain the footprint and payroll of a 16-screen multiplex.

And, coming full circle, that creates an opening because “It’s not just about the movie or the play itself,” Harris says, any more than going out to dinner is just about the food. “It’s about the experience. The expertise.” In his vision, independent theatres “reinvent ourselves as true curators of shared experience and entertainment.”

There is a device in the performing arts known as “breaking the fourth wall” when a performer addresses the audience directly, breaking out of the imagined confines of a set, shattering the illusion of a barrier between the pretend world of the stage and the real world where sits the audience. Yet for the past year, whether by real walls or an agreed-upon barrier, it’s the real world that has been unnaturally contained.

As the time is approaching to break our own fourth walls, to walk out our front doors and directly address the real world again, we’ll have some work of our own to do. And, as with any great piece of theatre, the world we return to will be different from the one we left, even if it’s only our perspective that’s changed. First and foremost, there will be some relearning of what it means to trust.

In the process, we might remind ourselves that trust, like the corner office, is not owed—it’s earned; that the opportunity to learn carries with it the responsibility to discern; and that we don’t get to choose our consequences, only our actions, so we should choose carefully.

And finally, if we need any lessons in the matter, we might want to take in a show.
JESSICA BALDIZON’S STUDENTS ARE DIFFERENT AGES, FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, DIFFERENT CULTURES AND DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. THE WORLD MIGHT LEARN A THING OR TWO FROM THEM.

Où la langue n’est pas une barrière.
Donde el idioma no es una barrera.
Wo Sprache kein Hindernis ist.
Dimana basa sanés panghalang.
Dove la lingua non è un ostacolo.

Where language is no barrier.

Room 2201 at Cesar A. Batalla Elementary School may be short on supplies, but it’s overflowing with HOPE.
Jessica Baldizon ’13 teaches at Cesar A. Batalla Elementary School in Bridgeport, where 93% of the students are minorities, a significant number of whom are immigrants and refugees. Among this group are Jessica’s sixth graders, who are learning English as a second or even third language.

Here is more than just a classroom—it’s a model of community for her students, a place where all are welcome and valued. A classroom charter states, “We the ESOL students and teacher of Room 2201 want to feel respected, welcome, intelligent, safe and happy.”

On a bulletin board bearing the invitation to “Create the World You Want,” her sixth graders stretch their language skills by writing about a particular place that they want to see in their community and then reading each other’s needs and dreams: day care centers, orphanages, schools of art, soccer fields.

Then, come the final bell of the day when the other classrooms empty, Baldizon’s tiny room expands to fit giants. Baldizon’s fiancé, William King, teaches ESL just down the street from Room 2201 at the high school serving the same neighborhood. As both teachers were already in the habit of staying after school to tutor their own students, they wondered what might happen if they combined the groups and joined forces.

For four years now, HOPE Club—Harboring Optimism and Perseverance through Education—has brought together kids ranging in age from grades 4–12 and from countries and backgrounds as diverse as Haiti, Venezuela, Honduras, Sudan, Eritrea and Congo. Roughly 30 students crowd together in Baldizon’s classroom to eat together (“like the Last Supper,” she says), build community and develop language skills in an authentic way. In the absence of grades, but with the support of each other, they gain confidence and leadership skills as they learn how to lead discussion, arrive at consensus and give one another constructive feedback.

At first blush, it may seem odd that young adults about to head off to college would want to spend their time with the hopscotch set. But that’s the power of community. Those who are older see themselves in the younger students, who in turn look up to them, and the club becomes something more than an extracurricular activity. It becomes family.

Jessica Baldizon’s time at SHU was all about connecting to and serving community. She joined the Rotaract Club, a collegiate branch of the Rotary Club, to cultivate leadership skills and volunteered every Saturday morning with the Daughters of Charity, organizing the donation center.

Now as a graduate and educator, Baldizon relies once again on those family stories to inform her work. She believes education as an endeavor that may be anchored in a classroom, but not bound by it. As with that crowded dinner table or the gathered desks of HOPE Club, she knows firsthand the need newcomers have for a welcoming space.

“Teaching is a vehicle for working deeply within the community,” Baldizon says, a theory tested and proven as COVID-19 restrictions drove HOPE Club out of the classroom, forcing them to regroup online. Though everyone missed the physical sense of community, an interesting thing happened. The new format allowed for alumni of HOPE Club to join the meetings in a kind of homecoming. And come they did, returning as guest speakers, playing the part of that older generation with all those stories to tell. “Their shared experience of being immigrants transcends their difference in age and even in culture,” says Baldizon, so that fascinating overlaps and rich connections occur. “We see them really own their stories.”

Baldizon’s students also learn, as she has, how important sharing those stories is to building a community.

Stories’ Staying Power

“Growing up, I knew there was power in language,” says Baldizon, whose classroom reflects her own upbringing in more ways than one. She is herself the child of immigrants who sought safety and stability; her parents and maternal grandparents fled a war-torn Nicaragua in 1984. Once settled in Connecticut, her parents worked for a large book company, and her playroom featured a wall of books. Living in a multigenerational home, she drank in the family narratives about life in Nicaragua—vivid pictures of her young Abuelita’s rolling cigars and her Abuelito selling avocados filled her imagination. Gripper tales, too, the kind that forge resilience and character, and some that explained why certain loud noises could still cause her mother to freeze. Creativity, resourcefulness and “unconditional care” were common themes that emerged from these stories that helped Baldizon think about who she was.

Raised listening to stories of extended family arriving in the States, fortunately all able to live together—17 people and three generations under one roof at one point—Jessica grew up surrounded by aunts, uncles and many cousins. Still, sitting around the crowded dining room table, there was always room for anyone needing a little help or a plate of Abuelita’s nacatamale. There, she listened and she learned.

“Their stories helped ground me,” Baldizon says. They also showed her the power of the village and the need to build strong communities to rise up and endure.

Building Community

Jessica Baldizon’s time at SHU was all about connecting to and serving community.

“Growing up, I knew there was power in language,” says Baldizon, who now teaches English as a second language at Cesar A. Batalla Elementary School, Bridgeport.
In the main academic building’s science wing, right at the heart of Sacred Heart’s campus, is the new home for an old school. Its students are SHU, through and through. They study in Hawley Lounge and the Ryan Matura Library. They eat at JP’s Diner and 63’s. They have big dreams. But unlike much of the rest of the SHU community, who hail from 48 states and more than 40 countries, at the end of the day most of these students head home to residences throughout Fairfield and New Haven counties.

They are the students of St. Vincent’s College. Formerly its own entity, SVC was founded in 1905—nearly 60 years before Sacred Heart—to meet a growing regional population’s healthcare needs and, in the process, helped serve its educational and economic development as well. That it was brought into the SHU family in 2018 to become the University’s sixth and newest college is simply the most recent development in its long and illustrious history.

St. Vincent’s College bears the distinction of being the University’s newest college—and its oldest—at the same time …
Anyone entering the SVC conference room will encounter artifacts such as nursing pins dating back to 1905, antique medical equipment, preserved nursing uniforms and textbooks. In Dean Maryanne Davidson’s office there is a snapshot of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul arriving by covered wagon to Bridgeport.

“It was an industrial city, and many people were not receiving health care,” Davidson says. “The Daughters thought this was an injustice.” Their society, devoted to serving the poor, founded St. Vincent’s Hospital first and then, to provide staff, the hospital’s Training School for Nurses. Initially, student nurses lived in the hospital. In 1915, a separate nursing residence opened.

After World War II, the School of Nursing, as it was known by then, began forming associations with local colleges for students to take general education courses, while SVC itself focused on education courses, while SVC itself focused on hands-on learning to award its students a growing education. Initially, student nurses lived in the hospital. In 1915, a separate nursing residence opened.

After World War II, the School of Nursing, as it was known by then, began forming associations with local colleges for students to take general education courses, while SVC itself focused on hands-on learning to award its students a growing education. Initially, student nurses lived in the hospital. In 1915, a separate nursing residence opened.

In 1905, St. Vincent’s Hospital Training School for Nurses admits its first class as a motion of immigrants builds its first hospitals that need trained nurses.

1915 The first nursing residence opens.

1918 St. Vincent’s College joins Sacred Heart University.

Believed to be the first photo of the Daughters of Charity arriving in Bridgeport.

1918 Bachelor’s degrees in both nursing and radiologic sciences are first awarded.

1923 The school’s footprint expands with new facilities.

1956 St. Vincent’s is listed among the leading nursing schools in the country.

1984 The college gets authorization to award associate degrees and becomes St. Vincent’s College.

1998 A Continuing Education Office for certificate programs is established.

After graduating from Suffield Academy, Shiglio decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and enroll in St. Vincent’s. “Initially it was a little overwhelming, a young boy of 17 leaving an all-boys boarding school and entering a nursing school with all women,” he recalls. “The instructors looked at me with a jaundiced eye. But I made my way through it. I tried to get along with everybody.”

That he did. And for many years after graduating, he served the St. Vincent’s family as a member of its board. Today Shiglio is CEO of Ryder’s Health Management, which owns Lord Chamberlain Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Stratford and six other skilled nursing facilities statewide.

Student life traditionally involved routines, just like any household. Ginand recalls required studying hours from 6 to 8 p.m. while Day remembers respect the influence of the nuns who ran both the college and the hospital. “That created a dedicated mission to provide quality health care and strong clinically trained nurses,” the younger man explains.

It’s the jobs. If we can give people opportunities through unique or specialized education, that’s what we’re going to do,” she says.

Vincent’s has always been about responding to the needs of the community. At first it was health care. Then it was the nursing and staffing. Now it’s the jobs. If we can give people opportunities through unique or specialized education, that’s what we’re doing,” she says.

“Through the typical St. Vincent’s College students today are adults, many juggeling work and their own family obligations, traditionally the school served younger women.

Women like Virginia Day, whose St. Vincent’s ties began in high school, volunteering at the hospital while at Notre Dame on Park Avenue (in the building that would eventually become home to Sacred Heart and, coming full circle, would house SVC here on campus). A 1964 graduate of St. Vincent’s, she recalls some bright women who enrolled because older relatives had, or because they had volunteered at the hospital, or because their family could not afford a four-year college education. Day would go on to teach at St. Vincent’s and is now a chaplain, with degrees in nursing and theology.

Then there’s Ginny Ginand, a Stratford resident and 1971 graduate who went to a Catholic grammar school in Bridgeport and spent 10 days in St. Vincent’s Hospital in fifth grade when she had rheumatic fever. That was a time when parent visits were capped at an hour or two daily, she recalls. The care she received—and a budding interest in the lives of Clara Barton and Florence Nightingale—sparked her career aspirations and would later help her feel at home in the school and hospital.

Alumni of that era weren’t always women. Martin Shiglio’s father attended St. Vincent’s in the 1950s (before leaving to prepare for the birth of Martin’s older brother) and would share stories about the strict teachers. His dad shared stories about the strict teachers. His dad...
bers early morning Mass followed by prayer. And before student nurses could report for duty, they needed to pass inspection by the sister director of the school. Indeed, as a whole, the sisters were treated with reverence by one and all. “The doctors—big names, heads of surgery—had to do whatever sister said,” Day explains. “These women had such influence.”

Influence that reached well beyond the walls of the school. Day recalls piling into a big, black Buick with her classmates and the sisters’ driver to make home visits to impoverished community members. She recalls nuns being called to the bedside of the dying. “I learned how to do that from them,” she says. “The sisters transmitted to us very deep values about how patients should be treated.”

A NEW CHAPTER

O

VER THE NEXT FEW DECADES, the school continued to evolve, expanding its offerings while staying true to its roots. Meanwhile, St. Vincent’s Medical Center became part of St. Louis-based Ascension, and then in 2018 the company made an agreement to be acquired by Hartford HealthCare. St. Vincent’s College was not part of the deal, though, and Hartford’s loss proved to be SHU’s gain.

Some alumni, including Day and Sbriglio, feared that “a complete divorce of the program from the hospital” (Sbriglio’s words) would spell a loss of the history, tradition and mission of the original school. But, as Davidson explains, “We have continued to have a very strong and positive relationship” with St. Vincent’s Medical Center. Its chief nursing officer is part of SVC’s advisory board, and it continues to be involved in clinical placements. So, while not officially part of the college family anymore, the hospital continues to play a fundamental role in its life and work.

Now, having worked closely with SVC through its transition, Day views the College’s programs and goals for students as very similar to that of the original school. And Sbriglio sees the positives of the College being part of a broader University family with education as its core mission. “The hospital’s management won’t affect the quality of education for our future nurses,” he says.

Meanwhile, at Sacred Heart, Kierran Broatch, executive director for university advancement, is now SHU’s advancement lead. When he finds himself sharing the College’s story in conversations with SHU contacts, Broatch will note its history and how most graduates remain in the Greater Bridgeport area. “I’ll ask where they’re from and about their local hospital, then talk about how many St. Vincent’s graduates are working there,” he says. “It really blows people away that this College had such an impact on Connecticut’s health-care needs. It’s like the little engine that could.”

That, and everything old is new again.

SHU AND 42

Sacred Heart and the Jackie Robinson Foundation join forces—honoring a pioneer, supporting Pioneers

WHEN JACKIE ROBINSON stood on Ebbets Field on April 15, 1947, ready to be introduced as the first Black man ever to play Major League Baseball, Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher Ralph Branca stood by his side. Thirty years later, Branca stood by his daughter, Mary Branca, as she exchanged vows with former Los Angeles Dodgers and longtime New York Mets manager Bobby Valentine, now SHU’s athletic director. →

“PINNING IS A RITUAL THAT WELCOMES GRADUATES INTO THE PROFESSION,” DAVIDSON EXPLAINS. PINS HAVE EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS TO MARK THE TRANSITIONS OF THE COLLEGE.

“STRENGTH DOES NOT COME FROM PHYSICAL CAPACITY. IT COMES FROM INDOMITABLE WILL.” MAHATMA GANDHI
Now Valentine is looking forward to standing next to the first recipient of the new Jackie Robinson Foundation Scholarship, an honor that will bring things full circle, giving one deserving student a chance to become a pioneer among Pioneers.

The new program will provide students identified by the Jackie Robinson Foundation with a four-year scholarship to SHU after a national, selective application process. These scholars will participate in Foundation programs that promote the values and character traits embodied by Robinson, known to many simply by the number on his jersey, “42.”

Founded in 1973, the Foundation has advanced higher education by providing four-year scholarship grants, coupled with a comprehensive set of support services, to highly motivated scholars attending college throughout the country, continuing Robinson's lifelong commitment to equal opportunity by addressing the achievement gap in higher education.

Announced in 2020, as many Americans were wrestling with the country's past and protesting for a brighter, more equitable future, this scholarship is a reflection of the diversity and inclusion initiatives that are central to the University's mission. “We are very excited about this collaboration and scholarship,” said University President John J. Petillo as the scholarship was announced. “Sacred Heart's mission, the JRF's mission and the late, great Jackie Robinson's mission all align, as we all want to promote the common good of society.”

In October, Valentine joined another baseball legend, champion New York Yankees manager Joe Torre, for “SHU and 42: A Subway Series Celebration,” raising more than $300,000 for the new scholarship endeavor. During the memorable virtual evening, the pair recounted the iconic 2000 World Series matchup between the Mets and Yankees and discussed baseball's past, present and future with moderator Harold Reynolds, a sports analyst and former MLB second baseman himself.

“We have two great organizations collaborating—Sacred Heart University and the Jackie Robinson Foundation,” Valentine said before the October event. “Both organizations are dedicated to helping young people succeed. This is a great partnership in a time when we want to bring people together.”

A former Stamford resident, Robinson broke barriers not only in sports, but in media and business. His impact on society helped set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement. For these reasons, and for his lifetime of leadership both on and off the field, SHU bestowed Robinson with an honorary degree in May 1972. He was, in every sense, a Pioneer.

For more information, visit the SHU Jackie Robinson Foundation Scholarship page.

Sacred Heart continues to add NCAA D-I Emerging Sports for Women, as Pioneer women's wrestling steps to the mat.

It took 12 years from the time women's wrestling initially appeared in the Olympics for the U.S. to win its first gold medal. Then it took four more years for the NCAA to add wrestling to its list of Emerging Sports for Women in Division I. But it only took three months for Sacred Heart to become just the second D-I school in the nation to fully commit to the sport.

John Clark is eager to explain what that means. “It means not only will we have women's wrestling at Sacred Heart, but the women will be on exactly the same level as the men as far as the University is concerned. They will have the same budget as the men, the same support as the men, the same staffing—full-time head coach and assistant—and, eventually, the same size roster. It's what we are. It's what we're doing.”

The enthusiasm in his voice is easy to hear. That's a good thing because, for several months now, Clark has been pulling double duty, serving as both head coach of men's wrestling (whose
REMEMBERING DON FEELEY

Sacred Heart’s first athletic director and basketball coach built more than a team. He built a legacy.

“If Don Feeley came and talked to you, you were going to play for Sacred Heart.”

— BRUCE BERNHARD

The number of women wrestling at the high school level in the U.S.

29K

The number of D-1 schools with women’s wrestling programs.

2

Roster he has grown from 16 to 47 in just three and a half years and recruiter for the newly announced women’s team that he expects to see bloom in the same way. Oh, and he’s also leading the search for the women’s coach.

All this, it should be noted, in the middle of a global pandemic that is leading many other schools to cut their athletics programs just as Sacred Heart is expanding its own. “We’re a school built with a mission to provide opportunities,” Clark explains. “We’re not losing sight of that.”

It might seem a challenge to recruit athletes for a team that doesn’t exist with a coach who hasn’t been hired for a schedule that can’t be filled since there are so few other programs to compete against, but Clark is finding the opposite to be true. While his biggest draw in men’s wrestling has primarily been New England and the Northeast, that there are roughly 29,000 women wrestling at the high school level in the U.S. and currently only two D-I women’s wrestling programs for them to choose means he has a national pool from which to draw.

What’s more, adding the women’s team seems to have caught the attention of the men out there. “The male recruits see the value of having a women’s program,” Clark says. “A lot of them have women on their teams or family members who wrestle. They look at us and they see us caring about the people they care about. It shows them who we are.”

That “we,” Clark is quick to clarify, is not just the team itself. “The support at every level of this University, from the top of the administration right to the people who knock on my door, has just been amazing.”

For Jim Barquinero, senior vice president for athletics and student affairs, there was never any question. He recalls the coach and the administration being on the same page even from Clark’s first interview with the school. “I’m always looking at what’s happening around us,” he says. “One thing is constant: the schools with the best academics are also the schools with the most teams and the most teams for women. If giving more students more opportunities also makes them better students, that’s an equation I don’t have to think very hard about.”

Simply put, it’s the package deal—equality, equity, academics, leadership. And once again, SHU is out in front. “We’re the Pioneers,” Clark says, with a quiet shrug as if to say. Of course. “When we pioneer, we’re doing our part.”

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The organization transitioned to a fully sanctioned team, no one knew them. No one wanted to play them. Their head coach and athletic director was the same guy, an unassuming fellow who had been coaching high school hoops only the year before. Their assistant coach was a college freshman who, 55 years later, recalls the team asking any game they could get just to fill a schedule—including against a Hartford-based business school with players who didn’t even have uniforms, just swimming trunks and Bermuda shorts. That was 1965.

In just six years, they were contending for the NCAA regional title, coming in third. Same again the following year. And again three years after that. By 1978, they were playing in the NCAA Division II Elite Eight, missing advancement to the Final Four by only two points.

Driving it all was that unassuming coach, Don Feeley, whose easy character and warm style of leadership seem to have been as instinctual to him as the hoop, but Feeley seemed fixated by any one player’s relationship with the loop, but Feeley seemed uniquely to understand what opportunities lie in defense.

“Like the time Feeley coached Bernhard’s high school squad against rival Norwalk—and their All-American, future NBA All-Star paint guard, Calvin Murphy. “[Feeley] had us play our five on their other four and just let Murphy score all he wanted,” Bernhard remembers. Feeley’s boys prevailed, though the greater victory seems to have been the life lesson learned: no individual can beat a team.

“He was a real player’s coach. He built that team from scratch to a national powerhouse.”

—Dave Bike

One example: “He coached D when everyone else was focused on offense,” Bernhard recalls. It’s easy to become fixated by any one player’s relationship with the hoop, but Feeley seemed uniquely to understand what opportunities lie in defense.

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The first varsity squad. With coach Don Feeley (front left), Bruce Bernhardt (second row, third from left) and young assistant coach Dave Bike (back, far right).

Sacred Heart's first varsity squad. With coach Don Feeley (front left), Bruce Bernhardt (second row, third from left) and young assistant coach Dave Bike (back, far right).

Don Feeley passed away September 18, 2020. As per his wishes stated in his obituary, he would like you to hug your loved ones and celebrate life.
On March 15, 2021, we broke ground on the Martire Family Arena located on the University’s West Campus. The 122,000-square-foot, $70 million facility will open in January 2023. It will serve as the home to the men’s and women’s Division I and club hockey programs and the top-ranked club figure skating team.

We are not just building an arena, we’re creating a new center of our growing community. It will be a place to celebrate—not just a rink, a rallying point, designed to benefit our student-athletes and our entire community.

See you on the ice.

Join us at: www.sacredheart.edu/arena