

# PERSPECTIVES

2019-20

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Goes Virtual

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Humanities Scholars  
Reflect on the Impact  
of COVID-19

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Your Guide to the  
Strange World of  
COVID Conspiracies

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How Historical  
Inequities Shape the  
Course of Pandemics

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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES





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# PERSPECTIVES

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# A Message from the Dean

It goes without saying that the current year has forced us to find new ways of doing familiar things. We wanted to devote the bulk of this, the second issue of our college magazine, to showing our readers some of the ways we have adapted our teaching, scholarship, and creative work to address the COVID-19 moment. We also wanted you to hear from our students about the impact of the pandemic on their academic careers. Included here are some brief remarks from our undergraduate Humanities Scholars and the story of a communication major from our Korea campus whose much-anticipated year in Salt Lake took some unexpected twists and turns.

The College of Humanities has always taken pride in the quality and consistency of its award-winning teaching. We are particularly committed to a pedagogy that, instead of relying on monologic lecturing, encourages students to engage in dialogue with their instructors and their peers. Natalie Stillman-Webb describes here some of the strategies we were able to use to maintain this pedagogical commitment as we hastily converted to online teaching this year. Professor Stillman-Webb was recognized by the university for her excellence in this process, especially as she mentored our large staff of instructors in academic writing courses.

These past months, the university's work in medical research has been deservedly in the spotlight, but we wanted to call attention as well to the ways our own scholars have responded to the moment, in particular by studying in real time how people have digested and responded to medical information and by offering analyses of why conspiracy theories become appealing in times of uncertainty. 2020 has also become a moment for grave reflection on long-standing inequities in our society and judicial system. This is an area of particular concern for scholars in humanities disciplines. The contribution here from our Department of History briefly recounts the persistence of epidemics in our nation's history, from the moment of the first encounters between Europeans and Indigenous groups to the present, and reminds us of the social impact these episodes have had. We've also included Professor Crystal Rudd's comments on how a new genre of literature, Afrofuturism, can help us frame the questions we are facing in this critical moment.

From its inception, the public research university has played an important role in the story of America and we are confident that the University of Utah will continue to contribute significantly for many years to come. However, especially in the humanities, we rely on the engagement and support of our alumni and the broader community. We hope that this window onto our COVID-19 year will renew your interest in—and commitment to—our ongoing work as students, teachers, scholars, and artists.

Sincerely,

**Stuart K. Culver**

Dean, College of Humanities  
University of Utah



# How Historical Inequities Shape the Course of Pandemics

By

**Nadja Durbach**

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

**Gregory Smoak**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

AND DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN WEST CENTER

**W**e can never view pandemics as purely biological events. While it is true that microbes are discrete organisms, replicating and mutating through natural processes beyond our control, human actions and power structures have always shaped the epidemics those pathogens have spawned. This is as true today as it was when relentless waves of disease first began to devastate Native peoples in the centuries following European contact. Native peoples were subject to dozens of

distinct epidemics that included bubonic plague, measles, typhus, influenza, and smallpox. Pre-contact populations plunged by 90 percent in many areas. Because these pathogens struck peoples that had never encountered them before and thus lacked adaptive, or “acquired” immunity, they have been called “virgin soil epidemics.” The phrase is evocative and at one level captures a biological reality, but it also “naturalizes” the epidemics in ways that mask human interventions. Diseases were indeed a major factor in a hemispheric depopulation, but



they did not occur in a vacuum. It was the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts for disease, not simply the novelty of the pathogens that mattered. Colonial America was marked by warfare, social dislocation, slave raiding, and the destruction of Native subsistence bases. Malnutrition was in fact the single greatest factor in spiking epidemic mortality rates. The kind of health care infrastructure that we may take for granted today did not exist; caring for the afflicted was the responsibility of kin and community. Regardless of biological immunity, any society in collapse,

unable to feed or heal itself, stands little chance in the face of a pandemic. Still, generations of Euro-Americans cited high Native mortality rates as evidence of inherent Native weakness, displacing blame.

Native peoples were not the only Americans subject to racist discourses and actions that shaped their experience of epidemic disease. When yellow fever hit Philadelphia in 1793, esteemed doctor Benjamin Rush, one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence, theorized that African Americans were immune to the disease. While

**Left:**  
Sixteenth-century Aztec drawings of smallpox and measles victims

**Below:**  
Nurses working in the Red Cross rooms in Seattle, WA, with influenza masks on faces, 1918





**Above:** Black people struck by the Spanish Flu of 1918 received substandard care in segregated hospitals.

**Below:** San Francisco's Chinatown c. 1900. Photo by Arnold Genthe



much of Philadelphia's white population attempted to self-quarantine, its free Black people were recruited to be first responders: they were put to work as nurses, coffin makers, and grave diggers, coming into direct contact with contagious bodies. While at least 240 African Americans died of the disease, debunking Rush's theory, they were nevertheless accused of profiteering and looting rather than being praised for doing the dangerous work of caring for the sick and the dead.

Since the early 19th century, immigrants to the United States whose "whiteness" was always contested, have also been blamed for pandemic diseases. In the 1830s and 40s, when they arrived in America seeking economic opportunity and fleeing devastating famine, the Irish—considered both racially inferior and as Catholics widely despised by the majority Protestant population—were accused of spreading cholera. The Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe who passed through Ellis Island around

the turn of the century in the wake of anti-Semitic programs were similarly blamed for an uptick in tuberculosis. When the bubonic plague appeared in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1900, many argued that it was a disease that only affected Chinese immigrants and should thus be of little concern to the wider public. City officials initially quarantined Chinatown. But they soon opened it up again as fears for California's economy and distrust of new laboratory-based medical science led the governor to insist that the plague was "fake." In 1916, Italians were blamed for a polio outbreak in New York City. Although cases were low amongst this population, Italians were ostracized, vilified and attacked on the streets, as the first identified cases of the disease had been Italian-American children in an impoverished district of Brooklyn.

During the last great global pandemic—the influenza of 1918–1919—worldwide, some half a billion people were infected and up to 50 million died. In the United

States, Native peoples were hit harder than any other population. Nearly one quarter of all people living on reservations came down with influenza between October 1918 and March 1919, and 9 percent died. That was quadruple the death rate in America's largest cities. The influenza of 1918 was particularly devastating for the Navajo people. An estimated 40 percent fell ill and at least 2,000 Navajos out of a population of just over 30,000 died. Rather than blaming preexisting conditions, malnutrition, and lack of adequate health care for the mortality rate, many physicians, scientists, and government officials interpreted the death toll as evidence of the genetic inferiority and bodily weakness of a "primitive race."

It is no surprise to historians that this novel virus is now ravaging the United States' least privileged and most vulnerable communities. In 2020, the Navajo Nation is again at the center of this pandemic. Some 175,000 people currently live on the Navajo Nation, an area the size of West Virginia, whose infection rate is nevertheless almost double that of New York state. Many of the same circumstances that spiked Navajo morbidity and mortality a century ago are still factors today. Preexisting conditions such as diabetes and heart disease and limited access to health care have made COVID-19 a deadly threat to this community in particular and reveal how historical inequities continue to shape the course of pandemics. Like the African

Americans that Rush conscripted as first responders, an inordinate percentage of frontline "essential" workers—which now include bus drivers and employees of meat-packing plants—are African American and Latinx. They do not have the luxury of working from home while sheltering in place. At the same time as we invest in containing the spread of this virus, which is only partly within our control, we should thus attend to the lessons of the past. Rather than reenacting our nation's past reactions to pandemics, we should acknowledge the politics of public health and prioritize what we can control—our political, social, cultural, and economic response—in order to mitigate the unequal effects of this latest pandemic.

**“At the same time as we invest in containing the spread of this virus... we should thus attend to the lessons of the past.”**

▲  
The Navajo Monument Valley Tribal Park in Oljato-Monument Valley, UT, closed to the public in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on the Navajo reservation



# Your Guide to the Strange World of COVID Conspiracies

**By James Tabery**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Conspiracy theories about COVID-19 abound. There are the 5G variety. These purport in one way or another to attribute the pandemic to the roll out of 5G cell towers—either that the towers magnify the transmission of the virus, or that the towers are the actual cause of the illness. Then you’ve got your Bill Gates variety. These put the founder of Microsoft behind the whole affair—either that he’s cashing in on the infectious disease to make money off a vaccine, or that he’s actually engineering the whole thing and planning to insert digital microchips in all of us under the guise of a vaccine. And don’t forget the U.S. government variety. You may have caught the viral video “Plandemic” circulating in April, which is an instance. These versions mark the federal government as the nefarious force—either that the CIA created the virus and released it on the unsuspecting Chinese people, or that public-servant scientists like Dr. Anthony Fauci are using the virus to make the American populace dependent on a government vaccine.

These COVID conspiracies proliferate on social media. If

your Facebook feed looks anything like mine, what’s puzzling is the fact that people who are drawn to these conspiracy theories tend to promote them rather indiscriminately—to the point where a “Plandemic” video shared one day placing blame on the government, is followed up by a meme the next day attributing it to Bill Gates and then followed up a day after that with a link to British conspiracy extraordinaire David Icke’s interview about 5G towers. It can’t be Dr. Fauci and Gates and 5G. So, what’s going on here?

We can start to understand this strange phenomenon by turning to a study that psychologists at the University of Kent conducted after the 2011 assassination of Osama bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The researchers asked study participants what happened to bin Laden and gave the participants the opportunity to rate explanations that they found most convincing—that bin Laden died from a Navy SEAL bullet in Abbottabad, that bin Laden was in fact already dead when the soldiers reached Pakistan, that bin Laden wasn’t even there and actually is still alive somewhere. Remarkably, the Kent researchers found that the more participants were inclined to believe the already-dead explanation the more they were simultaneously inclined to



believe the not-dead-yet explanation.

The Kent psychologists' key insight was that the participants drawn to conspiracy theories weren't drawn to any particular conspiracy theory. Rather, they were just skeptical of the official, government story. So, any alternatives to the official version of events—even alternatives that were mutually incompatible—were judged believable.

That brings us back to COVID. An infectious disease pandemic makes painfully clear how interdependent we all are—with our families, our neighbors, our fellow citizens. A virus doesn't respect county, state, or national borders. As a result, responding to a pandemic requires careful coordination and concerted collaboration in order to track the spread and minimize transmission. There are organizations made up of professionals expertly trained to do that—public health departments, epidemiological services, and the World Health Organization.

The problem is that a significant portion of Americans perceive such collaboration and such professionals with profound suspicion. Robert Goldberg, professor of history at the University of Utah, points out in his *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* that Americans have been drawn to conspiracy theories for centuries. Fears about encroachment on individual liberties and an embrace of anti-elitism got built into the fabric of the country from the outset and fueled all sorts of conspiracies—about aliens, about the death of JFK, about the antichrist.

These forces continue to work during the current pandemic. “Careful coordination” and “concerted collaboration,” for some Americans, smacks of communism and threatens an individual's right to decide, for example, whether or not they want to wear a mask. Public health officials, for some Americans, are nothing more than elitists from the “deep state,” hellbent on disrupting a maverick president.

## “Americans have been drawn to conspiracy theories for centuries.”

When we combine the insights from Goldberg regarding the history of the American conspiratorial mindset with the results of the Kent psychologists regarding incompatible conspiracy theories, we can better appreciate the current environment of COVID conspiracies. If someone thinks Dr. Fauci is part of the deep state and thinks wearing a face mask violates their individual liberty, then they're manifesting an historically deep-seeded suspicion of government institutions that focus on protecting the public. And if that suspicion is severe enough, they may find believable almost any explanation that offers an alternative to the official story about this pandemic, even if it means the “true story” behind COVID-19 is Dr. Fauci...and Bill Gates...and 5G cell towers.

# Afrofuturism and the Potential for Hope

By Crystal Rudds

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Science fiction and Hollywood have popularized so many versions of "the viral outbreak" that there's an uncanny sense that we've been here before. And yet, I'm sure the rapidity of recent cultural shifts feels new and unwelcome to many. When I think of the coronavirus outbreak from a racial perspective, an aspect that stands out to me is the jarring, uneven experience of time. We know that due to health disparities, political and social violence, racism, and economic loss, each of us is navigating the pandemic very differently; and the daily factors that either cushion or steal from our individual time banks make the difference between life and death. I can think of no stronger illustration of the pandemic's chronopolitics than the killing of Breonna Taylor. Working double shifts as a COVID frontline responder, Taylor was an African American paramedic with dreams of a future in nursing. She was shot after midnight, during a no-knock warrant delivered to her home in a gentrifying neighborhood.

NOTHING CAN  
BE CHANGED  
UNTIL IT  
IS FACED.

-JAMES BALDWIN



Three months later and in the wake of George Floyd's murder, social media hashtags finally earned her the attention that her death deserved. The legal gridlock currently protecting the officers involved triggers an entire century of trauma vis-a-vis the criminal justice system, which disproportionately impinges on Black families' physical and sensorial experience of time. As an African American woman sheltering in Utah where the pandemic crisis has been managed fairly well, I feel very lucky. But I also recognize that my identity in America puts me at risk no matter where I live. I am only as secure as my social net at any given minute.

What I appreciate about science fiction is how it inspires questions about society's progress and the human ability to intervene. Twenty years from now, will we still mourn Breonna Taylor? Are we doomed to cyclical behavior? Will race relations in this country ever change? One strand of science fiction that helps me process these types of questions is Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism is a cultural philosophy expressed through literature, fashion, music, technology, and activism that uses Black diaspora cosmologies to imagine alternative futures for people of color. Cultural critic Kodwo Eshun warns that the future has already been commoditized based on mathematical and economic models that may not take into account the cultural memory and needs of Black and Indigenous peoples.<sup>1</sup> Afrofuturism intervenes into these future projections through a counter-imagination. Moor Mother, another theorist, argues that when Black people and people of color more generally, synthesize lessons and helpful values from the non-Western past, they develop more strategic and creative planning, and become empowered to re-envision our current moment: "The hopes and dreams of our ancestors act as important metaphysical tools that serve as agents to help one discover hidden information in the present time."<sup>2</sup> This reasoning implies there's a benefit to embracing simultaneity, as disjointed as it may feel, because each time-event holds the potential of previously embedded wisdom.

Afrofuturism injects hope into mainstream science fiction's dystopia without disregarding that life is hard and the future can be frightening. In the collection *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, named for the incomparable sci-fi author Octavia Butler and which incidentally opens with a story about the racial fallout of an epidemic, writer Alexis Pauline Gumbs responds to the thrust of Afrofuturism in a piece depicting an archive of saved emails in which a 12 year old writes to her ancestor of five generations past:

"Ancestor Alexis... last year I did a project for our community about your time, the time of silence breaking...People broke a lot of things other than silence during your lifetime. And people learned how to grow new things and in new ways. Now we are very good at growing...everyone is supportive of growing time, which includes daydreams, deep breaths, and quiet walks...It seems like people are growing all the time in different ways. It was great to learn about you and a time when whole communities decided to grow past silence."<sup>3</sup>

I find this passage hopeful because, although it appears change may take decades, the character alludes to one of the coronavirus pandemic's most important reminders, in my opinion—that painful realities can be offset by growth. The ancestors in Gumbs' story intentionally push past the danger of silence and accept that the discomfort of resistance might characterize their time. In this passage, and elsewhere in the narrative, Gumbs also suggests alternative uses of time: dreaming, reflecting, breathing, and dancing. Combining struggle with contemplation and celebration is an Afrofuturist value.

My aim here, however, is not to suggest that the work of "silence breaking," which I would call social justice, is simply a matter of reflection or cheer. Rather, I am arguing that reckoning with the present and leveling the experiential field of time requires creative tools, such as the lens of Afrofuturism. In classes focused on this literature, for example, students discuss the multiple meanings of "taking one's time," how in one context it valorizes an intentionally slower pace and in another, it can mean seizing an opportunity to guarantee redress no matter how long it takes.

In a science fiction, imaginary, just as in real life, catastrophic events happen. Things break. Divides are revealed. But to reflect on time is to move towards change, and with change comes the potential for hope.

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<sup>1</sup> Eshun, Kodwo. "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism." *The New Centennial Review* Vol. 3, No. 2, globalities: possibilities of the globe (summer 2003), pp. 287-302

<sup>2</sup> Goddess, Moor Mother. "Forethought." *Black Quantum Futurism*. Afrofuturist Affairs, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. "Evidence." *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*. AK Press, 2015.

# Teaching Writing Online Amid a Pandemic

By **Natalie Stillman-Webb**

PROFESSOR-LECTURER OF WRITING AND RHETORIC STUDIES

Like many U faculty, I spent spring break moving my courses online, in anticipation of campus being closed due to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, I created online migration resources for my colleagues in my role as Online Learning Coordinator in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric Studies. I also spoke with panicked faculty members while hosting webinars for the Global Society of Online Literacy Educators: One professor at a small liberal arts college in New York requested help with recording videos for her students, while an instructor in Australia worried about the best way to move class discussions online.

Our emergency shift to remote teaching was different from the best practices in online pedagogy that I study. Teaching online is not about hastily uploading files or constructing a correspondence course but instead centers on designing and fostering a digital learning community. Over decades and across disciplines, researchers have found that online students' sense of social presence—their interaction with an instructor and classmates who they perceive as real people—has been linked to student motivation, satisfaction, retention, perceived learning, and critical thinking.

My own research has investigated the role of interactivity in online writing instruction. In one study, my research team and I surveyed 669 online and hybrid first-year writing students about their perspectives. We found that students most valued their instructor's feedback on their work, followed by effective course organization. Students also pointed to peer review and discussions as important ways they learned with their peers. Based on this research, I prioritized collaborative pedagogy as I moved my classes online in March, designing online discussions, group activities, and peer reviews to promote active learning and keep us all connected despite the physical distance.

Flexibility was also important in adapting to our altered circumstances. In my Visual Rhetoric course, for example, I was able to integrate recent events into the curriculum. I created an assignment called “Visualizing COVID-19,” in which students analyzed and discussed data visualizations of arguments to “flatten the curve.” Many students commented that the assignment helped them evaluate the claims of visualizations they were encountering in the media. I shared this assignment with one of my colleagues, whose student commented, “I just wanted to thank you for keeping the class engaging and relevant to current events. Viewing these events in the light of the class has been fun and engaging.”

Since we couldn’t hold student presentations of their final projects in the physical classroom as usual, I asked my students to create videos using Adobe Spark. Surprisingly, their projects were the strongest ever in my decade of teaching the course: The video format, I discovered, allowed students to more clearly organize and articulate their ideas. One student remarked that the video presentation “pushed me out of my comfort zone and stretched my artistic abilities.” In this case, our online migration allowed me to experiment with a format that ended up encouraging students’ best work and is a practice I’ll continue next year, regardless of whether my class meets in person, in a hybrid format or online.

This is not to say that everything went smoothly as we shifted online. My students were impacted in significant, material ways by the pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn. Those with challenging personal circumstances found it increasingly difficult to complete coursework. One of my students confided that he was experiencing daily, debilitating, panic attacks. Another lost her

job; although she was able to find temporary work to support her family, her new position had unpredictable hours. A young father unexpectedly found himself the primary caregiver for his 2-year-old daughter. Yet another student had a family member diagnosed with COVID-19.

These are the students who felt comfortable reaching out to me about their struggles; no doubt many others grappled with issues like decreased access to the internet or altered living situations. Supporting my students during this time required greater openness and flexibility with deadlines, so they could progress toward their educational goals. Access to technology also became an obstacle for many, and I needed to adjust the requirements for a Digital Storytelling course project to ensure

access when students couldn’t use university audiovisual equipment after campus buildings closed.

The teaching strategies I’ve discussed here—for fostering community, flexibility, and accessibility—are not only important to migrating courses online during a pandemic, but are key to the responsiveness and quality of any learning in digital environments. There is also much to learn from emerging research

## “Teaching online ... centers on designing and fostering a digital learning community.”

on best teaching practices. The pandemic has placed a sudden spotlight on online instruction: We have a unique opportunity to employ it as more than simply a backup for in-person teaching but as an effective way to construct knowledge with others.



# Humanities Scholars Reflect on the Impact of COVID-19

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Throughout the 2019-20 academic year, the Humanities Scholars—a first-year learning community—studied High Impact Practices, referred to as HIPs, which are a set of educational activities such as intensive writing, collaborative projects, internships and research and service-based learning. HIPs have been shown to have a positive correlation with student success measures such as GPA, retention, and completion. As part of this learning, students were required to study and engage in various HIPs such as an alternative spring break (which supports nonprofit organizations and community-identified projects) to give them hands-on experience. However, in March 2020, all spring break trips were canceled, campus was closed, and all classes transitioned to an online format due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The Humanities Scholars were left wondering how they were going to complete not only their high impact practice projects, but also their regular school work virtually. The scholars describe what the transition was like, how it impacted their education, and how they coped and thrived despite the setbacks.



## **Andee Mazurowski:**

“Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the HIPs I studied were nearly inaccessible. Studying abroad programs were cut short this year and canceled for the summer. Although the experience was no longer available, we could find many resources online to learn about other cultures, including simply reading the news to learn about what is going on in other countries regarding the pandemic. Service-learning opportunities such as alternative breaks were canceled as well as for the summer. Although the trips were gone, the need for service increased in our own communities. In my own community, many people were making homemade masks, donating to food shelters, and helping others online.”

## **Peter Mannebach:**

“The biggest thing COVID-19 affected for me was my ability to be in a specific environment. As an average student, I did really well in specific environments that directly influenced my school work, such as the lecture hall for class or the library for studying. Without these specific environments, I found myself lacking motivation, which made it hard to stay on track. The virus also forced me to prioritize financial issues rather than academics, which caused a slippery slide of missed assignments and lack of communication in classes I would normally be thriving in. Because of all this, I wasn’t in my normal routine and didn’t really have a chance to prioritize my studying and self-betterment.”

## Jacob Waters:

“For college students, COVID-19 turned the semester upside down and we still do not know the impact it will have for the rest of our college experience. What we can see clearly is that COVID-19 has destroyed most college students' abilities to participate in HIPs. Luckily, we got a majority of our first year under our belts before it began so we got to participate in seminars and experiences. When it comes to internships and undergraduate research, many students were not able to continue them because businesses, offices and research labs were closed due to the rapid growth of COVID-19. Collaborative projects were still possible, but they reached a whole new level of difficulty due to being virtual. HIPs such as writing intensive courses, ePortfolios, and common intellectual experiences were not interrupted by COVID-19 in a dramatic way. If anything, it was the perfect time to do some writing and finally put together that ePortfolio we had all pushed to the side. In the grand scheme of things, I would say that COVID-19 put a damper on HIPs, but it is not a worry because soon people will be back in college with a new appreciation for all we have and will be more likely to use the resources at our fingertips.”

## Sophie Gardner:

“I missed having in-person class and discussions. My only class that used Zoom was Humanities Scholars and I really enjoyed seeing everyone and connecting more in that class than my other classes that used recorded lectures or written lectures. Some of my classes were using discussions in Canvas, which has made it a little easier to interact. Although I'm sad because my New University Scholars meetings had been canceled, I did get to talk to my academic advisor over the phone about my class schedules for summer and fall semesters to make sure I was on track to graduate and get some course suggestions.”

## Makayla Patrick:

“Going from one online class to an entire schedule of online classes was a challenge. Being at home with little to do convinced my brain that I was on a summer schedule. I had a hard time waking up to alarms and sticking to a routine. Having the Humanities Scholars as a Zoom class helped me keep a schedule. Most of my classes had recorded lectures, so it became harder to do the work as if I was still going to the lectures every week. Having at least one class that met virtually made it seem as if school was still occurring, despite my brain's intentions to convince me that it was the middle of summer.”





# CHANGE OF PLANS

By Minsu Kim  
COMMUNICATION MAJOR



**O**n Jan. 1, 2020, I transitioned to the University of Utah's Salt Lake City campus from the U's extended location in South Korea. My initial plan was to spend the spring and summer semesters in Utah and finish my senior year at the Utah Asia Campus. Unfortunately, I spent just 80 days in Utah due to the outbreak of COVID-19, but I can proudly say this time completely changed how I view my future career.

I felt hesitant before coming to Utah. I was

worried about the cold weather, food, huge size of the campus, obtaining an internship, and making friends.

When I arrived, I found Salt Lake City was cold, but not freezing and the snowy mountain range behind the campus was mesmerizing. I found an American friend through the language exchange program who wanted to learn about the Korean culture. We shared tips on how to learn a foreign language in a fun and easy way. I also discovered great places to eat on campus—my favorite spots were located in the C. Roland Christensen Center and the Career & Professional Development Center.

Although I had a good GPA and a few internship experiences, I didn't know what I really want to do after graduation or how to make myself competitive in the job market.



I wore two layers of masks and dared not fall asleep or drink water during the 11-hour trip. On the plane, a woman sitting behind me suddenly became dizzy and nauseous with blurred vision leading the captain to ask if there were any medical staff among the passengers. The other passengers, including myself, were terrified. It turned out she had chronic anemia but I still clearly remember the fear in the passengers' eyes and my own. Human contact had become a universal fear.

After coming back to Korea with many twists and turns, I barely left my house for three months. Prior to the outbreak, I rarely spent time at home because I was busy taking classes, participating in internships, and working part-time jobs. I felt stuffy and depressed at first, but I slowly began to reflect on my life and put into action the one thing I had planned in my head—YouTube.

I vaguely thought about creating a YouTube

*During the lockdown, Minsu Kim started a YouTube channel called "5 Minute Korean."*

# 5 분 간 한 어

Three career coaches helped me immensely with exploration, my resume, cover letter, and interviews. Thanks to their advice, I got two internship offers for the summer semester—UAC marketing intern at the College of Humanities and communication intern at the University of Utah Global Health through the Hinckley Institute.

When my parents checked on how I was doing in early March, Salt Lake City seemed more peaceful than ever. I was excited about the internship offers and ready to get some rest during spring break. I had no idea it would be my last week in Utah. Soon after the WHO confirmed the coronavirus as a pandemic, daily necessities were sold out at local markets. The number of confirmed cases in Utah increased each day and to make matters worse, a 5.7 magnitude earthquake occurred early one morning shortly after campus was closed. I got too overwhelmed and hurriedly booked a flight back to Korea.

I can never forget the fear on the plane. The flight was packed with passengers.



channel for a long time, but I was not sure what to present. The language exchange experience at the U inspired me to teach Korean language and culture. I initially named my channel “Konglass” because I wore a pair of sunglasses while explaining Korean. Maybe I expected too much from the beginning, but it didn’t really go well. Knowing Korean and learning Korean are two different things. I lost motivation, but instead of giving up, I did some research, made changes and continued forward. I renamed my channel to “5 Minute Korean” because “Konglass” wasn’t self-explanatory and now I stick to content that I enjoy and feel confident about.

pessimistic about my future. I was narrow-sighted and had low self-esteem. However, as I met new people and explored different things, I created unforgettable memories that substantially broadened my international perspectives. After returning to Korea hastily, I was initially frustrated over things I could not do in the post-corona era. I felt doubtful about myself again when my first YouTube channel didn’t go well. If my channel had gone viral from the beginning, however, I wouldn’t have thought about initiating my website and promoting content more creatively. No matter how it turns out, I will continue to give it my best shot.

## “The language exchange experience at the U inspired me to teach Korean language and culture.”

My communication courses served as a foundation for starting my YouTube channel. In the digital journalism class, I learned how to communicate effectively via digital platforms, including WordPress, podcasting, and YouTube. Without the experience, I wouldn’t have dared to become a content creator. I enhanced my storytelling skills through the course Principles of Public Speaking and I’ve become comfortable talking to the camera due to online courses.

In addition to YouTube, I write on my new website every day to teach Korean through K-Pop lyrics, K-Drama scenes, and variety shows. I also share my mom’s Korean cuisine recipes and essential tips for living in Korea.

Before traveling to Salt Lake City, I was

insu, a Senior majoring in C

십! 십년이 가도 너를 사랑하  
nyun:ie ga:do neu:leul sa:r  
! I will love you even after

조심히 가  
ake care = good-bye!

나 사돈 좋아해요.  
[na sa:don jo:a:hae:yo]  
I like you, sadon.

Representative Korean

아름다운  
[a:rum:doon]

beautiful

## 2. 더워

deo:wo

It's hot.



Communications

예쁜 말 모두 모아서 따다 주고 싶은데  
[yep:peun maal mo:du mo'a:seo tta:da ju:go sip:eun:de]

I want to pick and gather all the  
pretty words for you



## 4. 추워

chuwwo

It's cold.



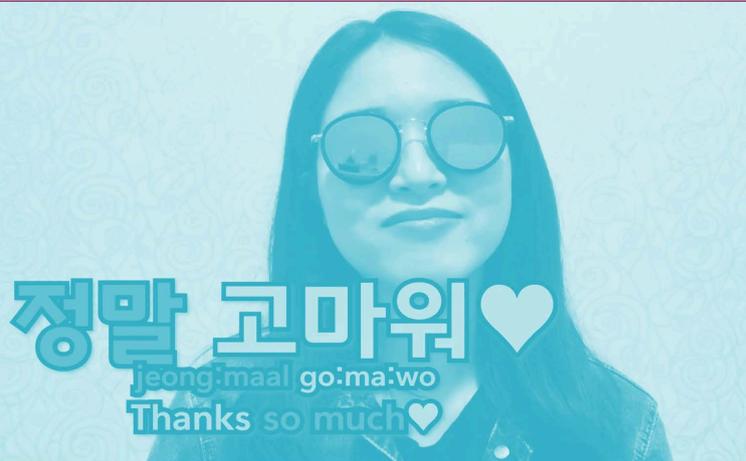
애~해~  
[ang:hae~ hae~]  
ten years~

Minute Korean

가!

(informal)

정말 고마워 ♥  
jeong:maal go:ma:wo  
Thanks so much ♥



5 Minute Korean

# 어떻게 지냈어?

What have you been up to?  
(informal)



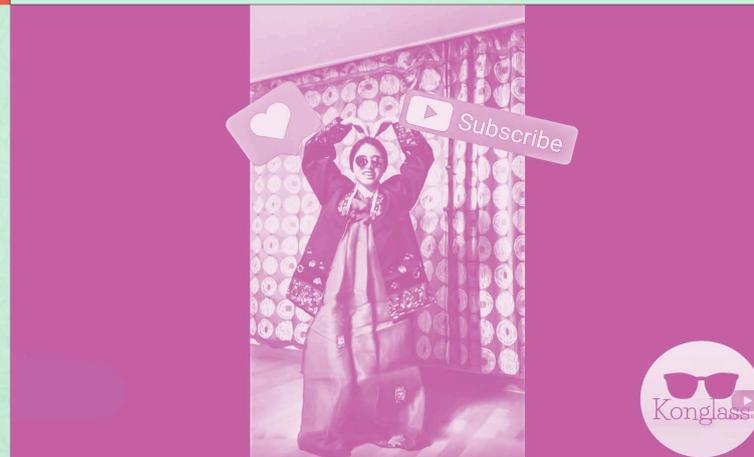
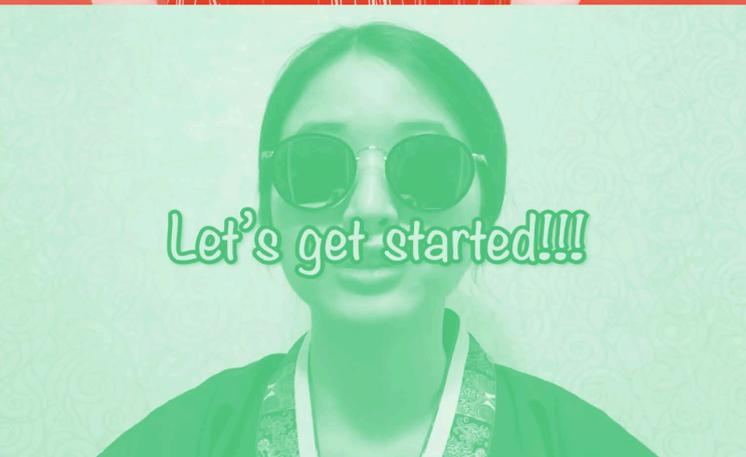
Minsu

and more !!!!!

folksong

광  
기

Let's get started!!!!



Konglass

# Tracking Perceptions of COVID Messaging

By **Jana Cunningham**  
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND  
COMMUNICATIONS



Communication has been a significant challenge during the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic arose quickly and has stretched on for months, which has created a combination rife with opportunities for message fatigue and information inconsistency. Jakob Jensen, professor of communication at the University of Utah, and his team have been studying people's responses and experiences with information and messages since before quarantine began.

The team's first survey was completed in March 2020 and they continued collecting data every week through mid-September. This groundbreaking dataset provided researchers with a unique avenue for exploring the complexity of pandemic communication. Jensen's data advances theory and research by evaluating responses to a pandemic as it occurs in real time.

"By asking questions about messages received from news, social media, at the workplace, schools, and businesses, we can track and evaluate how effective or ineffective these messages about COVID are and how people's responses shift over time," said Jensen. "This helps researchers identify pathways that assist with ongoing efforts to combat this pandemic and advance understanding for health crises to come.

Across six months, Jensen's team tracked four unintended effects of communication—message fatigue, information overload, perceived repetition, and perceived exaggeration—to understand how they manifest and evolve over the course of a pandemic. For example, past research has indicated that people experience increased exhaustion and boredom as they continue to see and hear redundant messages. This



negative and unintended communication outcome of message fatigue can occur among populations that receive messages repetitively and can have adverse consequences over time (e.g., paying less attention to messages in the future and increasing one’s desire to argue against a message’s content).

“All four message perceptions were high in mid-March, and then they began to fade as we moved into April. Dr. Fauci’s press conferences seemed to have a positive impact on messaging, with a notably decline in perceived exaggeration after he took a more active role,” said Jensen.

Jensen’s data suggests that having a strong voice from the CDC may be key to managing public response to pandemics, but his research also revealed problems. Over time, public health communicators struggled with inconsistent messaging. From masks to the persistence of COVID on surfaces, messages seemed to shift or change.

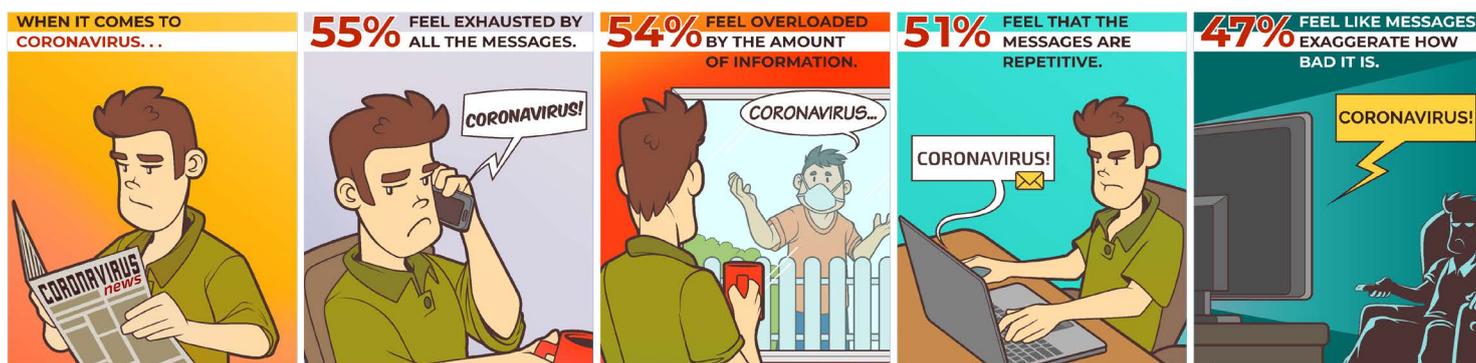
“A key lesson is that messaging may have been too certain and dichotomized. We need strong message leadership, but also a willingness to acknowledge

uncertainty,” said Jensen.

Jensen was awarded a grant for his work in April 2020 as part of a COVID research initiative supported by the Office of the Vice President for Research in partnership with the Immunology, Inflammation, and Infectious Disease Initiative at the U. The initiative awarded \$1.3 million in seed grants to 56 cross-campus projects to examine a host of issues arising out of the pandemic.

“We were very fortunate to get in the field quickly, and then receive continuation support from the university seed grant. The grant completely funded data collection from weekly survey for 18 straight weeks,” said Jensen.

Jensen has taken his research into the classroom and currently teaches an online course that explores the unique communication challenges and opportunities presented by the crisis in a changing environment. Students study the communication strategy of public health organizations—including the WHO, CDC, and state departments of health—and examine how commercial brands have responded to COVID.



BASED ON A SURVEY OF 400 U.S. ADULTS CONDUCTED MARCH 20-24TH, 2020

# Healing and Transformation During the 2020 Pandemic

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**By Dave Derezotes**

PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL WORK

DIRECTOR OF PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES



As our Religious Studies students know, the wisdom traditions of the world all remind us that the future is unpredictable. On March 18, I found myself suddenly in the hospital, being wheeled into the recovery room after having an emergency surgery. As I looked out the window at the early morning city lights, I was thinking about how much had changed since the onset of the pandemic and found myself wishing that everything would go back to normal again, when the whole building suddenly started shaking from the 5.7 magnitude Magna earthquake.

Most of us are now experiencing a high magnitude of stress in our lives. Our current pandemic crisis is challenging humanity to not only deal with the immediate health, economic, and psychological difficulties of quarantine, but also with the local and global contexts we all find ourselves in. In this article, we will briefly examine some of these individual and collective challenges and provide some suggestions for individual and collective healing and transformation. In our study of human cultures and of how people make sense of the world, the humanities help provide us with the right questions and answers to help guide us through this crisis.

Let's start with some basic self-care. When I ask students, staff, and faculty what self-care approaches have been most helpful, the most popular response is "walking outside," followed by other forms of aerobic exercise. Other popular responses are "developing a new routine," "getting enough sleep," and "practicing self-compassion." We are all different; what seems to work for you?

What is healing? Out Latin scholars know that the root of the word refers to the idea of "making whole." To heal in the current crisis can mean that we notice and "own" the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that we are experiencing in reaction to the pandemic. During this quarantine, many of us have more self-reflection time to do this work. When I am critical of the things I notice in myself, as most of us are, this does not contribute to healing. Instead, I want to "look with friendly eyes" at what I see. This combination of awareness and acceptance is arguably the central goal of mindfulness, which we could call consciousness. As J. Krishnamurti explained it, the goal of all meditation is to see the world the way it is and to be OK with that world.

The pandemic calls for us to heal the losses that most of us have experienced, which might include loss of freedom of movement, loss of a job and income, and even loss of loved ones who became sick from the virus. The work of loss is to grieve, which usually means to let myself feel sad, as well as to feel the many other feelings that might be associated with loss, including anger and fear.

What is transformation? Transformation is a process of radical change that involves more than healing, although healing may be a necessary part. Transformation also usually includes creating greater empowerment and reconnection. Empowerment can be thought of as knowing and expressing

effectively what I think and feel, whereas reconnection can be thought of as the realization of my relationship with everything in the universe.

Our crisis is an opportunity for individual transformation. Working in a university in the Beehive State, and in a nation that prides itself on efficiency and productivity, most of us have learned the habit of busyness and have suffered from a sense of time poverty. Suddenly, many of us now have more time to take care of ourselves, self-reflect, and interact with people we live with and love. We may notice however, that the old habitual patterns of busy minds and busy behaviors persist, even when we do not need to be as occupied and driven.

The transformation of these patterns of busyness begins with consciousness of them. We can also practice new behaviors, being patient with ourselves as we learn that it takes effort and focus to think and act differently. Since meditation is about being conscious, I could, for example, set aside even just 15 or 30 minutes a day to "do nothing" in my favorite place to sit, and just notice what comes up for me. Instead of sitting still, some of us might prefer combining an activity with meditation; for example, I find outdoor activities like gardening, hiking, or running very helpful.

**“Suddenly, many of us now have more time to take care of ourselves, self-reflect, and interact with people we live with and love.”**

Our crisis is an opportunity for collective transformation. As the Peace and Conflict Studies students know, deep collective transformation usually begins with my own self-work. For example, prior to the pandemic, we all shared a looming future that most of us did not want; a future of overpopulation, global warming, persistent conflict, and preparations for war. Now that the virus has pressed a reset button for humanity, we have the opportunity to look at our values and consider reordering them in a different hierarchy of importance. Perhaps for example, the focus on competition to have the best "economic indicators" might become lower on the scale of importance and a focus on cooperation for the highest good might be put at the top of the list. Crises have a way of waking us up to what is most important.

Finally, as humanities scholar-practitioners who value social justice and equality, we recognize that the pandemic adversely impacts many less-privileged populations disproportionately, and we work to eliminate those disparities. Ultimately, perhaps the best way to transform myself is to focus upon helping other people in my community who are suffering more than me.

# Featured Alumni

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**Vanessa Seals**  
ENGLISH MAJOR

&

**Kathleen Cates Rose**  
HISTORY MAJOR





# Kathleen Cates Rose

B.A. | History | 1970

When Kathleen Cates Rose graduated with a history degree from the U in 1970, there were basically no career prospects available in the field for women besides teaching. Little did she know that decades down the road her degree would lead her to a successful career as a trailblazing genealogist.

“Back then, if you’d have told me I’d be a genealogist, I’d have rolled my eyes,” Rose says with a laugh. But for more than 20 years after her three sons were raised, Rose put her education in U.S. history to use as a professional family historian and helped hundreds of people discover their ancestors. She even helped to pioneer the use of DNA testing in genealogy that is so popular today.

At 40 years old, Rose’s genealogy career began when one of her sons, away at college, lovingly told her she needed to “get a life” instead of always calling to hear about theirs.

“I realized then and there that I did need to get a life!” she recalls. And she did, helping other people bring their ancestors’ stories to life.

She said she had dabbled in family history for years and was pretty comfortable on a computer, which was unique for an older woman in the early 90s, and felt like she could align her passion and education to find some fulfillment. She and a friend began working together, volunteering to help neighbors and loved ones as family history consultants. It didn’t take long for word to get out, and they were soon taking on clients and teaching community classes on doing family history research online.

“Our connection to people is greatly enhanced when we can understand something about why people do what they do. Our ancestors are regular people, and they make decisions on the circumstances by which they are surrounded,” she says. “So when I was





“Our connection to people is greatly enhanced when we can understand something about why people do what they do.”

helping someone research, they often got a mini history lesson and suggestions of places to go to find out more and most, if not all, found that if they could imagine themselves in the time and place of their ancestor because they knew the history of the area, their research was much more profitable and fulfilling.”

“It is so fascinating to pursue these clues and find our loved ones buried by time. Finding people is like solving a mystery because paper and books were scarce,” she explains. “You can find evidence of peoples’ lives amongst the road surveys, wills, probates, and marriage records. If someone came to the town clerk to have their children’s birth’s recorded, he would look through a book to find a section of paper and write wherever he could. You must learn to read the whole page and start at the beginning!”

One night, Rose posted on an online bulletin board looking for more information

on an ancestor named Samuel Rose, and she soon received an email from a man in Upstate New York who had the information she was looking for. Her correspondence with him and the questions that arose led her to connect with another online contact named Dave Brown, and the two of them raised funds in fall 2001 to do a project testing the male-chromosome DNA of nearly 200 people from the Rose family line. Eighteen separate families with the name Rose were clearly identified, each with a distinct DNA profile, from countries including Scotland, England, Holland, France, Germany, and one Native American family. The Rose DNA Project became one of the largest surname studies in the world at the time and was published in the 2004 issue of *New England Ancestors*.

Now retired and able to look back on the way her early love of history shaped her life and career, Rose says she is grateful for her education that allowed her to “get a life” and help other people uncover the incredible lives of their loved ones whose stories deserve to be told.



◀ Kathleen during her graduation, June 1970

# Vanessa Seals

Honors B.A. | English | 2010

Vanessa Seals developed a love for reading at a young age while growing up in Price, Utah, but was surprised to discover a different genre of literature as an English student at the University of Utah that sparked her passion for years to come.

“When I took my first class with Dr. Wilfred Samuels at the U, an African American novels class, it gave me a new perspective on my own experience,” said Seals. “I’m Black, but I had never read African American literature before. I liked Victorian literature, but then I read people like Toni Morrison and loved it. I didn’t know people were writing like that.”

Seals’ interest in the genre solidified her decision to major in English and minor in African American Studies, graduating from the U with an Honors B.A. in 2010. As a standout student, her professors weren’t surprised when she was accepted to her top-choice doctoral program at Stanford University where she graduated in 2017.

Her time at the U inspired her to focus her doctoral research on multiracial families. Growing up in a mostly white family, she had never seen herself represented in literature before being introduced to books such as *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna in Samuels’ class. Seals titled her dissertation, *The Loving Family: Writing Multiracial Families in U.S. Literature since 1967*, and presented an analysis of the ways families affect the construction of multiracial identities for individuals.



**I love that English is not a discipline that relies on ‘correct’ answers. It’s about noticing patterns and exploring them. It’s about making connections across texts, authors and time periods.**

When she entered Stanford, her plan was to become a professor, but while in graduate school, she did a lot of work in diversity, equity, and inclusion and noticed that students of color and low-income and first-generation students had very different experiences in graduate school than her peers. While working with the Women’s Community Center, the Diversity and First-Gen Office, and the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity, she realized she wanted to work with students outside of the classroom rather than inside.

She moved back to Utah in 2017 and landed a job at Westminster College working for the McNair Program, which helps to increase educational attainment of low-income and first-generation students. McNair, in particular, supports students as they prepare to apply to and attend doctoral programs in various fields. Seals has since been promoted to director of the program.

“I was actually a McNair Scholar when I was an undergraduate student

at the U. I didn’t know what I was going to do after I graduated with my English degree and I was fortunate to be directed toward the program by a faculty mentor. My participation in McNair was a life-changing experience, and it led me to my doctoral program at Stanford. Before McNair, I didn’t know what a Ph.D. was, and I didn’t realize that my professors all had them!”

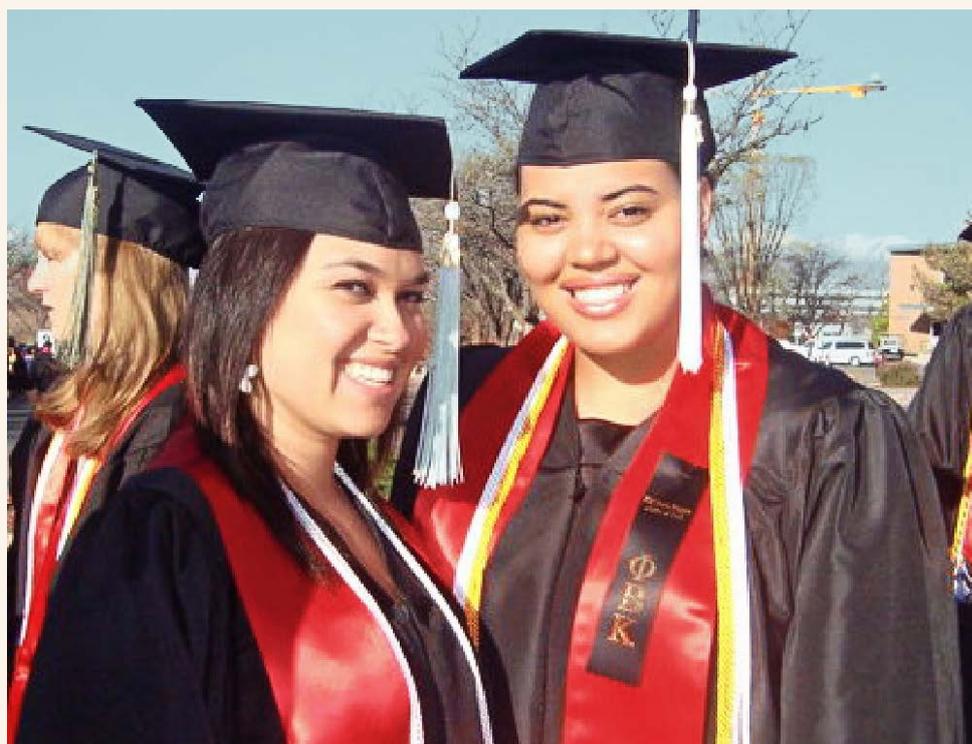
Seals finds great joy in working with students as they find their confidence and their calling. She has found that students who start the McNair program are worried they are unprepared and unqualified for graduate work, but after working together for several months they become surer of themselves and about the process of applying to graduate school.

“In general, I am very fortunate to have a career that I love and for which I am so well-suited. It’s not perfect—sometimes I’m exhausted or tired or frustrated, but I’m always excited to go to work the next day.”

Finding her career path wasn’t simple and during graduate school Seals took the time to really look at her qualifications in terms of skills. As an English major, she had gained valuable writing, critical thinking, reading, and communication skills and was able to digest and retain a lot of information in a short period of time.

“I love that English is not a discipline that relies on ‘correct’ answers. It’s more about reasoning and thinking through how and why something might be true. It’s about noticing patterns and exploring them. It’s about making connections across texts, authors and time periods. That level of thinking is invaluable when it comes to problem solving and creative thinking.”

Seals is grateful for the advice and support offered to her by professors during her time at the U and says she might not have found English as the right major for herself if she hadn’t listened to them. Their encouragement shaped her academic research and led her to a career she hadn’t predicted.



▲ Vanessa smiling on graduation day with one of her classmates

# Commencement Goes Virtual

In spring 2020, when all events at the University of Utah were cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak, perhaps those most disappointed were the graduating students. After years of hard work, studying, writing and researching, they didn't get the final celebration they so deserved. They didn't get to walk across the stage as their family and friends cheered, they didn't get to accept their diploma from the dean and they didn't get to shake hands or hug their favorite professor for the final time. In an effort to celebrate humanities' students, the college created a way to virtually acknowledge the graduating class of 2020. Professors submitted videos of congratulations, the dean and student speaker gave pre-recorded speeches, each student's name was posted and many awards and accomplishments were acknowledged. Although nothing could replace marching through campus behind a pipe band, gathering into the Huntsman Center while *Pomp and Circumstance* played over the loud speakers and loved-ones shouted from the stands, hopefully students felt recognized and celebrated for their accomplishments.



To see more, visit the convocation website at [humanitiesconvocation.utah.edu](https://humanitiesconvocation.utah.edu)



Lexie Kite  
Director of Dev  
College of Hurr



You're on your way to  
things!  
Joy Pierce  
Associate Dean for Academic and  
Faculty Affairs

a massive  
let the glorious feeling of  
accomplishment wash over you.  
Congratulations Class of 2020!

today!!!

Rebecca Baker  
Class of 2018

Writing & Rhetoric

3

Congrats everyone!

Congratulations! I can't im  
how hard graduating must  
been with everything that  
happened. Good job pulli  
through!

202  
You are  
accomplish  
Watch out wor  
Wishing you all the

velopment  
unities



## Message from the Dean

**Stuart Culver shared some words of encouragement and congratulations with the graduates:**

“Graduations and in particular college convocations are not meant for social distancing. They are times for handshakes and hugs, farewells to cherish friends, and congratulations from proud family members. You may be your family's first college graduate or following in the footsteps of others, but all of you have worked hard and under difficult circumstances the last few weeks to get across that finish line.

Of course, this year you've left the campus itself some weeks ago. Some of you will be returning to or starting jobs very soon. Others will be attending graduate or professional schools in the near future. Still, others may be pursuing passionate interests through public service or volunteerism. Many pathways are open to you, especially because your education in the humanities has neither defined nor categorized you. Rather, it has given you the tools to continue learning and redefining yourself. You've learned to read closely and reason carefully, to master the means of communication and expression, to interrogate the assumptions behind assertions while acknowledging the cold hard facts. Finally, you've learned to appreciate and to respond to voices from other times, other places, and other perspectives.

What's important is not just the intellectual curiosity which has driven all of you to acquire new knowledge, but also the experience of learning with and about others. I hope that we as a college can help you preserve this community, but it is time now for you to follow a path away from us. It is our hope that you will return to this campus physically when it's possible, and virtually, and even more frequently in memory as the site of your most formative experiences of joy and enlightenment.”

To ensure they weren't left empty-handed, each graduate received a small congratulatory gift from the college to recognize their success. ▶





# Congrats from the Faculty and Advisors

Faculty and advisors recorded uplifting messages for the graduating class of 2020



If your mind is bigger than when you came and your horizons broader and your dreams not just bigger but also more realistic, then you will have gotten an education. That's what we hoped for you when you came and we know you will be carrying it on.

**-Peggy Battin**  
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR  
PHILOSOPHY



Your degree has given you the intellectual tools to handle whatever life throws at you and the ability to apply your knowledge to new situations. You are a member of the class of 2020. Be proud, be strong, be hopeful. And most of all, congratulations.

**-Kimberly Mangun**  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
COMMUNICATION

Congratulations, you did it! And now adventure is calling, folks. Get out there and get it.

**-Jon Stone**  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
WRITING AND  
RHETORIC STUDIES



Hey all you cool cats and kittens that graduated class of 2020. You've done it. Now keep on peddlin'!

**-Justin Nistler**  
ACADEMIC ADVISOR  
LINGUISTICS



Graduating is hard enough. But having to do it in the midst of a global pandemic, a bunch of earthquakes and a frozen economy? That's impressive.

**-Taunya Dressler**  
ASSISTANT DEAN  
FOR UNDERGRADUATE AFFAIRS



We may not be going anywhere physically right now, but your journey continues. Celebrate your accomplishments, have hope for the future and keep in touch!

**-Margaret Wan**  
PROFESSOR  
WORLD LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

May the patience of perseverance that you are gaining during these trying times be the foundation for a bright future. Peace, health, and happiness to you all. Congratulations.

**-Kim Korinek**  
DIRECTOR  
ASIA CENTER



MEET THE 2020 STUDENT SPEAKER

# Madeleine Parkinson

What happens when love of physics meets its match in philosophy, literature and classical languages? A “humanities star” is born. Madeleine Parkinson fell in love with astrophysics and literature at the age of 14 because she “could find poetic similarities between the two.” Earning an associate’s degree in physics, it wasn’t until she was working as a nanny in France that she immersed in the writings of Kierkegaard, Beauvoir and Frankl. “I loved how philosophy allowed me to begin answering the questions that arose from my study of physics and literature,” she explained. When she returned home and began taking philosophy courses at the U, she met her match. “I realized philosophy was my life passion.”

Madeleine quickly emerged as a rising star in the philosophy department, where her combined quantitative physics training and engaging personality led to an invitation to run a logic lab for the department. “Her contagious enthusiasm for the material and skill at teaching others helped dozens of students succeed in our courses,” said Department Chair Matt Haber. “That’s a truly rare and unique talent, and we’re all excited to see what successes are sure to follow.”

Madeleine is graduating Magna Cum Laude with double majors in philosophy and English literature, and a minor in classics in both Attic Greek and Latin. Reflecting on her experience in these disciplines, she writes, “Philosophy has taught me critical thinking, clear writing, and logical argumentation. English has taught me empathy and has revealed to me the deep similarities of human experience. Classics has taught me that I can relate personally to those who existed centuries ago. These disciplines have opened my mind to new perspectives. I realize that I exist in a world with myriad perspectives, cultures and belief systems that all offer something beautiful and informative.”

After graduating, Madeleine will attend U.C. Berkeley’s 10-week summer Latin program. She ultimately plans to pursue a Ph.D. in a joint classics and philosophy program, continuing on to become a professor of philosophy. “I hope that by teaching philosophy I can share my sense of curiosity and wonder with others. Further, I hope to begin bridging the gap of disparate fields of study so that new connections and advances can be made in each.”



*Transcription of the  
College of Humanities  
convocation speech given  
by Madeleine Parkinson*

# The Shock of Beauty in a Time of Shock

When I wrote this speech I had been in quarantine for a little over three weeks. Unable to see family or friends, unable to leave the small confines of my room, I had plenty of time to think about the end of the world. Though this is certainly the scariest large-scale disaster I have personally ever lived through, I have also studied enough history to know that this is not the first time the world has ended. The world has ended many times in the course of human history and the defiant will to continue, to stubbornly progress against all odds, and to make a segue out of an ending, is arguably a defining aspect of human experience.

Nobody thinks about “The Beautiful” during the end of the world. I certainly didn’t at first. But with plenty of time on my hands and little I could do to help (beyond keeping to myself), I turned my attention to beauty as a means of transcendence. Let me explain a personal thought I’ve been nursing for the past couple of years: Humans have a remarkable predisposition for habit. We are great at setting on a course of action and following it tirelessly. Unfortunately, this ability can also lead to stagnation. We cling to perspectives long past their usefulness because we fear it will take effort to change (and it will take effort). Beauty is that little spark of life that illuminates new perspectives and paths for understanding ourselves and the world. Beauty is what compels us into uncharted intellectual, artistic, and innovative terrain. It is the reminder of how much humanity has changed in the face of obstacles, and how much room we still have to grow.

Beauty surfaces when many differing ideas, images, and perspectives harmonize together to create an emergent understanding of the world and of ourselves. This is “The Beautiful” experience. Whether hearing Vicente Huidobro’s metaphor, “My glances are a wire on the horizon where swallows rest,” to seeing Salvador Dalí’s “Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee,” our brains weave the already present, quotidian ideas into a novel way of experiencing and appreciating the world around us. Beauty shakes us from our automatic, habitual mode of viewing life and opens new ideas and pathways previously unseen.

The humanities are in the business of educating us in the history of “The Beautiful.” As Plato once said, “δεῖ δέ που τελευτᾶν τὰ μουσικὰ εἰς τὸ τοῦ καλοῦ ἐρωτικά.” “Without doubt, the final aim of all scholarly activity is to enter into love of the beautiful” (Republic 403, C. Personal translation). Whether you study literature, philosophy, history, or communication, the humanities offer a robust picture of human change in the face of adversity. We are shown again and again how, when frozen at the precipice of a new challenge, upon discovering old ideas were no longer fit for the new world, humankind did not hesitate, but grew.

We are taught to expand past our own perspective and sympathetically grasp the beauty of other world views, regardless of how alien they may feel. We are

given critical and creative tools to not only understand the past, what motivated and molded it, but to apply those lessons as a lens to the future. Those catalysts of “The Beautiful”—the men and women we’ve spent the last four years studying—were those who were willing to embark on the absurd, the sublime, and the utterly unthinkable. They did not fear the condemnation of their contemporaries, but saw beauty in a new way of thinking and committed themselves to showing this beauty to others. As Mina Loy wrote, “Most movements have a fixed concept towards which they advance, we move away from all fixed concepts in order to advance.”

Beauty often advances slowly, the proponents of new perspectives convincing the world one by one. They were patient and loud, it happened, and thought moved. The quicker route to advance new perspectives is often found in the face of disasters such as the ones we are living through. In these situations we recognize the impossibility of clinging to old views. We know stasis is a little death, and an unacceptable death. Desperation is truly a remarkable motivator towards beauty.

If I had been asked four years ago how the world would deal with a global disaster such as the coronavirus, I would have been undoubtedly pessimistic. It seemed we had stagnated, ignoring an ever-worsening social division, an unsustainable world view, and a hatred for those who disagreed with us. I feared we could not muster the empathy or the courage to overcome our own stubborn habits and self-concern. In reality, public response to coronavirus has been nothing less than inspirational. People have sacrificed their daily lives, activities, and sometimes their means of support, in hopes of protecting the population at large. Essential workers have performed overtime, putting their own lives and well-being at risk. The world generally has demonstrated remarkable empathy and innovation as we begin to mold new social systems to face global crisis. The willingness to come together, to share our ideas and our burdens, to support each other and this beautiful earth, and to grow not simply as individuals but as a collective whole—this is a work of art.

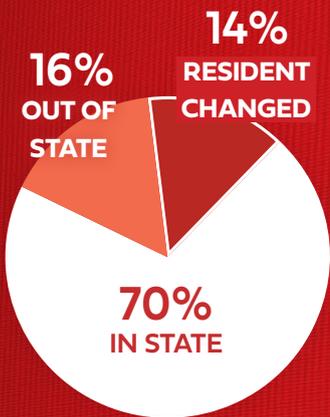
As graduating seniors in the humanities, we have particular insights and creative tools to assist in building a new world. Like those we have studied, we have the ability to redefine the current perspective and posit new forms of beauty that will allow the world to overcome the current impasse and bound forward into the future. We are in the midst of incredible hardships and our old way of thinking, our old habits, are no longer suitable for current success. A new perspective, a redefinition of ourselves and our personal beauty, is absolutely essential.

Beauty is a call to action. Answer the call!  
Class of 2020, thank you, and

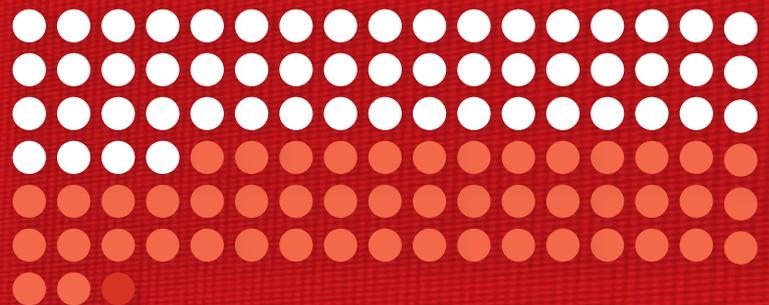
## Congratulations!

# 2020 Graduating Class

## Statistics



○ = 10 STUDENTS



● 535 FEMALE   ● 379 MALE   ● 11 UNIDENTIFIED

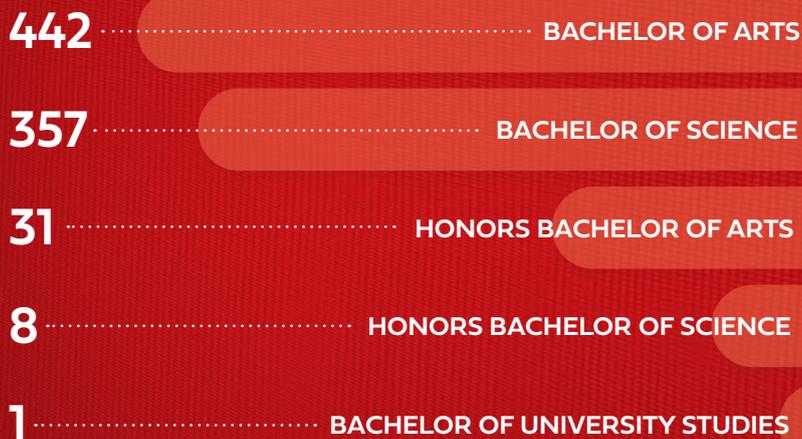
MIN AGE  
**19**

AVG. AGE  
**26**

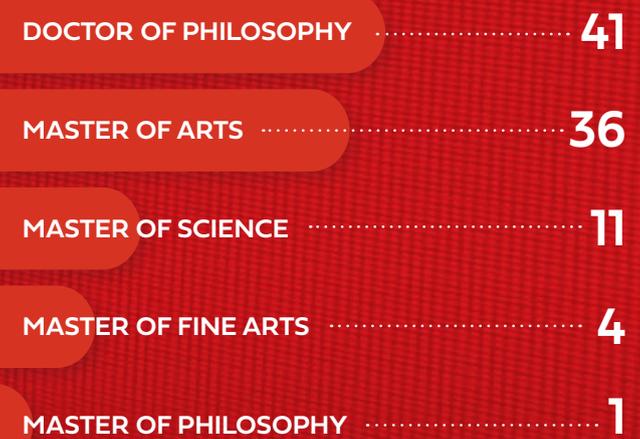
MAX AGE  
**62**

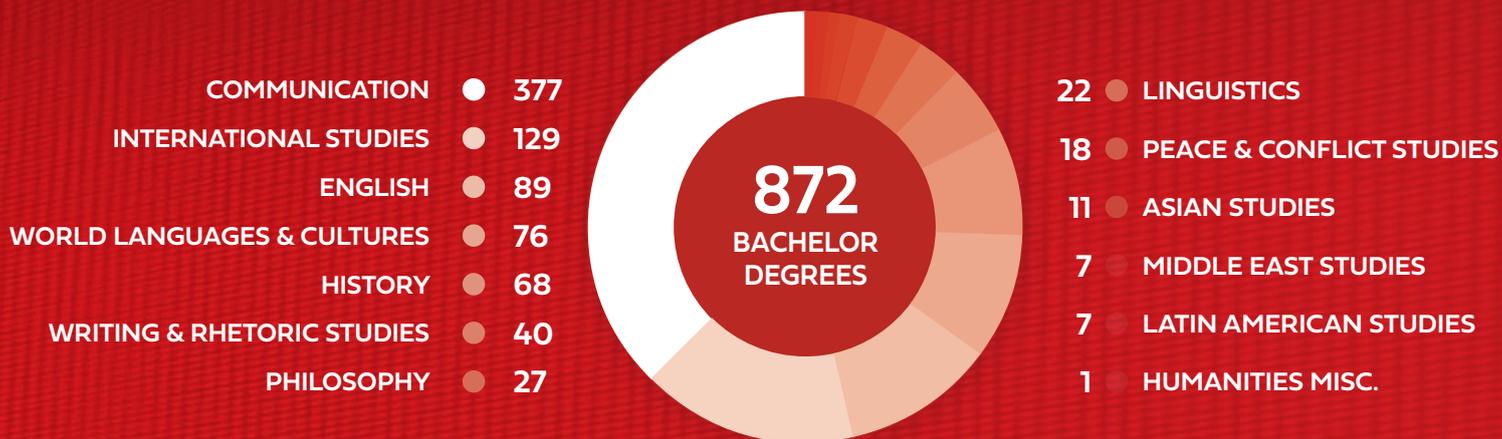


### UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES AWARDED

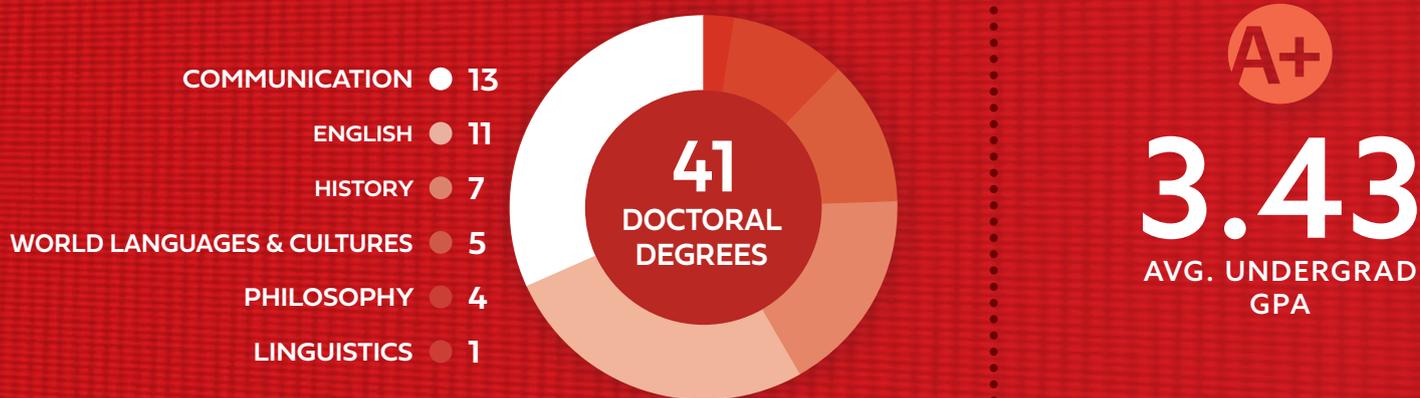


### GRADUATE DEGREES AWARDED





**925**  
GRADUATES



**A+**

**3.43**  
AVG. UNDERGRAD  
GPA

**231** MINORS AWARDED





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