

Tuesday April 21, 2020

Sending positive thoughts and wishes for health and safety from beautiful, sunny New Mexico!

This year, well before any of us had heard of COVID-19, sustainability had been a major focus for UWC-USA. Our work included personal, communal, and environmental sustainability, all of which have been supported by a generous matching grant from the EE Ford Foundation and those who enabled us to make the match. We've been taking a hard look at all of our resources and embracing our responsibility to manage them with care. While our work on communal sustainability has primarily been focused on our campus community, we've also been focused on our larger communal sustainability, including, for example, partnering with the Friends of the Montezuma Hot Springs to protect and improve the hot springs, which are located on campus and which are an important community resource.



COVID-19 has focused our larger community efforts even more. UWC-USA takes seriously its responsibility to partner with local entities and to support those who live nearby. And so, as part of our effort to contribute to communal sustainability at this difficult time, we have been working for the past few weeks with a local shelter and food pantry, the Samaritan House, to provide over 400 meals per week to support a spike in local need. You can read about this important initiative [here](#).

And here are other updates on what we have been doing to sustain what we value in challenging times:

- We recently learned from the New Mexico Department of Health that a second person has been diagnosed with COVID-19 in San Miguel County. Now that the state of New Mexico is identifying cases by zip code, we know that neither case is in Montezuma or the immediate area. We continue to focus on fact-based decision-making in all we do, and we are confident that our efforts are paying off for our community.
- To meet IB requirements, teachers conducted over 1,000 uploads of student work under extraordinary circumstances. Kudos to all for the sustained effort it has taken to be ahead of the curve!!
- We continue to communicate with parents, students, and host families to make sure current arrangements are sustainable as we look forward to summer and beyond (And yes, there will be a beyond!). We are working on a case by case basis for now, weighing visa requirements, home situations for our students, and their plans for next year.
- We are hosting an online session with admitted students and their families on Thursday to answer questions about the coming academic year. I will be joining our director of admissions, John Carpenter. We have asked admitted students to help with translation. Our main point will be that we plan to open, but that we will all need to be flexible as a picture emerges of what exactly opening will look like.

- Parents of current students will also join an online session with me, in addition to Alexis Mamaux, our dean of academics, and Naomi Swinton, dean of students, to address questions about our current situation and next year. We have asked students to help with translation if necessary.
- Right now we are following CDC recommendations for those whose work requires them to be on campus. We are reviewing these practices and also know that as more people return to campus our guidelines for social distancing and mitigation will continue to evolve. Kudos to all sustaining our campus and the larger community through their efforts!
- In an effort to understand how students are adapting to distance learning and the challenges of maintaining a remote community, we have conducted a survey of current students. Over 90 students have responded and the results indicate that our students are shining in sustaining themselves and others!

Our news around sustainability goes beyond COVID-19 and the ways we are stepping up to deal with its impact. UWC-USA was officially informed that we earned a bronze rating from the Association for the Advancement for Sustainability in Higher Education. The rating was the result of the work of David Neidel '87, who as a UWC-USA alumni-in-residence worked on a number of sustainability initiatives last year with students and staff. Our rally around sustainability is a reminder that we are all part of something larger and more important than ourselves. Tirso Jesus Lara Rivera, a first-year student from Venezuela, shared this observation with us recently: "Adverse circumstances and uncertainty about what is going to happen simply create a really good opportunity for me to take control of my life. This is not the first time that a school shut down evacuating me in the middle of a chaotic world. My strength comes when I remember that UWC-USA gave me a life. Every day I remember my classmates, my teachers, my family, the community, and the last six months that were amazing. THAT is what keeps me motivated - UWC-USA AND THE UWC MOVEMENT!"

I couldn't say it any better myself. Here's to the ways we sustain ourselves and especially one another!

Yours,

Victoria
