Hehir Memorial Lecture Goes Virtual

Just days after the COVID-19 outbreak forced cancelations of all campus events larger than 50 persons, Dr. Ana Martínez Alemán delivered the 2020 Rev. Martin A. Hehir C.S.Sp. Memorial Lecture via webinar to a virtual group of students, faculty, and administrators.

Hosted by Duquesne University’s Master of Science Program in Higher Education Administration, the annual event welcomes a distinguished scholar in the field and aims to support effective practice in local colleges and universities by convening area administrators to consider critical issues in higher education. Martínez Alemán’s presentation, titled “Achieving the Democratic Imperative of American Higher Education: Engaging First Generation Students through Technology,” highlighted key findings from her recent book, Technology and Engagement: Making Technology Work for First Generation College Students.

“A new challenge to educational equity has been the advent of social media,” Martínez Alemán noted. “In the new sociology of campus, relationships critical to democratic ends are now both real and virtual.” Discussing the findings of a five-year longitudinal case study focused on how first-generation college students use technology to access “campus capital,” Martinez Alemán examined how social media “promotes a sense of community, ensures engagement with campus life, and strengthens relationships with home” for these students.

Campus administrators who attended the event virtually found it “incredibly insightful,” as observed by Dr. Adriel Hilton, Dean of Students and Diversity Officer at Seton Hill University. It also facilitated cross-functional conversations, touching on the roles of faculty, staff, and students, respectively. Dr. Erin Rentschler, Associate Director for Faculty Development at the Duquesne University Center for Teaching Excellence, stated, “Dr. Martínez Alemán’s presentation couldn’t have come at a more opportune time. Disruptions on campus due to COVID-19 closures illuminated the need for clear and thoughtful communication to students, especially to those who may have experienced the disruption most significantly, like first generation students. Communication via social media creates important touchpoints for students navigating new terrain.”

Graduate students currently enrolled in the Master of Science in Higher Education Administration similarly appreciated Dr. Martínez Alemán’s scholarship. For Sara Shaw, a member of the Spring 2020 cohort, the webinar was “refreshing” and informative, giving her “insight that I can take back to my campus as I work with a very diverse population.” Another member of the Spring 2020 cohort, T. J. Carpenter, found the lecture “engaging” and highly “relevant.” Carpenter added: “As future leaders in higher education, we will put these real-world practices into action to ensure high-quality student learning and experience.”

A recording of Martínez Alemán’s presentation can be viewed on the MSHEA program website at www.duq.edu/highered. Details about the third annual Memorial Lecture, which will be held during the 2021 spring semester, will be posted to the program website in January 2021.
Practicum Students Engage Mentors and Solutions

During the Spring 2020 semester, the first class of students in the Master of Science Program in Higher Education Administration completed the Administrative Practicum, a field-based experience through which students learn how to apply improvement principles to real-world administrative issues within an area of personal interest.

At the close of the Administrative Practicum, students submit a proposal for their capstone research project, the summative academic experience of the program. During the Administrative Practicum, students complete a minimum of 60 hours on site at their field placement, often at their current place of employment, and work closely with a field supervisor to identify a significant issue for extended study.

This experience provides students an opportunity to assume additional responsibility and demonstrate both academic and professional growth. Students from this inaugural Administrative Practicum report that the field experience has helped them develop as leaders that see the whole picture. Ashley Geese, a member of the Fall 2018 cohort, explained, “Diving deep into my field placement gave me perspective that I did not have before about the various functions of the office of residence life, such as budgeting and accreditation.” But students are not the only ones who benefit. Dr. Alydia Thomas, Ashley’s field supervisor, highlighted the mutual learning that occurs: “Ashley has learned to facilitate meaningful conversation surrounding many facets of the office that are not specific to her daily role. With the work Ashley has done and challenges she has brought to light regarding department programming, our office can now implement tactics she has suggested in order to ensure that our residents have increasingly positive experiences.”

In tandem with the field experience, students completing the Administrative Practicum also participate in a professional mentorship with a seasoned college administrator with expertise in the student’s area of interest. Reading a shared text on academic leadership, students and mentors connect each week by phone to discuss how leadership lessons can be applied to their specific administrative context.

Sabrina Mitchell (Fall 2018 Cohort), a graduate of Butler County Community College, was paired with Dr. Sydney Beeler, Vice President of Enrollment Management at Westmoreland County Community College. Beeler found the experience “encouraging,” especially the opportunity to “help future leaders like Sabrina develop confidence in their ability to ask good questions, think through processes and structures, and remember the importance of the people they serve.” Mitchell found the mentoring relationship personally rewarding, as well: “During my conversations with my mentor, I gained not only a valuable professional connection, but also a friend. Dr. Beeler and I formed a really positive relationship, and I learned what it takes to be a successful female leader in higher education administration.”

Dr. Ronald Mahurin, a former provost who is currently a senior consultant with Design Group International, mentored Melissa Keebler (Fall 2018 cohort), who previously served in the president’s office and the provost’s office. Noting the uniqueness of the MSHEA program mentorship, Mahurin found his participation “an enriching experience for both myself and my mentee. As we explored the particular challenges of leadership in today’s
competitive higher education landscape, I drew upon insights from my own professional career to reframe situations and provide hope and clarity for the future.” Keebler described the professional mentorship as “a tremendously invaluable experience.” In particular, “being able to discuss with Dr. Mahurin the leadership principles we were learning in coursework and his own professional experiences not only helped me to gain a better understanding of them, but also helped me to see how they can guide me in my own career path.”

MSHEA Program Adds Two New Faculty Members

The Master of Science Program in Higher Education Administration at Duquesne University is pleased to welcome two new faculty members: Dr. Kimberly McCurdy and Dr. Rubab Jafry O’Connor.

Originally from western Pennsylvania, Dr. Kimberly McCurdy began working in the financial aid office of Indiana University of Pennsylvania while still an undergraduate student majoring in journalism there. She then was employed at a variety of institutions across Pennsylvania, serving for over 25 years in the field of financial aid. Dr. McCurdy returned to Pittsburgh in 2004, working first as a student loan representative for Bank of America and then as an Access Partner in Allegheny County for the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA). In this role, she provided public service outreach related to financial aid programming for secondary and postsecondary institutions throughout the region.

In addition to her extensive professional experience in financial aid, Dr. McCurdy holds a master’s degree in Adult Education from Widener University and a Ph.D. in Instructional Management and Leadership from Robert Morris University. She recently authored a book chapter for RMU’s College Affordability Academy: A Blueprint for Counseling Students and is currently the Executive Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Higher Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Dr. Rubab Jafry O’Connor is the Distinguished Service Professor of Business Management at Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University, where she teaches business leadership development to undergraduate students. In 2019, Dr. O’Connor created and launched a three-year leadership development course sequence for undergraduate business students which focuses on introducing and practicing the critical behavioral skills needed for leadership success.

Prior to teaching, Dr. O’Connor held many roles, including academic advisor, leadership coach, career consultant for MBA students, and Head of Career Center for both undergraduate and graduate students nationally and internationally. Dr. O’Connor’s other work experiences include investment banking in credit marketing and serving as a Research Assistant for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in New York. She also holds two master’s degrees, one in Economics from Government College University in Lahore, Pakistan, and one in Policy and Management from Carnegie Mellon University. She received her Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from the University of Pittsburgh in the field of Higher Education Management. Dr. O’Connor’s research interests include the influence of stress management on student success.
Current Student Spotlight: Ashley Geese

Why did you choose Duquesne’s MSHEA Program?
When I was searching for graduate degree programs, I knew I wanted to stay in a program focused on higher education. As a student affairs professional, a program solely focused on the student experience was not enough for me. I needed a program that set me apart and gave me a fair seat at the table with other university administrators. After I looked through the courses for the program, I instantly knew that having a holistic view of the inner workings of colleges/universities was going to be beneficial to my career, with courses in financial management and budgeting, external relations, legal issues, and the like. The fact that the program is fully online was an added bonus! As a full-time working professional, the program was extremely attractive because of its flexibility.

What are your favorite elements of the program?
Some of my favorite elements of the program include the broad view of higher education, exclusively online courses, and the sense of community that is created between cohort members. I think that having a close-knit community is not something that is usually expected for a fully online program; however, we have many opportunities each week to talk with one another through discussion boards, Zoom meetings, and other types of communication to bounce ideas off each other.

How has the program coursework helped you in your current professional role?
Looking at the coursework broadly, I believe that the program has equipped me to make decisions in a way that benefits not only the students, but also the university. Working in student affairs, I am always advocating for student needs, but now I feel like I have a better understanding of what institutions of higher learning need as well. Additionally, I have become more aware of how to assess certain processes, implement new ideas, and engage in conversation with many different faculty and staff about enhancing the student experience.

What excites you most about your next professional chapter?
I am very excited to become a professional with experience in improvement and change processes. During the Administrative Practicum, I have been able to apply all of the courses thus far to generate ideas with my field supervisor. This also builds my own professional credibility, as my field supervisor now trusts me to bring new perspectives to current or outdated processes within the Residence Life department. I think that after my Capstone course is completed, I will easily be able to apply improvement principles to my future role as Coordinator for Student Involvement and Disability Services.

What advice would you give to prospective students considering our program?
I would pose the questions, “Where are you now?” and “Where do you want to be after your graduate program?” If you are looking for a program to provide an immediately applicable experience for your future, this program is the right fit for you. Often my advice has been solicited at work, solely because of the topics we discuss in the courses. I have made so many connections and gained such valuable knowledge from my peers in the program. I’ve had class with individuals early in their careers, some who have worked in higher education for 10+ years, and others who do not yet work in higher education—the unique perspectives and experiences everyone gives have been wonderful for both my professional and personal growth. Growth happens in this program!
Meet Our New Students: Spring 2020 Cohort

T.J. Carpenter
Undergraduate Institution
Capital University
Area of Interest
Student Affairs

Erin Kennedy
Undergraduate Institution
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Area of Interest
Academic Advising

Kimberlee Matthews
Undergraduate Institution
Geneva College
Area of Interest
Financial Aid

Justin Miller
Undergraduate Institution
Bethany College
Area of Interest
Admissions, Financial Aid, College Teaching

Samantha Mozden
Undergraduate Institution
Syracuse University
Area of Interest
Student Affairs

Bryan Partika
Undergraduate Institution
Point Park University
Area of Interest
Student Organizations and Programming

Terrell Nelson
Undergraduate Institution
Florida A&M University
Area of Interest
College Teaching

Komal Rizvi
Undergraduate Institution
Temple University
Area of Interest
Academic Advising

Sarah Shaw
Undergraduate Institution
Colorado Technical University
Area of Interest
Military & Veteran Services, Office of Disability Services, Career Counseling

Kari Jo Vitucci
Undergraduate Institution
Marquette University
Area of Interest
Intercollegiate Athletics
News & Notes

Taylor Bryner (FA19) recently became the Recruitment Coordinator for West Virginia University’s Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources. Taylor is responsible for recruiting and marketing of all graduate, undergraduate, and certificate programs at Statler College. Taylor also works with the outreach team to engage students K-12 in STEM activities.

Ashley Geese (FA18) has a new role as Coordinator for Student Involvement & Disability Services at Duquesne University. In this role, she will be supporting all programming within the Freshman Development Office, while serving as a point of contact for students, staff, and faculty registered within the Office of Disability Services. Within the Freshman Development Office, she will be responsible for aiding in the planning, execution, and assessment of FAST, the Orientation Program, Fall Family Weekend, all initiatives for First-Generation College Students, and other office programming. Within Disability Services, she will review documentation, meet with students and families, and advocate for registered persons’ accessibility needs.

Melissa Keebler (FA18) serves as Assistant Director of Annual Giving at Duquesne University. She was recently assigned increased responsibilities and now oversees all mail solicitations and the university’s faculty and staff campaign. Melissa also chairs a collaborative group of partners from within the University Advancement Division charged with setting goals and strategies for annual giving.

Taryn Linder (FA19) started working at Pittsburgh Technical College in January 2020 as an Admissions Assistant. She helps students look at possible areas of study and schedules them to speak with one of the program coordinators to gain further information on both the program(s) and the institution.

Bryan Partika (FA19) recently became a Graduate Assistant in the Center for Student Development at Duquesne University. Bryan continues to serve as an Orientation Coordinator at Point Park University and an Assistant Track & Field Coach at Chatham University.

Sarnali (Sara) Shaw (SP20) was recently hired by the Community College of Allegheny County as the Military and Veterans Success facilitator for the Boyce Campus. Sara has worked with veterans and military families for fourteen years.

**Higher Ed Horizons** is the newsletter of Duquesne University’s Master of Science Program in Higher Education Administration. This 30-credit, online program is designed to offer a broad, holistic, and integrated understanding of university structures and operational areas. For more information, please visit: www.duq.edu/highered

If you are interested in learning more about postsecondary leadership that sees the whole picture, please contact the Director of the Master of Science Program in Higher Education Administration, Dr. P. Jesse Rine: rinepj@duq.edu