Though you are not in our classrooms, labs, and offices, our thoughts are with you. We hope you are safe, healthy, and sheltering in place. We put together this brief newsletter to connect with words and well wishes, to say we are here, doing well, and thinking of you. We may be apart now, but we are still very much connected during these challenging days.

In this first week after spring break, this first week of return to classes, this first week of patience with online technology, we welcome spring here in the City of Grinnell. The temperatures are rising, trees are budding, April showers (no more snow!) occurring to help bring May flowers, and the majority of people who are out are walking tethered to happy dogs sniffing the renewed earth. We practice social distancing. Restaurants offer carryout dining. Your faculty work at home to carry on the learning and curiosity spirit of Grinnell College.

We envision producing a newsletter about every 10 days this semester to foster support and connections with you. This current first issue is from faculty to students, but we ask you to join us! Please send in messages for the next issue. In about 10 days, you will receive a second newsletter, which will share your messages (as well as more messages from us). If your situation allows, please email a brief paragraph by April 10 to ralston@grinnell.edu describing how you are getting by and coping in this period of online courses and sheltering in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you!!!

We are not alone. We are connected and in this together.
For this issue, each faculty member responded to the prompt:

“What have you been doing to cope with sheltering in place?”

**Ann Ellis**
Hi Everyone!
I moved into my home office where my new puppy is helping me with distance education. I’ve enjoyed video chatting with students in my courses and with my friends and family. My puppy tries to find a time every day when we can take a long walk in town or at the nature preserve.

**Janet Gibson**
On March 17th, bowling alleys were closed. My team was about to go to the state tournament, and my two leagues’ seasons were cut short. To cope with being home all the time, I committed to a daily work routine, and my work keeps me sane. I finished a journal article on cognition, creativity, and humor for a special series in *Frontiers in Psychology* on humor and creativity. I responded to a media inquiry about why people enjoy gallows humor in times of stress. I learned how to do WebEx meetings and Collaborate class sessions. I’m teaching PSY 113 and 220 asynchronously now, connecting to my students in Collaborate sessions for office hours 3 days a week, and putting together short(er) PowerPoints and assignments to help structure our online learning. This work takes surprisingly more time than it should. Students checking in with me really helps, and I enjoy hearing from them. When not doing psychology, I spend time on assignments for ENG 207 Creative Nonfiction, which I am auditing (which also takes more time than it should), and my Wii bowling scores are improving, but tennis scores reveal slow reaction times. I try to find inspiration in the wisdom of others—“Challenges are what make life interesting, and overcoming them is what makes it meaningful” (Joshua J. Marine).

If a laugh instead of inspiration is desired, here is a joke that was rated the funniest by my sample of 112 Grinnell students, beating, by a small degree, the funniest joke in the world (to appear in the next newsletter): *A man and woman who had never met before find themselves in the same sleeping carriage of a train. After the initial embarrassment they both go to sleep, the woman in the top bunk and man in the lower. In the middle of the night the woman leans over, wakes the man, and says, "I'm sorry to bother you, but I am awfully cold, and I was wondering if you could possibly get me another blanket." The man leans out and with a glint in his eye says, "I've got a better idea. Just for tonight, let's pretend we're married." The woman thinks a moment, "Why not," she giggles. "Great," he replies. "Get your own damn blanket."*

**Damian Kelty-Stephen**
I am spending a lot of time with my kids, e.g., running around, drawing, coloring, and doing crafts, dancing, going for walks, and crawling after Simon to make sure he doesn't eat the toys that Violet doesn't want to put away.

Coping for me involves learning to enjoy all the time I get to share with my kids. I would not have chosen this reason to spend so much time with them, but they are wonderful people to get to know in a terrible time.
Emma Kelty-Stephen
Life in Grinnell has changed dramatically in the last few weeks. Coping with "social distance" in our house is affected by the fact that our children (a preschooler and an infant) are home with us...all the time! Our main coping strategy has been to create a schedule so that each adult has a couple hours a day to work without (too many) interruptions and so that our preschooler has some sense of when she can beg for snacks or episodes of "Daniel Tiger." Another coping strategy I have used is to connect with old friends over video chat -- many people who were hard to keep in touch with in the past are suddenly spending a lot more time at home! During "normal life" we spend quite a bit of time with my parents, who live only a mile away and love spending time with our kids (also known as little disease vectors). My dad has Alzheimer's which makes it hard to hold a conversation over the phone, but now we have a daily story time, where I read a book to our preschooler and my dad watches via skype. It gives us some sense of spending time together, even if we are not physically in the same place. A sense of structure and continuing social interactions have been crucial in coping with social distance!

David Lopatto
My Pleasant Events Schedule includes spending time with my family, receiving updates from Behavior Analysis students, and watching Spring emerge.

Christopher Ralston
The transition to couch teaching has harder than I anticipated. Not only is it a challenge to figure out and implement, but it really is hard not seeing the students. I particularly miss seeing our seniors around. To deal with it all, it is important to engage in self-care. For my partner, Sarah, and I, we have been taking really long walks pretty much every day. Normally, they are around 4 miles, but they have been much longer, at times. As we walk, it’s fun to try to find teddy bears in some people’s windows (that’s a new thing!), and we do our best to avoid passing others on the sidewalk. That means that we cross the street a lot and zig-zag across town. Sometimes we go out to CERA or Krumm to get back into nature, which is really calming for me. We also try to talk about things that are not work- or COVID-related, if we can help it. I don’t really watch TV that much, but we did start watching both the Hillary Clinton documentary on Hulu and Tiger King on Netflix. The Tiger Kings is fascinating! We’re only a couple episodes into each. Beyond that, I try to give my dogs a lot of attention. They both had birthdays this past week, so I cooked them each an egg (their favorite) and gave them a both a new Kong toy that double as treat dispensers. They love having me home so much, though they don’t want me do work sometimes. They are asking me to take them out right now, so I’m going to do that. 😊 I’m wishing you all the best.

Nancy Rempel-Clower
I am slowly getting used to teaching from home but I really miss in-person interactions with students and colleagues. I’ve been coping with staying home by trying to keep a regular daily schedule. My dog is happy to have us around more, and we’ve been taking her out for long walks every day. We’re also planning a large vegetable garden. We’ve started seeds and are finding satisfaction in watching them sprout.
Laura Sinnett
I’ve been coping with physical distancing fairly well. I of course really miss the regular face-to-face contact with all—friends, colleagues, and students. What has helped me is that I work from home much of the time over breaks and when on sabbatical so I’m used to that—regular sleep schedule, sticking to a daily work schedule, etc. Of course I don’t usually have two milk crates of files on the dining room table and a paper box full of journals (thanks Ann for the box!) under a coffee table (Grinnell Herald Registers are on top of the table so I guess it’s fair to write that the heavier reading is on the bottom.) I’m frustrated by technology—what I’ve had to learn so quickly and by having an old and underpowered laptop, no iPad, and an old iPhone. I ordered a new laptop over the weekend that will be fantastic when it arrives on May 18 (May? Really? Supply chain issues.) I’m going to ask ITS for a new laptop for work because the camera doesn’t work on mine so that when I do online meetings I can see all but no one can see me. (That can have advantages of course—I can make faces, roll my eyes, … use your imagination!) I also miss my research and look forward to returning to it when summer hits.

Personally I am well. Joyce and I feel very fortunate to have a nice home and job security. We’ve both been connecting with family and friends over the phone and have talked about using AV platforms to share dinners with friends and to have games nights once we all get into a routine and find more time. (I welcome suggestions—Joyce’s laptop is new so we’re good there.) Everyone is healthy right now. Clearly that’s a huge thing! So far we’ve both had very little free time but, fingers crossed, that’ll change. We have two big puzzles to put together which we’ll do while listening to music or podcasts. I look forward to getting back to editing snorkeling photos, and we’ve got lots of stuff in our Prime and Netflix cues. (I knew I was taking physical distancing seriously my gut reaction to a scene with a lot of people in close contact while watching an episode of The Crown was … “You shouldn’t be standing … “). I also look forward to more pleasure reading—there’s lots of sample books on my Kindle. I always have bedtime reading. Right now I’m reading de Wall’s The Bonobo and the Atheist. I love it!

Andrea Tracy
Hi Psychologists! I miss seeing all your faces around the building and hearing your voices pass by my office. Instead, I'm listening to my dog bark out the window at all the people walking and biking by, while I try to record neuroscience classes and chat with students on Webex. I've got an "office" at my kitchen table that I'm sharing with my spouse and trying to keep work space separate from home space (the other end of the kitchen table is for eating, the living room is not for working). When not working, I'm taking my dog on extra walks and getting some exercise on the spin bike I'm very glad to have at home, reading (just finished Emily Nussbaum's "I Like To Watch" - if you are a TV lover like me, I highly recommend it - and just started N.K. Jemisin's "The City We Became"), cooking (lots of soups and breads), and, as always, watching TV (watched Collateral - the British crime drama, not the Tom Cruise movie - and the second season of Sex Education recently). And a few online concerts (Josh Ritter on Tuesdays, Ben Folds on Saturdays) to make up for cancelled live shows I'm missing (good, but not the same 😞). Trying to consume the right amount of news. Wishing you all good health and relative peace during this time.
Barbara Brown

This is Josie, my basset hound. She enjoys having people at home all the time now, and she likes having more walks than usual. I enjoy spending more time with her, too, but I also miss hanging out in class and lab with students. Josie is good company, but she never asks how to put error bars in an Excel figure, and she has no use for PSELL or for designing and running experiments, and those are the sorts of interactions I miss having each day with students. Are you able to access the PowerPoints your instructors are putting up? Have you figured out Collaborate and Discussion Groups in PWeb if your class is using those? I can help troubleshoot, if you need any help with these or other things you are trying to do. Please don’t hesitate to send an email. This first week back to classes is one big experiment for all of us.

My household includes a professor, as well as a college student and a 7th grader, so there are lots of different online teaching and learning experiences to observe. During the day, everyone retreats to their own space with their own device. The 7th grader also knows the daily TV schedule for “Let’s Make a Deal,” “Price Is Right,” and “Jeopardy,” and I just have to remember that education happens in many different ways.

Work usually gets put aside late afternoon. Family diversions include games and jigsaw puzzles, and getting outside when the weather is nice. Some people are watching “Tiger King”; I’m looking forward to “Killing Eve” making an early return in another week or so, and I’m excited that HBO will be streaming stuff for free.
We end with a reprint of an adaptation of a letter Martin Seligman sent his own students earlier this month.

This is not the first time that great universities have had to shut their doors during an epidemic. And there is perhaps a lesson for all students about what can happen during a shutdown.

In 1665, Cambridge University closed as the bubonic plague swept across England. Isaac Newton, a 22-year-old student, was forced to retreat to the family farm, Woolsthorpe Manor. Isolated there for more than a year, on his own he revolutionized the scientific world. Newton said that this shutdown freed him from the pressures of the curriculum and led to the best intellectual years of his life.

Here is what he did:

Optics: He discovered the fundamentals of color. It was already known that sunlight passed through a glass prism produced the rainbow spectrum—bands of red, orange, yellow, and so on. But were these a fundamental aspect of light as opposed to some artifact produced by prisms? To find out, he passed a single-colored beam from the first prism through a second prism and got the same color once again. The glass did not change it.

Gravity: Sitting in the orchard behind his farmhouse, he considered two orbs in his view, the moon and a single apple. Newton wondered if the force that drew the apple to the earth was what held the moon in orbit. These musings led him to later construct the laws of gravity and motion that tied everything in the universe together.

Calculus: He wrote three papers inventing calculus. (Shortly afterward, Gottfried Leibniz came up with the same principles.) Thinking about the rate of change as an object accelerated falling to earth, he realized that one could get an accurate total of the area under a curve by summing the rectangles, down to the infinitely small rectangles, that made up this area.

In 1667, Newton returned to Cambridge, the plague having abated. He presented all this work to his mentor and professor, Sir Isaac Barrow. Two years later, Barrow resigned his chair in favor of Newton.

Don’t let current circumstances interrupt learning.

Do imagine what you might do when freed from conventional routines and requirements. When it comes to curiosity and creativity, the mind knows no boundaries.

With optimism and gratitude,

Marty

Martin Seligman, author of The Hope Circuit, is the director of the Penn Positive Psychology Center and Zellerbach Family Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. He is proud to serve on the Advisory Council for Character Lab.