INSIDE:

CENTER PRESENTS WELLBEING SERIES ON PLANETARY HEALTH

ADVANCES IN RESEARCH DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

NEW SURVIVORSHIP WEBSITE LAUNCHES
MANDALA

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Mandala is the Sanskrit word for “circle” and is a sacred symbol that mirrors a state of consciousness through a concrete pattern. Native Americans use mandalas as healing and transformational art in the sand; art therapists to facilitate healing; and Tibetans as visual representation of Buddhist beliefs. As a universal symbol of healing, the respective circles of the mandala capture the many diverse aspects of the Center’s work: reflection, transformation, spirituality, creation, and lastly, the ongoing journey that continues to shape what we are to become.

The views and opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the University of Minnesota Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing.

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Could Anyone Have Imagined?

Like many, I am very eager to put 2020, which was a year like no other, to rest. I am not sure that anyone could have anticipated the confluence of the challenges presented by a twin pandemic of COVID-19 and systemic racism, which were both further complicated by deep political divisions. Yet, despite the cumulative and collective losses, there are deep learnings and reasons to be grateful. In this issue of the Mandala, I will highlight 4 themes that are on my mind: reflection, celebration, transition, and anticipation.

Reflection: For many people, seeing the civil unrest unfold following the murder of George Floyd was a wake up call about systemic marginalization. As the Covid-19 pandemic spread in the spring, life changed as we knew it over the course of just a few days. In conversations I have with family, friends, and colleagues, a common topic is that these watershed moments have resulted in people reflecting deeply on life, values, and priorities. At the Bakken Center, one of the discoveries we made was that people desperately needed what the Center had to offer, and that we were quite well-positioned to work remotely and offer academic courses, community events, and even research interventions virtually.

Celebration: Our collective capacity at the Bakken Center to pivot, innovate, and respond to emerging needs is celebration-worthy! Our Bakken Center Covid-19 resource web page and the Taking Charge of your Health & Wellbeing website was populated with information for students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. University of Minnesota President Joan T.A. Gabel often included links to these sites in her messages as did businesses, cities, and communities we serve. What makes this all the more surreal is the fact that this is happening to all of us – our families, our workplaces, neighborhoods, cities, states, the entire US, and the world. We are facing cumulative and collective grief. Yet at the same time we are dealing with all the challenges noted above, life moves forward. Within the Bakken Center, we are mindful of the challenges presented by a twin pandemic and systemic racism, which were both further complicated by deep political divisions. We anticipate wanting to leverage the efficiency and flexibility that remote learning and working offers while creating space for face to face interaction for times that being in the same physical space is more optimal. As we plan for the Center’s future, we are diving deep into ways that we can ensure equitable learning opportunities for students and the community. Our creative juices are flowing and I will have more to share soon.

Anticipation: Over the past 6 months, on top of everything else, the Bakken Center has been working on our next 5-year strategic plan. As we draw to a close this year of celebrating our 25 year anniversary, our focus is on the future. It has been a fascinating exercise to anticipate what the needs will be of people, organizations, and communities we serve. We don’t anticipate that life will be returning to what it was – soon or ever. Lots of learning and innovating has occurred. What, where, and how students want to learn is a key consideration, as is how the workplace will be transformed. We anticipate wanting to leverage the efficiency and flexibility that remote learning and working offers while creating space for face to face interaction for times that being in the same physical space is more optimal. As we plan for the Center’s future, we are diving deep into ways that we can ensure equitable learning opportunities for students and the community. Our creative juices are flowing and I will have more to share soon.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to all who believe in and support our work – students, faculty, staff, donors, community and university leaders. As difficult as these times are, at the Bakken Center, we remain hopeful and optimistic about 2021. While the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to be a major problem, vaccines are becoming available. This is a critical time for all of us to focus on staying safe and connected.

Warm Regards,

Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN, FAAN
Founder and Director
Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing
Impacting Student Wellbeing

Bakken Center Offers Support to Students During Covid-19 Pandemic

BY JACQUES LEROUGE

SINCE MARCH 2020, students at the University of Minnesota have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. During a time that many have identified as stressful, overwhelming, or even hopeless, students have turned to the academic courses offered by the University’s Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing. To learn more about the tools that the Center is providing our students, I checked in with 14 undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students.

Our conversations started with a basic question: How are you? Julia Albrecht, a Master of Arts in Integrative Health & Wellbeing Coaching student acknowledges that this year has been unlike any other. “I am giving myself space to ride the wave and be present with what is,” she says. “So some days I’m really great, I feel awesome, and then other days it feels as if the world’s gonna end.”

This sentiment was shared by many other students. “Even just asking ‘how are you’ is a roller coaster,” says Loryann Fradejas, a Doctor of Nursing Practice, Integrative Health and Healing track student, who comments on the absurdity this year adds to a usually benign question.

But what does it mean to be well in 2020? There are common threads throughout all 14 stories. Students who often have heavy workloads or parent - in addition to their coursework - are overwhelmed. There’s fatigue from endless hours spent on video calls. Extended isolation has elicited feelings of rawness and exhaustion.

However, Center students choose to remain optimistic, and have found ways to focus on resilience and wellbeing. Students are supporting each other through personal connections like text chains and virtual homework hours. There is a resounding dedication to equity and improving the wellbeing of our whole community. “I’ve just been trying to pay attention to how I’m feeling, acknowledging that, and choosing how I react.” Angelica Wilson says, who is a traveling nurse pursuing her DNP, IHH this year. “My classes that I’ve taken with the Center have given me the tools to be able to do that.”

Dr. Douglas Kennedy and Dr. Miriam Cameron were cited by several students as outstanding teachers for their students’ wellbeing. When asked how she makes a difference for students, Dr. Cameron said, “Kind, informed, fair teachers can make a life-long difference in their students’ wellbeing. Because Dr. Tenzin Namdul and I are passionate about Tibetan medicine, we wrote the new CSPH 5315 textbook, Tibetan Medicine and You, with a blessing by the Dalai Lama, in easy-to-understand English that students can apply in everyday life.”

“As teachers, we hold space and model behaviors for our students.” says Dr. Kennedy, a mindfulness instructor and researcher at the Center. “It is partly about creating a space where students can be open and feel supported in discussing how they are navigating the current challenges. Another part is about establishing a consistent, caring, and stable environment. In my experience, our presence in the classroom (whether virtual or in-person) makes a huge difference in how students engage.”

“We understand that even in ‘normal’ times, students experience stress and anxiety,” says Center Director Dr. Mary Jo Kreitzer. “That’s why we have developed the Wellbeing Enhances Learning Model to improve engagement and learning.”

The Bakken Center is deeply committed to educating students who will become future wellbeing leaders not only in healthcare but in many other sectors, too. Below, our students share more about how the Bakken Center has impacted their wellbeing.

Explore the Center’s new Wellbeing Enhances Learning (WEL) Model at z.umn.edu/WELmodel
ALEXIS CIELUCH is a senior Finance Major at the Carlson School of Management. “My Tibetan Medicine class and the Hatha Yoga class have given me the language to start a mindfulness practice, and strengthened my ability to disengage from stress by using a mindful attitude.”

ALYSON HORNBY is a senior Nutrition Major at the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences. “Staying present is really important. Meditation is a great tool even if it’s for two minutes a day. I bring your attention back to what is currently happening.”

ALYSSA WILDENAUER is in the Master of Arts in Integrative Health & Wellbeing Coaching program. “We’re assigned an outside health coach but I’m really glad that’s the case because that’s been one of the biggest supports to my wellness. There’s really essential work that we need to do if we’re going to prepare to be coaches.”

ANGELICA WILSON is in the Doctor of Nursing Practice, Integrative Health and Healing track. “I would really recommend a class at the Center to any student. Instead of necessarily thinking of it as another class, it’s more like a resource to get you through all the other stuff that you’re dealing with during this time.”

ANGIE CARROLL is in the Master of Arts in Integrative Health & Wellbeing Coaching program. “A class that I had in spring was CSPH 5102 - Art of Healing: Self as Healer when the pandemic started. My teacher did a great job of giving us space to connect with each other during the first lockdown.”

DAVID WROBLESKI is a dual Doctorate of Nursing Practice student in the Integrative Health and Healing and Psych Mental Health tracks. “A lot of the techniques that I’ve learned through my courses through the Center do come back to me both professionally with ‘how can I apply this to someone else?’, but also personally like doing 4-7-8 breathing before I had a simulation in psych mental health yesterday.”

EDIE BARRETT is a Masters Candidate at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. “I really appreciate the faculty that have been stunning at the Center in supporting my wellbeing. I had a lot of anxiety about trying online classes, but the classes are so well thought out and structured. The intention and the integrity that I say about Miriam Cameron and Tenzin Namdl - they are walking the path that they are teaching. Jean Larson is an amazing faculty with healing and nature classes. I am profoundly grateful to The Earl E. Bakken Center for the caliber of education I’m receiving.”

GABRIELA SIERRA BEDON is a senior dual major in Finance and Art. “I think the Bakken Center is such a hidden gem, I wish I had taken these classes earlier on in my undergrad. I feel like of all my other professors, these have been the ones who really care about how you’re doing and care about creating community in the classroom.”

JULIA ALBRECHT is in the Master of Arts in Integrative Health & Wellbeing Coaching program. “The Center itself and how much support it’s provided me in every class is so great. Then, on top of that is their free offerings. This summer I did Stress Busters every week and it was amazing.”

KAEL JENSEN is in the Master of Arts in Integrative Health & Wellbeing Coaching program. “Everyone is responding differently to this year, and now is the time when reactivity comes up not only with the pandemic but also with system changes in our government. Being really open and gentle with one another is important right now.”

LORYAN FRADEJAS is in the Doctor of Nursing Practice, Integrative Health and Healing track. “I am grateful for the Bakken Center because every single class has taught me such beautiful lessons on how I can help myself. I think that for me getting that control and power back is so important when it comes to my own health.”

RYAN GRIST is in the Master of Arts in Integrative Health & Wellbeing Coaching program. “One of the core things about being healthy this year is emotional intelligence. This is a time of immense change, disruption, stress and overwhelm. Being healthy in 2020 is learning to befriend emotions and find new strategies to regulate them when everything is challenging and changing.”

MAGGIE HOFMANN is in the Doctor of Nursing Practice, Integrative Health and Healing track. “As a young adult, I remember feeling like I didn’t want to ask for help and especially as a health professional you feel like ‘I’m the nurse, I should be caring for people’. It’s hard to acknowledge when maybe you also need help so don’t be afraid to reach out.”

URSZULA WINKIEWICZ is in the Doctor of Nursing Practice, Integrative Health and Healing track. “I am grateful for the Bakken Center because every single class has taught me such beautiful lessons on how I can help myself. I think that for me getting that control and power back is so important when it comes to my own health.”
THE MIXED ELECTION RESULTS and pandemic have left me, like many others, dealing with melancholy and depression—struggling to keep disgust from morphing into contempt. Covid-19 has forced me to close a beloved gallery/store we’ve co-owned for 19 years—taking most of our life’s savings with it. Out of respect for my customers’ and my own health, my photography gallery in Moose Lake remains closed to the public, I am not teaching or lecturing, so my outlets as an artist and my face to face interactions with those who acquire my photographs have all ceased. There are two parts to being an artist—creation and delivery. Without the ability to deliver, there is little purpose in creating.

Even so, I’ve been using this time to develop a new product I feel has promise, but I’m fighting technical issues with laminates and plastics as I sit in a windowless “clean room” with only my computer and phone as ways to reach out for assistance.

The world, it seems, is bound together in a common loneliness — an alone-ness intimately shared with those we cannot safely be with.

My early career as an artist included creating wheel-thrown ceramics. The process begins with centering a ball of clay on the spinning wheel. You can “pull” up a pot before it is perfectly centered, but you will constantly struggle with it becoming asymmetrical — possibly even collapsing. I’m doing that right now — spiraling into an inevitable demise. I need to stop. To start over. To re-center my attitude—my life.

I turn off the outside world and concentrate on the physical now in the forest that surrounds our home. It is late autumn, a time...
of harvest and preparation for the winter. This is a “mast” year, as the red oaks were heavy with their every-other-year production of acorns—the abundance assuring not all will be consumed. Leaves beneath every oak are churned up by white-tail deer pawing the ground seeking the nutritious nuts.

Several large oaks have blown over, and I head into the woods to harvest them for firewood that will heat our home during the next two winters. I count 120 rings on a cross-section of the largest. Each round splits easily with a ripping pop upon the second strike of my splitting axe. I stack the oak into satisfyingly larger and larger rows.

The opening weekend of deer season is marked by record-breaking warmth, an unwelcome reminder of what we are doing to our planet. A half hour after climbing into my deer stand a small buck trots into the clearing in front of me and stops. Perfect. I peer through my scope and everything is a blur! I’ve forgotten to remove my eye glasses. He spooks as I remove my glasses, chiding myself, but also chuckling at my blunder and how lucky the buck was.

The next day my deer stand, along with the large aspen it leans against, sway to the rhythms of a strong wind. The lack of gunshots confirms few deer are moving, and I see nothing all day. As I am about to pack it in, a large, 10-point buck and doe appear across a ravine—not far, but too far to risk a shot with my stand still rocking in the wind. The pair nearly disappear behind balsams, where I can just make out the buck mounting the doe, passing on his genes to next spring’s fawns. Then they are gone. I swing around to face an opening in the direction they are heading, and hope. The buck reappears, crossing an alder swamp towards me. He is feeding on acorns at the edge of the swamp, ever-so-slowly getting closer and closer, but always behind too many branches for a clean shot. My gun raised, my arms grow weary. He is now so close that any movement will surely alert him to my presence. Only a few more steps and he will reach a clearing 25 yards away. My shot drops him in place. He is a magnificent animal. I feel the primal relief and satisfaction of procuring venison that will provide our family’s meat for the coming year—yet, that feeling, as always, is mixed with a pang of sadness at having taken a life. The naturalist in me repeats the mantra, that without such predation, the deer would overpopulate and starve, degrading the entire forest ecosystem. I envy wolves for their ability to carry out their role as predators without such mixed emotions.

For the next three days, our yellow lab, Ginger, sits at my feet as I process the deer, her gaze intently assessing each motion for the next tidbit I’ll send her way—the long process that turned wolves into labs being reinforced in our kitchen. Every few hours I deposit a bowl of trimmings beneath a balsam outside our home. Almost immediately, the winter birds flock to the growing pile: pileated, red bellied, downy and hairy woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches and blue jays, all consuming the energy-rich store of fat the buck had converted from acorns.

As I finish the butchering, the final presidential election results are announced over Minnesota Public Radio, followed by good news about vaccines, along with the horrific projections of how many people will die as we wait for them to become available. I try, unsuccessfully, to not feel hatred towards those still refusing to wear masks.

What about my feelings towards my fellow citizens—those who have been indoctrinated by a cult that builds them up by tearing down others, the truth, and the tenants of our country? How do I not feel contempt for those who express nothing but that towards me, for what I believe? That will be a longer, harder process than a couple of weeks in the forest can mend. But, I am now in a place from which I can scan each individual for common ground. Removed from the bolstering reinforcements of a crowd mentality, I trust each of us is more alike than we realize, and hope this new beginning will allow us to rediscover some kernel of goodness in one another. It is a place to start. +++

From Acorns to White-tails
Finding Healing Solace in the Forest

WINTER 2021
MANDALA

future as an artist will be different when we re-emerge, and right now, I have little idea what that will look like. But, my time in the forest has been cathartic. I now feel like a newly-kneaded lump of clay, spinning perfectly centered, waiting to be opened into a new creation.
Legacies of Learning and Development

ANYONE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA’S Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing will share that it’s hard to imagine the Center without Louise Delagran, director of the Learning Resources Group, and Dianne Lev, director of development.

After a combined 30 years of constant changes and challenges, both Delagran and Lev retired from their respective positions at the Center in January. However, the legacies these two women leave behind won’t be forgotten by their colleagues, as their extensive list of accomplishments have set the Center up for long-term success.

“Both Dianne and Louise are the type of strong and intelligent women that inspire the younger generation. They’ve both been by my side as I accepted new challenges early on in my career,” said Dr. Megan Voss, Integrative Therapy Program director, Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplant at the Masonic Children’s Hospital, and assistant professor at the Center. “These women leave big shoes to fill. At the same time, they have paved the way for so much incredible work that will continue.”

Louise Delagran, a visionary

When Louise Delagran began her role as senior education specialist and the director of the Learning Resources Group 18 years ago, the Center offered no online courses or learning modules. Delagran worked in the e-learning sector before coming to the Center, and upon her arrival, worked quickly to create online modules to benefit both students and faculty. Because of her forward thinking and ability to continuously adapt to new challenges, today 75 of the classes offered through the Center are available online.

“It was always about creating a vision for the Center for what our instructional structure, strategies, and philosophy was going to be online,” Delagran said.

Both Delagran and coworkers pointed to the Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing website, which offers free, evidence-based information to users from around the world, as one of her biggest accomplishments.

“This is an incredible resource that has reached millions of viewers over the years and has brought hope and relief to many,” Andrea Uptmor, previously part of the Learning Resources Group as senior writer and editor, added regarding the website. “It is wonderful to reflect on how far Louise’s reach has been on this planet!”

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Some coworkers describe Delagran as a “straight shooter” and a mentor who makes those around her feel appreciated, and knows how to work with an individual’s strengths and interests.

"Louise will leave quite a legacy behind her in the people that she has mentored and trained,” explained Dr. Asa Olson, academic technologist. Olson added that those who worked alongside Delagran will continue to act in accordance with one of her philosophies: Seek opportunities to stay busy and prove worth.

Kely MacPhail, academic technologist, said Delagran was always thinking about how the team’s local effort would help the Center achieve a greater global impact.

“As we move forward, the Learning Resources Group will continue Louise’s legacy of helping the Center meaningfully reach a multitude of audiences through content intentionally crafted to meet different needs. And we will bring the same enthusiasm, forward thinking, and collaborative spirit she brought to each new endeavor,” MacPhail said.

Center Director Dr. Mary Jo Kreitzer described Delagran as an “academic technologist extraordinare” with outstanding project management skills and exceedingly high standards for both rigor and relevance. Under Delagran’s leadership, Kreitzer noted the Center has been at the forefront of innovations in teaching for close to two decades.

“As I reflect back on her contributions, they are extensive and include pedagogical, technological, and creative innovations,” Kreitzer said.

“She taught us the value of ‘reusable learning objects’ that could be used in both academic and community-based courses. By helping faculty apply their expertise in the classroom and in community-based learning, Louise helped us advance many community outreach programs including Mindfulness at Work and Introduction to Mindfulness,” Kreitzer added.

Kit Breshears, communications director for the Center, called Delagran’s accomplishments “brag worthy.”

“What Louise has done in her decades of service to the Center sets us up for decades of success. She has positioned us to be a truly inclusive, equitable, compassionate, educational environment here at the university,” he said.

**Dianne Lev, a cheerleader**

Dianne Lev’s favorite word is “yes.”

Lev, who has served as director of development, will retire after 12 years with the Center.

“I’ve always seen this job as a privilege,” Lev said of her work. “I can hardly find words to express what it means when the stars line up and the moment comes and one of our donors says, ‘yes.’ There’s no words to describe that feeling. Our donors are special friends, and I’ve enjoyed building relationships with each of them immensely.” Lev said.

Relationships are what Breshears said Lev will be remembered for around the Center in the years to come. He explained that so much positive energy and vibrancy came out of Lev’s office, it will feel empty there for some time.

“We are deeply aware of each other’s strengths and how we challenge each other. Dianne has made me a better communicator because we’re able to disagree so eloquently,” he said of their working relationship. “Over time she has made me learn to question my own assumptions and to be very open minded to different approaches.”

Lev charted new ground in fundraising during the first few years in her current position, and as the Center grew, she found her stride that led the way into new frontiers — including a visit from the Dalai Lama in 2011.

Cherry called Lev a “force of nature,” and said no one is more passionate about the Center’s work.

“I will never forget working with Dianne on the 2011 visit of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. It was an exhausting but incredibly rewarding nine months for both of us and I would guess that it is one of the highlights of both of our careers,” said Cherry.

Kreitzer highlighted Lev’s successful stewardship of donors and gifts that allowed the Center to not only meet, but exceed fundraising goals.

“Dianne loved the work of connecting donors with their deepest passions and will be remembered for her exquisite attention to small details that matter, handwritten notes, and many acts of kindness,” Kreitzer said.

Other colleagues spoke of Lev’s honesty and dedication, along with her commitment to the Center and its goals. And most importantly, how her work will benefit students both currently and moving forward.

“You can meet up with Dianne in a crowded room and for her there’s nobody else in that room,” said Patty Porter, vice president of development, medicine and health, at the University of Minnesota Foundation. “She really cues into details of people and what’s important to them. And for development work, there’s really nothing more important.”

“She’s willing and very happy to do what it takes to keep those relationships that are important to her at the forefront of her focus,” added Christina Owen, student services specialist.

“Even when things might be a bit heavy on some days, she has a way of bringing joy, perspective, and insight to my life,” Owen added.

**Leaving legacies to foster success**

While those who worked alongside both Delagran and Lev say it was an honor just to be a colleague, they know both women and their hard work have set the Center up for a great deal of success in the future.

“Both Louise and Dianne spent significant time investing in relationships to advance their work and it clearly paid off,” Breshears said. “Their mastery of that relationship building is what sets us up for success down the road.”

Sue Nankivell, director of business development and community relations, said those at the Center truly are a family and work together as team. And the upcoming absence of these two women will be felt greatly among their work family.

“While I couldn’t be more excited for both of them and look forward to following what’s next for them — they are both energetic, passionate, and talented, and have so much to give in their next chapter — I’m sad that we’re breaking up the band,” Nankivell said. +++
Diversity in Research Communities

BY KEVIN COSS

ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, Roni Evans and her research team were in the middle of a pilot study exploring how mindfulness might encourage adults over 50 to be more physically active when they noticed the study’s 30 participants had a lot in common.

“We were observing the same thing we had for so many years: study after study, the people showing up for our complementary and integrative health research were largely white, higher income, and highly educated,” said Evans, DC, PhD, director of the Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing’s Integrative Health and Wellbeing Research Program (IHWRP). “This demonstrated to us we were reaching only a fraction of our communities, and missing far too many who could benefit.”

Evans and the IHWRP team resolved to change this trend. Through a concerted effort over the last few years, the team has been working to reach more of those who have been underrepresented in research, taking into consideration the age, income, gender, education, and race/ethnicity of participants. This commitment to diversity will play an important role in fulfilling the research program’s goal to use rigorous science to support health and wellbeing for all—not just those who have traditionally been represented.

Addressing the disparities could lead to big health benefits. While over 60 percent of people in the highest income brackets get enough physical activity, Evans said, only a little over 30 percent of those in the lower income brackets do. Similarly, about 40 percent of black and Hispanic individuals get sufficient physical activity, compared to over 50 percent for whites and Asians. Only about a third of individuals over 65 get enough physical activity, while 55 percent of younger adults do.

Doug Kennedy, PhD, assistant professor at the Center who played a leading role in developing IHWRP’s diversity efforts, said research carries more validity and makes a bigger impact when it represents the communities in which we live.

“It’s really about doing good science, about being a good citizen, a good community member,” Kennedy said. “How is our team engaging with the community and how are we working with our community-based partners to better meet the needs of the people that are our neighbors?”

Spotting the Barriers

Understanding why a large part of the American population has been underserved in research and in healthcare, Evans said, means considering the barriers that can prevent participation.

Some individuals may find the cost of complementary and integrative health approaches, which often are not covered by insurance plans, places them out of reach. The lack of time outside of work, family, and other day-to-day commitments may also make it hard to participate. Others may doubt the effectiveness of these health approaches, unaware that research supports the effectiveness of some, or may not find the practices acceptable for other reasons. Mindfulness may appear to clash with some religious beliefs, for example, and acupuncture may cause fear in those who fear needles.

There are also concerns about safety, as any health intervention carries some degree of risk. Individuals may worry about the possibility of rare but serious side effects, or may distrust research based on the ways it has historically mistreated some groups of people.
Understanding how to reduce such barriers, Evans said, requires a shift in perspective, where the team must start to see about equity and diversity through the lens of behavior.

“We started by asking the question, ‘what knowledge, resources, and motivations do diverse populations need to engage in research, especially in complementary health approaches?’” Evans said. “We quickly realized a big part of truly addressing this requires us as researchers to look more closely at ourselves and our own behaviors.”

Building Relationships

As the team’s equity and diversity efforts got underway, Kennedy received invaluable guidance from the University’s Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC). The center helps initiate and nurture collaborative work between University scholars and the North Minneapolis community.

“We were excited to affiliate with Doug’s research because of his commitment to connecting with community in an authentic way and his emphasis on diversity and equity,” said Makeda Zulu-Gillespie, UROC’s executive director.

UROC helped Kennedy start conversations with community organizations and develop an engagement strategy that focused on transparency and mutual benefit, providing a foundation for trust and relationship building. Zulu-Gillespie said it’s important not only to connect with diverse communities in research, but to develop an understanding for the way they are shaped by their experiences and environment.

“People’s experiences vary deeply by culture, and culture and environment shape responses that we believe help us to survive,” she said. “When we honor the culture and environment of the people we wish to study, academic research can benefit others more quickly, more deeply, and in a long-lasting way.”

Listening became a crucial part of the engagement process as a way to ensure the research was responsive to community members’ needs. The team also made efforts to become more visible in the community by developing partnerships with several community organizations and participating in volunteer work, including helping in community gardens and giving health talks.

“When we honor the culture and environment of the people we wish to study, academic research can benefit others more quickly, more deeply, and in a long-lasting way.”

“A lot goes into establishing those relationships and showing that you’re credible,” Kennedy said. “It’s a very nuanced field. It’s about respect, reciprocity.”

Throughout these efforts, an ongoing collaboration with the YMCA of the North proved instrumental. The YMCA’s close relationship with its community and the expertise of Bruce Yang, its senior director of social responsibility, helped IHWRP researchers reframe their recruitment materials and the way they engaged people. The researchers also enrolled in the Intercultural Leadership Training program at the YMCA’s Equity Leadership Institute to develop their own capacities around equity and diversity.

All together, this approach has allowed the researchers to join the YMCA as part of the community, Yang said, rather than analyzing it from afar.

“This collaboration between the YMCA and University of Minnesota has helped researchers learn and see through an equity framework that ensures all communities are represented, especially the underrepresented,” he said. “Our hope is that the researchers will begin to adopt this framework to foster a collaborative and trusting partnership with communities, while allowing communities to be their own experts at identifying and sharing with researchers what the needs are within each specific community.”

Good for Science, Good for Communities

Through their guidance from UROC and their partnership with the YMCA, the IHWRP team is gradually making a difference in how they engage with and attract a more diverse group of research participants, with the most recent step being the formation of a new Community Advisory Team to guide future engagement efforts and share research results with the community.

The team is seeing early success, Evans said, noting more diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, age, income, and education during their last recruitment wave.

“By including a more diverse population, we then have research that is more applicable and relevant to the entire population—that’s good for individuals and for science and discovery,” she said. “We are building relationships, hopefully enduring ones, that can help rebuild trust and a mutual understanding of how communities and researchers can work together.”
FINDING STRENGTH
IN SURVIVORSHIP

BY KATIE OUSLEY

AT 16 YEARS OLD, Jasmine Bennetsen got a life-changing diagnosis: Fanconi anemia (FA), a rare disease that prevents her cells from repairing certain types of DNA damage, which can cause cancer.

“Finding out I would be lucky to survive past the age of 22 was devastating,” said Bennetsen. “I had many dreams that I wanted to pursue, but from that moment on my whole life perspective changed. I wrestled with helplessness for a while trying to find what ‘normal’ meant for me.”

To learn what resources were most needed, Voss and Anderson hired Crux Collaborative, a user experience consulting group, to conduct extensive patient and family interviews. They found patients and their families valued continuity of care, access to integrative and mental health services, and the ability to evaluate community-based integrative practitioners after leaving the hospital.

A Unique Undertaking

The website is unique because it is designed by survivors, for survivors, and is a trusted source of reliable, evidence-based information.

“Toxic is a significant amount of poor information online, specifically related to integrative therapies” said Voss. “Many family members may join Facebook groups that are meant to be supportive, but also contain a lot of misinformation. We wanted to provide a safe space online that was facilitated and curated by experts, but broad in patient experience.”

The website is also distinct because it features resources for many patients — mainly between the ages of 15 and 39 — who feel caught between a pediatric world and a world of older, established adults battling cancer. It was also designed with patients who live in rural areas in mind as they often have less access to mental health care.
Maureen Anderson, co-creator of the website and an integrative nurse clinician, says that living after treatment can in some ways be harder than fighting the disease itself. “Survivorship isn’t always a place of profound gratitude and relief. It’s normal to be mad, scared, or sad,” said Anderson.

For these reasons, Voss and Anderson sought to create an extensive and reliable resource for patients and their families.

Building a Trusted Resource

Visitors to “Taking Charge of Your Survivorship” can find virtual support, resources to maintain good physical and mental wellbeing, access to integrative therapies, and resources for the whole family.

Expert advice on good physical wellbeing includes how to maintain healthy nutrition, get adequate physical exercise, and the importance of quality sleep. Learning how to cope with anxiety, depression, loneliness, and finding meaning and purpose in life are just a few of the topics on the mental health portion of the website.

Angela Bedoya knows how helpful mental health resources and integrative therapies are. At five years old, she was diagnosed with FA like Jasmine. At 17 years old, she received a stem cell transplant after her bone marrow cells began developing mutations.

“A resource like ‘Taking Charge of Your Survivorship’ is very important because there were almost no resources to integrative therapies when I received my transplant,” said Bedoya. “Several years after my transplant, I was able to access massage therapy and mindfulness techniques from Megan and Maureen to really enhance my long term care.”

Scanxiety, or anxiety tied to scans and tests, is a common struggle for people diagnosed with cancer or a rare disease, which is heavily explored on the website.

“For some, scanxiety may precede their appointment by a few weeks, significantly impairing their quality of life,” said Anne Blaes, an associate professor in the Division of Hematology, Oncology and Transplantation at University of Minnesota Medical School. “That’s why it’s so important to learn how to cope with anxiety.”

The website also contains resources for caregivers experiencing physical and mental stress including how to build resilience and parent mindfully. Periods of transition can be particularly challenging for patients and families as well.

“Many caregivers ask how to prepare to let their child go to college or how to remain present for their other children when caring for one child. We want to be the place that caregivers come to, to ask those questions and find solutions and understanding,” said Anderson.

Offering robust information on numerous integrative therapies was also important to Voss and Anderson. Information on mindfulness, essential oils, and music therapy, including how to find therapies near you, are just some of the topics explored.

A Perfect Partnership

Believing in the power of integrative therapies was one of the primary reasons Blythe Brenden gave the generous donation from her organization, the Blythe Brenden-Mann Foundation, through Children’s Cancer Research Fund (CCRF), to support this resource.

“I believe that integrative therapies, including access to expert advice, benefits the whole family,” said Brenden. “If you learn to play an instrument, how to calm yourself or change your mindset with deep breathing or meditation, you can take those skills with you anywhere.”

With CCRF’s goal of helping survivors thrive as they grow into adolescence and adulthood, CCRF’s Vice President of Mission and Marketing HaiVy Thompson shares that this resource is vital. “This website is so valuable because it ensures families have access to the healing and coping experiences provided by integrative therapies, even once they’re back home.”

“Taking Charge of Your Survivorship” is a companion to the Center’s “Taking Charge of Your Health and Wellbeing” website, which aims to empower people with information and tools to improve their health and wellbeing.

“We’re proud to host the ‘Taking Charge of Your Survivorship’ website in partnership with the BMT Program to help people along their survivorship journey,” said Dr. Mary Jo Kreitzer, Center founder and director.

Future Developments

Website visitors will have even more to explore in 2021, with the addition of a peer support component in partnership with Caring Bridge, the ability to set up telehealth appointments for integrative health and mental health, and more.

“Some of the updates available next year will include resources for developing independence and conversation toolkits,” said Voss. “We want to empower patients with the words to get their needs met when they require help from a new care team member, and the tools to organize their medical records when they go away to college. We’re absolutely thrilled to continue building out the website in the months ahead.”

To learn more about “Taking Charge of Your Survivorship,” visit takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/survivorship. +++
GOOD HEALTH BEGINS AT HOME. That’s more than just an old adage. Throughout the past three decades, public health data has shown that the conditions of where we’re born, live, work, and age explain why some Americans are healthier than others. But the healthcare system has been slow to address the social determinants of health in the care that it provides.

“We know about the disparities in death risk based on the zip code in which you live,” explains Karen Lawson, MD. “But physicians are trained to understand pathology — what’s broken physiologically — and to use certain tools to intervene to stop a patient from suffering from symptoms that don’t feel good, or to stop progression and development of worsening symptoms.”

“We ask what the patient thinks rather than just telling them what to do.”

“Nothing that we do is about moving further upstream and making people healthier than they were before they got the symptom,” explains Lawson, who is Co-Director of the Bakken Center’s Integrative Health and Wellbeing Coaching Program.

“Health has become largely about the body and mind in our western culture, which leaves out a lot of a person’s experience as well as resources for healing,” she adds. “There is not a broad understanding of health and what contributes to it, for instance dance, art, and cultural healing practices that are integral to different cultural models of health and healthcare.”

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The United States medical model and its care practices — such as running labs and checking diagnostics such as temperature and blood pressure — are based on Eurocentric traditions, beliefs, and mindsets.

“These racial underpinnings lead to misunderstanding of and inadequate treatment of many of those who seek medical care in our system,” says Theresa Nutt, Co-Director of the Center’s Integrative Health and Wellbeing Coaching Program.

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If you’re not aware of your bias, you take away the wholeness of the person you’re coaching.

Jill Greendeer, PhD

Bridging the Gap

Enter health coaches. “Coaching is a collaborative approach,” says Solange Monono, a national board-certified health and wellness coach at Northpoint Health and Wellness Center in Minneapolis, Minn. “We ask what the patient thinks rather than just telling them what to do.”

Since providers in clinical settings have limited time to spend with patients, coaches can offer continuity of care and guide patients toward successful behavior change.

Coaches also build rapport with patients in a way that other medical providers can’t. They have time to dig deeper into the patient’s life and health history to uncover and address challenges that may be inhibiting a patient’s wellbeing, build their confidence, and get them engaged in their health and healthcare.

“Our job requires us to address socio-economic issues, food insecurity issues, or abusive relationships before we can begin to help people meet their own health goals,” Monono says.

But what if you don’t have access to a health coach or even know they exist? “A majority of minority populations have never heard of health coaches because there’s no access to that kind of resource,” Monono says.

Improving access is essential if coaches are going to be able to shift the health care paradigm toward patient-centered care. To do this, Monono suggests reaching out to providers, front end staff, and the patient population to increase the profession’s visibility.

Monono argues that boosting coaching’s visibility to underserved communities is a way to increase diversity in coaching, because being impacted positively by coaching can inspire someone to become a coach and take their skills and experience back into their community.

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Improving Accessibility

Programs like the Center’s Integrative Health and Wellbeing Coaching Program teach coaches an important skill set they can use to guide people into figuring out how to improve — and even transform — their lives.

Working in partnership with Integrative Health Clinic of Minnesota, the program is committed to providing integrative health coaching to underserved populations.

In order to overcome a massive barrier to recruiting a diverse pool of students — finances — two $1,500 scholarships are awarded by the Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing annually. More opportunities for financial assistance may become available in Fall 2021.

That’s good news to Jamie Hazelton, a program graduate and founder of Whole You Health. “I believe the biggest way that we can cultivate diversity into health and wellness coaching programs is by making it cost-effective,” she says.

She notes that the trans community, for example, suffers high levels of work-force discrimination, making it challenging to afford basic necessities and medical care — and putting higher education out of reach.

Co-Directors Nutt and Lawson also work on boards at the state and federal levels to increase awareness about coaching’s ability to improve health outcomes and advocate for health coaching to be paid for by insurance companies.

Representation is Critical

They’re also keenly aware that they need to improve diversity among the ranks of their own student population. To date the program has graduated 114 health coaches since its inception in 2005 — most of whom are well-educated white women.

That’s not surprising to Reverend Doctor Shawn Moore, PhD, Adjunct Professor at Bethel University. “Modern day coaching is a Eurocentric phenomenon,” he explained during a recent symposium held by the Center titled, “Addressing Inclusion in Coaching: Advancing Health and Wellness in a Diverse World.”

Moore says that a key to improving diversity in health coaching is recognizing that we live in a racialized society. (Racialization is the process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a relationship, social practice, or group that did not identify itself as such). “Racialization is like the air we breathe,” agrees Jill Greendeer, PhD at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing and graduate of the Integrative Health and Wellbeing Coaching program. “We must be aware of those things as a coach.”

Boosting Outreach

Efforts to diversify the program’s student body are underway. “In order to recruit students from diverse populations, we’re partnering with the University of Minnesota Graduate School of Diversity to increase awareness of the health coaching program,” says student services specialist Christina Owen.

Owen also utilizes the National Name Exchange (NNE) — a consortium of fifty-five nationally-known universities that collect and exchange the names of talented undergraduate students from underrepresented populations. “The purpose of the NNE is to ensure that participating universities continue to identify qualified students who could be recruited to graduate programs at participating institutions,” Owen explains.

Representation of diverse groups in coaching is imperative, says Moore. If clients don’t have to spend time explaining things like their cultural norms and values to a coach, they have more time to focus on discussing how to meet your own healthy living goals.

That means implicit bias training is imperative for successful coaching. “If you’re not aware of your bias, you take away the wholeness of the person you’re coaching,” Greendeer says.

The essence of coaching, Monono says, is “meeting people where they are and sitting there in uncomfortable spaces.” ++
IT’S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER that the Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing makes its courses accessible in these unprecedented times. As an academic technologist and a former professor, I’ve been surprised consistently by the small things many of us do that can create barriers for learners, especially learners with disabilities. The Bakken Center is fortunate to have faculty who care about these issues. In fact, during our first faculty meeting this fall, more than 70 percent of the instructors identified digital accessibility as a subject they hoped to learn more about. I was ultimately pleased by the number of our faculty who attended my recent accessibility training toward this end, and their attendance reflects one of our goals at the Bakken Center, as characterized by Center Director Dr. Mary Jo Kreitzer: “Promoting educational equity is a priority for the Bakken Center, and with the transition of most of our academic courses to virtual formats given the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become even more important to understand ‘best practices’ in the digital world.”

The Center has been prescient with its transition to virtual course formats. Before I came to the Center, my colleagues Kely MacPhail and Louise Delagran closely followed these best practices for online instruction, which actually draw from a major shift in architectural design over the last few decades. This shift recognizes what’s now an obvious fact of accessibility: people vary tremendously. Everyone is different, and our disabilities may not be inherent so much as they are created by
our environment, which can hinder the way we interact with the world around us. The classic example is how a revolving door creates a “disabling condition” for someone who uses a wheelchair to get around. An automatic door is more accessible for people who use wheelchairs. The shift also recognizes that this accessible design can benefit people more broadly—parents with strollers or shoppers with carts, in this case. This design concept obviously applies to physical environments. It also applies to digital learning environments. We need to aim for a flexible, responsive course design, which is more universal.

The pandemic has intensified the need for this sort of design since many courses have transitioned into online or hybrid formats. Digital learning environments can increase access for students who live far from campus or who work full time, but it can provide new challenges for students who use assistive technologies, like screen-readers and screen-magnifiers, and students who need to navigate digital environments by keyboard instead of mouse. It also poses issues for students who live in rural areas or low-income, urban residential districts. At the beginning of the pandemic, I taught as a professor in southern Arkansas where many of my students came from disadvantaged backgrounds. Every one of my courses had multiple students who had limited or no Internet access when they returned home for the pandemic. Several had to drive to the nearest McDonald’s for the Internet, but they had limited access to a vehicle and no public transportation. Believe it or not, accessibility initiatives helped my students stay afloat. They ensured that my course technology was robust enough for students who relied on smartphones or slow Internet speed.

Recently, the Learning Resources Group and I led a training opportunity at the Center, which focused on increasing digital accessibility and removing potential barriers for students. This training began by broadly discussing the concepts I’ve outlined, which are “Universal Design for Learning” (UDL) and “The Social Model of Disability.” It then focused on small tasks or practices that faculty can implement in their online courses and instructional materials. In groups and altogether we identified and resolved accessibility issues in case studies. Faculty took the opportunity to ask questions about their courses, such as what types of documents tend to be more accessible. Dr. Debbie Ringdahl noted, “Attending this workshop made me more aware of the real importance of making the online format easy to read! Small improvements like enlarging font size or using easy to read colors can make a big difference.” Since the training, several faculty members have followed up or scheduled one-on-one meetings with me to improve their course’s accessibility, which affirms my recognition that our faculty members really do care about students and their access to learning.

Our accessibility initiative is ongoing, and it overlaps with other initiatives at the Center, including our current exploration of anti-racist pedagogy.

“While anti-racist pedagogy, as the name suggests, focuses on racism, the strategies it offers—with respect to course goals and content, along with teaching and assessment strategies—also open the tent to all students who experience less privilege due to marginalized identities,” said Delagran. “And these solutions benefit all students, because working to create equitable and effective instruction and assessment simply creates better courses.”

Accessibility has been a driving force in our approach to designing and developing non-academic materials as well. As Kely MacPhail explains, “When creating the website for a recent business development project, the client asked if it was going to be ‘accessible’—we were able to quickly respond in-depth about the ways our design met Web Content Accessibility and UDL guidelines. Our response did more than reassure the client; it also increased their understanding of these essential accessibility principles.” The Bakken Center has pursued these initiatives for some time now, and the COVID-19 pandemic has since spotlighted their importance and timeliness. We will continue to pursue them and assist our instructors with more universal course design, even after the spotlight fades. +++

Louise Delagran
Asa Olson
Kely MacPhail
Debbie Ringdahl
BEFORE THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC forced the world into lockdown, staff at the Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing created a series of webinars — free, interactive online opportunities to hear Center-connected experts discuss the latest topics in health and wellbeing.

The Center’s first webinars were well-attended by mostly University staff, students, faculty, and alumni on their lunch breaks or at home in the evenings, says Sue Nankivell, director of business development and community relations. “At our first webinar, there were 60 people. We were excited to see so many registrations. It went really well.” Then, unexpectedly, COVID hit, and the webinars’ attendance jumped dramatically. “Since COVID, there have been times when we have more than 1,600 people registered for a single program,” Nankivell says.

Because online programming is, by its very nature, COVID-safe, Center staff seized the opportunity to expand the webinar offerings. Molly Buss, Bakken Center community relations program and events manager and the webinars’ host, says that she and her colleagues brainstormed about how to expand the series’ offerings.

“We expanded our thinking, looking for the most timely topics, things that really could help participants, especially during a pandemic, where you don’t know what will happen next.”

For the organizing team, Nankivell explains, expanding the webinar series’ offerings meant thinking outside of the box, developing programming that would appeal to a larger cross-section of participants and further advance the Center’s mission. “The idea in coming up with new programming was not to be formulaic or rigid,” she says. Planners had to be flexible and fast on their feet. “Our goal is to provide wellbeing resources in a timely way and be responsive to what is evolving in our world.”

SMOOTH SHIFT

The pandemic also meant that popular in-person Bakken Center classes, like the weekly “Stress Busters” series and the popular eight-week “Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction” courses, had to shift online.

This required instructors to be flexible and creative, says Mariann Johnson, mindfulness and wellbeing instructor at the Center. “Like everybody else that provides training and education, we had to reconsider how to deliver what we usually deliver in person in a quality fashion online. Fortunately we had some experience with the webinars we’d already been hosting under our belts. So for us the transition wasn’t actually so difficult.”

In the end, Johnson adds, program participants had an easier time making the shift than anyone expected. “We all thought what we’d miss the most were those times spent lingering before and after class and getting to know each other more informally,” she says. To replicate that experience, “We’ve opened up the webinars earlier. A lot of times participants will come early and chat with each other before the program starts.”

Just like webinar series offerings, the mindfulness classes have also seen a significant attendance spike. Before the pandemic, Johnson says, around 30 people usually attended “Stress Busters” Monday sessions, which will be called “Mindful Mondays” going forward. When the program was moved online, interest soared.

SPREAD THE MESSAGE

The original webinar series grew out of a desire to deliver the work of the Bakken Center to as many people as possible, Nankivell says. “For quite a while I had been wanting to create this series of free webinars to take the treasure trove of resources and expertise and passion at the Center to a broader audience.”

While it’s hard to feel happy about living through a global pandemic, Nankivell believes that the jump in webinar attendance the crisis has fueled is one bright spot in an otherwise grim reality.

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Bakken Center webinars are a bright spot in a dreary world

BY ANDY STEINER
“At the beginning of a webinar, I’ll invite participants to introduce themselves,” Buss says. “When I ask them to say where they’re coming from, we’ll meet people from places like the Philippines and India.”

Organizers are not just excited about expanding the webinars’ reach worldwide; they’re also happy to learn that their programs are reaching people who might not have been able to access in-person programming.

“Many people tell us, ‘I wouldn’t be able to attend this if it wasn’t offered for free,’” Nankivell says. “It means a lot to us to be able to support people who wouldn’t be able to get the information otherwise.”

Online programming increases physical accessibility, Buss adds. She tells the story of an 87-year-old woman who’s been essentially shut in at her senior-living facility since the pandemic broke out.

“She reached out and asked us to do a private session for herself and other residents,” Buss says. Center staff held a special private session for the woman and her neighbors. It was a breakout success, Buss says. “Now her entire senior-living facility has joined us. It’s a great outcome.”

**RIGHT FOR THE TIMES**

“The webinars’ accessible, useful messages feel like the perfect balm for a stressed, edge-of-your seats world,” Nankivell says.

Enthusiastic post-session comments from participants underline this truth, including:

“Thank you for sharing these inspiring webinars; they continue to empower me to keep a positive attitude and persevere during challenging times.”

“Profound gratitude for your course offerings, especially during COVID-19 and polarized political times. Thank you! Thank you!”

Nankivell believes that the webinars’ timely topics may be the reason for this enthusiasm. “We have featured everything from ‘Mindfulness during challenging times’ to ‘Purpose and uncertainty’ to ‘Self-Acupressure for stress management.’ We also offered one on sleep and wellbeing and one on cooking at home.”

As we head into what could be a long, dark winter, Buss adds that she and the other planners are focused on developing webinars that offer a source of hope and inspiration.

“Now, more than ever, people are feeling fear and anxiety and isolation,” she says. “We have a number of webinars coming up that will address some of those immediate issues. They could be a helpful survival tool in tough times.”

Johnson agrees. “Most of us right now, especially given all of the stressors in our days, need some helpful tools to remind us of our natural capacity for inner wisdom. These programs are designed to do that, and they have the power to help so many people.” +++
FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS of the Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing’s first specialization, which focused on Integrative Health and Medicine, it became clear – an additional specialization in Integrative Nursing was critical. Faculty with specializations in nursing, midwifery, aromatherapy, guided imagery, and mindfulness, were tapped to create a new online, asynchronous, four-week curriculum for deployment on Coursera.

Dr. Mary Jo Kreitzer, director of the Bakken Center and professor in the University’s School of Nursing, says that since the textbook Integrative Nursing, co-edited with Dr. Mary Koithan, was published—first in 2014, followed by a second edition in 2018—“nurses around the world have been drawn for practice in this way—a whole-person approach to care that includes the use of integrative therapies and healing practices.” The Bakken Center has also hosted three international Integrative Nursing symposia.

It all indicated a hunger for the information outside of a traditional degree-seeking program. “The Introduction to Integrative Nursing course offers an introduction to the principles and concepts of integrative nursing, along with extensive ideas on how to implement them—how to make the practice of integrative nursing come alive. Coursera was the perfect platform.” The platform has tremendous international reach with more than 75 million registered users.

Importantly, these online course discussions and designs were in progress pre-pandemic, but began to serve a dual purpose as instructors used their Coursera lessons to work for distance learning with traditional students.

DEMOCRATIZING EDUCATION WITH COURSERA

Kreitzer was excited by the idea of “democratizing education” and Coursera offered a way to roll it out, with a reach the University itself could not have. Anyone with an Internet connection around the world can enroll. While work completed via Coursera does not apply toward a degree, knowledge gained through this new specialization can serve as an introduction to someone curious about pursuing a degree-seeking program. Completing courses via Coursera can also help inspire students about to enter their field professionally, or empower nurses, coaches, and other health professionals to shape care within hospitals, clinics, and other health settings.

The Integrative Nursing specialization covers how to return nurses to their point of expertise: caring and healing, including major principles and practices and evidence-based ways to use popular modalities: mindfulness, guided imagery, and aromatherapy. To date, more than 10,000 people have enrolled, and the completion rate keeps rising, even and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Louise Delagran, director of the Center’s Learning Resources Group and a Center mindfulness instructor, says she loves the “radical accessibility” the skills-focused Coursera platform offers to anyone, from healthcare practitioners to social workers to life coaches and beyond.

“This is a multi-prong strategy to really get these theories and practices about integrative nursing widely distributed around the world as part of standard nursing practice,” she says. “The idea is that hopefully it will transform healthcare.”

Dr. Megan Voss, integrative therapy program director for pediatric blood and marrow transplant at the University’s Masonic Children’s Hospital and assistant professor at the Center, says this is not just to help patients heal—it’s about restoring authenticity to the relationships between nurses and patients, and by extension, helping nurses stay healthy, too.

The new Integrative Nursing specialization takes off on Coursera.

BY KATIE DOHMAN
**A GLOBAL VIEW OF HEALING**

“We know our healthcare workforce is burning out at high rates and COVID-19 has accelerated that to what some are calling a ‘parallel pandemic.’ When people can be empowered to practice in an integrative way, they do their own self-care too, which is protective against their own burnout,” Voss says. “They move out of a robotic technician role and into a higher level, more clinician role with meaningful plans. They partner with patients to make achievable goals and see them through to those goals.” This process, she says helps avoid the moral distress nurses feel when they do not have autonomy in their practice to provide care that feels ethically and morally sound.

Delagran agrees. “Nurses have always offered integrative therapies and care, and we’re giving them some credence within healthcare organizations to say why this type of approach should be officially standardized. One of the other things this course will do is give healthcare organizations an ability to train employees at the delivery level—removing the barriers and giving them a way to make changes that, in the end, will help their bottom line and also be what staff really wants to do.”

It also allows for the possibility to improve patient outcomes. Voss explains seeing patients as a whole person with a whole story and set of circumstances they are inseparable from help create effective care.

“Let’s take racial injustice, for example,” she says. “If a nurse doesn’t see a patient of another culture, inseparable from their lived experience, then that nurse cannot service them in a way that does them justice. Expanding the nurse lens to consider environment, social determinants of health, systemic racism, and teaching nurses to examine their own biases helps them show up as a whole person and address the patient as a whole person.”

**DISTANCE LEARNING: A LONG HISTORY**

Sharing knowledge outside traditional on-campus, degree-seeking students has taken many forms over the years, in part because of the U of M’s land grant mission, says Dr. Bob Rubinyi, senior analyst for online learning at the Center for Educational Innovation at the U in the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. He’s also the University liaison to Coursera.

“The University’s land grant mission is so important to our institution. It’s not just what happens on campus, but it’s an important part of our mission to disseminate the results of research on campus with people all over state and country and world,” he says. “That’s been part of our DNA practically since our founding.”

These efforts have evolved from bringing agriculture information to farmers by train to correspondence courses to broadcast television education, to extension education, to online education, which began in 1996.

Rubinyi adds that the Bakken Center had been involved with online efforts earlier than many other units at the University, stretching back to the beginning of his tenure when the Center was an active member of the Technology Enhanced Learning Council. “They’ve been innovators in this area, showing a strong interest early on in online learning,” he says. He notes, “this characterizes a lot of the work of the Bakken Center. They have this incredible specialty that’s not available everywhere.”

Voss sees that come into play often when she is speaking to clinicians excited about integrative health concepts. Previously, she hadn’t had a place to send them to learn more. “They may get excited, but don’t have the time or tools. It has been really useful, because it gives people a place to go and explore without any risk or cost,” she says.

She adds that the course is full of practical information, because it was developed by practicing clinicians. “We’re doing these things, so we’re aware of balancing evidence with practice trends, and what is feasible and acceptable in the clinical realm.”

**LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD**

“I’m a public health nurse, I really believe that we are all better off when we are empowered to care for ourselves and others,” says Dr. Susan Thompson, a Center instructor who designed the guided imagery course. “We have a responsibility to speak up.”

Dr. Deborah Ringdahl, co-director of the University’s Doctor of Nursing Practice, Integrative Health and Healing Track, has worked on a variety of distance learning methods across her career. She says she has seen the powerful impact access to these types of opportunities have created—in another role, as one example, she saw Native American midwives getting critical information to their communities—only deepening her commitment to "opening the door.”

For Rubinyi, offering knowledge through Coursera and other online learning programs addresses both equity and access. “We can’t expect people now to stop what they’re doing and come to campus for a year or two years to get additional education in all these different areas,” Rubinyi adds. “People can work around their professional schedules, jobs, family situations. It just makes things a lot more democratic and equitable.”

But it extends even beyond that, Delagran notes. “We’re seeing more distrust of science and some pretty radical conspiracy theory stuff showing up in the wellness world,” she says. “This is a way of countering that with evidence-based, very accessible, practical information and that feels really important. It has always been the mission of the Center to be teaching practices that aren’t necessarily in the mainstream of conventional medicine—but always with attention to the evidence. Coursera can be another important way for us to wage that good fight, I think. It feels especially urgent now.”

Center faculty Dr. Janet Tomaino, who designed the aromatherapy course, sees it as an opportunity to correct the misinformation proliferated online and by multi-level-marketing operations. She sees it as a perfect opportunity to address how to successfully implement policies at work—but also make sure consumers are using essential oils safely at home.

Early reviews have garnered impressive ratings and personal reviews, and not just on the Coursera website. Despite the fact that the course runs itself, students have found the instructors ready to connect with them.

“People are so much more appreciative than I would have imagined,” Thompson says. “This has really had an impact. One student sent me an email - an all-caps thank you that said, ‘Your class is on my list of COVID silver linings.’”

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**Center Presents**

**WELLBEING SERIES FOR PLANETARY HEALTH**

**BY AEGOR RAY**

PETTING ABOUT PLANETARY HEALTH, suggests Dr. Lalitha Surapaneni, is no longer enough. An internal medicine hospitalist at the University of Minnesota Medical School, Surapaneni is a committed advocate for understanding planetary health as a crucial component of human health, and vice versa.

“Science is a tool, and I encourage people in STEM to build a bridge from the ivory tower and bring science to the people,” Dr. Surapaneni says. Public forums that incorporate a multiplicity of voices, disciplines, and methodologies are essential in her work to empower individuals and communities to organize towards sustainability.

The University’s Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing hosted its eighth annual Wellbeing Series this year, and offered a special fall mini-series titled “The Wellbeing Series for Planetary Health.”

“It’s hard to think of a more pressing issue,” Bakken Center director Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN, FAAN, says. Indeed, each of the speakers and performers at the fall Series stressed the urgency of planetary health by foregrounding the ways that the ongoing climate crisis is inextricably linked to public health, including structural racism and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Center convened health workers, climate justice leaders, artists, and activists in a free, three-part virtual series, incorporating live music, panel discussions, and spirited calls for action. Kreitzer notes that because this event series was offered via Zoom, the Center was able to expand audience reach and engagement. Though the measures taken to ensure pandemic safety created physical distance, the Center did not forego the intimacy of an in-person event. One audience member noted, “I learned that Zoom can be creatively harnessed when you take it outdoors. I loved sitting by the campfire and listening to healing music.”

**STORYTELLING ILLUSTRATES OUR INTERDEPENDENCE**

“We are to live as relatives with all that is living,” Dakota poet Strong Buffalo invoked the instruction of Wakan Tenka, the Great Spirit, in the land acknowledgment that opened the Wellbeing Series. Songwriter and poet Ben Weaver strummed a banjo behind him, and the dulcet harmony was woven with birdsong and the sound of breeze rippling through trees and grasses. This pre-recorded segment of song and poetry placed the concerns of the Wellbeing Series in its context: our shared ecosystem and the cross-cultural, multidisciplinary commitment that is required of global citizens to fight for its wellbeing.

Interdependence arose as a crucial theme not only to understand the consequences of the climate crisis, but also as the means to forge the way forward. “Rather than single solutions made by people in power, the climate movement calls for passionate, powerful people operating in community-engaged movements on the ground,” emphasized Julie Frost Nerbonne, the Executive Director at Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light, in her description of effective climate justice strategy, narrative, and action in Part 3 of the Series.

Kira Liu, the Community Engagement Coordinator at Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy, describes her work as solutions-focused and story-driven. “Seventy percent of Americans agree that climate change will cause harm, but, more than data, we need the head and the heart. Storytelling is how we meet people where they’re at.”

**AN EYE FOR JUSTICE**

Sam Grant calls for nothing short of an entire overhauling of the world system in order to establish a mutually reinforcing dynamic between health of the people and health of the planet. The Executive Director of MN350 delivered a rousing presentation in Part 3 of the Wellbeing Series that inspired viewers to heal their relationships to the planet and each other. “Eco-Apartheid,” a term Grant cites from environmental activist Vandana Shiva, denotes the structures of division and domination that have led to current unsustainable patterns of living. For Grant, multiple layers of social transformation need to occur in order for current systems of eco-apartheid to move into ecological and intercultural democracy, decentering a strictly science-based framing of climate issues in favor of an explicitly justice-oriented model.

This macro-level analysis of planetary health as a multi-layered system was echoed in myriad speakers’ impassioned evocations of planetary health as social justice. “Historically, communities of color and low income communities have been excluded from conversations about climate change, despite facing the brunt of its effects. These communities need to be centered,” assessed Liu, whose organization collects and archives personal stories about the climate movement. Liu sees the diversity of perspectives in the climate movement as a strength, and states that it would behoove climate organizers to “lean into” this plurality as a force for change. Recently, Climate Generation published the book Eyewitness: Minnesota Voices on Climate Change, a collection of stories, artwork, and poetry from contributors all across the state. A tool for literary activism, Eyewitness will be delivered to state legislators as an urgent call for united political mobilization towards an issue that truly affects each and every person.

For Dr. Surapaneni, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought issues of equity and justice to the front and center. “There’s an increased awareness that when we continue to exploit our ecosystem, the bill comes due. Because we were all forced to stay indoors, a lot of us have become aware of the interconnections that have been blurred by us not valuing them.” She advocates for a human-based approach to science: one that does not abandon the data, but uses it to improve the quality of life of communities according to their specific cultural and social needs. Dr. Surapaneni’s work on the State Transportation Advisory Council as an advocate for biking and walking has shown her that even the issue of healthy transportation in communities is rife with social and economic barriers that deter access or inform capacity. Rather than prescribe a universal model of success or health, Dr. Surapaneni hopes that scientists will instead appreciate the value of showing up in person and communicating directly with affected communities so that collaborative, long-term solutions are possible.
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

Winona LaDuke, co-founder of the Native environmental advocacy group Honor the Earth and resident of the White Earth Nation in Northern Minnesota, believes that Minnesotans need and deserve a new Green New Deal. Her work in industrial hemp farming is crucial to her imagining of a world economy that has moved beyond fossil fuels, illustrating what Mary Jo Kreitzer describes as “the importance of thinking globally and acting locally.”

LaDuke’s presentation in Part 3 of the series dovetails nicely with the spirit of hope, collective action, and individual agency throughout the Series. “Consciousness precedes action,” surmises Kreitzer, “and our role at the Bakken Center is to raise awareness of these critical issues and give people information and tools to make decisions in their lives. I may not be able to change the level of gas emissions allowed, but I can choose what kind of car I drive or to ride a bike.”

“The Wellbeing Series touched me spiritually with the visuals, stories, songs, and scientific facts,” wrote one viewer as feedback. The Bakken Center’s presentation of planetary health in both wide-angle and microscopic framing provides ample space for viewers to plug in and make the issue personal. Space to experience climate grief and allow that grief to catalyze one’s actions is held in tandem with scientific data, song, and storytelling.

The Wellbeing Series for Planetary Health shows that for an issue as urgent as planetary wellness, everyone is required to participate as a changemaker. As Sam Grant says, “Each crisis is a transformative opportunity.”
In the Fall 2019 issue of Mandala, to honor the Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing’s 25th Anniversary, I thought it would be fun to name 25 distinctive highlights. 20 were described in that issue. Some were examples of the Center’s innovative culture. Several recognized the University of Minnesota, where the Center flourishes. Others offered observations about the broader arena of integrative health and wellbeing. I encouraged readers to stay tuned for remaining points in the next issue and, well, this is it! Fulfilling that promise, I want to set forth five ongoing achievements that I find especially inspiring as the Center’s anniversary year draws to a close.
THE CENTER’S INSPIRED RESPONSE TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

The Center’s community programming has been robust for many years—including outstanding Wellbeing Lectures, weekly StressBusters (now Mindful Mondays) sessions, and a consumer-focused website called Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing, which annually reaches more than 2.5 million people worldwide. During week 1 of sheltering in place last March, the Center team instantaneously migrated our wellbeing content—mindfulness, resilience, sleep, nature, and much more—into free resources that were disseminated to thousands of frontline healthcare workers, business leaders, parents, and educators. UMN President Joan Gabel consistently referenced the Center’s resources in her weekly messages. In addition, during this year, nearly 30,000 people have taken part in lectures, webinars, StressBusters, and the three-part Wellbeing Series on Planetary Health. Through evaluations, we learned that these experiences and resources were lifelines when people felt isolated.

A second demonstration of the Center’s remarkable capacity to respond with the right expertise at the right moment was evidenced by our Learning Resource Group! This team thrives at the juncture of instructional design and technology. When faculty and students faced the mandated online learning format, the LRG assessed and strengthened every one of the Center’s courses so that faculty felt confident in their delivery, and students received content in stimulating, transformative ways. Fall semester went resoundingly well. Now the team is helping to weave the Center’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion into its courses and programs.

REMARKABLE EDUCATION FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

I arrived at the Center in 2008 feeling that I knew a great deal about nursing. I had experienced care in both inpatient and outpatient settings, and had worked beside nursing colleagues at the Red Cross and in other healthcare settings. Today, I have a much deeper appreciation for the nursing profession because the Bakken Center is the nation’s only integrative health center in an academic institution led by a nurse, Dr. Mary Jo Kreitzer. In concert with nurse educators, practitioners, and nursing students across the globe, Dr. Kreitzer is leading a growing movement called Integrative Nursing. Furthermore, my understanding deepened because Development supported:

• Faculty leaders conducting bold research via a fellowship established by nursing professor emeritus Dr. A. Marilyn Sime, who passed away in 2017.
• Graduate students studying for their Doctorate of Nursing Practice degrees with a focus on integrative health and healing, as they explored their visions for becoming integrative nurses, supported by the George Family Foundation.
• Nursing students who received scholarships that honored the life of Mary Jeanne Kennedy Anderson, a nurse and the Anderson family’s beloved wife and mother.
• Design of a Coursera specialization in Integrative Nursing—reaching thousands of nurses worldwide—that was funded in part by Dorothy and Michael Perry.
• Three International Integrative Nursing Symposia, with sponsorships from Medtronic, the Samueli Foundation, and many other groups.

A second profession about which I now know so much more is health coaching. The Center launched its health coaching certificate track in 2005, and the Masters of Arts in Integrative Health & Wellbeing Coaching program was approved in 2014. Graduates—who typically become nationally board-certified health coaches—apply their expertise with clients seeking to improve health and lifestyle challenges. Today, many people are looking beyond conventional medical care to deal with stress, anxiety, obesity, and chronic disease. Health coaches—who appreciate the long view of behavior change—can be essential guides on our journeys toward greater wellbeing. Resulting from my sharpened understanding, I recently decided to explore a long-standing health issue with support from a graduate of the Center’s coaching program.

LEADERSHIP IN THE EARL E. BAKKEN CENTER FOR SPIRITUALITY & HEALING

I want to celebrate the Center’s uniquely talented staff. I first recognized the herculean capacity of this team when the Center co-hosted the 2011 visit from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama with the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota. Every detail—beginning with a reception at Eastcliff and ending with the public lecture before thousands at Mariucci Auditorium—went smoothly. Time and again, I’ve witnessed how the staff brings a rich mix of skills, an unwavering drive to succeed, and an undaunted spirit to ambitious events like the Wellbeing Experience in 2018 and the unexpected Wellbeing Series for Planetary Health last September. How does this eclectic band of professionals manage to work together so well? We have what is known as social capital: a sense of trust, respect for each person’s knowledge, and a culture that makes stretching our norm. Mutual concern helps staff to remain resilient—individually and collectively.

THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY IN POSITIONING THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA FOR THE NEXT ERA

Metrics matter, because we get what we measure. In fulfilling its mission to attract and steward philanthropic gifts that advance Minnesota’s public land-grant university, the University of Minnesota Foundation set a bold goal of $4 billion for its Driven campaign, which will be reached when the campaign concludes in June 2021. The Bakken Center’s Wellbeing for All campaign has been successful—with gifts from more than a thousand generous donors, we have exceeded the $10 million goal, currently by 30 percent. My boundless thanks to every contributor! The University and the Center are poised for educating the next generation of leaders; conducting life-saving and life-enhancing research; and sharing emerging innovations with the state and nation. The power and capacity of this University and the Bakken Center give me enormous hope for the future.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH & HEALING VIA THE U’S PARTNERSHIP WITH MHEALTH/FAIRVIEW.

One of the most inspiring projects I’ve had the honor of advancing involved adoption of integrative healing practices within the Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplant Program at the MHealth Masonic Children’s Hospital. Graduates of the Center’s DNP-IHH program brought a full array of healing therapies to pediatric patients whose lives were altered by rare, often devastating diseases. These nurses ensured that integrative therapies were also available to children’s families whose lives were turned upside down during extended hospital stays and long periods of treatments. I see vast potential for expanding the collaborations between the Bakken Center and MHealth’s hospitals and clinics, based in communities all across Minnesota. As with all innovation, philanthropy will fuel awareness, education, pilot projects, and evaluation so that eventually a blend of leading-edge clinical and integrative practices becomes our gold standard of care. This moment has never been more right for integrative nursing, medicine, mental health, and other disciplines in Minnesota.

That’s it! 25 years and 25 highlights. With this column and my heartfelt gratitude for all I have learned from so many, I sign off as the Bakken Center’s Director of Development. Thank you for continuing to give generously—the frontiers ahead will need support from all of us. Thank you for doing everything possible to remain healthy and keep your loved ones safe. Today’s extra effort will lead us into a bright new year. +++

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It is always gratifying to be part of something larger than one’s immediate world. On November 19th, the Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing was proud to be part of Minnesota’s Great Give Together, Give to the Max Day 2020. This year’s mini-campaign focused on our exemplary Wellbeing Public Engagement programs which disseminated wellbeing resources to thousands of individuals, families, businesses, and communities. A campaign goal of $25,000 was set to honor the Center’s 25th anniversary. Our aspirations were set in motion with a challenge grant from our long-time friends and supporters at Eniva Health.

With many generous donations, we reached the Give to the Max Day goal. As we head into a promising new year, the optimal way to honor the Center is with a gift that will help ensure continuous, exemplary programming. Visit our website to contribute.

Along with our gratitude, we send our best wishes for a healthy 2021.