

Stranded on Calypso's Island: Cornerstone, COVID, and power of transformative texts

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As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery
(Cavafy 1992)

A Memorable Day

March 10, 2020 was a memorable day in the lives of Purdue students. On that day, they learned in an email from President Mitch Daniels and Provost Jay Akridge that their coursework would be conducted online for the next three weeks. Many felt shock and dismay. For most, their attention to the spread of the Coronavirus in mainland China had been limited at best. The death of basketball great, Kobe Bryant, on January 26 had made a bigger impression. Now they felt a sense of disbelief. We went to our Chemistry midterm like zombies, recalled one. “Everything I had looked forward to for the end of my first year at college seemed to fall apart,” wrote another (Baladad 2020). Some took the news in stride, feeling at first like a “snow day” had just been announced, merely an extended Spring Break. But the full impact began to set in as parents called and texted, “come home,” and Spring Break travel plans were cancelled. Over their break, bad news arrived with every email. Study Abroad and summer internships were cancelled. On March 16, President Daniels announced that online instruction would continue for the remainder of the semester. “I lost all hope of going back to school; Mitch Daniels soon confirmed that campus would be closed. I moved out of my dorm ... without being able to say bye to any of my friends or even my roommate. Worst part of it all, classes were online for the rest of the semester” (Al-Awadi 2020).

This is the story of how students in the Cornerstone program reacted and adapted to the shutdown and quarantine amid the COVID-19 pandemic of March and April 2020, based on their own words. It is also the story of how both students and faculty in Cornerstone adapted to

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the transition to online learning. Faculty had less than two weeks to figure out the best delivery methods for the last third of their courses, upload material, reorient their syllabi, and experiment with new technologies. How would they maintain the dynamism of a class built around discussion? How would they continue to connect and mentor students? Students, bewildered by the suddenness of the change, had to cope with finding themselves back in their childhood bedrooms, separated from their friends and campus routines, under the new rules of quarantine and the new online delivery of their courses. “I think the students are still quite discombobulated,” observed one Cornerstone instructor on March 30th (C. Campbell, personal communication 2020).

But adapt they did. Quarantine was not easy for them, according to their own stories, especially at first. They missed their friends; they missed Purdue. Many struggled with loneliness and depression, boredom and anxiety. But all of them turned a corner and felt a reawaking as they settled into life under quarantine. Many gained a new appreciation of family; many renewed old hobbies or learned new ones. They also felt a new connection to the texts they were reading in Cornerstone and were able to relate the feelings and words of some of the world’s greatest literature. From the poetry of Homer’s *Odyssey* to the apocalyptic landscape of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, the transformational literature in Cornerstone’s new first year sequence took on a new poignancy for the students, proving one of the central tenets of the program: that classic literature is inspirational and that students want to be moved by ideas, by the feelings, and by the richness of “transformative texts.”

Perspectives

The student and faculty experiences shared in this paper are told through the positioning of the two researchers, both scholars and teachers. Dr. Amanda Mayes has over a decade of experience teaching at the K-12 level in communities with high poverty levels and is particularly interested in leveraging the power of the humanities to close achievement gaps. Dr. Melinda Zook is a highly published historian and an award-winning teacher. She is the current director of the Cornerstone program. While both researchers hold positions of authority within the academy, they share a deep sense of accountability to the faculty and the students in Cornerstone. In this essay, Mayes and Zook strive to record the authentic voices of Purdue students. As often as possible, they directly quote both students and faculty, enabling the reader to draw their own conclusions. Naturally, the impact of the quarantine on the students was as varied as the students themselves. However, among their essays, reoccurring themes were noted, and they are reflected in this essay.

The Cornerstone Program

Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts, a 15-hour certificate program, was launched in 2017, primarily as an outreach program for STEM students. Designed by faculty, Cornerstone provides an enriched first-year sequence, inspiring students from across campus to see their majors whether engineering, healthcare, computer science, forestry or pharmacy from the perspective of a humanist or social scientist. The program begins with a two semester-sequence, Transformative Texts I and II (SCLA 10100 and 10200) designed for first-year students. These courses develop Purdue students’ communication skills as they engage with classic literature, along with film, art, and theatre. Students then move on to complete three more Liberal Arts courses arranged in

Themes like “Science and Technology,” “Environment and Sustainably,” or “Healthcare and Medicine.”

Students discuss a range of texts - treatises, poetry, plays, novels, speeches, short stories, scientific writings, etc., - with a Liberal Arts faculty member in Transformative Texts I and II. These courses are based around active learning. Students and faculty grapple with big questions about life, death, friendship, hope, truth, science and the supernatural. The synergy of Transformative Texts springs from human interaction, not merely discussion; but debate, teamwork, competitions, presentations, and peer review. Faculty also take their students out of the classroom with visits to the theater, simulcast operas, galleries and museums.

The other key component to this first-year sequence is mentorship. Office hours and one-on-one instruction are vital to the program. Cornerstone instructors seek to guide students, hone their communication skills, foster their interests, and continue to be a resource throughout their college career. Faculty are also prepared to handle “students in crisis.” But all the training and preparation by the Cornerstone faculty was predicated on a bricks and mortar, in-class, on-campus experience.

The pandemic tested the faculty and the program in completely unforeseen ways. In the Spring semester of 2020, 36 Cornerstone faculty offered 59 sections of SCLA 101 and 102 to 1,724 students. Everything was running smoothly prior to mid-March. We held faculty workshops such as “How I Teach This Text,” in which faculty shared assignments, best practices, and lunch. We organized a film fest for students centered on *The Big Lebowski*, wherein they compared the philosophy of “the dude” to the carefree Daoism of *Zhuangzi*. Faculty took their students to *Walk On: The Rosa Parks Story*; Purdue Theater’s *Angels in America*; and the new feature film, *1917*. Some were preparing to have their students attend Neil Simon’s *A Bronx Tale* later that spring. But after March 11, all such outings were canceled, along with everything else.

Purdue faculty had only a short window of time to transition from classroom teaching to online instruction. On March 10, Cornerstone faculty received an email from the Director asking them to consider how they might deliver their instruction online “in the event that our campus suspends classroom instruction” (M. Zook, personal communication, 2020). On March 11, the “event” occurred. Faculty had the remainder of the week of March 9 and Spring Break to take their active learning classes into cyberspace. They relayed the news to their students on March 12 and 13. “At our last meeting, students bemoaned the fact that ‘the discussion board wouldn’t be the same’ as our in-person class,” wrote one faculty member (D. Kane, personal communication, March 13, 2020). Almost immediately, several others asked Zook if they could still hold office hours. Panicked students were emailing them, “would they still be willing to meet with them?” Sadly, no. It was too unsafe and as the full realization of the shutdown began to seep in, students packed their belongings and left campus.

Losing Ithaca

For most students, going home wasn’t easy and sometimes the journey itself was unnerving. Alex Lin flew first-class back to Taiwan but nonetheless had to wear his face mask for the thirteen-hour journey, “along with a full-body disposable raincoat, my CHEM 115 goggles and disposable latex gloves.” Nor was a single meal served. “That is a once in a lifetime experience,”

he quipped (Lin 2020). When Lin arrived in Taiwan, he discovered he was not permitted to use public transportation. Instead, he was loaded into a government issued quarantine taxi, after being “showered in alcohol spray from head to toe.” Kareem Ekanem, returning to his small, quiet town located in Kent County, Delaware, got his first taste of the new realities of a world in crisis at the airport. The TSA agents wore full hazmat suits, airplanes were sprayed with disinfectants, and everyone had their temperature taken when deboarding. Along with other students, he was surprised and dismayed by the precautions of his parents, who met him at the airport but wouldn’t touch him, “instead they gave me a mask and I sat in the car quiet until I got home. Once we arrived, my parents made me leave my luggage in the garage for 48 hours so the virus could die ... They also made me take a shower before doing anything else” (Ekanem 2020). Others received similar receptions upon their return. “I [had] hoped to be greeted with warm hugs and comforting food,” wrote Shobana Iyer, who found the environment at home bleak instead. “For the next couple of days, I would ask my family ‘isn’t the grief-stricken state of our world unsettling enough, so why exactly should that same aura be present in our home?’” (Iyer 2020).

The choice to stay on at the increasingly deserted campus or return home was particularly difficult for international students. With flights being rapidly cancelled, students had to make tough decisions quickly. Many feared they would not be able to return if they left. Arjun Harbhajanka described a stress-filled time trying to decide if he should return home to India, stay at Purdue, or head to his uncle’s house in Houston. “My plans were changing by the minute,” he wrote, “at one moment it got so stressful, I started doing pushups in the middle of my residence hall lobby” (2020). Ultimately, Arjun and several friends made the decision to return home and had a mere twelve hours to pack the content of their lives at Purdue. Gowri Harish made a similar decision to return home to India. She finished an evening final exam and stayed up all night to pack. “I didn’t get time to say goodbye to my friends, it was hard leaving the college life I loved so much not knowing when I would return” (2020).

Vidit Shah had a smooth trip home back to India but an eventful arrival. The government authorities in India monitored Vidit from the moment he arrived, with the local municipality corporation sanitizing his home as well as the homes of his neighbors. “Further, they also stuck a big notice pamphlet on the front door of my house saying that I should remain in quarantine for the next fourteen days and that all outsiders should stay away from my residence.” This was followed by house visits from a doctor and several nurses as well as police officers to ensure he was at home. Vidit had to install a state-sponsored app and send his location via the app to authorities every hour and mandatory morning and evening health questionnaires (2020).

Time and again, students both in the States and abroad, spoke of their grief and boredom, often comparing life at Purdue before the pandemic to their new reality. Prior to quarantine, Isaiah Koeninger had troubles with depression and loneliness but he could still, “visit friends and go bowling or to the arcade in the union. I could play pool in the community center across the street from my apartment in Purdue Village.” Now, “I’m sitting in my room for hours at a time each day at home, the loneliness is only amplified” (2020). The students grieved over the loss of their “Purdue family” or “my Purdue friends;” and many compared their grief to Odysseus missing Ithaca (Horz 2020; Iwu 2020). Their scheduled campus lives - going to class, dining at Owen, off to Co-Rec, studying at the WALC - all ended abruptly. Wrote one first-year student, “I [had just]

started to love Purdue and where I was in life, and right now, as I am sitting in my home, back in the small town of Union Mills, Indiana, [and] I am missing Purdue more than anything.” Then the boredom. Students reported falling into a repetitive cycle: “Every day is the same” and “more depressing” than the last (Halbleib 2020). “We have only been in quarantine for about five weeks now,” wrote Michael Epperson, “but it feels like an eternity. The days and weeks inch by as each day seems to be a repeat of the last” (2020). Several reported feeling depressed and anxious. Many of them knew someone affected by the virus; friends and neighbors, who had experienced sickness and death. Many felt the stress of being constantly worried about their loved ones: fathers who were first responders; mothers who were nurses; parents who lost their jobs; younger siblings yearning to be free; older siblings graduating without job prospects.

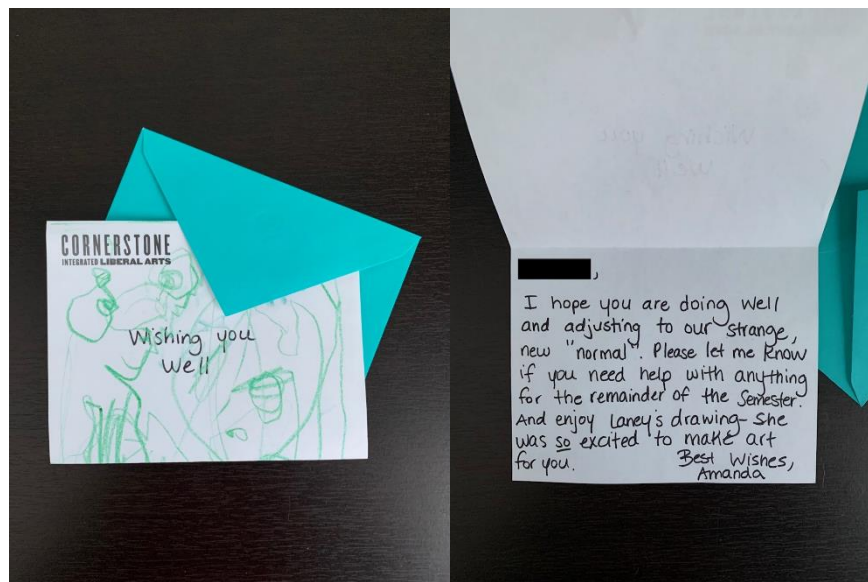
Some students had the added burden of dealing with the anti-Asian discrimination that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic. The proliferation of anti-Chinese rhetoric prompted the Human Rights Watch to issue a statement urging governments to take steps to prevent and prosecute racial attacks against Asians and people of Asian descent (Human Rights Watch 2020). Yiduo Huo reported that four of his Chinese friends were accosted walking back to their apartments near campus. The assailants called them, “Chinese viruses” and taunted them to, “roll back to China” (2020). Chinese American student Samuel Zhang wrote at length about the uptick in race-baiting directed toward Asians in America. Growing up in California, he had always thought of himself as American first, Asian second. “Whenever I walked outside of my dorm, I purposely avoided other Asian students wearing face masks and was quick to profile them as potential carriers.” But news of attacks against Asians began to trouble him and he collected the stories from around the US. At home, he found himself wary of how others might see him. Walking in his neighborhood, “I took off my face mask and slid it into my pocket as fast as I could ... I had removed the one item of protection I had in fear that I would be profiled as an Asian with coronavirus. ... Was I willing to sacrifice my physical health, and potentially the health of my family, to be more socially accepted in public?” Samuel ends his essay feeling fortunate for never having felt discriminated against but also perplexed, “my world is torn between choosing which I value more: my American identity or my Asian heritage” (2020).

Online Learning

Of course, both students and faculty were challenged by the shutdown. Cornerstone faculty sought to retain the vitality of the in-class experience in their online versions of Transformative Texts, experimenting with a wide array of online platforms and other tools: Hotseat, Discord, OneDrive, Google Meet, and Camtasia among others. Delivering content was not an issue. But maintaining lively discussion and simply connecting and mentoring students in some human way was a source of concern. Some scheduled synchronous meetings with students; others, phone calls on Facetime. “I want to communicate with the students in as human a manner as possible because I am concerned about the psychological impact of social distancing on students who lack a support system,” wrote one Cornerstone instructor (Leverage, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

It soon became apparent that many students were unable to manage their time and meet deadlines, “I received more requests for extensions than usual, and I had to be flexible. Illnesses, bereavement in the family, internet connectivity, and evictions were among their reasons” (Marazka, personal communication, May 4, 2020). Silence from students, especially among

those once active in classroom discussions, was one of the most troubling issues for faculty. What do you do about students who simply stop communicating? “The biggest issue I face,” wrote one instructor, “is the uncertainty and disconnect of this type of teaching. There are ways that students can contact me, of course, but when things are relatively silent, you are not sure if it means that everything is OK from their end or if some are falling off and just not making that known” (Watkins, personal communication, March 27, 2020). Professor Amanda Mayes, hoping to connect with her students, in a more human, less technological way, mailed handwritten notes, with drawings by her toddler, to each of her students. Many of her students responded in kind with selfies and drawings. Alyssa DeLouise wrote, “I got your letter in the mail last night. It means a lot to me. Missing Purdue a lot right now” (personal communication, April 9, 2020).



Handwritten note sent to student by Prof. Mayes

Over time, Cornerstone faculty became increasingly inventive with their online instruction. One termed his thrice-weekly lessons, “Wilbur Radio,” after his cat, whose antics were already known to the students. Starting their day with “Wilbur Radio” (a mix of lecture, close reading, and interpretation along with cat pictures) was so agreeable to students, that even parents became fans. Another professor seeking new ways of reaching the students “in lieu of face-to-face interaction,” filmed her lecture on John Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale” at Happy Hollow Park in West Lafayette to emphasize the importance of nature to the Romantics (Frketich, personal communication, March 27, 2020). This was met by students creating and sharing their own videos and photos of their favorite corners of nature that reminded them of what Keats was trying to express. Another instructor, conceding to the simple fact that was most on the minds of the students was the virus, had them each produce a shareable work on the medium of their choice with the broad theme, coronavirus. Students could create short films, infographics, public service announcements, comics, trailers, an animated work, or a series of photographs.

Certainly, students needed a way to reflect upon and express what was happening to them as a result of the virus and the shutdown. The “My Quarantine Story” contest became that vehicle. Amanda Mayes was inspired by Brandon Stanton’s Humans of New York (HONY), a photography project aimed at documenting 10,000 inhabitants of New York City. The project,

started in 2010, has grown to include the stories of the photography subjects. HONY has over 20 million followers on social media -- a testament for the very human need to tell and read stories (Stanton n.d.). This aligned with the ideas of Transformative Texts and students were asked to tell their stories by reflecting on how their readings helped them think about their new life under quarantine. Students had the options to write a short reflective essay of three to five pages or give a three to five minutes speech. Cornerstone director, Melinda Zook and Professor Mayes developed the following prompts as suggestions to help, but students were asked to write/speak from the heart and tell their stories however they saw fit:

Prompt 1: I never thought I would be able to relate to [character from a transformative text], but now....

Prompt 2: [transformative text title] is a work of fiction but now strikes a chord because...

The winning essay received a \$100 Amazon gift card, while second and five honorary mentions received \$75 and \$50 Amazon gift cards, respectively. Purdue President Mitch Daniels' student enrichment fund for Cornerstone provided the prizes. Many instructors adopted the contest in place of other assignments or for extra credit. A total of seventy submissions were received and judged by a panel of seven Cornerstone faculty. Naturally, among the seventy entries there was a great deal of diversity. A handful of students stayed on campus; some returned to their homelands abroad; but most moved back in with their families in the States. There was, however, a pattern to the vast majority of the stories, regardless of where the student was or to what character or book they related. They spoke to their grief about suddenly leaving campus; the often-difficult adjustment to quarantine and online education; and finally, to a turning-point, a moment at which they not only adapted to their new life, but began to improve and even enjoy their circumstances.

According to their stories, the onset of their online classes, beginning March 23, posed a real challenge for most students. Gibson Spencer's comment that online instruction was "a chore instead of a learning experience," was echoed time and again (2020). Students missed the energy of classroom discussions and the opportunity to talk to their instructors during office hours. They found themselves easily distracted and had trouble comprehending online materials. Above all, retaining the information coming at them from their laptops was a problem. "I learn better with face to face interaction," wrote Robert Silinghia, "and being in a class room gives me an emotional trigger that helps me retain more of the information in contrast to watching the lectures online and not being able to retain as much as if I were in a classroom" (2020). There were exceptions. A few spoke of the transition to online education as a saving grace. One suffered from panic attacks on campus and found the isolation of quarantine conducive for learning; another self-described "introverted personality" was more comfortable with learning from her family home than having to trudge across campus to class (Harrison, 2020). But the majority felt adrift from the education they had come to expect at Purdue and for those that needed "personal attention," remote learning was a disaster. "My grades dropping," wrote one, "I am neither understanding nor receiving attention. For example, multi-variable calculus is not really something that is easy to learn on your own. Quarantine has taken quite a negative toll on me, unfortunately" (Al-Awadi 2020).

The Transformation

Yet despite the toll quarantine brought to their lives – the anxiety, the boredom, the loneliness – most of the students reached a point in which they decided to turn things around, shake themselves out of their doldrums, learn to appreciate what they had, and embark on new habits of self-improvement. Their moment of catharsis was never dramatic, but rather a slow realization that life was not going to be the same again anytime soon and that only they had the power to change their lives. Often, they began new routines: dieting, calisthenics, yoga, jogging and biking. Many rediscovered old hobbies - puzzles, watercolor painting, and piano – or began new ones like cooking, golfing, and guitar. They often found that the best instructors they had were their parents.

Indeed, reconnecting with their families was part of their recovery. “After a month and a half of being locked in my house with my parents and sister, one would think that I got so sick and tired of their shenanigans that I decided to run away from home and never come back,” wrote Evan Kamm. Yet, he asserted that “spending all this time with my family helped me realize how great they are.” As part of Evan’s program to “improve upon myself as a person,” he started cooking with his mother and golfing with his father (2020).

Of course, parents themselves had different methods of coping with the return of their adult children. Some students report parents whose new quarantine safety rules were too strict and the cause of friction; others speak of parents working from home, glued to their laptops; still others who were fixated with online shopping; and some who went perhaps overboard in their efforts to keep everyone occupied. “I am quarantining with all 5 members of my family, and my cat, and although we are sick of each other,” wrote Veronica Reynolds. “I know we are all grateful to have each other.” Her father bought 36 wooden birdhouses for Veronica and her sisters to paint,



Birdhouse painted by student Veronica Reynolds

“a quarantine craft to keep us busy We hang up the finished ones in the trees by the sidewalk in the front of our house so that the people taking walks can look at them.” After seeing how popular they were, her father bought, “more things to paint. We are still not finished with the

original 36 birdhouses, but he bought us wooden trays, jewelry boxes, canvases, wooden lighthouses, picture frames, and even bigger birdhouses to paint” (2020).

Johans Baladad began his quarantine upset and frustrated. The Grand Prix, March Madness, spring intramurals, and “my church’s spring mission trip to Florida which I had been looking forward to since Christmas” were all cancelled. But he too turned a corner, and “despite all the disappointments that arose, there are opportunities and hidden blessings behind all experiences. Just as the world literally distanced itself, I have never felt closer to my family.” His family also set up “zoom calls every weekend with my extended family that reaches all corners of the world like Texas, California, Canada, England, and the Philippines” (2020). Zoom and Facetime calls with grandparents were frequently mentioned by students as particularly special and part of their healing process. Margaret Hutchinson’s quarantine shift happened on Zoom calls with her mother’s extended family. Relatives she typically only saw once a year, now checked in weekly to laugh and catch up. Margaret eloquently stated, “This period of our lives has not been lost but instead changed” (2020).

The students’ quarantine stories were made all the more poignant by the connections they drew between their own situation and those they had read about and discussed in Transformative Texts. The range of literature they cited was vast: Cormac McCarthy, Michael de Montaigne, Mary Shelley, Victor Hugo, Franz Kafka, Edgar Allen Poe, Robert Frost, Viktor Frankl, and M. T. Anderson, among others. From their readings, they found the words and images that helped them think about what was happening to them and their world. Odysseus and his long trek back to Ithaca in Homer’s *Odyssey* became a touchstone for many. “Just like Odysseus struggled to return home to his old way of life,” opined Collin Stroup, “we too are struggling to get back to life the way we once knew it” (Stroup, 2020). Trapped on Calypso’s Island, Odysseus grieves for his family and his kingdom. “Likewise, I have felt lonely and helpless,” wrote Andrea Romero, separated from her father as well as “the home I built at Purdue. I wish I could hug my dad. I wish I could spend another night in my dorm with my best friend. I wish I could go to lunch with my closest friends ... But most of all, I look forward to my return to ‘Ithaca’” (2020).

Another student, who read Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charlie*, wrote that while travelling back to Singapore, “I realized why Steinbeck would choose to bring a dog [on his travels], a creature with naturally positive disposition, and speak so casually to it as if to another human.” Sometimes connecting with other humans, especially in times of grief, is the hardest thing of all. “Perhaps more dejecting than the circumstances that surrounds each one of us is the inability to express it. I could not find a more poignant encapsulation of that feeling than when Steinbeck said, “[a] sad soul can kill you quicker, far quicker, than a germ” (Shing, 2020).

Many related their feelings of grief and loss to the profound sorrow of Gilgamesh when his best friend, Enkidu, dies in the ancient epic, *Gilgamesh*. “Obviously,” wrote Miles Tipton, “my grief for the loss of my friends is temporary because I will most assuredly see them again, while Gilgamesh will not [see Enkidu again]. But a lot can be said about losing a friend without any warning. In both Gilgamesh’s and my case, there was no forewarning that soon we would be without all of our friends” (2020). Students not only reflected on their own sadness; they were moved by the destruction of the pandemic. They saw that although they might be safe, others

were not. One of the most thoughtful stories reflected on the Polish poet, Czeslaw Milosz's poem, "A Song on the End of the World." The poem begins,

On the day the world ends
A bee circles a clover,
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing
And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be
(Milosz 2011).

On the day the world ends, according to Milosz, "No thing, animal, or person is out of place in the natural flow of daily life," wrote Hannah Harrison.

Only one wise old man is aware of what is happening and even he does not stray from his normal routine. Because there are no dramatic or chaotic accompaniments to the end of their world, the people simply deny it is happening. The innocence and naivety of those people mirrors that of many people during this troubling time of disease and quarantine, including myself. I am lucky enough to be virtually unaffected by the COVID-19 outbreak, as my family is financially stable and has a safe and secure place to self-quarantine. For a multitude of people, COVID-19 has brought with it family struggles, financial ruin, and even loss of life (2020).

The stories Purdue students told about their quarantine in March and April of 2020 may well be similar to stories told around the globe amid the pandemic. Gloom, grief, boredom, anxiety – all common to the human experience in those sad times. But there was also resilience. These young adults faced tipping points when they learned to adapt and to accept their new reality and forge ahead. "I keep going back to Odysseus and his travels," so Collin Stroup (2020) concludes his essay:

he could've easily given up during his many years of trying to return home. He didn't lose sight of his end goal which is the most important thing. When you're trying to get out of a hardship, you cannot give up regardless of the circumstances. ... We have to have a similar mindset to Odysseus and keep persevering through our troubles. ... Can you imagine having to struggle for ten years to get back to your home?

Going home was by no means easy for Purdue students. But quarantine also opened new opportunities and avenues of self-discovery. They endured; they even thrived. "Contrary to Odysseus," wrote Matthew Kwan, "I have no gods out to ruin or support me on this journey of discovery." "What I do share with him, however, is a loving family that believed in and supported me through all my struggles, leading me home as I pushed through adversity to reach a happier life. ... In the end, these trying times, rather than isolating me, have all but strengthened my bonds with my friends and family, and rekindled my love for the things I had forgotten about" (2020).

The transitions both faculty and students made in the spring of 2020 were certainly significant, certainly life changing. Cornerstone faculty became adept at new technologies, some with fear and trepidation, others with great ease and enthusiasm. They were delighted when their students (most students) continued to participate and engage with their readings; and they were dismayed and anxious when met by silence from a few. “My aspiration,” wrote one instructor, “is that they can take from this whole experience something worthwhile that ...[they] learn life-lessons as well as bookish lessons from this very unusual situation” (S. Robertson, personal communication, March 27, 2020). Indeed, that their road might be long, but filled with discovery. The stories Cornerstone students told about their quarantine suggested that it was a journey of self-discovery and that they also looked forward to their return to Ithaca.

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