

The Magazine of Friends' Central School

# QUAKER WORKS

12:1 Fall 2020



VIRTUAL FCS

*A community adapting to change*

COMMENCEMENT

*Celebrating the Class of 2020*

ANNUAL REPORT OF GIFTS

*2019-2020*



Members of the Class of 2020 process  
to the Commencement Ceremony  
See page 8 for a Commencement recap



# QUAKER WORKS

## The Magazine of Friends' Central School

### ON THE COVER

Masked and at an appropriate physical distance, Bradleigh Bell '20 and classmates process to the Commencement ceremony on August 1. Read about Commencement 2020 on page 8.



FRIENDS' CENTRAL SCHOOL

### Head of School

Craig N. Sellers

### Editors

Clare Luzuriaga  
*Director of Publications*

Lisa D'Orazio  
*Director of Communications*

### Layout

Clare Luzuriaga

### Contributors

Lydia A. Martin  
*Director of Strategic Initiatives*

Luke Nowell  
*Digital and Social Media Specialist*

Colette Kleitz  
*Chief Development Officer*

Linda Waxman Wasserman '75  
*Director of Alumnae Affairs*

Jim Davis

*Archivist & Development Associate*

Kim Emmons-Benjet

*Director of Leadership Giving*

Matt Cohen

*Director of Development Services*

Melissa DiNofia-Bozzone

*Director of Annual Giving*

Danielle Gershkoff '06

*Development Associate*

### Photography

Victoria Bastian, Michael Branscom,  
Matt Cohen, Lisa D'Orazio, Jay  
Gorodetzer, Clare Luzuriaga, Paola  
Nogueras, Luke Nowell





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Letter from the Head of School

We welcome any comments, letters, photographs, and suggestions for future issues. Please send all communications to [communications@friendscentral.org](mailto:communications@friendscentral.org).

#### Friends' Central School

1101 City Avenue  
Wynnewood, PA 19096  
[communications@friendscentral.org](mailto:communications@friendscentral.org)

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# Letter from the Head of School

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter, Friends' Central is readying for its 175th year. Our beloved School's history spans times of national and international crisis, as well as moments of triumph and progress. During this past year, in our country and in our School, we have faced dual pandemics – COVID 19 and systemic and institutional racism.



In January 2020, we were aware of a frightening, yet – we thought – geographically distant virus. In March, we closed our campuses and began what would be three months of remote learning with end-of-year celebrations different than any we've ever experienced. Many of you know firsthand the extraordinary dedication of Friends' Central teachers. As you read, you will be interested in and not surprised by the examples of the creative ways they have transformed their curriculum and their care for students to a new, virtual experience. Nor will you be surprised by the generosity and leadership demonstrated by gifts to the Community Response Fund, tremendous Class of 2020 parent giving, and the donation drive spearheaded by Keenan Willis '03 and Maya Francis '03 in support of our neighbors in West Philadelphia.

For the 2019-2020 school year, in keeping with our tradition of focusing on a Quaker testimony, we decided on Community. The bright light shone on the inequities long suffered by Black people in our country, in our neighborhoods, and in our School called us to examine the way we think about community and inclusion. For us to move into a true and fully inclusive community, we must make change that is long lasting.

Erica Snowden, Friends' Central's inaugural Director of Equity and Multicultural Education is leading a number of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives – among them, a summer of growth and learning with faculty and administrators. I believe families will feel a difference on our campus this year, and I promise you that, while our beloved School is imperfect, we will continue this work with enthusiasm and a passion to live into our Friends' testimonies.

The 2020-2021 school year will require each of us to be open to learning and to draw on our own resilience, creativity, and expertise. *We shall face today's challenges with the same measure of creativity, intellect, determination, and faith that has distinguished our School for the last 175 years.*

Thank you for your generosity and partnership.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C. N. Sellers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Craig N. Sellers**  
Head of School









# Friends' Central Welcomes New Employees



Rowena Castillo Lesher



Andy White



Andrea Pien

Friends' Central is thrilled to welcome fantastic new employees to the School for the 2020-2021 school year.

Joining Friends' Central at the administrative level are **Erica Snowden**, Director of Equity and Multicultural Education (*see opposite page for more on Erica*); **Rowena Castillo Lesher**, Lower School Assistant Principal; and **Andy White '03**, Middle School Assistant Principal. Rowena Castillo Lesher received her bachelor's degree in political science and education from UC Berkeley and her master's degree in bilingual and bicultural education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Prior to FCS, Rowena taught Kindergarten, first grade, and fourth grade during her eight-year tenure at Episcopal Academy. In 2013, she became Founding Executive Director of Horizons at EA and continued as Program Director through 2020. She also served as a bilingual educator at PS 89 in New York and as a founding teacher at two KIPP public

charter schools, one in New York and one in Philadelphia. Andy White '03 earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania and holds two master's degrees – one in cinema studies from the University of Southern California and another in English education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Prior to FCS, Andy taught English at Hopkins School and St. Bernard's School before becoming their Head of Upper School (gr. 7-9). At St. Bernard's, Andy was responsible for hiring, retaining, evaluating, and supporting faculty; he also strengthened and led the advisory program and programming for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Andrea Pien** is our new Associate Director of College Counseling. Andrea comes to us most recently from the Bay School in San Francisco, where she served as Assistant Director of College Counseling since 2017. Andrea gained experience on the other side of college counseling as Assistant Dean of

Admissions and Admission Counselor at Swarthmore College and as a Senior College Counselor at college admissions counseling in Shanghai, China, where she advised Chinese international students and parents in college selection, interviews, and essays. Andrea received her BA, double majoring in political science and Asian studies, from Swarthmore College and her MA in education from Stanford University. In addition, she completed intensive Mandarin study from National Taiwan University in Taiwan.

New to Friends' Central's Lower School are **Claudia Parra**, grades 3-5 art and Spanish teacher; **Judith Browne**, Maker Teacher for Pre-K-grade 2; **Sofia Seidel '13**, assistant Kindergarten teacher; and **Natalie Martin**, Pre-K-grade 2 science teacher.

We are thrilled to announce a new position for the Lower School for this year, a Pre-K-grade 2 Social Justice

## FACULTY & STAFF

Instructor. **Sabrina Johnson** joins the FCS community after her time at Right At School, where she served as Program Manager. She has a Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies from Penn State and has held roles at both the Grayson School and the Haverford School. An ordained minister, Sabrina cares deeply about her faith and the inclusion of children and families within communities. She will work closely with and be mentored by Erica Snowden, our Director of Equity and Multicultural Education, to help carry out our plans for an antiracist curriculum within our Lower School.

Joining Friends' Central in the Middle and Upper School are **Elizabeth Carlson-Guerin**, Upper School drama teacher and director; **Katrina Collia**, Middle School English teacher, advisor, and coach; **Kirk German**, Middle School English teacher and advisor; **Stephanie Lista**, Middle School English teacher and advisor; **Karl Paranya**, Upper School math teacher; **Sonja Srama-Souder**, Middle School Prima Lingua and French teacher; **David Talone**, Upper School world languages teacher; and **Barbara von Salis**, Middle School history teacher.

Joining the the Admissions Office is **Sylvia Indyk Devietti**, Associate Director of Admissions for Middle and Upper School.

Friends' Central also welcomes two interns in Support Services: **Alessandra Loffreda-Mancinelli** and **Caroline Royal**.

Welcome to Friends' Central! **qw**

## Introducing Erica Snowden



### Director of Equity and Multicultural Education

We were thrilled to welcome Erica to the FCS community in July 2020. As a member of the Friends' Central senior administrative team, Erica oversees equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts school-wide.

Since joining FCS, Erica has implemented an equity audit. Many alumni/ae/x, families, colleagues, and students have already completed the survey and volunteered to be interviewed for the audit. The culminating report and findings will be shared with the community upon completion, with checkpoints for progress and accountability.

Among other initiatives by Erica that are already underway, the School has been engaged in a great deal of anti-bias/anti-racist professional development over the past two months.

Erica comes to FCS from Greene Street Friends School, where she served in a number of roles since 2012, including Dean of the Lower School, Learning Specialist, and Diversity Clerk. Erica is a nationally recognized expert in the field of diversity and inclusion. She has published widely and is frequently asked to present at national and local conferences. Before joining the Greene Street Friends community, Erica was Dean of Students at Friends School in Detroit. Erica holds an MS in educational leadership from the University of Pennsylvania, an MA degree from Marygrove College, and a BS degree from Lincoln University.





**THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** Grade 8 family at the Meeting for Leaving; grade 5 family at the bell ceremony; teacher Sharon Morsa delivering “moving up” packets to grade 8 students; the grade 8 Meeting for Leaving; teacher and parent Cheryl Davis with son Blake '27 at the bell ceremony; the grade 8 Meeting for Leaving

**OPPOSITE** Gemma '27 receiving her diploma

**O**n June 8, the FCS Middle School celebrated the Class of 2024 at the Eighth grade Meeting for Leaving. The community participated in a Zoom Meeting for Worship, followed by a virtual Meeting for Leaving ceremony in which each student was individually recognized.

The Lower School held their bell ceremony on June 12 to mark the transition of fifth grade students to Middle School. Students and families progressed slowly through campus in their cars, collecting their diplomas at the Friendship Bell as Lower School teachers held up congratulatory signs from the pathways.





# *Grade Five & Grade Eight Celebrate Transitions*

It was a beautiful day on Friday, June 12 as we celebrated our 5th grade students and families, during our grade 5 bell ceremony. Although it looked a bit different from our previous bell-ringing ceremonies, this year's event was certainly one to remember.

## **Middle School Citizenship Awards**

During the last week of school, the Middle School recognized the following Class of 2024 winners of Citizenship Awards for their contributions as citizens to the School community and to the community at large.

### ***Ida Hill Cabn Award for Peace Through Service***

Nia Brooks  
Savina Copas

### ***Frank M. Groff Award for Sportsmanship and Friendship***

Jacquo Pierre  
Quin Stovall

### ***Jacqueline Frances O'Neill Award for Enthusiasm and Spirit***

Phoebe Davidson  
Spencer Kim  
Nora-Simone Thorne



# COMMENCEMENT 2020

## *Celebrating the In-Between and Honoring the Radical Compassion of the Class of 2020*

Friends' Central's 175th Commencement on Saturday, August 1 was quieter, with far fewer people in attendance than any previous Commencement in memory. Members of the Class of 2020 and their parents/guardians, seated at individual tables arranged in front of the Graduation Terrace, were masked and observing physical distance. Despite the unusual circumstances, there was no less a sense of occasion than any other year. The sun shone, the campus was beautiful, and the quality of the speeches outstanding. It was thanks to the hard work and careful planning of many, along with the responsible observance of all the safety measures by the attendees, that the in-person event was possible at all.

The ceremony began with 86 members of the graduating class – who number 101 in total – processing, six feet apart, in front of the Main Building and across the Graduation Terrace to sit with their families and hear the speeches.

Head of School Craig N. Sellers, in his welcoming message, acknowledged the many people who were watching the proceedings via the livestream, not able to be there in person. “I want to make sure that my welcome on behalf of all of us is just as genuine for those attending via the internet this morning as it is for those who are sitting here at 86 tables in front of me,” he said.

The first student speaker, Jade Halpern, delivered a beautiful speech focusing on the “in-betweens.” “Buddhist tradition calls the space in-between death and rebirth *bardo*, the period where the greatest spiritual transformation is possible,” she explained. “Zen meditation often concentrates on the space between one breath and the next, because that microscopic in-between is where our existence hides, without distraction.”

She reminded her classmates of the moment half of them were stranded when the bus broke down on the way home from a field trip in October, and they were stuck on a highway median, between two opposing lanes of traffic. “When that bus ran out of fuel miles from home, we got handed an in-between – this rare and special space where you are truly in the middle of nowhere, with nothing to do.”

“I’m speaking to you all today as we end one of the longest in-betweens of our lives and commence upon the next,” she concluded. “You could look back at our momentous 14 years and define the Class of 2020 as the one that submitted their Common Apps two days after that bus ride, participated in the largest civil rights movement our country has ever seen, and graduated in a pandemic. And you’d be right, but come on, have you met my classmates? Of course they’re going to change the world. Today, let’s just look for the in-betweens. For a moment, let’s take our eyes off the theatrical thunderstorm overhead and just watch our friends dancing on the highway median in front of us.”

Gordon Wilcox, the second student speaker, highlighted the “radical compassion” of his classmates in his uplifting speech. “There is something special about the Class of 2020. And they all say the same thing – it’s how we care for each other, how we support each other. I know, as I’ve had that experience personally,” he said, sharing an example from ninth grade when he participated in the student-teacher basketball game and made a major misstep. His classmates could have made him feel humiliated. “Instead, I felt supported,” he said. “Here’s why. They reminded me that it wasn’t about playing my highest level of basketball but it was about putting myself out there and having fun while I do it.”



# COMMENCEMENT 2020

1. Connor Mack '20

2. Grant Calder, history teacher and parent of two graduates, delivering the Commencement address

3. Evan Sweitzer '20 receiving his diploma



4. Fariha Khan, Vice-Clerk of the FCS Board of Trustees giving a reading

5. Students prepare to process to the ceremony



6. Nicole and Mary Rose Gilliland '20 receiving their diplomas

7. Tristan Szapary '20

8. Lucas Klein '20

TO SEE MORE PHOTOS FROM COMMENCEMENT 2020, VISIT [bit.ly/FCSAlbums2020](http://bit.ly/FCSAlbums2020)



“The Dalai Lama said, ‘Compassion is the radicalism of our time.’ I never thought our class to be radical, but by his standards, you’ve proved to be nothing but,” Gordon continued. “Time and time again, this class has demonstrated truly compassionate forms of radicalism. We fought to protect the environment by pushing to have refillable water bottle stations on campus, took stands for racial justice by participating in Black Lives Matter protests, and spoke at rallies against gun violence.”

He exhorted his classmates to “continue this radical compassion wherever we go next. Keep challenging the status quo, keep uplifting our friends, and make sure to keep having fun while we do it.”

Grant Calder, faculty speaker, struck a more somber note, stressing the importance of looking to the past to learn the valuable lessons it has to offer. He provided the example of the knowledge gained about social distancing from the flu of 1918. Beyond the lessons, he said, “History offers us more; its

recognizable cycles and patterns reassure us that versions of the challenges we face in our times have been shared by our forebears. They persevered and so shall we.”

He asked the graduates – whether or not they become professional writers – to write about their lives. “Our chronicles and narratives are the *big things*.” He also encouraged them to “show interest in those you meet, listen to their stories, and when they’re disturbing or painful to hear, make an extra effort. I’m convinced that connecting and communicating are the most effective ways to make our society healthier.”

Following the speeches, the graduating seniors each received their diploma directly from a parent or guardian and officially joined the ranks of the many proud and distinguished Friends’ Central alumni/ae/x.

We wish all the members of the talented, compassionate, and courageous Class of 2020 all the very best as they head out and continue to peacefully transform the world. [QW](#)

**The 1845 Award** is an honor conferred by the graduating Class and the Upper School faculty on two members of the Class of 2020 who embody the characteristics displayed in Friends’ Central’s school seal. These characteristics are, as reflected in the image of a balance scale, a classmate with a commitment to fairness and justice; as reflected in the image of a bird in flight with an olive branch, a peer who has taken thoughtful risks and broadened our understanding of peace; as reflected in the clasping hands, a friend who “lets their life speak,” providing a pattern for the lifelong relationships. The 1845 Award was presented by Head of School Craig N. Sellers to **Emma Malone** and **Benjamin Miller**.

## 2020 Cum Laude Society Inductees

On May 28, live via Zoom and YouTube, Friends’ Central School held its annual Upper School Academic Awards Ceremony, recognizing students for their outstanding efforts in academics, service, and citizenship. The ceremony began with the induction of 20 members of the Class of 2020 into the Cum Laude Society.

The Cum Laude Society recognizes the distinguished academic record of students during their Friends’ Central career. In his address to this year’s inductees, Head of School Craig N. Sellers said that, as members of the Friends’ Central Cum Laude Society, part of their responsibilities is “to make some contribution to the ongoing search for greater understanding of the world in which we live.”

**The 2020 inductees into the Friends’ Central School Cum Laude Society are: Thaddeus Bashaw, Caroline Blackman, Marielle Buxbaum, Grace Decatur, Lucas DeSipio, Ruolin “Victoria” Feng, Benjamin Flora, Elisabeth Forsyth, Jade Halpern, Benjamin Lehrer, Jing “Vicky” Liu, Rachel McCabe, Benjamin Miller, Jonathan Roach, Lindsey Schweitzer, Tristan Szapary, Anna Volpp, Ziyun “Victoria” Wang, Jane Whellan, and Muhan “James” Yu.**






"... have you met my classmates? Of course they're going to change the world. Today, let's just look for the in-betweens. For a moment, let's take our eyes off the theatrical thunderstorm overhead and just watch our friends dancing on the highway median in front of us."

**Jade Halpern '20, Commencement Speaker**





"Time and time again, this class has demonstrated truly compassionate forms of radicalism. We fought to protect the environment by pushing to have refillable water bottle stations on campus, took stands for racial justice by participating in Black Lives Matter protests, and spoke at rallies against gun violence."

**Gordon Wilcox '20, Commencement Speaker**



## The Class of 2020 College Choices

American University	Lafayette College	UCLA (2)
Arcadia University	Lehigh University	University of California, Irvine
Bard College	Macalester College	University of Chicago
Bennington College	Massachusetts Inst. of Technology	University of Delaware
Boston University (2)	Miami University - Oxford	University of Michigan (2)
Brown University (2)	Middlebury College (3)	University of Oregon
Bryn Mawr College	Mississippi State University	University of Pennsylvania (5)
Carnegie Mellon University	Mount Holyoke College	University of Pittsburgh (3)
Claremont McKenna College	Muhlenberg College	University of Rochester
College of the Holy Cross	New York University - Tisch	University of St. Andrews
Colorado College	New York University (2)	University of Sydney
Cornell University	Northeastern University	University of Vermont
Drexel University (4)	Penn State University	University of Virginia
Elon University	Point Park University	Ursinus College
Emory College	Princeton University	US Air Force Academy
Florida International University	PSU Schreyer Honors College	Vassar College
Franklin & Marshall College (3)	Rice University	Villanova University
Harvard College	Roberts Wesleyan College	Washington University in St. Louis (6)
Haverford College	Sarah Lawrence College	Wellesley College
Hofstra University	Stevens Institute of Technology	Wesleyan University (2)
Howard University (2)	Swarthmore College	Wheaton College
Johns Hopkins University	Syracuse University (2)	York College of Pennsylvania (2)
	Trinity College	

### CLASS OF 2020 ATTENDING SPECIALIZED COLLEGES AND PROGRAMS, INCLUDING:

One Historically Black College, Three Women's Colleges, Three Honors Colleges, Five Theater and Arts Programs, Ten Graduates to Ivy League Schools, MIT, Stevens Institute of Technology, New York University Stern School of Business, US Air Force Academy, University of Sydney





# The Class of 2020













# Celebrating the Class of 2020

In honor of this extraordinary class on their last official day of classes, the students had lawn signs delivered to their homes, and many submitted photos of themselves with their signs, all of which appear here and were also shared in a slideshow with families.





# PONDERING A PANDEMIC

## A RETROSPECTIVE ON THE SPRING OF 2020

Over the next few pages, we take a look at the ways teachers and students alike adapted to the abrupt transition to Virtual FCS this spring. We explore how the Distinguished Visiting Lecture Series went ahead in a different format, along with many other virtual classroom visits from a wide range of

artists and other professionals. We look at how Upper School faculty came together to save Senior Project, and we give several examples of how outstanding FCS teachers – through dedication, ingenuity, and creativity – found ways to engage their students and keep them learning through it all.



# VIRTUAL VISITORS TO CAMPUS

When COVID-19 forced the shutdown of on-campus learning in mid-March, our Distinguished Visiting Lecture Series had to change format temporarily. Although it remains true that there's no substitute for face-to-face interactions, with various technology platforms, both our 2020 Distinguished Visiting Humanities speaker, Daniel Immerwahr '98, and our 2020 Distinguished Visiting Scientist, Helen White, were able to visit and work with students. In addition to the Distinguished Visiting Lecture Series, Friends' Central teachers drew on the strength of their connections – particularly with alumni/ae/x – to coordinate a significant number of virtual visits to classrooms this spring, enriching the students' learning experiences during this time of much uncertainty.

## DISTINGUISHED VISITING HUMANITIES LECTURER

With the assistance of Upper School history teacher Grant Calder, Daniel Immerwahr '98 met with faculty and student members of the Humanities Core Team in April for an online discussion. Daniel is an author and associate professor at Northwestern University, specializing in 20th century U.S. history within a global context. His recent book, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, is described by *The New York Times* as “wry, readable, and often astonishing.” Guided by Upper

“HAVING DANIEL FOR AN HOUR BY VIDEO WAS BOTH WONDERFUL AND FRUSTRATING,” EXPLAINED GRANT. “THE SESSION WAS GREAT, BUT IT MADE US REALIZE HOW MUCH MORE WE COULD HAVE DONE WITH HIM IN PERSON OVER A WHOLE DAY AND AN EVENING.”

- GRANT CALDER  
UPPER SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER

School history teacher Danielle Saint Hilaire, the Humanities Core Team had spent the previous six months studying Daniel's book.

“Having Daniel for an hour by video was both wonderful and frustrating,” explained Grant. “The session was great, but it made us realize how much more we could have done with him in person over a whole day and an evening.”

## DISTINGUISHED VISITING SCIENTIST

Helen White, 2020 Distinguished Visiting Scientist, is Professor of Chemistry and Environmental Science at Haverford College. Her work as a geochemist has focused on the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in a collaborative project that examined what happened chemically to the oil and to the dispersants used in the aftermath of the disaster. She is the winner of Haverford College's 2017 Henry Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar Award. For her virtual visit, Dr. White shared three pre-recorded videos she had made specifically for the students to watch, and then, on May 1, she held a live



Daniel Immerwahr '98



Helen White

Q&A via Zoom with Upper School Science Core Team students and Upper School science teachers John Gruber and Anna Schall, which all Middle and Upper School students and faculty were invited to watch via the FCS YouTube channel.

Anna Schall shared, “Dr. White was generous with her time and energy throughout the yearlong process of our Distinguished Visiting Scientist program. Once it came time for the virtual visit, she really went above and beyond. The videos that she produced for the FCS community in lieu of the traditional lecture touched beautifully on her journey to being a marine chemist, as well as her current and future research.”



“DR. WHITE WAS GENEROUS WITH HER TIME AND ENERGY THROUGHOUT THE YEARLONG PROCESS OF OUR DISTINGUISHED VISITING SCIENTIST PROGRAM. ONCE IT CAME TIME FOR THE VIRTUAL VISIT, SHE REALLY WENT ABOVE AND BEYOND.”

- ANNA SCHALL  
UPPER SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER

## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI/AE/X VISITORS

In mid-April, coordinated by Middle and Upper School music teacher Carl Bradley, LA-based composer and producer **Jackson Greenberg '08** paid a virtual visit. A group of young FCS musicians took full advantage of the generous offer from Jackson, joining him for an engaging and informative online film-scoring workshop.

A former student of Grant Calder, **Gabe Levitt '96**, visited Grant's history class in May. The class had been studying the Vietnam War and reading several related sources. Gabe and his Vietnamese partner run a “social enterprise” (the equivalent of a non-profit) in Ho Chi Minh City that helps young Vietnamese women lacking education to build domestic service job skills and gain employment with a solid living wage.

In April, Drama and English teacher Terry Guerin's drama class had a surprise visit—they were “zoom bombed” by award-winning songwriter and composer **Benj Pasek '03** from his office in NYC! Terry reported, “He spent an hour with us and could not have been more gracious—answering questions, cheering us on, and talking about a career in theatre. It was amazing.”

In May, comedy touring agent **Michael Grinspan '05** joined Terry's Zoom drama class to talk about working in the

comedy, sitcom, and television business in LA. Later that month, Terry's ensemble theatre and play making class had a visit from screenwriter **David Brind '96**, who spoke about and screened his *Dare* project for the students and shared his experiences working in the film industry. **Tom Robson '98**, Associate Professor in the School of Theatre and Dance at Millikin University, visited with Terry's drama class to discuss how the lockdown has affected theatre. Terry's drama students were also visited via Zoom in May by author, critic, podcaster, screenwriter, and television producer **Andy Greenwald '95**.

## OTHER DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

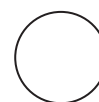
In addition to the many alum visits, in April, students in the Upper School Climate Fiction Class, led by Monty Ogden (English and humanities teacher) and Dwight Dunston '06 (Coordinator of Equity & Justice Education), received a virtual visit from **Ashley Shelby**, a prize-winning author whose work – read by the class – addresses climate change.

FCS parent **Brian Gordon** visited Grant Calder's U.S. history class (virtually) in mid-May. Brian served three terms as a Lower Merion Township commissioner and ran for Congress.

In April, **Matt Doeblar**, Associate Music Director of the Broadway production *Jagged Little Pill*, visited music teacher Michele Zuckman's Upper School chorus class to talk about his career trajectory. Michele also arranged a visit for the chorus students in May from voice teacher and choral conductor **Holly Phares**.

Also in May, composer and music teacher **Suzzette Ortiz** held an online workshop for Michele's world music drumming class, and professional vocal percussionist **Tiago Grade** met with both Upper School chorus and world music drumming.

It's a mark of the dedication, adaptability, and creativity of FCS faculty members that, in spite of the challenges of the current environment, they have been able to continue to connect and engage students with the wider world. FCS teachers went beyond to ensure that these important encounters with visiting scholars, scientists, artists, musicians, and writers were not lost this spring. **QW**



EXCERPTED FROM THE FULL ARTICLE, PUBLISHED IN [FCSFEATURES.ORG](https://fcsfeatures.org), FRIENDS' CENTRAL'S ONLINE MAGAZINE

**Benj Pasek '03 (bottom row, second from right) on the surprise Zoom call with Terry's class**





“As classrooms across the country emptied and teachers were left to figure out a new world of teaching, I was continually amazed by the resilience, commitment, and creativity of our Lower School faculty – each teacher working with a steadfast focus on keeping the warmth and engagement of their classrooms alive through screens,” said Lower School Principal Melody Acinapura.

Charisma Presley, FCS parent of two Lower School children, reflected on the spring. “To say the least, it has been an adventure! There have been some hiccups along the way, but the teaching staff and the Principal in the Lower School were great with encouragement. And I think encouragement went both ways – for the teachers and for us. We were encouraging them because we knew this was very new for them, and they were very responsive to feedback. I really appreciated that. It made them be more human and say, ‘Hey, we’re figuring this out together.’”

“From my perspective,” shared Charisma’s husband Joseph Dougherty, “I remember being impressed at how proactive FCS was in responding to the coronavirus threat ... I also appreciate how open and responsive the School was to the

needs of my children. The frequent communication from the teachers and administrators asking for feedback was a relief whenever I started to feel like everything was becoming overwhelming. There was a willingness and openness to change that was undergirded by genuine care and positivity from the School. Virtual learning was by no means pleasant, but I thank God that my kids are at FCS during these times.”

From the youngest Lower School learners to the fifth graders readying for the transition to Middle School, all had to be kept engaged while parents and teachers alike grappled with life under lockdown. The Lower School faculty clearly rose to the challenge. Below are a few examples of the many adaptations and creative solutions devised by teachers. The following pieces are excerpted from the full articles, which are available on the School’s online magazine, [fcsfeatures.org](http://fcsfeatures.org).

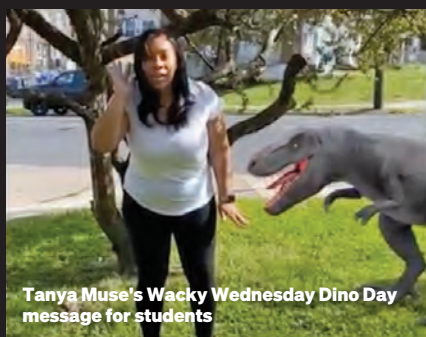
**“THERE WAS A WILLINGNESS AND OPENNESS TO CHANGE THAT WAS UNDERGIRD BY GENUINE CARE AND POSITIVITY FROM THE SCHOOL.”**

**- JOSEPH DOUGHERTY, P ’29, P ’31**

## MAINTAINING THE MAGIC OF KINDERGARTEN

“The magic of Kindergarten at Friends’ Central is hard to describe,” said Lower School Principal Melody Acinapura. “It’s teachers who transform their classrooms into rainforests, arrive at your doorstep dressed as a crayon, and organize trips to Harlem to expand the world and knowledge of our youngest learners. That did not stop when we were forced to teach virtually!”

In speaking with FCS Kindergarten teachers Tanya Muse ’02 and Kristi Kallam, it’s evident that the secret to their successful transition to Virtual FCS was a potent alchemy of extremely hard work, dedication to their students, an abundance of creativity and collaboration, and plenty of technical know-



**Tanya Muse's Wacky Wednesday Dino Day message for students**



**Kristi Kallam's Theme Thursday recording from the Millennium Falcon**

how – all brought to life by the natural warmth and charisma of both teachers. Assistant Teachers Jared Deveau and Caleb Shelton completed the dynamic team and brought their own strengths and energy to Kindergarten learning.

### THEME WEEKS AND CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

The teachers maintained a sense of fun within the learning. They also kept to a firm schedule, which helped provide some structure and continuity. “Early on in Virtual FCS,” explained Tanya, “we decided that we were going to have themed Wednesdays.” The team brainstormed themes, including a Dino Day. With no dinosaur outfit on-hand, Tanya explored dinosaur filters online and



found several on Snapchat. Enlisting the help of her son Omar '26, she recorded her message to students with a T-Rex standing behind her outside on the front lawn, one small dinosaur indoors on her head, and several dinosaurs that appeared tattooed on her face. "It was really fun. The kids LOVED it," said Tanya.

Kristi had an Around-the-World Theme Thursday every week for her students. Dangler, a toy sloth, is the class mascot, and she titled the challenge *Where in the World is Dangler?* For the first virtual week, in March, Dangler went to ancient Egypt. "The first clue was a triangle," explained Kristi, "and then students had to read books about camels and hieroglyphics. Then they would do activities around that culture and that region, and, at the very end, the final clue would be 'Where do you think Dangler is?'"

"I used a green screen in my videos. I made Dangler talk using an app. That was probably the biggest highlight. It was such a big hit that a number of my students acquired their own Dangers, and we'd have 'playdates' with Dangers!"

### STAYING CONNECTED

The teachers ensured there were plenty of opportunities for students to connect with them virtually as needed, including Community Fridays, where they'd meet with their classes in small groups synchronously to wrap-up each week's learning.

Tanya encouraged parents to set up a meeting with her if students just needed some check-in time. She also made a point of visiting students' homes – safely and at a physical distance, of course! One home drop-off Tanya made was in

honor of World Book Day. The teachers chose *The Day the Crayons Quit* as the highlighted book. Tanya and her sons dressed up as crayons and delivered a stuffed crayon to each student.

Kristi, whose house an hour away made student drop-off visits difficult, was equally committed to maintaining the connection with her students during the pandemic. She provided ample opportunities for students to check in with her in real time that were different each week, along with regular one-on-one student check-ins.

"Virtual FCS was difficult. No one had the blueprint for how to teach online this way," said Tanya. "We had to figure it out. In Kindergarten, kids are impressionable. I think that's why Kindergarten teachers are so bubbly. I was determined to make sure that the experience they had with me in the classroom was, as much as possible, the same online. The only thing I can do is be myself and make sure they're learning."

By all accounts, the learning not only continued smoothly for Kindergarten students, but it also remained joyful and fun. The teachers both shared plenty more examples of creative learning techniques that they were able to bring to Virtual FCS. "Whether it was being chased by dinosaurs or finding themselves lost in space," said Principal Melody Acinapura, "our Kindergarten team, led by the incredible Tanya Muse '02 and Kristi Kallam, was nothing short of spectacular!" QW



EXCERPTED FROM THE FULL ARTICLE, PUBLISHED IN [FCSFEATURES.ORG](https://fcsfeatures.org), FRIENDS' CENTRAL'S ONLINE MAGAZINE



Tanya, Omar '26, and Nathan '30 dressed for World Book Day

**"WHETHER IT WAS BEING CHASED BY DINOSAURS OR FINDING THEMSELVES LOST IN SPACE, OUR KINDERGARTEN TEAM WAS NOTHING SHORT OF SPECTACULAR!"**

**- MELODY ACINAPURA  
LOWER SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**



For one assignment, students were tasked with building a pyramid using materials from home.



## THE FOURTH GRADE IMMIGRATION UNIT GOES VIRTUAL

The traditional Ellis Island one-day field trip is the single biggest educational event for FCS fourth graders – one eagerly anticipated by all. When the pandemic rendered an in-person visit impossible, fourth grade teacher Alice McBee knew she had to find a way to salvage the trip – to make it virtual, without losing the impact of the experience. She needed to tap into her creativity and bring her acting game to make it as real as possible.

The class reads two books for their immigration unit – *Letters from Rifka*, about a Russian Jewish family's emigration in 1919 to the US via Belgium, based on the personal account of author Karen Hesse's great-aunt Lucille Avrutin; and *Inside Out and Back Again*, inspired by author Thanhha Lai's childhood experience as a Vietnamese refugee to the US after the Fall of Saigon.

In groups of around four students to keep the experience intimate, Alice took the students through a more modernized version of Rifka's journey to Ellis Island, starting in Belgium, using Google Earth. They went from Antwerp through the English Channel, across the Atlantic, with Alice pointing out important spots and asking the students questions along the way. Tapping into her talents as an actor and her prior background in community theatre was crucial to bringing each aspect of the journey to life.

When they "arrived" at Ellis Island, Alice switched to the Ellis Island website and its virtual tour – which wasn't designed for her purpose but did provide some

behind-the-scenes places and parts of the island that hadn't been renovated – before moving up into the legendary Great Hall, with its high, vaulted ceiling. At this point, she used a slideshow of her own photographs to continue the visit.

At the far end of the Great Hall are the Stairs of Separation, as they were known – "a long flight of stairs that go back down. There's no fanfare to these stairs," explained Alice, "but the stairs themselves have worn away with the feet of all the people who've walked over them – the millions of immigrants. You can see how the stairs have worn away unevenly, and that part always gives me chills. We traditionally crouch down at one end and look back up the flight of stairs, and you can see the light shining on the edge of each stair." Using her own slideshow photographs, she was able to recreate the powerful moment virtually for her students.

"As I always do with the kids, I asked questions such as, 'How would this feel to you if you were an immigrant?'" The sense of awe of the students and their responses showed Alice that, "at that point, they were really in it with me." It felt very similar to the reactions that she would have expected to see had they been there in person. Typically, many students connect the experience to their own ancestors' stories, often with a sense of wonder and amazement that they are retracing their ancestors' steps, and this virtual visit was no different.

"The invitation from Alice to join her fourth grade virtual tour of Ellis Island as

"ALICE WAS MASTERFUL IN PLOTTING OUR COURSE THROUGH GOOGLE MAPS FROM EASTERN EUROPE TO THE TWO TINY ISLANDS ON THE HUDSON RIVER, PLACES WHICH HELD SO MUCH HOPE FOR THOUSANDS OF BRAVE IMMIGRANTS, READY TO BEGIN A NEW LIFE IN AMERICA AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY."

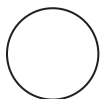
- GINGER FIFER  
INTERIM LOWER SCHOOL  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL



The second virtual trip of the fourth grade immigration unit was to Angel Island State Park in the San Francisco Bay. From 1910 to 1940, the northeast corner of Angel Island served as an immigration station. For this visit, ranger John Clagett led the students as a class on a live zoom tour from Angel Island, where he lives. Pictured here is John speaking to students from a bunk bed on Angel Island, where the immigrants were housed.



the culmination of her annual spring immigration study was intriguing,” said Interim Lower School Assistant Principal Ginger Fifer. “How could it come close to the experience and excitement of actually being there, on a field trip I had established 20 years previously with my fourth grade class? Alice was masterful in plotting our course through Google Maps from eastern Europe to the two tiny islands on the Hudson River, places which held so much hope for thousands of brave immigrants, ready to begin a new life in America at the turn of the 20th century. Passing the Statue of Liberty and moving through the Ellis Island Immigration Museum virtually provided us all with a deep understanding of why Ellis Island was indeed the ‘Island of Hope, Island of Tears’ for so many of our forebears in the FCS community. Alice’s expertise, both as teacher and tour guide, resulted in an unforgettable experience.” **QW**



EXCERPTED FROM THE FULL ARTICLE, PUBLISHED IN [FCSFEATURES.ORG](http://FCSFEATURES.ORG), FRIENDS' CENTRAL'S ONLINE MAGAZINE

(Below) A Kindergarten Community Friday game of Kahoot with Light Lab Director Brie Daley, Kristi Kallam, and Caleb Shelton

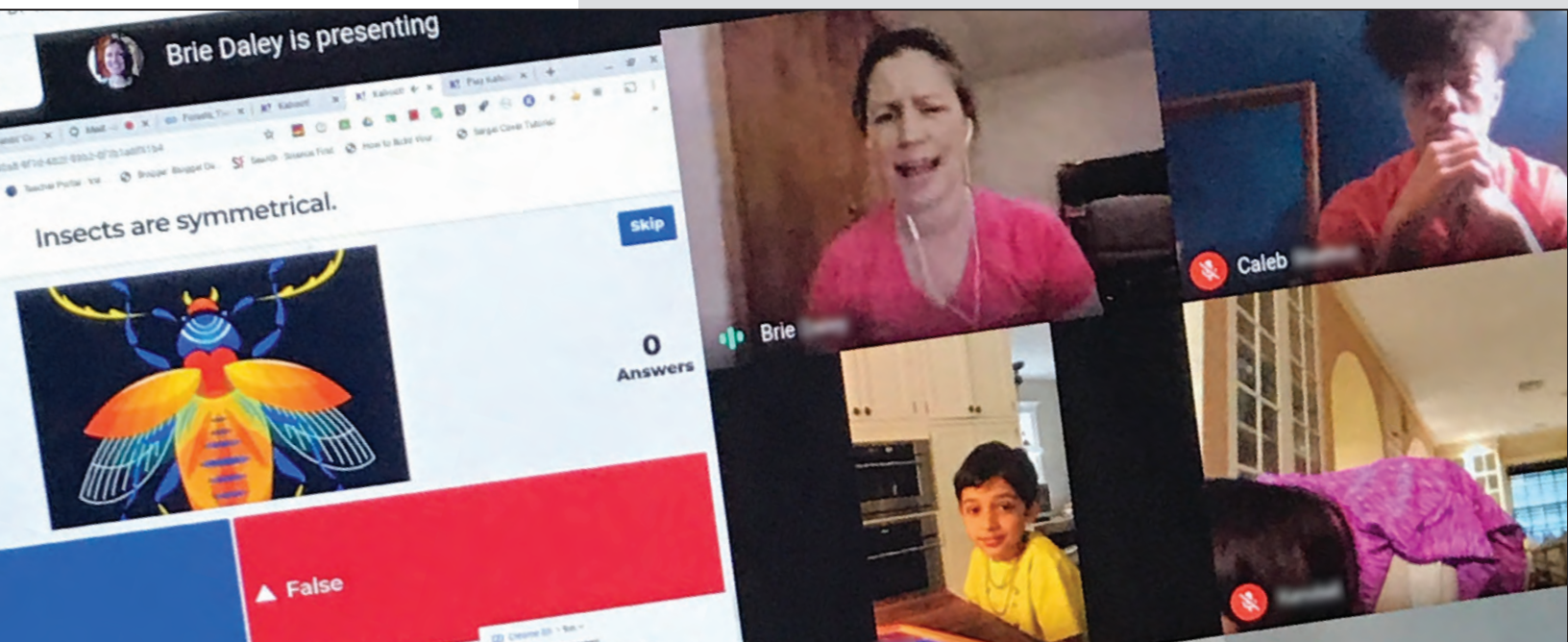
## THE STRUCTURE OF FIFTH GRADE VIRTUAL LEARNING

During the spring, “our fifth grade team found an excellent way to provide new content and support to their students with a very quick turnaround,” explained Lower School Principal Melody Acinapura.

Fifth grade teacher Sue Clough, in her own words, described the approach. “I split the class into small groups of around four or five and met with each small group two times a week in order to present new material and give students a chance to ask questions. If a group was not meeting with me on a certain day, I provided a teaching video and practice activities for them. I also offered live extra help sessions three times a week, as well as optional enrichment small groups two times a week. Students were also able to ask for individual meetings as needed. The math workshop model was used, and students worked in small groups to

solve problems during our live lessons. They then individually created posters that explained their strategies. Enrichment was also offered by creating enhancement activities that were optional for those students who wanted to do more math, or wanted more creativity in the lessons.

“The challenge of virtual learning as a teacher was the steep technology learning curve and the amount of time it took. At the beginning, I was working 12 hours a day to keep up with planning, creating, and posting assignments for all students. Our curriculum is not formatted virtually, so I had to create it all from scratch as well as provide practice for the students not seeing me live on certain days. I do think we all adapted well, and I am confident that the fifth graders are ready for Middle School math.” **QW**





## SIXTH GRADE GLOBAL LEARNING DURING VIRTUAL FCS

Several years ago, Middle School history teacher Jebb Chagan changed the curriculum of his sixth grade history class with the aim of taking a wider, less Eurocentric, look at the world – more reflective of the students that are in FCS classrooms. “We start with Latin America and work our way over to Africa, and then we try to make our way into South Asia and the rest of Asia.” The course covers a variety of countries and regions on each continent.

Jebb has been welcoming several parents with international backgrounds to his classes as part of this World Cultures and Human Geography course. “It has allowed us to make connections to real-world events and many different cultures,” he explained. “It’s also a wonderful source of pride for students to have family members come in and share some of their lived experiences.”

Last winter, the father of Aleem Castillo-Gambardella ’26, Roberto Castillo Sandoval, visited the Middle School. Author, translator, and professor in the Department of Spanish at Haverford College, Mr. Castillo Sandoval is originally from Chile. During the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, he took part in peaceful demonstrations against the regime. He visited all three of Jebb’s classes in person and held informal Q&A sessions with the students, sharing his experience growing up in Latin America.

The father of Kareena Mathur ’26, Anurag Mathur, was also scheduled to visit Jebb’s classes in the spring, just a week after the pandemic forced the School to transition to Virtual FCS. Mr.

Mathur, who works at Google, was born in Iraq and grew up in Tanzania, Malaysia, and Liberia, before moving to the US for college. His current job typically involves a great deal of travel.

It was important to Jebb that the students didn’t lose out on the visit by Mr. Mathur. “We try to create opportunities for our students to have a personal connection to the curriculum and to real world events,” Jebb shared. “We do that anyway in our classrooms, but we have an added challenge when the learning is virtual.” The teachers had received some great training before embarking on Virtual FCS, said Jebb, “Our learning continues just as students’ learning continues.” Going virtual, and the technology involved, had some benefits when it came to guest speakers who may not be local.

For Mr. Mathur’s visit, Jebb helped students generate a list of questions, and Kareena herself brought those questions to her father in an interview, recorded asynchronously.

Mr. Mathur began the interview by describing his upbringing in various countries. His father was a university professor who took teaching jobs around the world, bringing his family with him. Mr. Mathur answered questions about the differences between his own education and that of FCS Middle Schoolers.

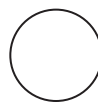
As a class, the students had been examining how colonization and poor leadership can have a negative impact on people’s lives. Kareena asked her father what role he felt a government should play in education. Mr. Mathur responded,



“In many countries, the government plays a much bigger role in the education system – which textbooks everyone will use, in particular.” This, he explained, can have a negative impact when, for example, history as described in the textbook could be edited by a president who might choose to remove pieces of history they didn’t like. In his own education, Mr. Mathur’s school would sometimes be forced to seek other sources of information – listen to the news, read other books from around the world, etc.

The video of his interview generated an ongoing dialogue for Jebb’s students, where kids were asked to comment on the conversation. “The goal is for the kids to think deeply and critically and have honest conversations,” explained Jebb.

Reflecting on the challenges of the spring, Jebb made it clear, “We couldn’t have done it without our students and families.” Although the switch to a virtual world hasn’t been easy, he felt that a lot of learning was still going on – particularly real world learning, with students being asked to manage their time in a way they hadn’t before, as well as to reach out for help. “Students really grew as young people in some ways, and they prepared themselves for future learning.” **QW**



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# RE-INVENTING SENIOR PROJECT

*When the majority of carefully planned FCS Senior Projects were undermined by the pandemic, the Upper School faculty came together to provide the seniors with meaningful alternatives.*

Senior Project, a capstone Friends' Central Upper School experience, traditionally takes place during the five-week period after seniors have finished their academic classes in late April. It's a time for seniors to get some hands-on experience – either testing the waters for a possible career choice or simply exploring a new area of interest outside the familiar bounds of school work – while also acquiring some independence and remaining engaged for the remainder of the school year leading up to Commencement.

Project choices are proposed by the students themselves and submitted for approval to the Senior Project Committee. The Senior Project Committee – headed by Upper School science teacher Dr. Phyllis Hanson with faculty members Deborah Skapik, Holly McCloskey, Linda Quinlan, Julie Plunkett, Kelley Graham, and Michele Zuckman – meets regularly throughout the school year, beginning in the fall, to help students through the process, assisting with a multitude of issues including project approval, deadlines, clearances needed, and even guidance on how to approach and interface with adults in the outside world.

As the school year progressed, the Class of 2020, supported by the Senior Project Committee and faculty advisors, was

ahead in their planning. By February, 80 percent of the seniors had projects lined up. There were projects in San Diego, Italy, and even at a Mount Everest base camp; internships and job shadows were set up in various disciplines. In early March, as COVID-19 infections increased in the US and abroad, projects started to get cancelled. Employers could no longer take students as interns or shadows, and travel was restricted. Steadily, the students were losing their opportunities. The process “fell apart with COVID-19,” said Phyllis.

As more and more projects were cancelled, Phyllis realized, “we need to rethink this,” and she met with Class of 2020 Dean Laurie Novo and the Upper School administrative team to discuss what would happen to this important tradition and how to provide the seniors with meaningful alternatives as their time at Friends' Central came to a close. Phyllis proposed the idea of Senior Seminars, where teachers would be asked to generate unique project ideas and lead a group of students through the project.

She sent an email to Upper School teachers and staff asking if any would be willing to develop and hold a Senior Seminar, and if they had ideas for how that seminar might look in light of COVID-19 restrictions. Within 30

minutes, Phyllis explained, she had 20 people respond to her with various seminar ideas. Overnight, teachers came together, and Senior Project was saved!

“When I received that incredible flood – and it was a flood – of responses,” said Phyllis, “I was overwhelmed with gratitude and admiration for the devotion our faculty has to the students. Everybody wanted to help the seniors.” “It truly was heartwarming to see how many teachers stepped up to offer seminar experiences,” agreed Laurie Novo.

A small number of Senior Projects could proceed as originally proposed – projects including the Grade 9 and 10 Play (albeit virtual), art exhibits, podcasts, music, novel writing, and computer-based research. Many of the international students had returned home and were able to complete their projects as planned.

*“WHEN I RECEIVED THAT INCREDIBLE FLOOD – AND IT WAS A FLOOD – OF RESPONSES, I WAS OVERWHELMED WITH GRATITUDE AND ADMIRATION FOR THE DEVOTION OUR FACULTY HAS TO THE STUDENTS.”*

**- DR. PHYLLIS HANSON  
UPPER SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER &  
SENIOR PROJECT COORDINATOR**



Senior Project photo essays by Eva Bartholomew (top row); Pierce Hayton (middle row), and Gordon Wilcox (bottom row)





## THE UPPER SCHOOL

The remaining students had the option of signing up for one of the Senior Seminars.

By mid-March, the seminars were in place, but it was difficult for many of the seniors to switch gears and feel enthusiastic about the new plan. After the initial letdown, the seniors moved ahead, selecting seminars and committing time and energy to their new projects. So many of the expectations they'd had for their senior spring had fallen apart, but they were resilient. "Once they got over the shock, they bounced back. They were appreciative of the new options; they adjusted as only teenagers can, and they showed us how to adjust. They weren't happy, but they understood," said Phyllis.

The choice of Senior Seminars was broad. Faculty put in a great deal of thought and work into their seminar proposals for students. Math teacher Brad Morris offered an analysis of COVID-19 – examining wide-ranging perspectives including scientific, statistical, psychological, sociological, economic, technological, international, social justice, and historic. Several students, guided by Head of School Craig N. Sellers, created a photo essay of the pandemic (*see previous page*). History teacher Kelley Graham and English teacher Bill Kennedy both offered book discussion seminars. Coordinator of Equity and Justice Education Dwight Dunston '06 and English teacher Monty Ogden

led a seminar on developing an advocacy campaign around climate change. Upper School science teacher John Gruber offered a seminar titled Field Notes in Science and Nature, with students heading outdoors, studying, taking notes, and practicing field note sketching. And there were many other seminar offerings.

Asked if she had any useful takeaways from this year's experience, Phyllis responded that, although developed out of a difficult and unprecedented situation, Senior Seminars were a net positive and had great future potential. Senior Seminars give students that are having trouble developing a project a way to have a valuable, hands-on educational experience. With this in mind, she would like to continue to see seminars offered as a Senior Project option. *QW*

**If an adult in the FCS community – current or past parent, grandparent, alum, past or present Board member – has an idea for a project and an interest in supporting a student, Phyllis would love to hear from you. Doctors, activists, lawyers, teachers, nurses, artists, and more, please contact her at [PHanson@friendscentral.org](mailto:PHanson@friendscentral.org).**

## SOME SENIOR PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Despite being in his last months before retirement, math teacher Brad Morris applied his usual energy and enthusiasm to his statistics seminar on COVID-19, a well-attended and unanimously enjoyed option.

Eva Bartholomew, Pierce Hayton, and Gordon Wilcox, who participated in Head of School Craig N. Sellers' seminar group, created photo essays of the pandemic (*see previous page*).

Drama teacher Terry Guerin guided students in the transition to a virtual format for the Grade 9 and 10 Play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Marielle Buxbaum '20.

In the writing workshop, led by Laurie Novo and Megan Schumacher, participants created a collection of pieces they titled *Pondering a Pandemic*. Seniors not in the seminar were also invited to contribute any creative pieces done during this time. Musicians, writers, podcasters, and students in the environmental activism seminar contributed to the publication.

Evan Sweitzer composed six pieces of music – two he described as conventionally composed pieces in a suite for piano and violin and four improvised piano pieces.

Sydney Bendesky invited artists to share work that they had created in quarantine. She compiled the rich range of pieces, including her own, into a map in a Prezi.

Roxy Calder and Savannah Lopez, who participated in Bill Kennedy's book seminar, created a podcast in which they discussed the connections between the two books they read in the seminar and the situation at the time of their reading.

Dabin Seomun worked on a powerful and creative graphic story.

Mary Rose Gilliland produced a short documentary interviewing several peers about their thoughts on COVID-19.

Alexandra Wang created some beautiful animations based on several paintings on the FCS campus.



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VISIT [ISSUU.COM/FRIENDSCENTRAL](https://issuu.com/friendscentral) TO READ *PONDERING A PANDEMIC*.





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