

Northern Potential

Inspired partnerships: forging new paths to education and opportunity

Together, we're on the trail to student success: An update from the Yukon University Foundation Board

Only 50 days have passed since the COVID-19 restrictions were enacted... Following recommendations of the Yukon's Chief Medical Officer, Yukon College ensured the safety of students and staff by restricting access to every campus building to only essential employees, with the majority working remotely to support student success. Classes finished the term by moving to alternate forms of delivery; Convocation and the Yukon University launch celebrations were postponed.

As the adage proclaims, "Crisis doesn't create character; it reveals it." COVID-19 certainly revealed the character of Yukon College: the leadership, innovation and resilience of its instructors, staff and students. Here are a few stories from this unprecedented time...

The Power of Compassion

From March 23 to May 1, eleven Culinary Arts program staff and students, eight Campus Housing staff, and 28 Yukon College staff volunteers served over 120 meals each day to students and families living in Campus Housing. The students were unable to prepare their own meals, as the communal kitchen was closed to due to COVID-19. **4,848 meals were served in the 39 day period!**



Students helping students! Campus Housing Student Staff Harkirat Kuar (left) and Karen Massiel Jimenez Perez (right) help fellow student Yuga Masuyama safely access a delicious meal.

The Power of Positivity

Shara (pronounced Sara) Kearney is no stranger to Yukon University. She started at Yukon College right after high school, and has completed both a Heritage and Culture Certificate and a Northern First Nations Studies Diploma. She'll be entering her final year of the Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Governance degree program in the fall.

Shara also worked as a Welcome Centre host for the past year, greeting visitors to the Ayamdigtug campus, directing calls, and maintaining the oh-so-important notice boards around the campus.

During her five years at Yukon College, Shara has experienced every course delivery option offered: online, hybrid (half in person/half online), and face-to-face (most of which had a videoconference interface for students in the communities or for those who couldn't make it to campus that day). She accessed almost all the student support services, and cited the Academic Support Centre, loan and funding advising, personal counselling and academic advising for their tremendous help.



COVID-19 has had a big impact on Shara. Her classes and student support services were moved to videoconference, telephone or email delivery, she lost her job at the Welcome Centre, and she lost the support of her classmates and colleagues. The cumulative effect of all these changes meant that Shara's anxiety escalated to unprecedented levels.

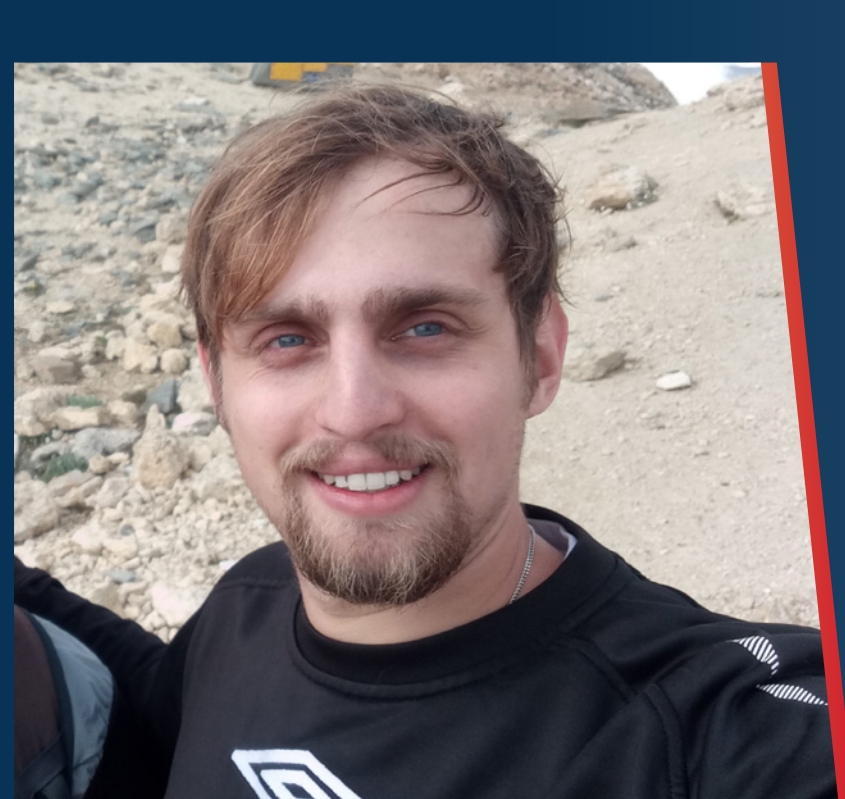
But Shara didn't let COVID-19 get the best of her. She drew on the lessons she learned during her time as a Yukon College student. She put her mental health first by limiting access to social media. She maintained a healthy balance of productivity and relaxation by completing class assignments and rediscovering her love of art. She reached out to her instructors, her supervisors at the Welcome Centre and her classmates to stay connected. Best of all, she's upheld her positive outlook: "I am excited for my final year and getting back to learning and growing with Yukon University."

[Yukon College staff and instructors] are a wonderful team, willing to help in any way possible.

The Power of Commitment

Andrea Bacchetta's hometown is Ivrea, Italy (in the country's northwest corner, close to the Swiss and French borders). He came to Canada in 2017 to pursue his passion for sled dogs. Not surprisingly, his pursuit led him north, to connect with the vibrant mushing community in the Yukon. Andy (as he prefers to be known) decided to enroll in the Northern Outdoor and Environmental Studies Diploma program at the College in the fall of 2019.

Andy admits to having a soft spot for social involvement. In just his second semester, he signed up for the Student Life Engagement Committee. It wasn't long before he was appointed as VP Internal for the Yukon College Student Union. This position also serves on the Senate, the academic governing body that came into force with the Yukon University Act in



February. He was also asked to participate on the President's Youth Advisory Committee. All this, and he was enrolled in five courses and had a part-time job at the Baked Café & Bakery!

Andy worked to understand the issues that face his fellow students: everything from quiet study spaces to support for mental health and wellness to access to housing. He ensured that the decision-makers at the College were aware of these issues, and he advocated for including students in the decision-making process.

And then COVID-19 arrived. College President, Karen Barnes, asked Andy to join the COVID-19 Committee to bring the student voice to the response planning. Andy was instrumental in shaping student supports during the pandemic: meals for on-campus housing students, maintaining casual employment for students and implementing a new grading system that accounted for the unprecedented circumstances.

Andy credits Yukon College for his rich experience as a student: Not only do faculty and staff know your name, they encourage you to step forward, to explore and to express your potential.

The Power of Community

The cancellation of the Arctic Winter Games on March 7 was, for many Yukoners, the first clear understanding of how serious the COVID-19 pandemic really was. It was a turning point for Melanie McFadyen, a Yukon College instructor and member of the Academic Support Centre (ASC) team. She cancelled her family's vacation and took a hard look at what this might mean for her English 060 – English for Academic Purposes class.

Luckily, she didn't have to face the COVID-19 challenge alone. Yukon College leadership was developing a response, and the ASC team worked together to chart a course to the end of the semester.

The first step? Reach out to students and ensure that they were ok. The ASC team wanted their students to know that Yukon College and their instructors were still available and ready to support them through such a dramatic change.

Contacting and maintaining regular connection with the 18 students in Melanie's class required a significant investment of time and resources. Some students had moved home and some had gotten out on the land to weather the crisis; some didn't have personal laptops nor access to the internet; some had children at home; some had jobs and some were suddenly unemployed and trying to find work; and still others found themselves homeless.

The ASC team believes that academic content is only one part of a student's educational journey. The Centre takes a holistic approach and supports the mental, spiritual and physical aspects of each student. That meant that the team worked diligently to connect with Melanie's ENGL 060 students, as well as the other students in the College Access Pathways program. They identified their needs and strove to meet them: borrowing a laptop from the Yukon College Library, helping with internet access, mailing grocery cards to those who were hungry, and scheduling weekly one-on-one meetings via Zoom or telephone to support their coursework. The ASC team connected students to other YukonU experts: Library staff to help with research, counselling services to provide personal support, and both academic and financial support advisors.

Nine students were able to complete their course with Melanie. What shone through the turmoil of COVID-19 was the resilience of Yukon College students, the level of commitment of staff and instructors, and the value of caring for each other.



Shots captured from the ASC's student support video.

The first step in Yukon College's COVID-19 response: Reach out to students and ensure they were ok.