Dear Colleagues:

I have lately read a number of historical accounts of infectious disease that wreaked havoc upon the living and laid millions in the grave. Cholera, bubonic plague, HIV/AIDS, influenza, measles, and smallpox have disrupted life, caused devastation, and often enough brought death.

My reading has helped me realize how obscured from consciousness have been the pandemic-sourced griefs and perils of figures whose accomplishments we admire. Justinian, who famously codified Roman law and undertook major building projects including Hagia Sophia, also lends his name to a particularly deadly plague. Julian of Norwich, the great anchoress and mystic, offered Christian counsel and encouragement to plague-shocked citizens of Norwich who sought her advice. I can’t keep up with the flurry of articles accounting for Shakespeare’s prodigious playwriting in the midst of plague (see here, here, and for a bit of levity from The New Yorker, here). In Annalee Newitz’s opinion piece a couple of days ago (“What Social Distancing Looked Like in 1666”), she points out that Oxford and Cambridge closed because of a mid-seventeenth-century plague, sending Isaac Newton home for what later was called his *annus mirabilis*. His mature work on calculus, optics, and theories of gravity and motion have their origins in that homebound year away from Cambridge. Justinian, Julian, Shakespeare, and Newton are but a few in a long line of rulers, saints, artists, and scientists whose work flourished in the face of pandemic threats to health and wellbeing.

Would to God that COVID-19 had never been. While it continues, we may give thanks that it is not worse than it is. Until it ends we rightly pray, “Lord, have mercy.”

Yet in one way or another, our mortal frailty is always with us, even when we disregard it. For this reason, I find it encouraging to remember that Justinian passed laws and built churches, Julian succored lost souls, Shakespeare wrote moving tragedies, and Newton revolutionized science—all the while imperiled by disease and social disruption, grieving their losses, and sustaining faith aware of life’s limits. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 presents us with grave challenges and real loss; even so, we rightly remain faithful stewards of the things entrusted to us by God.

Within the life of the Honors College, here are a few matters to note:

- As spring semester courses continue on an online basis—along with all of our advising and registration outreach efforts as well—please show sensitivity to students who are struggling. Survey data indicate that our students face personal challenges arising from family dynamics, finances, health, and housing, in addition to discontent with social distancing practices that have taken them away from our campus and separated them from friends. It is important that we support their academic progress through extraordinary teaching, mentoring, advising, and encouragement. Regularly updated information and resources are available on the [COVID-19 FAQ page](https://www.baylor.edu/).  

- Many of our faculty have completed the COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey, a University-wide initiative undertaken through the leadership of Provost Nancy Brickhouse. In order to ensure fully representative survey results, please be sure to complete the survey if you have not done so. It will remain available until April 17. If
you have questions, please contact **Lenore Wright**, associate professor of interdisciplinary studies and philosophy in the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core, director of the Academy for Teaching and Learning, and co-chair of the University's Task Force on Faculty Job Satisfaction.

- It will come as no surprise that the twenty-eighth annual **J. Harry and Anna Jeanes Academic Honors Week**, planned for the third week of April, is cancelled. One of the highlights of our spring semester, the week typically features thesis research presentations, a banquet for Honors Program and University Scholars Program seniors and their mentors, and Academic Honors Convocation, which recognizes outstanding students from across the University, honors Phi Beta Kappa inductees, and identifies the Cornelia Marschall Smith Outstanding Professor of the Year. As with the loss of other happy gatherings this term, we will do our best to provide an alternative form of recognition for fine students that will miss this special week of events.

- Congratulations are most deserving for **Anne-Marie Schultz**, director of the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core, upon her appointment as Master Teacher. The highest honor granted to faculty members for sustained excellence in teaching at Baylor, appointment as a master teacher comes after a rigorous process of nomination, committee recommendation, and review and decision by the Provost and President. Master Teachers are named on the basis of years of commitment to and highly successful practice of the art of teaching. We’re proud of your accomplishment, Anne, and we anticipate many more years of great teaching contribution from you.

- To our colleague **Alan Jacobs**, distinguished professor of humanities in the Honors Program, congratulations are in order for his book, *Breaking Bread with the Dead: A Reader’s Guide to a More Tranquil Mind*, available for pre-order [here](#). Taking up lively conversation with voices of the past, Alan “breaks bread” with the likes of Homer, Frederick Douglass, Henrik Ibsen, Simone Weil, and Edith Wharton, among others. Andrew Delbanco calls it “a moving account of how writers of the past can help us cope in the frantic present,” and Austin Kleon praises it as a “beautiful case for reading old books as a way to cultivate personal depth in shallow times.” Excellent work, Alan.

- Something beyond congratulations are due to **Paulette Edwards**, assistant to the dean of the Honors College, upon the announcement of her retirement, effective May 29. With an astonishing forty-six years of service to the University (plus three additional years of service during her undergraduate days), Paulette has witnessed remarkable change at Baylor, but she has remained steadfast in her commitment to excellence, integrity, loyalty, and our mission. I will forever appreciate the grace and support she has offered me during our shared time in the dean’s office. When, with a full heart and touching words, she let me know her decision to join Buddy in retirement, my response was, “well done, thou good and faithful servant.” We’re grateful to you, for you, and with you, Paulette, knowing that you have indeed done well.

All the best,

---

**Douglas V. Henry** | **Interim Dean**
Honors College | Baylor University
[baylor.edu/honorscollege](http://baylor.edu/honorscollege) | 254.710.7689