

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

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<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 33

Responding to the Crises

In order to provide a forum for YWMC members to share strategies and raise questions regarding the COVID-19 crisis as well as the crisis to address racial and social inequities, we have continued to hold Open Forums via our Zoom platform for members in general and for faculty. Information regarding links to these sessions are sent out via the YWMC Google Groups email lists. We welcome any institutional members of the Coalition who wish to join the conversation. For further information contact Ann Landis, annlandis@gmail.com. In addition, we have created several documents which readers may find useful in their thinking about these current issues. These may be found on our website: <https://yeswemustcoalition.org/publications-webinars>.

YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Mount Aloysius College

Established in 1853, **Mount Aloysius College** (MAC) is a private, not-for-profit, liberal arts institution located in Cresson, PA. Mount Aloysius is based in the Catholic tradition but welcomes students of all faiths. The College is one of 17 Mercy-sponsored colleges and universities in the United States and is a member of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education.



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Situated on 193 acres of land in the heart of the Allegheny Mountains, MAC provides small class sizes, and students benefit from accessible faculty and staff. The more than 1,000 full-time undergraduate students, 70% of whom are women, come mostly from throughout Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic region. The College offers more than 70 undergraduate and graduate programs and has an 11:1 student/faculty ratio. There are 16 Division III men's and women's athletic teams for students to participate in. Mount Aloysius has been a member of the Yes We Must Coalition since 2014.

Mount Aloysius College offers both need- and merit-based aid. Forty-eight percent of MAC students are first-generation, and 98% receive scholarships and other forms of financial aid. The average aid package, based on grants and scholarships, is approximately \$12,000 per student per year. There are over 90 endowed scholarships available to students, including a book scholarship sponsored by MAC's Alumni Association, which aims to offset the costs of textbooks for students.



Mount Aloysius holds true to the values of the Sisters of Mercy: mercy, service, justice, and hospitality. In the 2019–2020 academic year, for example, MAC students performed more than 10,000 hours of community service. The College also offers a variety of programs for students in need, including:

- Catherine's Cupboard, named after Catherine McAuley who founded the Sisters of Mercy, provides food, hygiene necessities, and other products donated by MAC employees, the College's Board of Trustees, and the community.
- The Mountie Career Closet is a thrift store stocked with professional attire. Students can contact the director of career services to "shop" for clothes for an upcoming

interview or internship. Through the Career Closet, students can receive an entire outfit at no cost.

- The Marc Sidone Short-Term Emergency Fund provides financial assistance to current students. Named after a former English professor at the College who died suddenly in 1990, the emergency fund provides money to cover books, food, transportation costs, and other living expenses, and is available to both undergraduate and graduate students.

Students have made regular use of these programs, especially the food bank. MAC also offers a hospitality center providing students food (although no longer freshly prepared meals), and a place to relax. Some students have reported that during these difficult times, the meals served at the hospitality center “got them through the day.”

In response to the COVID pandemic, Mount Aloysius is following all CDC guidelines and state-imposed restrictions. Large classes have either moved to assembly rooms or split into hybrids, with some courses moving to a completely online format. All students are required to wear PPE, and in certain classes (such as simulation labs), there are temperature checks. For the moment, most meetings and events have been moved to tents outdoors. The College purchased Adirondack chairs and spaced them outside; all students were also issued camp chairs which they can carry to the outdoor classes. Some meetings and events have been moved to a remote format. Interestingly, Student Affairs has noted that during spring semester and currently, the attendance at virtual events has been very good, with a number of students who never participated in activities prior to COVID-19 now participating--the virtual/remote setting is more conducive to their schedule and their home responsibilities.

To learn more about Mount Aloysius College, visit their website at <https://mtaloy.edu>.

Institutional Resources/Practices

Debt Relief for Adult Completers

American International College (MA) has recently implemented a new degree completion program offering debt relief to former students returning to the College. The Buzz Back program was created to give former undergraduate students an opportunity to return to complete their degree without the weight of outstanding account balances to hold them back. Students enrolled in the Buzz Back program have their initial outstanding balances forgiven upon completion of their degree, removing the financial obstacle created by that debt. Although a relatively new program, students have already begun taking advantage of this opportunity by re-enrolling and beginning to progress towards degree completion.

The Buzz Back program is open to undergraduate students who previously attended AIC and did not complete their degree, have not been enrolled for at least two years, and whose student account balances have not been placed with a collection agent. Degree programs must be completed within six years of reenrollment, and Buzz Back students must take a minimum of six credits per semester while maintaining a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher. In addition, payment arrangements covering all classes taken through the Buzz Back program must be approved in advance. Buzz Back does not forgive federal student loan debt or other accounts held by third party creditors.

“AIC was founded for the purpose of providing access to a quality education for the underserved, underrepresented people whose lives would be most transformed as a result. More than 130 years later, this mission is as relevant as ever,” said AIC’s Executive Vice President

for Academic Affairs Mika Nash, EdD. “The Buzz Back program was designed to remove one of the most limiting barriers preventing former students from returning to complete their degrees, and we are here to partner with them every step of the way.” For further information, go to <https://www.aic.edu/buzzback>.

Submissions for Future Issues

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice on their campuses this year. Send brief descriptions to Nia Lane Chester, YWMC Program Manager. niachester@gmail.com.