

# College of Liberal Arts and Sciences 2020-2025 Strategic Plan Report

Academic Year 2020-2021 (Fiscal Year 2021)

## I. Overview

As the largest and most academically diverse college at the University of Connecticut, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is fundamental to the success of the University and its students, faculty, staff, and constituents. The College provides critical ideas, infrastructure, and employment for the State of Connecticut and its impacts have global significance.

During the 2019-2020 academic year, more than 80 faculty, staff, and students in the College developed a CLAS Strategic Plan that articulated the College's mission, goals, and strategies for reaching those goals over the next five years.

We ensured from the beginning that the plan represented a dynamic entity, a roadmap of guiding principles with the flexibility to adapt to the changing environment in which we work. COVID-19 hit the world in spring 2020 as we were entering the last phase of creating this plan. We could not have imagined the duration or impact of the pandemic. Over the past year, the importance of developing a flexible guide that can adapt to situations we cannot control has become all the more clear.

This report reviews progress in the first year of the Plan's implementation. It is also available on the CLAS website.

## II. Statement of Mission, Vision, and Academic Themes

### *Mission*

The UConn College of Liberal Arts and Sciences transforms lives. Through critical research and inquiry, creative education and mentorship, and ethical social engagement, we generate the foundational, collaborative environment that empowers all members of the UConn community to discover their agency and do meaningful work in the world.

### *Vision*

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will be UConn's recognized and supported hub of learning and research, where an engaged, innovative liberal arts and sciences community develops student success, crosses boundaries of study, and reflects the diversity of our state and our world.

### *Academic Themes*

- The Earth and Its Future
- Sustainable Systems, Global Resources, and World Cultures
- Big Data: Science, Policy, and Ethics
- Inequalities, Social Justice, Truth, and Belief
- Health, Disease, and Well-Being
- Brain, Mind, Language, and Logic

### III. Report of Progress

We are at our best when our work is integrated across our goals. To make this report a useful and indexable document, the text is divided into sections, but many of the articulated goals and strategies overlap and complement one another.

For each of the four major College goals, we summarize the objectives set out in the original Strategic Plan and report progress on specific strategies (indicated with bold text) during the time period of July 2020-June 2021 (Fiscal Year 2021; FY21). In some cases, initiatives were added as we progressed through the year, which are also described below.

We are grateful for the input of the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee, which met with the Dean twice each semester. This committee's full membership is listed in the Acknowledgments.

#### ***Goal 1: Climate, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***

Build and continually support an academic environment and workplace where diverse faculty, staff, and students feel valued and thrive.

#### **Objectives**

**Recruitment: Develop a comprehensive plan to attract more diverse individuals (e.g., with regard to ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status) for all positions.**

Recruitment of a diverse workforce is a critical step to ensuring a broad community of equity and inclusion. This year, our Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Kate Capshaw, worked with every tenure system faculty search committee to **ensure diverse membership**, as well as examine the advertisements for invitational language, advise committees on recruitment efforts, and consult on ways to keep DEI in the foreground through the interview and selection process.

Kate assessed each candidate pool by working with the UConn Human Resources Department (HR) to examine the demographics, and she asked for further advertisement and recruitment until the pools were diverse and representational of the field. Kate then evaluated all "long lists" of potential candidates for initial interviews and "short lists" for prospective in-depth interviews (virtual visits due to the pandemic). She advised committees and unit leaders throughout faculty searches on **best practices for interviews and candidate selection**. The Associate Deans overseeing individual units and the Dean worked with department heads on **negotiations** to provide attractive and equitable startup packages.

We are working to institute similar processes for non-tenure-track hires going forward.

Recognizing that to attract the best new faculty it is often important to provide employment for their partner, CLAS also aggressively pursued **partner hires** during the past year. The College worked with the Office of the Provost to provide resources. For faculty searches conducted during the 2020-21 academic year, the College facilitated four partner accommodations.

Late in the spring 2021 semester, the College instituted **changes in staff searches** to help recruit wide-ranging candidate pools. Every staff advertisement now contains a preferred qualification that allows search committees to consider the candidates' ability to support and work with diverse student, administrative, and faculty populations. Candidates are considered for their "commitment to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in an educational setting." The interview process also now involves a standard question that allows candidates to discuss their perspective on DEI as core values to the College.

In concert with the Provost's Office, the College conducted a **cluster search** for faculty pursuing antiracism scholarship. In addition to advancing areas of research where the College has particular strengths in line with our Academic Themes, this initiative increased the diversity of faculty members across several departments. See details in Goal 2: Hiring Initiatives.

We also pursued cluster hires for some tenure system faculty in the 2019-20 academic year, while this Strategic Plan was being developed. Therefore, we report data on that year in addition to 2020-21 and compare them to the demographics of total CLAS tenure system faculty in the 2018-19 academic year (FY19). While it is too soon to assess effects on hiring due to strategic changes in the search process for non-tenure track and staff positions, we can report meaningful progress for tenure system hires in the last two years. Compared to the 617 tenure system faculty employed by CLAS in 2018-19, the 34 new hires in 2019-20 and 21 hires from 2020-21 searches were far more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (see Fig. 1).

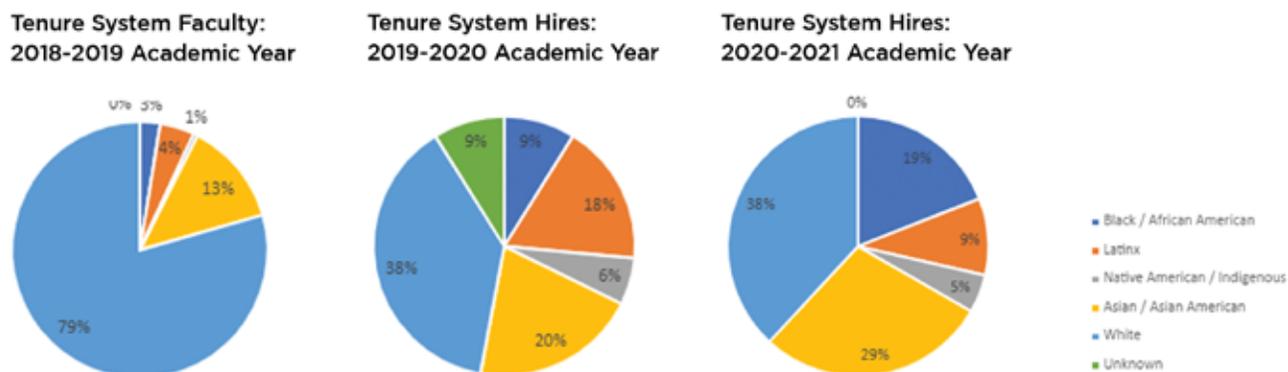


Fig. 1. Tenure-system faculty data. Information for 2018-2019 is from Human Resources. To obtain more complete information, we collected data on hires in the two more recent years from application materials submitted by the candidates.

The proportion of women hired has also increased. Compared to 39% of our full tenure system faculty in 2018-19, individuals hired were 53% and 76% women from searches in 2019-20 and 2020-21, respectively.

We had intended to track the demographics of applicants to tenure and non-tenure track faculty positions, as well as those for staff. However, the implementation of the PageUP hiring system in the middle of the 2019-20 academic year has presented some challenges. We cannot get an accurate baseline from that year for comparison to 2020-21 due to the timing of the implementation. In addition, the data are not as complete as we would hope. For example, 19% of the applicants for tenure track positions have not disclosed data on race and ethnicity. We plan to work with HR on how to best capture the information going forward.

**Retention: Develop policies and practices that improve retention of all faculty and staff.**

We worked this year to **value scholars with diverse perspectives and lived experiences** by elevating their stories and work. Articles produced by our Communications Office include announcements of new faculty the College hired through cluster searches (see details in Goal 2); and marketing articles that elevated research themes in the strategic plan, including antiracism work, health disparities research, and climate science. The stories grew out of monthly meetings between the Associate Dean for DEI and the Director of Communications, Christine Buckley.

We also revised and expanded our Annual CLAS Faculty and Staff Awards so that they reward College employees for work conducted across the goals of this plan, further emphasizing leadership, service, DEI initiatives, and notably, a new series of endowed awards for mentoring by faculty.

To create a more transparent and fair process to **identify and mitigate existing issues in faculty salary compression and inversion**, we had developed in 2019 a tool to make salary data relative to years of experience readily available within our office and to CLAS unit leaders. Using these data in concert with the process outlined in the AAUP contract, in the past year we worked with department heads to begin to systematically make salary adjustments for faculty in both tenure and non-tenure tracks. The College provided two-thirds of the funding for this initiative.

We **promoted an environment of social and professional support for faculty by strengthening our centers, institutes, and programs.** Beginning in summer 2020 and extending through fall 2021, we facilitated collaborative conversations among these non-departmentally organized units focusing on race, gender, and ethnicity. They have begun considering a unified structure that would promote greater research and pedagogical intersections and productivity. They have formed a working group to conceptualize the new structure, involve faculty vision and feedback, and execute a plan for institutionalization. The group is faculty-led and, with the College's support, has consulted experts in interdisciplinary academic structures.

The College also actively negotiated packages to increase retention of faculty. We did not wait for faculty to receive an outside offer before working on an accommodation. Depending on what was most important to the individual, these included salary increases, hiring partners, and research funding. In the 2020-21 academic year (FY21) our offers were sufficient to retain 8 of 9 individuals (89%). While far more retentions were negotiated in the prior year (FY20), the proportion in which we were successful increased (84% of 16).

### **Mentorship and Professional Development: Provide training and mentorship programs for CLAS employees, including tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty and staff.**

We began to develop an evidence-based set of best practices and support mechanisms to facilitate **mentoring of faculty.** In academic year 2020-21, we developed and implemented a series of four Research Workshops for early-career faculty. We also produced one peer-mentoring session specifically for assistant professors-in-residence. The inaugural session, on the topic of the importance of mentoring, attracted 82 participants, and the remaining four sessions attracted 50-56 registrants. We also hosted a specific question-and-answer session for in-residence and clinical faculty to talk with the Dean about their concerns; 62 faculty attended this session. Responses to an end-of-year evaluation suggest that the sessions were appreciated by the attendees, with 22 percent of respondents reporting that they were extremely satisfied with the offering and 48 percent somewhat satisfied. Over three-quarters of the respondents replied that they would like CLAS to continue offering mentoring programming in the next year.

We also began work to **facilitate the development of leaders** at various levels within the College. In this area, we updated and expanded the CLAS Department Heads' Manual (originally introduced by Dean Jeremy Teitelbaum in 2013) to provide new information on UConn and CLAS policies, as well as the responsibilities of department heads and best practices for accomplishing the work. The Dean's Office also offered a series of leadership workshops for CLAS unit leaders, including department heads, and center, institute, and program directors. We encouraged these individuals to invite emerging leaders within their units. The sessions included: an overview of the CLAS budget and financial strategies; time management and running efficient meetings; rewarding, valuing, and retaining faculty; working with support staff; and difficult conversations.

### **Amplifying Voices: Seek out new ways to give College constituents greater influence over the conditions of their work and/or education.**

This year we worked toward providing units **increased flexibility in the use of resources** to better advance the mission of our College. Decisions on course releases provided to faculty were transferred from the College to the unit level with the goal of empowering unit leaders with the ability to use this resource to advance research. Two new systems were also put into place to ensure student success and equity in workload. First, Assistant Dean Mansour Ndiaye worked with CLAS units to articulate the schedule of courses that would be offered in a predictable pattern. Second, a reporting system was created to capture the releases afforded to faculty and their intended purpose.

**Advisory committees were established** to offer ideas and recommendations to the College on a range of topics, including faculty research; graduate student affairs; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Associate Deans hosted the meetings of the committees within their portfolios.

The College also issued a Request for Proposals on antiracist teaching, research, and climate in summer 2020. We funded four initiatives, including: an Activist-in-Residence program developed by Africana Studies, American Studies, Asian and Asian American Studies, El Instituto, Judaic Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; a series of lectures and pedagogical developments focusing on decolonization and curricular reform

by professors and graduate students in Literatures, Cultures, and Languages; an undergraduate course on Language and Racism developed by faculty in Cognitive Science and Psychological Sciences; and the Racism in the Margins project, which spawned a conference with 900 virtual attendees from universities around the country to discuss antiracist practices in teaching writing. This initiative also pursued pathways to more fair and inclusive assessments of student writing across disciplines, and has plans to build working groups and trainings for UConn's faculty and graduate students.

Toward **creating an inclusive environment by developing opportunities for meaningful interaction and understanding of diversity**, we created a set of suggestions for units to develop Community Norms. The Dean's Office Senior Staff then followed the process, which led to thoughtful conversations about diversity and inclusivity in the workplace and a document to guide our professional interactions. In addition to encouraging our departments and other units to engage in the process, we offered to share the Dean's Office document as a model.

## ***Goal 2: Innovative Scholarship***

Promote interdisciplinary research by building on a foundation of core disciplines and engaging novel intersections to address major challenges to knowledge, well-being, and our world.

### **Objectives**

**Synergistic Activities and Internal Research Support: Create opportunities to stimulate convergence among disciplines and foster collaborative relationships that spur innovative thinking and advance scholarship in priority areas.**

The College **hosted two symposia**, which we called Research Conversations, among scholars in areas for which we conducted cluster searches in the 2019-20 academic year: Health Disparities and Native American and Indigenous Studies. More than 40 faculty and students attended the Health Disparities event in February 2021, which introduced our cluster of three new faculty in this field. With the leadership of political science professor Sandy Grande, and involving faculty from our cluster hire in Indigenous studies and faculty who identify as Native or Indigenous, the April 2021 workshop drew 60 faculty, staff, and students. Attendees expressed enthusiasm about the College's orientation towards a more just engagement with the historical and contemporary implications of colonization.

The College invested \$408K in supporting **small grants to pilot collaborative work** across departments and units, based on calls for proposals this year. Resources were designed to stimulate externally-funded research in three of the six Academic Themes: Big Data: Science, Policy, and Ethics; Inequalities, Social Justice, Truth, and Belief; and Health, Disease, and Well-Being. They also included funding for the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL;) to provide a mechanism for supporting faculty both in and outside of the tenure system. We also issued a call for proposals to faculty and staff for funding to develop research, pedagogy, and programming that advances work against racial injustice. See the description of these projects above in Goal 1: Amplifying Voices.

The College **created a competitive summer salary mechanism** for scholars from fields in which it is difficult to obtain or typically not part of startup packages to apply for these resources. We funded 11 proposals that supported 13 faculty for a total of \$264,631.

The Associate Deans also began working with departments and non-departmentally organized units within CLAS to encourage **development of strategic plans** for enhancing research and fostering equitable workloads. This effort was facilitated through the division meetings, and in other conversations.

**Hiring Initiatives: Pursue hiring into targeted clusters to increase the College's interdisciplinary capacity in the thematic areas identified, while also maintaining our strengths in high-level basic research and education. These clusters might be within a department, across units within CLAS, or across colleges and schools.**

We are particularly proud of our **cluster hires** in antiracism and environment and human interactions in this past year, which will advance our research and teaching in critical areas such as social justice and climate change, respectively. The Environment and Human Interactions cluster will bring a total of seven tenure-track faculty to UConn, five of which joined the College this fall in the Departments of Anthropology, Chemistry, Political Science, Public Policy, and Sociology. The faculty study how human activities are impacting a range of Earth systems, and how changes to the Earth itself are impacting humans. The Antiracism cluster brings eight faculty in departments across the humanities and social sciences, all jointly appointed with a CLAS institute or program focusing on race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. From searches framed through the concepts of Catalyzing Antiracist and Decolonial Futures and Racial Justice, the faculty are joining the Departments of English; Political Science; Philosophy; Journalism; Literatures, Cultures, and Languages; History; and Communication. Their scholarship focuses on centralizing Black, Latinx, Asian and Asian American, and Indigenous voices in the humanities and social sciences and on building transdisciplinary research.

**External Funding Support and Infrastructure: Increase support for faculty in funding applications and publication activity through mentorship and training (see Mentorship and Professional Development section above).**

To **support junior faculty in their scholarship**, we offered a series of five Research Workshops on topics such as applying for NIH R01 funding, writing a book proposal, developing interdisciplinary collaborations, and continuing research during COVID-19.

To evaluate and determine ways to increase **support for grant proposals**, in spring 2021 the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education, Ofer Harel, began bi-monthly meetings with the Corporate and Foundation Relations team at the UConn Foundation to increase opportunities and relationships to facilitate funding from corporations and private foundations. These have been mostly mutual fact-finding meetings that will lay the groundwork for future partnerships. The team has also begun to regularly forward information on funding opportunities to be shared with our units.

The College has worked with units toward increasing equity in **teaching loads** for faculty both in and outside of the tenure system and encouraged them to complete or update governance documents on faculty workload. We have also provided flexibility to units to offer course releases in service of advancing research (see details of working with departments on flexible teaching in Goal 1: Amplifying Voices).

To **strengthen research infrastructure**, we issued a call for proposals for equipment funding, particularly large pieces that will facilitate collaborative research. The College contributed more than \$1.2M to this initiative, distributed across 10 groups of faculty. Departments provided additional resources (\$291K in total), as did the Office of Vice President for Research in one case (\$200K).

The College implemented a new dashboard to facilitate tracking and analysis of external funding for both principal investigators (PIs) and co-investigators (co-Is) by department and faculty career stage.

We are proud of the funding success of our faculty in the past year (FY21; see Table 1). Compared to the previous year, the number and level of funding increased for both proposals submitted and awarded for CLAS faculty as PIs. The values for awards also increased for our Co-Is, although the submissions were lower. It is difficult to interpret those data, however, due to the relatively small number. The small drop in research expenditures from FY20 to FY21 likely reflects disruption of research related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. External funding to College faculty in FY20 and FY21.

	Fiscal Year 2020	Fiscal Year 2021	Percent Change
Research Expenditures	\$36,434,788	\$35,406,645	-3%
PI Proposals Submitted (Count)	427	530	19%
PI Proposals Submitted (Amount)	\$197,953,901	\$262,674,704	25%
PI Proposals Awarded (Count)	158	212	25%
PI Proposals Awarded (Amount)	\$48,667,249	\$62,359,720	22%
Co-I Proposals Submitted (Count)	15	14	-7%
Co-I Proposals Submitted (Amount)	\$22,476,996	\$13,222,646	-70%
Co-I Proposals Awarded (Count)	6	8	25%
Co-I Proposals Awarded (Amount)	\$9,072,507	\$9,597,783	6%

Note: Data were pulled from the CLAS College Holistic Academic Data dashboard CHAD, which collects information directly from Sponsored Program Services in the Office of the Vice President for Research. Data for Co-Is are distinct from those listed for PIs and they reflect proposals submitted with a PI outside of CLAS.

**Fundraising: Work with UConn Foundation colleagues to secure funding across CLAS with emphases on research areas in the academic themes identified above, and on retaining existing donors to the College.**

More than \$8.6M was raised through the UConn Foundation in the past year, which included support for **research** (\$2,097,692); **endowed faculty positions** (\$2,026,827); and students (\$2,984,806), including support for **graduate students** (\$448,004).

### ***Goal 3: Teaching, Learning, and Student Success***

Enhance through experiential learning, mentorship, and innovative pedagogy the College's opportunities for undergraduate education.

#### **Objectives**

**Student Support and Engagement: Create multifaceted opportunities for students and reduce barriers to participation in undergraduate research, internships, study abroad, and service learning.**

We continued our ongoing efforts of working with the UConn Foundation to **secure scholarships for undergraduate students**. Our UConn Foundation partners were successful this year in obtaining a \$1,350,000 bequest for the Martin Horn Scholarship in Communication. As noted in Goal 2, \$2,984,806 was raised in funding for student support.

The College and the Director of Alumni Relations, Elyssa Kelly, created a new program for CLAS undergraduate women, the CLAS Women's Leadership Collective. This program is a unique leadership learning experience coupled with group mentorship from UConn alumnae. Nearly 70 students and alumni were grouped into 16 "mentorship circles" focused on career communities. They met virtually 5-6 times throughout the course of the academic year. Nearly all students reported a high efficacy of their alumnae mentors. The majority of the students also reported an increase in their confidence, personal and professional development, and community-building. In addition, based on surveys asking how likely students were to recommend the program to their friends, the program achieved a 78 Net Promoter Score, which ranks it as a "world-class experience" according to the score's description.

We began tracking in earnest the work our students are doing in **experiential learning**, including internships, practicums, and other out-of-classroom experiences. This year, 233 students registered for CLAS internship courses, 117 enrolled in CLAS practicum courses, and 386 registered worked on research with faculty members for credit. Another 871 undergraduate students enrolled in independent study courses, despite the largely virtual format. In addition, faculty across the CLAS departments reported more than 100 research projects in collaboration with students not associated with course credit.

Since COVID-19 had deep and broad effects throughout our academic year, teaching and classroom experiences were difficult to accomplish in a regular way, let alone in a strategic way. Thus, we plan to further address our student success strategic goals as COVID-19 subsides in the coming years.

### ***Goal 4: Broader Impacts, Service, and Visibility***

Support existing and new initiatives that impact the welfare of Connecticut and highlight the advantages that we provide.

#### **Objectives**

**Facilitate Community Engagement: Expand and incentivize engagement with Connecticut communities, and increase the visibility of what CLAS does with and for citizens of the state.**

One way to measure the efficacy of our internal work to increase outreach of the College is **positive media attention** recognizing faculty, student, and College contributions. In this fiscal year, 440+ articles featuring CLAS faculty and alumni were published in the news media, and more than 200 were published in UConn Today. We also began **developing procedures for reporting and recognizing the work of CLAS faculty, staff, and students, and their community partners across the state, as they address public issues in Connecticut**. In many cases our departments collected data on outreach and community engagement for the first time, signaling a step forward for valuing this kind of work in the College.

**Engage Government and Nonprofits: Engage with state and local agencies and nonprofit organizations to promote meaningful, evidence-based policy and enhance opportunities for funded research.**

Faculty reported giving 234 **presentations to the Connecticut community** this year. These presentations included 116 to interested civic groups, such as local historical societies, antiracism collectives, Rotary Clubs, and events hosted by local public libraries. Faculty gave 71 presentations to non-profit organizations and 29 schools (public and private).

Fourteen presentations were made to local governments and state agencies, and four presentations were made to the Connecticut state legislature: one to the legislature's Committee on Higher Education and three to the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors Equity and Opportunity. These data represent those reported to department heads and directors.

**Leverage Alumni and Donor Networks: Work with UConn Foundation colleagues to develop and strengthen CLAS alumni networks and engage alumni and corporate and state leaders as donors, mentors, and teachers for CLAS programs.**

More than 120 **alumni served as speakers or presenters** in CLAS virtual events this year, including panel discussions, classroom visits, and guest speaking roles. The topics ranged from cognitive science to women in the pandemic to branding, marketing and product management. The Women's Leadership Collective also had its inaugural year (see Goal 3).

In the past year, the UConn Foundation surpassed its \$8.5M fundraising goal for CLAS with support in total of \$8,633,258 from alumni donors, friends, corporations, private foundations, and others. The amount was down from the previous year (\$10,050,301). However, we saw an increase in the number of individuals, with 1,916 contributors. This jump of nearly 700 new donors indicates a significant increase in **alumni engagement**.

## IV. Summary and Looking to the Future

As we transition out of the grip of COVID-19, we are enthusiastic about continuing what we started. We look forward to tackling the strategies planned for subsequent years, as well as those we had hoped to start earlier but could not address within the constraints of a pandemic.

We plan to provide updates each year on our progress and will use the information to guide our evolving work to fulfill our missions.

## V. Acknowledgements

### *Contributors to this report:*

- Juli Wade, Dean
- Edith Barrett, Associate Dean for Social Sciences, Regional Campuses, and Community and Global Affairs
- Christine Buckley, Director of Communications
- Kate Capshaw, Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Ofer Harel, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Affairs
- Kane Lynch, Executive Director of Shared Services
- Andrew Moiseff, Associate Dean for Life and Physical Sciences
- Lyn Tribble, Associate Dean for Humanities and Undergraduate Affairs

### *CLAS Strategic Plan Advisory Committee*

We are grateful to the members of this committee for their work throughout the year, which was made all the more challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Andrea Celli, Assistant Professor, Department of Literatures, Cultures and Languages; Center for Judaic Studies and Contemporary Jewish Life
- Lisa Eaton, Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences; Institute for Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Policy
- Kathy Erickson, Administrative Program Support, Department of History
- Jason Hancock, Associate Professor, Department of Physics; Institute for Materials Science
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