

Inaugural Black Student and Family Fair

More than 125 people attended the Black Student and Family Fair in Gaiser Student Center on April 15. Although most students were of high school age, middle school and elementary students also attended.

CTE Showcase: High school students learn about Clark's programs

More than 250 high school juniors and seniors explored degrees and programs offered at a career pathways event at Gaiser Hall on April 18.

Open House: Veterans Center of Excellence

Often when veterans enroll at Clark College, they aren't aware of the assistance they can receive at the center, said Megan Anderson, manager. Even students who are not veterans themselves but have a parent or spouse who is or was a veteran, may qualify for Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits. Staff can connect student veterans to agencies,

programs and support.

Spring 2023 Welcome Week: Involvement & Financial Wellness Fair

Gaiser Hall's Student Center bustled with activity as students, staff, and faculty gathered for Clark's Spring Term Involvement & Financial Wellness Fair in the Gaiser Hall Student Center on April 5.

Clark College honors Vietnam War veterans by dedicating Witness Tree

More than 100 Vietnam War veterans, families and supporters gathered at Clark College on March 29 to dedicate a Witness Tree commemorating the 50th anniversary of the end of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

A passion for education



Moses Kimeli Korir at Clark College's 2021 Commencement ceremony.

Ever since he was a 10-year-old boy growing up in Kenya, Moses Kimeli Korir dreamed of being a teacher. When he grew up, he traveled 9,000 miles to Vancouver, Washington to fulfill his dreams.

Twenty-two years later, Korir was a step closer as he attended Clark College's 2021 Commencement ceremony to receive his Associate of Applied Science degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE). And during the ceremony, he discovered that his journey had been given a huge forward boost: President Karin Edwards announced that he was that year's recipient of the Community College President's Award, providing full tuition for up to two years to complete his bachelor's degree at Washington State University Vancouver.

"Balancing parenthood, full-time employment, and college coursework is no small feat, but [Korir] has managed to do all

of this while maintaining a high academic standard,” said Dr. Edwards in her announcement. “He is a great example of our students’ resilience and determination.”

A musical awakening

Korir’s passion for teaching is intertwined with his passion for music—both of which he discovered at age 10.

That was when he saw a piano for the first time, while attending school in a city near Mount Elgon and the Kenyan-Ugandan border. He was intrigued. He wanted to touch it, but children weren’t allowed.

Shortly afterward, his family moved to a rural area. He did not see a piano again for a long time.

Finally, he discovered a neighbor who had a piano.

Korir said, “I asked permission to play it, and I taught myself to play.”

He already had decided he wanted to be a teacher, but his connection with the piano was another “aha” moment.



Early Childhood Education professor Sarah Theberge congratulates Moses Kimeli Korir at Clark College’s 2021 Commencement.

He explained, "When I began learning the piano, that's when I decided I wanted to become a piano teacher. I wanted to help children learn something new."

He bought his first keyboard at age 11. He worked and saved his money to buy his first piano when he was 17. He practiced the piano diligently.

After high school, Korir trained to be an elementary school teacher. He taught for a year. Next, he taught piano with an international organization in Kenya for two more years.

Then he realized the next part of his teaching dream: relocating to the U.S. to earn a teaching degree and teach in an American school. In 2019, Korir came to Clark College through its International Programs and began pursuing a degree in Early Childhood Education.

The right place

Korir said, "I found myself at Clark College. It's the right place. The ECE path at Clark College is the best. If someone has a passion to be a teacher, it really gives you the background and knowledge to be successful."

At Clark College, Korir was able to get hands-on experience in his field by working part-time in the college's Child & Family Studies program, which provides on-campus child care to students, employees, and the community. He enjoyed working with children, and eventually gained enough work experience to gain a position as a full-time teacher in a Head Start preschool classroom for Educational Opportunities for Children and Families (EOCF). He was delighted to find a job that allowed him to continue working with children and more than doubled his work hours, providing enough money to pay his tuition and provide for his wife and two young children.

The new job meant less time for studying, but Korir made it

work. He did his homework at night when his own young children were asleep.

Despite the challenges, Korir says his Early Childhood Education classes at Clark have helped him excel in his preschool classroom.

“All my ECE classes are going deep on how to help children,” he said. “All are applicable in the field. I’m using them every day. Not only at work, but also at home with my own children.”

“He is a student who is hungry for knowledge and who beautifully weaves knowledge from his culture into Western practices, while thinking critically about how these things intersect,” said ECE professor Michelle Mallory. “He brings us all along on that journey.”

A calm presence in classroom



Moses Kimeli Korir brings a broad cultural perspective to his work teaching children.

Wynette Francis, Korir’s supervisor at EOCF, said, “Moses has a calming presence, a steadiness in the classroom. He’s willing to learn and grow. He exudes kindness and respect.”

Dana Taub, center director of EOCF's program at Ellsworth Elementary, said, "Moses engages with the children. We have a child on the spectrum, and he's very good with her."

Noting that the Ellsworth Head Start is an all-day program, she added, "Keeping kids engaged all day, you have to be on top of your game."

Korir said his education at Clark College taught him how to help children cope with their emotions—an important skill, given the challenging situations he can encounter in the classroom.

"For instance, if a child hits another child or hits me, the teacher, I've learned how to calm them down," he said. "I talk with the child and acknowledging the situation. Acknowledge their feelings. Most of the time, it works."

And teaching brings rewards along with the challenges. "I am enjoying my connection with the children in Head Start," Korir said. "They make me smile."

Keeping the dream going

Receiving the President's Award will enable Korir to pursue his plans to transfer to WSU Vancouver and earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Development.

The Community College President's Award in honor of Val Ogden is given each year to a student who has completed their studies at Clark College and is transferring to Washington State University Vancouver. They receive full tuition and fees for two years while they finish their bachelor's degree at WSU Vancouver. The award is traditionally announced during that year's Commencement ceremony. This year, due to COVID-19, the ceremony was held outdoors on the college's soccer field, with only graduates and faculty attending.

Korir's educational goals stretch beyond his bachelor's

degree. He plans to earn his master's degree in education and eventually become an instructor at a college or university.

“Education is important to me because it’s an equalizer,” Korir says. “It brings everyone on board whether you’re from a poor background or a rich background.”

And he hasn’t forgotten his piano dream—he hopes one day to open a music production studio to help others share the gift of music. He’ll be sure to let curious children who visit touch the piano keys as much as they want.



Moses Kimeli Korir, *second from left*, poses for a photo with International Programs Associate Director Jody Shulnak, fellow International Student Venant Manirafasha, and International Admissions Manager Csendi Hopp at the 2021 Commencement ceremony.

Celebrating Juneteenth



Clark College President Karin Edwards and Cuisine Management professor Earl Frederick get ready to greet students during the college's first Juneteenth barbecue.

Clark College celebrated the emancipation of Black enslaved people with its inaugural Juneteenth Drive-Through Cookout on Friday, June 11. The event was organized by the college's Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and culinary programs. Clark College's McClaskey Culinary Institute and ODEI provided 100 boxed lunches for students.

In an email to the college community, Rashida Willard, Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, explained the significance of Juneteenth, which is also known as Emancipation Day and Freedom Day: "On June 19, 1865, Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas with news that the Civil War had ended, and that Black slaves were now free, nearly two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Many celebrate this holiday honoring Black culture through social gatherings,

cookouts, and time with family.”



Clark College cuisine students pack lunch boxes for the college's first Juneteenth barbecue.

Cuisine instructor Earl Frederick said, “Barbecue is recognized as a Black contribution to American culture. It was slaves who passed through the Caribbean, cooking animals over pits on sticks. This style of cooking called *barbacoa* translates now into what we know as Southern barbecue. They also picked up seeds from hot peppers in the Caribbean, which became an important flavoring for the pork in the South.”

Cuisine students made smoked turkey, baked beans, collard greens and cornbread. Students in Professional Baking and Pastry Arts made individual hand pies for dessert. Clark's students made all the food except for barbecued pork, which was donated by Donnie Vercher, owner of Daddy D's Southern Style BBQ. (Vercher's daughter, Ramona Vercher, is a Clark College alumna and

recipient of the 2013-14 Community College President's Award.) On the morning of the event, cuisine students were busy in the kitchen packing 100 lunches in boxes highlighting significant people and events in Black history.

Students had signed up in advance to receive the lunches. During the event, students drove into the parking lot west of Tod and Maxine McClaskey Culinary Institute, rolled down their window and were handed a boxed lunch from a cuisine student.

Despite persistent rain, it was a party. DeeJay Mark Kernell played Earth, Wind and Fire's "September" as he spun what he called "good '70s and '80s R&B, backyard barbecue music."

Nearby, Clark College President Karin Edwards chatted with Frederick, who was busy stirring a pot of Caribbean-style paella at the wood-fired grill. A pot of gumbo simmered alongside it.

Frederick said his maternal grandmother, a sharecropper from North Carolina, told him stories about the significance of barbecue.



Each Juneteenth lunch was packed in a box printed with information on Black history.

“My grandmother told me that barbecue is something that Blacks and whites in the South share,” he said. “When tobacco was harvested in the fall, it was all-hands-on-deck with Blacks and whites working together doing the harvest.”

Workers hung tobacco leaves in tobacco barns that have slats to let air through. To prevent spoilage, this work had to happen quickly, so a big oak fire was built to cure, dry and smoke the tobacco. Throughout the night, workers stoked the fire, which accumulated hot coals.

Frederick explained, “The tradition developed to roast a pig using those hot coals. People dug a hole in the ground, put hot coals in the bottom of the pit, put a grate over the coals, and put a butchered pig on the grate to slowly cook the pig. Everybody—black and white—ate the pig together. Something that didn’t happen any other time.”

Next year when Clark College holds its second annual event, Juneteenth will be a state holiday, thanks to legislation passed in May. The law will go into effect in 2022.

Governor visits Clark College



Governor Inslee speaks with Vicki Hrdina, SW WA Career Connection Director. Background left to right: Clark College President Dr. Karin Edwards and Land Survey student Sadie Deshong.

Washington Governor Jay Inslee visited Clark College on April 30 to announce the state has certified two current Clark programs as Career Launch programs. The endorsement will provide students with opportunities to “earn as they learn” as Clark partners with local employers to provide students with meaningful, paid, on-the-job experience in their chosen industry.

Clark College’s new Career Launch programs are:

- A partnership with Eurobake Bakery to provide students with paid work experience as they earn an Associate in Applied Technology (AAT) degree in Professional Baking & Pastry Arts Management
- A partnership with MacKay Sposito to provide students with paid work experience as they earn an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree in Surveying & Geomatics

“This is a great opportunity for students at Clark College,” says Dr. Karin Edwards President of Clark College. “Working strategically with our industry partners, we can help develop the talent pipeline that will allow local companies to grow and will provide outstanding opportunities for our students to succeed.”

Clark now has six Career Launch programs; three more are in development. Career Launch programs are a win-win for everyone. They create opportunities for students to get real-life paid work experience, complete their education and be successful in their chosen field. Career Launch helps our business partners fill the workforce pipeline with skilled, experienced employees.

The two programs join the college’s already-existing Career Launch partnerships:

- AAT in Mechanical Instrumentation (part of the Mechatronics program) in partnership with SEH America, Silicon Forest Electronics, Analog Devices, Inc., and Kyocera International, Inc.
- AAT in Toyota T-TEN Automotive in partnership with Toyota America Corporation
- AAT in HiTECC Automotive in partnership with Dick Hannah Dealerships
- Associate in Science – Transfer Track 2 (AST2) in Engineering in partnership with SEH America

Clark’s proposed Career Launch programs

in cybersecurity and welding technologies are pending review by the Career Launch Endorsement Review Committee.

Armetta Burney, Interim Dean of Workforce Professional and Technical Education and STEM, said, "At Clark College, we understand the value and importance of building relationships with our local industry partners. These relationships play a critical role in the growth and development of our students as they obtain the career and academic training they need to prepare them for their next step after graduation. Our goal is to develop Career Launch Endorsements across the many degree programs that we offer to include CTE, AA transfer and our BAS programs."

Benefits of Career Launch programs

During his visit, the governor met students in the two new programs.

Then he led a roundtable discussion about the benefits of Career Launch programs. Joining in the discussion were President Karin Edwards; Clark College Trustee Chair Rekah Strong; Armetta Burney, Interim Dean of Workforce Professional and Technical Education and STEM; Erielle Lamb, Clark Surveying & Geomatics instructor; Alison Dolder, Professional Baking & Pastry Arts Management instructor; Vickei Hrdina, Executive Director, Career Connect Southwest, Career Readiness & STEM Initiatives; and industry partners and three students.



Baking students (*left to right*) Jasmyne Trujillo and Paola Ibanez present Gov. Inslee with baked goods and a sample of a takeaway box created by cuisine instructor Earl Frederick celebrating Black history in honor of the new proclamation of Juneteenth designation as a holiday in Washington state.

Geared for working adults, Clark's Surveying & Geomatics program currently offers remote classes Monday through Thursday evenings with in-person, on-campus classes on Saturdays. About one-third of the program's students already have a bachelor's degree and are making a career change. Many are juggling a full-time job with full-time school. Going forward, students will benefit from being paid for their hands-on work opportunities with program partners—helping both them and their families.

Tim Kent, the program's coordinator, says, "It's a grand opportunity for this to be a state-supported program that will benefit our ability to train up-and-coming survey professionals."



Left to right: Prof. Tim Kent; Carla Meritt, adjunct instructor and Survey Director at MacKay Sposito ; Prof. Tina Barsotti, faculty; Sadie Deshong, land survey student; and Erielle Lamb, instructor and Lead Surveyor for Gifford Pinchot

Partner input



Josh Svenhard, Eurobake owner with Baking Professor Alison Dolder

Industry partner Tim Schauer, past president and board of director chair of MacKay Sposito, said, “Without this program, we’d be training people ourselves—and that’s difficult and expensive.”

He noted that these are family-wage jobs and said MacKay Sposito pays licensed land surveyors \$125,000 in its Federal Way office.

Industry

partner Joshua Svenhard, Eurobake President, emphasized the benefits of the partnership with Clark College: “If I invest in the community in this way, it benefits the students, the college, Eurobake—and my industry.”

Schauer of MacKay Sposito noted that because jobs are changing quickly, “the connection between community colleges and industry leaders is key.”



Dr. Karin Edwards with Tim Schauer, MacKay Sposito president

Governor Inslee focused on the important role of community colleges in their communities: “Community colleges are the best bang for your buck. And they’re the point of entry for entry for any program you want to pursue. It opens up all those doors.”

Looking around the room he added, “These are dream factories here.”

Vaccination Visit



Gov. Inslee, center, meets with the organizers of a free COVID-19 vaccine clinic, left to right, Sarah Thorsen, Program Specialist in Allied Health; Cammie Pavesic, WPEA; Courtney Braddock, Fiscal Analyst.

Governor Inslee also visited a vaccination clinic being held the same day, also in the STEM Building. The clinic was conducted in conjunction with Rite Aid Pharmacies, WPEA, and AHE. It was open to Clark College employees, their families, and students. During the day, 179 individuals received the Pfizer vaccine for free.

Vaccinations are an important step in the process of returning to on-campus operations. The college has announced it will be offering more than 500 classes with on-campus components in fall term—roughly one-third of its total class offerings for that term.

The college will host another vaccination clinic in May so that participants can receive their second vaccine dose. Future clinics are under discussion.

About Career Launch

Career Launch is a program of Career Connect Washington (CCW), an organization founded to bring industry and education together to provide pathways for young people to succeed in college and career. There are already 10,000 students enrolled in Career Launch programs, including Registered Apprenticeships. The recently passed 2021-2023 biennial budget provides additional resources for Career Connect Washington to reach more young people, especially those furthest from opportunity, at a time when they are so impacted by COVID-19.

More photos can be seen [here](#).

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

**Overcoming obstacles,
pursuing their dreams**



Marcell Richard has had to miss out on time with his daughter while his family is separated during COVID-19. *Photo courtesy of Marcell Richard.*

Clark College students shared the obstacles they have overcome during the pandemic during “Student Voices: The Realities of Being a College Student during COVID.” The April 15 Zoom panel was presented by Clark’s Teaching and Learning Center and moderated by Director of MESA Dalila Paredes.

The panel grew from Paredes’ work with MESA, a program that supports underrepresented student populations pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. When she meets one-on-one with a student for the first time, she starts the Zoom session by asking the student how they are doing and what challenges they have faced during the pandemic. Their common struggle is figuring out how to pay their tuition. But their challenges go far beyond money.

Paredes said, “So many of their stories are

incredible. Many students have been furloughed from their jobs not just once, but twice. Many are parents. They are in multiple-generation households and are taking care of their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncle and their children—with very little resources. We have students from war-torn countries, intergenerational households, poverty. Students who have lost their housing. Family members who are ill.”

She added, “I wanted faculty to hear these stories—to hear students say, ‘These are my hurdles. This is how I overcame them.’ For underrepresented students, COVID is just one more hurdle. It’s just one more thing for them to navigate.”

Two of these Student Voices stories are featured below.

Pearl Muodzi



Pearl Muodzi

Pearl Muodzi, 20, is majoring in biology at Clark with an eventual goal to become a doctor. She had a comfortable life in her native Zimbabwe where she lived with her

parents and three brothers. She had a private school education.

But her life changed drastically beginning with her father being diagnosed with a rare type of inoperable cancer. She became his caregiver. Her father died in 2017. A few months later she was walking with her brother when men driving fire trucks and army trucks pulled up and began shooting people.

Muodzi recalled, "I found myself sprinting for my life with my little brother."

Things in Zimbabwe grew increasingly unstable. The president was ousted, inflation was rampant, and life became more difficult. Muodzi, her mother, and younger brother took a two-week vacation to visit family in Vancouver and to get a break from the challenges back home. But the week they arrived in Vancouver, civil war broke out in Zimbabwe. Friends and family in Zimbabwe sent videos showing soldiers killing people just outside the gate of their family home.

Muodzi said, "I cannot begin to explain how shocked I was. We could not go home. Our two-week vacation turned into an immigration situation. When you're going on vacation, you carry a small suitcase and just a few things from home. We left everything behind."

Muodzi's two aunts welcomed her family into their home and helped them. Eventually, her mother found work and they moved out into their own place.

Muodzi said, "There we were, trying to start a new life."

In fall 2020, Muodzi enrolled at Clark College as a full-time student. To help pay for her education, she works 25 to 30 hours a week at a mail-shipping business.

In Zimbabwe she had just completed her Cambridge exams and

already had studied college-level biology, chemistry and math, but those classes were not accepted. She had to start over. Despite the challenges of a new country, new education system, online classes and working, she earned a 3.9 GPA at Clark.

Navigating college in America during a global pandemic has been just one more challenge for Muodzi.

She said, “I’m proud of my growth. I’ve learned how to tackle challenges differently. To endure challenges. I’m proud of myself for stepping up in my academic life.”

Money and time are her biggest barriers.

“Balancing working and going to school is challenging. Most of the time I am tired. I’m not doing as well as I could.”

Muodzi said, “A big motivator for me is my parents. I want to be a doctor because I want to find a way to cure the disease my dad had. I also am inspired by my mother who works day and night to provide for us. I see my mother work so hard. I can’t take school lightly.”

Muodzi’s pathway to become a surgeon includes completing two years at Clark, then transferring to WSU Vancouver to earn a bachelor’s degree in biology. Next she plans to attend University of Washington Medical School. It’s a long road ahead of Muodzi, but she already has come so far.

Marcell Richard



Marcell Richard

Marcell Richard, 31, is a full-time Clark College student who is pursuing a biology degree. His eventual goal: to earn a degree in forensic toxicology. Richard is experienced at climbing over obstacles to reach his goals.

He's a first-generation college student raised by his single mother. His father is black; his mother is white. When his mother was diagnosed with cancer last summer and became very ill, Richard stepped up to be his mother's caregiver.

Due to COVID, last year Richard was laid off from his job waiting tables and bar tending. He exhausted his unemployment benefits. He and his partner, also a Clark College student, have a two-year-old daughter. When their lease expired in January, they could not afford their apartment. Richard moved in with his mother, in Gresham, Oregon, to be her caregiver. His partner moved in with her own mother in Vancouver with their daughter. Richard spends the night with his partner and daughter two to three times a week to maintain some continuity in their young daughter's life—and to be a couple with his partner. They are saving their money in the hope of eventually being able to rent their own place and be together again.

Richard diligently is overcoming challenges. He recently

started a work-study job with Clark's Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion as a student consultant. He's a member of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society for community and technical colleges. Richard is a BUILD Exito student, a MESA student, and is a student advocate for MESA.

He explained, "I'm trying to uplift students and form a community, especially during these times when we're isolated and apart. I've been given an opportunity to go to school and have received scholarships and help. It's time to give back."

Richard listed his biggest barriers: "Trying to take care of my mom and watching her health deteriorate. Also, I'm away from my daughter half of the time. It puts a strain on my relationship with my daughter and my partner. I bury myself in my studies. That's how I cope."

Through all the loss and challenges, Richard said, "Many times, I've tried and failed due to pitfalls, but I've never given up on my education. Despite the difficulties, I've stayed in school. I have a lot more schooling to go. This is the path I chose."

Richard plans to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology, a Master of Science degree in Biology with a minor in chemistry, and eventually apply to medical school to study forensic pathology.

He added, "Everyone has a different narrative. We don't know what other people are going through. Kindness goes a long way."

His advice to fellow students navigating through the pandemic: "If you're like me, you have this sense of imposter syndrome. That you can't do it. But you can do it. Take one leap of faith. Reach out to resources and groups. Make connections. It's all about breaking out of your shell and creating a support system. Get as much tutoring help as possible if you have problems with math like I do. Clark has so many programs

and resources to help students. Use them.”

Unlocking education for the incarcerated



A Clark College faculty member brings backpacks full of class supplies to students at Larch Corrections Center. Photo courtesy of Hanan Al-Zubaidy

A surge in COVID-19 cases paused Clark College’s programs at Larch Corrections Center in early January. The minimum-security prison had its first positive COVID-19 test in late December. Only a week later, 218 of those incarcerated –about 70 percent of the prison’s residency–had tested positive for COVID.

An immediate shutdown meant Clark College programs came to a halt. The classroom building was closed. All face-to-face

classes were canceled.

“With COVID restrictions, everybody in the education field propelled forward into new methods with online learning, but corrections education took a few steps backward,” said Hanan Al-Zubaidy, Clark’s Director of Education at Larch Corrections.

For security reasons, Larch residents do not have access to the internet, so online education is not an option.

Al-Zubaidy said, “With our classroom closed, we had to figure out a new way.”

As it turned out, the new way was an old way.

Making a game plan

“We came up with a game plan for getting coursework materials to students until they can return to the classroom,” Al-Zubaidy said.

She and Clark instructors –Justin Allen, Lauren Zavrel, Steven Smith and Ron Powers–stepped up to provide educational care packages to those who are enrolled in Clark programs at Larch. They filled backpacks with textbooks, packets of assignments and reading materials, paper, pens and pencils–everything students need to do their work.

They distributed the backpacks with books at the beginning of the quarter. Students work on their Clark projects in their living units and return their completed work in a collection box. Assignments are collected weekly. The assignments are critical to keeping students engaged so they can get back on track once classrooms are open again.

Adapting during COVID



Hanan Al-Zubaidy helps prepare backpacks for students at Larch Corrections Center. *Photo courtesy of Hanan Al-Zubaidy*

Clark College offers business, GED, and High School Plus (a high school credit-recovery program) courses at Larch Corrections Center. While the classroom facility is closed, students cannot take the GED test, but they can work on recovering high school credits.

Typically, 175 Larch students are enrolled at Clark per quarter, but with COVID social distancing restrictions and rapid releases shortly after the pandemic began, only 68 students are enrolled winter quarter.

Al-Zubaidy, the instructors and staff are working remotely from their homes, but they drive to Larch twice a week to drop off packets of course assignments for students. Located in the remote Cascade foothills in the far east of Clark County, Larch Corrections center is 22 miles—about a 40-minute drive—from Clark College’s main campus.

Sometimes instructors and staff go into the living units to drop off the material. If there are many COVID cases, they dress in PPE or the corrections staff distributes the educational material to students. Due to the number of

active COVID cases, when students' completed papers are picked up, Al-Zubaidy sprays papers with a cleaning solution and leaves them in the classroom for two days before instructors can handle them.

During the COVID lockdown, students who have questions about a particular assignment can message their instructors via an offline messaging system called a kiosk, which Al-Zubaidy described as like a computer, but without internet access. Students also can request tutoring help from a trained tutor if one is living on their floor. (The residents are confined to their own floor.) These paid tutors are also residents at Larch. Some tutors also are Clark students.

Al-Zubaidy said, "We wish we could have a tutor on every single floor, because they are in the units with our students when we can't be there during COVID."

She spoke about the Larch students having to adapt to frequent changes in their housing units during the pandemic and dealing with additional stress from not knowing what is expected of them.

"Our students have been very patient. To help reduce their stress, we've been flexible with assignment due dates. It's important we do what we can do to ease some of that frustration."

Looking toward the future

Al-Zubaidy was the re-entry navigator at Larch before becoming the program director in September. The Clark team at Larch does significant reentry work to prepare students for continuing their education after they are released. They set students up with meetings with colleges across the state. During the lockdown, Al-Zubaidy has been dropping off FAFSA forms and college applications for students.

Because there is no guidebook for running educational programs in a prison during a global pandemic, Al-Zubaidy, the Clark faculty and staff have had to problem-solve each time a new roadblock arises. The deans and directors of all corrections facilities across the state meet weekly via Zoom to share ideas and best practices in corrections education during the pandemic.

Al-Zubaidy said, “It’s helpful to be able to bounce ideas off other directors and ask: ‘What did you do in this situation? What worked for you?’ This group makes me feel supported for all that’s going on.”



Clark College staff and faculty deliver backpacks full of school supplies to students at Larch Corrections Center, where online learning is not an option. *Photo courtesy of Hanan Al-Zubaidy*

This was the first backpack drop for Clark students at Larch Corrections Center, but it won’t be the last. Al-Zubaidy said although it was a lot of work for her team to put together backpacks and folders with student materials and to distribute packets throughout the quarter, it was important to do.

She said, “Students were yelling through their

windows asking us if we were finally bringing their assignments. One student saw our basic skills instructor through the window and began asking how he could turn in his homework and if he could get more assignments to work on while in lockdown. Providing our students with material keeps them on track in their programs, gives them something to do to fill their time, and provides a sense of normalcy during these challenging times.”

Al-Zubaidy’s team isn’t done innovating: Clark College is expanding its educational offerings at Larch to include a degree program in Supervisory Management.

Armetta Burney, Interim Dean of WPTE & STEM, said, “I appreciate our faculty and staff’s leadership and the extraordinary commitment they have demonstrated to support our students at Larch. They have come up with creative solutions. They are deeply invested in our students at Larch.”