

RESEARCH BRIEF

Humanity and Resilience: Minority Serving Institutions in the Age of Coronavirus

by Marybeth Gasman and Brandy Jones

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has thrown higher education into a time of uncertainty. Many scholars and pundits are making dire predictions about the future of tuition-driven colleges and universities, including most Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Although most MSIs will get hit harder by COVID-19 than Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) due to their smaller endowments and enrollment of larger numbers of Pell Grant eligible, first generation, and low-income students, they will also benefit from their biggest strengths – that of being humane and resilient.

We have witnessed the actions many colleges and universities have enacted as they handle the wrath of COVID-19 – some approaches have been beautiful and others have been less than compassionate. Whereas some institutions have taken care of their low-income students, international students, and those afraid to return to homes that are less than supportive or worse yet, dangerous, other institutions of higher education have made assumptions that their students are all the same – middle class, without needs, and safe.

MSIs – including Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCUs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) and others – have substantial experience serving low-income students. We should look to them as models in this regard, especially during the current COVID-19 crisis.

This brief highlights some of the many actions of MSIs in the midst of COVID-19 – actions on the part of presidents, faculty, student affairs professionals, students, and others. These actions are organized in sections related to community outreach, communication, technology, mental health, basic needs support, and curricula. Hopefully they will inspire others to act in the most humane ways toward students, faculty, staff, and beyond.

SPONSORED BY

RUTGERS
Graduate School of Education



SAMUEL DEWITT
PROCTOR INSTITUTE
for Leadership, Equity, & Justice

Center for
MSIs

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Howard University, located in Washington, D.C., has a COVID-19 treatment center at its hospital and recently received \$13 million as result of the Coronavirus stimulus package. The hospital is an American College of Surgeons-designated Level 1 Trauma Center.



Moriah Chandler, an Assistant Professor at the **University of Houston's** College of Optometry, is sewing masks for doctors and nurses in the Houston area.

Professor Gregory Tanaka, a biologist at **San Jose City College** contributed an article to [China Daily](#), speaking out against the Xenophobia taking place across the nation, and in President Trumps' Coronavirus press briefings — during which he referred to the virus as the [China virus](#).

Students at **Benedict College** in Columbia, South Carolina are helping a local homeless shelter through Operation Blessing Bags – an effort to collect food for the homeless in the area.

BENEDICT COLLEGE STUDENTS PRESENTS
OPERATION BLESSING BAGS!
 FOR PROVIDENCE HOME HOMELESS SHELTER

Want to Help?

Contact Faith Dupree
 Call (404) 926-6504 or email
 f.dupree16@gmail.com for more details!

Looking forward to your help!

WE NEED HELP WITH:

- Bread
- Turkey
- Cheese
- PB/Jelly
- Chips
- Fruit
- Prepackaged Sweets
- Sandwich Bags
- Paper Bags

The pervasiveness of COVID-19 and the economic fallout across the nation prompted **The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley** to expand its free tuition and fees program, offering it to families that make up to \$95,000 – a \$20,000 increase. The University is located along the Texas/Mexico border in one of the most poverty-stricken areas of the nation.

COMMUNICATION

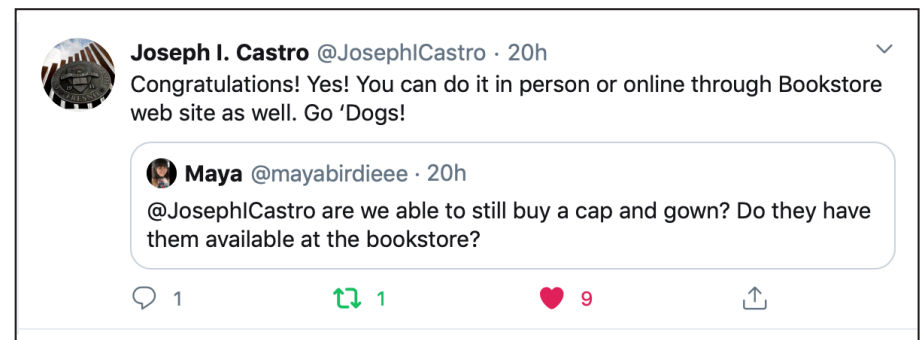
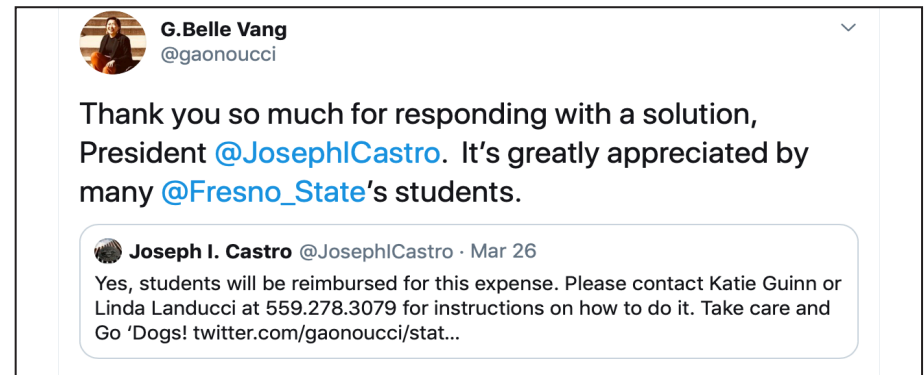
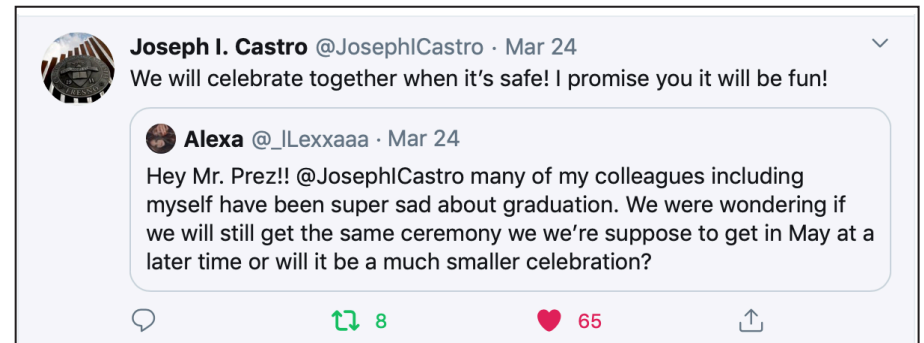
At Paul Quinn College, President Michael Sorrell is hosting Instagram live sessions titled "Coronation Pop-Up with Prez" so that students can ask questions. Take a look at [@michaelsorrell](#) for more details.



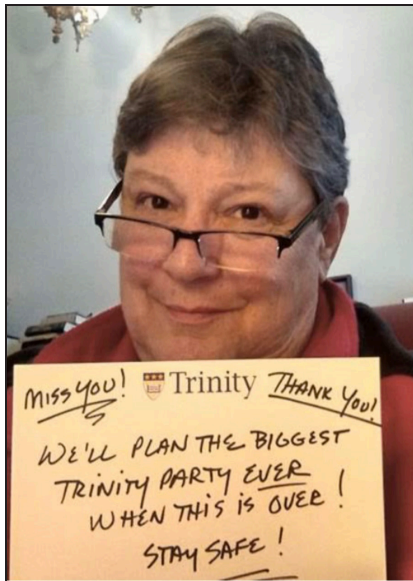
Spelman College's president, Mary Schmidt Campbell, is inviting students to "share words of encouragement" and ways to stay connected. She also requested that students use the hashtag #SpelmanIsUndaunted. Follow the hashtag and President Campbell ([@SpelmanPres](#)) and see the tremendous contributions of Spelman women.



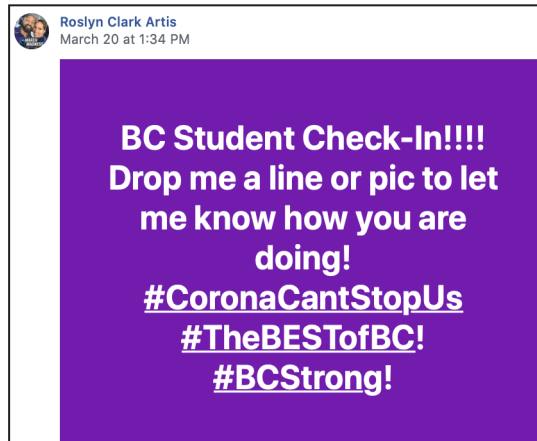
President Joseph Castro ([@JosephICastro](#)) of Fresno State University, is answering student and parent questions on Twitter in real time as they come in. He is pointing everyone who reaches out to him to various campus resources, and if they don't get an answer, he is asking people to contact him directly.



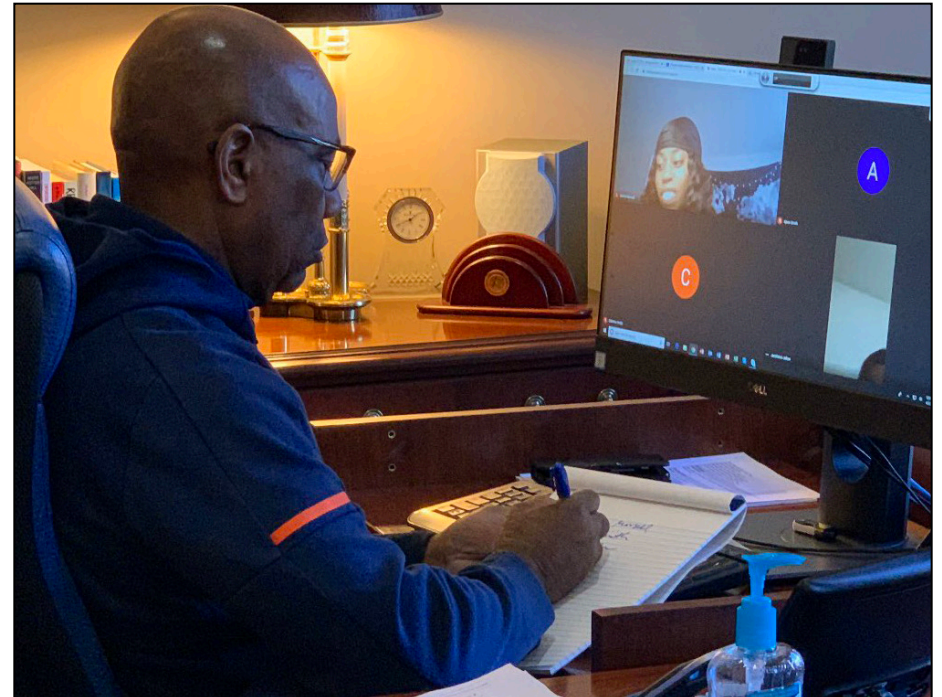
The president of **Trinity University** in Washington, D.C. – Pat McGuire – is encouraging students by promising the biggest party ever at the women-serving institution as well as asking students to show their purple and gold colors in solidarity. In addition, she's passing along scientific information to students regarding avoiding the virus and overall safety. Follow her at [@trinityprez](https://twitter.com/trinityprez).



Roslyn Artis, the president of **Benedict College** in Columbia, South Carolina, asked students to check in with her with updates via Facebook, demonstrating care for them on an individual basis.



David Wilson, president of **Morgan State University** in Baltimore, Maryland, held a virtual town hall meeting with constituents of the campus, answering all of their questions and easing their concerns. Participants were able to send in questions via e-mail in advance. He also signed up for a course to see what students are experiencing in their online instruction.



At **Grambling State University** in Grambling, Louisiana, both President Rick Gallot and Vice President Gourjoine Wade are answering student questions and encouraging them to stay strong via direct messaging across various social media platforms.

TECHNOLOGY

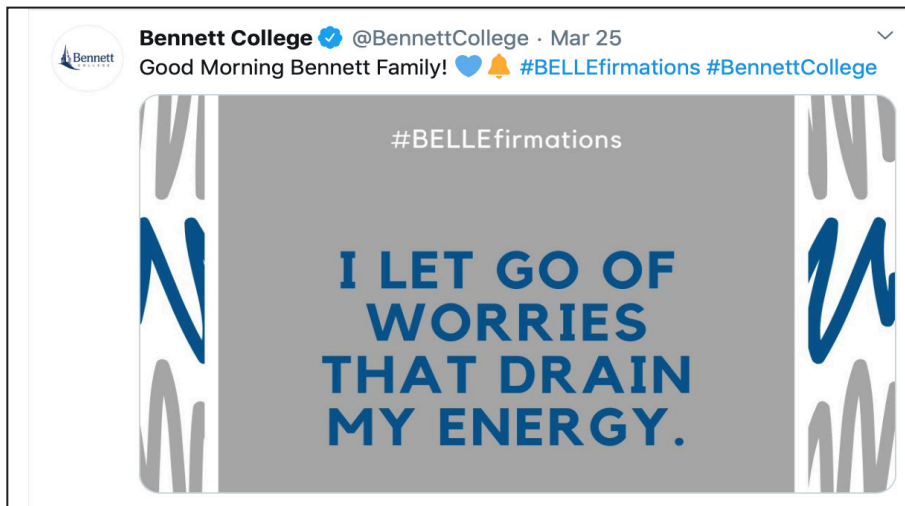
At **Paul Quinn College** in Dallas, Texas, students without access to laptop computers are able to check out a computer from the institution to use at home.

At **Florida A&M University** in Tallahassee, Florida, faculty members developed online courses and were specifically asked to consider those students who might have limited access to technology. The administrators are thinking about instruction from the perspectives of students, even using Facebook and Instagram Live as options for teaching.

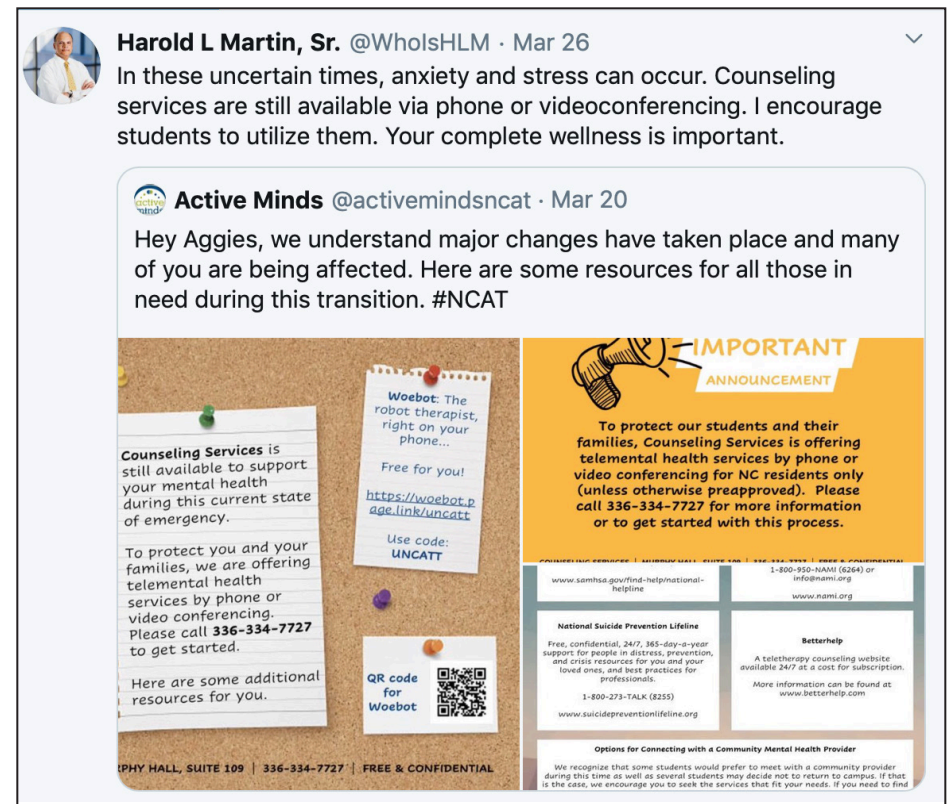
Walter Kimbrough, president of **Dillard University** in New Orleans, Louisiana, also considered those students without access to technology at home, offering students who live nearby and those who remain on campus access to computer labs. Follow President Kimbrough on Twitter at [@HipHopPrez](#).

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

At **Bennett College**, the institution is sharing “Bellefirmations” – or affirmations to inspire students and alumni alike during this difficult time.



Harold Martin, the president of **North Carolina A&T University (NCAT)**, is ensuring that his students have the proper mental health supports. The NCAT counseling center is open for counseling sessions via telephone and videoconferencing. You can follow President Martin at [@WholsHLM](#).



BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT

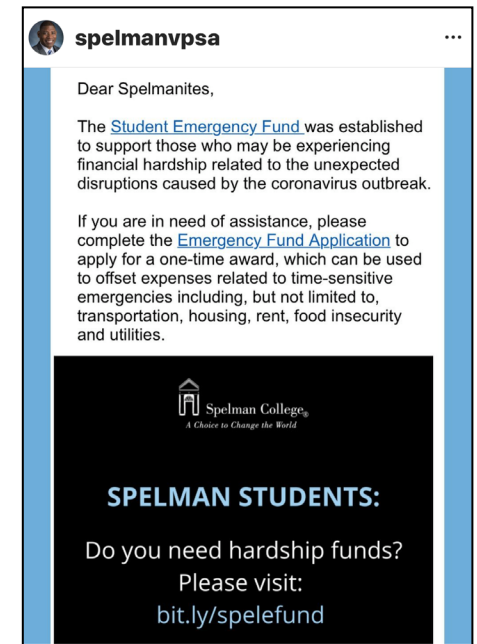
At **Fresno State University**, the first lady, Mary Castro, is serving students through the Student Cupboard – a food pantry for students who are food insecure.



Administrators at **San Jose City College** are distributing food to students through their on-campus market, using a “drive up and go” strategy.

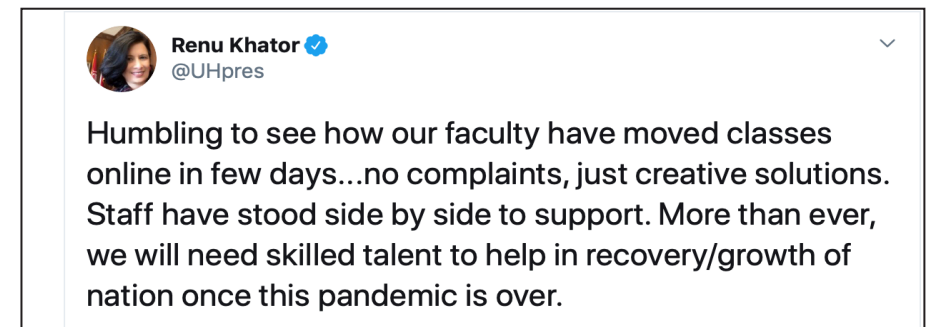


The Vice President for Student Affairs at **Spelman College**, Darryl Holloman, is using Instagram to make students aware of hardship funds that are available through the college. Students can complete a short application and access support for transportation, housing, rent, food, utilities, etc. Follow along at [@spelmanvpsa](https://www.instagram.com/spelmanvpsa).



CURRICULA

President Renu Khator at the University of Houston, much like many other MSI presidents, is cheering faculty and staff on as they move to online courses for the first time. She is also asking people to look toward the future and the skills development that will be needed. Follow her on Twitter at [@UHpres](https://twitter.com/UHpres).



At **Sacramento State University**, English Professor Anita Scharf hosted an online session with her students via [Zoom](#), inviting the library staff to share their expertise and to highlight all of the resources that can be accessed electronically. And like many professors, her cat joined in on the learning.



El Paso Community College is offering on-line tutoring 7 days a week from 6 a.m. – 2 a.m. to serve their students.

William Serrata Retweeted
EPCC @EPCCNews · Mar 27
 Online tutoring is available for all EPCC students! Go to us.bbcollab.com/collab/ui/sess.. to access the online tutoring room. If any issues arise call (888) 296-0863. #ElPasoCommunityCollege

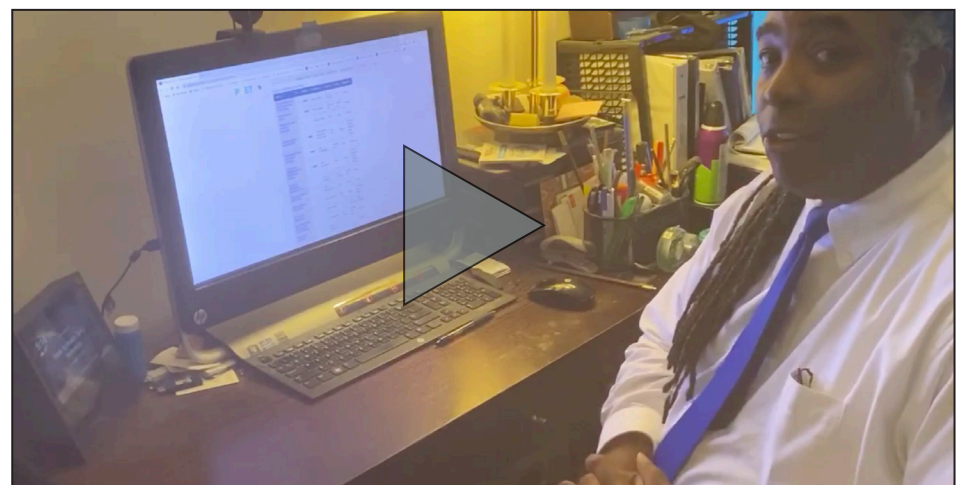
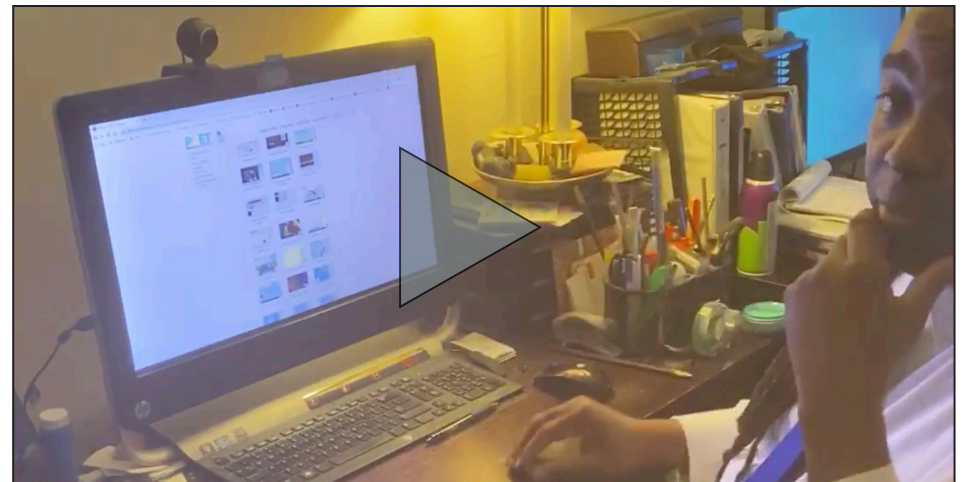
We're online 7 days a week to help you complete your semester.

Math, Calculus, Biology, Statistics & many more...
 Check our Tutor Finder for a complete list.

Spring 2020 Online Tutoring Schedule
Monday - Sunday • 6:00a.m. - 2:00a.m.

1. Scan the QR Code or use the Link below to access Blackboard Collaborate Ultra.

Fisk University Physics Professor Kent Wallace is working hard to engage students in his online physics and natural science courses and labs. He uses [Big Blue Button](#), which is embedded in the [Canvas](#) platform. According to Professor Wallace, there is a lot of work involved in setting up an online course this quickly, but students feel cared for and engaged during this difficult time because he checks in on their mental and physical health and provides regular announcements from the Center for Disease Control. Check out these videos of Professor Wallace teaching and explaining how he teaches.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

USE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATING REAL-TIME INFORMATION TO STAKEHOLDERS: Staying connected with stakeholders amidst COVID-19 is critically important, especially given the influx of misinformation regarding the virus. Social media is an effective tool for posting relevant news, institutional updates, and can be used as a medium for directly communicating with constituents.

PROVIDE FREQUENT INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS: Institutions must think about the ways they can be supportive and provide assistance to students who may be experiencing housing or food insecurity during this time. Simply having a food pantry on campus may no longer suffice given the social distancing parameters set up by the CDC. Institutions should share resources for accessing food from local and community food banks, frequently share any emergency funds established to support these students, and check in on students who may be in need of support in this area.

CONSIDER HOSTING ONLINE EVENTS TO CONNECT THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY: Institutions should establish online events and programs for students, staff, and faculty that provide them with a chance to connect with peers and colleagues. Social isolation can be a daunting experience for all institutional stakeholders; institutions should work to create virtual spaces for community collaboration.

ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Many social organizations (i.e. food banks, hospitals, etc.) are in need of additional support during this time. There are also a number of ways to volunteer virtually. Institutions should be a model for getting involved, and can encourage their stakeholders to do the same in a safe way.

SUPPORT FACULTY AND STAFF AS THEY TRANSITION TO ONLINE AND VIRTUAL INTERACTIONS: Institutions should share resources that could be helpful for transitioning to virtual and online courses and meetings. Academic deans should also aim to frequently check in with their faculty to ensure they are supported during and throughout this shift.

SHARE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES ON A FREQUENT BASIS: Taking care of one's mental health is vitally important at this time, given social isolation. When sending correspondence to stakeholders, institutions should be sure to include clear instructions and helpful links to the available mental health resources.

TAKE TIME TO REVISIT YOUR EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS: For many colleges and universities, COVID-19 uncovered the lack of institutional preparedness in managing an institutional crisis. Institutional leaders should be charging their crisis management and response teams to evaluate their plans to identify areas of improvement and ways to better communicate crises to the campus community.

For decades researchers and practitioners have lauded many Minority Serving Institutions for their family-like environment, humanity, and wrap-around services. A great number of the best practices that have been adopted more recently by Predominantly White Institutions, and are often touted as innovative and fresh, were first used at MSIs. These practices are a necessity due to the student population, which includes significant numbers of first generation, low-income, and students of color. During a time of crisis, there is much to learn from these diverse and important institutions.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marybeth Gasman is the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Endowed Chair in Education and a Distinguished Professor at Rutgers University. She serves as the Executive Director of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity & Justice and the Executive Director of the Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions.

Brandy Jones is the Acting Director for Programs and Communications at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity & Justice and the Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions at Rutgers University.