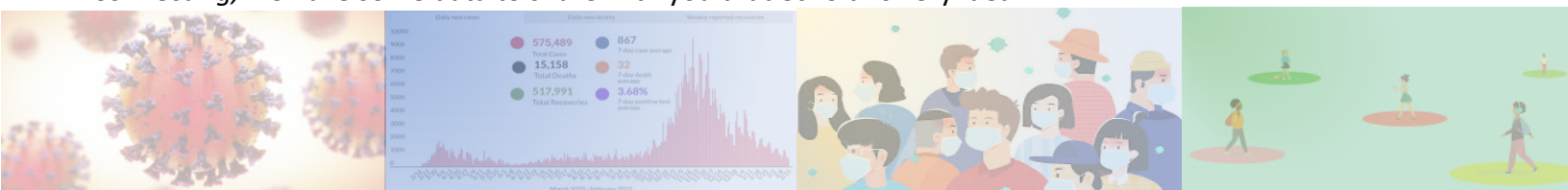


This is the third issue of *Connecting*, and, although COVID has delayed it, we're very happy to be re-connecting with you. During this unprecedented time, we first want to send you our best wishes. We hope you and those you love have endured the hardships of 2020 and that this new year will bring you peace and health!

Back in March of 2020, before the sudden lockdown of many parts of the country, most of us probably never imagined the challenges this year would bring. In the past ten months, we have had to wade into much uncharted territory: online teaching and learning, social distancing, quarantines, masks, and Zoom meetings. It still feels surreal looking at the curves showing numbers of COVID infections and COVID-related deaths as dates on the x-axis keeps on extending with no end in sight. It is as if the same tragic event stubbornly repeats itself day after day. We know this pandemic will be over one day, and we will eventually resume our "normal lives"; however, regardless of the degree to which things will seem like they used to be, our thoughts and our society will undoubtedly be affected by this pandemic in many ways. One thing that the pandemic has acutely reminded us is how important human connections are and how we simply cannot take them for granted. Being keenly aware of the lessons we have learned from this pandemic is perhaps one of the best ways for us to fight back against the challenges that the virus has relentlessly presented us with. In this issue of *Connecting*, we have some data to share with you that echo this very idea.



Findings from the Alumni Survey

In the first issue of this newsletter (<https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/92386C7F-BF75-96ED-67D9FAA81701D122/connecting-alumninewsletter1.pdf>), we reported responses on work-related questions from the Alumni Survey conducted in 2016. In the same survey, we also asked questions related to life satisfaction and about the things that were most positive and most challenging in people's lives.

On Life Satisfaction:

One of the most prominent researchers in the area of subjective well-being, Ed Diener, along with several colleagues, developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This scale is designed to assess people's overall life satisfaction and includes the following five items, all of which we included in the Alumni Survey:

- In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.
- The conditions of my life are excellent.
- I am satisfied with my life.
- So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

The more that people agreed with these statements (using a 7 point scale in which 1 was *strongly disagree* and 7 was *strongly agree*), the higher they scored on life satisfaction. We calculated mean scores across the five items for each individual. Shown below are the average life satisfaction scores, by decade (with alumni who graduated in the 1960s and 1970s combined due to lower numbers of participants).

Mean Life Satisfaction Scores by Decade

Class	1960-70s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
N	43	38	134	229	233
Mean	5.91	5.73	5.47	5.36	5.10
Std.Deviation	.63	1.03	1.00	1.04	1.08

As you can see, average life satisfaction scores are well above the midpoint for alumni in all decades. This is consistent with the literature on life satisfaction, in particular, and subjective well-being, more generally. As is the case with our alumni, people generally report being higher than neutral (i.e., higher than 4) on life satisfaction.

On most positive and challenging things in life:

If you were one of the alumni who responded to this survey, you may recall that there was also a qualitative component. In particular, we asked our alumni to list the three most positive things in their lives and the three biggest challenges they faced. To summarize, we classified responses into 12 categories:

1. Career
2. Education
3. Family (including immediate family members, spouses and significant others, children and parents)
4. Financial and material needs
5. Health (including both physical and psychological health and wellness)
6. Recreation and leisure (having fun, pursuing hobbies, and lifestyle choices that enhance the comfort and beauty of one's surroundings)
7. Recognition/reputation/respect (social status relative to others, being distinctive and unique in one's position, and being publicly acknowledged)
8. Self-realization and personal growth (self-discovery, self-reliance, self-acceptance, finding balance in life, feeling fully alive and fulfilled in a general sense, and personal enrichment)
9. Service to others (being altruistic, generous, and prosocial)
10. Social connections or social bonds (social relationships outside of one's family, such as friends, coworkers, neighbors, and community members)
11. Religion
12. Other (anything that could not be easily assigned to any of the above categories, such as location of residence, distance from work, politics, preparing for retirement)

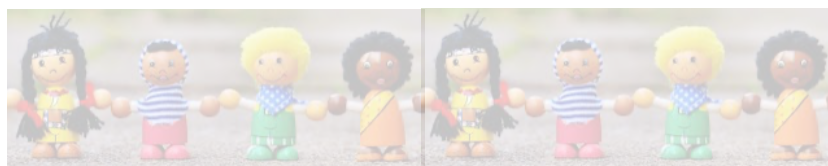
The following is a summary of the results on the responses to the question: **What are the three most positive things in your life right now?** After classifying the responses into the above 12 categories, we ranked ordered them by the percentage of alumni who mentioned a positive thing that was coded as a specific category for each of the graduation cohorts. For example, for those who graduated in the 1960s or 1970s, 94.6% mentioned something related to family as one of the three most positive things in their lives.

Class 1960-70s (N=37)		Class 1980s (N=37)		Class 1990s (N=118)		Class 2000s (N=202)		Class 2010s (N=202)	
Family	94.6%	Family	91.9%	Family	100.0%	Family	94.1%	Family	92.1%
Social Bonds	32.4%	Career	59.5%	Career	56.8%	Career	56.9%	Career	49.5%
Career	24.3%	Social Bonds	21.6%	Social Bonds	35.6%	Social Bonds	38.1%	Social Bonds	47.0%
Health	24.3%	Health	18.9%	Religion	28.0%	Religion	16.8%	Financial	20.3%
Religion	18.9%	Financial	16.2%	Health	18.6%	Financial	13.9%	Education	17.3%
Leisure	13.5%	Religion	16.2%	Financial	13.6%	Health	8.9%	Personal Growth	12.4%
Personal Growth	13.5%	Leisure	13.5%	Leisure	5.1%	Leisure	6.9%	Leisure	11.4%
Other	10.8%	Personal Growth	5.4%	Personal Growth	5.1%	Other	5.9%	Other	8.9%
Financial	5.4%	Other	2.7%	Service to others	4.2%	Personal Growth	5.4%	Health	8.4%
Recognition	2.7%			Other	4.2%	Education	3.5%	Religion	8.4%
Service to others	2.7%			Education	3.4%	Service to others	1.5%	Service to others	4.5%
				Recognition	0.8%			Recognition	0.5%

The following is a summary of the results for the question: **What are the three most challenging things in your life right now?** Similar to the data on the three positive things, we also ranked ordered the percentage of alumni who mentioned a challenge that was coded as a specific category for each of the graduation cohorts. For example, for those who graduated in the 1960s and 70s, 55.6% mentioned something related to health as one of the three most challenging things in their lives right now.

Class 1960-70s (N=36)		Class 1980s (N=35)		Class 1990s (N=118)		Class 2000s (N=197)		Class 2010s (N=197)	
Health	55.6%	Family	51.4%	Financial	45.8%	Financial	52.8%	Financial	73.1%
Other	52.8%	Financial	42.9%	Family	43.2%	Family	45.2%	Career	38.3%
Family	44.4%	Health	37.1%	Career	42.4%	Career	42.1%	Family	30.3%
Financial	19.4%	Career	34.3%	Other	30.5%	Personal Growth	32.5%	Other	29.4%
Personal Growth	16.7%	Other	34.3%	Health	28.8%	Other	26.9%	Education	19.9%
Career	8.3%	Personal Growth	11.4%	Personal Growth	26.3%	Health	23.4%	Personal Growth	19.9%
Social Bonds	8.3%	Leisure	5.7%	Leisure	6.8%	Social Bonds	7.6%	Health	16.9%
Leisure	5.6%	Social Bonds	5.7%	Social Bonds	5.1%	Education	7.1%	Social Bonds	9.0%
Religion	2.8%			Education	2.5%	Leisure	5.1%	Leisure	2.5%
				Religion	1.7%	Service to others	0.5%	Religion	1.5%
						Religion	0.5%	Recognition	0.5%
								Service to others	0.5%

Given that the responses for challenges were much more varied than those for positive things, the following examples will give you a more concrete sense about what challenges our alumni reported facing in their lives.



\$37,100

Financial:

- Student loans (many responses were about student loans)
- Not knowing how to manage money
- I am primarily concerned with being able to live on my own while also paying off my student loans
- Paying for children's college
- The salary at my place of employment and pushing to have it raised.
- Struggling to make ends meet and not receiving any help
- Feeling of not using your college degree but still paying off student loans

\$52,000

Career:

- Learning more at my job
- Not happy at current job
- Lack of new position openings in my field
- Deciding if this career is correct
- Job security
- Struggling to advance my career
- Job dissatisfaction
- Determining what to do next in my career
- Wanting a different job using my psych degree more
- Having a job that requires me to do a lot of things I never learned to do in school

Family:

- Family problems
- My parents who have mental health and addictions issues
- Recent death of mother
- Unsupportive family
- Emotional challenges from family members
- Parenting
- Raising a young child

Personal Growth:

- Learning the ropes of adulthood
- Finding meaning in life
- Self exploration
- Desire to do something meaningful
- Feeling a lack of direction
- Trying to balance personal & professional parts of my life
- Figuring out my long term life plans/goals
- Uncertainty of professional/educational goals
- Learning how to balance work and personal life

Social bonds:

- Distance between myself and others
- Making deep friendships
- Forgiving those who have hurt me in my past
- Keeping in touch with family/friends
- Finding new friends

Leisure:

- Finding time to relax/travel
- Stressful workout routine that takes a lot of free time

Education:

- Getting further accreditations
- Putting life on hold because I'm in grad school.

Health:

- Getting depressed easily
- Managing stress
- Overcoming anxiety
- Physical issues
- Getting healthier

Recognition:

- Climbing the success ladder
- Being appreciated at my job
- Deciding when the time is right to seek opportunity to move up in the work force

Service to others:

- helping my family and friends achieve their goals
- not being able to volunteer more of my time because I have to work more to pay off student loans

Religion:

- Finding time with God's word
- Faith

Other:

- Live too far from home
- Preparing for retirement
- Getting everything done
- Not having enough time
- Figuring out where to live
- Living far from friends and family
- Seeing people "milking the system" when I'm working two jobs just to get by

What Have We Learned?

A striking theme in these survey responses is the importance of connecting with others. For example, in response to the question about positive things in their lives, family was the most mentioned among all twelve response categories for all alumni cohorts. Furthermore, social connections emerged as the second or third most commonly mentioned category for all cohorts. These findings illustrate the importance of social relationships. Clearly, when we asked people about what makes their lives better, many thought about their connections with others. The way that people responded in this survey is consistent with the work of Baumeister and Leary (1995). They made a convincing argument, backed by a great deal of data, that belongingness is a fundamental human need and that we are deeply motivated to establish and maintain close bonds with others. This need is something we've heard about a lot during the coronavirus pandemic. Through media reports and conversations with others, we hear people speaking to their concerns about family members, their feelings of loss and disconnection due to the pandemic, and their desire to return to their normal social lives. Remember that the alumni survey was conducted years before the pandemic and, even then, people expressed their need for connection. The pandemic may have heightened our awareness of the importance of family, friends, and neighbors, but for many of us this awareness is always front and center. Relationships matter.

Another remarkable pattern is that, for many people, family emerged as a challenge as well as a positive factor. In fact, for every alumni cohort, family was mentioned as the first, second, or third most common of the twelve kinds of challenges we coded. This, of course, doesn't contradict the notion that relationships are important. If anything, it reinforces this idea. When you ask people what is going on in their lives, as a positive factor or as a challenge, people talk about their family relationships. The take-away message seems to be that what is happening in our close relationships is meaningful to us, whether what's happening is positive or negative.

It's also notable that many people referred to their career as a positive thing and many considered career to be a challenge. In addition, financial concerns and health were mentioned as a challenge by at least some people in each alumni cohort. It would have been interesting to have alumni survey data from this past (COVID) year to compare with these data from several years ago. Our hunch is that financial and health concerns, and perhaps those related to family as well, might be higher now than a few years ago.



Call for Two Upcoming Panel Discussions

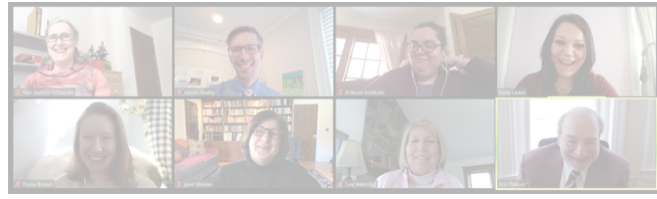
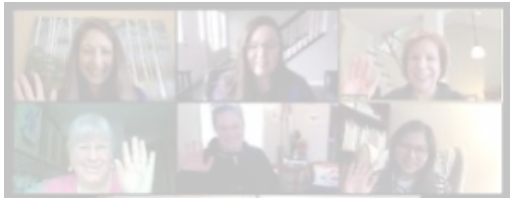
Career panel discussion

As you may recall, in our last Alumni Newsletter, Connecting (<https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/92386C7F-BF75-96ED-67D9FAA81701D122/connecting-newsletter-issue2.pdf>), we featured an event held in November, 2019. This was a panel of three alumni discussing their career paths with our current students. The event was very well received, and we hope to organize a similar event via zoom during this winter semester. The idea is to have alumni share information about their careers that may help current students better prepare to make the transition to the next phase of their lives. If you might be willing to serve on this kind of a panel, please [contact us](#) and let us know.



Connecting alumni with each other

As a Laker, you may already be connected with other Lakers. However, your shared experience of majoring in Psychology may make that bond even stronger. To facilitate connection-building among our Psychology alumni, we would like to organize a Zoom event where alumni can network with each other regarding careers and other issues.



If you are willing to serve on the panel for either the current students or alumni, please [contact us](#) at your earliest convenience. It would be really helpful for us to plan the events if you can briefly tell us what aspects of your career path or life experience that you want to share with our current students or other alumni. We are hoping to create alumni panels that represent a broad range of careers and experiences. We are especially interested in hearing from people whose careers and lives have been highly impacted (positively or negatively) by the COVID-19 crisis. This information could be very valuable to our students and to your fellow alumni to build resilience and get through this pandemic together.

Sharing Your Thoughts

We are also thinking about doing a future newsletter on the impact of COVID-19 on our alumni. If you have any thoughts or stories about how this pandemic has affected you, for better or for worse, we would be grateful to hear from you. And please let us know if you would allow us to include in a newsletter what you have to say, in whole or in part, and whether you would prefer to be identified by name or anonymous. We would love to hear from you: [Connect with us!](#)

All the best from the Psychology Department!