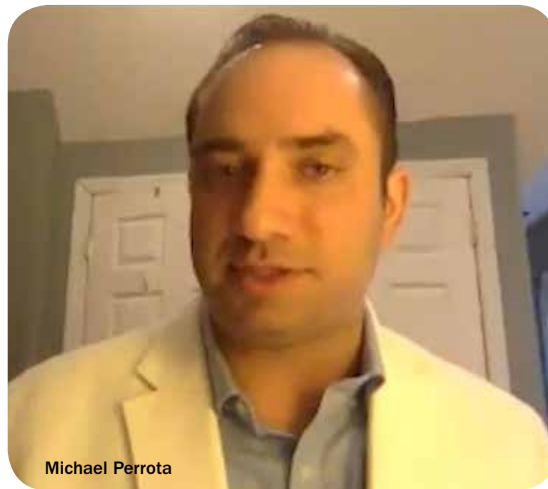


# Pandemic Provides Learning Opportunity for Mercy Students



The coronavirus pandemic produced a captive audience for companies to communicate to their customers, and for news outlets to convey information to their readers and viewers. With so many people stuck at home, their connection to the events of the world electronic, it provided a “living case study” for students studying advertising, public relations and journalism at Mercy College through the spring term, according to Jade Snyder, assistant professor in Mercy’s Communication and the Arts department in the School of Liberal Arts. In real time, students were able to observe and analyze “companies aligning their brands with doing the right thing as we go through the storm,” says Snyder, who teaches communications, advertising and public relations. “That’s very rare. And the communication was suddenly personal, with messaging focused on how ‘we’re in this with you, you’ve been a long-time customer, we’re thinking about you.’ The challenge for companies was how to advance the brand without appearing exploitative of the pandemic.”

Michael Perrota, associate professor and chair of the Communication and the Arts Department, who teaches journalism, pointed out that students were both studying COVID-19 through the lens of journalism and living it as well. “Students have family and friends who have the virus. They’re going out into the world – working, stacking groceries, making deliveries. You’re not studying a disaster from afar. Here you’re in it, and everyone is affected. It is a personal moment and a



Michael Perrota



Jade Snyder

teaching moment.”

Perrota and Snyder took part in Mercy’s “Discussions with Mercy Leaders in the Time of Coronavirus” series, which featured numerous professors at the College offering their expertise on various aspects of the pandemic, including the latest medical updates, keeping fit at home, the CARES Act, keeping children’s education going at home as well as others.

Perrota says his students were afforded a unique opportunity to see the pitfalls of the 24/7 news cycle when the facts on the ground are constantly changing. “We’re used to immediacy. So, when the answers aren’t fluid, or the information is not 100% accurate, or the scientists and doctors don’t know, that’s tricky: as the science changes, so does the news coverage.”

Perrota added: “Information was always gettable. Never before have you had more access to sources, because you’re home and they’re home. You can find them like never before. Yet at the same time, news outlets have to consider how much truth will frighten

an audience. Sometimes truth can put an audience on panic mode. We’re all crisis learning right now.”

Snyder notes, “It’s all a living case study for students that changes every day, and has been illustrative to the point that sometimes I just cut back my original lesson plan and said, ‘This is it: feet to the fire, every week we’re checking in on brands that are doing a great job, brands that could be doing better.’ You can’t design these case studies because they’re being built right now. It’s a great opportunity to judge a situation in its context.”