Dear SIGNA Community,

There is a saying, "Bloom where you are planted." This adage teaches me to adapt to situations even in disagreeable conditions. What can be done to transform and thrive even in intolerable situations? Through SIGNA members, coaches, mentors, leaders, parents, and my life community, I've learned that extra doses of flexibility, creativity, and grace spark resilience and are needed during this pandemic, age of racial injustice, and political unrest.

Flexibility is the quality of bending easily without breaking; the ability to easily modify; and have the willingness to change. Pre-COVID, we had set routines and favorite things we did that did not involve being in our homes. During this pandemic, it has been hard to plan anything. But these past 10 months have taught me that flexibility (to include adaptability) is a skill that has been highly underrated. In SIGNA, and I hope in other areas of life, we have learned to be more flexible and willing to change. Change can be scary, but it can also help us strengthen our resiliency muscles.

Creativity is the use of imagination or original ideas. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be working from home EVERY DAY! Perhaps a few snow days and when my students were in class, could I picture working from home to catch up; but not all the time, much less running the SIGNA program virtually. Remarkably, SIGNA continues to transform its online format to help everyone hone skills and offer opportunities to connect with others. With care and ingenuity, our entire SIGNA community pitched in.

Grace is being courteous or offering goodwill. In this period where time seems compressed, life is often uncomfortable, and we are stressed and stretched, we can offer each other and ourselves grace. Each day is a chance to try again, live again, love again. Things may go wrong and most times, it will be okay; if not, do-overs are okay too. As long as we have breath, we have a new day to try again.

So, let's be flexible, creative, and grace-filled people. Be intentional to make new traditions. Take time to watch the sun rise or snow fall. Discover more about ourselves in positive ways. Because time is our only non-renewable resource. Bloom where we are planted.

Very truly yours,

Kathy Dow-Burger
Kathy Dow-Burger, M.A., CCC-SLP
Clinical Associate Professor/Speech-Language Pathologist
SIGNA Founder and Coordinator
WHO ARE THE COMMUNICATION COACHES (CC)?

Communication Coaches are HESP Master’s graduate students in speech-language pathology. They program and implement individual, weekly coaching sessions with each SIGNA member related to social interaction and executive functioning skills that help the member learn ways to organize themselves around the many academic expectations and settings on campus. The skills worked on are based on each member’s input, standardized test measures, and observation. Communication Coaches also run the SIGNA Launch group meetings.

"My advice for SIGNA members would be to think about their goals and what they want because more likely than not, we can work on it together. Also, take advantage of the resources we provide!"

Danait (CC)

Although teletherapy was not what I expected my grad school clinical experience to be, my involvement in SIGNA made it all worthwhile. My teletherapy sessions were fulfilling, rewarding, and fun! My SIGNA member and I developed a strong and positive relationship despite only meeting each other over Zoom.

NADA (CC)

I had a wonderful experience doing teletherapy with SIGNA members this past semester. Despite the virtual environment, all members came to Launch meetings with an open mind and eagerness to engage in meaningful conversations. SIGNA Launch was one of the highlights of my week, and I will miss it this semester! Good luck to all in the spring semester.

REBECCA (CC)

THANK YOU AND WELCOME!

We want to say a BIG thank you and good job to our Fall 2020 Communication Coaches (pictured on left) who were the first coaches to navigate a full semester of online coaching with our SIGNA members!

We also want to welcome Hannah, Caitilin, Lauren, Caroline, Victoria, Meghan, Laurel, Michelle, and Candace, our Spring 2021 Communication Coaches (picture to come soon)
Thanks to the Friedman Family Funds, SIGNA welcomes Faculty Specialist, Candace Nuzzo Michiels. Candace joins the Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences as Faculty Specialist for the UMD SIGNA program. Previously, she worked with teens in the UMD Executive Functioning For Effective Cognitive Transformation (EFFECT) program. Throughout her career, Candace has worked with pediatric, teen, and adult clients in the home, daycare, clinic, and school settings. This year, she will work with SIGNA members in individual sessions and act as team coordinator to support the Peer Coaches and Peer Mentors working with first year SIGNA members and in the group meetings.

"I enjoyed my time at SIGNA as a member which is why I wanted to be a peer mentor. SIGNA helped me make friends both within and outside the community and manage schoolwork so I didn't feel so overwhelmed. I think compared to the other peer mentors, I was/am a little bit more experienced because I'd done SIGNA myself as a student and peer mentored last year. I guess I was also able to give some insight to my mentee as a fellow autistic person although I'm not sure I did enough of that. Biggest challenge was the technology. I missed the in person aspect a lot because we used to do end of year parties with lots of food and I could've gone out for a meal with my mentee or something if we were in person But I'm glad I got to give back/volunteer during this time and hope my mentee remembers this as a bright spot."

Nino (Peer Mentor Fall '20 & Spring '21)
In the UMD Community:
The President's Commission on Disability Issues

**WHAT IS THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON DISABILITY ISSUES (PCDI)?**
Established in 1986, the President's Commission on Disability Issues is responsible for advising the President on issues of concern to people with disabilities and bringing awareness to the campus community on disability and equal access issues. The Commission investigates and studies these issues as part of the University's commitment to the full participation of all members of its community in the educational, cultural, and social life of the campus.

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**PCDI ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

**The President’s Commission on Disability Issues**
**Student Advisory Committee** is looking for students to join!

If you're interested in inclusion, disability advocacy, and connecting with students and faculty while working towards creating a more accessible UMD, come join!

For more information, please email pcdi-sac@umd.edu.

All are welcome!

**PCDI SAC is hosting Student Disability Community Affinity Spaces** for students who identify as a part of the disability community to connect, socialize, support each other, and share resources.

Please find information about the bi-weekly spring semester Spaces at https://pcdi.umd.edu/disability-affinity-space; this link includes all of our meeting dates with zoom registrations for each Space!

Follow the PCDI SAC Facebook page for meeting info and more updates!

**PCDI is hosting the 2021 Disability Summit- Access and Crisis: Disability and the Collapse of Everything**
We are currently accepting proposals, which can be emailed to disabilitysummit-committee@umd.edu with the subject title "Disability Summit 2021 Submission" and a 200-word abstract, including presenters' names and pronouns, due by February 11th, 2021.

We are also looking for volunteers to help with the Summit! If you're interested in helping, sign up at go.umd.edu/2021registration.
Welcome to Spring 2021. While we stay virtual and move, slowly, toward normalcy, you have to stay focused on career prep and a successful transition to the workforce.

The University Career Center is open and fully operational- though we are operating virtually. You can still find support for all components of career readiness -- resume, interview, networking, meeting with recruiters, learning about industries and jobs-- through the career center.

Don't forget our events calendar: www.careers.umd.edu/events-calendar. I want to let you know about a series of speakers on Race & Disability coming this spring.

1. Our first speaker runs the National Center of Excellence on Neurodiversity for EY-- one of the founders and key companies behind the Autism@Work movement. Don’t miss this talk by Jamell Mitchell. He runs the ND program! You want to meet him! **Wednesday, March, 10 7pm.** RSVP at http://go.umd.edu/wwbs -- select this event.

2. Our next speaker, Teresa Danso-Danquah, runs the NextGen program with DisabilityIn that several SIGNA students have participated in. This is a premier professional development program for students. Come to this event to learn about race and disability on campus but also to meet the NextGen program leader. **Wednesday, March 24th 4-5:15pm.** RSVP at http://go.umd.edu/wwbs -- select this event.

3. Our final speaker, René Hill, founder of Black Girl, Lost Keys https://blackgirllostkeys.com/, will join Anaya Truss-Williams, campus student leader, and Lydia Woods, Employer Relations specialist at the UCC, on a panel titled: “Black-- and ADHD-- Like Me: Managing a Life.” **Monday, March 29 4:30pm.** RSVP at go.umd.edu/wwbs -- select this event.

**EmployABILITY Corner: Employability at UMD**

Nancy Forsythe, MA, EdS.

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The Neurodiversity in the Workplace class (BSOS288A) is meeting. This is a class that all ND students on campus should take to better understand how the career prep process and the transition to work may differ for ND people. The class is focused on your needs and provides tips, strategies, and support for managing ND in getting an internship or job and then succeeding in the workplace.