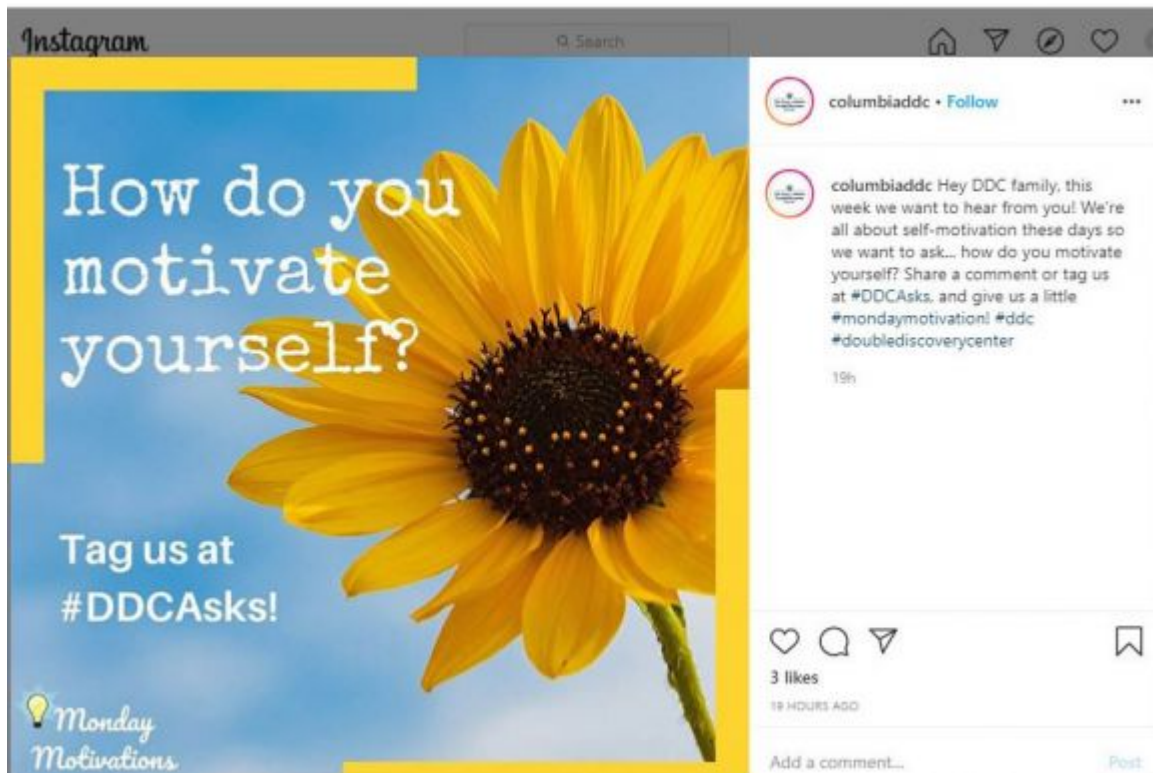




# The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college



***May 5<sup>th</sup> is GivingTuesdayNow! Please consider a [gift to DDC](#) so we can provide our students with the crucial support they need in the midst of this crisis.***

***On behalf of our students who benefit from your generosity, Thank You!***

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## **In This April 2020 Issue:**

- **DDC Is Now Virtual!**
- **Calls for Assistance Surge and HMB Steps Up Care of DDC Families**
- **Post It and They Will Come! The Instagram Relaunch of [ColumbiaDDC](#)!**

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## **DDC Is Now Virtual!**

DDC launched its virtual programming on March 23 to keep students on track with their learning, college preparation, and social-emotional wellness during the COVID crisis. Instructors, counselors, and staff completed the incredible feat of converting our 26 spring semester classes and tutorial sessions to online platforms; and re-engaging students through different digital technologies.

As we collectively reflect on this past month of virtual programming, there have been challenges but also unanticipated opportunities. One benefit has been a more flexible schedule for students, particularly with tutoring. Our tutoring schedule was expanded to six hours Monday thru Friday, and by appointment on the weekends. Students struggling with time management due to disruptions in their regular routines have found the increased flexibility a tremendous help. *A few of my students say they prefer online classes, they like to learn at their own pace,* says Jess Yip, a DDC Counselor.

DDC students have had to confront two fundamental challenges to their online learning. First, consistent access to devices with strong internet connectivity. At least fourteen DDC students received internet-enabled devices from the NYC Department of Education as part of their transition to remote learning. However, based on our student survey, nearly 40% of students have to share a device with three or more people. In addition, 45% of students reported erratic internet connectivity. These conditions significantly undermine their short- and long-term academic progress.

The second challenge is rigorous and engaging online instruction. When asked whether their remote learning, including school activities, has been engaging, 47% of students said no. Nearly half reported that they are logging into their school classes 80% of the time or less.

*It's not enough to post PowerPoints and assignments and expect students to be able to learn the material, now more than ever, we have to keep the learning experience engaging,* says Jess, *students are overwhelmed.* Margaret Banks, DDC Fellow and PhD Candidate in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University adds, *we have to get creative to make learning exciting. Remote learning forces teachers to be very thoughtful with lesson planning.*

Unfortunately, many school and after-school instructors were not well-prepared for the hurried shift to online instruction. This, coupled with students' lack of technological resources, diminishes the effectiveness of remote learning. Consequently, the loss of learning that typically occurs for students over the summer will worsen, especially for low-income and first-generation youth. In response, DDC is ramping up its professional development support of instructors and counselors so they can provide students with more engaging online learning experiences.

The students, along with their teachers and counselors, are mourning the loss of human interaction that they enjoy in face-to-face classroom settings. *It is such a pleasure being around the students, you get a better sense of what is working, I miss that,* says Fernanda Albuquerque de Araujo, Teachers College, Columbia University graduate student and DDC instructor. For students, it is also a matter of emotional support. Kali S., DDC '20 says, *I miss being able to hug my counselors when I feel stressed or overwhelmed with the college process.* This sentiment is echoed by Abi P., DDC '20, *I value that in-person connection you get when you interact with the other students and DDC staff. I miss being able to participate in the class without being interrupted by my family.*

*For many of our students, this is not the ideal learning environment,* says Yarisell Hernandez, DDC Counselor. *It can be scary to put your face online. Some students may be embarrassed to show their personal space to others. Students enjoy the personal relationship and community building that is so characteristic of DDC and a big incentive for them to attend DDC,* she adds.

Students' essential need for social emotional supports has crystallized during this crisis and fortunately, DDC's HMB team is addressing some of the challenges.

## **Calls for Assistance Surge and HMB Steps Up Care of DDC Families**

Research published in the Journal *Pediatrics* in 2017 found that children and adults in low-income households were at increased risk for lifelong mental health problems, and that they often lacked access to high-quality mental health care. New York State's Stay-at-Home mandate forcing the closure of schools and all non-essential businesses has thrown our low-income and first-generation students and families into a perfect storm of stressors for serious social emotional distress.

DDC students and their families are trying to cope with loss and grief on so many fronts – a friend or family member who may have fallen victim to COVID-19; parents with less or no household income because of sudden unemployment; children barred from face-to-face meetings with friends; and no traditional celebrations of the different milestones of adolescence. Students are anxious about the uncertainty of what is to come, especially in terms of the health and welfare of their families, their return to school, and their academic standing. Alumni in college worry about whether their campuses will reopen in the fall as well as the type of learning and social experiences that will define college life. For some, there is a real financial threat as they may not be able to afford to go back to college. Given these realities, it is not surprising that DDC's Healthy Minds & Bodies (HMB) team is experiencing a dramatic four-fold increase in calls for its counseling and referral services.

*Students are experiencing a lot of grief, says Kristan Rosenthal, DDC's Assistant Director, Healthy Minds & Bodies. Grief for family members and friends lost to the virus with no opportunity for communal mourning, but also grief for important rites of passage like prom, high school graduation, and the joy of the summer before college that have been forever snatched from them. They will never have these memories.*

*The isolation at home and uncertainty over the future add to students' anxiety. They do not have a full understanding of what is going on, says Kristan, and they do not have the usual outlets and means to communicate with and get consolation from friends and trusted adults who are part of their emotional support network. If they live in turbulent households, they can no longer escape the negative situation. We are seeing the heightened anxiety evolve into situational depression in both parents and children.*

Some college-bound seniors are considering putting college on hold because of their families' current economic hardships that likely will persist for an extended period. *They feel they have no choice but to defer their college acceptance and remain home to make money, adds Kristan. For them, helping the family unit is more valuable than attending college.* Unfortunately, putting college on hold may derail and upend their college journeys. There is no guarantee that schools will grant deferments; and even if they do, it is not certain that the economic conditions of students' families will change or that they will be motivated to return to college a year from now.

In response to these new challenges, DDC's HMB team has significantly ramped up its services:

- Forthcoming website with downloadable information and detailed resources map on physical and mental wellness services in the community.
- Case management consultations to provide referrals and guidance accessing social services (e.g. SNAP, Medicaid, unemployment, etc.).
- Additional individual and small group counseling sessions, including grief counseling; and activities like virtual Zumba that create opportunities for everyone to laugh together.

Traumatic events have long-lasting effects on everyone, especially on our youth; and DDC is working to mitigate that impact through our HMB programming so that our young people are resilient and can thrive after the crisis.

## Post It & They Will Come! The Instagram Relaunch of [ColumbiaDDC](#)

### Why Instagram?

According to a 2019 study by Hootsuite, a leading social media management platform,

- 75% of Instagram users followed up post viewing with website visits, which is the highest engagement rate of any social network.
- 55% of Instagram users were between the ages of 18-29 making it the most popular social network among U.S. teens.
- More than one-third (37%) of American adults used Instagram.

Instagram is an indispensable tool that combines creativity with functionality to facilitate knowledge sharing and community building, which is why DDC has revamped its page. It will increase DDC's overall visibility by keeping our students and friends informed of the wonderful things happening at DDC.

On April 6, DDC relaunched [ColumbiaDDC](#). Its redesign and maintenance is led by Jazz Digao and Spruha Reddy, both graduate students at Teachers College, Columbia University; and Jane Lanier Watson, Columbia College Class of 2022. Two goals guided the redesign of [ColumbiaDDC](#) – communicate program logistics and event highlights, including students' accomplishments; and strengthen the sense of community across our stakeholders.

At [ColumbiaDDC](#), students' voices matter! We collaborate with our students at every step of the process. *We balance content repetition such as class schedules, says Jane, with content creation that includes student postings and live stories where they can engage with followers in real time.*

Students suggested interactive forums and polls, such as “How do you motivate yourself?” and “What is your best study advice?” *They voted in favor of posting TikTok group dance challenges – you need 3 people to do it right, so you have to bring your parents, said Spruha, perfect for this time of self-isolation!*

So, what will you find when you visit [ColumbiaDDC](#) today? Seniors sharing news of their college acceptances, including several Ivy's. [Click here](#) for a peek at our seniors' joyful accomplishments; and come back in May to see the institutions they will attend in the fall and the scholarships they were awarded!

All year long, [ColumbiaDDC](#) will showcase student engagement across DDC events and classes like the college trips, the BRAINYAC lab at Columbia's Zuckerman Institute, and the digital media class visits to *The Atlantic* for project-based mentoring from the staff. Instructors and students will share pictures, short videos and captions that reflect their experiences. They will tell DDC's story in a fun, impactful and individual way. *DDC cares about each student individually, says Jazz. They get tailored support, counseling and tutoring to help them achieve college and career success. Alumni have told us “DDC changed my world!”* Their stories will leave our Instagram followers with an understanding of DDC's comprehensive and long-lasting influence.

Follow [ColumbiaDDC](#) and share your DDC story. As a [ColumbiaDDC](#) follower, you can introduce your friends to DDC's programs, accomplishments, and impact. They will thank you for connecting them with an organization striving for social justice by creating educational equity and social mobility for low-income and first-generation youth.

We look forward to seeing you at [ColumbiaDDC](#)!

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**Partner with us to offer the gift of education! To help fund our programs and expand our outreach, click here: "[Change a Life](#)"**

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**Calling all DDC Alumni and Former Volunteers!  
We want to hear from you!**

Click [HERE](#) to reconnect

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- Meet us on [Facebook](#)
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*Photo Credit: Jazz Digao, Expanded Learning Opportunities Coordinator, Double Discovery Center*

### Double Discovery Center

Alfred Lerner Hall, Rm. 306

2920 Broadway, MC 2604

New York, NY 10027

Phone: (212) 854-3897

Fax: (212) 854-7457

[ddc@columbia.edu](mailto:ddc@columbia.edu)

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