The power of "thank you"

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Scientific studies show that people who show gratitude are more likely to thrive. And thriving is something that has never been more important than now.

Through the Gratitude Project, an initiative offered by Student Success & Retention Innovation [1], students, staff and faculty members can send personalized thank-you notes to other members of the University of Arizona community.

"We know that students who are more engaged with the University community and have connected with other community members feel a stronger sense of belonging and are more likely to persist," says Jenny Nirh [2], SSRI's associate director for communications and outreach, who oversees the Gratitude Project. "Through the Gratitude Project we hope to enrich the experience and sense of belonging of all Wildcats."

While the program is now in its fourth semester, this round marks the first time that the Gratitude Project is fully online, replacing the previous physical paper mailings that were sent through campus mail or the postal service.

Under the present circumstances, the program's organizers initially hesitated about moving forward with the program.

"We weren't sure folks felt they were in the right place to do it," Nirh says. Based on feedback from students, the office decided to take the project online.

"Possibly because these times are especially challenging and difficult, a sizable number of individuals came forward saying they wished to express gratitude to their instructors, advisers or other University employees," Nirh said, adding that many wanted to say how much they appreciated those efforts, especially in the current situation.

Since the program's inception in the fall semester of 2018, more than 900 people have participated, sending a total of almost 1,500 thank-you cards to students, staff and faculty members.

Most are prompted through communications from SSRI, which invites undergraduate students to identify a member of the campus community who made a positive impact on them during the previous year or semester, or at any point during their time at the University.

In past efforts, students submitted personalized messages online, which SSRI printed onto paper cards that were mailed through campus mail or, if the recipients were likely to be away from campus, through regular mail.

"Thank you for the academic & emotional support during this unprecedented time," one student wrote in note that was submitted recently. "I have never had a teacher as considerate
and passionate as you, it has truly been an unforgettable experience. The world needs more professors like you. Thank you."

Other messages take a lighter tone.

"Some of the submissions are kind of goofy because they're between friends, and that's fine," Nirh said.

This year, the messages will be sent in electronic greeting cards, Nirh said. So far this semester, almost 500 notes have been sent.

Nirh says that encouraging students, staff and faculty members to show appreciation for another community member can positively impact both the sender and the recipient. Also, a note of appreciation doesn't have to be elaborate or in-depth to make their day or just put a smile on their face for a moment.

Even parents of University students have felt compelled to send notes of gratitude.

One in particular stands out for Nirh, a thank-you note sent to a staff member in the Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center. The services provided by the staff member "made all the difference in the world," they wrote. Without those services, according to the note, the student might not have finished the year, let alone had the success they experienced.

Nirh says her favorite part of the Gratitude Project is seeing the impact that people can have on their community and the student experience.

"People say really meaningful and positive things about those who have helped them," she says. "All around, this is such a positive program and it feels great to work on this."

Faculty and staff members are invited to join the effort this semester. To send an electronic thank-you card, use this online form.

For more information about the Gratitude Project, email studentsuccess@email.arizona.edu.

Source URL: https://uatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/power-thank-you

Links
[1] https://studentsuccess.arizona.edu/
[2] https://studentsuccess.arizona.edu/person/jenny-nirh
[3] https://www.salt.arizona.edu/
[5] mailto:studentsuccess@email.arizona.edu