

ERIC VOEGELIN INSTITUTE

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

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NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020

From the Director:

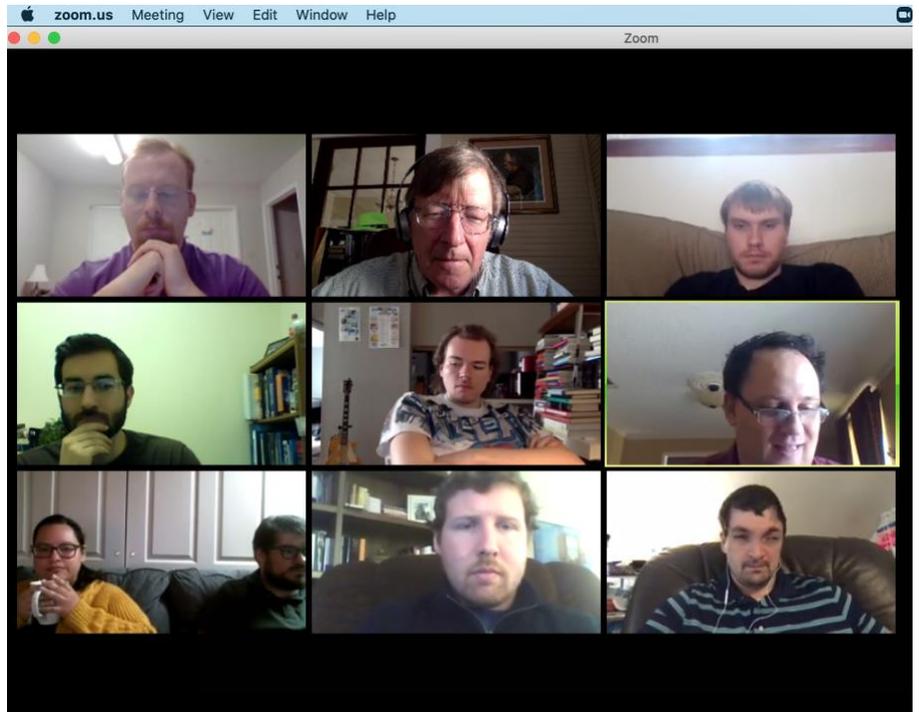
Not being a medical doctor but a social scientist and a teacher, I cannot help but reflect on the meaning of the pandemic and the public response to it from a faculty point of view. At the time of this writing, medical evidence indicates the principal source of contagion is extended contact between people in an enclosed space, particularly when speaking. The dangerous encounter to be avoided, in other words, is precisely what we teachers do!

Moreover, since the disease can be transmitted by those who as yet show no symptoms, we are encouraged to keep our distance from one another and even to go about masked. Distrust, once the bane of society, becomes the seed of our new social virtue, "distancing."

I suppose there are good lessons that social quarantine encourages us to relearn: that education demands solitary study as well as discussion, that writing remains critical to sustained thought and fruitful communication, that travel and novelty can satiate and distract as well as inform and enlighten. Still, I long for the restoration of a life of the mind that includes one another's presence, where unplanned and unprogrammed exchange spurs spontaneous thought and discovery. We plan lots of programs at the Voegelin Institute, but their real aim is a fresh encounter with truth.



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Keeping Up the Conversation via Zoom

Several major events planned by the Voegelin Institute for the Spring semester, including our spring conference, had to be cancelled due to the closure of the University to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, but our weekly lunch colloquies for political theory graduate students made the transition to an online format via the Zoom platform. Students and faculty continued to take turns presenting synopses and critiques of recent journal articles—accessed electronically, of course—and we generally learned to adapt to the awkwardness of technologically mediated exchange.

A few advantages emerged. First, our attendance increased, partly because people had few scheduling conflicts, partly because we could include former students (now faculty at other universities) and colleagues who would not have been able to make it to campus. Second, having begun during the spring semester, we continued for the first time over the summer, albeit meeting monthly rather than weekly. We usually end the year with a catered lunch—but that, of course, will await our ability to gather together again in person. We certainly hope that happens in the fall, but in the meantime, all who joined seem grateful that our community of study endures.



Photo by Eddy Perez

EVI Hosts Convening, Public Panel on Civic Education at LSU

About sixty educators—university faculty, high school teachers, and education administrators—met at LSU in early February to develop a “roadmap” for the reform of civics education in America’s public schools. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and coordinated by iCivics, a Massachusetts nonprofit founded by Justice Sandra Day O’Connor that is a leader in developing civics materials for students, the two-day discussion was hosted by the Voegelin Institute and sponsored as well by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Ogden Honors College. Louisiana teachers and LSU students participated in several panels, and one evening included a dinner and panel at the Old State Capitol in Baton Rouge.

Pictured above are members of the Steering Committee, flanking NEH Chairman Jon Parrish Peede and LSU Interim President Thomas Galligan, who welcomed the participants. Harvard Professor Danielle Allen (far right) and Arizona State University’s School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership Director Paul Carrese (far left) spoke on a public panel immediately after the conclusion of the conference, joined by LSU History Professor Zevi Gutfreund and Southern University Political Scientist Albert Samuels.

Two Major EVI-sponsored Seminars Conclude despite Covid

Both the Apgar Faculty Workshop on Teaching Western Civilization and the Aristotle Research Seminar, coordinated by the Voegelin Institute and described in our Winter 2020 newsletter, completed their schedule of meetings by switching to Zoom for their final sessions.

The Workshop, sponsored by a grant from the Apgar Foundation which has been renewed for 2020-21, included sessions led by visiting scholars from major universities: Josiah Ober of Stanford, speaking about the importance of studying Athenian democracy for contemporary civic education, and Kathy Eden of Columbia University, who discussed the origin of teaching a literary canon in the ancient world. Professor Ober gave a public lecture as well during his visit; Professor Eden’s workshop presentation, scheduled for mid-March, was run electronically, with her lecture postponed. Two of the four courses in the Honors European Civilization sequence were taught this spring by workshop participants; a third will be offered by other participants in fall 2020.

The Aristotle Research Seminar included study this spring of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, *De Memoria*, and *Physics*. Professor Rachel Parsons of the Philosophy Department shared her own translation of *De Memoria*; the session on the *Physics* was led by LSU Physics PhD candidate Ronald Pagano.

“Reason and Revolution” Ppd!

Remember when “PPE” stood for “Philosophy, Politics, and Economics,” a popular program of study at Oxford University and a name adopted by the Voegelin Institute’s undergraduate reading group? Our students now have to explain they are reading books, not making “personal protective equipment,” but read they did this year on their chosen theme of “Revolution,” including books by Paine, Burke, Wollstonecraft, Tocqueville, Marx, C.L.R. James, and Hannah Arendt. Though our spring conference had to be postponed until next year, no one can accuse our undergraduates of being unprepared for the events of this summer.



Manuscript-Preserving Monk

EVI was honored to co-host Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar Columba Stewart, O.S.B., who travels the world digitizing ancient manuscripts, particularly in places such as the Middle East where they are especially threatened with destruction. Describing his work in Syria, Iraq, and Mali, Fr. Stewart lectured to a crowd of over one hundred, then came to the Voegelin Room for a reception, where he is pictured above with undergraduate Matthew Dreher. Hill Library, the History and Religion Departments, and the Honors College co-sponsored his visit with PBK.

Godspeed & Countless Thanks!

If you’ve seen a poster for a Voegelin event these last four years, enjoyed a photo, or just thought our events went well, credit goes to our magnificent assistant Kristina Plunkett. Kris graduated from LSU this spring and begins study in the fall for a History PhD at Tulane. We wish her all the best!

