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CONTACT: Mark D. Weinstein
Executive Director of Public Relations
[937-766-8800](tel:937-766-8800) (o)
[937-532-6885](tel:937-532-6885) (m)
Mweinstein@cedarville.edu
[@cedarvillenews](#)

Online Tutoring Provides Academic and Social Lifeline During COVID

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- When the United States went into lockdown because of COVID-19 in March 2020, Cedarville University joined the many universities pivoting unexpectedly to online learning.

Students, like Grace Gregory, who rely on [The Cove](#), Cedarville's academic enrichment center, didn't miss a beat in their studies because of The Cove's commitment to caring for its students through online tutoring.

The change was simple for The Cove's leaders: implement a feature of the new tutoring interface that they had adopted less than three months earlier.

Gregory, a junior early childhood education major from Downers Grove, Illinois, was one of the many students encouraged by The Cove's seamless transition in the turbulent time. "I didn't think they would continue tutoring after we were sent home," she said, "but it was so reassuring that they could."

Cedarville offers free peer tutoring for any class through [The Cove](#), a unique asset that Gregory has been using since her first semester as a freshman.

Before 2020, The Cove was using a scheduling system that was quickly becoming overloaded with tutoring requests. In the face of unexpected demand, The Cove made a bold switch to a new interactive calendar system over Christmas break 2019. They worked quickly with Cedarville's [Information Technology](#) to implement it in time for the 2020 spring semester.

It was a complete success. Now, with the new tutoring platform, the 145 peer tutors would provide their free times in the interactive interface. All students would need to do is select a time to meet and be prepared to learn.

The new system included the online tutoring function, although The Cove did not anticipate using it. A worldwide pandemic quickly changed that expectation.

When COVID forced Cedarville University, along with all other schools and universities to shift to remote learning, tutoring was able to maintain operation by switching online with only the push of a button. If they had not made the system transition, continuing tutoring would have been nearly impossible.

"Especially in times of distress like the pandemic, it's essential to have that one-on-one relationship to encourage students to persevere academically," said [Kim Ahlgrim](#), director of The Cove.

The same day that president Dr. Thomas White announced the school's shutdown on March 11, 2020, The Cove emailed the student body with the reassurance that tutoring and academic support would continue as normal.

[Deidre Sizer](#), The Cove's tutoring and office coordinator, remains awed at the providential timing of the interface switch. "God gave us an urgency to get things moving to help our students, but we didn't understand why at the time," she said. "We don't know what's going to happen, but God does, and he will provide."

Because of the COVID experience, The Cove now promotes both its online and in-person tutoring. "Peer tutoring is the service used most by students in The Cove, logging over 3,400 hours in the 2020-2021 academic year, but it is only one of many services we offer," Ahlgrim said. "We offer peer coaches, faculty coaches, labs, courses and other services."

This online tutoring during COVID gave students like Gregory a much-needed sense of stability in the face of turmoil.

"Lockdown was still a struggle," said Gregory, "but I would have struggled far more without my tutors. The Cove tutors were so kind to sacrifice and go beyond their paid duties to help me succeed. Even the little things made a huge difference. I'm a visual learner, and my tutors would seek to accommodate me by juggling a whiteboard. We worked through it together."

Gregory emphasized that The Cove helped her not only academically, but also personally and spiritually.

"I'm an only child and was alone in the house most of the day," Gregory noted. "It felt like you had no one to talk to, and my tutors almost became family by caring about me and my struggles. Helping you be academically successful was only their minimum."

"The greatest commandment is to love God and love others," Gregory continued, "and they lived this out by loving me. They would put everything aside to check if I was doing okay mentally and spiritually, to build a relationship and become friends."

"They constantly reminded me that I have a purpose."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including its [School of Education](#), strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Written by Brendan Rowland