



# ENA Customer Success Story



## Four Innovative Ways Austin Peay State University Is Leveraging Zoom to Foster Community

Like countless higher education institutions across America, Austin Peay State University (APSU) in Tennessee found its courses and community disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic this past spring. As public health concerns required the cancelation of traditional on-campus activities, APSU transitioned to a remote learning environment.

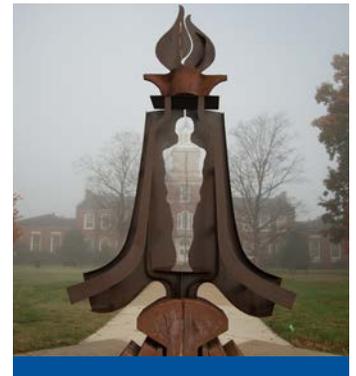
Because universities offer their communities so much more than education, APSU was also committed to finding ways of fostering connection while everyone was away from the Clarksville campus. Working hand in hand, administrators and educators brainstormed innovative ways to leverage the power of Zoom to not just keep the community together, but to also help foster new collaborations.

Here are four ways video conferencing has helped the APSU community thrive in these unprecedented times.

### APSU IS SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES WORLDWIDE

At the start of 2020, Christopher Gentry, Associate Professor of Geosciences, and his colleagues were planning a session on tree rings at the American Association of Geographers' annual conference. However, when organizers decided to host the conference over Zoom, Professor Gentry and his team saw an expanded opportunity to promote scholarship.

"My colleague Dr. Adam Csank at the University of Nevada, Reno, put together a flyer for our session, which we then posted in online tree-ring societies' web forums," he explained. As a result, attendees from around the globe who never could have attended the conference in person were able to join. "It was very well received," Professor Gentry said. "We ended up receiving a few dozen emails and messages asking for us to make this a quarterly event for our tree-ring society."



Professor Gentry believes that organizing regular digital conferences could transform the lives of scientists.



*“A digital conference gives individuals who may not have the funds or time to travel an opportunity to share their presentations with international audiences,” Professor Gentry said.*

Based on this success, Professor Gentry and the Department of Geosciences are considering expanding their digital learning opportunities by inviting guest lecturers, attending international conferences, and expanding asynchronous education—all made possible by secure video conferencing.

## **APSU IS EXPANDING ITS DEFINITION OF WELLNESS TO CREATE A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY**

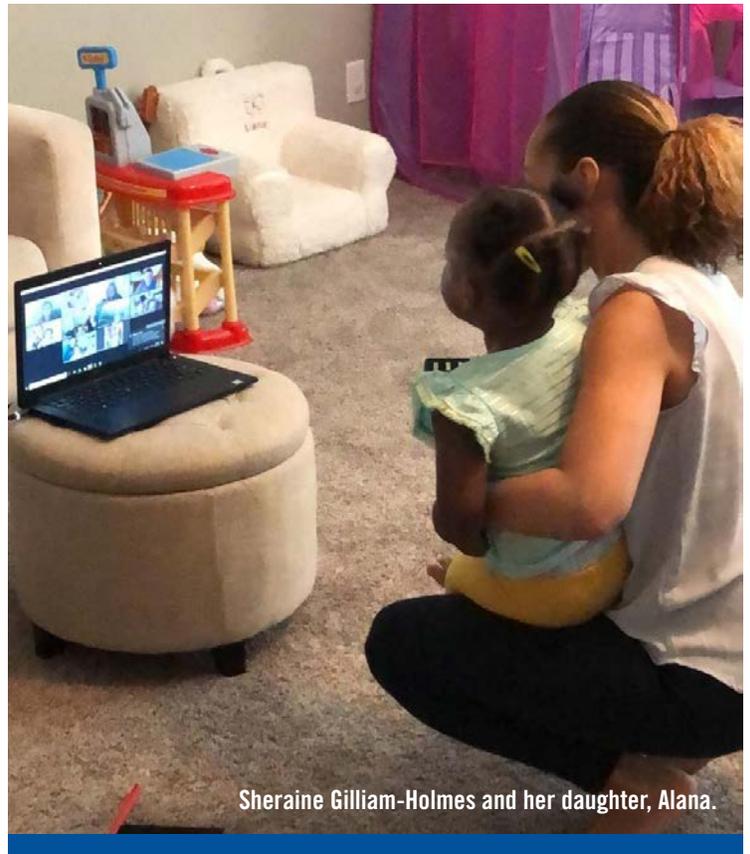
Sheraine Gilliam-Holmes, Executive Director and Chief Human Resources Officer, initially responded to the disruption caused by COVID-19 by ensuring that everyone in the community had access to essential information and resources regarding the pandemic. However, she knew that such outreach would not be enough to meet her community’s needs.



*“We knew we needed to focus on creating connections and an inclusive community amid these crazy and unprecedented times when we all felt so disconnected,” Mrs. Gilliam-Holmes said.*

And so she and her team worked to develop new resources that engaged the community’s concerns and tapped into internal talent: a series of programs for kids, online yoga and Zumba classes, stress-reduction courses, and more.

As the circumstances evolved, Mrs. Gilliam-Holmes and her team continued to find new ways of being responsive. For instance, as concerns of injustice became more prominent within the community at the end of May, APSU’s African American Employee Council held a virtual town hall and follow-up sessions to help community members effectively ally themselves with efforts to promote social justice. Attracting



Sheraine Gilliam-Holmes and her daughter, Alana.

hundreds of attendees to these events, Mrs. Gilliam-Holmes sees an inspiring level of engagement and improved wellness throughout the community.

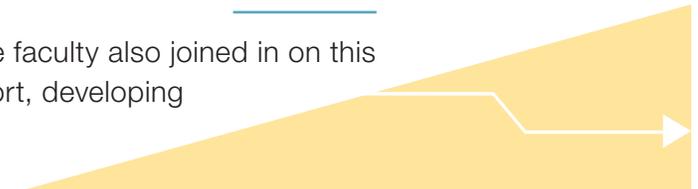
## **APSU IS MAKING LEARNING FUN FOR CHILDREN**

As Mrs. Gilliam-Holmes and her team focused on mental health and family wellbeing, she noticed something important in her Zoom calls: “Everyone’s children kept popping in and out the screen,” she said. As a result, the HR team expanded APSU’s community support efforts to include more support for parents and children.



*“We developed a ‘Survivor’ series on parenting,” said Mrs. Gilliam-Holmes. “Surviving with a toddler, surviving with school-aged child, etc. We had ‘bring your child to telework’ day. We had STEM fun with our own scientist Brian Gaither. And we created Toddler Time and weekly programming for school-aged children, which actually helped us with the challenges of working from home with children.”*

The faculty also joined in on this effort, developing



lessons explicitly aimed at children. A lab manager, for instance, hosted weekly Zoom meetings with science lessons for K-12 children. For his part, Professor Gentry organized a reading event in which he read Dr. Seuss stories to kids. Doing so was a win-win, he explained, because the kids were learning while the parents got a little extra down time.

## APSU ENTERS INTO A DIALOGUE WITH ITS COMMUNITY

With the pandemic disrupting the APSU community in ways both large and small, it was essential to create effective channels for communication. To do so, administrators elected to host virtual town halls for faculty, staff, and students. These forums not only provided a chance for administrators to communicate what the school was doing to support the community, it allowed people to ask questions, voice concerns, and be heard.

“There are a lot of questions regarding what school will look like this fall and what returning to campus will be like,” explained Dr. McCartney Johnson, an administrative specialist in APSU’s President’s Office. “These Zoom sessions addressed many of our students’ concerns.”

Additionally, the President’s Office used Zoom in its efforts to expand the APSU community. “We’ve been able to use Zoom in our search for a new provost,” Dr. Johnson said. “We’ve also used it for our Board of Trustee meetings. Everything’s gone really well with that.”

With all of these initiatives and events powered by Zoom, APSU will be relying on the solution as the university develops its plans for the upcoming school year. Despite whatever limitations the university may face in the fall, APSU’s faculty has proven they are equipped with the innovation and skills necessary to produce positive outcomes for their community.

To discover more about how ENA and Zoom can help your community stay connected, please visit [ena.com](http://ena.com)



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