



From classroom to online: impact on college students of the COVID-19 virus in 2020

By Ellen Taricani

In the spring semester of 2020 at Penn State, students took off to have a little spring break. Little did they realize that when they left, they actually were not coming back. That was the end of classroom time and the start of online classes due to the corona virus outbreak. The university decided to close the doors to stop the potential spread of the virus and protect the students. What did this mean? For one, all the faculty suddenly had to scramble and start working on putting their classes online before the break was over. The students had to figure out how to get home and find suitable technology to keep up with the work. Plans for the semester were very suddenly altered and there was still a possibility of returning in a couple of weeks. As the days passed, the return was halted, and everything changed.

Students continued to find gathering places for continued learning. In the current crisis, students find connections online with each other. Students in my culture and technology class were assigned a section to explore more deeply. Included with the research and commentary, each group was asked to conduct a short poll with college peers. These are the issues addressed in this paper as we consider the impacts that occurred so suddenly for so many students. Areas to be considered are the following:

social challenges, use of new unknown technologies, faculty communication issues, conditions at home, staying informed, new terms and understanding, and possible fears and apprehension. Each of these will be developed by students who are walking through this.

Most found their schoolwork was harder to do without their independence and support of their friends that they previously had. One survey comment includes: "I used to be motivated to do schoolwork so I could hang out with my friends when I was done. Now that I'm not with them, it's hard to find the motivation to do it. I used to look forward to being done with a long assignment and relaxing with my friends after." In another question, about 75% of students answered that they are not engaged at all during an online class. This shows that many students have lost interest in their studies because they are finding it harder to concentrate when not in their usual learning environment. "I miss having my own space and have the freedom to do whatever I want. I was able to have no pressure on when to do things and could eat at my favorite restaurants. I miss being on campus and being surrounded by my friends." Overall, the students that were surveyed were not ready for this sudden change and were forced to adapt to new social situations that have affected their learning.

It seems that professors have done an overall adequate job in communicating their availability to students. 76% of our participants said that they were aware of their professors' office hours. In the poll, it was found that 75% of the students were still

expected to work with peers online. Over 95% said it was more difficult to complete group work with remote learning. Some general comments about the switch includes:

- a. "People are assigning more work and lectures to watch 'in our own time'."
- b. "They don't get back to me fast enough."
- c. "The biggest struggle is trying to come together when we aren't all together in class or on campus."

"Different time zones"

The best thing for people to do is to get their news from reputable sources and ask questions if they are confused because the only way we can fight this virus and the spread is if we are informed about what we are talking about. The Coronavirus is hopefully a once in a generation pandemic, and as such is obviously going to cause an impact throughout the world. The terms that have come along in conjunction with the virus are just as important as knowing what the virus is.

Some comments from the survey question (Do you think we will continue to use these terms after the Coronavirus pandemic is over?):

- a. Things will be different, and people will be scared for years to come
- b. I believe with all the attention it's getting these terms will be ingrained in our minds for a long time
- c. I think terms such as "social distancing" will remain in the conversation, but medical terminology like "chloroquine" or "respirator" will not be used once the pandemic is over.

- d. This pandemic will be talked about for the rest of our lives. What happened, how we handled it, and how we prevented the spread will continuously be discussed for years after it's been cured.

Conclusion

Moving forward, the number of infected students can easily increase with the closeness of living conditions and classroom setting. Questions remain about the continuation of residential classes. It is certainly easier to continue to learn with many online tools, but it is not the same as resident education with all the possibilities of interactions and other activities.

