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Introduction to the Special Issue on Teaching During The Coronavirus Pandemic

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Introduction to the Special Issue on Teaching During the Coronavirus Pandemic

In the spring semester of 2020, the United States higher education system faced the terrifying and uncertain effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the disease spread across the globe, administrators, instructors, and students attempted to adjust in a matter of days to on-campus closures and shifts to remote learning. Instructors worked with great determination to shift to remote learning and successfully maintain their pedagogical visions of courses, and administrators wrestled with questions of public health and safety (Centers for Disease Control, 2020; Supiano, 2020). Students found themselves displaced from dorms and even stranded across the globe as they shifted their energy and expectations for the remainder of the spring semester and an uncertain academic future (Korn, 2020). It was an unprecedented time in higher education.

In addition to the mounting public health risks of COVID-19, the economic tolls have become apparent. There are rising unemployment rates across the globe, substantial losses in some industries, and the likely collapse of entire sectors of the US economy (Bell & Blancheflower, 2020). Higher education is also forced to confront economic realities and viability of the various service delivery models it offers to students. The effects of COVID-19 on the financial health of institutions has been felt from elite Ivy League schools to local community colleges (Witze et al., 2020). Although the nature of the challenges may vary across institutions, it appears that all higher education institutions cannot ignore the current public health crisis and looming questions about the upcoming fall semester.

The Special Issue

The articles in this special issue represent a variety of views of instructors, administrators, and graduate students who find themselves in the uncharted territory of a mid-semester shift to remote learning. This shift raised practical and pedagogical questions on course delivery, access to vital resources, and work-life balance that exceed the typical demands of even the most challenging semesters. The coronavirus is novel in far-reaching ways that ultimately will shape the students' experience of learning and the instructors' pedagogical vision. This special issue captures the initial shift to remote learning and raises questions of what such rapid shifts mean for teaching through crisis and uncertainty.

The articles by Kozak and Shea offer the perspective of the graduate student and early-career instructor. Kozak provides an account of a graduate student who simultaneously weighs questions of pedagogy in her own education and in the delivery of course content to undergraduate students as a graduate instructor. The author reflects upon the varied demands placed upon her to fulfill her own educational goals while also providing recognizing the needs of her students. The article by Shea blends her clinical training with her teaching pedagogy to offer ways dialectical-behavioral strategies provide a foundation to cope the stress of working in a worldwide pandemic and mindfully engage in teaching, instruction, and course planning. These articles provide a framework for pedagogy during uncertainty as a dynamic and reflective process among educators, particularly those who are in the early stages of their careers. In addition, these reflections and recommendations offer a framework for all educators to respond to the stress of a pandemic with flexibility and compassion.

The article by Grenier, Robinson, and Harkins introduces the reader to the unique challenges of delivering a course focused on service learning when conventional, in-person access to a community is no longer feasible. The authors help the reader to reimagine what is

meant by community engagement among undergraduate students during a time of collective stress and social isolation. The article also raises questions of how service learning can shift to a remote setting and make the most of a highly unusual circumstance to build relationships and provide vital learning opportunities. The authors conclude with recommendations for future semesters when accessibility to a community may be compromised by public health concerns.

Behling offers the unique perspective of the administrator who is not directly tasked with course delivery but must account for the needs of students whose transitions to remote learning present unique challenges. Drawing on existing research on universal design and college student development, Behling assembles a timeline of the shift to remote learning for administrators. The author reflects upon the lessons learned from this initial shift and proposes how universities can implement universal design to provide accessible, formative educational experiences for all students during times of crisis. Behling's blend personal reflection and research forms the basis for her recommendations for the next phase of responses among higher education administrators as they prepare for the new academic year.

Finally, Mascolo looks ahead to what this initial shift to remote learning and the public health threat of COVID-19 means for the longstanding issues within higher education. Using initial public health crisis as a starting point, Mascolo presents a model structural transformation and advocates for deep exploration of goals and values within higher education to resolve the present crisis caused by the coronavirus and to address longstanding issues within higher education. The author challenges readers to look beyond immediate concerns of the spring 2020 semester to identify opportunities for transformative change that will enhance student learning and foster more responsive and informed teaching pedagogy.

The articles in this special issue highlight the challenges and opportunities of higher education's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote learning as a matter of public health. The authors all raise questions about the long-term consequences for higher education beyond the spring of 2020 and the need to have a clearly articulated pedagogy for online courses. Future issues of PHS will likely hold the answers to these questions and introduce vital pedagogical considerations for the continued experience of teaching in the age of corona.

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