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ARTICLE

The Pandemic Pivot: Change and Adaptability during Quarantines, Social Distancing, and Anthropology in the Virtual Classroom

Toni Copeland[1] and Abigail Wightman[2]*

The University of Alabama[1]
Mary Baldwin University[2]
**Corresponding author*, toni.copeland@ua.edu

Abstract

As COVID-19 swept across the United States in March 2020, it crippled the economy and exposed social vulnerabilities. With the closure of residential campuses and the pivot to remote learning, university administrators and faculty feared negative repercussions for both budgets and student success. In this article, we document the impact of the pandemic through a discussion of how two anthropology courses, at two very different universities, were adapted to remote learning. Our "accidental successes" suggest that a student-centered approach with flexibility and creativity in course design, as well as considering the socioeconomic realities of our students, could benefit all courses.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Virtual Classroom, Adaptability*

Introduction

Is the university sending us home?
Are we going online?
Are classes cancelled?
Is school ending after Spring Break?
What about Summer Study Abroad trips?
How will we learn online?
Did you hear about Washington and Harvard?
Where will I go?

These are all questions university students asked us in March 2020 as the novel coronavirus pandemic exploded across the world and cases were confirmed in the U.S. Students and faculty were anxious, at least in part, due to the uncertainty of a rapidly changing situation. Indeed, the University of Alabama adamantly insisted that there were no plans to cancel classes or move to remote learning on March 10, 2020, followed two

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days later by the announcement that immediately following an extended two-week Spring Break, all instruction was moving online. This is but one example of how unpredictably the landscape of higher education transformed in the Spring of 2020 due to COVID-19.

Educators and students alike were tasked with adapting to this fluid situation as traditional in-person college classes moved to online and remote modes of instruction. Due to the immediate need, faculty and students lacked time to learn, familiarize themselves, and in some cases access the technology needed for remote instruction because the move to online and remote learning was forced due to necessity. This was not a case of planned online education, but a sudden shift in the middle of the semester for many who were simply unprepared for remote teaching and learning.

It was in this landscape that we transformed our classes in response to the pandemic in ways that helped students cope with rapidly changing sociocultural, economic, and physical environments while also better preparing them for the future. COVID-19 presented challenges and encouraged adaptability that presented possibilities that benefitted many students. Anthropology, as a holistic and humanistic social science, provided perspectives and methodologies to confront this difficult situation. We present examples of these approaches and suggest that examining and reflecting on our experiences are imperative in order to improve education and anthropology.

This article presents two case studies of anthropology classes transformed in response to the pandemic. Both examples highlight the benefits of flexibility and also providing multiple pathways for successful completion based on students' individual needs and interests. Flexibility allowed us to respond to the changing demands of the pandemic and the specific needs of our students, courses, and institutions. Because we pivoted so quickly with little time to incorporate best practices for online teaching, we experienced a sort of accidental success in engaging students in a variety of skills beyond traditional academic writing and testing. The changes we made to our courses incorporated student-centered approaches to teaching and learning. Our successes reflect and reinforce the value of these pedagogies. They also suggest ways to learn from the pivot that continue to benefit students.

Because of differences in the authors' university settings, one, a predominately white public research university and the other a smaller and more diverse liberal arts college, these examples indicate that successful "pandemic pivots" require an effort to consider students' sociocultural conditions. Despite these differences, both courses adapted to the pandemic in ways that helped students cope with the uncertain and precarious conditions associated with COVID-19 in the Spring of 2020 as we were forced to change course delivery, assignments, and assessments. It was precisely these changes, many of which align to student-centered pedagogies, that provided additional skills and experiences useful for teaching and learning anthropology as well as job market preparation for students.

This article proceeds with a brief review of student-centered pedagogy, online teaching and learning, flexibility in teaching methods, and the value of experiential learning to better communicate marketable job skills to students. It then presents the university settings that serve as the backdrop for our classes and two examples from our experiences with pandemic pivots. Finally, we discuss the lessons we learned, implications for continued success in teaching and learning anthropology as universities shift from remote to hybrid learning, and present recommendations for moving forward during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Teaching and Learning Anthropology

The pandemic pivot was a shift from classroom to online learning. This required an evaluation of course goals and the methods used to achieve them so they could be translated into a virtual format. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted faculty evaluations of their own courses, goals, and pedagogies. Along with presenting challenges, the pandemic encouraged exploration of different and "new" ways to accomplish course goals. It was in this landscape that we found different ways to communicate skills and provide opportunities that allow students to see the application of anthropological skills, theories, and methods to real world problems, thus better preparing them to apply and practice anthropology in any setting. Many of these techniques align with existing student-centered approaches to teaching and learning; they were "new" only in the sense of being unfamiliar as a formalized pedagogy.

Student-centered learning is a broad pedagogical category. Wright (2011), following Weimar (2002), suggests five main components of student-centered learning: 1) shifting some power and control to students; 2) using content to meet learning goals rather than for an appearance of rigor; 3) shifting the role of teacher from expert to guide, encouraging students to move from passive to active learning; 4) shifting responsibility for learning to the student through active and experiential course design; and 5) giving students many forms of and opportunities for evaluation so that they can practice and improve course skills and methods (Wright 2011, 93-95). Of these components, shifting some power to students is a key component and a prerequisite for several others. University teaching is almost always teacher-centered because professors create the course and choose content, assignments, and evaluations. Power sharing can begin by allowing students some say in choosing content such as picking readings or assignments from a list. Once power is shared, teachers move to a support role, where students are more active and responsible for their own learning.

Student-centered learning provides a baseline to the models presented in this article, connecting best practices in online teaching to the advantages of using experiential learning to teach anthropology in meaningful ways that are relevant and that lead students to more productive careers for our students. Exploring these techniques is more important than ever as disruptions to traditional in-person learning opportunities on

campuses across the country continue at least into 2021; the lingering impact of online and hybrid courses is likely to change the face of higher education for much longer.

Online Teaching and Learning

Academic literature about online teaching and learning is vast and evolves rapidly because it is linked to developing technologies. This literature includes research that addresses best practices and efficiency in online teaching in general but also includes discipline-specific genres. In anthropology, there are few publications that specifically address online teaching and learning, a pattern that reflects the dearth of publication and research on anthropology pedagogy more broadly. Of the few publications on online teaching and learning within anthropology, most were published in the 2000s and show their age, particularly in terms of technology. Wasson (2007), Cruz, Wasson, and Gibbs (2007), Davenport and Henry (2007), and Nuñes-Janes and Cruz (2007) recount the development of the first fully online applied anthropology graduate program at the University of North Texas. The authors recount their efforts to replicate the quality of their in-person applied anthropology program, including simulating the intellectual curiosity of the anthropology graduate seminar, creating appropriate online pedagogies, building community among faculty and students, and creating professional networks for students.

Although the "pandemic pivot" did not allow for the extensive planning used to develop traditional online teaching programs, these articles provide valuable foundations for aligning student-centered teaching practices with online course design. In particular, Nuñes-Janes and Cruz note that they specifically designed online courses in the applied anthropology graduate program similarly to their in-person classes, with a foundation in critical and student-centered pedagogies "based on the premise that students and teachers are collaborators in the production of knowledge" (2007, 21). As a result, their online courses were designed with open-ended discussions and assignments that allowed students to add their own experiences and interpretations to collaboratively develop course content, sharing power with students and moving away from teacher-centered learning. These assignments allowed students to contribute scholarship as peers with faculty, particularly though collaborative literature reviews. Many assignments, including paired discussion leadership, were adapted from graduate seminars to online learning environments.

The pandemic pivot challenged faculty teaching courses that were designed as in-person or community-engaged and often required lab technology or access to community events or activities. Anthropology courses, particularly those that rely on a fieldwork component, were often similarly impacted by lockdowns and quarantines. Online experiential learning leans heavily toward computer simulations or case studies (Beckem and Watkins 2012). Pre-pandemic configurations of online learning and service-learning typically rely on students' independent volunteer work in their home communities, as opposed to service-learning led together with a course and a faculty

instructor (Strait and Sauer 2004). During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, particularly during the lockdowns in the Spring of 2020, nearly all opportunities for experiential learning were lost or had to be transformed, as discussed in our course examples below.

The pandemic pivot did not always allow for the careful application of student-centered approaches to teaching and learning because of the rapid changes. Experiential opportunities such as fieldwork assignments and service requirements were cancelled or altered as we all spent the last months of the Spring semester distancing as much possible. Similarly, the quick pivot made it very difficult to incorporate best practices for teaching diverse students online or to adapt culturally responsive teaching (CRT) to online environments (Woodley et al. 2017). However, the authors' experiences suggest that, as faculty scrambled to turn in-person courses into online ones, many of our adaptations became useful tools and methods for both in-person and online teaching in the future.

Flexibility in Teaching and Learning Anthropology & Preparing Students for Life after College

Experiential learning is learning through experience and hands-on activities such as collaborative research, service-learning, community engagement, participatory action research, and various class projects that leverage ways to communicate skills, knowledge, and experience outside the traditional classroom setting. As a student-centered learning pedagogy, experiential learning requires students to actively engage with course material and take on more responsibility for their learning, moving away from a passive-learning, lecture-oriented teaching model (Wright 2011, 94). It provides important ways to prepare anthropology students for real-world employment (Brownell and Swaner 2009). Such an approach might include asking students to practice methods with each other during class time, to participate in various presentation genres, or to complete internship experiences.

Engaging students in practical classroom experiences, research projects, client interactions, and community engagement as part of their educational preparation helps to 1) communicate required skills and 2) provide opportunities that allow students to see the application of those skills to real-world problems (Copeland and Dengah 2016). Studies show that students who participate in such projects gain valuable skills and knowledge that prepares them for careers (Moreno-Black and Homchampa 2008; Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and van Willigen 2006). Models of "experimental" and productive educational approaches train and educate students in anthropological perspectives, research skills, working collaboratively, and, importantly, how to communicate the usefulness and application of these skills to professional settings. Collaborative research provides students with valuable career preparation by translating classroom information to experience, knowledge, and marketable skills (Copeland and Dengah 2016).

Experiential learning provides important opportunities for applied anthropology students to link classroom theory and methods to real-world practice. These techniques also have the capacity to provide meaningful experiences for students by allowing them to participate in projects that aim to directly impact communities. One assessment of a service-learning program at Minnesota State University includes projects with historical societies, a free clinic, Habitat for Humanity, and a leadership program for at-risk youth. The assessment found that students, faculty, and community partners appreciated the "realness" of projects, and that the experience also improved student comprehension and application of skills initially learned in the classroom (Schalage, Pajunen, and Brotherton 2018). Collaborative research, community projects, and other experiential learning techniques are valuable approaches in applied anthropology education.

A key component of preparing students for careers beyond academia is providing experiential learning opportunities which include various forms of research or applied projects, collaboration, or service-learning. The skills students learn in anthropology classes are important components of their future careers and success. These include critical assessment of literature, critical thinking, detail-oriented record keeping, intercultural skills, working with others in diverse settings, research design, observation, data collection, qualitative and quantitative analyses, interpretation of results, and communicating those results to others in various settings such as business, government, and the general public. Many anthropology programs, individual faculty, and classes engage students to provide the experience necessary for the application of these skills in the workplace (Copeland and Dengah 2016; Guerrón-Montero 2008; Kedia 2008). Student-centered pedagogy, flexibility in teaching methods, and experiential learning offer methods for successfully communicating marketable job skills through online teaching and learning even during unprecedented "COVID-times."

Setting

A case of pneumonia of unknown cause was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in China on December 31, 2019. In January 2020, the WHO identified the cause of the Wuhan, China, outbreak as a novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, which causes the disease COVID-19. The first death attributed to the virus was reported four days later. The first reported case in the U.S. was in Washington on January 21, 2020. Nine days later, the WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. This was followed by international travel restrictions as countries scrambled to contain the virus, but obviously too late. Over the next two months, COVID-19 cases and deaths spiked in countries around the world. On March 8th, confirmed cases in the U.S. topped 500. National travel plummeted along with the stock market as conventions and events were cancelled including sports leagues (e.g., the National Basketball Association cancelled all games on March 11th after a player tested positive). States started closing schools or moving to remote learning across the country by the middle of March. California was the first of several states to issue statewide stay-

at-home orders. By March 26th, cases in the U.S. had grown from 500 to over 82,000. At the time of publication in July 2021, U.S. confirmed cases topped 33.6 million with more than 604,000 deaths. This is by no means a comprehensive timeline of COVID-19 in the U.S. (CDC 2020). This brief summary is included to provide context for the examples presented here. It was during this rapidly developing, uncertain, and extremely stressful pandemic that our classes were suddenly, without planning or preparation, shifted to remote learning. We now turn our attention to the university settings for our specific classes.

University of Alabama Blount Scholars Program

The University of Alabama (UA) is located in the city of Tuscaloosa with a population of just over 100,000, almost half that of the county. The Tuscaloosa Metro Area includes surrounding counties in West Alabama, as the city serves as a center for a population of approximately 240,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). UA is nestled in a high-traffic area close to downtown and historic districts. It employs almost 7,000 residents, is the largest and the oldest public university in Alabama, and draws much attention through college sports, especially football.

Eighty-six percent of UA's more than 38,000 students were classified as undergraduates in the 2019-2020 school year (University of Alabama 2020; U.S. News & World Report 2020). Of those, more than a third had high school GPAs of 4.0 or higher and ACT scores of 30 or more. Overall, 57 percent of the student body is from out-of-state with an additional four percent classified as international students (UA 2020). The majority (92 percent of undergrads and 84 percent overall) are under 25 years of age. Forty percent of undergrads receive some form of need-based financial aid. With a student body comprised of 75 percent white, 10 percent Black, and 5 percent Latino students, The University of Alabama is a predominantly white institution (PWI) (UA 2020).

The Blount Scholars Program (BSP) was established in 1999 through an endowment. The program was created to provide the academic and social experience of a small, residential, liberal arts honors college in the heart of a comprehensive research university. BSP is an honors program that includes a living and learning community, small, seminar-style classes, intensive interaction with faculty, and an interdisciplinary curriculum leading to a minor in liberal arts. The program has approximately 380 students with varied majors from Arts & Sciences to Business to Engineering and more. The mission of BSP is to develop in its students, through study in the liberal arts, the skills and dispositions conducive to their personal growth, career success, and participation in civic life. The conception of liberal arts education informing this mission is at once disciplinary and dispositional – that is, it is defined by both a broad domain of study and an approach toward study itself.

Mary Baldwin University

Mary Baldwin University is in Staunton, Virginia, a town of about 24,000 people in Augusta County in the rural Shenandoah Valley of western Virginia (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). While Staunton is 85 percent white, MBU has experienced a significant demographic transition (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). Founded as Augusta Female Seminary in 1842, the institution was renamed Mary Baldwin Seminary in 1895 in honor of pioneering female educator Mary Julia Baldwin, and it became Mary Baldwin College, a small women's liberal arts college, in 1923. In 2016, Mary Baldwin College became Mary Baldwin University to reflect its growing range of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs. MBU began admitting non-residential men to undergraduate and graduate programs in the 1970s and "went fully co-ed" – began admitting undergraduate men to the residential college – in the fall of 2017. In 2019-2020, there were 2,050 total students across two campuses, with 896 residential undergraduates on the historic Staunton campus.

On the eve of the pandemic, MBU residential undergrads were a racially and ethnically diverse student body facing significant financial challenges. In 2018, 45 percent of residential students identified as white, 45 percent identified as either Black or Latinx, and 10 percent identified as "other" (SCHEV, n.d.). In 2018-19, 64 percent of Mary Baldwin University undergraduate students qualified for Pell Grants (IES NCES, n.d.). Although it is less easily quantifiable, the residential undergraduate population also includes significant diversity in terms of gender identity, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation.

The Blount Scholars Program at The University of Alabama and Mary Baldwin University provide the backdrops for the case studies the authors present here. One, a class of scholars of predominantly white middle class honors students with diverse majors, and the other, a more diverse group of students at a small liberal arts college, faced the challenges of the pandemic pivot and found surprising successes.

Teaching Anthropology in a Developing Pandemic

It is in these settings that classrooms had to rather suddenly and unexpectedly change. Here, we describe how we handled the need for flexibility in addressing ways to maximize educational opportunities while navigating concerns about health and resources. This was made more challenging because of the uncertainty we all experienced. Students' questions presented in the introduction reveal some of the anxiety they experienced with an ever-changing landscape where everything felt threatened – education, relationships, social support, futures, and even families and lives. The conceptual and methodological tools of anthropology combined with student-centered approaches gave our students opportunities to reflect upon their pandemic experiences and the impacts of COVID-19 in their communities.

Traditional Paper to Multi-Media and Mixed Methods Projects

I (Toni Copeland) was teaching an upper-level seminar-style special topics class, *Living Longer, Living Better?*, for a small group of Blount Scholars when the pandemic hit in the Spring of 2020. This class explored health and illness with special attention to social and cultural factors that influence healthcare such as gender, race, economic status, and environmental concerns that impact who gets sick and who gets better. It was a medical anthropology class designed and formatted for Liberal Arts honor students. Despite the somewhat ironic title and subject matter of the course, our class was no exception to the unprecedented challenges and opportunities that COVID-19 posed for teaching and learning anthropology around the country.

One primary concern during the initial outbreak was the uncertainty of what would happen and how it would impact classes and education. In this case, the Thursday before Spring Break, we were alerted that the break was extended to two weeks. Faculty were also told to prepare for remote teaching at the end of that time and that a decision on in-person verses remote classes would come later. Meanwhile, COVID-19 infections spread, which became increasingly apparent with improved access to testing across the country. Within days, UA notified us that students were not coming back to campus and all classes must shift to remote delivery. Suddenly, we were all scrambling to learn technology that we had not previously used in classrooms. Because of the small size and seminar style of my class, I opted for virtual meetings over Zoom during our regular class period.

My class originally included a final research paper that asked students to explore a health-related topic by constructing an argument grounded in a literature review. I had considered creating a more flexible assignment that allowed for various mediums to explore and present topics. However, I never seemed to have the time or motivation to learn enough about various options to create an assignment and accompanying rubric. Here, the developing pandemic health crisis, a course aimed at exploring health and illness, and the sudden shift to remote learning mid-semester combined with high levels of uncertainty to push me to change the final research paper to a more flexible final project. Students were allowed to focus on their original topic or the pandemic. They could choose a classic research paper format or various other options including short films, video diaries, presentation such as PowerPoint with voice-over recording, or a more ethnographic written account that explored health from an anthropological perspective. I created a rubric to cover the criteria for excellence with examples for various formats (see Figure 1) and instructed students,

> For all formats, your project should: introduce the topic, present your argument, provide evidence & analysis that cumulates in the conclusion. Remember, you are using different tools and techniques, but the overall goal is the same – to present what you have to say in a way that effectively communicates it to your audience.

	Use	Paper Example	Presentation Example	Film / Video Example	Brochure Example
Criteria for Excellence	☐ Verbal skills ☐ Visual ☐ Written	☐ Quotes & experiences ☐ Images, tables, figures ☐ Integrate facts and lived experiences to paint a picture with words (i.e., communicate well)	☐ Spoken script or clips in slideshow ☐ Slides, images, video clips, charts, tables ☐ Slide visuals and wording	☐ Narration, quotes, & experiences ☐ Images (still and live) ☐ Titles, charts, etc.	☐ Quotes or Experiences ☐ Images, charts, figures, pictures, and formatting ☐ Typed words
CLARITY Argument Thesis 30%	☐ Clearly state thesis ☐ Clearly make argument that flows & supports thesis • Facts, evidence from texts, digital media, charts, tables, and figures should relate to this and be well connected or explained • Stories, experiences, and images should also support, explain, describe, or provide examples that relate to argument.	☐ The thesis statement is specific, clearly worded, and at the beginning ☐ Argument addresses the topic fully. Each premise clearly relates to the next, is fully explained, & addresses the thesis. ☐ Charts, tables, & figures are easy to follow and relate ☐ Qualitative data, stories, and experiences follow these criteria as well	☐ PP contains your basic thesis, what you are purporting early in the slide deck (e.g., Covid-19 has disrupted life for university students in specific ways by…) ☐ Slides & script presents perspective/argument and flows in a way that explains it and we can follow	☐ This is presented in different ways in video, but should also be there in some way. We need to know what you are doing & why ☐ In images & words, explain to us what you are presenting/arguing • Show &/or tell us what it is you are trying to communicate and why (e.g., narration, script throughout, images interspersed)	☐ What is the point or argument you are communicating (e.g., social distancing saves lives & how and young people should care because…) ☐ Walk people through it in a way that they will understand why and how this is important and will want to follow your guidelines. Convince us with your argument (or try)
INTEREST & JUSTIFICATION Evidence and Analysis 30%	☐ Interest • Make it interesting! Get our attention. Get us involved or vested through verbal, visual, and written means. ☐ Justify • Provide evidence in the way of citations (texts, websites, documents), experiences (your & others), and analysis	☐ The evidence from the text supports the argument • Various sources (included websites, social media, news media, texts) • Includes qualitative data, stories, & experiences ☐ Thoughtful and insightful analysis –ideas are used rather than summarized. • Make sure your thoughts and ideas make it on the page	☐ PP includes support for your position/argument from various sources (including qualitative data) • Charts, summaries, images, short videos inserted, or stories of lived experiences ☐ Do NOT just present what others say, do, argue. Be sure that you include YOUR thoughts and ideas in explaining the relevance and linking these for us.	☐ Use images, scenarios, clips of news, media, or personal accounts, charts, pictures to show and explain. Here, you have to not just explain, but also show us. • An image of Hwy 69 completely devoid of cars is powerful *if* there is context. ☐ Be sure that your thoughts and analysis are making it to the screen.	☐ Use evidence and images that will resonate with your audience (for the example above, grandparents) ☐ You have to explain and convince people. Your thoughts and ideas that tie all these images and facts together to make it *real* will go a long way to accomplishing that!
ORGANIZATION & FLOW Structure 20%	☐ Organization • We must be able to follow your argument, justification, and analysis • There must be a beginning, middle, and end	☐ Overall organization is clear and helps showcase the argument. ☐ Paragraphs & sentences are well constructed ☐ The introduction relates well to the argument, and the closing paragraph completes it.	☐ Slide transitions should be smooth and labeled • Don't jump from topic to topic, but flow from one point to the next (words and titles on slides help) ☐ Images and words should relate to what you are discussing and follow through on the topic before going on to the next point	☐ Film & video MAY have slightly different orders, but still must have a beginning, middle and end • You may start a film with right now (the middle (?), but at some point, you have to go back and explain or show how it began.	☐ Give the problem/issue, why people should care, what they must do about, and how or what end result that will have. ☐ It is a little different beginning, middle, and end, but still follows the same sort of flow.
PROFESSIONALISM Style 20%	☐ Professionalism • Formatting (Title, your name, date – at the beginning), use appropriate grammar • Style (creative and appropriate) ☐ ≤ 12 pages ≤ 20 minute PP or video Standard brochure/flier	☐ Uses vocabulary appropriately. ☐ There are only one or two grammar and spelling errors. ☐ Formatting follows the guidelines.	☐ PP uses appropriate grammar, spelling, and vocab ☐ Slides are OUTLINES, not paragraphs! They do not stand alone. Your words fill in the blanks. They should be easy to read/see, which means not overcrowded (do NOT have to use complete sentences)	☐ Must also start with a title, your name, and date (or Spring 2020 Semester) • Narration should follow same guidelines • Spoken words and quotes are different, but should be appropriate for what they are	☐ Cover page that includes title, name, and date ☐ Product must have title • Follow same guidelines with some exceptions for quotes and language aimed at a specific audience

A+: Must receive Excellent in each category.
A: Must receive Excellent in most categories and Average or better in all.
B: Must receive Good in most categories and Fair or better in all.
C: Must receive Average in most categories - no Poor in Evidence/Analysis or Structure
D: Must receive Fair in most categories or receive many Poor in Evidence/Analysis and Structure.
F: Must receive Poor in most categories.

For all formats, your project should:

- **Introduce the topic, present your argument, provide evidence & analysis that cumulates in the conclusion**

Remember, you are using different tools and techniques, but the overall goal is the same—to present what you have to say in a way that effectively communicates it to your audience.

Figure 1. Rubric with Criteria for Excellence for Student Projects with Examples

The pandemic created an opportunity and the motivation for me to shift from a professor-created assignment to a more student-centered one that shifted some power and control to students as they practiced skills and methods through various forms of learning and evaluation.

Almost all of my students changed their topic to COVID-19 and the emerging pandemic. Students produced five recorded presentations, two video diaries, two short films, one ethnographic paper, and two research papers. I posted the files on Blackboard so they could view their classmates' work. I was impressed with students' creativity and use of various mediums. We were forced to adapt to drastically different and dangerous circumstances with little to no experience with many of the tools to help us do that. Yet, student outcomes (see Figure 1 for assessment criteria) were truly outstanding.

One student short film included the student filming herself as she ventured out for the first time after being sent home. She captured her reactions to empty streets and closed businesses as well as a most striking reaction to fuel prices. That seemingly simple aspect of the pandemic spoke volumes about her experiences and the effects COVID-19 was having on the lives of people. It was something she never would have included in a research paper but communicated so much on film. Another student (Phelps 2021, this issue) captured the joy and hope of 2020 New Year's celebrations followed by the disruptions that followed. Through visual and auditory images, she portrayed the contrast, the vast difference between life pre- and post-COVID-19. Several students who opted to create presentations for their projects commented that this was their first-time using programs such as PowerPoint to portray their work. Students also engaged in ethnographic research. They interviewed friends, family, and students about their experiences. They interpreted and presented these experiences in creative and impressive ways. These are just a couple examples of how students communicated so much more than the constraints of a research paper would allow. They rose to the occasion because of the challenges that were presented, in part, through student-centered approaches that were adopted because of the pandemic pivot. The pandemic pivot resulted in experiential learning opportunities that lead to better career preparation by linking classroom material to real-world applications.

All the students in my class had access to computers, smart phones, reliable or fairly reliable internet access, and technology to help create fantastic projects. Most had some experience using many of these tools. For instance, some who produced recorded presentations had prior experience with presentation software even if they had never used a voice-over recording program with it. In fact, it was my students who helped me figure out how to post the files within our Blackboard constraints to make them available to all in the class. These students had access to tools and information that were integral in developing these projects.

Spring 2020 was stressful for my students and for me. It seemed that our class – our educational routine – was thrown into a blender, ripped to pieces, and dumped onto a

plate. There was a lot of uncertainty. Uncertainty with the class itself, the future of education, the health of everyone and their families, and even the future of the nation. However, this unprecedented and worrisome situation presented us with opportunities. Our adaptability resulted in success on various levels. Students produced outstanding projects, yes. But they also learned and practiced skills that will benefit them in real world practice. Most of my students are not going to be anthropologists, but they will take what they learned from this class and apply it to real-world issues in settings outside of academia. Communicating complicated information about a developing situation through professional presentations, film, and in writing in ways that accentuate not only facts, but what it means in the lives of people – those are skills these students will use. COVID-19 forced me to rethink a class with no pre-planned experiential learning component in an effort to find ways to continue to teach remotely. Faced with enormous challenges, student-centered experiential techniques provided the means to meet challenges and exceed expectations.

Oral History Projects

As an anthropologist, Mary Baldwin University's changing demographic profile has long fascinated me (Abigail Wightman). In Spring 2020, I launched a new anthropology honors colloquium, *Transitions*, aimed at training students in oral history techniques to capture the experience of MBU's co-ed transition through the creation of an oral history archive. Although most honors classes at MBU have traditionally been seminar classes, I wanted to try an experiential component so that students could gain skills not just with oral history, but with the organization of a collaborative project, marketing, audio recording, transcription, and curation of archived material. We would focus our oral history collection on MBU residential seniors, the last class that applied to and entered MBU when the university was a women's college. Based in a theoretical foundation of the anthropology of gender, the course was structured so that the first half, before Spring Break, was dedicated to background reading and preparation for the oral history project, which would take place after the break.

For the oral history project, students were divided into groups and each group chose a project-related task to work on, such as marketing and recruitment, printing interview and release forms, and organizing our shared course Google Drive folder. After Spring Break, we intended to collaboratively write the interview questions and release form. Students would work in pairs to do two oral history interviews and were responsible for uploading audio files, release forms, and a full transcription of one interview. Once interviews and transcriptions were complete, we intended to collaboratively analyze and code a modest subset of interviews. The final assignment wrapped up the course by presenting our new archive to university leaders, administrators, and librarians.

The small class – thirteen students, most of whom had little experience in anthropology – were engaged throughout the semester and all professed to be looking

forward to beginning the oral history project. The pandemic, of course, forced many changes to our plans. After our Spring Break in early March, MBU students returned to a campus under the shadow of an emerging COVID-19 pandemic. After the decision was made to close our campus and send students home, I was able to meet with the *Transitions* class only one more time in our in-person classroom. Before we went outside for our final discussion, the conversation in the classroom was not about our oral history project or even coursework more broadly. Instead, students worried about the virus, getting sick, their jobs, and how to finish their classes remotely.

On such a diverse campus, and with so many students facing serious financial challenges, including homelessness, the decision to send students home was not made lightly. In my other in-person class, some students were visibly shaken about having to go home, more worried about leaving campus than the virus. For some students, home is not safe. Home may include parents or relatives who reject LGBTQ+ identities or may be physically and/or emotionally abusive. For other students, going home meant having to return to nearly full-time jobs to help support their families and sharing space, as well as Wi-Fi and computers, with siblings. Quite a few MBU students live in rural mountainous areas west of campus, where broadband internet and even cell service is non-existent. But for a small minority of students, Mary Baldwin is home, and it was difficult to face leaving. One student raised her hand in class and said simply, "I don't have any place to go." In response to the needs of these students, the administration allowed some students to apply to stay on campus, and about 100 students did so. When the significance and permanence of the COVID-19 pandemic became more apparent, however, these last remaining students were sent, unhappily, home.

I had less than a week to convert *Transitions*, along with another in-person class, to an online mode of delivery. In reality, it took several weeks to fully adapt the course. I began with the easy things, such as adding discussion boards to our Blackboard course to continue the close connection we had in the classroom. Then I began to focus on the oral history project. First, I sent out an email survey to students asking them to respond to several questions, including if they still wanted to continue the oral history project, if they had consistent internet access, and if they could use a video-conferencing platform, like Zoom. The majority of the students, but not all, replied yes to all three points. Those who replied no to continuing the project did so seemingly because of concerns such as technology and internet access and the amount of time required by the project. Since some students identified internet access and time as general concerns, I planned an asynchronous course.

Because of the mixed response, I developed a flexible course with two pathways to completion, a "choose-your-own-asynchronous-course." The first pathway was similar to our original course and required participating in a smaller oral history project; students would conduct one interview instead of two and record it on Zoom. The second pathway required a final paper based on the course readings. The two pathways came together in

required online discussions, so that even if a student chose not to participate in the oral history project, they were still able to learn from the process. Discussions required students to submit questions for the oral history interview and allowed project participants to present some of their findings and reflections with their classmates. Instead of a final synchronous class presentation, I chose to have students record final presentations on Zoom.

All the students in *Transitions* completed their assignments and passed the course, as perhaps expected for honors students. In the end, students collected eight oral history interviews recorded via Zoom and corresponding transcriptions, significantly fewer than we had originally intended. Students who participated in the oral history project also submitted papers that began to examine the experiences and responses to the co-ed transition at Mary Baldwin University. In addition, though, *Transitions* provides lessons for future teaching, both online and in-person – particularly in terms of communication, listening to our students, the need for flexibility, and the need to consider inequality. Although some instructors assume online courses to be inferior to in-person classes, I found that students were more forthcoming and honest in their communications online. Perhaps this resulted from the anonymity students may feel online (even though in this case all the students knew each other well) or, more likely, from avoiding the peer pressure of in-class group decision-making. For example, one male student admitted he was nervous about interviewing someone for the oral history project, since he assumed – it turns out incorrectly – that interviewees would be resentful and angry that men had been admitted to MBU. He also was concerned that his computer was too old to support Zoom. He chose the non-project course pathway and successfully completed a readings-based paper. However, because all students responded to the same discussion prompts, he learned that in our small sample of oral history interviews, student respondents professed to be welcoming to men on campus.

The flexibility I built into the online version of *Transitions* should, perhaps, have been built into the original in-person version as a form of power-sharing and co-collaboration of course and project content. Similarly, I should have listened to student voices at the beginning of the semester, instead of only after the transition online. Students could have been involved in the development of the project itself, developing tasks and offering input on alternative assignments or additional pathways. Certainly, such a process is time-consuming for the instructor and inhibits planning a course in its entirety before the semester begins. However, in some small classes and with some projects, students will likely benefit from additional options – and the course will be better because it has been built with student input. In the case of *Transitions*, for example, I could have offered students opportunities for various forms of leadership or organization roles within the project instead of direct participation in the oral history interviews.

Although the experiential nature of the course changed, by adapting oral histories to a new technology, I partially preserved the oral history component of the course. This

adaptation, and the pandemic, did impact the long-term goal of creating an oral history archive of the co-ed transition at MBU. Recognizing student needs meant that we ended up with a smaller oral history collection than originally proposed, and the adaptation to Zoom meant that those recordings were not archive-quality. As a result, we were not able to create an oral history archive. Importantly, though, the students who participated in the oral history component still gained valuable experience in conducting, transcribing, and analyzing oral histories. These students, then, still benefited from community-based experiential learning, even during a pandemic that severely limited social interactions. As these limitations continue into the foreseeable future, faculty across academic disciplines will have to make similar adaptations to guarantee access to community-based experiential learning.

Transitions, as well as the pandemic pivot at large, exposed inequalities always present in our classrooms and that exist between faculty. Although some students struggled with online learning because they did not have a computer or had to share one with family, the biggest issue in *Transitions* was internet access. Staunton is at the edge of a large mountainous area of rural western Virginia without broadband internet service. In this region, folks either rely on inconsistent and expensive satellite internet or, if they have cell service, they buy pricy cell phone plans and use personal hotspots. I live just ten minutes west of town, and like some of my students, I do not have broadband service – but I am fortunate to have cell service and can afford to channel my internet use through my cell phone data plan. Several students did not have this option. Some of these chose the non-project pathway, but one student without reliable internet service insisted on participating in the oral history project. In order to conduct Zoom interviews, she drove an hour away from her home to find a free hotspot, a process even more challenging during stay-at-home orders in the commonwealth.

Discussion: The Pandemic Pivot and Accidental Success

The outbreak of COVID-19 in Spring 2020 forced higher education institutions to shift traditional in-person university classes to remote modes. The situation presented little time for educators or students to prepare. Instead, everyone had to adapt to the fluid and uncertain situation on the fly. As one student wrote on a course evaluation, "It would have been better to start the oral history project earlier, but who plans for a pandemic?" Here, we presented ways that we addressed rapidly changing sociocultural, economic, and physical environments while facilitating teaching and learning anthropology in two classes at different universities with very distinct groups of students. We experienced what we call accidental success in the face of unprecedented challenges and limited resources as we adjusted class delivery and assignments in our attempts to best use available technology and while considering our students' specific needs. Although this experience was one of forced remote learning rather than planned online classes based on decades of student-based learning pedagogy, we tried to build community and comradery among students and faculty through video conferencing, synchronous and

asynchronous discussions, and videos while encouraging intellectual curiosity, active learning, and student ownership of learning (Cruz, Wasson, and Gibbs 2007; Davenport and Henry 2007; Nuñes-Janes and Cruz 2007; Wright 2011). Our students were able to engage in discussions and assignments that allowed them to include their own experiences and interpretations though multi-media and mixed methods. Even in an online, pandemic context we were able to provide experiential learning opportunities that allowed students to learn course concepts through application.

The pandemic pivot presented many unprecedented challenges associated with teaching and learning anthropology for students, faculty, and institutions. In facing these challenges, we found that respecting the stress everyone experienced, communicating with students with clarity and honesty, and practicing flexibility along with employing technology provided situations that taught marketable and valuable skills. Some of these successes were:

- Student engagement
    - Despite the extenuating and unusual circumstances, students engaged with each other, with us, and with modified assignments. This engagement was strengthened through flexible power-sharing among teachers and students.
- Experiential learning opportunities
    - Students created outstanding projects because they were able to engage in hands-on activities, even though this required flexibility.
- Useful and marketable skills
    - Multi-media techniques such as creating videos, films, and presentations are all skills that are useful in and outside of explicitly anthropological careers as well as in and outside academia.
- Critical reflection on their own lives and communities
    - In both courses, students used the tools of anthropology to critically and deeply consider significant events in their own communities. These critical thinking skills will serve them in future careers and, hopefully, as engaged citizens.

At the time of publication, new COVID-19 variants (e.g., Delta) are spreading rapidly despite the availability of vaccines. Plans for in-person learning, face-to-face interactions, and reduced social distancing on campuses in Fall 2021 remain tentative due to ambiguity about the future of the pandemic. Despite the accomplishments and victories presented here, we cannot deny the very real challenges that students and faculty continue to encounter. Indeed, we argue that recognizing these concerns is imperative as a first step in our quest for success in teaching and learning under the current circumstances of uncertainty. We must first identify and acknowledge the problems associated with forced remote and hybrid learning in order to address them. A few of the issues that impacted university classes in Spring 2020 and continue even now included:

- Access to technology
  - Not all students have reliable computers, internet access, or the software to facilitate remote learning activities. Furthermore, some must share these resources with multiple household members for school, work, and other activities.
- Economic challenges
  - Students were faced with many economic challenges that extended well beyond access to technology. Some faced job loss or homelessness because of the pandemic and campus closings.
- Physical environment
  - Educators and students were physically separated. Also, many faced challenges associated with sharing spaces with family who were also working from home. Virtual classes and meetings require a space to conduct discussions or interviews in addition to access to the technology (e.g., internet, computers, and software).
- Stress and uncertainty
  - There was a high level of stress associated with the pandemic. The changing higher education environment, unfamiliar technologies, and much more contributed to the stress of the pandemic pivot. This impacted students' and faculty members' abilities to cope and adapt.

Despite these challenges, we did experience a great deal of success in our pandemic pivots. However, we also heard from others who struggled to even deliver class materials. There were reports from both educators and students about classes that simply stopped when universities closed or continued with limited online content and little or no contact or communication. The pandemic pivot pushed us to focus on students' needs and experiences. We suggest that success moving forward as many continue with remote and hybrid classes depends on communicating with students, centering student perspectives, creating flexibility, and paying attention to inequality, especially associated with differential access to resources. Just as we do with the communities among whom we conduct research, we must consider our students within the broader social context of their lives and privilege their voices and perspectives as co-learners in both in-person and virtual classrooms (Wightman 2019).

In many ways, the pandemic is redefining education. Indeed, universities have spent the last academic year teaching in multiple formats: in-person, remote, and hybrid classes. In the short term, hybrid courses will likely continue for some courses into the future. The pandemic pivot set the stage for success in hybrid courses by encouraging faculty to critically reflect on course goals and pedagogies. In 2020-2021, we were able to take the lessons outlined above and apply them more intentionally to courses. At MBU, for example, all residential courses had a hybrid component and all course content was made available in both in-person and online formats. Student-centered courses are potentially more challenging when teaching hybrid classes; this is particularly the case for

in-class experiential learning and discussions, which must be modified for both formats. In addition, power-sharing takes on added complexity with many students attending class remotely due to concerns about COVID-19. As a result, faculty must now contend with a course structure that makes it easier than ever for students to return to passive learning.

The challenges and successes associated with the pandemic pivot provided possibilities for increased discussions of pedagogy and modes of instruction for in-person, remote, and hybrid classes as well as the potential for renewed discussions of making anthropology relevant beyond the classroom and outside of academia. The pandemic has exposed many social and educational inequalities, but COVID-19 did not create them, nor will they disappear with a vaccine. One unexpected benefit has been an increased interest in effective pedagogy both online and in-person.

Conclusion

We want to reiterate that the experiences we present here are not from intentional, planned online classes. Instead, they represent the challenges associated with the forced shift to remote and hybrid learning that students, faculty, and universities faced in 2020 and that will continue at least into 2021. Social distancing and masks are now commonplace in classrooms and on campuses. However, the anxieties that students expressed about class delivery, connections, school trips, and even where they would go when campuses close are likely to continue. The impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning anthropology, as well as our communities, persists. Fortunately, an anthropological perspective that encourages ethnographically-informed social and educational analyses offers a means to find success and usher in a more equitable post-pandemic world. As teachers and anthropologists, we are in a position to mediate this uncertainty by centering student learning and find not-so-accidental success by applying the lessons of our discipline – considering context, listening to all voices, and adapting to changing environments – as we move forward to meet the future.

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