

Covid-19 and Higher Education: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 Pandemic significantly disrupted every aspect of human life and has produced an unprecedented hardship on education. The COVID-19 Pandemic created challenges for professors of higher education on multiple levels not limited to teaching, scholarship, and service. Using an Autoethnographic case study with a Social theory symbolic interactionist paradigm, the author explores and reflects on professional and personal experiences encountered during the COVID-19 Pandemic between March 2020 through the fall 2020 semester and beyond. The author describes interactions with students, adjusting her research plan, and pivoting to include COVID-19 in service projects. Although this paper has not covered any statistical analysis on the impact of Covid-19 on higher education, similar accounts can be found and have been cited in the literature. These reflections are unable to offer systemic answers to challenges facing higher education. However, these experiences and feelings will provide important inputs to global discussions, lessons learned, and best practices about the future of higher education, after Covid-19.

Keywords: Autoethnographic case study, COVID-19, Education paradigms

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic significantly disrupted every aspect of human life and has produced an unprecedented hardship on education. Shahzad et al., (2020), approximate that worldwide COVID-19 affected the education of a billion students. The COVID-19 Pandemic created challenges for professors of higher education. At a moment's notice, professors found themselves having to alter their course delivery methods. Nearly 120 countries halted in-person learning (Shahzad et al., 2020). Professors needed to adjust how they conducted research. The main concern was how to collect data safely. Interactive service activities with students and in the community were also impacted by COVID-19. Due to restrictions imposed by municipalities and enforced by universities, not limited to stay-at-home orders, wearing face masks, and social distancing, professors found it difficult to manage and engage in service tasks. The overall problem is the COVID-19 Pandemic may be undermining the ability of professors to perform the expectation of the positions and the contractual obligations not limited to teaching, research, and service. The purpose of this paper and the research question is to explore what the positive impacts or implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic are on higher education.

2 Methodology

According to Ellis et al. (2011), auto-ethnography is a qualitative approach to research and writing with the goal of seeking to describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience. The literature has tens of thousands of auto-ethnographies



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describing unique and significant experiences encountered during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The article and reports are introspective and self-reflective, and the self is placed within the social context. Some of them use emotional recall as a heuristic tool. One must recognize the authority and privilege of the author to be in the research. This approach was selected because it is a best practice when exploring the author's experience from the author's perspective. Furthermore, the author does not live through these experiences simply to make them part of research or to publish; rather, these experiences are assembled in a reflective posture using hindsight. The author perceives these experiences to have had a significant impact on the trajectory of her professional and personal life.

3 Results

A search of the literature using google scholar as the main search engine and database revealed a gap in the literature. Most of the articles indicating a positive implication were specifically related to the environmental impact. For example, Ibn-Mohammed, (2021) critical analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 on the global economy, ecosystems, and opportunities for circular economy strategies. Another article referencing the positive impact of COVID-19 on the environment is Muhammad, (2020) study entitled "COVID-19 pandemic and environmental pollution: A blessing in disguise?" The research failed to produce any significant number of articles highlighting positive outcomes of COVID-19 in higher education except for being able to quickly embrace online teaching. Strielkowski, (2020) preprint states "COVID-19 pandemic instigated a digital revolution in academia and higher education." Moreover, Radecki & Schonfeld, (2020), similar to most articles, describe the negative impacts of COVID-19 on Higher Education. Specifically, as it relates to research, the study explained that less guidance was provided on how to continue research. Months of work were lost for 57% of the scientists who responded.

Teaching

In addition to the teaching method moving to a virtual platform delivery, I found it necessary to implement pre-lecture check-ins with the students. This allowed the students the opportunity to express how COVID-19 was affecting their overall wellness. It also allowed students to hear that others were experiencing similar situations. After these discussions, the students were better able to focus on class. The professor also incorporated hands-on real-world experiential assignments. No students were sent out to the community during the pandemic. They were given assignments to identify problems and propose possible solutions as they related to COVID-19. As a result, the students produced factsheets (figure 1) based on the results of the professor's COVID-19 research. Through it all, my overall goal was to continue to give all of her students the resources they needed to keep learning.

Me, Myself, &
Covid-19
FACT SHEET

ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM MENTAL ILLNESS?

MENTAL ILLNESS: a wide range of conditions that affect mood, thinking, and behavior.

MENTALLY HEALTHY

- You feel in control of your own emotions
- You have good cognitive functioning (thinking, problem solving, decision making).
- You have positive interactions with other people.
- The ability to maintain strong relationships with others.

MENTALLY UNHEALTHY

- This is a serious emotional disorder (feelings of anxiety, changes in appetite, obsessive compulsive disorders)
- Extreme emotional distress (behaving in an outrageous way).
- Psychotic behaviors

SYMPTOMS
YOU CAN NEVER TELL JUST BY LOOKING AT SOMEONE

- Anger
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Unmotivated
- Unfocused
- Low energy
- Racing thoughts
- Significant tiredness
- Constant worry
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Making bad decisions
- Feeling sad or down
- Depression or anxiety
- Excessive fears or worries
- Extreme feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes
- Trouble sleeping/Sleeping too much
- Problems with memory or concentration
- Withdrawal from friends and/or activities
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate

COPING/PREVENTION

- Relax
- Face your fears
- Healthy eating habits
- Get creative
- Get a pet
- Find a hobby
- Deep breathing
- Meditate
- Redecorate
- Treat yourself
- Keep a journal
- Go to therapy
- Clean or organize
- Get enough sleep
- Learn your triggers
- Build a routine and stick to it
- Try making a daily routine and sticking to it
- Do things that boost your self-esteem

RESOURCES

- Hillcrest Mental Health DC**
Phone Number: (202) 232-6100
Email: INFO@HILLCREST-DC.ORG
- Hotline DC Department of Behavioral Health**
Phone Number: 1-888-TWE-HELP
Email: dbh@dc.gov
- Mary's Bilingual Mental Health Program Assistant (Thrive Works)**
Phone Number: (202) 805-8097
Website: Thrivework.com
- UDC Counseling Center**
Phone Number: (202) 274-8000

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Figure 1: Student Created Factsheet

Scholarship

My research pivoted to focus on questions that were specifically COVID-19 related. One study was a department effort that surveyed 10,500 older adults in the U.S on their pre and post-COVID-19 health-related quality of life. The second was a local study in Ward 5 of Washington, DC on the perceptions of COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine uptake. Both studies were

approved by UDC's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the latter has produced a published article and is informing DC Council on policy regarding the issues identified. The local study was more difficult to collect data than the larger nationwide study. Due to COVID-19 partner sites not being open to post flyers, most of the data was collected via snowballing methods and emailing the study flyer (figure 2) to family, friends, and colleagues.

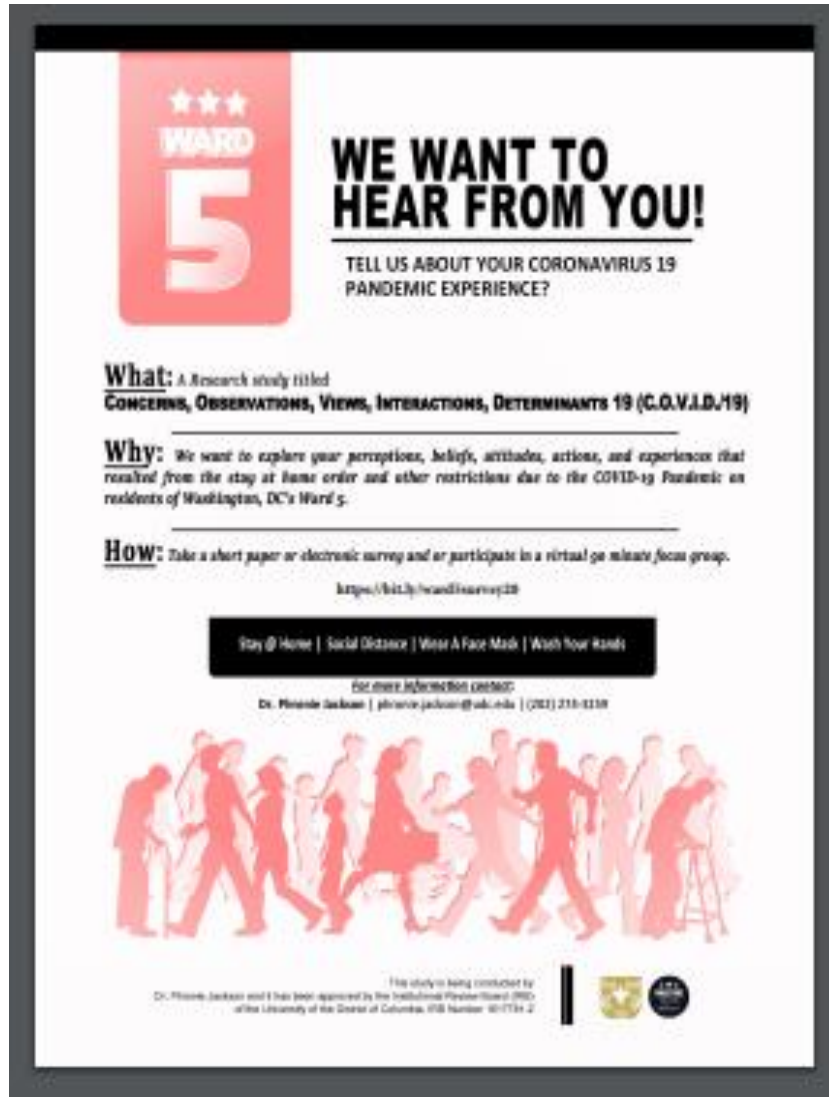


Figure 2: Local Research Study Flyer

Service

As the advisor of student-led clubs, I tasked the club members to use their collective voices to distribute accurate information about COVID-19 and promote safe behaviors during the pandemic. The students created email campaigns to encourage “W³” Washing hands often, Watching your distance 6 feet apart, and Wearing masks, including demonstrations on how to make masks. The students were invited to present during two National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Conferences. (see figure 3, presentation cover below). These activities afforded the students opportunities to apply Health Education and Peer Educator skills and theories.

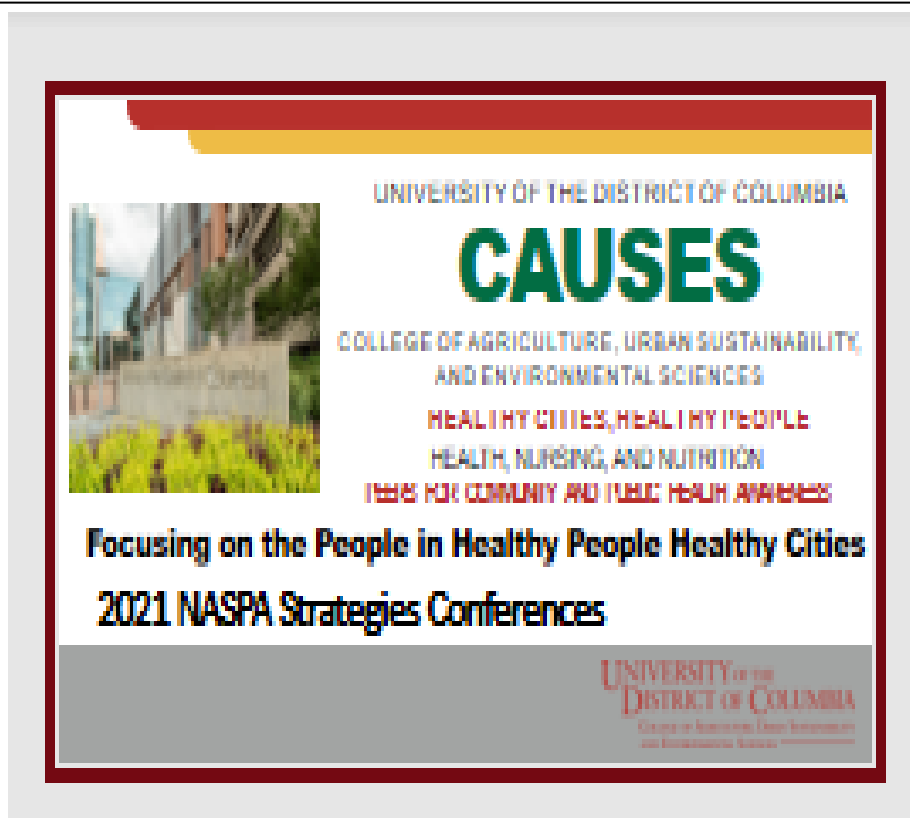


Figure 3: Presentation Cover Slide

4 Conclusion

This paper has not covered any statistical analysis on the impact of Covid-19 on higher education, the accounts of the author can be found and have been cited in the literature. These reflections are unable to offer systemic answers to challenges facing higher education. However, these experiences and feelings will provide important inputs to global discussions, lessons learned, and best practices about the future of higher education after Covid-19.

5 Publisher's Note

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