

Winter 2020

Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

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The onset of March 2020 presented unique challenges to our profession that no instructor, administrator, or institution was exempt from. The presence of COVID-19 forced practitioners the world over to amend courses and programs on the fly, while maintaining a level-headedness to move forward in an unchartered academic landscape. My institution, like many others, suspended in-person classes in early March and recommended all instructors to make plans to fully transition their courses online.

Reflecting on this time now only augments how surreal of an experience it was. I had just arrived back into the United States after traveling to Europe with an undergraduate course. The course, "Genocide in the Twentieth Century," brought students to sites of genocide across Eastern Europe (e.g., Poland, Hungary, Serbia, and Bosnia); a dear colleague of mine who instructed the class asked me to join the class as a chaperone. Almost at the very moment we entered back into the United States, myself and two other colleagues on the trip were confronted with the mandate to begin moving our courses

online. For me, this included transitioning five writing courses, along with a film studies course that investigated depictions of science in American cinema.

These courses presented their own unique challenges in becoming online synchronous, while maintaining the fidelity of the courses. The film studies class demanded that I get especially creative. The class could no longer congregate in person for a watch and chat, as we did pre-COVID. Rather, Netflix Party and Discord became new modalities for pedagogical success. As I think back on this time now, my greatest challenge concerned humanistic issues. So many of my students were no longer on campus; they now found themselves back

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at home where they were unequipped with proper technology or a stable internet connection. The transition did not simply present problems pertaining to course management or syllabi; rather, it galvanized our responsibility to ensure that all students were participating on a level playing field, and that they all had access to course materials.

While my perspective was certainly not unique, it was our shared challenges that led to the creation of this special issue's CFP. As ELTHE's editor-in-chief, Kevin Dvorak noted, we are all combing through an uncertain landscape. As such, it is important that we collect the testimonies of our peers, with hopes that their experiences will inform other experiential practitioners that find themselves in a similar position. The many voices and perspectives that you will find in this issue speak to the challenges of the last six months.

This final part of a two-part special issue includes six contributions from experiential educators across the disciplines. Laura Finley focuses specifically on a dating and domestic violence awareness initiative at Barry University and highlights adaptable approaches to finding service-learning opportunities for students learning remotely.

Rebecca Burwell, Jonathan Brooks, and Mackenzi Huyser offer insight into how Chicago Semester—an experiential education program across six private, faith-based colleges—pivoted to remote learning. Focusing on Social Justice and Urban Planning courses, the authors discuss how the pandemic offered an opportunity for students to further explore the city of Chicago's response to the pandemic and the multiple layers of inequality embedded within.

Beth Garcia and Betty Coneway underline shifts in the West Texas A&M University's Educator Preparation Program (EPP), discussing the implementation of virtual learning environments so that 90 clinical teachers could complete their vital in-person teaching experience.

Kerry E. Weir, Michelle Wohlman-Izakson, and Lina Gilic discuss the various approaches that faculty in the Exceptional Education and Learning Department at SUNY Old Westbury employed in order to design individualized learning plans for teacher candidates to complete their clinical placement experience.

Pamela Hall offers a critical reflection on the changes made to move a community-engaged, service-learning capstone course from in-person to remote learning. Throughout her reflection, Hall discusses the challenges the transition presented to her as an instructor; Hall also includes student testimonies about shifts in assignments and challenges they overcame while completing the course.

In a piece co-authored by both professors and students, Dale E. Hartz, Sheila McMahon, Merlyn Ascencio, Rachel Badilla, and Noemi Marquez discuss the potential learning opportunities offered by the pandemic for a social action entrepreneurship lab. The authors argue that bridging the skills gap between students and work environments can lead to a kind of personal growth and development that is key to enhancing student job readiness.

We are excited to share these articles with you and hope that they provide guidance and insight to others as we collectively navigate the 2020-2021 academic year. ■