Perspectives of Faculty: Teaching During COVID-19 Onset

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Abstract

The Coronavirus pandemic is a complex issue that fundamentally altered the landscape of higher education. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. By March 2020, colleges and universities across the United States experienced abrupt disruptions to teaching, learning, advising, internships, and student teaching. This study examines the perspectives of faculty regarding their teaching roles during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Four African American female researchers from universities in Louisiana explored the experiences of five faculty members during the pandemic shutdown. Using qualitative methods and autobiographical narratives, this study examined the impact of the interruption of structured professional environments on teaching, advising, research, and service. Findings contribute to the literature on faculty development, mentorship, professional learning communities, and the lived experiences of African American faculty in higher education.

Keywords: pandemic teaching; faculty roles; COVID-19; educational interruptions; thematic analysis

Introduction

America's higher educational systems today are faced with many challenges: one of these is meeting the standards of faculty and teaching. The late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan once said: "What people want is very simple. They want an America as good as its promise." The

educational, wealth, and healthcare disparities are well documented in multicultural populations, but the interruptions of education surrounding COVID-19 have lifted the veil for generations to come on how to solve the problems of inequality in our educational systems. The common values of systems in our educational structures were disrupted in a way that forced online learning to become the norm for all sectors of our society. These educational interruptions forced students and professors in institutions of higher learning to look at the pedagogy, the methods teaching, advisement and overall instructional methodology from a new and innovative perspective. This sudden shift in "the new normal" transcended teaching in a new way that will be evaluated, analyzed and studied for years to come. Various faculty from colleges and universities were forced in a matter of weeks to find innovative and flexible strategies to adjust to students who were assigned to internships, practicum experiences, and student teaching across the United States.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003) all children are to be ready for online learning as a tool by 2020. This overarching framework for online learning strategically linked the efforts of teaching to different organizational goals that provides guidance, direction, and momentum for student performance by the time of the pandemic of 2020. This contention also provided a leadership style that involved creating solutions and gains that were never intended for such interruptions as experienced by professors and students addressing COVID-19 worldwide. Therefore, taking the educational disruption that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic as an object of study, this paper aims to provide a snapshot of the unique challenges faced and the non-traditional strategies used as support for students and faculty during this sudden shift to online learning.

Review of Literature

Public Health Responses and Future Directions

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected global health, economies, and daily life. In the article "Covid-19 Navigating the Uncharted," Fauci, Lane, and Redfield (2020) comprehensively overview the pandemic's complexities and challenges. The authors, who are leading figures in public health, explore various aspects of COVID-19, including its transmission, clinical features, public health responses, and the development of vaccines (Fauci et al., 2020). The authors provide insight into the public health measures implemented globally

to combat the spread of COVID-19 (Fauci et al., 2020). These include social distancing, mask mandates, and travel restrictions. They emphasize the need for a coordinated response that balances public health concerns with economic and social implications.

Fauci and colleagues (2020) call for sustained vigilance and collaboration among governments, healthcare providers, and the public to navigate the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19. They highlight the importance of ongoing research, public health infrastructure, and preparedness for future pandemics. *COVID-19 — Navigating the Uncharte*d serves as a critical resource for understanding the multifaceted nature of the pandemic. The insights provided by Fauci and colleagues (2020) contribute to the broader discourse on public health responses and the importance of scientific research in addressing global health crises. Their work underscores the necessity of collaboration and preparedness in navigating the complexities of an uncharted public health landscape.

Online Learning Environment

While many universities have undergone the transformation of the classroom environment of complementing face-to-face teaching with online components (e.g. blended or flipped learning), some have fully transitioned into the full implementation of online courses with asynchronous and synchronous communicative tools (e.g., Kaufman, 2015; Wong et al., 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated an unprecedented shift in higher education, compelling universities worldwide to transition to remote teaching. The shift towards online learning environments has prompted educators to explore strategies to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Online education has rapidly evolved, necessitating an understanding of how digital platforms affect student learning experiences. Research has indicated that online learning environments can positively and negatively influence student motivation. On one hand, the flexibility and accessibility of online courses can enhance learner autonomy and self-regulation. On the other hand, challenges such as isolation, lack of immediate feedback, and technological barriers can diminish motivation (Tomej, 2022). Studies during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted these dualities, revealing that while some students thrived in online settings, others struggled to maintain motivation without face-to-face interaction (Tomej, 2022). Several studies have compared online and classroom teaching motivation levels during the pandemic. Findings suggest that students generally report higher

motivation in classroom settings, particularly regarding social presence and peer interaction (Tomej, 2022). However, some students expressed a preference for online learning due to its flexibility and the ability to manage their own learning pace. This dichotomy underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how different teaching modalities affect student motivation.

Faculty Roles

Faculty roles have evolved in response to changing educational paradigms, with increased emphasis on technology integration, student engagement, and collaborative practices (Aad et al., 2021, add at least one more). Research indicates that robust institutional support is vital for the successful implementation of online teaching. During the pandemic, many institutions faced challenges in providing adequate resources and training for faculty, leading to varied experiences in transitioning to online formats (Aad et al., 2021). Studies have shown that institutions offering comprehensive training, technology access, and ongoing support saw higher levels of faculty satisfaction and effectiveness (Aad et al., 2021). In order to maintain this effectiveness, faculty members must increasingly act as facilitators who guide students through the learning process rather than simply deliver content. Faculty roles have been modified to include providing emotional and academic support to students during a time of uncertainty. Building rapport and fostering a sense of community in online environments have become critical aspects of effective teaching. Institutional support encompasses resources, training, and infrastructure provided by educational institutions to facilitate teaching and learning (Aad et al., 2021).

The transition to online and hybrid teaching during the pandemic presented unique challenges and opportunities for educators. Research indicates that many teachers faced difficulties in adapting their instructional practices to new digital environments, leading to feelings of inadequacy and decreased efficacy. Teachers reported challenges related to technology integration, student engagement, and maintaining effective communication with students and families (Donald et al., 2021). It can be determined that high levels of teacher efficacy are associated with increased persistence, greater student engagement, and improved student performance. Robust institutional support is vital for the successful implementation of online teaching. Studies have shown that institutions offering comprehensive training,

technology access, and ongoing support saw higher levels of faculty satisfaction and effectiveness (Aad et al., 2021).

Effective professional development programs focusing on online pedagogy and technology use have enhanced faculty confidence and teaching efficacy. Faculty who received targeted training reported feeling more prepared to engage students and deliver quality instruction. Access to reliable technology and learning management systems is crucial for facilitating online teaching. Institutions that invested in robust technological infrastructures enabled faculty to adapt more effectively to online formats, thus enhancing overall teaching and learning experiences. Clear communication from institutional leadership and opportunities for collaboration among faculty members were essential during the pandemic (Aad et al., 2021). Hence, institutions that fostered a culture of support and open communication helped to alleviate feelings of isolation and uncertainty among faculty.

Several factors have been identified that influence teachers' sense of efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic: *Professional Development and Support*- Access to training and resources for online teaching has been shown to enhance teachers' confidence and efficacy, teachers who received adequate professional development reported feeling more competent in their ability to engage students in remote learning, *Technological Proficiency*- teachers' familiarity with technology and digital tools played a crucial role in their ability to adapt to online instruction. Those with higher technological proficiency reported greater efficacy in managing virtual classrooms, *Student Engagement*- The ability to foster student engagement in remote learning environments has been linked to teachers' sense of efficacy. As online education continues to evolve, understanding the dynamics of peer interaction will be crucial for enhancing student outcomes and creating more effective learning experiences. Educators who successfully implemented interactive and engaging online activities reported feeling more effective in their teaching roles. *Collaboration and Community*- The support of colleagues and participation in collaborative networks were vital for maintaining teacher efficacy during the pandemic. Teachers who engaged in collaborative practices reported enhanced confidence and a sense of community (Donald et al., 2023).

Research has consistently shown that peer interactions play a crucial role in enhancing student engagement and motivation (Goodman & Moore, 2023). In the context of online learning, chat features can facilitate real-time communication, allowing students to ask questions

and share insights. The concept of text-based interruptions, as discussed by Goodman and Moore, refers to the spontaneous interactions that occur via chat during online lectures. These interruptions serve as prompts for deeper engagement and provide opportunities for clarification of concepts. The authors highlight that such interruptions can positively influence individual confidence and the overall classroom dynamic, encouraging a culture of collaboration and support. The information provided derives from synthesized key findings from research that focus on the perspectives of university academics regarding their experiences with remote teaching during the pandemic, the impacts of online learning, motivation and efficacy.

Efficacy

The findings from research on teacher efficacy during the pandemic underscore the importance of targeted support and professional development for educators. Institutions must prioritize providing resources, training, and collaborative opportunities to help teachers navigate the challenges of remote and hybrid teaching. A supportive environment can enhance teachers' sense of efficacy and ultimately improve student outcomes. As educational systems continue to evolve, understanding and addressing the factors that impact teacher efficacy will be crucial for supporting educators and ensuring effective teaching practices in the future. Further research is needed to explore long-term effects on teacher efficacy and the strategies that can promote resilience in the face of ongoing challenges (Donald et al., 2023).

Implications of Remote Teaching

Research indicates that the rapid shift to remote teaching during the pandemic has had significant implications for university academics. Many faculty members faced challenges in adapting to new technologies and instructional practices while navigating the pandemic's emotional impact (Abdullah, 2021). By incorporating chat functionalities into online lectures, educators can create more interactive and supportive learning environments (Goodman & Moore, 2023). Providing robust technological support and resources is essential for enabling faculty to effectively transition to remote teaching (Abdullah, 2021). Institutions should ensure that faculty have access to the necessary tools and training to enhance their online instruction. Furthermore, they should offer collaboration and communication among faculty, which can help

build a supportive academic community (Abdullah, 2021). Institutions should encourage faculty to share experiences, resources, and best practices to enhance remote teaching effectiveness.

Other implications for the future of online education would rely on: *Sustainable Support Systems*- Institutions must develop sustainable support systems that provide ongoing training, resources, and infrastructure to support faculty in their online teaching endeavors; Continuous *Professional Development*- Ongoing professional development opportunities should focus on effective online pedagogy, technology integration, and strategies for fostering student engagement, and *Redefining Faculty Roles*- As online teaching becomes more prevalent, the roles of faculty will continue to evolve. Institutions should recognize and support these changing roles, ensuring faculty have the resources they need to succeed (Goodman & Moore, 2023). Academics expressed a range of opinions regarding the future of remote teaching. While some recognized the benefits of flexibility and accessibility that online instruction offers, others voiced concerns about the effectiveness of online learning compared to traditional methods (Aad et al., 2021). This divergence in perspectives highlights the need for ongoing evaluation of online teaching practices in lieu of the experiences we have learned from COVID-19.

Use of Critical Friends Group (CFG)

Of most significance to the current study is the research being conducted on the cutting-edge educational practice in institutions of higher learning, the Critical Friends Group (CFG) and Systems Theory. This theory is based on the premise that CFGs are committed to becoming actively involved with building community through reduction of isolation while offering support for teaching and learning for faculty and students in a higher education environment. It encourages best practices and ultimately a positive school culture (NSRF, 2020). The concept in establishing a CFG in higher education for faculty of color and of female gender is rarely used as a model for engaging teaching, research, and service in the institutions of higher learning. For this reason, the researchers of this study used CFG as the basic framework as a means of showing how support for faculty across disciplines in the midst of a pandemic can be used to foster academic mentorship and research and collaboration among institutions of higher education in the state of Louisiana. In Motivation Systems Theory, the attainment of social and personal goals within a specified context is motivated by achievement (Colbeck and Weaver, 2008).

Research Questions

This study explored faculty perspectives regarding their teaching experience at the onset of COVID-19. In order to address some of the implications suggested in the literature, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: What did faculty members experience *personally* at the onset of COVID-19?
   a. What stressors did faculty members experience?
   b. How did faculty members navigate the balancing of work and family and responsibilities while working from home?
   c. How did faculty members manage changes in university responsibilities?

RQ 2: What changes were there in faculty-student interaction due to the onset of COVID-19?
   a. How did faculty react to student stressors?
   b. What impact did student stressors have on faculty instructional activity?
   c. What were faculty thoughts regarding student attainment of course objectives? Research question 1 sought to explore faculty experiences at the onset of COVID-19. Attention was given to faculty members transition from the university setting. The student sought to explore stressors and more specifically how faculty members balanced work and family responsibilities. This question also sought to explore faculty response to changes in university responsibilities in cases when faculty moved from the traditional classroom setting to online instruction. Research question 2 explored faculty perspectives relative to student interaction and onset of COVID-19. The study desired to explore faculty reaction to student stressors, changes in instructional activity, and overall attainment of course objectives.

DATA and METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total of five (n=5) higher education faculty members aged between 36-62 years old and all of African-American descent, were recruited (brought together) from two higher education institutions in Louisiana, one a historically Black institution (HBCU) and one a predominately

White institution (PWI). The inclusion criteria were: (1) must be a faculty member who teaches and/or advises during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (2) must be willing to document their experiences written and orally. These faculty participants were from various disciplines such as education, social work, and professional studies.

Data: Autobiographical Narratives

The group of five faculty members were asked to document (journaling and video recordings) their autobiographical narratives concerning their personal experiences and the experiences of their students on navigating class and their personal life at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Two main questions were posed: (1) What did faculty members experience *personally* at the onset of COVID-19 and (2) What changes were there in faculty-student interaction due to the onset of COVID-19? The narratives presented by the faculty varied in length, the shortest being 618 words and the longest 1,064 words.

The stories and narratives of five professors have differences based on the entry points into the Academy, the academic positions, the professional experiences and challenges, work and transitions within the Academy. The overall stories have differing themes, but a common bond of geographic location, environmental factors in the professoriate arena. Each story is told with passion, vigor and authenticity for the road to the Academy. In writing each narrative, the CFG member reviewed other writings from various social and academic fields of educational leadership, curriculum and instruction, social work, counseling/ behavior sciences and family and consumer sciences, and professional studies.

Data Analysis

The responses of the faculty were analyzed using thematic analysis and narrative oriented inquiry. Thematic analysis is best suited for the current qualitative data because it allows for the authors to not only search for patterns within the qualitative data, but it is also most useful for identifying themes from narratives that allow for a more structured way to understand the meanings sometimes hidden within data on shared experiences and perspectives (Braun and Clark, 2006).

More specifically, we followed the steps proposed by Braun and Clark (2006), which consist of

1. Familiarizing oneself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes and
6. Producing the report.

The Story of CFG - A

This pandemic is unprecedented because it affected people internationally at the same time. Here I share my experience of how COVID-19 impacted me as an academician.

I teach at a university on a quarter system in a counseling program accredited by Counseling Accreditation for Counseling Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Our Spring quarter started in early March. I was teaching Practicum/Internship and Counseling Techniques.

The courses are based in experiential learning. I also had to teach a student who received an Incomplete the previous quarter. In the Counseling Techniques course, students are to demonstrate multiple basic counseling skills such as attending behavior like eye contact and body language, active listening, reflection, and summarizing. They receive feedback from me and their classmates. The students are also required to attend at least one counseling session with a licensed professional counselor during the quarter.

With Practicum and Internship, students are to demonstrate skills they've learned throughout the program. They submit tapes of sessions with clients for grading, attend supervision with their site supervisor, attend supervision with me, and receive feedback from me and their classmates. Internship and Practicum requires field experience. On the first night of class I reviewed expectations with the students and they shared their approved sites and the overall work that they were going to be doing at those sites. Their homework was to type three goals they had for the quarter, three goals they had for their sites, and three goals they had for their supervisors. The students seemed to bubble with excitement, and I was looking forward to hearing all of their varied experiences and watching them progress in their skills.

One week later we were informed by the university that all instruction would be done online due to the pandemic, coronavirus COVID-19. We were not to go on campus unless it was absolutely necessary. We also had to work from home remotely with office hours, attend department meetings, advise, and conduct interviews for prospective new students via Zoom. I had to revamp just about everything. I had to revise the syllabi. I had to make exceptions to things that generally were not acceptable. It was frightening to know that most sites were closed so students initially could not obtain hours and I had a student scheduled to graduate that quarter.

For the Techniques course I had to allow the students to record their skill demonstrations via Zoom. Trying to assess attending behavior such as nonverbal communication (eye contact, proximity to each other, body language) virtually is difficult if not impossible. Some students had internet issues so their sessions would cut off and then they would try to resume where they left off. In Practicum and Internship, students were panicking because they could not find any sites that were open. I tried calling and emailing some but wasn't having much success. Finally, a local site decided to accept our students if they qualified. I had to write recommendation letters and fortunately the two students that applied were accepted to complete their hours. When listening to their taped sessions, some parts were difficult because they were required to wear masks. I had another student who wanted to go but feared contracting the coronavirus. The student who was graduating remained at the original site but conducted online sessions. The clients at this particular site were university students and most went home during the pandemic, so sessions were limited.

In the interim when students could not find clients, I assigned students from my Techniques course who were willing to help out. Some were hesitant but counseling was a part of the course. Meanwhile in a listserv that I am a member of, there was ongoing debate about what universities were doing with students, namely allowing a pass/fail option versus a letter grade, and CACREP's refusal to allow practicum and internship students to count hours that were not with "real" clients. There were colleagues who warned against students going to sites to gain hours and threatening their safety. Other colleagues suggested that we recommend students drop and retake the course the following quarter. It was a lot to contend with and there were not any real answers. It was frustrating to respond to students' countless questions with "I don't know".

It felt like working overtime because faculty, staff, students, and family wanted everything immediately. Being pulled in so many directions I had to remind myself to stay calm and practice self-care, which I often stress to my students. I had to get used to having pets, babies, and spouses present during class in our new normal of remote instruction. I also had to get used to not seeing students' faces when they preferred to use the "stop video" to disable their camera.

With all of the trials and tribulations that I and the students encountered, we completed the quarter successfully. It took a lot of creative thinking and being ok with making rules and regulations that were appropriate with the situation, aligning with our new normal. I breathed a sigh of relief to know that we reached the end of the quarter with a few bumps and bruises, but practically unscathed.

As I talked to other friends and families about their experiences, I realized that we had several similarities in our stories. I decided to utilize Zoom in a personal constructive way. In addition to communicating with students, I connected with friends and family in a new way. I created Conversations with the Counselor and I invited those that wanted to discuss various issues, some COVID related to come together virtually. It was therapeutic in many ways because people realized that they were not alone. We were getting used to practicing social distancing, but it didn't mean we had to lose connection with others. People wanted and needed encouragement to remain helpful in such unprecedented times. We had to find the silver lining behind the clouds.

The Story of CFG - B

Being a news buff, when I first heard of the coronavirus, it was being reported in Wuhan, China, in late December. I remember thinking, if it is there and spreading so fast, it is a matter of time before it hits the United States. No one in this country took it seriously at first, and it was being perceived by many as "just another virus" like the flu. As I keep abreast of the number of fatalities in China and how it was spreading throughout Europe and other countries, that is when I became fearful. Considering the amount of international travel and how traveling from one country to another whether for fun, as a student, for employment, or whatever the case may be, I quickly became nervous. When it manifested itself in this country and people began

contracting it and dying at an alarming rate, after thinking about family, I immediately thought about my classes.

At that time, I was teaching two undergraduate level courses and a doctoral level course. The format for the doctoral course was hybrid. Therefore, the transition to adapting to online was no problem. However, the problem came with the undergraduate level students. They were unaccustomed to online/remote instruction. With that being the case, most were not ready for this new method of learning and being assessed which posed a horrendous challenge for me. Attempting to teach undergraduates remotely and realizing they were not disciplined enough for this independent instructional approach caused not only major problems for me but the administration as well. It was imperative for a new system to be created in a hurry to try to remain in control of the coming "new normal." Not only was this (what?) impacting students but faculty as well. Those unaccustomed to teaching remotely were required to take a series of online training to become knowledgeable about the different platforms that could be used in remote instructing and assessing.

Repeating some of the training did not affect me because all of our graduate courses are taught online. Additionally, I am a certified online instructor. However, trying to redirect the undergraduates to a new instructional and testing approach which most had a difficult time adjusting seemed impossible. The long-term effect in my mind will be a gap in learning. This gap in learning could and will possibly manifest itself as they enroll in advanced courses.

Not only was teaching and assessing undergraduates a challenge but grading. I asked the question, should I be more lenient in my grading for those not demonstrating success in the course or assign the grade they actually made? My ultimate decision was to assign everyone a passing grade although, not all of them passed the course. To me, this was the best way to handle the grading because the university decided that because of this "new" way of teaching and testing, students could appeal the final grade assigned by the instructor and more than likely, win the appeal. The deans and department heads would make the decision. So, I thought, this is a win-win for the student. Why not give all of them a passing grade and be done with it......which is what I did.

Because the university was placed in a position to overhaul the current educational and operational system, it is my belief that the consequences of COVID-19 will have a devastating impact on our students…. particularly the undergraduates. For me, the idea of this pandemic

and its dreadful, deadly impact is a reminder that humanity is witnessing moments of extreme uncertainty and an unprecedented global health crisis. Although it is impossible to foresee where this pandemic is heading, certainly, a new chapter in our history has just begun.

The Story of CFG- C

The nightly news from January 1, 2020 – March 15, 2020, featured stories about this new and mysterious upper respiratory virus called Coronavirus (COVID-19). The students discussed in my land-based classes and online classes in the weekly conference call discussions as we towed with how COVID-19 was not impacting children or young people, but the elderly was contracting the virus and many were fatal. The hospitals were beginning to prepare for a nationwide pandemic and then the news came that African-Americans were mostly impacted and dying from this horrible new disease. In shock, many of my students in the Internship Class were terrified as they had just been placed in various childcare facilities, schools and agencies throughout North Louisiana. I assured all my students that the university would notify them soon about plans for the remainder of the semester. Governor Jon Bel Edwards on March 15, 2020 made the formal announcement that the state of Louisiana was behind the state of New York in declaring a State of Emergency and everyone was ordered to be on lockdown for the remainder of March until March 31, 2020. We all were worried, but as I had always taught my students – WE WILL SURVIVE. My department chair and I discussed how to make the transition seamless for the students and prepared a plan of action for our FCS students to do their work online. The silver lining in this entire story was that our FCS program has a myriad of courses that are taught online, so the transition from land-based to online courses was automatic and engaging. Our students were very knowledgeable in navigating the online management system of Canvas. We continued our daily coursework and weekly sessions as if things were normal. However, the students knew things were not normal and they discussed in Canvas on a weekly basis and I incorporated comments and reflections into our weekly Internship Conference Calls. As the instructor, I had to hold my nervousness and always assure the students that everything would work out, no matter how our "NEW NORMAL" turned out. There was much discussion about graduation, grades, mid-term exams and finishing their internships after April 1-April 29, 2020. I always started and ended our calls with a quote that gave them and me comfort and hope for

the unknown. Some of my favorite quotes to give them included, "It is through our struggles that we gain our victories" by Dr. Atty Williams, "This too shall pass", or "You are your best thing" by Toni Morrison. Students were especially receptive when I would tell them, "When faced with a challenge look for a way, not a way out."

From March 15 – May 10, 2020, many conversations, postings and blogs were developed by the students to ensure that their experience was captured in a way that allowed them to express their frustrations, concerns, challenges and lessons learned from this extraordinary worldwide Pandemic caused by COVID-19. Some of the students in my classes are parents and non-traditional students with families and who also work full-time jobs in addition to attending

Grambling State University. Many are front-line workers and have been throughout the Pandemic. Often just the mention of the "Coronavirus" turned into a long and exhaustive conversation filled with honest, open and revealing circumstances that allowed me to see the depth of my student's souls in a way that I had not experienced since post Hurricane Katrina when I taught at Southern University in the Department of Child Development and Family Relations, College of Education from 2010 – 2013.

Some of recurring themes from students' experiences with COVID-19 are captured below:

"I need to know what is going on and when we will come back to campus"

"Will I graduate; will we have a graduation. I am really disappointed about all of this"

"We really cannot do anything about this – at all"

"This is scary, really scary"

"My children are with me all day and I am so frustrated."

"I really don't know if I am going to have a job – we all had to just go home"

The complete lockdown of the U.S. economy due to the coronavirus warranted a closer view of the impact on my students below:

"I am out of work now and don't have anything to look forward to"

"This is not fair. I worked so hard to get to this point and now this"

"God will see us through"

"I am just trying to hold on and graduate and get a job."

Over the next weeks and months and as time passed on (April – June, 2020), the horror for some students compelled me to observe closely and pay attention to their ongoing comments and voices about how they had been impacted by the Coronavirus. There were also some more

serious of cases where students were impacted the coronavirus. Some of these instances include the loss of jobs, the loss of a spouse's job, the death of family members to the virus, and even the contraction of the virus while enrolled in my class.

This was a very difficult semester and during this time it was even more challenging to keep the class going, the students motivated, but I persisted to the end of the semester and even into registration for the Summer and Fall sessions. I vowed intentionally at the beginning of each phone call that I made to a student (I called each one at least each month) or if a student called me – I always ask first, "How are you doing?" I found myself having multiple roles as the Instructor of Record including: teacher, mother-figure, pastor, friend, mentor, counselor, encourager, motivator, and coach. While I always value my time as their instructor, I found myself with an added intentional focus on ensuring that they were well – educationally, personally, mentally, socially and professionally. The movement of re-opening the economy was uplifting as I sent the Stimulus information and Cares Act Information to my students and encouraged them to apply for any aide that they were eligible for. The time passed quickly, but as we move to plan for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2020 semesters, I am confident that my students will prevail and I left them with my favorite quotes for the end of the summer session: "NEVER GIVE UP" and "You Must Be the Change You Wish To See in the World" – by: Gandhi.

The Story of CFG -D

I still clearly remember the first news reports that I heard about the virus, that is infamously known as COVID-19. Within weeks those initial reports turned into morbid accounts of deaths associated with the rising number of cases. Watching those news reports were a part of my lesson plan development for the upcoming week. As an alumna assistant professor at a HBCU, I wanted my students to be prepared and armed with current information to make an impact on individuals, groups, and communities. Therefore, the importance of visiting credible news outlets was ingrained into the educational process. There was always time to discuss a trending story, and eventually the discussion would lead to identifying the implications for social work practice, my field of study. In preparation for a practice class held in late February, I opted to visit the Centers for Disease Control website and pull an infographic that detailed strategies to prevent COVID-19 virus infection spread. My targeted learners were my master-level practice students. The majority of those students were engaged in field education course

work, which is commonly called an internship, or practicing in area community-based agencies. The students were attentive and fully engaged in the discussion. Some even voiced plans to share the content of our discussion with their field supervisors and clients. Two students even agreed to make a COVID-19 prevention informational poster, that was displayed in the student computer center. However, we did not know what changes were in store, but time would definitely unravel a new story.

Keeping with my daily schedule of watching CNN reports, the reports began to surface that universities were leaving their campuses and shifting to online instruction. I knew that changes were coming, and indeed they did. A received an email that students were being instructed to leave campus and professors would be meeting to discuss educational goals for the remainder of the semester. The instruction was to prepare for 100% online instruction. As a program director, I received a few calls from students regarding the lack of technological equipment. Referrals were being made to fulfill this need so that academic goals could be met without interruption.

Additionally, all students engaged in field education courses were pulled from their placement. Agencies with little awareness regarding this virus were closing, and there was no reopen date in sight. In our first departmental meeting and signing of telework assignments, some faculty said that this would pass and we would be back in a few weeks or early summer.

Some seemed to be able to tell the future, because they alluded to the fact that it would probably get worse before it got better. Nevertheless, the team rallied together. Those instructors that were savvy in developing online courses helped those that had never engaged in the process. The environment was filled with a spirit of reciprocal learning. I am truly grateful to work in an environment where others share their expertise with such vigor. However, there was still more to deal with. I wondered, how were our learners taking this shift in the educational process?

For some students, the transition was easy, whereas others talked about a sudden culmination of roles. This culmination of roles was especially voiced in the life of nontraditional students that were faced with care of family, work in some instances, and now navigating the online classroom. In some instances, anxiety levels rose and words of encouragement were extended as a means of support. The academic world had suddenly changed, and I (with my students) was in the midst of a pandemic. The life lessons were infiltrating my day to day life. I realized the importance of stressing that all students purchased internet accessible devices with

webcams and microphones. In the classroom, the webcam provided that face to face contact that was needed to truly engage learner's acclimation to this new process. Furthermore, staying abreast of faculty training in technology was of the utmost importance. Knowledge of platforms like Teams and Zoom meetings were vital in the quest to stay connected. I was so thankful that I had embraced technology training opportunities when they became available. Indeed, this learning premise was shared with my students to promote cutting edge skills in a society that was sure to embrace technology as a means to stay safe.

As the weeks passed, students adjusted and seemed to approach life with respect for the "new normal". Some stated that life had not unleashed its demands on them and that they would have to weather this storm. As an educator, I too had to adjust. My technology skills were being sharpened and the process was quick. I was also faced with sharing my skills set with others and they shared their skills with me. My home had suddenly become my office and my classroom.

My new office had a television that was saturated with stories from mayors, policy makers, and other political leaders about the impact that COVID-19 was having on the world. In some instances, I had to take breaks from these ongoing news reports were words like death and COVID-19 were routine. My task to prepare social workers to meet the challenges that would be issued in years to come were now more important than ever. Teaching during COVID-19 has its challenges, but this road of uncertainty is met with hope for the academic future. I envision a future that prioritizes student academic success and the professional development of faculty to meet the demands of the "new normal".

The Story of CFG – E

Resilience is the word that comes to mind when reflecting on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted my personal life, my teaching responsibilities, and the lives of my students who experienced a whirlwind of transitions that we all will never forget. I vaguely recall seeing something about a virus on the news that was drawing concern in a few parts of the world. No definitive statements yet about the cause or how this "new virus" may be impacting us here in the United States, but March 14th and 15th of 2020 would become infamous in college history. These were the dates the information began to spread across college campuses everywhere via email and university website postings that the world was shutting down.

Imagine having worked months and countless hours on a really important conference that would be hosted by your department on the campus of your university, and two days before the conference was to begin you receive an email that all upcoming events associated with the university are cancelled and the entire university is shutdown. I, along with conference committee members, go into panic mode. In that moment we realize that not only will all of hard work be for nothing, but we still had to think about the keynote speakers and panelists who may be stranded in the airport while attempting to travel to the conference here on campus.

In the same instance, I look down to the screen of my phone to check for any messages that I may have received from the school or daycare currently taking care of my children. This dichotomy of thoughts and emotions exemplifies my overall personal and teaching experience during this time. While the concern for my family had me experiencing levels of anxiousness I could have never imagined, I knew my students were probably experiencing even more unrest as many of them were far from home or also caring for families of their own.

And just like that, the directive came down and all classes would be moving to 100% online instruction. I could immediately sense that students were uncertain of how to effectively transition from classroom instruction to solely online, with no opportunity for in person advisement or mentorship. Communication from my end was very frequent in the first week following the shutdown, because the university wanted us to make it clear to the students that university business was still being conducted and classes must continue. However, toward the end of the first full month of no face-to face contact, it became very apparent that everyone's worries and concerns shifted from just classwork to the changes in our social, psychological well-being, and overall health.

While I was able to I weather the first few weeks of the pandemic without experiencing any symptoms, my husband did experience minor symptoms (e.g., cough and body aches) and my youngest daughter also became ill, but nothing too serious. Even with executive orders in place to distance ourselves when in public (and in the household from family members who were sick), I begin to receive email after email from students notifying me of their positive status for the virus. After the flood of notifications about the virus came the flood of notifications about deaths in the family. Things begin to get really difficult for me at this point, because on top of balancing the new time commitment to online learning, I began feeling the pressure to also serve in a "counseling" role for students who lost loved ones to the virus. Many of my students in some

cases were not given the opportunity to say goodbye to their loved ones and often times found it too difficulty to continue participation in the online instruction of the course.

The shifts in emotions continued into months two and three. While still trying to accomplish the objectives of the course, I could see (during zoom conferences) and hear (during phone calls) the toll that these traumatic events were having on the emotional, cognitive and physical well-being of my students. This made it very difficult for students to concentrate on just the learning aspect and meeting the requirements of certain classes. I remember one of my students asking me, "How am I supposed to analyze my data if I don't have the software like the computer lab." Navigating the data collection component for some of my students working on their thesis or other research papers became a whole other stressor. Many of the qualitative thesis studies originally formatted for face-to-face observation and interviews had to be reworked to an online questionnaire or postponed all together. Having to shift formats for thesis work hit me especially hard as well because I knew how much time and effort my students put into their papers.

The rollercoaster of emotions and physical transitions will certainly continue on into the next semester. Presently, I am doing my best to remain composed while attempting to teach, comfort, and advise. I am confident that my students will begin to feel more comfortable with the changes in environment and teaching methods and will hopefully begin to embrace our "new normal" that includes zoom, sanitizer, and paperless advising.

FINDINGS

Using the techniques of thematic analysis and narrative orientated inquiry, three major themes developed from the autobiographical narratives of the participating professors: commitment to student success, emotional stress, and transitional teaching. More specifically, the narratives demonstrate the importance of professional development in higher education, contextual matriculation in the academy and uniqueness for a CFG learning community of teaching, scholarship and service.

Faculty experiences at onset of COVID

To reiterate, research question one sought to explore faculty experiences at the onset of COVID-19, with attention was given to faculty members transition from the university setting. To begin, the initial announcement of the closing of the university and transition to online teaching was both shocking and scary to students but especially professors of courses whose practicum/internship courses are normally administered face to face and inside non-university facilities and organizations. The major question then became, "How in the hell will this work?" Professors were initially very negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing of classrooms. Not only were professors forced to scramble to revise their current course syllabi to reflect the new mode of learning, but the actual intern sites were also closing at the same rates as the universities. This means that students whose grades were dependent mainly upon their performance in an intern experience were now left with no physical place to gain practicum hours while simultaneously also having to learn how to navigate their once traditional courses virtually. More importantly (or of most significance), most students (and who relied on physical/face to face communication) revealed to professors that they were struggling emotionally trying to deal with the transition of the new course format as well as their personal home situations that were also negatively impacted by COVID (e.g. family members, juggling jobs, loss of jobs, etc.). These negative effects eventually spilled over into the personal lives of the professors as well.

Faculty student interactions at onset of COVID

One of the most significant findings from the perspectives is the obvious emotional toll experienced by all of the professors teaching during the spring semester. Aside from the additional work tasks being placed upon them by university mandates and course reformatting (e.g. syllabus and canvas/online training, regrading etc.) issues, all of the professors reported feeling the added strain or pressure of having to "make it work" and "going the extra mile" to make certain that all students were not only placed (e.g. writing letter or making extra calls) into new or different internships but that they felt somewhat at ease or comfortable during the entire process. This meant professors were now operating in the role of not only professor, but also counselor, parental figure, and sometimes spiritual advisor. As one professor stated, "I had to reassure every student after every virtual meeting that IT IS OK TO NOT BE OK." This mantra

became important not only for the students, but for the professor as well, because who is there at the end of the day when we need to express our frustrations or be reassured that others care for our well-being also. And one of most often reported reasons for high frustration levels aside from the multiple role playing, was the internal struggle experienced by all professors of having to gauge whether they were grading students based on their performance in the practicum setting or on the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and the course. So where is the light at the end of the tunnel?

The light at the end of the tunnel can be visualized when we see a picture of professors who now have more contact with students individually then they ever have before. The closing of offices and classrooms prompted professors to engage the students both socially and academically more often via phone and online environments. Although professors report experiencing more frustration and stress than in previous semesters, it was observed that the majority also felt a sense of accomplishment for being able to alleviate the constant fears of the students while also becoming more connected to their own family and friends via zoom or other online networking applications for which they sought relief. It was also reported by the majority of the professors that the new format forced them to learn new and more innovative ways to interact with students outside of traditional methods. This meant brushing up on the latest technological advancements and computer software.

Each of the themes derived from the narratives and lived experiences of the faculty are based on pure and honest assumptions based on teaching styles, learning strategies, university flexibility in teaching modules, pedagogical strategies and commonality and extraordinary commitment to student success. The ability to serve, work, commune, research and collaborate within the CFG members has allowed the increase of professional presentation, manuscript and book chapter reviews, mentorship coupled with publications. The overall enhancement of shared teaching styles during the pandemic and the police protests that occurred during the same time, garnered an extraordinary bond of cohesiveness that increased productivity from weekly virtual meetings and ongoing teleconferences among the faculty members in the CFG Group - The Esteemed Scholars

Limitations

This study aimed at observing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lived experiences of professors, which included having to shift teaching methods quickly and continuously for students in different disciplines. Thus, one of the major limitations to the current project was the number of participating professors who could provide narratives for examination. The recruitment of professors and the time being asked to document their experiences was not an easy task for many who were still juggling additional duties and responsibilities, and we wanted those who participated to provide honest and open descriptions of their experiences during the onset of the pandemic.

Another limitation of the current project is the lack of male faculty perspectives included in the narratives, as all of those included in the current paper were all women. Both of these factors limit our ability to generalize these findings across other settings and genders. As shown in the narrative descriptions of the student-teacher interactions, almost all of the professors at some point describe feeling that they were serving in a "motherly" role to students and consistently having discussions about their children and well-being. College-age students, especially female students, are often not as open and vulnerable about academic struggles and personal home life situations with male professors. In order to find out more factors that could have impacted faculty interactions with students during the pandemic, we suggest that further studies explore these experiences with a larger sample of faculty participants, with the inclusion of narratives from a large sample of male professors as well as those from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. It should be noted however that these limitations do not detract from the significance of the study because the rich narratives collected allowed us to sufficiently explore our research questions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study was designed to examine faculty members' lived experiences, reflections, and perspectives of teaching during the pandemic caused by COVID-19. Overall, preliminary analysis revealed that while the COVID-19 pandemic brought about much uncertainty and hesitation, it also brought about the possibility for advancement and positive change in the lives of both the professors and the students. In describing their continuous growth and continuity during this transitional time in higher education in the United States, this study captured their

innermost thoughts and experiences of teaching, advising, mentoring, and motivating their students to succeed in these most trying and overwhelming times during their internships, practicums, and student teaching. The underlying factors of teaching, advising, research, and service were not faltered as a result of the Pandemic according to all of the participants in this study. The underlying premise in all the narratives is that all faculty members remained structured and worked toward success even during this unprecedented time of turmoil, transition and uncertainty. The participants all recommend that faculty in higher educational institutions seek mentors to help them navigate the Academy and by working in small learning groups like the CFG of female African- American faculty – The Esteemed Scholars. While the threat of the virus caused interruptions for students in various programs in academia to stop, change, and adjust their academic studies including external work in the academic programs as noted in this study, the advantage of the faculty working together will have a professional reward for them individually, and also for the Academy.

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