

Special Issue: Implications of COVID-19 on Higher Education

Implications of COVID-19 on Higher Education (Special Issue)

On December 31, 2019, China reported a cluster of pneumonia-like cases that warranted close observation (WHO, 2021). By January 23, 2020, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), commonly known as COVID-19, had spread to an extent that officials locked down the city of Wuhan.

It has been just over one year since the WHO (2021) characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Starting in January, when Wuhan was closed, indoor activities began to cease across the globe as the virus spread. By early March 2020, economies in Europe and the United States also began shifting as a result of COVID-19. By March 27, 2020, nearly 1.5 billion learners globally, representing approximately 83% of learners, were impacted by the pandemic (UNESCO, 2021). In the United States, the U. S. Census Bureau reported, in August 2020, that 93% of households with children in school were attending with some form of online learning (McElrath, 2021).

Students at all levels were impacted by the shift to online learning; in many cases, they and the institutions they attended were not prepared for the complexities associated with remote/distance learning. In this special issue, *Implications of COVID-19 on Higher Education*, authors of three essays, four empirical articles, and one research brief have described the various ways the shift to remote learning has impacted students, faculties, and the institutions of higher education in different regions of the world.

Overall, it is impressive how many students, faculty, staff, and administrators made the shift so quickly. The research coming out of higher education institutions will be important in setting an agenda going forward on what higher education will look like post-pandemic. It seems likely that hybrid models will emerge that will warrant a more intensive focus on developing best practices as well as developing pedagogies that will be acceptable to all key stakeholders in higher education. Here is a brief summary of what you will find in this issue.

Essays

- Robert Funk, in the essay *Challenges for Higher Education in Times of COVID: How Three Countries Have Responded*, shows how the pandemic magnified the issues of financing of higher education, learning logistics, and income and technological inequalities. The availability of funding for college students to pay tuition and housing and for former students to pay loans has helped ease the barriers to educational access, but these are temporary solutions and make plain a larger problem of financing higher education. Technological inequalities present not only in Chile, Canada, and the United States, but globally, threaten the goals of equal access to education in general and specifically during times of pandemic when the only access to higher education is through a stable internet connection.
- Mohanad Halewah, in the essay *Are Universities Using the Right Assessment Tools During the Pandemic and Crisis Times?*, makes the case for using project-based learning as a means of assessment, rather than online exams, as a more authentic way to assess students who are learning

remotely from the university. The first priority is students meeting course learning outcomes. Project-based assessment can ensure that students are learning course material without the pitfalls associated with online exams, such as technological and privacy issues related to access to proctoring software. The author discusses seven key aspects of project-based learning, how they were applied to a course he teaches, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and how student learning is assured.

- Merith Weisman, in the essay *Remote Community Engagement in the Time of COVID-19, a Surging Racial Justice Movement, Wildfires, and an Election Year*, looks at community engagement in a California (United States) institution of higher education and how her program was impacted due to multiple crises that included the COVID-19 pandemic. Community engagement is a program that typically relies on face-to-face placements of students into communities. The author describes how she was able to adapt her program during a period that included some of the most defining moments in recent United States history that happened simultaneously: the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and confronting structural racism.

Empirical Research

- Sudipta Roy and Bonnie Covelli, in their research *COVID-19 Induced Transition From Classroom to Online Midsemester: Case Study on Faculty and Students' Preferences and Opinions*, assessed faculty and students at a liberal arts college in the midwestern United States during the transition to fully remote learning to understand the experience of faculty and students with online teaching and learning, the challenges associated with the transition, changes in comfort level with the new requirements, and students' perceptions of their overall experience with the transition. They generally found that the impact of the transition varied with previous experience with online teaching and learning. The researchers also found that students had less interest in online learning than before the pandemic. The results point to the importance of institutional preparedness for similar events that might occur in the future and that this event provides an opportunity for developing and implementing best practices in online pedagogy.
- Caio Cotta Natale, Paula Seixas Mello, Silvia Luzia Frateschi Trivelato, Patricia Marzin-Janvier, and Daniel Manzoni-de-Almeida, a research team from Brazil and France, in their article *Evidence of Scientific Literacy Through Hybrid and Online Biology Inquiry-Based Learning Activities*, examined the ability of students to use appropriate science practices in hybrid and online versions of active, learning-based activity that was originally designed for face-to-face instruction. An activity related to organ transplant health that had been taught in face-to-face instruction was developed as a three-phase instruction process. The researchers analyzed written reports for evidence of the presence of four categories of epistemic practices and found evidence that students are learning the necessary scientific practices, even in hybrid and online settings, providing confidence that even technical courses previously considered only appropriate for in-person instruction can be effectively taught online.
- Águeda Benito, Kubra Dogan Yenisey, Kavita Khanna, Manuel Felipe Masis, Rosa Maria Monge, Mehmet Ali Tugtan, Luis Diego Vega Araya, and Rekha Vig, in their research *Changes that Should Remain in Higher Education Post COVID-19: A Mixed Methods Analysis of the Experiences at Three Universities*, examined student and faculty perceptions of the transition to remote emergency delivery at universities in Turkey, India, and Costa Rica. The article presents the experiences of the three universities during the transition, and, using mixed-methods approaches, the authors combined and analyzed data from over 2500 students from the three institutions to discover commonalities of experience. They found that students discovered advantages to a hybrid format that balances the best of distance delivery and in-person meetings. Faculty and students reacted favorably to digital components of their experiences and expressed a desire to maintain some of these when their

academic life returns to a “new normal.” A fair number of faculty felt that learning outcomes could not be achieved as effectively as in the classroom and that faculty could use more support and training in online pedagogy.

- Jorge Chávez, Rosa Barrera, Rosa Montaña, Jaime Sánchez, and Jaime Fauré, in their research *Quality of Online Learning Participation in a Context of Crisis*, quantitatively analyzed messages posted in discussion forums in an online, first-year, computer-programming module in a computer science degree program at a university in Chile. The researchers coded the responses for information level (peer information, idea contribution, content processing, task situation, and motivation). They then used regression to show that Final Course Grade, Number of Words in the forum, and Self-Perceived Learning Predict higher Information Level. Based on these findings, the authors proposed the need for guidelines that clearly define online classroom activity and steer students to the types of discussions that lead to attaining new knowledge. These guidelines include providing clarity in concepts, deadlines for participation, and the connection between participation and course grade. These, along with teacher participation, are critical in planning the online learning process.

Research Brief

- Lee Stadtlander and Amy Sickel qualitatively examine interview data, taken 1 month and 3 months after COVID isolation began, to understand how self-isolation affected land-based and online faculty. While online faculty were more satisfied with their home office experience, both online and land-based faculty felt increased stress because of isolation. The researchers suggest that future research should focus on how burnout and work from home interact to impact positive feelings about work.

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Gary J. Burkholder, PhD

Walden University, United States of America

Editor

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5084-8099>

Erwin Krauskopf, PhD

Universidad de Las Américas, Chile

Managing Editor

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4082-5758>

Contact: hlrceeditor@mail.waldenu.edu

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