

For this reflection, I will highlight four areas that impacted faculty and student interaction during covid.19. These are disruptions to learning, instructional dilemmas, covid.19's impact on my doctoral research and the need for empathy in teaching.

In relation to disruptions to learning, the pandemic led to significant confusion and angst as faculty and students were forced to move their learning from face-to-face settings to fully online environments. This impacted my teaching as I had to adjust assignments I had already set for face-to-face instruction for the online setting. One of these assignments was an interview activity which now had to be done online. I think students missed the personal interaction, facial intonations, and the learning opportunity that face-to-face interviews would have provided. While interviews can also be done online, this disrupted my original lesson plan.

As far as instructional dilemmas, it was hard for me to tell if some students were not turning in assignments because they were facing significant personal problems they were embarrassed to share, or if they were just being lazy. I handled this dilemma by making sure they knew I was always available for them to reach out to me if they needed extra time on their assignments or if they needed a few days off to take care of personal challenges that arose. On a personal level, a lot of my students faced challenges accessing the hardware and software needed to successfully complete their classes online. In addition to this, some students faced bandwidth and connectivity issues with their internet which limited their ability to actively participate in the synchronous online sections of the class. The dilemma here is how harshly to grade students that could not clearly access lectures due to buffering on Blackboard Collaborate or constantly being kicked out of the online learning management system due to weak internet connectivity.

In relation to my doctoral research, my doctoral work was affected because I had to postpone field work on xenophobia I had planned for Johannesburg South Africa. I could not get the funding to pursue the research because of the pandemic. In addition to this, I also faced long term uncertainty due to the ongoing lack of clarity on when the global spread of the pandemic will finally be under control. Normal flights to South Africa are still disrupted. It is still not clear when normal flights will be resumed.

Lastly, I have come to realize the need for faculty to have a good amount of empathy for students. Not so much to hand "A" grades to all the students, but to have a discerning view of each student situation, and to be able to empathize with that student struggle. Covid.19 has not only made student learning harder, but it has also made the ability of students to fund their college programs, pay rent, pay for childcare and access basic necessities like groceries, that much harder. In addition to this, it is hard for many students to openly admit to their faculty that they are struggling. With this in mind, a good discerning sense of empathy on the part of faculty is critical in supporting student learning and retention. The impact of covid.19 will be here for a long time to come. I trust the better angels in each of us will grant the courage to see us through.