



The Advocate
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COVID Perspectives: Three Institutions

The long-term impact of COVID on teaching and professional experiences will certainly outlive the virus. Before COVID, our campuses were places where students lived, studied, and taught in close proximity with peers. Our institutions have been impacted by the spread of the virus, creating uncertainty regarding the implications for higher education, our programs, and most importantly, the students we teach.

In this article, Dr. Michelle Grenier, from the University of New Hampshire, Dr. Ali Brian, from the University of South Carolina, and Dr. Andrea Taliaferro from West Virginia University reflect on their COVID experiences in higher education. Some of the questions we address include institutional practices, impact on teaching, and student learning.

Name: Michelle Grenier, Ph.D.

Institution: University of New Hampshire-A land grant institution, the university is located in the Seacoast region of New Hampshire, about one hour north of Boston.

Home Department: Kinesiology

Number of students enrolled in the institution: 15,000 (undergraduate & graduate)



Teaching responsibilities: Elementary Physical Education Pedagogy, Elementary Physical Education Practicum, Motor Development and Learning, Inclusion in Physical Education, Advanced Studies in Disability, Adapted Physical Education Practicum.

Research interests: Teacher practices and students with disabilities in general physical education, the collaboration between general and special education, Narrative Inquiry and individual voice; COVID practices and teacher decision-making.

Teaching modality: This semester, I am teaching face-to-face. In the event students test positive or are exposed, all classrooms are equipped with zoom and OWL-capability for synchronous teaching. My content and curriculum have been adjusted to spend much of the class time in the gymnasium and the windows open and opportunities to maximize social distancing.

Institutional responsibility: In May of 2020, the university committed to offering face-to-face classes and asked faculty members to select their preferred method of teaching. While many faculty members opted to teach remotely due to factors such as age, health issues, and family responsibilities, as a PETE faculty member I elected to teach my classes face-to-face. Given the relatively low-class numbers, (n=20), I felt this offered my students the best learning experience as well as an opportunity to actively engage in peer teaching opportunities, particularly since our access to public schools and visiting external groups were significantly limited.

In preparing my syllabus for the fall semester, I was deliberate in my efforts to be flexible, given the distinct possibility that we would have to pivot, once again, to remote teaching. Despite the University's extensive efforts to maximize the safety of its students, faculty, and staff (e.g. by retrofitting its buildings with proper ventilation, providing directional signage, social distance guidance, and an abundance of hand sanitizing stations), I must admit I was skeptical.



The single most important step taken by the University was to develop its testing site and to establish rigorous testing protocols for all students, faculty, and staff. Relying on the expertise and efforts of its biomedical personnel, the University developed its state-of-the-art lab to conduct and manage testing from the three university campuses. Any student who is on campus must be tested twice a week and on-campus faculty and staff must be tested weekly. Students receive results within 24 hours and faculty and staff within 48 hours. Test results are uploaded to a University mobile application (the “Wildcat Pass”), which consistently evidences the testing status of all University personnel.

Currently, we remain in the “yellow zone” which reflects the continued number of low positive cases. We have three more weeks of face-to-face classes before students leave for Thanksgiving. Thereafter classes will continue on a virtual and remote basis until students return to campus for the second semester at the end of January.

Based on our experience to date, I am relatively optimistic that we will be able to adhere to that schedule, in large part due to social distance practices, mask-wearing, and testing. I continue to teach classes face-to-face and I appreciate seeing my students in my twice-a-week classes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they appreciate seeing and working with their classmates.

My skills with technology have increased immensely and I have come to recognize the value and need for continued collaborative efforts in reaching out to my cooperating teachers and colleagues within and outside the discipline. The course content has shifted so that I have optimized student time with peer teaching via social distance practices and the use of minimal equipment. Because the four credit elementary pedagogy course is followed by a spring practicum course, my instructional delivery this semester has included a strong focus on remote teaching skills and preparing my pre-service teachers to be flexible in their teaching practices.



A primary concern for the spring will be my ability to place students in the schools for a spring practicum and teacher's willingness to mentor these young professionals throughout the pandemic. This should be a test of my collaborative skills and capacity to extend beyond the traditional practices of face-to-face learning. Despite the barriers and challenges we are facing, my consistent message to my students is that the skills we acquire as a result of the virus will only enhance our professional capabilities.

Name: Ali Brian, Ph.D., CAPE

Institution: University of South Carolina

Location: Columbia, SC

Home Department: Physical Education

Number of students enrolled in the institution: 35,500 (undergraduate & graduate), a record for the university

The University of South Carolina: A land grant institution.

Teaching responsibilities: Undergraduate – Introduction to Pedagogy, Elementary PE Methods, Intro to APE. Masters – Adapted PE, Activity, and Sport, Motor Development for Adapted PE, Motor Learning for Adapted PE. Doctoral - Motor Development, Learning, and Control. Research Methods.

Research Interests: Assessing (including psychometric evaluation) and understanding the underlying mechanisms that support positive developmental trajectories for health for preschoolers with and without disabilities and children/adolescents with visual impairments. Understanding the role of motor development as its cascading effects across domains of development. Creating, implementing, and evaluating ecologically-valid interventions for preschoolers with and without disabilities and for children/adolescents with visual impairments.

Teaching modality: This year, we are teaching either hybrid or online only.



Institutional responsibility: UofSC has pulled no stops on attempting to create a safe, yet effective, learning environment for students, faculty and staff. Interested stakeholders can view current the current COVID status of UofSC via dashboard <https://sc.edu/safety/coronavirus/dashboard/index.php>. Currently, UofSC is operating at “new normal.”

Students, while on campus, are wearing masks and communicating well with faculty. Concerns remain regarding student responsibility at bars, parties, or at large social gatherings.

Testing is voluntary. Faculty, students, and staff can access free testing at the student health center as needed. All are strongly advised to test when symptoms arise. All are required to test when exposed to a student, faculty, staff, peer, etc., with a positive test result.

In my classes, student learning is not affected as I am accustomed to teaching remotely. My concerns, however, for the status of preservice teachers who have not experienced supervised internship experiences in face-to-face K-12 settings due to COVID. I am concerned, to no fault of anyone, that young educators who graduate without face-to-face experience may struggle during their first years as teachers.

Name: Andrea Taliaferro

Institution: West Virginia University

Location: Morgantown, WV

Number of students enrolled in the institution: West Virginia University is the flagship, land-grant institution of higher education and offers 193 degree programs to approximately 31,000 students through its 15 colleges and schools.



Teaching responsibilities: My coursework includes Adapted Physical Education Practicum, Principles of Effective Teaching, Advanced Laboratory- Principles of Effective Teaching. Adapted Physical Education Practicum is an undergraduate class that is being taught in a hybrid synchronous format.

Research interests: Research interests include minimizing health disparities for individuals with disabilities through the improvement of inclusive physical activity opportunities in school- and community-based settings.

Teaching modality: Face-to-face; remote; hybrid, synchronous/asynchronous.

Principles of Effective teaching and Advanced Laboratory- Principles of Effective Teaching are always taught in an asynchronous online format as a part of our online master's degree program. Classes are required to be taught in the format scheduled (i.e. faculty were not asked to select their preferred method of teaching).

Institutional responsibility. WVU announced mainly online instruction for the fall. They brought freshmen and grad students to campus only, with other classes (mainly practicum and clinical experiences) permitted by program request. Approximately 70% of undergraduate courses are online this semester; others are in a mix of hybrid, HYflex and in-person formats. Graduate courses are meeting in person. The beginning of the semester was delayed by one week. We did transition entirely online for two and a half weeks after Labor Day due to an uptick in COVID cases and potential risk of community spread due to student actions. We are back on campus at the current time, intending to continue in this format through Thanksgiving break. After the break, students will remain off-campus through the end of the semester.



All students, faculty, and staff who were returning on-campus this fall were required to be tested before the start of the semester and complete a COVID education module. Ongoing surveillance testing is being completed; student-athletes, club sports, resident assistants, and residence hall coordinators are tested weekly. Others are randomly selected to be tested, including those with in-person classes, specific faculty and staff populations, and random samples of students and employees. There is also voluntary testing for in-person class instructors. Results are posted on the University's Return to Campus website, with up to date COVID-19 information and test results posted daily. <https://www.wvu.edu/return-to-campus>

Classroom portions occur synchronously via zoom, and we have recently begun our in-person practicum. We have one group teaching virtual synchronous APE to a classroom, and 4 other groups teaching in-person at a local organization that provides recreation to individuals with disabilities.

Our practicum obviously had to be modified from our typical programming. In the past, we have run an on-campus practicum one time per week, with approximately 80-100 participants with disabilities, ages 5-21, attending each week. Our practicum program has been a long-standing partnership with the local school system, and they provide transportation for their students and teachers/staff to campus each week. We were unable to bring participants to campus this semester. In addition, while some students who receive special education services have been attending school in-person, our local school system only began in-person instruction last week on an alternating schedule for the population at large. As a result, we had to explore alternate practicum possibilities for the current semester. This semester, students are participating in a variety of experiences to complete practicum requirements: (1) in-person



teaching at a local community organization, (2) synchronous virtual APE lessons to local school system classrooms, (3) pre-recorded instructional videos that are being compiled into a resource library for special education teachers, Physical Education teachers, and APE teachers in the local school system, and (4) pre-recorded modifications to Active Academics activities. We have continued our partnership with the local school system to provide synchronous virtual APE lessons within certain special education classrooms, as well as to compile activity ideas into a resource library. I have partnered with a local community recreation organization that serves individuals with disabilities. They have allowed our students to attend in-person, in small groups, to teach their participants (athletes) who attend a Life Skills program two days per week. This is the only program they are currently holding at their facility.

At the master's level, course content has had to be altered due to the varied nature of students' current teaching experiences. Much of our course content is applied, and this has been difficult for some students who are not teaching at all or are teaching online. Additionally, due to Covid rates at the university, county, and state levels, we have had to be very flexible with preparing to pivot online at short notice. This has required adaptability on the part of instructors and students in terms of changes to assignments, due dates, class meeting formats, and in-person practicum opportunities that frequently change and are out of our direct control.

Because our courses are often very hands-on, instruction and the ability to practice pedagogical skills have been impacted. We have grouped our cohort of students into small groups across all classes that have an in-person component to minimize exposure across the group as a whole; therefore, student interaction has been impacted. I think the biggest impact has been on our ability to find alternate experiences for students to complete pre-student teaching



contact hours to apply course content. Moving forward, there are many uncertainties as to if our students will be permitted into the local schools for observation, pre-student teaching hours, or student teaching in the spring semester.

Overall, I have found that my students are being very responsible and want to be able to experience in-person classes and teaching experiences—especially because they did not have the opportunity to complete teaching experiences last spring. They seem to understand the implications of not following WVU’s policies and safeguards.

The biggest impact on student learning has been in those PETE courses that have pre-student teaching experiences and hours. Students were unable to complete pre-student teaching experiences last spring, including hours both in schools as well as teaching activity courses on-campus. Students have had to learn alternate ways to provide instruction virtually, as well as how to teach with increased safety measures in place. I think students have adapted well to online zoom instruction but have really appreciated efforts to have in-person teaching experiences this semester.