



Telling Our Stories: Western's Response to COVID-19

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Name Anonymous

Affiliation Student

Story contribution

In Winter 2020, I agonized over Microbiology keeping me from attending office hours for Animal Behavior. Of course, since it was Microbiology, it was the first class to move online. I was sure that the rumors of the virus were exaggerated and that it was another case of fearmongering among those who do apocalypse prep for fun. I was glad, however, that Microbiology moved online. Moving online meant that recorded lectures were uploaded to Canvas, where tests were also conducted. Spring 2020 was entirely online, and there was no standardized format for an online class. The three classes I took were in completely different formats. Intro to Biological Anthropology and Intro to Cultural Anthropology followed an asynchronous model with little, if any, interaction between classmates. Comparative Vertebrate Physiology, however, followed a synchronous model with lectures taking place over Zoom. Group work for the class was coordinated over Microsoft Teams, a program that many were unsatisfied with. The transition to online classes was a learning experience for everyone. I learned that my computer didn't like Zoom and I would need to borrow a school computer to participate fully in Zoom-based classes. I learned that no matter how carefully I scheduled activity for an asynchronous class, I missed being able to talk to my classmates. And I learned that there would need to be better coordination on the students' end for group projects. In Fall 2020, my classmates and I collectively decided that we would make Discord servers to facilitate communication outside of class. A number of us were already using Discord to stay in touch with our friends and coordinate social activities, so it seemed a natural progression to use the familiar software to help each other with class. It started with a few people talking in the Zoom chat, but by the end of the first week, I had helped to build a space where people could talk outside of class, fill in what happened for those who missed class, alert professors if someone was stuck in the waiting room, share resources, coordinate study sessions, and just lend each other support as needed. Similar to Zoom chat, it was entirely out of the professors' view, but unlike Zoom chat, it didn't disappear at the end of a class session. This was a great help in Human Anatomy and Physiology, a class that would have run me ragged otherwise with the sheer amount of memorization. Talking to my classmates allowed us to study in solidarity and coordinate group work in the classes where we needed to. We all learned that we didn't need to suffer in silence and that there was power in communicating our struggles to each other, and these are lessons that I've carried over into Winter 2021 as the admin of a class Discord server. Adjusting to online classes has had its unique challenges. On a positive note, though, I haven't had a single cold since the start of lockdown. I had frequent colds during in person classes.

End of contributed text from Story ID: 42 - Anonymous