

Experiencing the Online Classroom, Part 1

The Online Classroom is a production from the Instructional Design and Development team at the University of Northern Colorado. This podcast was hosted and edited by Dannon Cox.

Catherine Maher

Technology has increased and improved so much. And it's only going to continue. So having these online classes definitely helped get accustomed to that. But I do have to note, please still go outside. Get fresh air. (laughter) It really helps, like get sunlight. It's great.

Dannon Cox

That's science.

Catherine Maher

Don't forget to do that. (laughter continues)

Dannon Cox

Hello, and welcome to the online classroom, a podcast mini-series from UNC's Instructional Design and Development team. Chapter Three: Experiencing the Online Classroom, part one. This is the concluding chapter of the Online Classroom. We wanted to end this series by discussing Canvas and the online learning experience from the students themselves. In chapter two, we met Dr. Heidi Muller.

Dr. Heidi Muller

I'm Dr. Heidi Muller,

Dannon Cox

Associate Professor in the Communication Studies Department. Heidi invited two of her now former students to talk about the online classroom. Meet Ana,

Anabell Chavez

My name is Ana

Dannon Cox

A communications major and now alumna, and Catherine,

Catherine Maher

My name is Catherine

Dannon Cox

also a communications major and alumna. Both Catherine and Ana are familiar with Canvas and have some great and maybe not so great things to say about their experiences. Let's just jump right in. Ana, first off, what have your experiences been like coming to UNC?

Anabell Chavez

(laughter) I would say that it's really been interesting. I don't really know how else to describe it honestly. Like coming from being so close to a really big city into Greeley, Colorado was a huge adjustment for me. Being so far away from the city, and you know, all of the really big things and everything that I was used to was a little difficult. And I gotta be honest, I didn't really love it at first. I had a hard time with the smaller town, the smaller school. And yeah, I ended up coming here for a major in criminal justice because this is, I think, one of two schools that offers it in Colorado, and I ended up changing my major, which is hilarious to me. But yeah, and then after that, after I kind of made that adjustment and started living here full time, I started to appreciate it a lot more. It's a lot more quiet, which I didn't really realize until I went back into the city. And luckily, for the most part - I say, luckily I love my family when I say this, I promise - but luckily I didn't have to quarantine with them when COVID did hit. I was already in my own apartment here in Greeley and I was able to work through the entire pandemic, which was really interesting, because I went from working, you know, 10 hours while going to in-person classes, to working anywhere from 35 to 50 hours and doing completely like online classes. And so I started to kind of find myself gravitating towards those online classes. I found it to be a lot easier because I usually am a pretty busy person. And being able to do all of my study and my homework and all of those kinds of things at once, during any breaks, or once I got home from work, was a lot easier for me. So just coming back into like in-person classes, I've found it to be a lot more difficult. But yeah, I don't really know how else to describe the experience because it was so interrupted by a worldwide pandemic, which was not anticipated (laughter) by any means.

When you were working during the pandemic was that were you working virtually or you were you working in a physical space?

No. So I worked at Dutch Bros coffee. So it was completely in person. There was only one time where we had to shut down for a couple of days because of an outbreak. But yeah, I worked the entire time in person. So I never really had that experience of being completely shut off from the world. Honestly, thankfully, I don't know how I would have reacted to that.

Catherine Maher

I would have to say I had a pretty similar experience. I didn't work as much, but it was odd. My freshman year was like completely typical. I lived in the dorms, I hung out with friends. All my classes were in person, I took 18 credits, like it just felt so normal. And then the pandemic hit and then everything switched to online. And that was so different.

Dr. Heidi Muller

At the end of your sophomore year?

Catherine Maher

Yeah, at the end of my sophomore year, which I actually started out in South Korea, because obviously, I was supposed to be studying abroad, but my program got canceled because of COVID. So I had to come back home. And then because it was already the middle of the

semester, and I had no classes to take I had to take all summer classes that next summer and those were all online and then the fall came that was all online. And I kind of burnt out a little bit. So my motivation and my grades kind of dipped a little bit. I still kept going but it just did not feel the same. And this year was better having like the mix of in-person. And online because I kind of split it up because I did end up getting used to the online classes. And they're so different, that it's kind of hard to go back into all in person.

Dr. Heidi Muller

Are you taking any online classes?

Anabell Chavez

I had actually never taken an online class previous to that. Obviously, we had Canvas and you know, email and that kind of thing. And like turning things in on Canvas, but not even to the extent that we really went into during COVID. It was really interesting, because we would have like quizzes and that kind of thing every once in a while on Canvas. But to go into taking complete tests and exams and finals, and that kind of thing on Canvas was really weird. And now just like going forward a little bit, I'm having my first in-person test on Thursday, and I'm really scared about it.

Dannon Cox

Because of the content or because you're in person with a bunch of people?

Anabell Chavez

Just because it's in person, and I'm not really accommodated to that anymore. I've been taking so many exams and doing so many assignments online that just the aspect of it is really stressful. Even though I know the content, it's still stressful to be in a different environment doing that.

Catherine Maher

Yeah, I completely agree. Like there's more pressure in person. I took my first exam in person last semester, and I was like, oh, like the time felt shorter. I felt more rushed you see other students like get up to turn in their exam? And it's like, I haven't felt that in so long. And yeah, it's a lot more stressful now.

Dr. Heidi Muller

So tests specifically, it really feels different to be in person than online.

Dannon Cox

It makes a lot of sense. (inaudible) I want to hit that COVID point now with the busyness and accommodating, what was it like during that time when it came to any observations or reflections on your experience, as well as maybe what you experienced from your peers and the faculty like, because a lot of people had to pick up Canvas more than they were used to kind of like what you said, and and what was that experience like?

Anabell Chavez

Um, that was honestly really, I don't know, I would say it was more difficult for some than it was others. As far as Canvas goes with professors, I found that professors that weren't necessarily adept to technology had a really, really hard time with that. There were a lot of times where they'd say, you know, we posted this assignment, or please turn it in this way, or we have this presentation on this day. And just because they weren't quite sure how to work that technology, it didn't always end up going the way that they wanted it to, or something wasn't posted, right, or it wasn't accessible by all students. And so that was really interesting. And my experience from my peers was a lot different because I was like, I was waking up at 4am, to go to work at 5:00, 4:30, working until 11 to 12. And during that time, I was talking to people, I had six or seven people with me in the stand at all times, and I was constantly talking to individuals. And a lot of the times those people that I was talking to at work, like I was the only social experience that they had outside of their own homes, for the most part. And so that was honestly kind of really nice, because like I said, I'm a very social being. And so I think I would have had a lot more of a hard time with that if I didn't have that every single day. But yeah, I kind of maintained that just because I was going to work so early. And that was kind of like a little break. And then I'd get home and I'd start off with my schoolwork and start all of the online work. And so that was a nice way for me to manage it. But like my roommate, she's, um, she's a dance teacher. She teaches little kids tap dance, and she had to do all of her dances, rehearsals and that kind of thing - she had to do it all on Zoom - which just watching her try to do that, first of all, it was really annoying because she's a tap dancer. (laughter) That was constant, constant. But it was just really interesting to watch her do that because she would just put a board down and she would do it on camera. And her students would just have to watch her and do it at home, which was really interesting to see. And just seeing those kids like how they reacted to being online. I don't know how she did it because they were definitely antsy and you know, kind of sick of being at home as well. So it was just a really odd experience. There's really no way to fully describe it. So yeah,

Catherine Maher

One thing that I noticed is you're not close to your professors online like it's harder to you know, get to know them and be close and have them get to know you. And that's what I did like about in-person classes is that you got to know them and it was more fun when you just can know each other face to face, know their voices and you learn more about them and they learn more about you. But online, it's harder to do that. So that definitely affected me quite a bit because I'm also a very social person. So if I don't get social interaction, my motivation decreases a lot.

Dr. Heidi Muller

That's really (laughter and inaudible) because I had you in an online class.

Catherine Maher

I enjoyed having you in an in-person class.

Dr. Heidi Muller

It was better, yeah.

Catherine Maher
Much more fun

Dr. Heidi Muller
It definitely seems like as you're talking about that, like, I can see that.

Catherine Maher
Yeah

Dannon Cox 10:32
You say something like voices, though. Heidi, how have you been responding during that time when it came to some of these common ... ?

Dr. Heidi Muller
Well, I don't think either of you ... most of my classes during COVID. I did synchronously.

Dannon Cox
Okay

Dr. Heidi Muller
So we did face to face classes. So ... which is exhausting, really exhausting in its own way, but so I feel like we just we had small groups on class and in class and stuff. So that's how I did it. But when I do my regular online classes, you know, I record some podcasts, I have things like that on there. And we had some videos and stuff, but I tried to have my literal voice on there, but it's not like, it's not like their voice; it's not like my voice. It's not like me, it's not like the kind of back and forth kind of things that happen ...

Dannon Cox
Quick feedback

Dr. Heidi Muller
Yeah, quick feedback in the conversation or even coming in, and you know, seeing Catherine the day after she got back from her crazy trip and being like, "Are you here? I'm glad you're here." Because even if you type that it's just not the same as having someone just say that to you.

Dannon Cox
How many explanation points do you need to emphasize? Yeah, yeah, the voice aspect is something I've never really thought much about of just like, do you get to hear them? And yeah, you can see them and you can have an online video, or podcast, but then it's what's the vice versa? Do you know what Catherine sounds like? Unless they speak?

Dr. Heidi Muller

Yeah, I definitely think that because when I was going back, and I realized I'd had you in that summer, and I didn't even know it until I happened to go back and look at my roster and be like, Oh, I had Catherine before. And I had totally didn't it just in the summer is different, too. Because you everyone's really less involved, shall we say, in the courses. You're just getting through them, basically. But it was interesting. I do feel like I was really glad to have both of these students in a face-to-face class after I'd had them online. Because I kind of had a sense of who they were as students. I absolutely knew they were their students. But I didn't really know who they were as people. And maybe it's because we're all COMM people, knowing the person as a person really helps. Let me just throw a question out

Dannon Cox

Please do

Dr. Heidi Muller

Do you feel like as you're like, just kind of off of what Dannon said, and kind of knowing you both the students, do you feel like you kind of fundamentally take a different approach to doing an online class than doing a face-to-face class? Do you think about your assignments different? Do you think about how you pace your work differently? Does that question make sense?

Catherine Maher

Yeah, I would say I do it a little different. Like, when I'm in person, I know that I have to go see that professor. So I'm like, oh, I should probably make sure everything is done well. And online, I can slack off more. Which like, obviously, I don't want to admit that, but you can. It's easier that way. So I guess there's the

Dr. Heidi Muller

The accountability is not quite there in an online class.

Catherine Maher

Yeah ...

Dr. Heidi Muller

That makes sense, and it's just literally seeing the person's face and being like, she may look at me, and I'm like, Oh, I didn't do that, or whatever. Yeah, that makes sense.

Anabell Chavez

I actually had like, an exact opposite experience with that. I'm a little weird about my agendas, and so I like to keep a list of everything that I need to do with like specific due dates. And sometimes I'll put them in like a couple of days earlier, just to make sure that I'm getting done on time. And so doing that online was easier because I was able to just go at my own pace and say, Okay, I've done this, I need to take a break from this subject and move on to something else and come back to this later. And when it came to going back into in-person classes, my thought process kind of went to instead of just doing the reading and getting it done, oh, I'll just

wait until class when they do a lecture on the reading that I'm doing and then I don't have to do it. And so I really had to learn my lesson on that one kind of again, and you know, get back into the habit of doing that reading again. But yeah, that was really a weird adjustment for sure for sure.

Dannon Cox

Based on your experiences when it comes to the online classroom, so we say online classroom, but we're discussing Canvas here, what are your experiences with it good or bad?

Anabell Chavez

Um, I would say that it's efficient at best but frustrating at worst.

Dannon Cox

Broad scale, but it's pretty accurate. It's very accurate. (lots of laughter and cross talk)

Anabell Chavez

I would say in the case scenario where the professor and the student are both comfortable with it and understand how to utilize it, and they can really take as much as they can from Canvas, it's a really, really great learning tool in place. But I would say when you know, a student isn't quite sure where to reach things, or professor isn't sure how to get it to the student or, you know, run classes, especially in a virtual environment, that's when it gets really frustrating. Because you know, at least as a student, I just want to get my work done, and I want to make sure that I'm on top of things, Heidi knows, I get everything done.

Dr. Heidi Muller

She does

Anabell Chavez

Way early, way ahead of time. And so I just I can't keep up with those habits that I've already had, when I feel like a professor isn't getting it there or doesn't know how to, and I'm sure that it's the same were professors like, Okay, well, I've tried to do this, and the students aren't quite sure what's going on. I'm sure that's just as frustrating. So, yeah, efficient at best, frustrating at worst.

Catherine Maher

I know my freshman year, it was kind of hard, like when you're new to it. But over like the past two years, I haven't really had any problems. And I might be lucky because all my professors knew how to use it. And they would like post assignments way ahead of time. That's like a key thing, like, making sure the assignments are posted at a reasonable time. So if you want to get them done early, you can. Because sometimes professors will like post it a couple of days before it's due. And I'm like, Well, I'm going to be busy this day. So I don't know, that's like, my only thing with it is that it has, like given me high expectations of when things should be told to me of when I need to do them.

Dannon Cox

Which is fair in real life, too, right? You can't just say, Hey, we're going on vacation in three days. Pack or things, right? Like it's the same thing with assignments. Yeah, are there any like, and we don't have to name names, but like any stories that stick out either good or bad when it comes to Katherine, you kind of like hinted on some of the aspects about posting assignments way too late. But anything else?

Anabell Chavez

I had a professor (pause) I had a professor that had an assignment due on their syllabus, and they didn't post it until two months after it was due, like an entire two months almost. And they ended up sending out a Canvas announcement saying, I didn't get any of these emails, or I just hadn't looked at them in time, I guess. And I hadn't realized that it wasn't published. And so they just didn't publish the assignment and didn't realize it until they were going in to put grades in at like the very end of the semester and realized that nobody had turned it in. And they had gotten emails and kind of, you know, messages on Canvas about it and just I guess didn't realize it, or I'm not exactly sure how that happened. But yeah, that was probably the craziest one.

Dannon Cox

Next time on The Online Classroom,

Anabell Chavez

Going into a position where I am working remote at times, I don't think I would have been able to do it if I didn't have that experience doing remote classwork. And just getting comfortable with an online format has been a really big adjustment. And so, yeah, I would say that that has definitely translated into a lot of different aspects, whether that's just you know, doing paperwork online, which you would normally be able to do in person or doing online DMV appointments, which is a crazy concept to me.

Dr. Heidi Muller

It really is

Anabell Chavez

But yeah, it kind of translates into everything that we're experiencing now, which is huge.

Dannon Cox

Thanks for listening. The Online Classroom is a production from the Instructional Design and Development team at the University of Northern Colorado. This podcast was hosted and edited by Dannon Cox. Music was created by AA Aalto, song, Balloons Rising and Podington Bear, song, Kitty in the Window.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>