

# **Impacts of COVID-19 to On-Campus Students Attending a Rural University in the Pacific Northwest**

Chesley Thompson

## **ABSTRACT**

Social disruption has been experienced worldwide due to COVID-19. Using oral history and online surveys sent to all on-campus students, the impacts of COVID-19 for students at a rural university in the Pacific Northwest can be gauged and thoroughly analyzed. A mixed methods approach to understanding these impacts allows for a rich and broad understanding of how students have experienced social disruption at different points in their academic career. Students that offered an oral history were led through the events of COVID-19 as they unfolded in the United States as well as local events due to COVID-19 that caused disruption. The survey offered students the opportunity to gauge the impact that COVID-19 had on different areas of their lives using Likert scale responses. Analysis offered insight into stresses due to financial instability, decreases in social and physical wellbeing, and how social disruption can lead to a change in one's perception of the passage of time.

## Introduction

Late in 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as a pandemic and introduced measures for protection against the virus. Today, in early 2022, we are still living with these protocols and the social disruption they have caused. The COVID-19 pandemic and string of lockdowns that followed was unlike anything most people have ever experienced in recent times. Its influence is still impacting us today and will continue to impact us in the future. It is important that we document people's experiences related to this earth-changing event and the effects it has had for a range of people in our community and across the globe.

College students are no strangers to social change and stress. However, COVID-19 has only served to exacerbate that. To measure social disruption among students at a rural university campus in the Pacific Northwest, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and utilized in a mixed methods approach. The first step of documentation involved an ethnography project that was conducted with five student participants during the fall of 2020. Subsequently, a survey was dispersed via e-mail to the entire student population of the university, and information regarding different aspects of life that have been impacted by the pandemic was collected. First, I will provide a general discussion regarding quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies, to contextualize the multiple methods used in the research described here. Then, I will discuss specific methodology and analysis, ending with conclusions drawn from analysis of the data collected.

## Methods

### *Ethnography and Oral History*

Ethnography is defined as a “systematic approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other settings” (LeCompte and Schensul 2010:1). Through observing and sometimes participating in activities of the group one wishes to study, ethnographers can begin to see the world through a different cultural lens. By viewing the world from the perspective of those with whom they do their research, ethnographers make deeper meaning and offer a richer understanding of these different communities, institutions, and other settings. One method of ethnography is oral history.

Oral history is the process of collecting firsthand accounts of people who have experienced historical events. Oral history has broad applications and offers a duality in application, as it is both the process and the product of the interview that is conducted (Hajek and Davis 2015). This dual nature of oral history allows researchers to gain intimate insight into their research subject and/or participants. Through collecting and recording interviews, and in most cases transcribing them as well, a researcher begins to see how the information collected can be tagged. Through coding of each interview, common themes and similar experiences can be discovered and analyzed. Along with this discovery and analysis, impacts of an event or sequence of events can begin to be measured amongst a community.

In addition to providing data for researchers, oral history can also be used to document historic events through the experiences of a community. In their book, *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, Mark Cave and Stephen M. Sloan discuss how conducting oral history interviews after a community has experienced a crisis can be helpful for interviewees. By conducting oral histories with someone shortly after they have experienced a crisis, “the process can serve to validate the individual's traumatic experience and help the survivor begin to make meaning of the event” (Cave and Sloan 2014:1-2). By having the

opportunity to discuss with an impartial listener the events as they unfolded and how they had impacted the life of the interviewee, they are able to reflect upon how much they have truly been through.

Another important aspect of conducting oral history through recorded interviews is that more than just what was said can be captured. One can hear things such as someone's tone of voice, and whether their pause in answering a question is significant and what meaning can be gleaned there. In some cases, such as with Scott Sikes' research in the Appalachian Oral History Project, we are even given insight to the daily lives of interviewees such as what was observed as research-listeners can hear the background noise of their families around them (2021).

Along with all these audio aids, a recorded oral history can be saved and reexamined later, as in the Appalachian Oral History Project (Sikes 2021). In this way, researchers can offer future evaluation for posterity, a way to create connections through time and help understand people in our past from a different point of view. Not only can recorded oral histories serve researchers in the future, but they can also serve several types of research projects. During his discussion of the Appalachian Oral History Project, Sikes states that the recorded interviews provided a "trove of data for scholars across multiple disciplines" (2021:106). Along with the ability to capture a piece of a specific time or place, recordings can serve research far into the future and among myriad scholars.

Finally, oral history can serve to "create connections among people and community across difference" (Napoli et al. 2020:30). In their discussion of oral history's tradition of being a tool for radicalism, Phillip Napoli and colleagues (2020) discuss how oral history can be used to convey deep and personal meaning of an event to those who have not experienced it, as well as how it can be a valuable teaching tool to help students understand historic events such as war and

other crises. Indeed, oral history is a strong tool for conveying intimate information about a community or group of people who have experienced a historical event. Alongside this qualitative method, there are quantitative methods that can serve to further strengthen the analysis to be found in interviews.

So, oral history has multiple benefits and uses that allow for immediate therapy of the participant, a broad range of research topics to be explored, and can be archived for future research as well.

### *Surveying*

The use of surveys for collecting data is a longstanding practice in anthropology, and it affords researchers many uses that can be difficult to find in qualitative research methods. The administration of surveys or online questionnaires is a common practice for gathering information quickly and among a broad range of the population. A survey allows researchers to gauge impacts of events on communities or begin to understand a general attitude towards whatever or whomever they are researching.

There are several ways to set up a survey, and how one goes about survey development often depends first upon the questions one seeks to answer. However, determining a study's demographic is generally the first step, and this depends on a number of factors. One must consider the scope of the proposed study, as well as cultural factors that help to inform what the most appropriate demographic categories include. The customizability of how to categorize and reach the target demographic of a survey is a distinct advantage when coupled with a well-defined scope. For example, in a study regarding parents' attitudes towards influenza vaccination for their children, the demographic section of the survey was not very in depth as the researchers

were able to administer survey packets directly to parents or guardians of children from several different childcare facilities (Yui Kwan Chow et al. 2012). Conversely, the purpose of a survey can be to capture a generalized idea of an entire population, such as was the case in research that Min Yang and colleagues undertook when looking into the psychological impacts COVID-19 had on different provinces and regions of China. Through the use of an online survey, the researchers were able to gather viable responses from 5,854 people and the demographic section of their survey was substantial (Yang 2021).

Surveys, especially when distributed online, are a quick and cost-effective tool for collecting data. There are several different options for creating and dispersing a survey online that are of little or no cost to the researcher. Online surveys allow researchers to make contact with a larger portion of the population in a short amount of time. Once an online survey has been created and made available, researchers need only to wait until the designated time has passed and then they can begin analysis. In the wake of COVID-19, online surveys became an accessible and responsible tool for data collection regarding human participants. Researchers are able to recruit respondents in a number of ways and when looking specifically into the effects of COVID-19, have been able to partner with institutions such as health care facilities, or the state department of health (Vereen et al. 2021). One group of researchers even utilized different social media platforms to promote their survey when looking into how COVID-19 had impacted parent-child relations (Roos et al. 2020).

While surveys and other quantitative methods are often utilized for generalization of a population, there is still a lot of flexibility to be found when one defines said population. For example, a researcher could use a survey to understand different experiences of an entire country such as in a study by Min Yang and colleagues. Or researchers can narrow their population to

parental residents in an urban city that utilize child-care centers (Yui Kwan Chow et al. 2012).

The ability to narrow or widen population and even the topic of a survey allows for great control over the type and amount of information gained.

### *Mixing Methods*

Qualitative and quantitative methods have been viewed as two different “cultures” rather than two sides of the same coin that are easily comparable against one another (Goertz and Mahoney 2012). This is a great way to understand them when utilizing a mixed methods approach to research. A mixed methods approach lends itself to the beneficial attributes that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have to offer. Mixed methodology is becoming a more popular choice for some researchers, as it allows for research that answers, “complex questions that sometimes require a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods in one study” (Hesse-Biber and Johnson 2013:103). It has been observed by Sharlene Hesse-Biber that often a mixed methods approach can fail to use a strong qualitative element in the research design. In her article, “Qualitative Approaches to Mixed Methods Practices” Hesse-Biber (2010) outlines seven different case studies that employed a more qualitative forward approach to mixed methods. The third case study she discusses follows the same mixed methods approach as this current research project: beginning with a qualitative data collection method of in-depth oral history interviews, and then using the information collected to construct and administer a survey to a broader population.

As an advocate of quantitative-centric mixed methodology, Hesse-Biber makes a case for the benefits it can have in the public sphere as well. Citing four cases that exemplify the benefits

of a mixed methodology that begins with qualitative data collection, Hesse-Biber (2020) shows the wide breadth of uses available to researchers when they employ this approach in their projects.

In her article, “Transformative Paradigm: Mixed Methods and Social Justice,” Donna Mertens (2007) discusses the importance of mixed methodology in a cultural setting. Through use of qualitative methods to collect information from members of the cultural group one chooses to study, one will be able to maintain the people consisting of the study as a key component of research. Beginning with quantitative methods, researchers can take the information gathered and transform it into data that can be viewed and used to come up with solutions for possible social issues in that cultural group. Qualitative forward mixed methods can be employed in a number of ways, even ones that would seem to preside strictly in the realm of quantitative research.

In their article about Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Kwan Mei-Po and Guoxiang Ding (2008) discuss how a mixed methods approach that focuses on qualitative aspects of research can be extremely useful in social research. Through GIS and oral history, the authors suggest, researchers can get a better grasp of the lives of different cultural groups and even help in instances of land ownership debates.

In an interdisciplinary study regarding food quality in rural South Africa, researchers also used a mixed methods approach (Claasen et al. 2015). The beginning of their data collection starts with random sampling of homes in the area of study. The researchers propose to integrate quantitative methods within a more dominant framework of qualitative research. They administered questionnaires and took inventory of each household's food stores and then conducted focus group discussions based on their findings in their random sample. While they

began with quantitative data collect methods, an overall theme of qualitative analysis was the basis of their research design (Claasen et al. 2015).

Another study (Cortis and Abela 2021) began by first observing employees in their work environments and noting all activities that were part of their job description and those that were not. Later, after this initial stage of research, researchers began conducting one-on-one interviews with staff about their outlook on current working conditions. After interviews were conducted, more data was collected using a quantitative method such as individual scoring of each employee and evaluating time sheets for time spent in different department. The researchers on this project brought qualitative and quantitative methods together to triangulate data regarding hidden workloads (Cortis and Abela 2021).

Often, as exemplified above, a mixed methods approach will lean more towards qualitative or quantitative methods with the other used as a support system and this is a great way to exemplify how each methodology can create a stronger defense for one's argument. In a recent study by Roos and colleagues (2020), the researchers took a mixed methods approach to understanding how the social disruption of COVID-19 through mandated lockdowns could cause disruptions in Parent-Child relationships. Through administration of several online surveys to qualifying participants that were at least 18 years of age and were primary caregivers of at least one child, the researchers were able to gather a vast amount of quantitative data. Each survey also incorporated a qualitative approach by utilizing open-ended questions where participants were able to fully express themselves regarding the questions asked. This allowed researchers to generate a large quantity of quantitative data as well as qualitative data (Roos et al. 2020). A mixed methods approach holds strength when properly executed as it allows for intimate and broad knowledge to analyzed from the data collected.

## Methods and Analysis

Having laid out this general discussion of (mixed) methodology, I will next explain the specific methods I utilized in this current research, both oral history and online surveys. I will first discuss the processes and procedures involved when conducting an oral history, and the subsequent analysis through the use of tagging. Then, I will discuss how a survey was created from the initial analysis of the oral histories collected, its method of dispersal and statistical analysis.

### *Oral History*

Beginning with oral history as an ethnological method, the creation of an interview protocol that complies with the standards of the International Review Board (IRB) regarding human participants is the first step. As the protocol was being shaped, matters regarding the safety of the people participating in the recorded interviews were taken into account and it was decided that participants were to be kept confidential. Confidentiality better served the purpose of this research project by making the approval process more expedient and participant identity was not crucial to learning about the University's student experience during the pandemic. A [2020-06] form was submitted for review and approved by the IRB. The approved protocol can be viewed in Appendix A.

The questions constructed for the interview were designed to lead each participant through a chronology of events surrounding COVID-19 from the time it was declared a pandemic up to the point of their interview in early 2021. The questions were open ended so as to allow for maximum participant engagement and reflection on the series of events, as well as the impacts felt from social disruption.

After approval of the protocol by the IRB, demographics were taken into great consideration, as there were many ways to discuss the student experience. One could look specifically at students based upon their year/class standing with the university (First year, Sophomore, etc.), whether they were local or international students, or even what the experience of a student athlete may have looked like. After much deliberation about demographics, it was decided that a broad range that could be as representative of the University's entire student body would be the best approach for exploring the effects COVID-19 had to students. Different student groups and clubs on campus were contacted via email, explaining the project's goals and asking about their interest in participation. Due to lockdown protocols in place at the time, in person networking and recruiting was not an option and, therefore, email was the main avenue of interaction with potential participants. The difficulties of recruiting participants were increased due to a lack of in-person interaction that can be useful in several different types of data collection where human participants are involved. In the end, five students were recruited and interviewed for approximately one hour through a recorded Zoom session. Zoom has been a useful tool during the pandemic as a way for students and faculty to create a semblance of normalcy during a time of abrupt social disruption, and a rather new one for ethnography.

After all interviews had been conducted, transcription was utilized to create a deeper familiarity with what had been discussed in each interview. Through the process of transcription, one can begin to discover commonalities between the participants whether they be expected or unexpected. Familiarity with the interviews afforded by the time spent typing out every word from each participant and myself allowed the beginnings of analysis to come forth and common themes to be further investigated. While pauses and tone are not expressed in my transcriptions themselves, the connection I have with each interview is deep because I was the only one

conducting and then transcribing each interview. This allows me to recall things such as the general demeanor each participant had during different aspects of the interview. Tagging of the five interviews led to a deeper look at common concerns during a time of social disruption.

### *Analysis – Oral History*

Each participant in the oral history portion of the study contributed a unique experience during COVID-19. As such, their interviews reflect differences in how much one impact, or another was felt. Nevertheless, the participants still felt each impact to their social disruption regardless of age, gender, or time they had been attending the university prior to lockdown protocols. The main focus of social disruption was found to be around four categories: financial stability, mental health, physical wellbeing, and social wellbeing. While there was a broad focus on these particular aspects of social life, the questions were open-ended and encouraged discussion as well as introspection on the part of the interviewee. I allowed the interviewees to discuss the things that came to mind when I brought up each question at whatever length they felt was appropriate so that I could gain their truthful story and learn about what impacted them most. Some felt extreme loneliness, others had a strong support system to rely on. As I transcribed each interview, I began to see how deeply impacted these aspects of social life were for each participant and what unified their experiences. An abrupt and prolonged social disruption served as a challenge for each interviewee in one way or another and is the basis that connects their stories. Along with the expected areas of impact, there was an unexpected overarching theme surrounding the disruption of social time. Of the five interview participants, four of them discussed how time was disrupted for them at length. In the first interview, time was mentioned in 26 instances, in the third it was mentioned in 21 instances, in the fourth it was mentioned in 13 instances, and in the fifth it was mentioned in 15 instances. This led me to

realize how time is integrated into social structure and how social disruption leads to a disruption of time.

### *Online Survey*

In order to find whether or not these interviews informed a greater experience across the entire campus, a survey was created to gauge the aspects of social disruption discussed above and can be viewed in Appendix B. Once again working with human participants, safety of the participants was the greatest factor considered and it was decided that participants would be anonymous. Due to the anonymity of participants, a full IRB review was not necessary which also allowed for an expedient dispersal of the survey. This helped with a cohesiveness between methods, as students were kept anonymous in this portion of the study phase, and their experiences as students and people experiencing abrupt and prolonged social disruption were the focus. Data collection consisted of an online survey administered via email to all current students at the university and required participants to have an active university supported email account to access and participate in the survey.

The survey was live from November 10, 2021, to November 22, 2021, and received 56 total responses. Of the 56 responses, three responses were not included in the analysis as they were online students, and the scope of this research is strictly restricted to on-campus students.

The questions on the survey first included demographic questions in order to reveal several possible ways of examining the data and how COVID-19 may have affected some groups of students differently than others. First, demographic information was collected such as age group, year attending the university, whether the student attended the university full-time or part-

time, if the student held a full-time or part-time job, and if they paid in-state or out-of-state tuition.

Next, questions related to major themes discovered in the oral history portion of the study were given. The use of a Likert-type scale of one through five was implemented to allow students to gauge for themselves the impacts to their mental health, social and physical wellbeing, and financial stability that they had experienced during the pandemic. Allowing each participant to decide for themselves how impacted they were by COVID-19, leads to answers that require reflection about the pandemic itself and how they feel about the experience overall at the time the survey was distributed. After the Likert-type questions, a qualitative element was introduced by allowing each participant an opportunity to voice any other thoughts or concerns they had about the pandemic and the University's involvement.

#### *Analysis – Online Survey*

Initial review of the demographic data showed a fairly even distribution across the number of years students had been attending the university. Each year category has the possibility to present a unique perspective as they all have varying lengths of experience with the university prior to COVID-19. The categories of years attending the university were split into one year, two years, three years, and four or more years. Each of these year categories were tested against one another in each Likert-type response using a Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance test using the program SPSS v. 26. Along with the Kruskal-Wallis analysis, the mode of each Likert-type response category for each corresponding year category was determined for an overall look at responses among the year categories themselves.

First, the mode of each Likert-type question has been determined according to the corresponding year attending category and is displayed in Table 1 and shows a slightly less than average response to COVID-19 social disruption impacts. While the mode is unable to allow for very in-depth analysis, it offers a cursory overview and reveals a mostly negative trend from the respondents regarding the impacts they felt in these different categories of social disruption.

TABLE 1

Mean of Responses by Impact Category and Year

<b>Year Attending</b>	Financial Impact	Mental Health Impact	Physical Wellbeing	Social Wellbeing
<b>One</b>	2	2	2	3
<b>Two</b>	3/2	2	3	2
<b>Three</b>	2	1	2	2
<b>Four or More</b>	2	2	2	1/2

Examination of the results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests reveals that most year attending categories did not have vastly different experiences during COVID-19 and the lockdown protocols, aside from the impacts felt on participants mental health status. The significance results were as follows: financial impact 0.427, mental health 0.046, physical wellbeing 0.942, and social wellbeing 0.314. A more in-depth view of the test results regarding the participants and their mental health can be seen in Table 2 and shows that a comparison of year two to year three and year four or more supply the biggest differences.

TABLE 2

Pairwise Comparisons of Year Attending

<b>Sample 1-Sample 2</b>	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Fourth Plus-Third</b>	-.878	5.691	-.154	.877	1.000
<b>Fourth Plus-First</b>	8.448	5.429	1.556	.120	.718
<b>Fourth Plus-Second</b>	-13.917	5.804	-2.398	.016	.099
<b>Third-First</b>	7.570	5.309	1.426	.154	.923
<b>Third-Second</b>	13.038	5.691	2.291	.022	.132
<b>First-Second</b>	-5.469	5.429	-1.007	.314	1.000
<p><b>Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.</b></p>					
<p><b>a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.</b></p>					

Discussion

I will now discuss the four main areas of social disruption that were the focus of the interviews, as well as the Likert-type questions in the online survey. I will also elaborate on how the concept of time being disrupted came into play throughout the interviews. I will be using the qualitative and quantitative data that I have collected in tandem to discuss these impacts as they both serve the mixed methods approach that I have employed.

*Financial Stability*

Concerns with financial stability is common for college students, and COVID-19 only served to exacerbate this issue causing more stress for students. Seventy-one percent of the students that participated in the campus-wide survey were employed at least part-time. All of the interviewees were employed prior to lockdown protocols being put in place. One of the interviewees worked for a local restaurant and, while she did not lose her job, the restaurant did have to shut down and decrease hours significantly more than once during the first year of lockdown. This particular interviewee was ineligible for unemployment because she had not been let go, but was also not earning any income due to a lack of scheduling at her place of employment. During our interview, she expressed extreme distress and confusion that took place during the initial lockdown phase because she was living off campus, had rent to pay, and no way to pay it as a result of measures that had to be taken. Another interviewee who had struggled to find employment fell on especially hard times during the initial phase of the lockdowns, as she was living alone, was now unable to get a job, and had to choose between buying food or paying her bills. This interviewee expressed to me how she had to sit outside on campus somewhere just to gain access to wi-fi, she was unable to gain shelter from the buildings as they were closed due to COVID-19, but she had no other option in order to complete her schoolwork.

In fact, there is much to be said about the idea that there was no large difference in experience of financial stability across year attending groups, and that can also be seen from those who chose to respond to the optional, open-ended question that closed out the survey. Of the 18 participants that elected to respond to this open-ended question in the survey, five of them discussed financial aid issues such as having access to more grants and the university not increasing the price of meal plans and dormitory arrangements. One student simply requested that the university “provide more resources to students to assist them with any issues, whether

that be financial, food, living arrangements, etc.” This request for assistance was also seen in regards to mental health facilities.

Related to students’ requests for more access to financial assistance, is the CARES Act that was initiated as relief funds for universities to help students with COVID-19 related expenses. In the online survey, students were asked whether or not they were aware of the CARES Act related to student relief as well as if they had utilized the available funds. Of the student respondent, 43% were completely unaware of the CARES Act and its capacity to assist with COVID-19 related expenses for students. As such, 54% of students did not utilize these relief funds. When discussing the CARES Act with an interviewee, they informed me that they were unaware of its availability after the first term in lockdown. As some other students have said from the open-ended section of the survey, there seemed to be a lack of communication for some students and one student stated that their first year at the university felt chaotic as they had little direction when navigating the institutions at a university.

### *Mental Health*

Mental health is a great concern for college students during regular times. When adding a crisis that includes a high death toll and social isolation it is very possible to make matters worse. In fact, “for people with preexisting mental health conditions, a pandemic can further heighten their anxious thoughts and compulsive behaviors. Previously managed symptoms can flare up, requiring additional care beyond what was sufficient pre crisis” (Schoch-Spana 2020). For one participant, this proved to especially be the case. This participant had experienced sexual assault on multiple occasions during their time at the university and was struggling with it when the pandemic started. She experienced extreme isolation as she lived alone, off campus, and very far from her family. As a result, her mental health suffered even more as lockdown began.

While the university offers mental health counseling to students and did its best to make a seamless transition to remote counseling, unfortunately as this participant relayed to me “over the summer we don’t have access to counseling at [university] so I guess that’s what like spiraled me into that phase of just drinking and smoking” and struggled most with her mental health due to compounding trauma and loneliness. Survey participants also noted that they were unsure of how to utilize the mental health facilities offered by the university stating, “there could also be more mental health outreach in regard to making sure it is better known about the health center and the counseling center.” Along with programs being unavailable during the summer, the university is in a rural community that already suffers a lack of mental health care for residents. When asked about how they had coped with COVID-19 most interviewees felt like they had not really coped with it at all. One participant said they “haven’t really, like, reflected on the whole process so it was nice to think about that too” further exemplifying how interviewing shortly after a period of trauma can be of assistance. Another participant talked about how the time during lockdown allowed them to discover that they actually enjoyed time alone and helped them realize that their previous living situation had been somewhat of a burden for them. Four out of the five participants interviewed said they used a mixture of marijuana and alcohol. These four participants also said that their usage increased greatly during lockdown and would attribute this increase to mental health stresses felt from lockdown. All of the participants stated that they had cut back since returning to class, regarding their usage as “too much” and were glad that they had been able to successfully decrease their intake.

### *Physical Wellbeing*

Coupled with mental health, physical health was a concern among four of the five participants. These four interviewees all participated in some type of physical activity previous to

the COVID-19 lockdown. Two of the participants mentioned that they had gained an unusual amount of weight during the lockdown, and another participant felt that their lack of access to the university's gym hindered their mental and physical health.

This sentiment was shared by some of the survey participants as well, with one stating at the end of their survey that "increasing the gym hours would be nice." While the experience of each year group may have been about the same, it cannot be denied that most participants felt their physical wellbeing suffered during the pandemic when taking into account what the interview participants said and the mode for the physical wellbeing category being rated a two out of five in all cases but second year students.

### *Social Wellbeing*

Social disruption due to COVID-19 lockdowns has had an interesting and profound impact of the social wellbeing of students. As classes were quickly transitioned to a remote setting in the Spring of 2020, it created new issues of how these students would attend class and socialize with one another as well as others outside of their school lives. One interviewee discussed how she was unable to see her mother or grandfather for quite some time, as her grandfather was immunocompromised. On top of that, this same interviewee experienced the beginning months of lockdown alone in her apartment as her roommate had been away visiting family at the time and was unable to return home for some time. This interviewee discussed with me how isolated she felt and that attempts to connect with friends and peers failed as she was restricted from most of her regular social activities. Another interviewee discussed with me how even though she lived alone, she felt even further isolated than usual, as she had relied on classes and regular gym sessions as a point of socialization, and that was out of the question at the beginning of lockdown.

It was not uncommon to get similar responses in the open-ended question of the online survey conducted. One student expressed that they would have liked “more ways to engage with other students” and explained that there was a lack of activities for students even in a virtual setting. Another student stated that it was quite difficult for them to find any information about the virtual events that had taken place and requested to make these events more visible for students so they could have some way to engage with and meet new people.

### *Time*

An unexpected topic that arose from the oral history phase of the study was that of the passing of time and how it had been disrupted. The concept of how time passes is one that can be delved into deeply and with great complexity. I will be drawing on the concept of qualitative time as discussed in depth by Nancy Munn (1992) in her literature review “The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay.” What I found most interesting and applicable was that in a paradigm discussed by Durkheim and his colleagues “social time consists of ‘collective representations’ or ‘categories’ that derive from and reflect the groupings and varied ‘rhythms’ of social life” (Munn, 1992:95). What happens when the “rhythms” of social time become interrupted and how might that affect a person existing in this social time? When discussing lockdown with my participants, four out of five mentioned that time felt as though it had come to a halt. In fact, this disruption of social time permeated the other aspects of social disruption discussed above. Some participants mentioned that it had become difficult to remember what day of the week it was as they lost all structure to their day and time, in a social context, began to lose all meaning. This inability to maintain a grip on days progressing is connected to a loss of financial stability as well as social wellbeing. Without a work schedule or planned social activities, it becomes easier for the days to blur together. Students were able to find some

structure to their days during the Spring 2020 term as classes and schoolwork kept them mostly in check.

However, as summer began, they struggled to maintain a sense of social time as they were cut off from interpersonal interactions that helped keep their “rhythms” on track. Three participants stated that due to this disruption of social time, they began to stay up later and sleep in longer. One participant stated that she “almost, like, flip flopped my schedule where I’d just stay up, like, all hours of the night.” This type of schedule change impacted the interviewee’s mental health and social wellbeing as she was unable to socialize with friends as easily and felt even more disconnected from them.

While the impact of time on physical wellbeing is smaller in comparison to the other aspects of social disruption, it was still an impact felt. With a disrupted perception of time comes a disrupted schedule. It is not as easy to engage in physical fitness during the nighttime as students need to be considerate of housemates as well as a lack of access to fitness centers such as the university gym. In fact, one survey participant may have experienced such a schedule disruption in regard to their physical wellbeing as they commented in the open-ended portion of the survey “I think that increasing the gym hours would be nice.” This displays a lack of access at regular gym hours and could be indicative of a disruption to social time impeding their ability to maintain physical wellbeing.

Only one participant was able to recognize and try to resist this interruption to their social rhythm. When asked about their initial feelings on the announcement that COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and as the university would be going remote, their response was that they were not too worried about lockdown. The participant elaborated that as they had already made plans for the summer, they were not going to allow lockdown to let them miss it. This participant

also seemed to struggle less with their mental health and isolation, and it is very possible that even though their approach may be considered risky, that this could be related to their refusal to allow such a large interruption to the rhythm of their social time.

## Conclusion

COVID-19 has facilitated a large social disruption to the entire population. However, the impact of this social disruption can be seen to compound with other social stressors that are commonly experienced by university students. As discussed above, an increase in financial instability was felt by students through the loss of jobs and hours scheduled to them on top of payments for tuition. A lot of students also experienced a decrease in their mental health, physical or social wellbeing. Along with these anticipated social impacts, students' perception of time was affected due to the social disruption initiated by COVID-19 protocols. A large focus should be on mental health facilities and bringing awareness of these facilities to the students would be helpful as mental health was one of the most greatly impacted aspects observed during this research project. Aside from mental healthcare, there was also a lack of help found for students in need of financial assistance. While this does not fall squarely on the shoulders of the university, there seems to have been a lack of communication regarding assistance programs that led to a lot of the survey participants being unaware or unable to utilize funds from the CARES Act. Overall, this comprehensive, mixed-methods project has shown that students have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 regardless of age, years having attended the university, and employment status.

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## APPENDIX A

Please state your age and major.

### **March 11th, 2020, WHO declares COVID a pandemic**

Can you tell me about your initial thoughts and feelings regarding COVID-19?

- expectations regarding COVID-19 responses and protocols?

### **March 13th, 2020, a national emergency is declared in US regarding COVID**

What was on your mind as we went into lockdown at the end of winter term 2020?

Did you have any concerns regarding:

- your mental health?
- financial stability?

Did you experience loss of a job or other income during lockdown? What was that like?

### **March 18th, [University] declares that Spring 2020 term will be completely remote**

If you live with one or more people, have those relationships changed during lockdown? If yes, how so?

If you live alone, how has it been for you to experience physical isolation?

### **Spring Term 2020 March 30 - June 12, 2020**

What was your experience like during the Spring 2020 term?

How have you coped with social distancing?

Have you discovered any new hobbies?

Have you turned to the recreational use of drugs/alcohol during lockdown?

- How many drinks a week were you having?
- What recreational drug(s) would you use and how often?

Can you walk me through what became a typical day for you in lockdown?

**June 5th is when Phase 2 of [State Governors] reopening plan was set in motion**

**June 15th-25th confirmed cases increased exponentially. By June 25th, 297 confirmed cases in Union county.**

What are the common emotions you feel when you read/hear something regarding COVID-19 and its progression throughout the US/Union County?

Is there anyone in your life that is at high risk of contracting COVID-19?

Did you or anyone you know contract COVID-19?

## APPENDIX B

### COVID-19 Survey

This survey explores the impacts of COVID-19 to on campus students at EOU (You must be 18 years or older). This survey takes approximately 8 minutes to complete. No personal information will be gathered in this survey. By clicking the “Fill Out Form” button you are consenting to participate. Thank you for your time and thoughtful responses!

1. Are you an on-campus or online student?

On-campus

Online

2. How old are you?

18 - 19

20 - 21

22 - 23

24+

3. Do you pay in-state or out of state tuition?

In-state

Out of state

Which of the following best describes you?

1st year attending [University]

2nd year attending [University]

3rd year attending [University]

4th year attending [University]

5+ years attending [University]

4. Are you attending EOU as a full time Student? (12+ credits)

Yes

No

5. Do you currently live in the dorms?

Yes

No

6. Are you currently employed?

No

Yes, part-time

Yes, full-time

7. How has COVID-19 impacted you financially?

1 (being most negative)

2

3 (no difference)

4

5 (being most positive)

8. How has COVID-19 impacted your mental health?

1 (being most negative)

2

3 (no difference)

4

5 (being most positive)

9. How has COVID-19 impacted your physical wellbeing?

1 (being most negative)

2

3 (no difference)

4

5 (being most positive)

10. How has COVID-19 impacted your social wellbeing?

1 (being most negative)

2

3 (no difference)

4

5 (being most positive)

11. Did you hear about the CARES Act and its benefits to students?

Yes

No

12. Did you take advantage of the CARES Act to support your college endeavors?

Yes

No

13. Did you utilize the Student Success Information & Orientation Canvas shell?

Yes

No

14. If so, did you find it helpful?

1 (not helpful)

2

3

4

5 (very helpful)

15. Is there anything else you think that Eastern Oregon University could have done to assist its students during the pandemic?