

Dr. Poyo's interview transcript

Tue, 11/17 3:27PM 35:55

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

students, teaching, classroom, online, class, technology, semester, online courses, lecture, faculty, learn, university, films, canvas, department, graduate program, latin american, problems, mary, discussion board

SPEAKERS

Bianca-Rhae Jacquez, Dr. Poyo



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 00:03

Can you please introduce yourself?



Dr. Poyo 00:06

My name is Professor Gerald for Yo, and Professor of Latin American and us Latino history.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 00:18

How long have you been teaching at St. Mary's and how long have you been teaching in general?



Dr. Poyo 00:24

I've been at St. Mary's, since since the fall of 1992. And before that, I taught for about a year and a half, almost two years at Florida International University in Miami. And before that, I worked as a research researcher and a museum curator at the Institute of Texan cultures, downtown San Antonio. And, and along the way, when I was a museum curator, I taught I taught a course, every, every semester at San Antonio College, and either sent on your college downtown or UTSA.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 01:22

Um, have you always taught Latin American history? You have you dabbled in different fields of study?



Dr. Poyo 01:30

Well, Latin American history is the area that I specialized in. And in the early years, teaching at San Antonio College in UTSA, I taught almost exclusively US history, because they didn't teach Latin American history. And, and then, when I at Florida International University, I taught human history, and I taught Latin American history. And then when I came to St. Mary's, I started teaching us Latino history, and Mexican American history, in addition to Latin American history, and, and US history.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 02:16

I did not know that. That's why it's always like, you're just be dedicated to one field of study as professors.



Dr. Poyo 02:22

Well, you have to you have to, you get your field of specialization, but especially if you go to small universities, like St. Mary's, because the fact because the departments are small, then you have to try to teach, you have to expand your teaching. Unlike if you go to like a major university, like UT Austin are something you teach, you teach your specialty, and that's all you teach. So it's kind of nice to be at a smaller place where you can expand your, your teaching experience.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 02:57

So how would you describe your class structure pre pandemic?



Dr. Poyo 03:03

structure? What do you mean by structure?



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 03:08

Was it very interactive in person? Have you ever done like, a lot of online courses before?



Dr. Poyo 03:17

No, I have never taught online courses. And I had promised myself that I would never teach online courses. Because I believe so much and being in the classroom, and be students. And I think that there's something to be said for face to face. Teaching. So my, in my classroom, I do I have I began in my earlier years, I spent a lot of time doing lecturing, because that's the way that's what you did. That's the way that that professors taught mostly was, at least history professors was, was through lectures. And over time, I started doing less lecture and more discussion, group conversation. And now today, I don't really do much lecture anymore. I do mostly I try to lead the classroom conversation into a particular direction and add lecture material as I go. But it's my assumption always that if the students come to class with their assignments, there's no reason to lecture, but rather, rather to take but to rather take a deeper look at the material that the students have already read.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 04:45

Um, in March 2020, we were announced that we were going to get an extra week of Spring Boot spring break, to allow us to transition to online classes. How did you react to that announcement?



Dr. Poyo 05:00

Well, I reacted, as we all did. It was it wasn't a, they were asking us to do it, they were telling us to do it. So despite my trepidations, I decided that I would, this would be a good time to take advantage and to learn a lot of stuff about technology that I had never really taken the time to learn. My idea about about technology was you learn it when you absolutely have to use it. And since my job was mostly teaching, and I did a lot, and then writing, researching and writing, I didn't really need a lot of, of the emerging technologies for what I what I do. But once once we had to go online, then everything changed. And we had to take had to take a new attitude and move forward.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 06:04

How did you feel emotionally about it? Were you scared, nervous?



Dr. Poyo 06:10

I wasn't nervous, I was scared I was. I was a bit concerned as to how quickly I could, I could learn all the things that I needed to learn. But really, when things closed down in March,

I'm the only thing that I really had to learn at that point was how to how to use zoom. And so we took the existing class that was already already had in place. And rather than going to the classroom, I just did it on zoom. So I thought, well, this is not too hard. So after fumbling, fumbling around a bit and learning how to do zoom, then I worked through the rest of the semester. And it was, it went well. But that was just the first taste, because after the semester ended, then we were informed that we all had to be certified. To teach online university has a university has a certification program for any professor who wanted to teach online. And, and frankly, that was one of the things that that sort of persuaded me that not to go online, because then I'd have to spend the whole summer going through this very, was turned out to be quite a quite a rigorous course. And I never really wanted to spend my summers doing that I wanted to spend my summers doing research and writing. So I had never really moved in the direction. But now in that direction. But now I had no choice. We all had to be certified and we all had to be prepared to go into the fall semester.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 08:12

What changes? You and he said you had more discussion and conversation conversational type in person classes is that the structure? You're still trying to keep now that you're online?



Dr. Poyo 08:25

Yep. Yeah, pretty much. In fact, one of the things that Well, let me just let me just go back to the main thing that changed in my course, was that online, at least through the certification program, we were required to set up the entire syllabus with the entire course, already completed. That is, in my experience, I don't have a syllabus, buddy, but exactly what you know, exactly each week exactly what, for example, if I had a quiz or a test, or some other activity, I wouldn't necessarily that wouldn't necessarily be on my syllabus would that I handed out at the beginning of the semester, in terms of the actual questions, for example, that I might ask. And then the other part is that we were encouraged very strongly to learn how to do the discussion forum. And the discussion forum was really the same thing that I did in class. And I mean, that's the way I used to think about it. But actually, as I, as it turned out, the discussion forum is really an additional complement to the classroom discussion. And I found that very, very useful. So that so that the way the class is structured now, students are assigned a reading. They come in, on this semester, for example, on a Tuesday, they then we talk about the readings students, and they have students that will gain get a participation grade, based on the participation of that day on the readings. And the way that that is set up on on canvas that you can just add that

grade, you know, as soon as the class is over, you can just add the grade, right. Then, during the week, Tuesday to Thursday, I have the discussion forum. And the students then have to read. In the second text that we have, which is a documents test, the students have to read that documents text. And then they have to post answers to particular particular prompts that I asked about those documents. So that by Thursday, when they come into class, then we're ready to discuss the documents and broaden the documents, right. And then on the basis of the, on the basis of the of the readings from the first text, and the and the documents in the second text. By the end of the week, then the students will write a a week, a weekly paper in which they summarize and reflect on the theme for the week. And so what this course with this online course made me do was to was to structure the course much more clearly for students arm since since we were in this sort of strange situation where sometimes the internet works, sometimes it didn't, it all had to be available there for them. And so I thought it I thought it was a good a really good learning experience for me, I learned how to do all of the, the technology stuff on canvas, all the discussion boards and all these other things. Video, record, etc. And, and to and to be much more much more reflective about what I want each student to students to do each week. So it gave it made me think the course ahead much more thoroughly than than I had traditionally done in the classroom teaching. So I found that really quite enlightening quite. And it's something of course, that that I'll probably continue to do whether I'm in the classroom or not.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 13:03

Time could be an issue, not showing up at the right time. For my instance, I'm in Mountain Time Zone and San Antonio is central time. So for me, it was really hard to adjust to that time zone. Because my classes were reflecting a different time. So in my head, I was like, What to but it's actually one is that an issue that you saw with a lot of students this semester?



Dr. Poyo 13:39

Um, no, I didn't find that at all, I think I can't think of a student really that was outside the timezone. I had one student who was in Honduras, or who isn't under us. And I don't know if the time is exactly the same there or not. But it wasn't a problem for her she saw that know that the time issue really was not a was not a problem for me to I guess the most disconcerting part is, was the issue of not being able to see the students faces. It was very, it took me a long time to get used to the idea that I would just be talking to these little black boxes except for except for a couple students or two or three to ready to students who regularly turned down their videos. And the rest of them although I encourage them to didn't so I only had I only had two students who would turn on their videos. And I don't

know exactly why. But I do know that sometimes students would not really be there behind that little black box. And so I always had to be We had to be sure to be calling on everybody to be sure that they were actually there. And we got into a bit of a, with a couple students a bit of a cat and mouse game where it wasn't clear to me that they were there, or if they were there. Or they said they were away, they'd stepped away for a minute. Anyway, it was a little disconcerting to have to worry about that and to be thinking about that. The other part that was sometimes problematic is the student. The student mics often didn't work. But sometimes it got the I got the impression that if they didn't know the answers to the questions, I asked him in class, they would say, their mics not working. And so, you know, that also was a bit problematic, sometimes trying to figure out, you know, especially if they're getting a participation grade for the classroom participation. And so how do I evaluate their participation? When they're not? Either either able to talk to me? Or maybe they use that as an excuse when they don't really have the answer. So those kinds of things, they're, they're not really, they're not really terrible. And they weren't really traumatic, but they were things that I had to sort of deal with, which you wouldn't have to and then in a regular classroom.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 16:49

Did you have any technology issues with connecting to your classes.



Dr. Poyo 16:55

I didn't have any I had, I didn't really have any, any problems at all. I know, I had students who had problems who couldn't get on or they got kicked out. Or, or it was unstable. But I think all in all, all in all, it was pretty good. Not, not there weren't that many problems.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 17:26

Um, what advantages Do you see online learning having on your career, and your ability to teach in the future? Now that you've had this long experience and all these years, especially since you're certified now? How do you think that event is an advantage to your career?



Dr. Poyo 17:48

Well, I think the main effect, the main thing is that I'll be able to support the department. If it decides that it needs more online courses, or, for example, the graduate program is right now during this this year, a totally online future.



Dr. Poyo 18:15

I don't know if it will be totally online, but but online will certainly continue to be an important piece of it. So that allows me to support the department in that sense and, and teach those courses. So that's I think that's a great benefit for the department. And great better for for me, because that I can continue to teach and the graduate program also provides the possibility of expanding our undergraduate online courses, we have never, we've never had an online underlie very many online courses we, in the past taught Dr. Van Hoy, for example, would teach some online courses in the summer so she was the vanguard of our, of our online of our online teaching. And she was the only one that did it. Your some years ago. But now we can expand that and we could teach classes during the regular year, if we need to, or want to. So I think I think that's the main benefit for me. The other the other benefit might be that I'm learning how I've learned also how to do meetings meetings online. And, and department has been doing a lot of presentations online. And, and in the future, we'll probably be doing some webinars. And so those are those are all things that I've learned how to do. And once once we go back to regular time, regular things, I don't know if we'll continue to use this technology in this way. But if we need to, we certainly know how to do it.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 20:21

If you were offered right now to go back onto campus, would you go back? Do you think it's something that you view as an important part of your classroom now like going on to campus? Or do you think it's as a as of right now?



Dr. Poyo 20:48

I had the opportunity to go back to campus, but for the spring, but I chose not to. I just turned 70. I am I am, I'm in that I'm in that high risk category. So it doesn't make any sense for me, I don't think to go back into the classroom, even though there seemed to be doing a very good job. It seems to me that I would rather just wait till my till I get my vaccine. And then, then I'd be happy to go back to the classroom. In fact, I'll insist on it.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 21:34

I think you should wait your safe. If it becomes before everyone else.



Dr. Poyo 21:42

That's what I think too. There's no point there's no point in getting sick if you have if you

have an alternative.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 21:50

So now, how do you feel now about online? You did say You promised yourself in the past that you weren't going to online? How do you feel by now like, would you say want to do online teaching only now or maybe you expand your online team, to others different avenues may help other universities in their online teaching?



Dr. Poyo 22:20

Well, my whole my whole view of online teaching has, has changed dramatically, really. And and I think, you see, when, when online teaching first developed, it was very low tech. And there was no zooming things like that. It was it was just you just put your course online. And you email back and forth or chat back and forth Somehow, I don't know, I don't know exactly how it was done. And it just seemed like it was a it was no real contact, you know, real time contact with students. So I guess I developed my attitude about online teaching from from that, from that time. And it wasn't until spring that when I actually had to do it, I saw how much the technology had advanced. Zoom, I'd heard about zoom, but I've never used zoom, before last March. And I was really surprised at what a wonderful tool it is and how and how, how you can how you can engage on zoom as easily as you can engage in the classroom. And then the discussion, the discussion board, which of course, we've always had on on canvas. I hadn't ever used too much because frankly, I never wanted to take the time to learn how, how to do it effectively. Anyway, I would prefer to do the adult one if I can do discussions in class, why would I want to do discussions online. But but doing it having this experience I've learned that those two things can be very complimentary. You can do both and and have different objectives in the classroom from from the objectives online, in the forum. Right. So so so by getting really deeply involved in it, I could see more clearly the different options. And with the technology, what the technology the way it is. It really it really makes it interactive and makes it so that you can you can engage you can you can do a lot of things that I never know you could do. So I'm happy to continue teaching online but certainly not exclusively. I don't want to I don't want to. I don't want St Mary's to turn into a University of Phoenix.



Dr. Poyo 25:03

I know that's where you that's where you are right? Oh, you're in El Paso. I thought you were a phoenix person

D

Dr. Poyo 25:14

Oh, yes, that's right. So we don't want to turn into a school that's exclusively online, obviously. But but for, for creating, for having for being able to attract more students, for example, in the graduate program, we have a couple students now, who are ones in Utah. And I don't know where the other one is, but but they're only taking those courses that only enrolled in our program this semester, just because they could do it online. Now, I don't know if that's the I don't know if once the virus has gone, they'll come back, they'll come here or whether they'll want to finish the whole program online. I don't know about that. Yeah. So. So yeah. So like, I've appreciated learning all this. And I'll continue to use it as long as it's useful for me and for the department. And but I do not want to replace my in class teaching with that.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 26:16

So what is one thing you would like people to understand about a professor's point of view during a pandemic? Online Teaching is something that a lot of people have not thought about, especially what the teachers/educators are going through? We've mostly been focusing on the students perspective, the administration struggles, how do you want people to understand from your perspective, what has happened, and what's going on?

D

Dr. Poyo 26:48

I think the probably the, the thing that people may not understand is how much extra effort and work it took to take to transform an entire faculty in a matter of, really five months. From a faculty that's primarily classroom focus. And to transfer that into an entire faculty that can teach online. I think that's been a really big commitment by the faculty. And, and in the face, in the face also of the uncertainty of, of keeping jobs, a lot of faculty that, that lost their jobs are not our full time faculty, but our adjunct faculty. And in the uncertainty of what's going to happen, what happened to our benefits or benefits have been cut. And whether we'll ever get that back or not. Who knows. And our salaries have been cut. And I think we all understand why. And I don't think anybody would, not many people oppose the idea. Because it had to be done. But it but there was a lot of a lot of stuff was going on, affecting our lives. And I think that our faculty at St. Mary's stepped up in a big way, and have done a great job. But you know, we just just did what we had to do, and I'm not sure how many people out there in the world really know much about that. Lots of times, that lots of times people say oh, a university professor, he teaches you teaches two courses a day. And then he goes home, right.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 28:53

I've seen you in office. I know how much work you put into it.



Dr. Poyo 28:59

That's all of us. We all work hard. Just as just as just as you all do.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 29:07

What do you think the university did well in preparing you guys for the online classes?



Dr. Poyo 29:12

Do we think that St. Mary's did well?



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 29:15

Yes. In preparing you for the online classes? What type of support did they offer you?



Dr. Poyo 29:21

Well, St. Mary's, um, turns out that St. Mary's has one heck of an Academic Technology Department. They're always they're always there but and you and it's like everything else. If you have a canvas problem, you know, you call them up and you say I've had this canvas problem, or whatever it is. But this was a whole new level of demands on them. And they, I mean, they were working day and day and into the night to to support First of all, to teach us all of this. And secondly, to support whatever technology problems that we had in terms of how to how to solve technology problems that we had in order to be able to be the online. So I think there was a lot of investment, additional upgrading the technologies, and I don't know exactly everything they did. But they did it. And they did it quickly. And they did it quite efficiently. So what we did, as faculty members, we couldn't have done without that, that really commitment and investment by the Academic Technology, I suppose not. I mean, for us are, we dealt with academic technology, but obviously, the entire Technology Group at the university,



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 31:05

I know have talked a little bit about their new methods you've added to your course, like

the discussion board, are there any other ones that you look for, you want to try out in your next semester, in the spring semester, any new technology things like, I know, for example, Dr. Wieck does flipgrids as another way of discussion board through videos, during different avenues you want to take that you have, I guess, shared with other professors in your in the department.

D

Dr. Poyo 31:37

Um, well, I learned how to do the video videotaping so that I can do lectures if I need to. But I never really used that because I decided not to do lectures in the classroom. In the zoom meetings, as I mentioned, I decided that I would put a lot of pressure on the students to and and one of the reasons I could do this is because it was a relatively small class 15 students, so that the students were expected to come in having read the assignment, and then the class time would be, would be direct conversation with the students, which included in and involves calling on students and calling on all the students throughout throughout the, throughout the class time. And so if it's a bigger class, you know, if you got 25 students or something that's a lot harder to do. And maybe, maybe you need to lecture. But with the smaller classes, you can, you can have the conversation with the students. And if they're not getting something, then you can sort of go into a mini lecture, if you will, or a series of mini lectures during the during the course class time, to clarify to go deeper, to do things at student to get into areas that the students asked about or didn't quite understand very well. So I found that interactive approach a lot more satisfying. I think for students, I think the students liked it more. And, and for me, it allowed, it allowed me to be more flexible. And to be able to think in real time about which which direction I wanted to take the material. If I have a lecture already pre pre recorded, then it's it's it's not as dynamic, right? So so I didn't really use that video, I don't know, if I will, in the future depends on maybe the size of the classes. In the past I have already used in the past. with Canvas, I've used lots of films. I didn't haven't used I didn't use films this year, because so far because I find that the canopy, the canopy site, which we use for films has been cut so badly so badly that we hardly get any films anymore. So that the films that I'll use, I use I can't really access them anymore because the university is cutting back because of the financial crisis. So the financial so each film that you watch on canopy University has to pay for each time that it's, it's, it's viewed. And so and, and I would have many, you know, mics now on my classes, but many of my classes I use a lot of films. And so then what, what happens is, Oh, I can't afford them anymore. Then they are cutting back. So this semester rather than fighting to see where I could find these films. I just decided not to use them and Until I can figure out how to get to them. The stuff that Dr. wick does is all beyond me right now. It's all way beyond what I I know about or can do. So I'm hoping to learn more and more from her as I am already on in the public history program, learning how to use omeka, for example. And, and so I'm more intrigued

by the technology than it was before thinks that it's always best to have a random order. The History Department has worked together very well on all of this. So I think we've been lucky.



Bianca-Rhae Jacquez 35:51

Thank you Dr. Poyo.