

Transcript of Interview with Camryn Blackmon by Gwyn Hartung

Interviewee: Camryn Blackmon

Interviewer: Gwyn Hartung

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Location (Interviewee):

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: This interview was conducted with college junior Camryn Blackmon about her experiences with online learning and COVID19. She expresses her frustration at the change and discusses how previous problems, such as anxiety and depression, were heightened due to the pandemic. Hearing from an undergraduate student gave me more perspective about what it's like to learn online during COVID19.

Gwyn Hartung 0:00

All right. So, um, would you mind introducing yourself a little bit?

Camryn Blackmon 0:06

Yeah, so my name is Camryn Blackmon. I'm a junior at St. Mary's, my major, I'm an International Global Studies major. Um, I have a work study in the research and academic office. And I'm also a commuter.

Gwyn Hartung 0:24

Um, what are your pronouns?

Camryn Blackmon 0:27

Oh, She/Her/Hers.

Gwyn Hartung 0:29

Awesome. Um, so, um, prior to the pandemic, did you take your classes online, in-person, or like a hybrid of the two?

Camryn Blackmon 0:41

So before the pandemic, I have had like, one online class, and the rest were all completely in-person. So yeah, and I really like being in-person.

Gwyn Hartung 0:55

Awesome. So if- you since you took them mostly in person, was it kind of difficult to switch over? Um, if so, what was like the hardest part of having to switch over to online classes?

Camryn Blackmon 1:11

It was really difficult to switch over. I think I also noticed, for my professors, it was really difficult on them, I think, getting used to new technology, especially, I had a few older professors last spring, I think that immediate switch was really difficult for them. um like trying to work Zoom, but also trying to help students participate. I noticed a lot of people ,even this semester, too, a lot of people are going through I think a lot of stuff with their mental health. And just like, trying to find the productivity. I think that's, personally for me, is like trying to find this

productivity during difficult times of like, isolation, uncertainty, but like, I noticed, it was difficult for my professors as well, trying to get used to that, this new format. I had some that just didn't even use Zoom, they were like, okay, just submit some comments on canvas, because some of them hadn't even used Canvas before. So it was the biggest issue was on like the student side having the like, motivation but also professors trying to figure out how to navigate everything.

Gwyn Hartung 2:24

That's, yeah, no, that's a really good point. Um, so do you feel like the- your professors have been, you know, a little more open, a little more understanding during all of this?

Camryn Blackmon 2:36

It's been a big mix, I've had some that have really been understanding really, really want students to kind of grasp more of the content more than worry about the issue of just turning grades in and you know. So I have two really great professors that really want to focus on content, and they don't penalize students for turning in assignments late. It's really more about like your participation, and not making yourself sick over getting grades in. I do have one professor like who will close assignments, and I've had issues with that, um, and I think they've noticed issues too with students not being able to turn things in and my professors have to adjust their syllabus for us where you either get extensions. And the fact that they've had- they have had to be more flexible during this time.

Gwyn Hartung 3:30

Yeah, I feel like kind of everybody in every facet of life has been a little bit more flexible, which is kind of nice. Do you feel like you suffer from tech overload? Just you know, sitting in front of the computer all day, or do you like, have like isolation issues, anything like that?

Camryn Blackmon 3:52

Absolutely. Yeah, I think it is really hard to have to sit at either, wherever you are, and most people are at home. But if you're sitting at a desk or kitchen table, you're doing something for an extended amount of time, and you're looking at the same screen. Um, I know personally for me, like I get headaches and certain fatigue. And then when it comes time to like being on Zoom, I get like this new social anxiety of having to like see myself in the little like Zoom camera all day. And then also participating. So I think there's like new, like, weirdness with technology now with like, the Zoom and being online all day. And then what was the other question?

Gwyn Hartung 4:38

Oh, do you feel like you are suffering from like, isolation and whatnot?

Camryn Blackmon 4:44

Yeah, I really have been. Well, I tried to like, make a trip to target or something to get myself out of the house. But even then, it's so weird not to have like the social life of college where you could go, and you didn't even have to talk to anyone who's sitting around people in social areas like the commons at St. Mary's, or even just being able to really communicate with your professors because it's just such a different thing to just like, to leave the Zoom, you know? Like

you're not actually in a classroom and you don't reply to them you just like, a meeting with them [unintelligible].

Gwyn Hartung 5:18

Yeah, for sure. Um, so out of all of this, I'm sure you've had a lot of challenges, but what is the biggest challenge that you've had to overcome with online learning?

Camryn Blackmon 5:32

I think the biggest challenge has honestly been my own mental health. Like before the pandemic, like I've always had anxiety and depression [unintelligible] and taking medication for that. And it was manageable before and I think it helps to go like in-person. And every once in a while, I would have to ask for, like, extensions, but it was really rare. Like I had a good control of everything. But once we shifted to online and there's just so many changes, and like I said earlier, it was still uncertain with like the climate here. So I suffered a lot with my own productivity. And I think there are days where I wake up, and I don't want to do anything, because part of me is like me "we're in a pandemic, why should I write an essay right now?" I just, you know, I say, I kind of think my, my hurdle is like myself my own, like mental health and kind of depression. And like how I've been coping, so I've been trying my best, using a lot of days it's hard to like, want to be students when you're kind of struggling to be a person.

Gwyn Hartung 6:41

Yeah, no, I totally understand that. Um, so if this is how classes are going to be for, at least probably the next semester or so, how are you going to manage things? Are you going to do anything differently next semester? Or are you just going to keep chugging along as best as you can?

Camryn Blackmon 7:04

Really good question, because I think next semester probably will be online or maybe hybrid. So I know that campus is open and they've been really good about like, facilitating, like getting people's symptoms, and when you go into certain areas and take your temperature. So I think I have to make myself go work on campus at least once or twice a week, just to like, get out of like, the surroundings I'm in every day. I think because I get like, it's kind of hard to stay productive in like one state. I think I also make myself a strict schedule. I know, everyone, all my mentors and stuff have been telling me, advisors, they're like, strict scheduling, get out of bed, work when you can. But I think I'm still in the state of like, the newness of COVID, and the strangeness of it all. But I guess once it's going to really become our new normal, I just need to like adapt to that and be strict with how I am as a student.

Gwyn Hartung 8:01

Yeah, no.

Camryn Blackmon 8:02

Yeah, like a structured schedule.

Gwyn Hartung 8:04

That's something I definitely need to do too.

Camryn Blackmon 8:07

Yeah, it's like I do not have that.

Gwyn Hartung 8:09

So, um, is it safe to say that you probably prefer in person classes as opposed to online classes?

Camryn Blackmon 8:16

Definitely prefer online. I just think there's so much more you get from it. The participation, and professors have tried so hard with breakout rooms, but it's not the same, it is really not the same. And I think everyone's going through so many different things that no one wants to participate right now.

Gwyn Hartung 8:34

Yeah, for sure. No, I, I've noticed that especially this time of year, it's, you know, we're nearing the end of the semester, and everyone's just like, trying to get done.

Camryn Blackmon 8:45

Yeah.

Gwyn Hartung 8:46

Um, how do you stay sane and not overload yourself? What do you do for fun?

Camryn Blackmon 8:52

Um so for fun lately, so my family of six cats. I live with my family. We had four before the pandemic, but during we found these two stray cats, and my dad fell in love with them, so he kept them; now we have six. But honestly, that has kept me sane because I can take a break and play with them or sometimes they take breaks, they fall asleep on me. And so it's like, "Okay, I guess I'm going to sit there too." But like I said, I occasionally try to go house like pick up a little coffee just to drive and like, or possibly go to Target. Or I've been trying to go to campus every once in a while, trying to get out of my house and like semi socialize.

Gwyn Hartung 9:40

Yeah, no, those are all great things. I have four cats myself so...well- [unintelligible] So I love cats. So out of all of this, a lot of it was unexpected, I think, but what's one thing that you were really surprised about when it comes to online learning, good or bad?

Camryn Blackmon 10:01

Um, one thing I was surprised about is that I feel like most of my classes are, it feels like more work. And I've talked about it with other students from other schools and other like years and they've been noticing things differently, they feel overwhelmed no matter what major school they're from. They talked about how they feel like it's more like busywork. Like it's so many discussions posts, more like written assignments we wouldn't have before or in person. Or that professors have tried to get us to do like, group projects. And that's just like, you can't really meet in person. But you know, that's harder, so I think I'm kind of surprised by the expectations that some professors had on students during the pandemic. So quite a few there's been really

flexible and kind, but then there are others say, like, “can you try to exercise?” I've had that a few times, like, um, but yeah, I've been most surprised by that. And I guess, positive is that I kind of have more time for myself. I used to be very, like involved with everything. I have, like an internship work study. And so I was never home. Like, I'd wake up super early and grab something like a banana. But now I can actually like make breakfast. So there's like some things in my life that slowed down in a positive way. But then there's also like, the negative parts that like, you know, they battle each other.

Gwyn Hartung 11:33

For sure, for sure. It's always good to have some pros and cons with everything, I think. So3, thank you so much for doing this oral history. I really appreciate it. Um, do you have any questions for me?

Camryn Blackmon 11:46

No, I'm good. I hope I helped give you good stuff.

Gwyn Hartung 11:49

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, no, this was great. If you do have any questions, just like shoot me an email or something later, but now we'll stop recording and switch over to you.