Invisible Labor & Emotional Labor of TAMU Faculty During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Student Perspectives

Lawren Lee Walker (RISE Fellow)
Benyt Hagler (TAMU Undergrad, Psychology)
Dr. Cynthia Werner (Anthropology/ADVANCE)
Presentation Overview

● Key Concepts
● Introduction
● Research Question
● Objectives
● Methodology
● Common Themes
● Conclusion
● Limitations
● Suggestions for Future Research
● References
Key Concepts

- **Invisible Labor**
  - Unrecognized and uncompensated work that faculty and staff perform in addition to regular job responsibilities
  - Unacknowledged in performance and promotion evaluations
  - Work that underrepresented faculty members are disproportionately called on to do by virtue of that status
  - Ex. Mentoring students who see aspects of themselves in their professors

- **Emotional Labor**
  - Effort that goes into managing one’s personal emotions and appearing “professional” while interacting with others in a work setting
  - Includes emotional burdens of coping with daily microaggressions that disproportionately impact women faculty and faculty of color
This project is an extension of an ADVANCE research project that looks at how COVID-19 is having differential impacts on scholars at Texas A&M.

Both student researchers have been working as research assistants on that project, in addition to conducting their own related research project.

Note: The ADVANCE Covid-19 research project is generously funded by:
- the TAMU School of Innovation,
- the TAMU Office for Diversity, and
- the College of Liberal Arts.
Research Context

United States:
- Greatest number of cases & fatalities; nearly the greatest number of cases/population
- Political chaos in 2020; politically polarized views on risk-reduction methods and vaccines

State of Texas:
- One of 4 states within the U.S. that fully opened public schools in the fall (allowing parents the option of sending kids to school)
- Other state policies are fairly risk-tolerant, relative to other states
- High # of COVID-19 cases & deaths, with Texas surge during Fall 2020, but about average when it comes to # of cases/population

Texas A&M University:
- Enrollments held steady.
- Budget impacts are not as severe (as other colleges/universities)
- Campus re-opened for classes in the Fall with ~50% of classes in person, and never closed.
- Students could opt to learn remotely; some instructors did not have the choice to teach remotely.

COVID-19 is experienced differently by region and by institution.

Texas A&M University, the State of Texas, and the United States serve as the context for this study.

Each of these geographic locations influence how scholars at TAMU are impacted by COVID-19.
ADVANCE COVID-19 Research Project
Insecurity and Inequality in Academia:
The Differential Impacts of COVID-19 on Work Conditions and Work-Life Balance among the Texas A&M Academic Community

1. **Existing Inequalities & Insecurities**
   - Work-Life Balance
   - Climate and Retention
   - Structural Inequities (Power & security)
   - Invisible Labor

2. **COVID-19 Pandemic**
   - Public Health Crisis
   - Shelter-in-Place & Social Distancing
   - Regulations on Travel & Work
   - Economic Impacts

3. **Work From Home**
   - Switch to Remote Teaching
   - Research Disrupted
   - Work from Home Environments Differ (caretaking roles, technology, space)

4. **University Response**
   - Keep Teaching Resources
   - Tenure Clock Extensions
   - Soft Hiring Freeze
   - Fall: Hy-Flex Model
   - Budget Cuts

5. **Differing Individual Impacts**
   - Exacerbate Existing Inequalities
   - Increase Insecurities (ABD & APT)
   - Intersections with Gender, Race, Ethnicity, etc.
Focus on “Vulnerable” Groups

Future Faculty: Post-Docs
Concerns include disruptions to research, job security w/ cuts to federal grant programs, & the future job market.

FF: Graduate Students
Concerns include disruptions to research, university funding prior to graduation, & the future job market.

Tenure-Track Faculty
Concerns include research productivity, impact on teaching, work-life challenges.

APT Faculty
Concerns include job security, continued importance with shift to remote teaching & threats to enrollments, etc.
Relationship Between the Advance Study & Student Study

Advance Study
- Participants: Faculty, Postdoctoral scholars, and Phd Students
- Impacts of COVID-19 on scholars & differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, & caregiver status.
- The responsibility of faculty to educate students.
- Increase of invisible and emotional labor.

Student Study
- Participants: College Station - TAMU students
- Impacts of COVID-19 on students lives & education.
- Main objective as a student is to learn effectively.
- Decrease in overall mental health.
- Increase in overall stress.

Changes between the interactions of students and faculty due to COVID-19.
Detrimental changes in the learning environment & its effects on faculty and students alike.
TAMU S.G.A. Fall 2020 Student Survey

**Impacts**

- Inequalities
- Concerns about LGBTQ+ students
- Contraction of COVID-19
- Mental Health
- Ability to learn in this new context

---

**Did your academic performance worsen in the fall 2020 semester? (Select any factors, if any at all, that contributed)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Fall 2020 [n=2,144]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, increased anxiety or stress</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, COVID-19</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, increased academic workload</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, my academic performance did not worsen this fall semester</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, current events</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, personal or family mental health concerns</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, personal or family heal concerns</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, economic burden</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, other reasons</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Questions

1. How have TAMU students adapted to the new learning environment?

2. How have the impacts of the pandemic on their lives affected their experiences as a student?

3. How have students viewed the university’s approach to the pandemic?
Objectives

● Expectations of Results:
  ○ Students will perceive an increase in the invisible labor and emotional labor among faculty and staff, especially among some demographic groups.
  ○ All students’ overall experiences will be negatively impacted.

● What We Hope to Gain:
  ○ Information that could be passed to administration to benefit students, faculty, and staff.
### Interview Respondents (18 students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Class Level</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 2 Black</td>
<td>- 1 Freshman</td>
<td>- 10 Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 5 White</td>
<td>- 1 Sophomore</td>
<td>- 8 Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 3 Hispanic</td>
<td>- 9 Junior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2 Asian</td>
<td>- 3 Senior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Multiracial</td>
<td>- 4 Grad/Professional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 5 No Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods and Procedures

**Recruitment**
- Convenience sampling
- Recruited via social media

**Questionnaire**
- Approximately 20 questions
- Google Form

**Interviews**
- 45 mins - 1 hr long
- Conducted via Zoom
## Methodology

### COVID-19 Research Project: Interview Questions

This project examines the impacts of COVID-19 on individual scholars given changes in the organizational context of work, taking into account the differential impacts that are likely to occur along the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, caregiver status, discipline, and appointment status.

**Clases**

I’m going to ask you a few questions about your experiences with classes that you were taking.

1. How many classes were you taking during the Spring 2020 semester?
2. Prior to the pandemic, how would you characterize your semester? Was your overall load of courses about average, or was it a “bare” or “easy” semester for you?
3. Where were you when you first heard the news that Texas A&M would not resume classes in person after spring break?
4. What was your first reaction?
5. When Texas A&M announced that classes would be online for the rest of the Spring 2020 semester, what plan of action did you take? Did you change your living situation (i.e. return to live at home w/ parents)?
6. What were your classes like after Spring Break?
7. Do you feel that the pace of your classes changed after spring break?
8. Did you have any classes in the spring that were not well suited for online instruction (such as lab classes)? If so, what was that class like?
9. How did your workload as a student change after spring break? Do you feel like you needed to spend more time studying? Or less time?
10. Were you able to spend as much time as normally did or would have liked to on your studies once classes moved online?
11. How was your academic performance in the spring semester? Do you think you did better, worse, or consistent and why?

### The effects of COVID-19 on Personal Stressors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description (optional)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How have your finances been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? (0 being most negatively, 7 being most positively)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most negatively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most positively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has your academic career been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? (0 being most negatively, 7 being most positively)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most negatively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most positively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have your familial relations been affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (0 being most negatively, 7 being most positively i.e. quality time spent, familial bonding, sense of connection)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most negatively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most positively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has your mental health been affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (0 being most negatively, 7 being most positively)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most negatively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most positively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classes
I'm now going to ask you a few questions about your experiences with classes that you were taking.

1. How many classes were you taking during the Spring 2020 semester?
2. Prior to the pandemic, how would you characterize your semester. Was your overall load of courses about average, or was it a "hard" or "easy" semester for you?
3. Where were you when you first heard the news that Texas A&M would not resume classes in person after spring break?
4. What was your first reaction?

Professor Interactions
I'm now going to ask you questions about interactions with your professors during the pandemic.

1. Did you feel that you had at least one professor that you could trust and rely on if something happened to you or a family member?
2. Do you think that your professors as a whole did a good job making the transition to remote learning in the spring and fall? Why or why not?
3. During the spring semester, did your professors provide any extensions or changes to your assignments and/or syllabus?
4. Before the pandemic, did you regularly talk to your instructors after class and/or visit their office hours to ask questions or get help with the class?

Housing
Now I am going to ask you some questions regarding your housing situation before and during the pandemic.

1. Before the pandemic, were you staying on campus, living off campus, or living at home? (Did you have any roommates?)
2. After the university announced plans to finish the semester online, did your living situation change? Did you move home? If you had any roommates, did they move home?
3. What was the environment like at your place of residence after spring break? Were there any distractions or interruptions that affected you academically?

Other Responsibilities
Now I will ask you some questions about other responsibilities that you had outside of classes before and during the pandemic.

1. What was happening in your life before the pandemic?
2. What was happening in your life after the pandemic?
3. Did you have to take care of any parents, siblings, or other family members?
4. Has your family been impacted in any significant ways by the pandemic?

Accessibility
Now I want to ask you a few questions about your access to resources for remote classes.

1. When classes were moved online, did you have access to the materials that you needed for class? For example, a computer and/or a stable internet connection?
2. Are you an international student? If so, what was the transition like for you during Spring 2020?
3. Prior to the pandemic, did you require any special accommodations to meet your learning needs? If so, were your instructors able to offer these accommodations after the switch to remote teaching?

Overall Experience
I am now going to ask you some questions about your overall experience in the Spring semester during the pandemic.

1. When did you first hear about the coronavirus?
2. Did you ever think that the coronavirus would impact you? If so, when?
3. If you're okay with sharing, have you contracted COVID-19 before?
4. If so, did you tell your professors, and what was their response?
Common Themes

All participants felt that they had to “teach themselves.”

44% of respondents became a caretaker after COVID-19.

Perceived increase in workload and extra assignments.

100% of students faced a lack of motivation to continue school.

Students felt that most professors became more lenient.

All respondents had favorable views towards TAMU’s response to COVID-19.

89% of respondents had to return home.
Students’ Overall Experiences

The effects of COVID-19 on Personal Stressors

How have your finances been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? (1 being most negatively, 4 being neutral, 7 being most positively)

23 responses

0 (0%)
1 (0%)
2 (26.1%)
3 (30.4%)
4 (26.1%)
5 (8.7%)
6 (0%)
7 (8.7%)
How COVID-19 Affected Participants Personally

- Meeting New People: 82.6%
- Quality Time With Friends/Family: 82.6%
- Participation in Organizations: 69.6%
- Extracurricular Activities: 65.2%
- Sports Events: 43.5%
- How You Make Your Money: 39.1%
- Internships: 30.4%
How COVID-19 Affected Participants Personally

- Aggie Ring Day (including festivities) - 26.1%
- Graduation (including festivities) - 21.7%
- Live/reside Where You Desired - 21.7%
- Research Opportunities - 17.4%
- Finished Degree as Planned/Desired - 17.4%
- Ability to Study Abroad - 13%
- Maintaining an On-Campus Job - 8.7%
Students’ Mental Health Experiences

How has your mental health been affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (1 being most negatively, 4 being neutral, 7 being most positively)

23 responses

- 1: 3 (13%)
- 2: 6 (26.1%)
- 3: 7 (30.4%)
- 4: 6 (26.1%)
- 5: 0 (0%)
- 6: 0 (0%)
- 7: 1 (4.3%)
How has your academic stress been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? (1 being most negatively, 4 being neutral, 7 being most positively)

23 responses

- 1: 4 (17.4%)
- 2: 8 (34.8%)
- 3: 5 (21.7%)
- 4: 2 (8.7%)
- 5: 3 (13%)
- 6: 0 (0%)
- 7: 1 (4.3%)
How have your familial relations been affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (1 being most negatively i.e. more disruption, fighting, poor communication, etc., 4 being neutral, 7 being most positively i.e. quality time spent, familial bonding, sense of connection)

23 responses
Support Given By Texas A&M Faculty & Staff During COVID-19

From March of 2020 (i.e. the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic) until the present, which of the following individuals have you talked to about the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on your personal life?

15 responses

- professor(s): 10 (66.7%)
- advisor(s): 6 (40%)
- teaching assistant(s): 1 (6.7%)
- supervisor(s): 6 (40%)
- student-help resources: 1 (6.7%)
- trusted staff or faculty member: 7 (46.7%)
Conclusion
Positive Implications of Online Learning

“I think that the course that I enjoyed the most in terms of learning experience was an accounting course that I took and it was actually in person. We had to wear masks and sit apart from each other, but I just felt it was the best because our teacher was able to help us if we really needed her help on anything and she was very available every day that we went to class. We didn't have to set up a zoom call or anything.”

“I had a 3 hour class period with [one professor] and it was very well organized. Everything was planned in the syllabus, and at the beginning of class, we were given an outline of what would happen for that day. She wasn't lecturing the entire time, and she gave us a 10-15 min break. There were lots of discussion groups, breakout rooms, and projects, allowing us to be able to communicate with one another. It was more natural than a lecture, and I liked feeling more engaged during class.”

“I think I took a horticulture class this past semester. And I think I just enjoy that class because it's easier than any other classes I was taking, but also the professor was very interactive and he just like made things more fun and entertaining.”

“I was taking an online class. The professor remained engaged, utilized reactions and chat box functions heavily, and made herself very available through email, chats, and canvas. She made videos of her going through the PowerPoint, making the class a lot more manageable, especially because of the fact that zoom fatigue is real.”
Negative Implications of Online Learning

“The class I least enjoyed was delivered completely online, and I didn't even know what my teacher sounded like until the end of the course when we actually emailed him asking for more instruction. There wasn't really lectures that he posted he just told us to read the textbook, take the quizzes and then eventually take the tests, so everything was just not well put together. I feel as though we didn't really learn, we were just regurgitating information from the textbook.”

“The class I least enjoyed was not scheduled well. Zoom classes were often canceled at the last minute, and lecture videos would be videos found on Youtube rather than the professor's own work. The professor's lack of interaction/care for her students made it hard to learn the material.”

“I was taking a [dance] class last semester. You had to let him know you were going to be remote, which I did. He said because I was remote and I didn’t have a partner, I had to learn and record myself doing both the man and woman part. He was just very inconsiderate and did not try to find any solutions for me being the only one on Zoom.”

“I was experiencing the same thing I am right now a couple of semesters ago because the class is very vague. There is no interaction with the primary professor, and different lab TAs teach on different days. Now it's just chaos, and needs order.”
Due to COVID-19, the changes in the learning environment had a negative impact on students’ learning experience.

Changes to the overall student experience takes into account not only the universal disruptions to teaching effectiveness due to COVID-19 regulations, but also the individually experienced changes in caregiver roles, accessibility to resources for online learning, employment status, and living situation.

Most students were satisfied with TAMU’s response to COVID-19.
Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

- 18 Interviews (College Station campus)
- Conducting all research over an online platform was difficult
  - Communication with co-researchers
  - Communication with interviewees
- Convenience sampling
- Missing international student participants
References


Kate Power (2020) The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families, Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 16:1, 67-73, DOI: 10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561


Funding

We would like to thank the following units for their support of this project:

- Department of Multicultural Services
- TAMU School of Innovation
- TAMU Office for Diversity
- College of Liberal Arts
THANK YOU!

For Your Time