5-7-2020

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences_CMJ 420 SL Health Communication & CMJ 466 SL Narrative, Performance, and Social Change_COVID-19 Response

Liliana Herakova
Hello,

I wanted to share with you some COVID-19 related work we have been doing in two service learning courses in Communication and Journalism. I hope I am not too late with this, as I really want to recognize students’ amazing efforts in these two classes! I am just so proud of them, their dedication, perseverance, and creativity! I welcome suggestions for recognizing their work beyond our classroom & I will be very grateful to get a confirmation that you have received this message.

**CMJ420 SL: Health Communication**

Each week, we integrate the course's topical focus with COVID-19 related news and resources - for example, we explored the role of communication in developing and enhancing health literacy through this multilingual project; when discussing communication on healthcare teams, we focused on an LA Times article about inequitable access to PPE, sick leave, and hazard pay among healthcare workers; students reflected on health disparities as they play out on such teams and what that communicates about professional socialization, decision making, and hierarchies within the healthcare system. **This kind of integration has been preparing students to shift the focus of their service learning projects and I am so proud of the work they are doing, using principles of supportive communication, relationship-centered care, de-stigmatization, and communicating wellness at work.** Since the beginning of the semester, all teams have been focused on addressing a health issue in our community via (re-)shaping communication channels, processes, messages, and narratives. But since the announcement of the pandemic and our varied personal experiences with it, the focus has shifted entirely on COVID-19 related support. Two of the teams in the class are working with a local respiratory clinic to assist their transition to telehealth and to increase access to these services to their patients, almost all of whom are high-risk (due to pre-existing respiratory illnesses), mostly rural and elderly. These students are working on developing and distributing different information materials and support for accessing telehealth services to rural patients throughout Maine. One team is collaborating with the Mabel Wadsworth Center and Partners for Peace on "kitchen table conversation" card game on topics of relationship and sexual health. The idea is using the game during "quarantine" in both physical and virtual spaces to enhance knowledge and understanding of healthy relationships and resources in the area. The last team in the class is developing a social media resource (blog) that provides informational, instrumental, and emotional support to fellow UMO students during this time of uncertainty. All of the teams' work is research-based and developed in close partnership with community organizations. These organizations have already stated that they are immensely grateful for the opportunity to work with students - not only because of the "products" students are developing, but also because of the questions they ask, the experiences they share, and the ideas they discuss. This is helping our community partners think deeply about the care they provide and the role they play in the larger Bangor area.

**CMJ466 SL: Narrative, Performance, and Social Change**

The persistent goal of this course is for students to work with narrative and performance approaches to research in order to collect and present community stories as way to incite dialogue and meaningful local changes. This semester we were partnered with an Orono-based organization, named Operation Breaking Stereotypes (http://www.operationbreakingstereotypes.org/). Students had a chance to work with middle-schoolers and town officials from Indian Island, Old Town, and Orono. The purpose of our project was to collectively develop a narrative performances exploring our varied connections to these local communities and the meanings of "place" in Maine. We had hoped this would be an inclusive piece to support conversations around Maine's history and present in relation to the state's bicentennial celebrations. Clearly, all this was upended by changes related to COVID-19 that affect all of us and particularly students and their families who might be in vulnerable situations. In response to this, we integrated weekly narrative exercises around how experiences with the pandemic are changing our relationships to places and communities. Unfortunately, we were not able to sustain our regular interactions with middle-schoolers, but students in CMJ 466 had already learned so much vulnerability and openness from our collaborations earlier in the semester. They are developing different creative expressions of how their relationship with places have change and we plan to share those with the middle-schoolers and the townspeople in hopes they can inspire their own reflections and further conversations about what makes resilient and inclusive communities in these times. Students have developed
blogs/web sites (e.g., https://sites.google.com/view/466individualproject/home?authuser=0), song renditions, scripts and videos, and multimedia journals (such as the one linked HERE). I am only including student work for which I have received permission to share at this point. I want to note that this work reflected "documenting" over the past few weeks and one of our goals was to "keep it simple and true," so that people of any ages and circumstances can see it and see themselves opening up to creativity and sharing stories during the pandemic.

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Lily L. Herakova, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor & Teaching Coordinator ~ Communication & Journalism
Affiliate Faculty ~ Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Faculty Advisor ~ Lambda Pi Eta Honor Society
University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Monday mornings, usually a chaotic time in the Davis family household. On a typical Monday my sister and I are fighting over the bathroom and my mum and dad are getting ready to leave for work. Now our Mondays have become Sundays. We no longer wake up to our alarms, our home has become a sanctuary of our isolation. For the first time in my life my house has felt like a home. Throughout my life my family would buy and flip homes. We would live in the renovated home for 2-3 years then find a new project. We moved into our current home 3 months before I left for college. I no longer know how long I will be home for. Over the past 3 years this could be the longest I will be home. My Family watch the news every night for Covid 19 updates, we watch in sorrow from our beautiful home as some people do not have adequate ways to isolate. Social distancing and isolation is a privilege. A privilege we take for granted. I have never spent much time in my house, it has always just been a place to live. With every move my room has remained the same. Never changing, only being rearranged to fit the environment. It is not surprising I find comfort in my room. Now everyday is an re-arrangement. My room is a collection of my childhood.
Ursula Le Guin

comments on the human

nature to collect things we admire

or desire into a bag to bring home. In a

way my room is my bag, showcasing all

my treasures I have obtained throughout

my life. I have sports medals dating back

to grade 2, my Barbie blanket and

stuffed dog I have slept with since I was

8, and the "when life gives you lemons"

canvas above my bed my that my mum

painted when I was born. No matter

where we moved, my room remained the

same. My room was my home. Now, as I

spend more time in my home, I am finding

myself feel more comfortable and at peace

in each space. No longer feel like a

stranger in my own home. I am

thankful for my home during these unknown

times. It has provided a place to protect

my family and from sickness, while

providing luxuries many people do not

have. A Monday morning where I would

usually drive to Starbucks to get my daily

coffee has turned into making lattes for my

family. With the espresso machine that I never

bothered to learn how to use. My Mondays

have changed, but for the better. My home has

changed from just a place, to a feeling of

love, peace and safety.
Since I was a little girl I have spent every summer at my cabin. I have spent countless hours building sand castles, riding bikes to the ice cream snack, and swimming until my fingers turn into prunes. My cabin friends are my family, we named ourselves the summer sisters. The beach will always hold a special place in my heart. However, now my family is unable to go to our cabin. My cabin is a special little piece of paradise. It is located in Washington State, but only accessible by boat or through Canada. It is a 20 minute drive from my home but separated. Due to COVID-19 the boarders are closed, and if they remain closed this could be my first summer away from Point Roberts in 19 years. Today my family walked our local beach, we can see our cabin in the distance but we cannot go. The beaches of Point Roberts are empty and untouched. While the beaches of Tsawwassen are crowded with outdoorsy individuals trying to social distance. I miss my cabin, I miss running barefoot through the streets, I miss sunset boat rides to the San Juan Islands. We are so close, but worlds apart. Walking the beach I follow the footsteps of others, an innocent habit I have had for years. But today it is different. We walk the beach in worry of 6ft apart, but idly walk in the footsteps of strangers. But as the tides come in, its wipes away all trace. I long for the days I can be at my cabin, but for now all I can do is walk 6ft apart.
WEDNESDAY
04/22/20

I woke up this morning to the rain. The heavy pitter patter, as it hits the roof outside my bedroom window. Raincouver, as the locals call it, are very accustomed to frequent rainy days. I arrived home on March 18, this is the first rainy day I have had since. Things are different though. I no longer have to walk to school with rainboots on foot and umbrella in hand. Once an everyday activity, I now sit in my kitchen with nowhere to go. My family's never ending collection of umbrellas remain untouched. There is nowhere to go but home, yet I do not feel trapped. I feel a sense of known in our new unknown. I watch the rain fall from the sky then flow down the streets. It is always safe to do nothing when it's raining. But now the nothing has a greater meaning. The nothing can change any minute, any hour, any day. Today my nothing is a puzzle. I have the fire roaring, kettle boiling. It almost feels normal. I am thankful for our rain. It brings peace to our storm. Now, the sun starts to shine, breaking through the clouds. Bringing light to the dark days. Each day brings something new, but sometimes we need a rainy day.

RAINCOUVER

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Today I decided to bake. I'm not sure if it was from seeing Lily bake or my cravings for something warm, gooey, and delicious. The title of the video also triggered an epiphany, the gathering bread. It reminded me of when I was younger and my 8 cousins and myself would go over to my grandma's house every Sunday for our weekly baking. I remember being 7 yrs old and trying to reach the counter on my tip toes as my grandma prepared the dough. I then remember, my grandpa placing a stool in the kitchen, so I could be a part of the action. Sundays, possibly the only day ever that all the cousins were well behaved and quiet. We would all sit and watch as she carefully measured out all the ingredients. Now, I realize we were performingative listening. Learning each recipe by heart, remembering each precise step, being able to create them for generations. But she was right, I now barley glance at her doctors handwriting recipe cards. They are engraved into my heart and soul. In my Environmental communication class we had Anthony Sutton talk to us about the power of food, and its ability to shape communities. My grandma held that power. She provided every dessert for every family gathering, creating family memories with every bite.
However, now I cannot see my cousins or my grandma. I have not seen them since Christmas and have no idea when I will see them next. We have weekly Facetimes with my whole extended family but it is not the same, I miss them and I miss our traditions. We have not had a baking Sunday with all my cousins in 5 years. As the years we grew older and outgrew our traditions I haven't given our lack of baking Sundays much thought until now. I stood in my kitchen alone, doing each step of the recipe by myself. The silence is peaceful, but I wish my grandma and cousins were here. I can picture my cousin Jacob dropping the egg carton, Ethan using salt instead of sugar, and Tyler always forgetting to preheat the oven. In this moment I want nothing more to be back in my grandma’s kitchen, eating freshly bake cookies with a glass of cold milk.
Today I went on a run, since I have been home running has become one of the only constants in my life. Before, when I was in Maine I would play field hockey everyday. Now I can no longer play the sport I love with the people I love in the state I love. Field hockey, a very running influenced sport, but I hate to run. However, I now go on runs to make the hours go by. Each day pushing how far I can go. Numbing the unknown. Running up and down the streets of my town for god knows how long. Today I ran through the farms. Not a usual route I take. Cutting down and through the blueberry fields. Each bush getting more full of violet berries as the weather stays sunny. A sign that summer is close. Tsawassen is known for their blueberries, boxes a stapple in every home. However, the fields were quiet today, the usually busy farms empty without their summer workers. Due to covid the farms cannot employ international workers who pick during the summer months. I reached 8 miles today but all I could think about was Summer. And how everything would be different. I craved to know our new unknown. I ran home in a cloud, wondering how each day would change going forward. I used to hate running until now. Now it provides a sense of control. Myself holding the power of exactly how long and far I go. Creating my own path and story.