

## **Community Feedback / University Professor Testimony**

### **1. How has COVID-19 negatively impacted your mental health as a professor?**

I am a professor at TWU. When we first went into covid lockdown last March, I was teaching a face to face, in person graduate methods course. I've taught this class for many years. They do a big group project, in which they conduct interviews with people in the community and then write a report as a group. The project is scaffolded so that each week they learn and apply new concepts and techniques. All of a sudden, I had to move my class online. I've taught online before, but never this course, so everything had to be set up from scratch. I could no longer do the major assignment, because my students could not go out and conduct interviews. This threw off my plans for the rest of the semester. So not only did I have to set up the technical side of things online, but I essentially had to redesign the rest of the semester. I then taught online in the summer and now in the fall.

I work entirely from home now. My husband is high-risk for covid, and the university generously is allowing faculty to decide whether or not to come to campus.

So how has this impacted my mental health? In a number of ways. First, there is no separation from work and home life. My desk and computer are in my bedroom and it is very difficult to get away from work. My teenagers are both doing school online, and my husband, who is also a professor, is teaching online. At the same time, it is very isolating. I miss my colleagues and my students. While we have lots of Zoom meetings, it is not the same. I miss my office, where I can close the door and work without interruption, or open the door and meet with people who come by. I miss having coffee with my best work friend.

There is something about Zoom that is exhausting -- I have seen some research that validates this. My students are struggling. One has lost four family members to covid. Two are high school teachers working on graduate degrees, and every time I talk to them on Zoom they start to cry from the stress. Students are scared and frustrated and lonely and I am asking them to read difficult readings and write intellectually, and most of them are simply not in a mental space to do that. That comes back on me - I have to be their cheerleader. I have to listen to them, empathize with them, and help them any way I can. But that cannot be a reciprocal relationship.

Mentally, I am not in the best place. I feel depressed and anxious. It is difficult for me to read and write and get my own work done because I am having trouble concentrating. I am having difficulty sleeping, and I know I am not getting enough exercise. I'm also worried I'm becoming agoraphobic -- I am so worried about catching covid that I feel anxious when I am around other people.

### **2. How did you realize your mental health was being affected? Was there a defining moment or did it happen over time?**

This has been a process over time. And I have ups and downs. Some days I feel fine and other days I just want to crawl in bed and watch TV.

### **3. What coping techniques, methods of recharging, and/or resources did you find helpful in dealing with the added stressors the COVID-19 pandemic has caused you as a professor?**

It helps me to get outside. My daughter and I walk around a lake near my house. Every Sunday I Zoom with my best girlfriends. And we vent about everything and have some good laughs. Another friend and I send each other funny political memes every day. I like to watch stand up comedy -- I use humor as a coping mechanism. Also, to be perfectly honest, I see a psychiatrist for professional help.

### **4. Reflecting on your personal experience, is there a message of hope you'd like to share with your fellow community members?**

We have been forced out of some of our routines and complacency, and there is some good there. We've adapted, developed new ways of doing things, had to be creative problem solvers. These are some things we can use as we come out of the pandemic

Pandemics don't last forever. If you look over time, there have been lots of infectious disease pandemics. The flu of 1918. Polio. They were awful and interrupted people's lives. And then they ended. This will end too. Every day, researchers are working to develop better treatments and a vaccine. We will probably have a safe, effective vaccine by the spring. I think we will get past this and come out stronger for it.