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Erin I. Hassett

University of San Francisco, ehassett565@gmail.com

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**eService-Learning During COVID-19: How Community-Engaged Learning Courses at the
University of San Francisco Responded to the Pandemic**

Erin Hassett

MPH Candidate 2021

School of Nursing and Health Professions, University of San Francisco

MPH 683 Integrated Learning Experience

Dr. Zahra Goliaei

August 13, 2021

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, universities and colleges had to transition their courses from in-person to online quickly. This switch to online learning heavily impacted community-engaged learning (CEL) courses because it meant that internships with community partners had to become remote as well as the coursework. The University of San Francisco (USF) requires their undergraduate students to take at least one CEL course during their four years there as a way to connect them to the school's Jesuit Catholic values, so pivoting these courses to a remote setting and keeping them available to students throughout the pandemic was imperative. This paper uses the Social-Ecological Model and thematic analysis of six interviews that were conducted by the Leo T. McCarthy Center at USF to evaluate how CEL at USF responded to the pandemic and the lessons that higher education faculty and administration can take into the future. The interview participants include course instructors, students, and community partners of both undergraduate and graduate-level CEL courses. The thematic analysis of these interviews resulted in five major themes: Openness to Learn, Adaptation and Flexibility, Guiding Values and Practices, Relationship Building, and Importance of Mental Health. Through evaluating these themes, this paper recommends that CEL instructors integrate mental health support into their courses, that universities expand CEL opportunities into online learning through eSL beyond the pandemic, and that universities and accrediting bodies reflect on how they can adjust their requirements to meet their students' needs in a post-pandemic world.

Keywords: Service Learning, Community-Engaged Learning, eService Learning, Higher Education, COVID-19, Social-Ecological Model, Qualitative Analysis, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

Service-learning (SL), also referred to as community-engaged learning (CEL), in higher education has been known for decades as a way to develop students' civic engagement, improve their cognitive development, and strengthen their self-esteem and interpersonal skills (Kuh et al., 2006; Wang & Calvano, 2018). Many universities, including the University of San Francisco (USF), require all undergraduate students to take at least one CEL course before graduation. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused most higher education institutions to stop in-person instruction and switch to remote learning. This meant that universities like USF that required CEL courses had to ensure those courses could adapt to remote learning and become eService-learning (eSL) courses. This switch brought a lot of aspects of CEL and course requirements into focus. The Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good (McCarthy Center) at USF interviewed faculty, students, and community partners who successfully made the switch to remote CEL to determine how they were able to adapt and what lessons they learned through this experience. This paper analyzed those interviews and compared them to the emerging literature to evaluate how USF CEL courses responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lessons they learned that higher education faculty and administration can take into the future.

Background

History of CEL

SL has been part of higher education since President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862, and the founding of the Cooperative Education Movement at the University of Cincinnati in 1906 expanded students' academic learning beyond the traditional classroom and laboratory setting. By 1942 there were 30 successful programs and after World War II there was a second

growth period of these programs that continued to nearly 200 colleges and universities by 1970 (Service Learning, 2015). CEL courses connect students with community organizations to work as interns while engaging in self-reflective coursework.

SL is rooted in the experiential learning theory which is made up of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Using this theory, Wang and Calvano (2018) found that the direct, hands-on experiential learning activities with community partners stimulate the four stages of the experiential learning cycle and exert a positive influence on student learning outcomes.

As a Jesuit Catholic university, USF strives to “distinguish itself as a diverse, socially responsible learning community of high-quality scholarship and academic rigor sustained by a faith that does justice” (USF, 2021a). CEL connects well with this mission because it helps to foster a socially responsible learning community. The main purposes of these courses at USF are to develop the students’ civic capacities, advance the public good, and help students better understand the course’s disciplinary content (USF, 2021b).

Remote Learning and CEL

While these courses are traditionally taught in-person at the universities with students interning in-person at their service-sites, they can also be taught remotely. eSL was originally designed for online students to improve engagement by requiring them to interact with others. While there was some emerging literature on its promise in relation to traditional SL, there was not a lot of focus on it before 2020. A systematic literature review on eSL research found that most studies focused on design and development of eSL and only two out of the 20 studies in the review focused on the impact of implementing online service learning (Marcus et al., 2020). There is still much more research needed to fully explore the impact of eSL courses and how

they compare to traditional SL courses; however, using eSL as a way to engage online students who may otherwise feel disconnected from their peers and instructors is promising.

Incorporating eSL into an online class can enhance student interaction, create project-based learning opportunities, increase student engagement through reflection, and develop interpersonal, communication, and empathic skills (Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). Therefore, during a time when most universities had to switch to online learning, eSL had a unique opportunity to shine as a way to connect with others while many people were feeling socially isolated.

Pandemic and CEL

Colleges and universities had to reimagine and adjust their course requirements and structures to accommodate public health and safety regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic and make all courses remote, which especially impacted CEL courses. In March 2020, most colleges and universities in the United States transitioned to online and remote learning to comply with regulations and guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local and state governments (CDC, 2020). Traditional CEL courses were significantly impacted because they required in-person community service with community organizations. As a result, they had to pivot to new online formats that still provided community-based learning opportunities (Alfaro et al., 2020). This pivot was important because providing pandemic responsive CEL courses not only ensured that students continued to receive the robust education and training opportunities their schools promised, but also because the pandemic has exacerbated health inequities that universities and accrediting bodies needed to help their faculty and members address (Domínguez et al., 2020). While some instructors decided to cancel their SL courses or assignments during the pandemic (Meija, 2020; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020),

others found eSL projects that not only allowed students to have fulfilling CEL experiences, but also addressed community needs that arose due to the pandemic (Brooks, 2020; Lewis & Strano-Paul, 2021; Prakash et al., 2020).

Social-Ecological Model and CEL

The social-ecological model consists of multiple levels that shape human behavior, addressing the impact of social context on the health behaviors of individuals and communities (Golden & Earp, 2012). This paper used the individual, relationship, community, and societal/systemic levels of the social-ecological model to examine higher education's response to COVID-19 (see Appendix A for a visual representation). The individual level is focused on how individuals were impacted by the pandemic in terms of adjusting to online learning and health. The relationship level looks at how interpersonal relationships were impacted by pandemic restrictions and how those relationships influenced how CEL courses responded to the pandemic. The community level explores both how community needs were impacted by COVID-19 and how CEL course instructors, students, and community partners came together as a community to respond to those needs. Lastly, the societal level, which this paper will also refer to as the systemic level, focuses on how higher education institutions, as an extension of society, responded to the pandemic in terms of their policies and leadership.

Individual Level

The individual effect of switching to remote learning is most clearly seen through students' reactions to the change and individual barriers to remote learning that some students experienced. Although none of the following articles specifically studied CEL courses, they still reflected the reactions and barriers of college students in a variety of different university courses.

One study surveyed 2,913 undergraduate students from 30 U.S. universities to see if their prior and current experiences of digital inequality were associated with their remote learning experiences. They found that students who reported greater financial hardship since the start of the pandemic experienced significantly more connectivity, device, and faculty communication challenges during remote learning and that having consistent, high-speed internet and functional digital devices was needed to develop remote learning proficiency (Katz et al., 2021). Therefore, COVID-19 exacerbated digital inequality for students that already had lower remote learning proficiency before the pandemic.

A study by Gillis and Krull (2020), in which they surveyed their own students on their reactions to their courses' transitions from in-person to online, found multiple barriers to the students' learning. 15% of students in Gillis's course were not sure where they would be living while the course was remote. 92.4% of students in both courses reported that distraction from being in a new workspace was a barrier to learning and 65.1% reported having no dedicated workspace. 81.8%, 77.3%, and 69.7% reported that they felt unmotivated, distracted, and anxious due to COVID-19, respectively. These barriers were much higher for marginalized students, with 84.2% of first-generation students reporting having no dedicated workspace versus 56.5% of non-first-generation students and 57.1% of nonwhite students being worried about personal finances compared to 31.1% of white students. Gillis and Krull recommended that instructors use techniques that increase the accessibility of interactive formats such as live Zoom lectures and discussions, drop-in office hours, and forums.

A Chinese study surveyed 867 undergraduate students about their academic workload, separation from school, fears of contagion, perceived stress, and health. The study found that academic workload, psychological separation from school, and fear of contagion were all

positively associated with perceived stress and negatively associated with physical and psychological health. In addition, perceived stress was found to be a key mechanism in the relationships between the three stressors and both forms of health (Yang et al., 2021). This suggests that addressing students' perceived stress may help reduce the adverse effects of that stress on their health.

A mixed-methods study by Biwer et al. (2021) looked at how bachelor's and master's degree students at Maastricht University in the Netherlands adapted to emergency remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted in May 2020 and 1,800 students completed a questionnaire on resource-management strategies and indicators of adaptation. The study found that the students could be divided into four types: the overwhelmed, the surrenderers, the maintainers, and the adapters. These four types of students responded to the switch to emergency remote learning differently and these categories could be used as a framework for future research on tailored interventions to help students adapt to online and remote learning. Both the overwhelmed and the surrenderers seemed less able to regulate their effort, attention, and time and reported being less motivated to study than before the pandemic. The adapters appreciated the increased level of autonomy and were more able to self-regulate their learning, while the maintainers remained relatively stable in their resource-management strategies.

All of these studies show that college students had to adjust to remote learning during the pandemic and their ability to do so successfully was determined both by external factors such as internet access, a dedicated workspace, and professor's instruction style, as well as internal factors such as perceived stress and resource-management strategies. Therefore, strategies for helping students on the individual level should address both of these types of factors.

Relationship Level

The next level of the social-ecological model is relationship. Switching from in-person to remote learning affected relationships because people had to find new ways to communicate and stay in touch when they couldn't meet in-person. In the Gillis and Krull (2020) paper mentioned above, they found that 86.4% of their students reported feeling unmotivated due to not being in person. 80.3% of the students had fewer opportunities for peer discussions in their other courses, although only 69.7% reported the same within Gillis and Krull's courses. This means that instructors are able to make their online courses more interactive and can help facilitate peer discussions to mitigate the loss of relationships. Katz et al. (2021) also found that strong human connections to instructors was needed for students to develop their remote learning proficiency, showing the importance of relationships not only for their own sake but also for building the students' learning capacity.

CEL courses can really help to build and maintain relationships because by definition they necessitate a relationship between the student and community partner at the very least. Brooks (2020) discusses how she originally made her course's service-learning assignment optional at the beginning of the pandemic but quickly realized that was a mistake. Many of her students had turned to digital service in order to find valuable human connections while still being physically isolated and nearly all of them used her service-learning assignment to, as she puts it, "reassert their own humanity by connecting with other people outside their home and reflecting on current social traumas". Building and maintaining relationships are so important in a time of crisis and uncertainty, and CEL courses are designed to strengthen relationships between all involved.

Community Level

The community is the next level in the social-ecological model. The COVID-19 pandemic in many cases exacerbated the needs of underserved and at-risk communities that adaptive CEL courses were able to respond to. The Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University noticed that the social isolation caused by the pandemic put older adults at a higher risk for adverse health outcomes, and therefore implemented a student-initiated service-learning project. 35 third- and fourth-year students who self-selected to participate in this elective provided weekly emotional support calls to geriatric patients under the direction of geriatric faculty members for two months. The calls facilitated authentic relationships with patients and provided patients with enhanced access to care during a period of restricted outpatient medical care. The course consisted of a remote orientation session, weekly virtual debriefing meetings, and a written reflection (Lewis & Strano-Paul, 2021). This is just one example of how universities can use eSL to respond to emerging needs of communities during a public health crisis. Not only were the students still able to receive community-engaged medical education, but the community of geriatric patients they served were able to receive the services and support they needed.

Veyvoda and Van Cleave (2020) provided examples and guidance for different types of eSL that can effectively address community needs remotely. They stated that 41% of college students are older than 25 years old, 26% are parents, 58% have work obligations, and only 13% live on campus, so opening service-learning opportunities to be virtual can allow students who may not have reliable transportation or who have other conflicts and commitments to still serve their community in unique and innovative ways. Aguilar (2020) also provided guidelines for teachers and professors to think about their systemic, organizational, and personal reactions to

the pandemic while centering their community's need for equity and empowerment. These guidelines include giving students "big picture" projects, embracing asynchronous activities, finding ways to connect with students and learn more about them, and foster opportunities for students to engage with ideas, develop agency, and connect with others in a playful manner. The article also included a Digital Equity Gap Survey and Interview Protocol that can be used by instructors or researchers to determine the technological needs of students for remote learning, because thinking about the needs of college students as a community during this pandemic is just as important as the needs of any other community.

Societal/Systemic Level

The last level of the social-ecological model is societal and systemic, and it can be used to address the university and accreditation leadership during a time of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) provided three best practices for academic leaders to follow in navigating the unpredictable adaptive challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those best practices are 1) to connect with people through servant leadership, 2) to distribute leadership by delegating leadership responsibilities to a network of multi-disciplinary teams, and 3) to communicate clearly with all stakeholders. The authors emphasized the importance of leaders with the flexibility and adaptive capacity to learn and evolve through the experience of navigating a crisis so they will be able to respond more effectively to future crises.

To be more specific about what universities and accrediting bodies can do during a pandemic, Domínguez et al. (2020) discussed different ways in which the American Psychological Association (APA) can encourage and lead its membership to enact systemic change and address social determinants of health during this unprecedented time. The authors are affiliated with the Departments of Counseling Psychology and Health Professions at the

University of San Francisco and focused on how the APA can support mutual aid organizations that benefit vulnerable communities, leverage the efforts APA psychologists have already made to ensure health equity and attend to the needs of marginalized communities, build capacity for multisectoral and interprofessional coalitions of health associations, health experts, and policymakers, and increase their participation in advocating for and prioritizing the physical and psychological health of communities whose lives are most endangered by COVID-19. The authors highlighted how marginalized and vulnerable communities are at higher risks of being negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of systemic issues in the United States that have led to major health inequities that the pandemic is exacerbating. They called for systemic change to address these issues.

Gaps in Literature

It is important to note that since the pandemic started in 2020 this is all emerging literature, and a lot of data is still currently being collected. Within the literature that has been published, there is not a lot of studies looking specifically at the effects of pandemic regulations on CEL courses; most of the literature looks at the effects of remote learning on students generally without looking at unique course types. Most of the emerging research also focuses only on student outcomes. There are very few articles that explore how the pandemic has affected university faculty and other higher education leadership. This paper's qualitative research addresses these gaps by exploring how the regulations and the switch to remote learning and work affected faculty and community partners as well as students in CEL courses at USF.

Methods

The Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good sponsors academic and SL programs as well as conferences and research to promote civic engagement and

ethical public leadership. It supports CEL at USF through nurturing community partnerships and providing resources for CEL course instructors. This paper draws on six semi-structured interviews conducted by the center as part of the USF MPH Applied Practice Experience internship. The study was developed through the collaboration of this paper's author and the director of Community-Engaged Learning to create an interview project that showcased CEL courses at USF that were responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendix B has the summary information on the conducted interviews. Four of the interviews were conducted as focus groups, with the aim to collect the perspectives of all of those involved in these courses: the course instructors, students, and community partners. All of the CEL courses were from USF faculty in partnership with community organizations. The participants were invited to participate in the interviews through the McCarthy Center and signed consent forms for the recorded interviews to be used by the center. All of the interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom. All participants received an interview guide (see Appendix C) ahead of time along with instructions for the Zoom meeting and each interview was around one hour long. This interview project and resulting qualitative analysis was part of the McCarthy Center's program evaluation process and therefore was exempt from IRB oversight.

Once all of the interviews were conducted, we performed a thematic analysis. The audio from the interviews was transcribed through Zoom's auto-transcription, which was then cleaned-up manually. We read through and coded the interviews individually, then convened to review the coding and come to consensus on the main themes and subthemes through thematic analysis.

Results and Recommendations

The thematic analysis found five overarching themes that were present in every interview. The five themes were "Openness to Learn", "Adaptation and Flexibility", "Guiding

Values and Practices”, “Relationship Building”, and “Importance of Mental Health”. As shown in Appendix D, these themes were informed by multiple subthemes, many of which connected to more than one theme.

Openness to Learn

All of the participants expressed a willingness and openness to tackle the obstacles that came with the pandemic restrictions and used the situation as an opportunity to learn and creatively problem solve. This openness to learn and to face the challenges of the pandemic as obstacles that could be overcome was a hallmark of all the CEL courses interviewed. This openness across all levels allowed these programs to pivot and adjust to the new needs and restrictions put on them.

At the individual level, students, instructors, and community partners each looked for ways to creatively adjust to the new situation and for lessons to take forward. One instructor (interview #6) stated that “We all always learn from something new, even when there’s the sadness and the loss in the hopes that we didn’t, didn’t get to realize, of what the other kind of class might have been.” A community partner (interview #3) expressed how one of the most important things was “just really understanding like going with the flow...everything was so new...so it was just like going with the flow.” While that sadness and loss is very real, being able to accept that and go with the flow of this new experience allowed the course instructors and community partners to work together to reimagine their CEL courses.

This openness to learn is also seen at the relationship and community levels, since in order to make these CEL courses work, the instructors, community partners, and students all had to be on board and open to making the internship and course work during the pandemic. The students especially needed to be open to learning during a public health crisis that in some cases

meant they were in high demand. One of the masters-level instructors (interview #2) remarked, “What an amazing opportunity to be an MPH student during this historic public health crisis that, none of us would have wanted them to have this opportunity, but how do we make the best of it to learn and to contribute.” Making the best of the situation was a common sentiment among the participants.

On the societal level, this openness to learn also means recognizing that this pandemic has shaped the training and possible career paths of current students in unique and unpredictable ways. Because this experience is still so recent, no one knows how the pandemic will affect students as they become trained professionals. As the doctoral-level instructor (interview #1) stated, “We all trained sort of very traditionally so we kind of have that knowledge, because we didn’t go through a pandemic when we were in our training...so we have a similar structure. We want to be innovative...it’s hard to push or we just don’t have the resources...but now we have no choice. You know, if anything, we have no choice. We have to make it work.” This is an unprecedented time, so traditional ways of teaching and training may not be appropriate for students during a pandemic.

Adaptation and Flexibility

Along with being open to new opportunities, the participants talked about how they all adapted to remote learning and remote work, and a major subtheme was realizing what they could cut out of their programs, what was not important. Because of the nature of the pandemic restrictions, all of the CEL courses had to become remote, so everyone needed to adapt to the new technology and the reality of working and learning from home. This was difficult for some on the individual level, as one student (interview #6) recounts, “it’s kind of different to have to do everything online and kind of set up your own hours so you kind of have to be more diligent

with yourself about making sure you have those hours and making sure you are kind of setting up a workplace environment.” This extra onus on the student to manage their time effectively and secure a good workspace can be a barrier to student-success that instructors should be aware of and work to minimize as much as possible.

On the relationship and community levels, the students, instructors, and community partners were able to work as a community to make these adjustments and support each other through the transition. As one instructor (interview #3) remembers, “We let go of a lot of stuff that we found out wasn’t that important. I know in one of my courses, for example, I would have asked teachers to write a paper describing their vision of classroom teaching and I realized we don’t need to write a paper...what new teachers need to do is to be able to articulate their vision, their philosophy, what’s important to them, and so now we have it as a podcast instead of a paper.” This flexibility and willingness to change assignments or other aspects of the course to fit the current needs and realities of the students and community partners was shown by a number of the participants.

At the systemic level, this adaptability meant in some cases adjusting the course or program requirements to account for the reality of the pandemic. One of the instructors (interview #2) explained that they “temporarily loosened up some of the normal guidelines and restrictions...I also created a temporary policy that can codify what changes we are allowing, including a little bit of flexibility on the hours for the students who did have an interruption.” These changes responded to the immediate need of students during the pandemic, but they also provided these programs a chance to reflect on their requirements and determine which ones were actually necessary and important.

Guiding Values and Practices

On the flip side of adaptation, the participants also discussed the main values and practices that they refused to change or compromise, important aspects of their programs that they held on to. One aspect that was not compromised on the systemic level in any of these programs was the CEL aspect. All of the instructors and community partners discussed the importance of keeping the CEL internships while adjusting them to keep everyone safe. As one instructor discussed (interview #6), “The internship class was always intended to be an internship, you know, doing it. So, I, that’s what I was most committed to keeping.” Keeping the integrity of the CEL course was very important for all the participants. Another guiding practice at the systemic level was adhering to accreditation requirements as much as was reasonable. One of the graduate-level instructors stated (interview #1), “we still have the minimum levels of competency that our students need to meet to get to earn their [degree], according to our accreditor.” It was important that the accommodations and changes made to the courses due to the pandemic did not completely remove all academic rigor, because universities are still expected to provide their students with a certain level of training to prepare them for their future.

On the community level, a major guiding value was continuing to provide support and services to the community, especially in this heightened time of need. One of the community partners (interview #4) explained that “we’re not going to stop doing outreach and organizing something...and then I think just we just, trying to use all the tools we could think of to stay in touch.” The commitment to the community was a driving force to make these CEL courses work.

In terms of the relationship and individual levels, keeping the fundamental aspects of CEL courses, especially human interactions, even if it was virtual, was vital to these courses’ success. The same community partner as above stated that “a lot of the fundamentals are the

same...the conversations happen over the phone or over Zoom, but how to walk through that conversation and build a relationship with the person you're talking to and to ask questions and listen and make tough asks of that person...they stay roughly the same." Whether the work was remote or in-person, the services being provided were mostly the same and the desire to help those in need was still there.

Relationship Building

The participants talked about the importance of nurturing their relationships between the university faculty and the community partners, and especially how important open and honest communication was throughout the pandemic. On the community and relationship levels, as one instructor (interview #4) explained, "Building relationships, building kinships is so important...we are building something, we are, you know, having this transformational experience that we're all coming collectively together to experience with one another." While the pandemic affected everyone individually in different ways, it also affected everyone collectively through shelter-in-place orders and resulting physical isolation. These CEL courses allowed people to connect to each other and continue to build relationships virtually during this difficult time.

On the individual level, coaching students to gain relationship building and interpersonal skills was one of the main purposes of CEL. One instructor (interview #2) stated, "What I tried to do was to coach students for having conversations with their preceptors about how they could help meet the emergent needs, sometimes that meant a significant pivot and that their internship suddenly focused on the COVID response. In other cases, it was having the interns pick up the slack for the agencies, areas that have their ongoing work that they were not able to address as they were responding to COVID." That effective communication is always important, but it is

even more so during a crisis when roles and responsibilities might need to change quickly and adapt to emerging needs.

Importance of Mental Health

Connected to the importance of open communication in relationship building, the participants also talked about the importance of being open about mental health and the extra strain and stress everyone was feeling due to the pandemic. Many teams talked about how they created space for supporting each other and for self-care. On the individual level, prioritizing self-care was regarded by most of the participants as very important and something many of them were working on, although many admitted it was difficult. One community partner (interview #3) recalled, “I really create a terrible habit of pushing my needs and things to the back...everyone is struggling and sometimes I tend to take on everyone else’s problem...There are some things, steps that I was taking in the beginning of the pandemic...I do plan on getting back to that because... I need to make sure that I am okay so I can help the kids that I work with.” Many participants echoed this sentiment, that they understood the importance of helping themselves before helping others, but actually putting that into practice was difficult.

On the relationship and community levels, having that open space where honest discussions about mental health can happen and everyone feels supported strengthens the community, which in this case is the community of students and their instructors and community partners. One student (interview #5) stated that “We had a lot of debriefing discussions over the course of the project to sort of check in on how we were doing mentally, physically, and just like in terms of the project. And I thought that was really helpful because just the semester in general has been very, very hectic.” Having these support systems like debriefing discussions provide

everyone with the space to talk about the issues they are having without judgement. These types of spaces can help give support to people struggling with their own self-care.

On the systemic level, one instructor (interview #1) discussed how university faculty could help support the mental health of their students, colleagues, and community partners more, “We have to be more understanding of [challenges] and more flexible, even in the way that we deliver our instruction...I am finding myself even more so making it a priority to really talk about self-care and really, really engaging in that conversation...the rigor of the program didn’t lend itself sometimes to kind of prioritize self-care or didn’t feel like it did...But now, more so is like you know, you really, we really need to think about how do we take care of ourselves, are you taking care of yourself?” Creating support for self-care on a systemic level could help everyone improve their mental health and destigmatize mental health discussions.

Discussion

Public Health Impact

Using the social-ecological model and the themes of openness to learn, adaptation and flexibility, guiding values and practices, relationship building, and the importance of mental health, I have developed the following recommendations to ensure CEL courses are responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic and any future public health crises that may require similar restrictions. Firstly, University instructors and faculty should attend to the individual needs of students and community partners, whether in terms of their internet access and workspace or in terms of their mental and physical health, as much as possible. One way to do this is for instructors to integrate mental health check-ins and support into their CEL course debriefings, reflections, and class structure. Instructors and faculty should work to build and maintain relationships throughout the pandemic, both the relationships with their students and with

community partners. Secondly, As the pandemic affects the health and wellbeing of many underserved communities, universities should work to meet the new demands of these communities by expanding CEL and SL opportunities to remote learning as an option beyond the pandemic. Lastly, on a systemic level, universities and their accrediting bodies should be providing effective leadership and guidance to their subordinates during this time of pandemic. They should reflect on their requirements and determine what is truly necessary for their students to complete versus what can be adjusted to fit students' needs.

Integrate Mental Health Support

In terms of individual CEL courses, instructors should integrate mental health support into their CEL course debriefings, reflections, and class structure. As both my interviews and the emerging literature has shown, the pandemic has affected people's mental health in many different ways, especially for students (Biwer et al., 2021; Gillis & Krull, 2020, Yang et al., 2021). Creating space within the class structure for mental health check-ins and support has allowed instructors, students, and community partners to be honest with each other and strengthened their relationships. That openness should not stop when the pandemic is over. Most CEL courses already have debriefings and reflections as part of their syllabus, so making sure there are prompts related to mental health and self-care should be easy to add. Another strategy that was used by one of the CEL courses interviewed was pairing students up into "check-in partners" and encouraging them to talk to each other outside of class. These partnerships not only help support mental health, but they also help build relationships between peers.

Integrating mental health support into CEL courses could help destigmatize mental health issues and help students both during a public health crisis and beyond. Creating safe spaces in CEL and other courses for mental health support will help reduce the stigma against mental

health issues and could help open up dialogue about student burn-out and what can be done to help minimize students' stress. Recognizing that different students respond differently to having to learn during a public health crisis (Biwer et al., 2021), instructors and community partners with student interns should be mindful of their students' mental health and work to support it as much as possible. University administration should also work to create a safe and supportive environment for their faculty and community partners as well as their students. The interviews showed that instructors and community members were dealing with a lot of the same stress students were dealing with, and some of them were neglecting their own self-care to care for their students' and communities' needs. Mental health support and discussion must include faculty and community partners' needs in order to fully destigmatize the discussion and support everyone.

Expand eSL Options

Universities should expand their eSL options beyond the pandemic because all of the interviews conducted in this study, as well as the emerging literature show that eSL can create fulfilling volunteer and internship opportunities for university students and the community partners they work with, especially when in-person service learning is not possible (Brooks, 2020; Lewis & Strano-Paul, 2021; Meija, 2020; Prakash et al., 2020; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). These opportunities should not be taken away once universities are able to reinstate in-person service-learning courses. For CEL courses that became remote due to pandemic restrictions, once in-person service learning is allowed to happen, they should have both options available and let students choose which version they want to participate in. The openness to learn and adapt that was displayed during this pandemic should not go away once things are able to "go back to normal". The lessons learned during the pandemic can and should continue long

after the threat of the pandemic has ceased, especially since no one knows when the next public health crisis may come.

Expanding CEL opportunities in universities to include remote work options could help address unique community needs, especially during a public health crisis. Having eSL options for university students, especially at universities that have a CEL requirement, will provide more opportunities for students to interact with communities in unique ways, as was shown in the article by Lewis and Strano-Paul (2021). Especially in times of public health crisis, having remote ways for students to help their communities is invaluable.

Reflect on Requirements

Alongside creating more virtual and remote opportunities for students, universities and accrediting bodies should reflect on their requirements and determine what is truly necessary for their students to complete versus what can be adjusted to fit students' needs. A number of interviewees talked about changes that their programs or accrediting bodies made during the pandemic to accommodate their students. While it may make sense to return to some of the original requirements after the pandemic, some past requirements may now be revealed to be unnecessary. Universities and accrediting bodies should set up evaluation studies to determine if the temporary changes to accreditation requirements due to the pandemic have any major impact on the skills and success of students and alumni.

It is also important to recognize that health professionals that received their schooling and training during the pandemic are having unique experiences that may not be able to be measured through an evaluation. These experiences will inform how they may respond to future public health crises throughout their careers. It will probably be a long time before we are able to understand the true impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on higher education, but for

students training to be medical and health professionals specifically, the increased demand for support among healthcare organizations put a premium on their skills and labor. CEL courses that were able to respond to these needs therefore provided students with very unique experiences while also helping their communities during a crisis (Lewis & Strano-Paul, 2021; London & Sanchez, 2020; Prakash et al., 2020).

Limitations

This study's qualitative research is limited because the interviewees were chosen through convenience sampling of who at USF had a successful CEL course during either Spring, Summer, or Fall of 2020. No one who canceled their CEL course due to the pandemic was interviewed, so that perspective is not reflected in this paper. It was also a very small sample size, and each course was unique, so generalizability is limited. Since the results of the thematic analysis may not be generalizable, the recommendations made in this paper may also not be generalizable beyond the USF community.

Next Steps

With this lack of generalizability, the most important next step is further research. More research should be done on CEL courses, especially on how these types of courses were impacted by the pandemic. It would be especially insightful for further research to look into why some CEL courses were not able to adapt during the pandemic. What are the different aspects of courses and universities that allowed some CEL courses to be adaptable while others were not? Further exploration into this question may help create recommendations and action plans that could be implemented by many different higher education institutions.

There should be a time of reflection by universities and accrediting bodies about which of their requirements are important to keep and which are not. The pandemic proved that deadlines

could be moved and required hours could be shortened, so reflecting on the purpose of certain requirements will help these institutions move forward in a post-pandemic world. USF has already started this process by encouraging their CEL instructors to focus more on the meaning of the students' experiences and less on the number of hours they complete (USF, 2021b).

Conclusion

As stated above, the gaps in literature that this study addressed were the lack of in-depth knowledge on how CEL courses responded to the pandemic and how course instructors and community partners were affected by the pandemic, since most of the current literature only looked at the effects of remote learning on students generally without looking at unique course types like CEL. The thematic analysis of the interviews conducted by the McCarthy Center resulted in five major themes: openness to learn, adaptation and flexibility, guiding values and practices, building relationships, and the importance of mental health. From these results, this paper recommended that CEL course instructors integrate mental health support into their CEL course debriefings, reflections, and class structure to help destigmatize talking about mental health issues and help students, instructors, and community partners during a public health crisis and beyond; that universities expand eSL options beyond the pandemic because remote options could help address unique community needs, especially during a public health crisis; and that universities and accrediting bodies reflect on which of their requirements are truly necessary for their students to succeed because health professionals that received their schooling and training during the pandemic had unique experiences which evaluations may not be able to fully quantify and account for. Future research is needed on CEL courses and how they were specifically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including researching CEL courses that were canceled due to the pandemic.

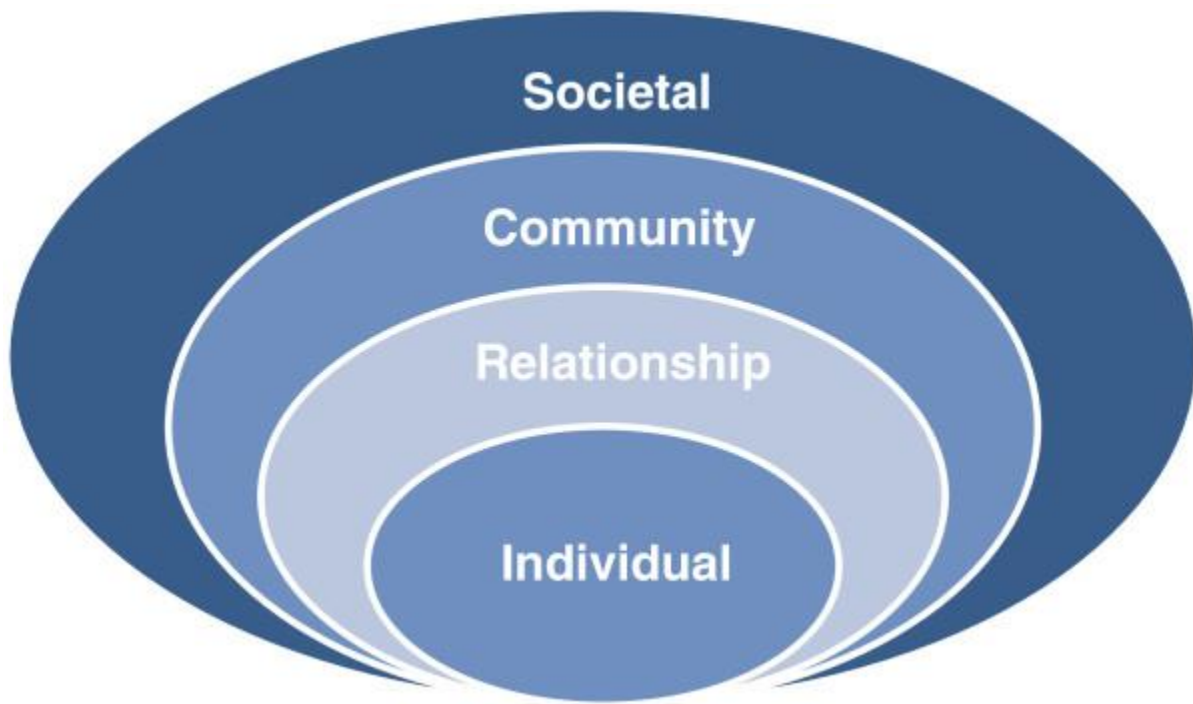
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Appendix A



Appendix A. Social-Ecological Model

Appendix B

Interview Group #	Number of Interview Participants in Group	Type of Participant(s) in Group	Degree Level of Program
1	1	Instructor	Doctoral Level
2	1	Instructor	Masters Level
3	3	Instructor, Student, Community Partner	Masters Level
4	3	Instructor, Student, Community Partner	Bachelors Level
5	3	Instructor, Student, Community Partner	Bachelors Level
6	2	Instructor, Student	Bachelors Level
Totals	13	6 Instructors 4 Students 3 Community Partners	1 Doctoral 2 Masters 3 Bachelors

Appendix B. Types of Participant Groups Interviewed

Appendix C

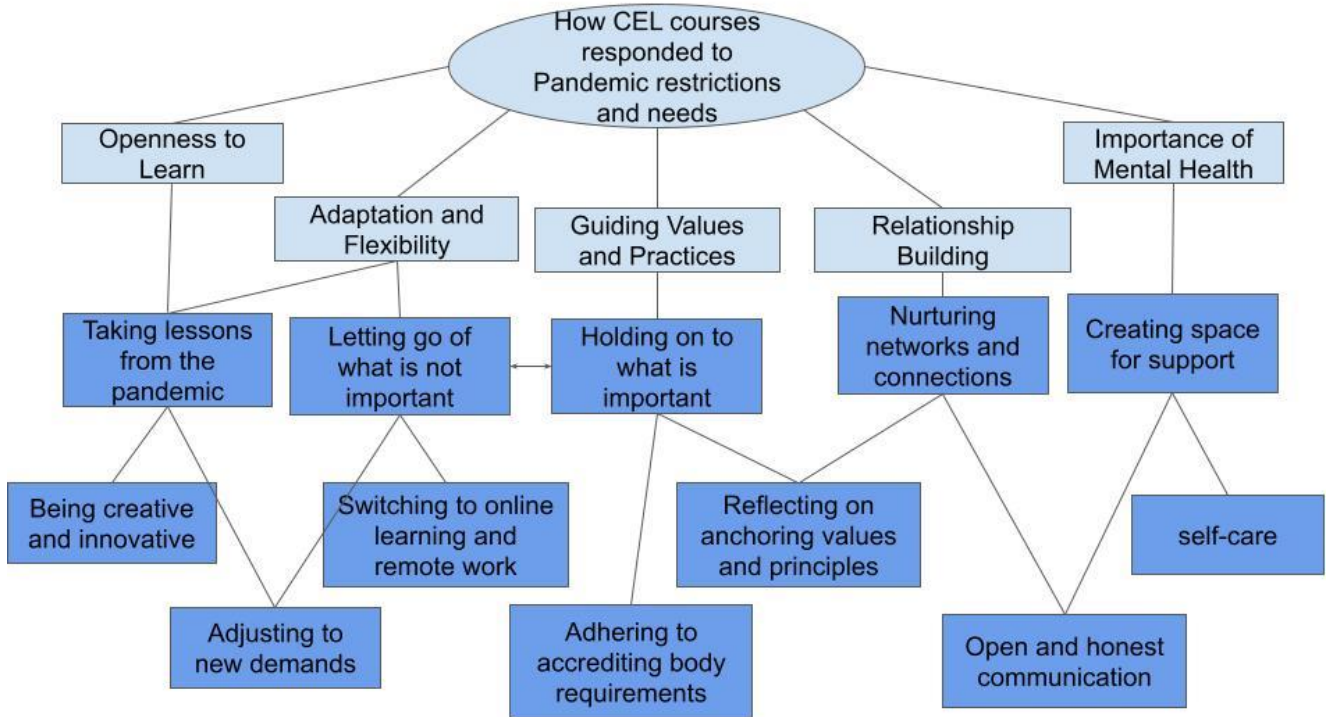
Interview Guide

Below are the questions that will guide our interview. Please feel free to review the questions so you have a sense of what we will be discussing and what your answers may be. This is meant to be a casual conversation, so there's no expectation that you prepare any talking points. We just want to give you a chance to reflect on your experience in light of the questions prior to the interview.

- What are your names, affiliations, and titles?
- Can one of you describe the community-engaged learning project/course?
- What role do each of you play in the project/course?
- How has the pandemic shaped or changed this project? (For example, did it illuminate new/urgent needs or areas of focus? Did it affect your capacity to collaborate? Did it affect the project details/timeline?)
- What aspects of the course/project have stayed consistent from before the pandemic?
- What new tools or methods have you developed for the project that respond to new needs from the pandemic?
- Is there anything you've learned from this particular project/course during the pandemic that you might not have otherwise learned in "non pandemic" times?
- How are you prioritizing or attending to your own mental and physical health, and the health of others, while participating in this project?
- What advice would you give to others in your same role who are taking on projects/courses during this time?
- What are aspects from this experience that you plan or hope to carry on in the future?

Thank you again for your participation in the Profiles Project, and please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Appendix D



Appendix D. Thematic map showing the connection between the themes (light blue) and subthemes (dark blue).

Appendix E

MPH Program Competency Inventory

CEPH Foundational Competencies

Competency	Why you feel it is relevant to your ILEX paper or presentation
Evidence-based Approaches to Public Health	
4. Interpret results of data analysis for public health research, policy, and practice	I analyzed and interpreted qualitative data from interviews to explore how CEL was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
Policy in Public Health	
15. Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity	I evaluated how USF CEL course policies adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.
Communication	
19. Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation	My main audience was university faculty and administration, and my secondary audience was community partners and university students.
Interprofessional Practice*	
21. Perform effectively on interprofessional teams	The interview project analyzed in this paper was developed through an interprofessional team.
Community and Public Health Practice Competency	
1. Apply qualitative methods to assess community assets for addressing public health and environmental issues	The interviews I conducted provide qualitative methods for assessing the needs of university faculty, students, and community partners in CEL courses during the COVID-19 pandemic.