

Fulbright Conversations | Episode 3, Teaching and Learning: Pandemics Transcript

00:00:03 Sam Thompson

Hello and welcome to the Fulbright Conversations Podcast: the show that brings together Fulbright alumni from both sides of the Atlantic to share their unique perspectives on some of the most pressing global challenges of our time. I'm your host, Sam Thompson, senior program manager at the US UK Fulbright Commission.

Today I'm excited to be speaking with two very special guests, Jessie Dubreuil and Jonathan Kennedy.

00:00:32 Sam Thompson

Last year, Jessie and Jonathan were paired up as part of the inaugural full right global Challenges Teaching award focused on pandemics. This collaborative award brings together pairs of teaching faculty, one at a US higher education institution and one at a UK higher education institution, to co-deliver a virtual exchange program for undergraduates between their two universities.

They did this using the collaborative online international learning method, also known as COIL, which is an approach that brings students and professors together across cultures to learn, discuss and collaborate as part of their class.

00:01:07 Sam Thompson

Jessie Dubreuil is the associate director for learning in the Teaching and Learning Centre at UC Santa Cruz. She is a faculty member in the writing programme. And at Merrill College, affiliated faculty in Global and Community Health and Faculty Fellow in UCS Global Classrooms programme.

00:01:23 Sam Thompson

Her co-edited volume, *Teaching Environmental Justice: Practices to Engage Students and Build Community* was published by Edward Elgar in late 2023.

00:01:42 Sam Thompson

Jonathan Kennedy is a reader in Politics and Global Health at the Centre for Public Health and Policy at Queen Mary University, London. He is also the Co-deputy Director of the Centre, and in 2023 his book *Pathogenesis: How Germs Made History* was published by Penguin.

accessible to many students. Could you tell us about how this COIL experience has impacted your students?

00:03:37 Jonathan Kennedy

00:05:55 Jonathan Kennedy

through the same kind of public health crisis and experienced many of the same things, but also in a very, very different way because of the differences in the US.

But I think more generally it was just fantastic for our students to have the opportunity to think beyond the world of biomedical sciences. You know, so to think about diseases in a much broader context, to take a step back. One of the great things I think was my background is more in sociology.

So I think very much about economic inequalities and how they impact health, and I think that's really important for students to think about. And then Jessie also adds all sorts of fascinating insights from her background as well, which I think really helped our students to begin to think about the problems that they see in a much more different way, a way that's much more grounded in the context that they live in.

00:09:20 Sam Thompson

I really want to delve into that a little bit more in terms of the educational approaches, but before I do, I just wanted to say how much I liked the idea of leaning into the discomfort of those initial interactions, because I do think that's such a really valuable part of any intercultural experience too.

But to return to your point, Jonathan, about bringing these different perspectives together, your research typically in the past has examined political and social impacts of pandemics and other public health problems. While Jessie, you've explored the rhetoric around public health and pandemics and how we write and remember these experiences, so both of you have approached this, I think, from an angle that's not just numbers and not just the science of how and why these things happen.

But I really want to get into why you think it's important to look at public health experiences and pandemics from such an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond the figures and the scientific facts of the event?

00:10:10 Jessie Dubreuil

Well, I think partly it's tempting to answer that question by going back to a couple of key terms that Jonathan's raising. And I think that disciplinarity so often such a great scaffolding for our approach to problems can also, especially in students, early careers represent the confining structure from within which to explore big questions.

And so when Jonathan's referencing the fact that this course not only brought together students from a variety of disciplines, but students of different ages and stages, dedicated premedical students on the path and in the case of UCSC students, largely aspiring global and Community health students in a brand new major on our campus, not necessarily decided yet in their pre health pathway, but interested in exploring the kinds of questions that might help them anchor themselves in a larger career path.

And when they came together, what we were partly doing was reminding them that they can and should speak from a place of disciplinary expertise.

00:11:14 Jonathan Kennedy

Building on your comments, I think one of the most impactful sessions that we had was when we were talking about our students, experiences of lockdowns and we framed that session by talking about The WHO definition of health, not merely the absence of disease and infirmity, but a state of complete physical, social and mental well-being, pointing out that things like lockdowns during the pandemic happened to stop people getting sick from disease.

But there were massive impacts to people's social and mental well-being, certainly, and it was really touching. Really fascinating sometimes, very sad to hear about the different experiences that our students had, and I think it was interesting as well to see them discuss those things.

00:11:58 Jessie Dubreuil

Drawing on the world of experiential and problem-based learning as we did, I appreciated the potential to really center students collaborative learning on the real-world problems and responses that came to them. I think it was exactly that kind of knowledge, the sort of home fund of knowledge that let them experiment and explore, take risks with frameworks for understanding this that they might not have without the wide-ranging course materials and their lived experiences of COVID built in. And students brought knowledge of the scientific, historical, and policy frameworks to the conversation and made those and considered them together.

But I think what felt most novel was that first-hand experience was elevated alongside the contextualizing background that we were bringing in from experts across disciplines.

00:12:46 Jonathan Kennedy

It was really interesting from my perspective as someone who's read during the pandemic enormous amounts about the different policy responses in different parts of

people from another culture and to see how our experiences were similar and in some respects different.

00:13:40 Sam Thompson

students educational lives, in the relationships they're building with others, it feels really meaningful that they would be a

larger policy or planning world that they will very soon have not just a choice but really an obligation to join.

00:26:49 Sam Thompson

I suppose changing tack slightly. Whilst the peak of the pandemic is over, many of the social impacts of COVID-19 are still present in our lives, in our communities. I suppose this is something that you would have both talked about with your students, but asked them to think about and their own responses, either to the simulated pandemic or to the pandemic. And these are things like societal experiences of loss and trauma, that mental health and isolation piece that you spoke to earlier, and the rise in conspiracy rhetoric.

So as we emerge from COVID, and it feels odd to say that even the increase in hospitalizations at the time of speaking, what do you think that we've learned and how do we ensure that these lessons aren't forgotten?

00:27:30 Jonathan Kennedy

So I think one major thing to consider is how we view the world in a really kind of fundamental way. So to me it seems like in many ways we're still stuck in the days of the Old Testament. You know, if you go back to Genesis and supposedly God created humans in his own image and then gave us Dominion over the natural world over the land, the seas and all the animals and fish. And still we think very much in this way. But what the pandemic has shown us is that actually the world isn't this kind of stage where humans play out their roles and the natural world is just some blank canvas.

Actually, we're living in part of a much bigger system, an ecosystem, and if we're going to live successfully on this planet, humans really have quite a minor role to play in this system. And so coming to terms with that and realizing that the pandemic wasn't something that happened out of the blue.

It's actually- when you look at the fact that there's more humans living on the planet than ever before, we're increasingly encroaching on animal habitats, the manner in which we are factory farming on an absolutely industrial scale, and the ease with which one can travel between distant parts of the world...this all combines to create a new Golden Age for infectious diseases. So although COVID is waning, hopefully, I think we have to prepare ourselves for the fact that it might not actually be that long until the next pandemic comes along.

We have to really focus on how we can build a society and a world that is resilient to the challenges that are going to occur in the next few decades.

00:28:59 Jessie Dubreuil

Yeah, I really love that, Jonathan. And I love the emphasis on resilience. I think that working in this way with students who've seen so much, but also have so much of hope to share about the future, you realize that one of the big takeaways for me is more about process, and if these students and others like them take away from an experience like this, not the code book or the answer to the next pandemic, but a way of thinking about the systems and the structures that define their local experience and the

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teaching, but of doing a great deal of learning, whether that was from each other or a new form of pedagogy, or from indeed your students as well, which just seems like such an incredible experience to have had.

00:34:21 Jonathan Kennedy

Thank you for having us and that's always a real pleasure to listen to Jessie. I always learned so much from talking to her and hearing what she has to say. So yeah, thanks to both of you.

00:34:30 Jessie Dubreuil

Oh, likewise Jonathan. And really leaving the conversation today and the whole experience with a sense of gratitude for the chance to be connected and the chance to continue in dialogue and relationship in such a special way.

00:34:47 Sam Thompson

That brings us to the end of episode three of our Fulbright Conversations series on global challenges. Don't forget to subscribe or follow us on your favorite podcast platform so you don't miss an episode.

You can learn more about the global challenges teaching awards by visiting our website www.fulbright.org.uk, and you can stay up to date with everything we're up to at the US-UK Fulbright Commission by following us on social media.

I'm Sam Thompson. Join us next time when we'll be discussing Media and Misinformation.