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ONLINE INSTRUCTION IN LARGE SCALE SPORT SOCIOLOGY COURSES: A COLLECTIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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Proem

This is our story of happy surprises and major but common pitfalls in teaching undergraduate students to engage in critical analysis of sport through two separate large-scale online sport sociology courses (KIN 142 and KIN 249) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Our story takes the form of four separate autoethnographies. Three instructors at varying stages in their careers as graduate students, and one faculty member, offer first-hand reflections - autoethnographies - (Denzin, 2009, 2010) composed of personal experiences. Our essay is not based on empirical research, although faculty training and ongoing development in online course design and teaching is influenced by such (e.g., Online Course-In-A-Box 2018; Kebritchi, Lipschuetz & Santiague, 2017; Crone, 2017; Miller, Cavanaugh, & Furr, 2018). Instead, the purpose of our autoethnography within is threefold;

1. To self reflexively consider what we each found useful (or not) related to online courses' teaching, learning and design;

2. To offer feedback to our and other institutions and online instructors to ponder while currently in the online course development process (see also Morgan, 2018); and

3. To highlight societal issues such as those related to labour, neoliberalism and communication. We offer this account as a bricolage (Denzin, 2010) of online education; in one sense, these autoethnographies are accounts of our ongoing discernment to be our best versions of ourselves as instructors.

Our essay provides some specific critique of our courses, reflecting on the role of the institution and the instructor as they complement and contradict each other. Each course is tuition generating and has enrolments of 750 students. Both are introductory survey courses in sports sociology; one concerns contemporary issues and the other modern society. Both courses were designed using Blackboard to be intensive – eight weeks – version of existing full semester courses. The courses incorporate multiple short reading reflections and discussion posts that ask students to reflect on their own opinions while simultaneously critically engaging with course material. Both courses utilise discussion groups to which individual graduate students are assigned as graders/markers for the entire semester. Discussion groups comprise between 25 and 30 students. Graduate students are hired as hourly workers and were assigned one discussion group per three hours of work per week (approximately), meaning a graduate student hired for 15 hours of work per week would be responsible for grading/marking five discussion groups. The faculty member, or in one case of KIN 249, the lead graduate student instructor was responsible for overseeing the graduate student graders as well as interacting with the enrolled students. Topics include hegemony, socialisation and authenticity, risk, violence in relation to masculinity and culture, racial inequality and social justice, and invention and tradition in relation to social nostalgia in sport, governmentality, and *agon* (contest). While one course was designed in 2010 and one in 2017, both were designed to be enduring, to the extent that digital technology can accomplish this. Importantly, the faculty who designed the courses chose not make use of video lectures or other live interaction options. As a result, the instructors and graduate student graders/markers interacted with students primarily through feedback on submitted graded assignments in a context in which both the student and instructor never meet.

In crafting this paper, it is evident that many of our struggles stem from instructional design choices at various levels, some of which were in our control and some of which were decisions made by our

department's leadership or other administrators at our institution. Also, teaching assistants are categorized as 'graders' and paid hourly, resulting in complicated ongoing labour negotiations at UIUC. If doctoral teaching assistants' funding percentage is calculated as 'grading' for less than 90 days, then the university does not have to fund tuition waivers for the students.

As three of us are graduate students, we are relative novices in a rapidly changing world of online education, for which we received little to no training in pedagogical approaches from our department. In our experiences at our institution, this is not unique to our department. While we critique ourselves and our own institution, we think these reflections would be useful for other institutions globally that choose to use graduate student labour for large scale (online) courses. As well, while the specific experiences we discuss are in an online context, we recognize that some of the criticisms discussed here are not unique to online platforms. We think these perspectives are important because our institution, with its size and academic reputation, plays a major role in influencing national and international higher education trends. Thus, highlighting our recent experiences in a relatively new trend (large scale online tuition generating courses) will hopefully provide useful feedback for future improvements. A primary point we intend to highlight is that our experiences reinforce our belief that all instructors, including graduate students, need access to, and training with high quality resources in order to create high quality educational environments for our students. At times, our autoethnographies may strike some as particularly negative. Here we request that the reader bear in mind our attempt to situate these experiences within the broader context of life as graduate students in our specific institution, which has a history of tenuous relations between the administration and the graduate student employees (Rhodes, 2018b, 2018a). Perhaps important, two of us moved from teaching face-to-face versions of these courses, which we designed, to teaching only the online versions, courses which we did not design.

Matt Haugen - Doctoral Candidate

I entered the University of Illinois as a PhD student in the fall of 2015, after a three-year stint working as a professional tennis coach for the government sponsored Hebei Province team with more than nine years of coaching experience. When I arrived on campus that first semester, I was nervous about entering the classroom space, to be called upon as an authority for passing along scholarly knowledge to undergraduate students. Even though there are many corollaries to being a coach and teaching, the experience that I had in an athletic environment gave me the confidence to stand and deliver information to my players that I knew would help them succeed on court. I knew entering the university there would be growing pains, but I was eager to gain experience in the classroom as a lecturer and teaching assistant; only with time, patience and practice would I feel confident in my abilities to stand and deliver a qualified academic lecture.

In my first year I was able to gain that much needed experience working as a TA for two discussion sections of a 200-level course, that met one day a week with approximately 25 students. It gave me a chance to analyse my pedagogical techniques and refine them between semesters. The real learning curve for me came the following year when I was asked to lead teach KIN 142 Contemporary Issues in Sport and Society, a face-to-face class in which nearly 75 students were enrolled. My objectives as the instructor of the class were to present controversial issues in sport and society and provide an environment for discussion and debate of such issues. Hall (1997) alludes to cultural studies as a discursive formation, a cluster of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. Although the development and management of sport has both positive and negative aspects, one feature most practitioners can agree upon is that sport is a great conversation starter and is an accessible topic from which to explore many pertinent issues in a modern society (Giulianotti, 2015).

In teaching the face-to-face version of this course, I began to feel more comfortable with the material and with my presence as a lecturer. I felt like I was reaching students and getting qualified feedback every day, as I was able to connect with them and see the student's facial expressions, read body language and feel their emotional responses to the subject matter. It was also during the fall of 2016 when our Kinesiology department announced that KIN 142 would be offered as an online course in the spring of 2017. When the department announced the creation of an online version of this class, I was not surprised but had some reservations. What would it mean for my role as a graduate student

gaining valuable teaching experience? How did it impact on the bureaucratic and neoliberal direction of our higher educational institutions? Would our online version of KIN 142 be as pedagogically effective as the in-class version?

As aspiring academics, the ability for a graduate assistant to design and teach their own face-to-face course presents pedagogical challenges but also a valuable opportunity to learn how to effectively manage a classroom setting. I worried that once the online course was launched I would lose a significant portion of my teaching assistantship waiver because enrolment in the on-campus classroom section of KIN 142 would decrease. As expected, the following semester only 13 students enrolled in the face-to-face class. In the fall semester of 2017, our department completely eliminated the classroom version of KIN 142, reducing my role to an online grader/marker, paid hourly, which would not count toward the necessary hours needed to fulfil my graduate assistantship and thus the tuition waiver that I relied upon. As an online grader, I didn't feel the sense of accomplishment that I had previously felt as a facilitator of knowledge and building a classroom around the ideals of discussion and promotion of social change through sport. In many ways, I felt our department opted for a pedagogical approach that valued generating revenue rather than expanding opportunities for social and educational interaction. Giroux (2010) argued higher education mimics the inequalities and hierarchies of power and ties public life and civic education to market-driven policies, social relations, values and modes of understanding. The shift from face-to-face classrooms to online forums situates higher education precariously as a bureaucratic solution that potentially sacrifices the fundamental mission of higher education by opting for classes that push for higher enrolments in order to create revenue.

While I recognize that well designed online courses can serve a purpose and hold value within institutions of higher education, I worry that this is often not the case. In my experience, as both an instructor and online grader, many students opt into online courses in order to decrease their workload and increase their availability for free time or time to work in paid employment. Additionally, online offerings are often designed either by the institution or an instructor in which value is attached to shorter assignments that lack critical thought processes, in part due to the large number of students that online classes can host. With a well-designed course, these pedagogical problems can be addressed, and I believe the current online version of our department's KIN 142 course has evolved into a model of what an online course with high academic standards should look like. However, I believe a more fundamental problem exists with online education, especially for social science offerings. The face-to-face classroom can be a place to confront societal issues and can be seen as a multi-sociocultural community where, students and faculty meet and where education in the formal sense is experienced, (Tinto, 1997). Well-designed online classes can also be seen as communities, where controversial issues can be debated through open discussion forums but my fear is the construction of knowledge, and the educational experience in an online class becomes, nameless, faceless, and colour-blind.

If educators and students alike hide behind the guise of a computer screen and mask their thoughts we risk losing having meaningful conversations in a socially inclusive and integrated setting. Many forms of online education focus on enhancing content and associated content delivery, not on the social interactions, cross-cultural exchanges... where eLearning is content-driven not based on social interactions and distributed intelligence. The emphasis remains on a knowledge transmission approach to education, not one rich in peer feedback, online mentoring, or cognitive apprenticeship, (Kyong-Jee & Bonk, 2006, p. 25).

Creating social interaction and cross-cultural exchanges is critical for generating productive conversations. With the advent of video chat, students and teachers have the ability to upload visual discussion responses in online settings, and the virtual classroom can be a place for "first-hand passionate debates during interactive videoconferences among students from different parts of the world," (Lee & Bonk, 2013) flourish. These kind of digital learning tools need to be implemented and designed into online classroom forums to eliminate stereotypes, stigmatism and colour-blindness, and to allow students to truly experience the expressive nature of each individual when debating topics of tension.

Though I disagree with the premise, many institutions of higher education continue to move toward more online offerings. If this trend continues, universities need to imbue online courses with effective pedagogy and ensure that quality courses are being designed so as not to devalue our educational process. I recognize that well designed online classes can create a positive learning environment, especially if these courses capture the needs of an ever changing and more technologically minded student population. However, I do not feel they should replace face-to-face classroom environments which can also harness this modern approach to course design. As a graduate student, I have benefited by being able to teach in front of students in a classroom setting. That experience has allowed my confidence as an academic to mature through the feedback I received from my students.

Where I believe online education can be most beneficial is in servicing those who have special educational needs and who lack access to traditional education environments. One such population group that I work with in my research are aspiring professional athletes in China, whose daily life takes them on the road for competitive events, therefore they lack access to traditional education environments. When access to traditional education settings are unavailable, then I am a proponent of online classrooms. Regardless of the backdrop, institutions of higher education need to adhere to their mission by providing options for students of all kinds, the ability to engage in pedagogically and methodologically sound classroom environments. Whether that is in face-to-face, or in online settings, the educational environment can be well designed and implemented in a manner that students receive a meaningful experience.

Doo Jae Park - first year Doctoral Student

In the second part of the autoethnography, I draw on graduate student labour to connect it with students' learning experience in online pedagogy. As an international graduate employee, I can see that American higher education has been rapidly globalised and encompasses composites of neoliberalism in the interest of profit. The most controversial neoliberal practice in higher education is a propensity for defunding public education (Giardina & Denzin, 2013). At the time, a climate in higher education shifted to a free-market orientation to generate revenues (Denzin & Giardina, 2017). Online distance learning seemingly fit well into this contemporary culture in the higher education scene; flips a traditional face-to-face class to a blended class, the same class content but with more potential for higher enrolments.

Revenue driven education draws clear lines to a labour hierarchy, involving 'higher' and 'lower' quality labour. As an international student, the English Proficient Interview test (EPI) is the criterion for whether I can be an in-class teaching assistant as higher quality labour or invisible online graders as lower quality labour. The EPI evaluates international students' spoken English ability. By law, international students at our institution must pass the EPI test to be in-class teaching assistants. However, graduate students who do not pass the EPI can still be online graders because the university categorises this position as a 'no-contact' position. I failed the EPI test and became an 'invisible' online grader. Did I really not communicate with students? During the fall semester of 2017, despite university regulations/restrictions, as the invisible grader, I did have contact with students while grading. Students submitted their reflection papers in relation to a given topic each week, and I read, commented and sometimes critiqued students' viewpoints. On the one hand, I posit that EPI ensures communication literacy for my university, specifically in English. On the other hand, EPI tends to minimise the meaning of written communication between students and TAs. Since there is limited time in face-to-face classrooms to develop students' sport sociological imagination through writing, written communication in distance learning is a critical advantage to prepare students to acquire critical thinking. I am not alone in emphasising the importance of written communication (Jone, 2011; Riley & Simons, 2016), which plays an important role in developing sport sociological imagination by giving feedback. My university appears to devalue written communication by situating graders as a 'no-contact' position.

Within the market-oriented higher education model, lower quality international graduate employees can be considered easily replaceable labour not only because of the labour hierarchy but also because of the hourly payment. What is the meaning of the replaceable labour to me? Living at the juncture of the US political turmoil regarding foreign relations, even though racism is covert, TAs perceive a xenophobic climate in every classroom setting (Cole & Stuart, 2005). The xenophobic climate

exposes me to job insecurity, labour positioned in the lower state of the labour hierarchy, the online grader. This anxiety most critically affects my grading tone. For instance, because of my anxiety, I tried not to be critical but to tone down my critique on controversial topics. When I graded students' paper regarding the Chief Illiniwek, the former mascot of our university, I thought more than twice before commenting on a weekly reflection paper. I concerned that my critique might upset the students who favoured 'The Chief,' which may lead to negative course evaluations about graders. I was afraid that receiving negative course evaluations would threaten my assistantship. Through my experience, my perspective of race and racialisation has been refined. Prior to KIN 142, I was a fan of Chief Illiniwek as the logo looked cool. Over time, I learned the problematic history of the mascot (Rosenstein, 1997) and it changed my perspective on Native Americans. I get irritated now when I see a person wearing the logo on campus. However, as the invisible grader concerned for my job security, I politically toned down my comments on related problematic reflections. My comments on the student papers I graded were circumlocutive such as 'sound reflection and thanks for your accomplishment' or 'it may be that you need to think about more Chief Illini and issues of misrepresentation of Native Americans.' Such negative internal turmoil over my disposability constantly anguishes me because there are more graduate students than available assistantships in our department. By doing so, my grading became lower quality, expendable mechanical labour. The market-oriented education model solidifies the replaceability. Since I desperately rely on a graduate assistantship for a tuition waiver, I have forced myself to be a good citizen who is not too critical on reflection papers regarding societal issues (e.g., weekly topic of race or gender) instead of using comments with moderate language and participating in self-surveillance to secure my assistantship.

Education should not segregate graduate employees in a labour hierarchy. This model of education harms students' learning experiences since the graduate employee sees less job security which diminishes the quality of their instruction.

Caitlin Clarke - Doctoral Candidate

I am concerned that the tuition generating large scale online courses (as opposed to a select range of free Massive Open Online Courses offered in partnership with Coursera), such as my department's introductory sport sociology courses KIN 142 and KIN 249, tend to utilise curricula that increase anxiety for both students and instructors. This inhibits new learning in the interest of creating courses that meet general education requirements for degree completion which can be completed quickly and easily (Young, 2016), part of the 'online paradox' (Barshay, 2015). In the platforms offered by our institution, Blackboard and Moodle, we as instructors are offered some flexibility in curriculum design regarding course content and student evaluations. Coursera, a corporate platform for Massive Open Online Courses, recently partnered with our University as well but, with the exception of the new iMBA program, is currently only offering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) with free and verified completion certificate options. Coursera (and many other eLearning platforms) is not a platform option for instructors and faculty at the University of Illinois to create online courses for admitted degree-seeking students. The two primary platforms used at our institution are Blackboard and Moodle, which mostly limits instructors to written communication through course announcements, feedback/grades on individual assignments, 'Q & A' forums and private email, largely due to class size and available resources (including the large student to graduate student teaching assistant ratio) at our particular institution. This is a common instructional design choice for our introductory online (and blended) courses.

This creates a serious challenge in attempting to assist students who are at risk of failing as well as accommodating students with disabilities that involve cognitive learning disabilities, ADHD, anxiety, depression, etc. I am troubled that as the instructor for KIN 249, in its online version, I had the highest rate of students requesting accommodations for anxiety related disabilities that I have ever experienced in my decade of teaching experience. At our institution, most instructors and TAs are encouraged, but not required, to identify at-risk students unless they are a student-athlete. Blackboard gets the heaviest use for the tuition generating online courses currently offered and does not currently have a flagging system for at-risk students. It is the student's responsibility to identify their struggles and seek support from their instructors, academic advisors, and other resources provided by their institution, which is difficult to get students to do even in face-to-face settings (Karabenick, 2003, 2004). The distance between instructor and student created through the use of digital platforms paired

with instructional design choices that constrict interactions to feedback after submitting assignments, seems to increase relative anonymity thereby exacerbating the help-seeking issue.

On the other hand, the tone and language choices of student's requests were significantly more demanding in my experience as an online instructor. This was not my experience in previous face to face classes. In the past year, one of the top complaints I received from students who did not earn an A (equivalent to a 93% or higher) was that their grade did not reflect their identity, stating that they are not a C student and the grade they earned does not reflect the effort they put into the course. Both of these frequent comments, while they may or may not have some merit regarding the grading standards used in the course, reflect the student attitude towards education in general such that they should be able to earn an A as long as they follow the identified correct steps as opposed to being able to think critically and form logical arguments. Indeed, many emails received throughout each of the two courses under discussion related to frustrations that, in the student's opinion, meant our course assignments did not explicitly list specific steps to complete the assignment. This issue is not unique to online formats (Tippin, Lafreniere, & Page, 2012), however in my experiences thus far the ability to address these kinds of issues is linked to my ability to build rapport with students, which was significantly limited in these large scale online courses with restricted student-instructor interactions (e.g. no live interaction options). Of course, this is also linked to a broader issue of grade inflation within the USA (Jaschik, 2016) that, in my experience, seems to be exacerbated in contexts such as the online courses described here.

In contrast, I myself certainly benefitted from the flexible schedule and ability to 'teach' remotely as an out-of-state educator and parent of two young children. I was afforded the privilege of working from home and caring for my children during a time that I could not have afforded childcare based on the income I earned as a graduate student employee. However, I worry about what the intensive tuition generating large scale online courses accomplish. It seems that they are often simply a task to complete. This is an especially sensitive issue for cultural studies courses in the humanities and social sciences, often viewed as too liberal. Where my previous experiences in face-to-face courses offered the chance for students to get to know me as a human, with real thoughts and feelings, my experiences with the online courses, as both instructor and grader, ultimately reduced me to a gatekeeper. Those who desire to be skilled instructors are necessarily learning to navigate both face-to-face and online formats but the available options through Blackboard and Moodle at our institution continue to inhibit instructors' abilities to easily and successfully build rapport with their students. Rapport being something that I contend is critical for moving students beyond the mentality of simply accomplishing a task and into the realm of genuine interest in a topic. A tendency towards increased anonymity, as discussed above, may remove the humanity from both the instructor and the students (similar to critiques made about anonymous commenters using social media platform (Golbeck, 2014; Sanders, 2016).

In both KIN 249 ONL and KIN 142 ONL, I noticed resistance from students who appeared to be more religiously and socially conservative. For example, students who disliked the assignments that asked them to consider the hegemonic nature of racial stereotypes within sports in the United States, would frequently make statements expressing opinions that politics should be kept separate from sports. By such comments the students were trying to avoid any further discussion on the topic. This particular style of avoiding confrontation is interesting given that the current political climate in the United States, particularly in online platforms, is exceptionally hostile such that even major social media platforms have been accused of fuelling divisiveness and hatred in the country (Metz, 2017). We included the common practice of points for netiquette which could be deducted in situations where students were openly hostile in their discussion groups. At times I wondered if the netiquette points in the rubric further encouraged students to find the path of least resistance to earning their desired grade as opposed to seriously considering views they may not support. This potential limitation of netiquette is a critical issue for instructors interested in creating a classroom dynamic that fosters empathy for all people from all kinds of diverse backgrounds while simultaneously facilitating more critical engagement of opposing views. In KIN 142, we encouraged students to get to know their peers through an initial introduction discussion post and required students to then respond to at least two peer posts. As a grader in that course, I noticed that even in the initial

introductory post the conservative students shied away from responding to students who were more openly liberal or progressive, though that was not necessarily true for the reverse. Instead,

conservative students tended to form sub-groups and frequently the peer responses on the subsequent graded assignments would be relatively superficial with statements that lacked interaction with the course material. Given the overall course structure, and the general attitude of simply needing to meet criteria to pass the course, there is not much incentive to behave differently.

Future versions of the course could award or deduct points based on the student's ability to address opposing views in their original posts and peer response posts. However, such adjustments fall back on instructors to find ways to entice students to "get comfortable with being uncomfortable" (Ajayi, 2017). This is no small task given the volume of students. Finding nuanced ways to engage students who resist, passively or openly discussing opposing views, is already a difficult task in face-to-face courses with students you see and speak with at least once per week. This is tricky for overburdened and overworked graduate students to navigate. Yet, as socially conscious students interested in social justice activism, it is imperative to find ways to effectively accomplish this task and improve our teaching skills.

What we share here is from recent experiences and large scale online courses. Much of our critique is concerned with the way these courses are designed with the intention of increasing enrolment for revenue. This intention affects the nature of instruction and our relationships with students. We each dislike multiple aspects of the online portion but I imagine we would find the online work more rewarding and satisfying if we were given more reasonable workloads with fewer students to grade or online courses with lower enrolments overall. Not all institutions that use online course options prefer these giant courses and not all institutions rely so heavily on graduate student labour and, indeed, many argue the value of online learning (Rees, 2017). It seems that the truly 'bureaucratic' nature is in the choice to enrol 750 students with only 6-7 graders as that immediately reduces our ability to fully engage with our students (if we want to accomplish anything else).

If universities desire to continue promoting large scale online courses and continue to use graduate student labour to teach them, even if only as teaching assistants and graders, they must seriously evaluate the burden these courses place on their graduate students. More serious consideration is needed regarding whether managerial choices such as an average student to instructor ratio of 100:1 (or, at times, even larger) allows instructors to create their best learning environments for their students – I argue that it does not. Whether online or face-to-face, ratios of that size make it incredibly difficult for a (graduate student) instructor to successfully create rapport with their students because it is so difficult to devote enough attention to any one student. As a result, such large ratios in an online setting increase anonymity between the instructor and students, which may exacerbate the problems related to 'harsher grading' discussed above, since the instructor may feel more comfortable assigning lower grades to students they have never met. Large ratios also reduce our ability to assist the struggling students, let alone answer questions about assignments and course content in a timely fashion, which are critical for student success.

Beyond all of the issues within the classroom (virtual or otherwise) itself, it is vital to the health of higher education – as well as the health of graduate students! – to evaluate the effects of allowing the experiences we described to become common for graduate student experiences. In both courses under discussion, multiple graduate students assigned to grade the courses were not students in the cultural and interpretive branch of our Kinesiology department and as a result, were not specialists in sports sociology with few having any exposure to the subfield at all. Based on instructional design choices and the managerial choices of our department, it became clear that not only were the graduate student graders not expected to spend time discussing issues with students, most could not anyway due to lack of expertise in the course content. Dr Sydnor and I both designed grading rubrics to support the non-specialists, but realistically grading rubrics can only do so much to help if non-specialists are not given the paid time to do the extra work to learn the material. As a result, their ability to adequately grade assignments and/or fully engage with students in their feedback was dependent upon the graduate student graders' choices to devote (or not) more time outside of their paid labour to better understand the course topics, which arguably should be spent on their own coursework or research. The large student to instructor ratio created a situation where all paid time was necessarily devoted to grading. For future versions of this course or other online courses, it is clearly important to either hire instructors and graders who have previous experience in the course topic or to pay non-specialists to

undergo training prior to the start of the course. When departments and universities choose not to, they send a signal to faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students that the quality of the course and the instructors do not matter and exist solely to generate income for the institution.

Additionally, I recognise that there are some online formats that involve live interactions, sometimes including video feed, between instructor and student. I believe those have real merit in fostering a better relationship between student and instructor than most other forms of online courses. However, those remain in the minority of current course offerings – at least as tuition generating courses currently offered at our institution. This may appear to be simply complaining and not wanting to embrace change like so many who love to hate online courses. Quite the opposite, there are clear benefits to maintaining and promoting online curriculum for both student and faculty. Thus, I hope this critique leads university administration and faculty – at Illinois and elsewhere – to consider further improvements. The role of the university in mitigating the above depends heavily on the pedagogical, as well as business models, employed by the department and administration. This seems to be key in the ultimate 'success'; of the course in terms of attaining a course equivalent to a face-to-face course as possible.

Multiple scholars of play argue that the most effective pedagogy combine both 'teaching' and providing freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities, which "often provided the best opportunities for adults to extend children's thinking" (Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007, p.9). I argue, like Peter Gray (2013), that this pedagogical approach is equally important for all ages not just children. In my current research, I spend a significant amount of time concerned with the mental wellbeing of adults, particularly in relation to depression studies in exercise science. I am similarly concerned with the potentially anxiety-inducing atmosphere of the large scale online courses at my university, particularly for students but also for instructors when factors such as large student to instructor ratios are involved. In my research, I am convinced that play deprivation, something only currently discussed in relation to child development (Brown, Patte, 2013; Gray, 2011; Santer, Griffiths, Goodall, 2007), is an equally critical issue for adults. Several scholars of play, who advocate free play as an essential aspect of child development, argue that the decline in free play is directly linked to an increase in anxiety and depression (Gray, 2013; Whitebread, 2012). I further their argument by suggesting that physical free play may be more important and more successful than exercise prescription interventions for adults in part because play may be the missing link to getting people with depression to be interested in trying exercise prescriptions and in part because exercise as medicine frames physical activity as 'work' and another task to complete (Clarke, 2018). Getting people to adhere to exercise prescriptions is already difficult for largely sedentary populations who have little to no experience with exercise. Being sensitive to novices in this situation is critical to success. In the same way, being sensitive to how instructional design and managerial choices affect novice learners appears critical for both student engagement and success in the context of online learning. Gray (2013) argues that the current education system in the United States does not actually foster learning due to the 'pressure to perform' and 'pressure to be creative', which inhibit new learning and creativity (p.134). His investigations on the effects of performance evaluation in comparison to free play and the emerging trend of 'unschooling' lead him to argue that close observation causes "the experts to perform even better… but had the opposite effect on novices" (p.132). Thus, the students who already perform well generally have no problems but "almost all participants" (p.133) end up struggling even more. In fact, Gray goes on to say,

> The continuous evaluation of students that occur in school reduces critical thinking not only because it leads students to look for what the teacher wants, but also because it promotes anxiety. Critical thinking is founded in creativity, and creativity always requires a degree of playfulness… The critical thinker plays with ideas – tries them out, turns them upside down to see what happens, explores their consequences. Anxiety prevents such play and forces thought along well-worn channels. Anxiety facilitates the ability to feed back what one knows by rote but inhibits the generation of new ideas or insights. (p.81).

The effect of the 'pressure to perform' as well as to adapt quickly to new specialised content, such as sports sociology, in an intensive online curriculum format is worrisome for disadvantaged students

who come from lower quality education environments. The focus on performance in higher education becomes a form of institutionalised discrimination for already marginalised students regardless of the intention(s) behind the performance evaluations. It is compounded by pressure on even well-meaning instructors and faculty, including those aware of this problem, to justify their existence and relevance within the institution through quantifiable measures including test scores and student evaluations, which appear to be heavily dependent on a student's perception of the instructor.

 Therefore, I suggest our university, and other similar institutions, consider eliminating grades and consider expanding platform choices in eLearning beyond our limited scope to better reflect current thinking in instructional design and educational psychology, as it seems our institution's free MOOC options through Coursera are of higher quality than those offered to tuition-paying degree-seeking students. Institutions who use these platforms can, and already do, offer free condensed overview courses that give students a sense of what to expect from similar courses by the same instructor. Some MOOCs seem to successfully accomplish the goal of addressing opposing views while simultaneously removing the focus on evaluation by making most assignments peer graded (Anderson, 2018). The quality of the available platforms cannot be underscored enough as advocacy for 'fractional learning' and better, more affordable, accessibility to a diverse range of learners (Commission on the Future of Undergraduate Education, 2017).

Lastly, I suggest eliminating the short intensive online courses or at least remove them as options for fulfilling general education or major degree requirements. The timelines these courses require are anxiety-inducing and against the best interest of the student and instructor. As Gray (2013) argues regarding the current educational system, "to succeed, students must acquire the limited information and shallow understanding to perform well on the tests" (80). In the current climate at our institution, the 'pressure to perform' exacerbated our already massive cheating problems along with the previously discussed issues. Instead, we need a return to a playful approach to exploration and knowledge within higher education similar to the call Gray makes for elementary and secondary education. Assignments such as Dr Sydnor's discussion responses attempt to achieve learning through writing in discussion posts, which is a worthwhile endeavour and can be a playful exploration for some students. I contend that removing the focus on evaluation might move these assignments a step further towards playful exploration and new learning.

The above recommendations are, of course, based on my own personal politics that education should be accessible to everyone and the belief that institutions of higher education should transparently support accessible education.

Synthia Sydnor - Associate Professor

I created the online version of "Contemporary Issues in Sport" KIN 142 at UIUC. The course is still undergoing university committees' approval to fulfil general education requirement in "Humanities and Arts: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives" and was previously a face-to-face course offered at least since the 1970s.

When I commenced my tenure-track position in 1988, I was assigned to teach KIN 142 but I baulked as I thought myself not an expert in contemporary sports issues—after all, my dissertation research had focused on ancient Macedonian society. Despite my trepidation, I had to teach KIN 142. At first, because it had always been handled as so in my Kinesiology and Community Health department (and in similar courses like this around the world), I used current sports history for course content paired with academic textbooks or journal articles to explain the sociological critique of sports issues. I personally failed at that because I was not a fan of present-day sports events, and I found sports issues such as they were framed in 1980s sociology, to be lacking critical and theoretical substance. Accordingly, KIN 142 was the most problematic of my courses: I simply am not expert in sports

matters such as team standings, recruits, championships. Furthermore, I am a female teacher and even with a great positive change towards equity, the nature of sport and its pedagogy continues today to be tied to males and masculinity. When I taught the in-class KIN 142, students now and again wrote in their anonymous teaching evaluations of me that they did not expect the professor to be a woman, that

they preferred a coach-type to teach about sport issues, that they were shocked that I did not know who quarterbacked the Eagles, etc. As I wrote in a 2017 chapter:

> it remains challenging for female faculty, especially older females (no matter their proficiency and knowledge; e.g., Freedman & Holmes, 2003) to be considered experts on sport --unless perchance they are current coaches or superlative athletes. We think of Marcel Mauss' (1934) techniques of the body: the university professor's body that presumes to teach about sports… is always bound by societal ideas and prevailing orientations about physical and intellectual acumen. (Sydnor, 2017a)

When it comes to sports courses, sports sociologist Jay Coakley also explains that sport seems to be a cultural form that many people don't believe warrants deep analysis, for it is done in leisure time, outside the realm of 'real life.' Coakley labels this difficulty to critically think about sport (such as to see sport as 'political or harmful') as part of a 'myth' which comprehends sport to be 'pure and good.' Those who believe this myth hold that "there is no need to study and evaluate sports for the purpose of transforming or making them better, because they are already what they should be" (Coakley, 2015, p. 11).

Over the course of my career, my teaching centres on 'teaching the conflicts', liberal arts/ humanities' core ideas, and wonder. My teaching perspective emphasises social justice, however tiny or huge, as student outcome. I want to matter as a teacher, help foster learnings of intellectual substance, support students to learn critiques of ideas/paradigms—for students to practice a kind of in-depth analytical thinking that is not easy to accomplish simply from social media and undiscerning chaotic knowledge banks.

I participated in a range of seminars about active learning and flexible classrooms throughout my career. University initiatives such as Writing Across the Curriculum, Ethnography of the University Initiative, and faculty learning retreats (Writing Across the Curriculum, 2013; Ethnography of the University Initiative, n.d.; Annual Faculty Learning Retreats, 2018) urged me to be 'uniquely, completely myself' (my idiom). For example, I am shy, not quick with words in oral arguments. Thus, I became keenly aware that I would not be successful in the classroom using Socratic argument, nor is it my style to be informal in the classroom/become 'buddies' with students.

I am one to quickly acquaint myself with new platforms and techniques in teaching and learning but I never considered teaching online. I held that my role in my department was to contribute humanities-based, philosophical knowledge to our program, and I did not understand how that could be done in an online course. Plus, as described above, I am an awkward performer and shirked at the thought of being on camera in an online course.

My past experience with UIUC workshops acquainted me with flipped, hybrid courses and using online platforms in face to face classes for teaching/eLearning. I experimented with selected facets of the methods/ideas that worked and fit my sensibilities in my 'real' classroom teaching. I used Moodle for submission of some student work, then migrated to Blackboard ("About Blackboard," 1997-2018) online learning platform (currently labelled Compass 2g at UIUC). I tapped Compass 2g for its grade book, student work submission centre, and most of all, to archive images, videos, websites, readings, PowerPoints and other digital material for use during class, assignments and student active and collaborative learning. My Compass sites for in-classroom courses are a labyrinth of folders and links; rich in material added to the course sites during the past 5-10 years, but greatly unorganised to most eyes.

Eventually, when I was no longer assigned to teach the ongoing face-to-face KIN 142 course, it became a valued university teaching experience for graduate students in our cultural-interpretive area of study (as Matt Haugen above describes his role as the lead instructor in that course). Although I no longer taught KIN 142, I kept it in the back of my mind as a course that could possibly be revised to accommodate large enrolment which could be a means to help fund our graduate students in cultural-interpretive studies. I had not considered this revision to large enrolment to involve an online format, but an invitation in 2015 to join a 4-day intensive workshop (part of a 21st century initiative by the UIUC to offer quality education to enrolled degree students in an online environment) to learn to build and teach an online course, kindled me to do something substantial with the KIN 142 course. It is a golden age today for sports sociology and cultural studies, as sports issues are intertwined with

precarious political life and daily conversations of humans around the world. Public intellectuals are needed.

So along with myself and a team of eLearning experts, technology consultants, and instructional designers, I built the KIN 142 online course. Crucial guideposts for my reworking of the KIN 142 course were: 1) material will focus on social theory, not the latest sports news; 2) the course should be as timeless/enduring as possible; 3) the course will use the idea of writing as a way of knowing; 3) my explicit expertise and interests will structure the course material.

In the course design process, I was stubborn to not agree with what some of the designers thought was mandatory for online courses. For example, the university experts who help design and conduct pilot tests of my material persisted in urging me to appear in daily videos as part of the online course, but I knew that I would not bode well in such a venue so I argued against this. The experts stipulated that the course should include a group project but I contended that this would be difficult in a large online format and that student engagement with an idea I had (to include what I came to call 'scholar commentaries' described below) instead would have a lasting impact on student critical thinking. For me, it is key in these big online courses that the teacher is confident with the structure of the course, that the course is a unique creation of the instructor and of the highest quality. In brief, by highest quality, I mean that the course content is based on knowledge that is creative, canonical and/or newly significant; researched and organised by the teacher; not found in other courses, universities, websites, etc.; and that the students leave the course amazed and impacted by some aspect of the material. Students should go forth from the course with social theories that they can use in many aspects of their personal and professional lives, not only or specifically related to sport.

One of the first things I learned as I created my online course was that I had confused online correspondence courses with online university credit courses. Also, the course would not be a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), although Coursera courses are taught through the MOOC platform at Illinois ("Why MOOCS," 2017). The online university regular three-credit course of the undergraduate program that I would help create was to strive to have enrolees interact as if in a 'real' classroom. A casual approach helped evoke this—for instance, I was encouraged by the online teaching experts to not use precise language in the materials created for classes, but to celebrate raw production, stuttering, small mistakes, etc.

KIN 142 went live for the first time to an enrolment of 750 in Spring Semester, January 2017. I wrote all the readings for the course, selected unique documentary films to complement course concepts and readings and asked faculty colleagues from a range of higher education institutes to contribute (15 to 40 minute) unedited videos (scholar commentaries) in which they told of their paths as scholars. I requested also that the contributors include their take on a specific theoretical concept that related to what I planned in class for the week. In online courses, it helps that the course material clearly fits together—the readings, scholar commentaries, documentary films and discussion prompts engage with particular related concepts that are echoed (but not duplicated or redundant) across each other each specific week; this course material builds upon and synthesises the material in broadening complexity as the weeks progress. Compared to my patchwork of multiple folders, images, PowerPoints, and wikis in my real-time course Compass sites, my online KIN 142 course Compass organisation and content is sparse, clear and easy to navigate. Many students mention this 'fitting together' as a positive aspect of the course (from student comments in university-administered anonymous course evaluations) and indeed, designing an online course has helped me immensely in organisation/use of my real-time classroom Blackboard/Compass material.

Six to seven graders, genius instructional designers mentioned above (who work sometimes on a 24-hour basis with me to keep the course running smoothly), and a great technology expert team from the university, all work to support KIN 142. The course uses writing and discussion as learning, so the graders closely mesh with the ontological aspects of the course. It is a change in my life in that as I described above, I am reclusive but now manage ongoing interaction with different teams of people. For example, I am the only contact with whom students ask questions and conduct other course business; in a course of 700 students, over the course of eight weeks, I answer about 700 emails. These are teaching/pedagogical moments – students who need additional help, have questions about course material, contest a grade or missed an assignment.

I love teaching online. Although my body is invisible (I purposefully only appear in a short orientation video in the KIN 142 online course), I have a presence in the course via my extensive email correspondence with students, my explanations in the course question and answer forum, my participation in class discussion and my ongoing work to hone and update course material.

Students are asked to engage with the course material in their own lives in weekly assignments. Some write their assignments in heartfelt prose, yearning toward making societal structural change. These give me hope for this world and it is personally energising for me to experience that hope first-hand every week as I read hundreds of student essays and discussion posts. In these times, it is extremely difficult in the USA to change a person's mind about racism and racial justice. Yet, I read students' writing in which they recount that they totally altered their mindset and practices about race, that they shared readings and convinced their families to change because of the KIN 142 course.

In the first semester that I taught KIN 142, I answered over 1,100 emails from students; in some, students write intimately of the interactions of course material with their lives. One student wrote to tell me that his father had been killed in an accident that day. The student spoke of how proud his Dad was of him for getting an education at UIUC and that his Dad could see the impact that his professors had made on him. The student thanked us for making his Dad proud.

When teaching face-to-face in a class of 125, one or two students might let me know that they enjoyed the course. In contrast, in my online course, I receive complimentary notes after final grades are submitted from many students that it was the best course that they ever took; that they wish that the course was a university requirement for all; that they now have words for unsayable things they previously did not understand; that they found themselves doing extra work because they were genuinely interested in learning more about a particular social theory concept. The anonymous course evaluations by students (about 250 to 300 of 700 students voluntarily complete optional online forms administered by the university) describe the course as 'unforgettable'; 'so engaging'; 'learned more in this course than in my whole college career'; helped me to become a better person'; 'taught me how to develop more informed opinions'. In my experience, the online platform largely enables and widely broadcasts liberal education.

Online teaching at UIUC also brings rare cases of sophisticated student cheating (experts monitor the courses for such); disappearing grades; difficulty with procuring expedient technology assistance for complex issues; skirmishes with administration about funding for online instructors; figuring out how to describe an online environment issue and who is the correct support person to contact for help for that issue in a University of 50,000 inhabitants; and for myself, worsening arthritis in my hands from scrolling through a grade book with over 500 grading columns and 750 rows.

There are issues/problems/glitches as clearly described by my three colleagues within. I understand that in a large part, the most serious of these issues, are born of my colleagues' roles as graders in a larger societal and university hierarchy that does not include graders in creation and design endeavours; does not sufficiently reward doctoral students with wealth or dignity; and that values speed and productivity over 'slowness' and quality of life (e.g. Andrews et al., 2013). Other online course faculty in my department and I, have met with our administration about these concerns and I am careful to permanently document these concerning matters. Online course faculty also come together in an informal email support system in which we brainstorm a range of online course issues. I will continue to attempt to reward and showcase doctoral students' contributions to the online courses and I supported a recent Graduate Employees Organization at UIUC (Graduate Employees Organization at UIUC, 2018) strike that eventually awarded tuition waivers under certain conditions to graduate students (tuition waivers a specific concern described in our autoethnographies).

Concluding thoughts

The troubles recounted within should not prevent us from continuing to develop and transform online learning, to remembering that design and communication comprise a good part of our academic vocations (e.g., Sydnor, 2017 b) in the 21st century:

> teachers as well as learners must take on new roles in the teaching-learning relationship… in adapting courses to online models, [instructors] pay more attention to the instructional design of their courses. As a result, the quality, quantity, and patterns of

communication students practice during learning improve. (Illinois Online Network, 2015).

Our criticisms and ideas for innovation of online teaching-learning experiences take the form of four autoethnographies. These autoethnographies touch on vital matters of cultural studies, teaching and pedagogy: the varying functions-meanings-purpose of a university; and the consequences of neoliberalism in academe and on the daily lives of humans. Our autoethnographic accounts, while explicit to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, hopefully illuminate issues linked to changing faculty roles and teaching and learning within large online courses.

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