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We Found Ourselves in *The Twilight Zone*

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Abstract: The author describes how using free internet extensions allowed for the continuation of a media-based honors course during the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; asynchronous instruction; Netflix, Inc.; student engagement; Nicholls State University (LA)—Honors Program

Citation: *Honors in Practice*, 2021, Vol. 17:235–36

I am a big fan of science fiction and have a bit of a crush on Rod Serling, so deciding what topic to teach in my Honors Forum course this semester was a clear choice. *The Twilight Zone* television series provided a wide selection of material that could be linked to the students' diverse fields of study. The television series tackled social issues through nonthreatening disguises (okay, sometimes aliens were threatening), moral lessons, and fun. These features fitted well into the one-hour Honors Forum course, which is interdisciplinary, consists of a wide variety of learning activities, and each semester focuses on a new topic chosen by the professor with input from the potential students. The semester was off to a great start since 90 percent of the students had never watched *The Twilight Zone* before. From the very first episode, "Where is Everybody," the class was hooked. Each week we watched a different episode and then had a class discussion, group assignment, or artistic activity to match the episode. Discussions were lively, and attendance was nearly 100% every week. Then the announcement came that we would be moving all instruction online for the rest of the semester because of COVID-19. The interactive social nature of the class was at risk.

To continue the enjoyable and fulfilling environment that we had created together, the students and I discussed the best way to move forward. First, I needed to make sure that everyone could access the episodes from their

homes. Luckily, they all had subscriptions to Netflix. The students suggested using a Google Chrome extension called Netflix Party; this free download allowed all the students to join in from their homes to watch the episode together and has a sidebar for chat, enabling students to continue their lively class discussions. The process also helped some of the students overcome the shyness that they had experienced in the face-to-face version of the class.

Once the class viewing and discussion were over, the students wrote a reflective journal entry about that week's episode. In the reflective journals, they introduced other materials into the class, such as research articles, artwork, mythology, and scientific organizations' websites. The independent reflection allowed the students to think about what they had seen on the episode, heard in the class discussion, and researched for their journal. Thus, they developed an appreciation of how the world is interconnected and of how much the world has changed and yet stayed the same.

At the completion of the semester, the students had watched a total of fifteen episodes, discussed the social issues presented, learned about the science in the episodes, and enjoyed the beauty of the symbolic links to art and mythology. The students joked that we started out studying *The Twilight Zone* and somehow found ourselves in our own episode, where we were in a situation that none of us had ever expected. The topic was an ideal choice for this weird semester, allowing the students not only to learn but to stay connected to each other and have fun.

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