##### [00:00:02.270] - Brian Shelton

I'm Brian Shelton, and you're listening to Harper Talks, a co-production of Harper College Alumni Relations and WHCM. Normally, Harper Talks is about our wonderful Harper alumni. But as we approach the one year anniversary of leaving campus because of the covid-19 pandemic, I thought it would be a good time to speak to a few colleagues about their experiences over the last 12 months. So we created this special bonus episode of Harper Talks. Today, you'll hear from Raeghan Graessle, Assistant Professor of Physics, Marie Lapidus, Assistant Professor of Business and Entrepreneurship, and Kevin Long, Associate Professor of Speech and Theater.

##### [00:00:44.240] - Brian Shelton

And for me, Brian Shelton, Assistant Professor of Mass Communication. I want to thank my producer, Shannon Hynes, for arranging this podcast and indulging me in this adventure.

##### [00:01:00.060] - Brian Shelton

So, Marie and Kevin, thank you so much for joining me on this special bonus edition of Harper Talks. And I was speaking with Raeghan Graessle the other day from physics, and I had this conversation with her. Do you remember when things first started with the pandemic, when we all first went home and how every email that you receive was a "I hope that you're doing very well. I hope that your family is safe, and I hope that you're staying well and keeping safe." And it seems the last three months or so that's really died off. So I really do want to ask each of you, how are you?

##### [00:01:35.370] - Marie Lapidus

Well, I still do that for people I haven't seen for a while, so I still see and hope everybody's healthy and you know, you're doing OK, but I'm doing well, I think.

##### [00:01:46.950] - Kevin Long

Same here. So if I haven't seen somebody or I'll always say, I hope you and your loved ones are doing well. But but for our colleagues who I communicate with on a regular basis, yeah. We're kind of past the daily blessing, I guess, but doing well, really doing well and trying to manage and create and still work in this new environment in a meaningful way. And that's been a great blessing in a lot of ways. So we're we're doing OK.

##### [00:02:17.880] - Raeghan Graessle

You know, I'm trying to keep positive, but I got to let you know that the and the struggles of the of the students plus my own family really does sink you down a notch or five. I've just found that I have to be real careful and seek out cheerful opportunities when they arise.

##### [00:02:38.130] - Brian Shelton

So it's a it's a year now, right when we're recording this, it's a year or so going back to that. You know, that week we was all are they going to kick us off campus or are we going to go away? There was all kinds of mumbly, like you could cut it with a knife in the air, you know, in the hallways, you know what's going to happen. And we're all just like waiting for that email to come, telling us to go home, you know? And, you know, I think we all I think many people felt like, OK, we're going to go home. We're going to come back a week or so after spring break and things are going to kind of go back to normal. I don't think that everyone at that time really believed that it would be a year or more before we came back. Did you think it would be a year?

##### [00:03:17.460] - Marie Lapidus

Not me. I thought we'd be back sooner, but I don't think I paid attention at the time to the severe impact that was actually having. And I don't know if we have that information to even pay attention to, but it was just kind of like, oh, there's this like far away pandemic kind of thing going on. I didn't feel it. I didn't see it anywhere. Right. Like nobody around us was sick. So it was kind of like, why are you shutting down?

##### [00:03:44.790] - Marie Lapidus

Like, everybody looks normal and healthy. And then so I think and at that time the news was like every day was something new that was coming out. So it was hard to keep up and to know. I mean, I think when we went home and said, you know, you're working from home, I don't think anybody knew, even two weeks, then what's going to happen the next two weeks from then. So I'm surprised that we're still out.

##### [00:04:09.180] - Marie Lapidus

But I'm not and I'm not surprised because as you get the news, I'm like, OK, makes sense.

##### [00:04:14.340] - Kevin Long

And with us, we were getting ready to open Shakespeare in love. So we had been working since December on a production. Everything was built. We were in Tech Week and we were just praying, please, because so many performances were being closed. So they were colleagues of mine, friends of mine. They were immediately told to go home and sets were half done or whatever. We got to perform that first weekend. So and then after that we struck the set. So we did not perform the second weekend. But that was a gift to us because all of that work that that a lot of friends of mine did not did not get a chance to kind of see the end of of the results of all of their hard work. And so we relished that. And then just like everybody was saying, is like, OK, so then maybe when we come back from spring break, everything will be fine and we can just pick up where we left off and then, Lord, everything, just closed. I mean, my whole, you know, art form has pretty much come to a crashing halt. And so we're working our way back out of that. But we I never thought that we would be still in the same situation that we're well, we're getting out. We're getting better. But it's been a year and it's just it's unbelievable. It's remarkable, you know so.

##### [00:05:36.000] - Raeghan Graessle

You know, I was actually in the class with my students when that email came through. And I had this sound on outlook going through the classroom because I told them at the beginning of class, I said, I think we're going to get the email during class. And so when they all heard the ding dong, everyone, everything stopped. We read the email together and we talked about it. And I I guess I wasn't thinking much past May. I was just like, well, it's probably going to be the rest of April. It did not occur to me that I would literally never see those students again after that day in person. It didn't even occur to me. And then it's just been so long now.

##### [00:06:18.980] - Brian Shelton

So now for me, transitioning all of my classes to online was really no big deal because I teach online all the time. So for my students who were in face to face classes, I think it was a challenge for many of them that first when we when we left campus. But for the radio station, it was really difficult because we really thought we were going to be back in a couple of weeks. And then all of a sudden it was, no, we're not coming back at all. And we had to teach everyone how to do everything off campus. And that has led to some interesting challenges and some cool creative things that we have done. Ideally, we'd like to be back in the studio full time, but it has led to some interesting stuff that we've been able to do. And I'm just curious, how did you adjust what you were doing in those in those initial weeks? What did you have to do?

##### [00:07:04.940] - Marie Lapidus

Most of my classes and most of my faculty were trained to be online. We teach most of our classes online and only in the fast track program and apprenticeship program they're blended, so they have online component anyway, so they only really class that kind of shifted was again, like you said, for the face to face students who are taking the intro to business class. But my faculty were ready, so we transitioned very quickly and very well. The students had kind of a shock to their system. And I saw that shock because I was actually doing a virtual exchange with my business and entrepreneurship club. And I lost all of those students because they were so worried about figuring out how to do their online classes that they're like they couldn't really handle anything else. And I think that what I've learned from this is that now that they've gone through this and they've taken online classes, the students aren't doing as badly as we all think they're doing actually pretty well. Then we did this virtual exchange that we had done in the spring. We repeated it in the fall and it worked really well because they were ready, because now they had done their classes online. So they were prepared for that. So I think that that was actually a positive result of what happened with the pandemic. And it also brought the students together. We worked with the University in Kurdistan, so we got to meet people from around the world. And it was a really a huge bonding experience even for the students in the club. So but I think for students in class, it was definitely a challenge. And I think the biggest challenge for them is actually remembering that they have class.

##### [00:08:45.570] - Kevin Long

So so I think at first I even remember I was in my teaching, my Acting II class and I was working a scene and then they all came running in one. We're going home. We're we're not going to be here, OK? So they did. And I really think that we all just thought, let's just get through the spring. And I retooled a lot of what I needed to do, especially for their final performance based classes. All of a sudden, switching to online format is pretty challenging. What was great in our department is we have Brian with so much online experience, our chair, Jeff, Margaret, Will. They helped create kind of like a basic shell for the speech course to help us immediately transition into a more permanent online format that helped us a lot. And then because our president had made her decisions early, I knew I was going to be teaching my intro to theater class online and now my acting class online well in advance. I took a class through the academy to help create an effective online class and I loved it. I really took to it. The student response has been profound, like there were a couple of students that said, you know, I felt like in this class that I wasn't just keeping up. I was learning. I was like, OK, so maybe it can work and then I'm going to keep it all. So I'll flip the classroom even more. So now I don't need to spend forty five minutes in class describing it. I've created three videos and I can get right to work with them.

##### [00:10:16.590] - Raeghan Graessle

It's one of my classes was was online asynchronous to start, but that was three of my 17 hours. So the other 14 hours was a lab. They had to go online. I was more prepared than I expected, like I was consistently surprising myself. So I already knew how to use this website that had some really good video labs where you can actually make measurements using tools you paste onto the screen. So I had that ready to go. It was so much work that I had to take that first week and not, you know, like I just had to ditch an entire five days to get ready to launch this new version of physics, asynchronous, online. And then once I had that, of course, it was like I was chasing a galloping horse. I still am.

##### [00:11:03.690] - Brian Shelton

So this is a big question. What have you learned?

##### [00:11:07.620] - Raeghan Graessle

So you know that there's this song. It's a gift to be simple and like it says, like to turn, turn. She'll be a delight still by turning, turning, we come round. Right. I feel like we have I have turned the worst corkscrew ever this year, just learning all these new things. And then a lot of things I used to believe I've completely flipped on. I used to believe like that physics lab had to be in person because using certain equipment was very crucial and critical. And I've taken a step back because humility wise, the physics classes I teach are not for majors or even engineers. And so, like, why would a pharmacist need to learn how to use a photo gate? And so being forced out of my lab has made me reevaluate the lab actual skills and then find ways that you can learn those skills off campus. And I think I've I found a really good balancing point.

##### [00:12:06.930] - Brian Shelton

You both kind of answered this question already. But when I when I asked Raeghan, her response was really kind of interesting. I asked her just a very simple question. What have you learned from all of this? And her response was that she has learned that things that she always thought were sacrosanct and important and that you could not teach physics without were not necessarily true and that there were other ways. So all these things were, you know, we say to each other as a faculty, we absolutely cannot teach this class without doing X. And then she's like, it turns out that's not true. And so now she's adapting everything. But that's essentially what both of you are saying, right? You've adapted everything and you're not going back. Right.

##### [00:12:52.020] - Marie Lapidus

There's software, equipment, whatever it is actually available. And we never had to use it, so nobody bothered. But I think that's the learning experience. I've done a lot more videos and I also learned that I don't care what I look like anymore on the video. You know what? There's only so much lighting I have in my house that, you know, that I can arrange. And it's never perfect. The light's coming in from the side because my window is there. You get a video because you need it. You don't get a video because I have to get dressed up and turn everything on. Like whatever you get is what you're getting a lot of those kind of. Well, we did it this way before. And I think, like I said, my department was really ready for that. But I think that we've learned even more and we've had the time to kind of practice even more and do new things. I think we're now even more ready to flip the classroom and have more experiential learning for the students versus lecturing at them, and hopefully they'll enjoy that more and learn more.

##### [00:13:52.070] - Kevin Long

There are still some skills. I think I really need to get that to them. And there are some that have fallen away because they really they're grasping what I need them to grasp without that golden nugget of what I thought was so valuable. But some of these skills are valuable. And then I've I've really just kind of learned how to take what I feel is absolutely necessary and present it in a new, more more effective way in this online environment that I'm going to keep. I just had a movement specialist come in and work with my class via Zoom, and she taught movement to the actors. So that's been a blessing. And then like my upcoming show Too Heavy for Your Pocket Play is about the Freedom Rides nineteen sixty one. I've connected with Freedom Rides Museum in Alabama and we have a civil rights icon, Freedom Rider, Dr. Bernard Lafayette joining us. He's going to work with a student that's playing the lead. And then we have a public forum. None of that would have happened without the blessing of this movement to the online world.

##### [00:14:54.350] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, I'm definitely looking forward to going back. I mean, one of the primary I mostly teach film history these days. And that class, while it seems like it would be the perfect class to be online, Kevin, you know this from theater, right? The communal experience of seeing the film together and then being able to immediately have a conversation about it is the best educational aspect of studying film. Right. Same with theater. We got to go see the production together and then be able to get together and talk about it. And so that's that's something that I really, really miss now. I've always taught film online. It's always been a part of my life, but it's always been the small part. Right. And it's like I cherish being in the room with the students and talking about the films. And that's what I miss the most.

##### [00:15:39.740] - Marie Lapidus

Online classes take way more effort to set up and you actually do a lot of work before it starts. I think that that is an important point, that it is a lot more work. And I don't know if I've ever found a balance of, like my life versus Harper life. I can say that for sure. I miss our Makerspace in talking to those students and, you know, even with my club to to be in a room together. But I think it has also given us some opportunities, like you said, to bring in other people. They would have never been able or do things that wouldn't it wouldn't have had the opportunity to do. So there's negative that we're not together, but I don't know if we're going to go back to this togetherness we had before.

##### [00:16:28.640] - Kevin Long

It has been more work on my end, especially when I'm creating these things. But I just keep looking at the end goal of I will use this continually throughout. But the balance of that has been quite challenging. We performed our Midsummer Night's Dream live on Zoom because we've been tired of let's create a movie and stream out a movie. So even though there were some were like, we don't know what's going to happen with technology-wise, they wanted to perform live, it was a challenge. We met it and they did a they did a great job. But were we are tired of the boxes and it would be great to be in the presence of colleagues and students because there's so much interchange that happens and energy in the room. But for me, yes, it is. I am tired and the balance has been challenging and the workload has been more. But I think I'm just trying to keep my eyes on the prize. It has been hard for everybody.

##### [00:17:27.530] - Raeghan Graessle

I've gotten I don't know if this is just a human thing. I've gotten into a groove some of my courses. I definitely want to put back in person. For example, this this Physics III. It's kind of like the capstone physics course. I would like that to be back on person. I really miss being able to have deep discussions and people to ask weird questions about special relativity and quantum mechanics like are we really waves? Those spontaneous fun conversations don't happen online. And so I think I really miss that.

##### [00:17:58.010] - Brian Shelton

So something interesting is happening. Speaking of whether we've learned anything or not. Right. Many of the high schools in our district. They've given the students the option to either come back to school or to stay online, and at most of the schools, the vast majority of the students have chosen to stay online rather than come back to the high school. And I can think of a million reasons why you would not want to go to high school personally. Right. For myself. But I'm curious what the long term effect of that is for us, for all educational institutions. Right. So if the students are deciding I'm only going to go to online high school, are they going to want to only go to online college?

##### [00:18:43.710] - Marie Lapidus

I don't think so. So I have one of those high schoolers. Right. So she was given the option to go to a blended when they went to blend in and she stayed online and she's staying online because she's like, I don't know. The people I want to talk to, I talk to anyway and the ones the other ones, whatever. And she's like and we can still talk on the Zoom's because they make them sit online. Right. Like it's not like us with asynchronous classes. They make them sit online. So she gets to see certain people. But she wanted to have the freedom like she has a job. So like easier to deal with having that. She spent a month and a half in Florida doing high school from there. So who is going to complain about that if you have those opportunities? Right. I know privileged, but she's going to go to college and she wants to go and have, you know, go face to face, have a college experience. So I don't necessarily think that students are going to want to be online for college, but I will say that they're going to want to be partially online for college. Not every class are they going to want to have to go into they're going to want to manage their time better. And I think that's what we need to think about in our offerings is what can they do? Which classes work best with the classes that really benefit from being face to face versus the the classes that are are beneficial online and work really well online. And I think that's what we need to think about. It's not going to be a future of, oh, we're back to totally face to face. It's going to be a future of this mix. And the students are going to want the mix because it gives them freedom to do other things.

##### [00:20:27.360] - Kevin Long

No, I think you're right. I think it's it's just another option for us to meet the learning styles of our of our population. But you're right. I think I think what students have learned is if you want to be successful in an online class, you really do need self-discipline. I mean, it is a different type of student. So I think you're right, though, Brian and you, too, Marie. Like, if that's what the students if they're if because there are some students that have just said to me, I just I need to go live, I really we can't yet. But so I they'll go they'll definitely come back. But yeah, I guess we really should consider that it most will probably want a combination of the of the two methodologies and how can we how can we accommodate that.

##### [00:21:12.510] - Raeghan Graessle

My oldest just started high school and the high school, I can't even remember how they did it. They had like freshmen coming Mondays, sophomores, Tuesdays, juniors, Wednesdays, seniors, I don't know. But so few of the high school students actually wanted to come back that they allowed the whole darn school could just come. Whoever wants to have in-person learning can go. And that was months ago now, like January, January 7th. I mean, because so few of the students are coming back to campus. And that makes me worried about college. Harper really could use this to expand their online stuff and certain misconceptions that I was dealing with, like like physics lab could never be legitimate online. I think maybe this has given us a second look at that, but I'm hoping that it'll lead to more flexibility where students will have more options and I think they'll take those those options.

##### [00:22:11.820] - Brian Shelton

OK, so I got one last question for you. Are you ready? You're fully vaccinated. The case count is down to like, practically nothing. What's the first thing you're going to do?

##### [00:22:19.560] - Kevin Long

We would travel. We, Louie and I, have not been able to travel at all. And we try to go somewhere or like we went to Peru two years ago and we really like to go. That's fine. And we would love that.

##### [00:22:30.570] - Marie Lapidus

I was thinking exactly the same thing. Although I have been traveling I've been going to Florida, if allowed actually back to London because my brothers are there and during this pandemic, I've kind of realized, like, I actually kind of miss them and I want to see them again!

##### [00:22:46.650] - Raeghan Graessle

Meeting people for Starbucks across the curriculum. So I have a dozen Starbucks dates lined up with people that I really, really miss. One thing that I've missed at Harper is having those conversations about like, for example, Kyle Knee and I were discussing if my students know certain math concepts in Physics III and how they've been presented and things like that, and then we branched off into like we really need to take each other's classes so we actually know what what students are experiencing. And those ideas that I feel like some of that flow that used to be has is gone. And I can't wait for that to come back, that creativity. I am an introvert and I never realized how much it warms you up to see someone in the hall and look at their face and they're actually happy to see you. You're like, wow, someone was happy to see me. Oh, wait, no, I got one more. I got one more Brian. You know, Christmas time. There's that song that says it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. So now it's stuck in your head and everybody. But there's that line and mom and dad can hardly wait for school to start again. And I was always like, whatever. I blew that line off until this year.

##### [00:24:00.250] - Brian Shelton

Raeghan Graessle, Marie Lapidus, and Kevin Long are all full time Harper faculty and I'm grateful for them for taking the time to talk. If you're enjoying Harper Talks, please subscribe and while you're at it, rate and review us so that others might find us. Harper Talks is a co-production of Harper College Alumni Relations and WHCM Harper Radio. Our show is produced by Shannon Hynes. Our technical producer is Eric Bonilla Sanchez. This week our show was edited by Shawndra Shelton because I begged. Our theme music was created by Aidan Cashman. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.