

LONG-TERM LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-INSPIRED CHANGES TO STUDENT-MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS IN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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BACKGROUND

- The COVID-19 pandemic caused higher education to switch from in-person to virtual delivery
- Most undergraduate research experiences were either shut down or conducted virtually
- The current research examines undergraduate students' perceptions of their research experiences during the pandemic

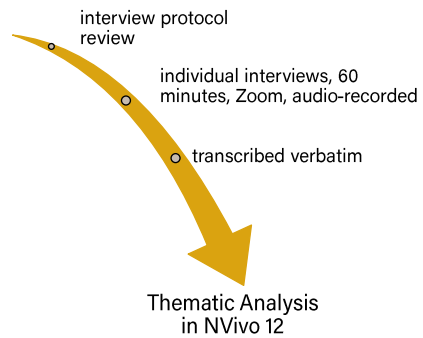


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METHOD

- Participants
 - 16 undergraduate student researchers who conducted research during COVID-19
- Procedure
 - Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews



THEMES

- COVID-related effects on research activities
- Experience with research mentors
- COVID-related impact on interpersonal relationships and experiences
- Gains (skills and rewards)
- Comparison with other campus activities
- Effect of URE on academic and career choices

THEME: COVID-RELATED EFFECTS ON RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

"...Most of my research was computer programming, so thankfully a lot of that can be done virtually, since most people have a laptop or a computer of some sort..."

"....my research relies a lot on in-person data collection because we work with animals...So that has made it a bit harder because you have to, you plan for that, if you get quarantined...."

"...I have to have some pretty technical conversations with them, just through email or Zoom and stuff, so that can be kind of hard...."



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THEME: EXPERIENCES WITH MENTOR

"In some ways I think it's kind of better, in other ways worse. I do miss meeting face-to-face. I think a lot of that communication of just talking to someone in person is lost. I'm a people person, so I kind of miss that a little bit. Also, just to have the chance to schedule Zoom meetings from wherever you are, not having to take time to travel or to set anything up officially. I think in some ways it's actually improved the easiness or effectiveness of this quick communication."

"... I don't see my mentors at Purdue as much, but he's still very accessible if I want to email him, but I don't see him in person for more of a casual interaction, it's always like, if I talk to him, it's cause I have a question or I want to know something..."

"He's very flexible, very understanding. So if I need to take a week off because I have exams, then he's very understanding if we need to postpone a meeting or reschedule it, so very understanding, if I don't understand something I can ask him and we'll stop over and he'll go back and catch me up to date."



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **This research provides insights into improving undergraduate research experiences, so that students have a quality experience despite disruptions**
- Program administrators should consider
 - Creating learning contracts
 - Facilitating opportunities for informal communication
 - Encouraging mentors to provide emotional support



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