

NAME

Prof Orozco Interview Audio.m4a

DATE

October 21, 2020

DURATION

26m 36s

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Sarah Garcia

All right, good morning. My name is Sarah Garcia, and I'm here with Professor Jose Orozco and he is part of the Department of History with your college. And I'm just going to be interviewing him and his perspective on how covid has impacted him specifically as a teacher and this transition to online learning. Just the number one question I want to ask you. In what ways did you feel that the transition to online learning has impacted specifically your teaching methods and materials?

[00:00:32] Professor Orozco

Well. I mean, you know. In every way and then sort of in no way, you know, I think insofar as my courses have always been structured around discussions of readings, I continue. I've continued doing that story books, students view movies, students read chapters. We gather together and we try to decipher what we've just read, try to figure out what's important, try to figure out what you know. We need to keep what we can ignore what important concepts are in it and then move on to the next topic. And insofar as that's the way I've always carried on my classes, classes have remained the same. Meeting over Zoom is more taxing for students and for faculty. There's sort of an emotional toll that comes with viewing screens and trying to decipher, gather emotion from students' faces sometimes when they're not willing to show you, show you their faces, sometimes when they are. But it's hard to understand the physical cues that you would know that you've gotten used to figuring out in class, because I think I try to teach classes that are very dynamic and student participation. So a lot of me is a lot of what happens in class is

me trying to figure out how to decipher how I'm reaching the audience. I'm reading the students are not getting it, are they? They seem to be embarrassed enough to say anything because they're not getting it and they're afraid to say that they're not getting it.

[00:02:34] Professor Orozco

And so all of that becomes much more difficult or online. That was that that was a huge transition. The other big change has been trying now that we've moved into modules, has added another layer. How do you maintain the class? That was the sensibility and the content of a class that I've taught. In 14 weeks, how do you maintain that in seven weeks? I think that actually has probably been more difficult for me and I'm not speaking for anybody else. You know, it's it's it's it's hard to know what's enough. It's not impossible to know what's enough. And if we were on and zoom in and forever or so, I would figure it out. And that's the thing. Human beings figure stuff out. And so I think students would figure out how to be on Zoom, how to take advantage of things that class on its own, you know, sort of allow them to take advantage of. And professors would figure out the same. I think that I guess the hard part is that we don't know how long we're going to be zooming. And so that's that, you know. Opens up the possibility both for students and for faculty about how much should you invest, how much you invest in constructing courses that you know are going to be ephemeral, that are not going to be around after the first time that you teach them.

[00:04:18] Professor Orozco

Students must feel the same way. How much? Just in this way of being a college student, if I know that I'm going to have to go back to being a college student in another way. And so, you know, all those things play into what's happening here. I mean, there's some I know professors don't want to talk about it, but, you know, there's been some positive things. I mean, if I were in a profession that gives us the large privilege of being able to work from home, working remote in a in a time of plague that is transmitted from human being to human being and and and for whom for which the only real sort of solution to it is not to be around other human beings who are infected. Being at home has been great or at least safe. And that's not a lot. That's not a privilege that other people get. So I want to acknowledge that it's been difficult. It's not been impossible. People figure it out. We all --you know, we do. We may not like it. It may not be what we were taught to do as graduate students.

[00:05:34] Professor Orozco

It's not --I've been teaching for twenty three years. It's not something that I was taught, you know, that I taught myself or figured out how to do in twenty three years, but. I have no skills, I have enough creativity, I have a work ethic. These are things we say we want to encourage and students and I think professors aren't absent. Some professors have more of that. Some professors have less of it. Some professors have more grit, some professionalism. Same. Same with students. Right. And so I think I'm not saying I know I'm at the top of any of those lists, but I have enough. And it's allowed me to figure out, I think, in a way that's responsible to student needs, how to be a professor in a pandemic. I think, you know, it's been hard, but it's been manageable. Again, have the privilege of being home. I like not having to commute every day to school. In fact, it opened up more time in my day to do other things. I know people don't want to admit that, but, you know, I have plenty to do. It's true. I'm probably working as hard or harder now. But it's also, you know, I mean, you know, it allows me to do other things at home. You know, the sort of downside that you're always home.

[00:07:02] Professor Orozco

We're social animals. We want to be around other humans. And that's been hard. I love my family. But, you know, after a while with anyone and fish, after three days, it begins to smell. So it's difficult to be around the same people all the time. But, you know.

[00:07:21] Professor Orozco

It is what it is. We've all tried to manage as best as we can, and I think me and our faculties have tried to do the same.

[00:07:30] Sarah Garcia

So, yeah, that's great. All right. And this goes along with question number one, because I know you were talking about, like, syllabus and everything, like, did you have any like grave changes to your syllabus or like future course works to accommodate to the transitional online learning? Or you just kept the same syllabus?

[00:07:51] Professor Orozco

No. Now and more than more than within the syllabi, it's it's so OK, so how to as we transition last year to, you know, mid semester.

[00:08:07] Professor Orozco

When we came back after a week hiatus, I was talking to a class one in my class and not your class into the class about, you know, the school's really, really wanted us to be empathetic of

students, empathetic of what was happening with their lives, with the lives of their families, the difficulties that might have that might come.

[00:08:30] Professor Orozco

Some students have access to Internet, some don't. Some students have computers that function with cameras. Some some don't. Some students have a room where they could actually do their classes. Some have to share a bedroom with two siblings. Some have had to teach two classes on their phone, in their car, in the parking lot of a place where they can get Internet.

[00:08:52] Professor Orozco

So they wanted to know they wanted us to be concerned, concerned and empathetic to that and make changes that would allow for different circumstances students might find themselves in. So I was talking to the students and telling them, you know, basically the line was, you know, if you have all these issues, we have all these problems, we're here for you. We're empathetic. We're trying to understand where you're at. We know this is a crisis and we're going to be as empathetic and kind of as possible. And a student who's normally very shy in the class looks straight into the camera and he said, why aren't the referees referees just a little bit? You feel they're my free? OK, well, after I said that, I said, you know, and Whittier College is here for you.

[00:09:50] Professor Orozco

We're feeling good about how socially progressive we're going to be with a student and everything, and we're going to be kind and empathetic. So tell us what you need.

[00:09:59] Professor Orozco

We're there for you and the students. Some are very shy, looked straight into the camera and said, why aren't you kind to us all the time?

[00:10:09] Professor Orozco

And I was like, it f***** me up, it did this it f***** me up for four. I'm still f*****up by now because he was right for a lot of students, this crisis. Only exacerbated crises that they have problems that they had every day.

[00:10:32] Professor Orozco

You know, and why be kind to them before we started thinking that if too many students dropped out of school, we could lose a lot of money and we were going to be in trouble. I'm not diminishing the fact that we're in a situation that needs tuition. We are-- we're a poor institution,

have a lot of working class students who take on a lot of debt. You know, we have a relatively small endowment. So the school does. We're not a rich school. And so we need the students.

[00:11:09] Professor Orozco

But I was --he blew my mind because it made me feel like. Yeah, why aren't we nice to you all the time? You have these crises, you're living with them. And now only when it's convenient for us, when we think we might be sort of, you know, in the long term, suffering the few levers that we decide to be this nice to say we're mean is not a mean place. But it blew my mind. And I think it's it's it's been, you know, six months of trying to figure out what to do with that. And I have. It's caused me to rethink a lot of things, to rethink what I do in my class, to rethink how I grade, for example, in my classes, what's the you know, you've been in my class. I don't want to, I don't like grades and don't like grades. I always had conversations with students about what grades mean and why we're so fixated on grades. And, you know, I think one of the things I've been reading about sort of just sort of a different way of giving grades and it's grades, grades not based on skill sets that students come into the class with, but rather on effort.

[00:12:26] Professor Orozco

Right. And so it's it's and it's and it's almost not giving grades throughout the semester. But the feedback are there other ways of giving feedback that doesn't count on little points, that students aren't constantly like Pacman trying to nibble away at points and that they feel that that's the way school is? Right. And taking into account that two grade students on anything other than an effort in the society that as hierarchical and white supremacist in its classes and as inequitable as a society, is really, really unfair. Right. Not every student has all the privileges that the other students have. Therefore, they don't have the same skills coming into college. And to just take skills that are linked to class and race and gender and a whole bunch of ways as the thing that you're going to grade on just perpetuates inequality. So, you know, that student's comment, the reading and just sort of my just long term disdain for grades has sort of cosmic like, what do I do? How do I transform my classes in a more radical way to deal with that knowledge?

[00:13:43] Professor Orozco

So I've been trying to figure that out. You know, in my freshman writing class, my first year writing class, it was from day one. I told them, you're all getting A's, everyone's going to get A's. And what you're going to get is constant feedback, thick feedback from me, consistent feedback from me and and and your writing and your and your participation. And the goal is for everyone

to get it together. There's no question it's just going to be about your effort. So some of you have had high school educations where you've done a lot of writing. Some of you have never written more than the paragraphs.

[00:14:24] Professor Orozco

Some of you have read a lot of books and schools. Some of you have never read a whole book. There's people-- we still get students and not a minority of students who have never read a whole book before the entire first year. And I'm thinking if we let them into school, we have to do something with that. Right. We can't just say, oh, sorry, we let you in, but you had a high school education, so take your lumps and get your C minuses and figure it out. That just doesn't work for me anymore. And so, you know, and, you know, we're finishing up and, you know, our first module and every kid has to get every student has Hasnain the class, every student has put, you know, the effort that goes into the final papers, the paperwork, the writing that they've done has been, you know, all over the place because some kids have had come in with different levels of of of attention from adults. And so but everyone's getting the name and we've had not one conversation about grades, which is the best in everyone. Everyone's been on the program, and they understand what it is. And. Not one conversation about points, that one conversation. All my feedback has gone back to critiquing and helping to improve their writing and their work has been taking that feedback and trying to get better. They're all starting from different places or other end up at different places with the writing, but talking to get A's. So, yeah, I don't know whether that can be sustained. This is a small class for 16 students. Whether I could do it in the class of 30. I haven't worked that out, but I'm going to try. And I started with covid and started with all the stuff that's happening around the world. And it started with their students comments that just, you know, penetrated because I had always been thinking about this. I had always been trying to figure out and I never could figure out what to do with it until now.

[00:16:24] Professor Orozco

I know that's more than you asked for, but that's where my headspace is. No, it's not. Yeah, go ahead.

[00:16:30] Sarah Garcia

No, I'm not asking for, like, a perfect, like, answer to this question, because I know, like, we're adjusting, we're adapting to this whole covid as we speak. And that's why I want to document

this. But it's great what you're doing about the grading on effort, because I know a lot of teachers and I still know to this day a lot of teachers that don't have that same mentality. And it's sad that grades are like a definition of a student, you know, and I don't think that's like a good idea. And it's like you said, it's the societal like kind of norm that all grades define who you are, your GPA defines you are, but yeah

[00:17:03] Professor Orozco

No yeah and If all students came with the same education, if everyone had a great education, then grades might make sense, because if everyone came in at the same level, then grades would actually measure effort because it's what did you do with that, with those skills? But that's not the society we live in and that's not what we do. That's not what Whittier College is.

[00:17:22] Professor Orozco

That's not the student body we have. You know, other schools may have that, you know, the schools that accept only kids with 4.0 and above and there are schools that are like that, then you could say grades is sort of metric system. That makes sense because in some ways and it really is measuring effort. If you all came in with great education, what would you do with that then is about effort, but not at Whittier. And so I know, so that's where.

[00:17:51] Sarah Garcia

Yeah, that's great. Great. All right. And the third question is, what are the challenges that your department has faced in the pandemic? Because I know you have a prominent role in your department. So if you want to talk a little bit about that, you know.

[00:18:02] Professor Orozco

The problems we have with our department are partly pandemic and partly just where we are as a department and. And what's happened with our department is we had one person retire, Bob Mark's retired, who used to teach Asian history and world history. And then Nat Zappia left the school he went to, he got another job elsewhere and he used to teach U.S. history and. And then Elizabeth Sage which is European History is on sabbatical. Right. And so functionally, what that's done is it's left really Laura Mcnaney and I as the only sort of participating, functioning members of the department. And this is where it comes in because of covid, because of the economic crisis that the schools in that a lot of schools are and we're not exceptional in this way.

We don't see when we're going to be able to hire. To those to other positions where the small department is, I think when we're fully loaded with the six of us right now, there's two of us.

[00:19:25] Professor Orozco

So that's, you know, managing that. The brunt of that has fallen on Professor McEneaney because she's the chair. But it hasn't. We're treading water, we're not, we're not building the department the way we should, so. So, yeah, that's I think that's that's the biggest that's the biggest way.

[00:19:47] Professor Orozco

And I think. You know, we try to-- we're a department, kids don't come into college thinking 'I'm going to be a history major', some might, people become history majors because they take our classes. They like us.

[00:20:02] Professor Orozco

They see that history that's taught in college is different than what they experienced in high school, but also a lot of social personal One on one interaction. People become history majors. We have to work for our major. It's not like poli-sci (political science) has a built-in that every kid thinks wants to be a lawyer, wants to be a policy major. It's a myth.

[00:20:20] Professor Orozco

But anyways, it's a myth that exists, is believed and benefits poly-sci. You know, I'm not saying they don't try. I'm sure they try, but history has to work on it in the way that other departments don't. And that's just the one that comes to my mind. And so, yeah, that's that's put a dent.

[00:20:43] Professor Orozco

We were growing actually as a department. We're pretty you know our numbers were up. And so, yeah, it's increased the workload mostly for Professor McEnaney. And then but but then it's really just we're just a two person department right now, so. That's that's where we're at.

[00:21:00] Sarah Garcia

And thank you for sharing that, because I know it's not always easy to just reveal that information, but thank you for sharing that information.

[00:21:07] Professor Orozco

I mean, people know we've lost two people. It's hard to replace them because of the schools not saying we're not going to replace them. But right now, it's, you know, they've they're cutting back and no one's getting hires. There's no searches this year, So that's we're in the boat with a

lot of people, we just, you know, if if those two people hadn't left in the past two years, we, you know, we would be better because we at least have, you know, everyone, the whole department functioning. We wouldn't, you know, but because they left and couldn't be replaced, that put a dent.

[00:21:45] Sarah Garcia

All right, and then the next question is just basically...

[00:21:53] Professor Orozco More? More? *Pardon the interview she has TONS of questions..*

[00:21:45] Sarah Garcia

Yeah sorry, if you wanted, I know, this will be like the last one because it's kind of the most important of it all.

[00:21:58] Sarah Garcia

But how has covid changed your teacher- student relationship? And like from the viewpoint of the teacher? Obviously, I'm not going to ask you to speak for the students, but your relationship.

[00:22:09] Professor Orozco

Well, I think I think in the ways I've talked about sort of the whole thing about kindness and being more empathetic. Has changed the way I approach my classes and therefore my students at that level. I've already talked about that. That's, you know.

[00:22:29] Professor Orozco

I think.

[00:22:31] Professor Orozco

Caused me to rethink almost everything I do. But, you know, at another level, I think that you're interviewing me because we developed the relationship in the class where we were in a space together and we could develop that relationship. I think if this covid online thing were to last longer or a long time, be hard to develop those relationships. So I don't know what other people think, but I think that I think those personal relationships between faculty, especially in the small school, especially because that's supposedly what you paid for, they matter a lot, not in the sort of Sappi or, you know, students who feel nice.

[00:23:16] Professor Orozco

I thought that I certainly want that. But also I think.

[00:23:20] Professor Orozco

Learning is emotional and emotions deal with humans and a lot of those emotions with humans deal with the way humans deal with each other and are in proximity with each other. And I think I hope this is only a one year thing, because if we went longer in the first year student, I feel bad.

[00:23:43] Professor Orozco

I know at least with your class, we had a half a semester. We had already built a relationship. So we could just say, well, you know, we're going to continue that. We already know each other. We-- you knew each other in the class. You knew me and, you know, not known. But we know we knew, you know, far as our rules demanded, we knew stuff about each other and it was easier to just carry that forth to the end, starting a first year class with little 17 year olds. And this is their first experience that trying to develop.

[00:24:18] Professor Orozco

You're trying to help them not only learn how to write, which is supposed to go, but also. Talk to them about how one is a college student, especially at Whittier, that's that's more difficult because we haven't been able to be in the same space.

[00:24:32] Professor Orozco

Now, again, we've managed to figure it out and we're all managing and figuring that out with the hopes that this is only a one year thing, because we talk about that next year when we can see each other, we will do it next year. So we're hoping it's only one new thing.

[00:24:47] Professor Orozco

But, yeah, I think that's that's it's been. Not impossible, certainly different, but I think, you know, you know, manageable, again, if they told us we had to do this for the next 10 years. You know, human beings are not the way we would figure it out with vigor, and after a while, the next generation would never know that there was a way of teaching, there was any way other than doing that this way.

[00:25:21] Professor Orozco

And like the old ways would be forgotten and people would be perfectly happy with Zoom in looking at people.

[00:25:27] Professor Orozco

And I think with this transitional generation, hopefully this is not a permanent transition where we still remember the way it was. But let me tell you, six months down the line, it's seven

months down the line, things begin to fade and you just begin to adapt. And I think, yeah, but it was I mean, the one constant is that this module, which was the first writing class. Yes. It was more difficult. And I and I missed not being able to be with them because I, I feel sort of tender towards 17 year old. They're just beginning to figure it out. But your generation, their generation has taken so many blows, economic, political, social, emotional, that this just seemed like another one that you didn't need. And so I feel I feel a little tender towards your generation. Plus, my kids are about your age, so that sort of thing.

[00:26:17] Sarah Garcia

So. All right, so that concludes the interview, did you want to add anything else? I know you did a great job of telling me your side of the story and thank you. You're going to be a part of history.

[00:26:28] Professor Orozco

I think we're all part of this. We're not just going to I'm just going to stop recording

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Automated Transcription by Sonix

[www. sonix.ai](http://www.sonix.ai)