

Story 21: Two Sides of One Coin – Hybrid Learning Edition

Nicole Cizauskas

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Bio: Nicole has been a student intern with the University of St Andrews Enhancement Theme Team since 2021. During this time, she has focused on researching the impact of online/hybrid learning on student life, looking to identifying cohorts more affected than others by transitional periods. She has also delved into qualitative research methods, using creative storytelling and social media analysis to look at student feedback. Nicole graduated with a BSc Neuroscience, class of 2022. Currently, she is pursuing a MSc in Health Data Analytics with Machine Learning at Imperial College London, while maintaining her position on the St Andrews Enhancement Theme.

Hitanshi Badani

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Bio: Hitanshi is a third-year student at the University of St Andrews studying International Relations and Psychology. She has been an intern with the St Andrews Enhancement Theme Team since 2021. Hitanshi researches the impact that online and hybrid learning has had on students' academic and social experiences and their wellbeing. She also works on promoting student involvement with the Enhancement Theme Team via social media, using takeovers and advertising to communicate this. Hitanshi is the Deputy Student Lead of the Enhancement Themes within the wider QAA community and represents the student voice at various bodies of higher education enhancement.

Paula Miles

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Bio: Paula is a Senior Lecturer and the Director of Teaching for the School of Psychology & Neuroscience at the University of St Andrews. She is currently the St Andrews Lead for the QAA's Enhancement Theme and is a member of the University's Mental Health Task Force, Mental Health Advisory Board and University's Student Experience Strategic Management Group. Paula's teaching includes topics on research methods, statistics and educational psychology and her current research focusses on factors that influence the student experience at university, particularly with respect to student wellbeing and resilience.

Circumstances:



Image: Housing by Nicole Cizauskas, Digital Art.

Circumstances

This image highlights differences in student experiences of online/hybrid learning: a person living in a city is having a crisis while in a Zoom meeting; a woman in an American farmhouse is working flexibly while caring for a newborn; a woman in a cottage struggles with Wi-Fi connection; a man in a terraced house is learning from his comfy bed with his pet nearby.

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Words by Students; Composed by Nicole Cizauskas, Hitanshi Badani, and Paula Miles

This poem is composed entirely of student responses to questionnaires and an online forum, where students reported on their experiences of online and hybrid learning during the pandemic.

“Online socialising made me incredibly anxious.

As a one-year PGT student I felt left alone.
To this day I still don't feel the same as I did before covid.
There is something I find awkward and scary about speaking in a large Teams call.
I was always afraid that someone would take a video, as I'm not a native English speaker.
I felt trapped and isolated staying in halls.
I was thousands of miles away from my friends and support networks.
Trying to study from home as a commuting student resulted in no place to go to study.
My home is only me and my mum who is a single parent.
I've had to contact a local therapist where I have to pay about 60 pounds per session.
Applying for university financial help is very time consuming for students who already work a lot.
I felt guilty for not doing more but I couldn't physically make myself do more.
I do not want my Uni experience of classes to be defined by COVID.

“My social anxiety was lessened through online learning.

Being a fourth year, I already had my friends that I was very close with.
We were a small cohort and had a group chat, so I never had a sense that I didn't belong.
I couldn't always attend lectures in person due to certain health/mental health issues.
Having recorded lectures online allowed me more control over my schedule.
Many neurodiverse people, including myself, have found online lectures to be a lifesaver.
I didn't need to attend a lecture when having a fatigue crash or flare-up of chronic pain.
It was a way for me to keep up with my studies even when I was physically unable to watch lectures live.
As a working student, recorded and online lectures were a huge help.
The intense stress of the exam hall was gone when I could sit the exam at my own home.
Recorded and captioned lectures must become a permanent aspect of learning.

I worked so hard to get here. Does anyone else feel this way?”

Our research changed our understanding of students: instead of looking at students as a singular cohort with a singular opinion, we learned to see them as groups of cohorts with differing and sometimes conflicting ideas.