How American Law Students Experienced Virtual Classroom Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Research Design

- Basic Interpretive Design

- Participants: 18 JDs who began Fall 2022
  - Most participants were FirstGen, though that was not a criteria.

- Site Selection: Urban + Elite + Strong Response to Covid19 Pandemic + Large

- Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews & Memos

- Data Reduction and Analysis: Topic Coding (1st Cycle) and Pattern Coding (2nd Cycle); Atlas.ti software.

- Ethics & Trustworthiness: member checking; reflexivity statement; peer debriefing

Five Themes Emerged

1. Participants were *challenged* by use of the Socratic Method.

2. Being online introduced *technological considerations*.

3. Participants cared deeply about how they were *perceived* by their peers.

4. Developing *bonds with peers* in the virtual environment required significant effort.

5. Participants used *office hours* to connect with professors and seek resolution of any gaps of understanding

Theme 1 – S.M. Challenged Participants

Five aspects:

1. Socratic Method online induced anxiety.
   - Physiological symptoms
2. Being cold-called was an unnerving and shocking experience.
3. Participants invested significant time in preparation of their online class sessions.
4. Law professors asked questions designed to get students to think critically during online class sessions.
5. Participants described their law professors as lenient, forgiving, accommodating, and kind.

Theme 2 – Technological Considerations

Six aspects:

1. Participants were able to perceive their peers very clearly through the utilization of webcams and microphones.

2. Disruptions caused by technology were common.

3. Warm calling (panel method) helped mitigate the effects of technology issues.

4. New phenomenon of students exiting a Zoom after being called upon.

5. Professors used breakout rooms to encourage small group discussion.

6. Older professors struggled with technology and virtual classroom management.

3 Key Findings

1: *Resilience* of the participants.

2: Participant self-consciousness was *extreme*.

3: *Community of Inquiry Model* worked for legal education study.

3 presences that are crucial prerequisites for an enriching higher educational experience: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence.