



ISOLATION LATE ION

A look at how the Bradley family has dealt with the COVID-19 global pandemic to date

TOGETHER
BY S.L. GUTHRIE M.A. '20
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DUANE ZEHR
⌚ 10 MIN.

It wasn't supposed to be this way.
Faculty stopped teaching face to face.
Students studying abroad returned early.
Research and other projects were interrupted or canceled.
Campus-based students who could, moved out.
Men's basketball missed its back-to-back NCAA tournament spot.
Spring sports couldn't finish their seasons.
No one was able to say goodbye the way they wanted.

All in all, not a great start to spring 2020.

The coronavirus global pandemic has changed everyone's lives and many experts agree there are permanent changes as a result. Medical personnel have become the new heroes as they risk their lives to save ours. Unemployment is the highest it's been since the Great Depression. As individuals, we've learned to practice social/physical distancing, which in some locations has created long lines to buy food. Major events — like Commencement — had to be canceled.

As of press time, all but essential Bradley personnel have moved to working remotely, while faculty and students have transitioned to an online learning platform, which will continue through the summer months. The changes have not been easy, but the Bradley family continues to get through this crisis with support and strength for each other and for those in our communities.

MOVE TO ONLINE TEACHING

Faculty had two weeks to get up to speed with technology, with a number of online options available. Megan Rimmel, assistant professor of political science, chose to teach asynchronously, which means students don't have to be online at a specific time. Rimmel spent the extended spring break building lessons for each of the content areas for her classes.

"Teaching asynchronously has advantages and disadvantages," she said. "I chose asynchronous learning because I knew many of our students' schedules would be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of them may have essential jobs. Some may be caring for younger siblings at home while their parents try to work from home. Some may be struggling with reliable internet access or need to share bandwidth with their families. So, I wanted to give them flexibility in completing the class when they have the time."

Rimmel admitted one of the disadvantages of this method is not having regular check-ins with her students.

"Certainly, I've had dozens of teleconferencing sessions, but I don't get to see all their faces on a screen at once. That means I'm being extra vigilant in emailing students to remind them of due dates and that I'm available to chat.

"Several students have emailed just to tell me what's going on in their lives, and I'm so happy to hear from them. I really miss my students — working with them face-to-face, joking around with them and talking politics with them."

Marketing instructor **Brad Eskridge '08 MBA '10** has taken advantage of several platforms. He used Panopto to make videos for his students. With Bongo, Eskridge hosts meetings where he and his students can share their screens. He also uses Bongo, Zoom and FaceTime to hold virtual office hours, or even a simple phone call, whatever the student prefers.

Unlike Rimmel, Eskridge holds synchronous classes during regular times and gives pop quizzes through Sakai, a learning management software. He said although the pandemic has disrupted the educational ecosystem, the faculty have to adapt to keep students and themselves healthy and safe.

"My dedication to my students isn't changing," said Eskridge. "Of course I miss seeing (students) face to face. Part of the Bradley experience is that close personal interaction. That's what we live for. I still care about them — what they learn, what they take away. None of that changes."

However, some faculty have expressed concerns for students who don't have the discipline to work from home. Professor of Political Science Craig Curtis told Peoria Public Radio at the end of March he expected some to struggle with time management, focus and adapting to unfamiliar programs and technology.

"They'll miss deadlines because they don't have to get up and go to class," he said. "There will be students who simply aren't paying attention in the same way."

Curtis added the change to online learning could prove even more challenging for international students who returned home because of a lack of internet bandwidth and time zone differences.

"You can't really ask someone who has gone home to some place that's eight or ten time zones away to be awake in the middle of the night to meet a schedule for synchronized learning on Zoom."

Working remotely hasn't been easy for the faculty. Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering Yufeng Lu admitted there's no longer a clear line between work and home.

"Everything takes planning," he said. "The side effect of working from home is that the efficiency of communication drops. When we were on campus, a quick talk in the hallway could solve a lot of things on the fly."

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS GO DIGITAL

Bradley's student newspaper, The Scout, has had to adapt to bring fast-breaking news to an all-digital platform. Editor-in-Chief **Tony Xu '20** said he and his team have a natural obligation to keep up with the situation and called it "a time when good journalism is needed the most."

"During an emergency like this, we must keep people informed and maintain an even-higher standard for our editing and fact-checking processes," said Xu. "Meanwhile, we try to feature the good in the community. Faculty and staff have come up with creative ways to make online learning as enjoyable as possible. I can attest to their hard work since all my online classes have had a smooth start."

Xu, an international student from southwest China, is still on campus, while most of his staff works remotely. He said eliminating the print edition for the remainder of the semester meant scratching their regular workflow and lost ad revenue. The move

toward developing and growing their digital media products over the past few years, including social media and an email newsletter, have helped.

“Our ad team has been great at coming up with ideas to create new ways for our clients to advertise digitally with us. We even did our annual April Fool’s Day special edition online. It was a one-day-only website, and we wrote many satirical articles to bring some light-hearted content to our audience. We had so many people reach out to us and express how much they loved the special edition.”

WAYS OF COPING, WAYS OF HELPING

The viral outbreak changed more than not having face-to-face classes. One of the biggest disappointments was the NCAA’s canceling of March Madness, eliminating the Braves’ men’s basketball team from competing. Canceling the remainder of the season erased the women’s team’s chances of a Missouri Valley Conference trophy (pg. 30).

Infielder **Allison Apke ’20** lamented the end of practices, games and hanging out with her softball teammates. “It is really hard being away from my teammates and friends during this time because who knows when I will be seeing them next,” she said. I think it’s important for people to understand that even though the NCAA is giving us a year of eligibility back, it doesn’t completely fix things. Some people have made post-graduation plans already and it’s difficult to adjust your whole life plan just to play the last 30 games of your career.”

What about activities already online? Bradley’s esports members agree the games help relieve stress, but they miss getting together.

“I know for the Super Smash Bros. and fighting game communities, our roots are in meeting in person and enjoying the atmosphere a group of friends brings to the games we play,” said **Jake Roy ’21**, president of Bradley’s Fighting Game Club. “It’s definitely been harder for us, especially since WiFi tournaments are not an ideal status quo nor the norm. Having the games we do online though has definitely brought

some amount of comfort during this time for sure.”

“Esports has been a paramount outlet for me to release anxiety I have about college,” added **Nicholas Shepherd ’23**. “Whenever deadlines are fast approaching, running a 30-minute aim routine serves as a great outlet to relax, especially now that college is online and I have to worry about my grandmother.”

For many, the lack of social contact has led to mood swings and other mental health issues. Junior **Katie Shields** currently studies anxiety, with a focus on younger generations. She’s been able to keep her honors research project going through weekly video chats with her fellow researchers. Although she lost her job at a small coffee shop, Shields keeps sane with dance parties and reading the “Harry Potter” series.

“All my life, I’ve struggled with what my dad has kindly labeled as ‘major control issues,’”

conference. Another prospective employer rescheduled.

“I wasn’t planning on doing virtual interviews, but I’m up for the challenge,” he said.

“This is new to everyone. They (employers, recruiters) don’t know what to expect, and neither do I.”

He said when the virus first hit, it felt like the end of the year being whisked away. “But my understanding has evolved. I realized it’s not just me this is affecting. There’s something greater here that’s dictating this, and we shouldn’t be complaining. We have time to work on ourselves, to work out. This time is good to better ourselves.”

In late March, Bradley employees filled a van with thousands of PPEs, including more than 2,500 masks, dozens of boxes of medical gowns and several hundred boxes of gloves. The donation went to a local hospital. Gathered with help from engineering, psychology, chemistry/biochemistry, student

“We try to feature the good in the community. Faculty and staff ... make online learning as enjoyable as possible. I can attest to their hard work.”

— **Tony Xu ’20**, editor of **The Scout**

she said. “The biggest challenge is definitely the ambiguity of the situation. No one seems to understand what’s fully going on in all aspects of life. With no structure or certainty, it’s so easy for your mental health to take a hit.”

There’s also fears of entering a depressed job market. **Nikkoh Mendoza ’20** caught a lucky break from electric car manufacturer Tesla, who changed his interview to a video

affairs, dining services and facilities, a hospital employee said the university’s donation was the largest local gift they had received as of that date.

More recent efforts include launching a chatbot powered by artificial intelligence called “Ask Bradley.” Designed to help answer Bradley-related COVID-19 questions, users can visit the university’s coronavirus

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

website and click the chat icon in the lower righthand corner. The chatbot provides efficiency and service benefits to the university and its various audiences.

“We essentially have a digital assistant available 24/7 to answer questions and provide users with information instantaneously, not just when our workforce is online,” said **Jim Crone '02**, Bradley’s executive director of digital marketing and communications. “Ask Bradley” continuously learns from new information we provide to the Bradley family, as well as from responses based on our users’ interests.”

Additionally, the university’s student engagement team increased its services. Members reached out personally to students based on their midterm grades and offered resource recommendations to help them for the remainder of the semester.

“These teams are creating connections to resources and building ways to communicate while gathering ideas and information about a variety of ways to cope with the new situation,” said Professor of Education **Heljä Antola Crowe**, who led the effort. “Faculty and staff are focused on many issues including how to support our colleagues (now virtually) and increase the coping skills and quality experiences for everyone.”

President **Gary Roberts '70** shared his appreciation for the combined efforts.

“I want to offer my sincerest thanks to everyone for your patience and for the gargantuan effort you have put in to get the university up and running for distance learning on such short notice,” he said. “I could not be more grateful and proud of the Bradley family for making sure our students continue to receive the great education and services that are our identity.” **E**

With additional reporting by Bob Grimson '81 and Mary Brolley.

Besides having to teach online, how has the pandemic affected your life? Our 20-year-old son, who studies at Boston University, was sent home from his study abroad in Germany and we had to quarantine for 14 days after his return. The day before he arrived, I went shopping and bought long-lasting ingredients like rice, beans, flour, frozen veggies, chocolate and meat we could freeze. I had never filled my shopping cart like that. I decided to keep the receipt as a historical artifact of these surreal times. My memories of growing up in food-deprived, totalitarian Romania in the '80s were triggered by the sight of the empty shelves and long lines, but I was touched by how graceful and patient people were with each other during this time.

What coping strategies have been useful? Staying focused on the present, exercising, sewing masks, keeping in touch with family and checking in with friends. Despite my best efforts, I've had periods when I couldn't focus, was filled with anxiety and felt downhearted. We're worried for aging parents at home with compromised immune systems and chronic conditions. They were lonely before, now even more. Thank God for WhatsApp!

What's been the biggest challenge of this unprecedented situation? The life-and-death stakes of the pandemic and its economic consequences represent the biggest challenge for me. My husband and I are lucky to be in good health (so far) and to have salaried jobs, shelter and food. I don't take it for granted. It's hard to hear about the growing number of fatalities in the world. The statistics and updates from doctor friends give me a sense of growing danger that makes it hard to focus.

There's a broader anxiety about how the world is changing economically, politically and culturally. I have a sense we may lose certain things for good, and we don't know exactly what they are yet: some of our voice, privacy, our innocence, our ways of working together, of teaching, of maintaining relationships, touching and connecting? I believe there is an opportunity to renegotiate how we protect vulnerable groups (children, the elderly, the unemployed),

Associate Professor of Organizational Communication Elena Gabor on the new normal.

as well as our local small businesses, nonprofits and artists.

I also anticipate students' anxieties about jobs. A former student already texted me she is out of her job because of COVID-19. I have high hopes she'll find another one because she's bright and resilient, but I would have liked to be able to take her worry away. I think our field of communication is well positioned to provide job opportunities in training and talent development, in virtual teamwork, in virtual corporate communication or crisis management. The ability to present our ideas and connect to others online, choose our channels strategically, understand networks and organizational systems and adapt to change over time is ever more important.

