

## Merrimack College COVID-19 Oral History Project

Interview Subject: Kait Hollinger

Interviewer: Claudia Mirshak

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Location/s: Merrimack College Royal Crest Apartment (Mirshak) and Merrimack College McQuade Library, Promise Suite (Hollinger)

Transcript edited by: Claudia Mirshak

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CM: Okay, so thank you for signing the informed consent form. I have it here. I'm just going to go over a brief rundown basically on what's on the informed consent form, just explaining the rights and everything, and then we can just jump right into it, if that's okay?

KH: Yeah perfect.

CM: So I just wanted to start off by thanking you for doing this and participating in this project. Sharing your story and experiences to help provide documentation on what it was like, going through the pandemic at Merrimack College. And then just going over the rights—as you know, we are conducting this interview via Zoom and it will be recorded and transcribed. Participation is completely voluntary and if at any point you feel uncomfortable with participating in the project, you are completely free to drop out. At any point throughout the interview, you may refuse to answer any questions you don't wish to answer. You may also request to stop recording at any time during the interview—if that's in order to clarify, to think through any questions before proceeding. After the interview, you will be able to review the recording and may request that any part of the interview may be excluded. After you have completed your interview, you will be asked to sign the creative commons license agreement where you will retain the copyright to your recorded and transcribed words. After that the recorded interview and the transcription will be made available for public and scholarly use through the Merrimack Department of History. That's including the online exhibition created by the “Intro to Oral History” class taught by Professor Robins. Any members of the general public will have access to the interview, and your words may be quoted in scholarly or public publications. This information can be found, again on the oral history informed consent form which is this document that you signed prior to this interview. Do you have any questions?

KH: No.

CM: Okay, awesome, we can jump right into it. Thank you so much, again. So we can start off by you giving a brief description and introduction on who you are, what you do at Merrimack and what your situation was, being both on Zoom and on campus. And just the timeline of everything if that's okay.

KH: Yeah, absolutely. So my name is Kait Hollinger. I work in the Promise Program at Merrimack College, which is part of the Academic Success Center. I'm the assistant director for student success in the Promise Program, but I've been a Promise success coach and working within Promise since July of 2018. So, a little over three three years. Do you want me to say, like what I do, sorry?

CM: Yeah, you can yeah totally go into that please.

KH: Totally. So Promise is a program that supports students, as they transition into and through college. Students are identified as a part of the admissions process as being a good fit for the program. And we're really just there to provide proactive outreach and support, as you know, students adjust to college level academics and how to navigate being a successful college student. So our primary goals are to help students really develop and strengthen their academic skills, build up a network of support and work on, you know, how do you make decisions, and problem solve and navigate college. So we do that through one on one success coaching, we do that with cohorted first year experience classes, and we have what we call a flexible learning community, where we have other four credit courses across the college that we partner really closely with the faculty and enroll our students in those sections, so they have kind of that--kind of learning community and work closely with a faculty member that we collaborate with. So, I typically pre-COVID would meet one-on-one with students in my office. On campus we have, you know, a space on the third floor of the library. We are part of the Academic Success Center. We have an open Promise suite that we have classes in and students can use to study, do work, our peer leaders meet in there, and all of our offices are off of that so it's very interactive in person. Students are in and out of our office collaborating with faculty and other staff and just a lot of contact,--and that changed obviously a lot through COVID.

CM: Yes, we will definitely get into all those changes soon. We can just start with some general questions, so what was going on in your life prior to the pandemic?

KH: Yeah so, here at Merrimack I was in my second year,--second full year of working as a success coach. So, I started to take on additional projects. I actually had spent the fall, developing and getting ready to pilot a one credit course for our peer leaders, so I got it approved through like the you know university curriculum committee. And we were going to run it in the spring. So, we started to run it spring of 2020 and it was--we had three sections. It was really exciting, we were piloting this curriculum that I had developed. I was still working with a caseload of students. I had I think, I want to say like 90 or 100 students on my caseload, some I saw more than others. And I was, you know, working on other, you know Academic Success Center events like admissions events, accepted students days, things like that. Personally, in

March of 2020 I was one month away from getting married, so I was gearing up for a wedding. Yeah, it was, what I thought was life as normal.

CM: Yeah I'm sure, so the next question is, do you remember the first time you heard about COVID and could you describe it?

KH: Yes. I actually very vividly remember the first time I heard about COVID. I was at my office and one of the classes that we have in the spring, in addition to our peer leadership course, is called "Academic Entrepreneurship." And it's for our students, in Promise, and our other transition programs, who are on academic probation to help them build up their academic skills. So I remember, I was in my office just you know, working on something on my computer. And one of the students—the class was going to start, and I had my door open and one of the students was talking to the instructor and was saying, "You know I don't feel well, I think I might have COVID." And the instructor was like, "You don't have COVID, like don't be silly" and the student laughed, and this was January, probably. And I remember being like, what the heck even is COVID? And that was kind of just like a moment that came back in focus in hindsight, but at the time was just something kind of funny. And then we had friends of ours who were supposed to get married in the Philippines in February of 2020, and that wedding got canceled. And I remember being like—oh that's so sad for them, like it's because it's an international wedding, like that's why. That's kind of the first time that it started to come into the conversation.

CM: Yeah so then next question is, did you think that COVID is going to be what it was? Like what did you think was going to happen when you first heard about it?

KH: Yeah I didn't think it was going to be what it was. I do remember, and in hindsight it's so funny, that this is the train of thought, but I remember my biggest concern being that my now husband was supposed to go on a business trip to California a couple weeks before our wedding and it [COVID] was in California. And I was like, oh, that's probably not a good idea to go right now. I didn't think it would spread beyond that. I thought it'd be a little- I honestly thought it'd be similar to like Zika where it was, you know a bigger deal, but it wasn't life stopping. And kind of—there'd be some areas that maybe weren't as safe to travel to, but others would be fine and it would be kind of one of those things that was like a blip on the radar.

CM: Yeah I definitely feel the same about that. Was there a particular moment when the pandemic became real for you, and could you describe it?

KH: Yeah, so I think the moment it really became real was- it was during spring break and in March, so we—I think it was spring break either way—I was on campus. I don't think students were, and I was supposed to have a meeting with my director, my other co-worker at the time. And my now-husband got a text or texted me, saying that someone in his office had been with someone over the weekend, who had been with someone prior to that, who had COVID. And at the time we had no idea what that meant. Like how many degrees of separation was I from that? Did it matter? And I remember saying, you know before the meeting like, do you want me to leave? What do you want me to do? And my colleagues were like, "Oh like, I think it's fine,

but like, I don't know let's just like kind of you know, run it up the flagpole." And, you know, it kind of became very clear that the best thing to do would be for me to leave campus. Because we really didn't know what was happening. And that was the first time that I was like, oh this is—this is a thing. This is, you know, something that is widespread. And then I had to, you know—I had plans that weekend, I had to cancel those plans. And then that Sunday was when, you know everything pretty much shut down. And we made the decision to cancel our wedding reception. And everything like that shut down. So that when it was really like, okay, this is something that's canceling things. That's when governor Baker first said like the two weeks, everything closed,—that was around that time, yeah.

CM: Thank you so much for sharing that. The next question is, it was March that the first lockdown started happening in Massachusetts. We kind of just touch on that. What was lock down like for you? What were the hardest parts?

KH: Yeah. I think, for me, the hardest part was having to second guess anything I would naturally do. And also the unknown. So really not understanding, like how long would this last. I remember my dad calling and being like, "Stock up on groceries." [laughter] And I was like, the grocery store is not going to close.— And it didn't, but you know, not knowing for like, what supply would be like. You know not really understanding kind of how long it would last. And I think at first it was like, oh we just have a break, we're pausing. Like okay, like we'll just be home. And then it kind of slowly started to— the novelty wore off a little bit.— But I think, I think it was hard not to— to see people as easily. And it was hard work wise to transition to being home. Because it felt like, on the one hand, we are very disconnected because we only had a screen and technology. But it also felt like we're almost too connected, because the lines are blurred between work and home. Because you never left. Like you just got up from your desk at the end of the day and walked over to your couch. And that was it. So that was challenging to feel like you were just kind of in an endless loop.

CM: Yeah, were there any positives for you, would you say?

KH: Yeah, I think that because I had to get creative with how I connected to my friends and family and I'm someone who really values that time spent, with them and I'm you know— enjoy a lot of connection that, in having to get creative, I was able to forge deeper bonds with some friends that maybe, we wouldn't have forged as deep of bonds. Because we were able— I wasn't so busy, and you know it was like, yeah, let's just Facetime on a Thursday night, sure like I literally have nothing else I can be doing. And that was really nice and especially with—personally, having the wedding canceled and feeling all those emotions—seeing kind of who was able to support me was really great. And I—my husband and I have two couples that live within a mile of us that we're very, very, very close to, and it was during COVID that we became incredibly close with them. So, that was like the best positive that came out of it.

CM: That is a really good positive. Do you remember the first time you wore a mask?

KH: Don't remember the exact first time. But I remember the feeling I remember around the first few times, I was going into a grocery store that I put it on. And I remember just feeling like so, like there was so obviously something on my face. And so constricted and like, feeling like a lot of anxiety around it and not because- I didn't disagree with it. But just because I was like this is real. Like this is a real thing, that we don't normally do that now we do. And it- it felt really odd it, felt really odd to- I remember the first thing I noticed was I still smile when I see people even though you can't see, I'm still smiling [covering nose and mouth with hands]. And that- that that feels really weird, like especially when you're interacting with a stranger. And you just like give a smile, just to say like oh go ahead whatever. I was just like this is so odd, like no one really knows what I'm doing.

CM: That is such a good point.

KH: Yeah.

CM: In the summer of 2020 the state's reopening plan began to go into effect. Was there something that you were really excited about opening back up?

KH: Yeah I was- I was excited about like outdoor dining opening back up. I do remember the first time outdoor dining opened up in my town and going and really being able to enjoy, just being outside and socializing. I was just excited about it being- feeling a little bit safer to socialize with people you don't normally see. I was really excited at you know, the possibility of how we're going to come back to campus in the fall. I think I still at that time really thought that everything would be back to normal by fall of 2020. I don't know why, but I just thought it would be. I remember, we had you know a lot of conversations as a team, you know, "How do you feel about coming back and what would help you feel safe?" And initially you know I didn't really have very many concerns and worries. Because I still just kind of thought it would all be normal, so I just remember there being, like an optimism like maybe it's finally ending.

CM: Yeah was there a point where you felt there was a new normal?

KH: Yeah. I think the first time I realized there's a new normal was, those like two couples I spoke about they kind of really became my pod throughout quarantine and we tried really just to see- or really summer beyond like out of true quarantine—we really tried to see each other, and I remember once being like—"Okay, so I have to go to see my cousin and do this but- she's only seen these people and then I'm doing this— Is that okay?" And being like, that is so weird I've never given someone a detailed account of the people I've seen before them- like ever.- like it was just- And then I was like oh this is odd. Like the fact that was just what I did and I didn't think anything of it. That's what I felt like okay, this is- this is weird.

CM: Yeah definitely, and then how did you cope with everything, would you say?

KH: I think really leaning on my friends and family and connecting. As well as trying to keep up routines as much as possible. So, from like a work lens, I tried really hard to, you know, stick to

a general work schedule. While also like, getting in some of the benefits of being at home. And just being able to be like, okay like- yeah maybe I'm going to answer a couple emails while I'm drinking my coffee, but then I'm going to go on a walk and like really log back in, you know, in an hour when I have a meeting. So trying to like, find that balance and really like- I did all the you know- I had a separate space that was my work desk. I didn't sit in it unless I was doing work, I didn't sit somewhere else and do work. Like I tried to kind of set up those boundaries. And really I think, and I think it's still as we progress, about taking the calculated risks that makes sense for you. Because your mental health is important and for me, having a pod you know four other people that we trusted and felt safe with and that we could socialize with, was a lifesaver and that was a comfortable risk for me, and my family. Might not have been for everyone.

CM: And then, what did you miss from pre-pandemic life or what do you miss?

KH: Just that sense of not worrying. Not feeling like, oh, I saw- okay i'm doing X, what do I have two weeks out? Do I need to worry about that? Or that feeling of like, the other shoe dropping of you did something you thought it was safe, and then what if you find out that you were exposed, or someone had COVID? That chain reaction. It's obviously gotten so much easier with vaccines and everything but that feeling of like, "Oh, no." That- that's hard.

CM: Yes, definitely. I know you touched on this quite a bit, but how did you stay connected with people?

KH: Yes, Facetime, talking on the phone. House Party, that app was big for a while and it was actually pretty fun.

CM: Yeah.

KH: I will say, for having to connect on Zoom it was really fun and we did like things- like we had a game night with some of our friends, their House Party and like, my husband and I took ownership of like creating the games and we did like one of them was like a scavenger hunt, and you to go through your own house and like find different items, and ended up being really fun.

CM: Yeah that sounds so fun.

KH: And like, you know, after a while it did- getting on House Party did get a little old. But it was nice to find a different way to connect with people. And yeah.

CM: That's so important, and that was such a good idea that sounds so fun. Was there anything that had been routine for you, but became strange, or vice versa?

KH: Yeah. So, I belong to a fitness studio in my town. I've been a member for almost five years. I would go multiple times a week to like, barre and spin and everything. And then that wasn't happening anymore. And then it transitioned to outside, and then it transitioned to inside with

masks. And then you know all of those different—it wasn't easy to access and it wasn't it- and that kind of disrupted my routine of really feeling like I could, you know, work out and access that and trying to figure out being at home and everything is that was really odd.

CM: Yeah definitely. This is kind of a touchy subject, if you don't want to share it's totally okay, but was there anyone, or you, or that you're close to that was affected by the virus?

KH: Yeah. So actually; myself, my husband, my brother, his girlfriend and my parents all got COVID.

CM: I'm so sorry.

KH: We were fine. Luckily we were all fine. But it was last Thanksgiving, so Thanksgiving 2020. I just saw them. And we all—we got COVID from it. Which was not fun. But luckily, my we- I didn't come back to work, because we were virtual after Thanksgiving last fall. And we didn't see anyone else we were waiting to get tested. And initially our—my husband's test came back negative, but mine- something happened with the sample. So I had to get retested, and in that delay my dad tested positive. So that delay kind of like helped us not see anyone, and then we were able to—and we were fine we were able to quarantine. A little bit of a bummer because we had had some fun holiday- like ways to make holidays—fun plans. But It was all right. Yeah.

CM: I am so glad everyone was okay.

KH: Yeah, yeah and the worst it was you know just some fevers and chills nothing crazy. And otherwise any friends or family I know who have gotten COVID, it's been the same situation like for them, you know sick but fine.

CM: Thank you so much for sharing that, I know that is a hard subject. Was there any particular moment where you felt there was a light at the end of the tunnel?

KH: Getting vaccinated. That was—knowing that they were available, one of my really good friends is a nurse. So, she got her vaccine fairly early I think in like January of 2021 or maybe even December I'm not quite sure. But just knowing that she was getting vaccinated, and then like when I was able to get it. Like that feeling of just like, that immediate relief, like that was—that felt like a huge light at the end of the tunnel.

CM: Yeah I'm sure. I feel like everyone with the vaccine, it was just like a sigh of relief. What is a memory you have of the pandemic that stands out to you as memorable that you could share? Were there any moments that were particularly low or high that you would also like to share?

KH: Yeah- I'm trying to think of a memory that stands out. I think it's a small one, but something that I think speaks to how quickly you adapt to new circumstances is I remember, this past summer, the 2021 summer when I was fully vaccinated. You know mask mandates were lifted in most places. I remember the first time I walked into a store without a mask and it felt so weird.

And I just had a moment of like, I've literally been doing this for more of my life,--far more of my life than I have not, and like--it just felt so odd and that's when it really hit me that, like even though it's a short blip of time, it really--you can adapt to things. And it felt really weird not having it on, because I just got so used to it. Even though that was typical. I think also when I would watch shows, and they were obviously filmed like pre-COVID and, I was like what are they doing? Then I'd remember there wasn't COVID [laughter].

CM: Yes.

KH: That was really weird in a lot of ways. So it's--it's weird how much you adapt. And I think for me, like the lows obviously were just the uncertainty and the fear. Especially in the very beginning of like not really knowing what was going to happen, how long is it going to go on for, and really that change of life as we know it. Personally, like everything with the wedding changing was really challenging. And it was a small piece but it felt like a you know, big upheaval trying to figure it out and navigate it. And even with work just figuring out, you know if 90% of my job is face to face with people interactions like what do you--how do you do that? How do you mimic that? And luckily we have a lot of great tools with Zoom and everything, but some things are harder to mimic as well.

CM: Definitely. How have you changed? And what have you learned? If there's any lessons or advice you have.

KH: Yeah, I think I've tried to make a commitment to myself to really make time for the things that I want to do. And not feel as beholden to different obligations or different--like for example, so I--I don't live near where I went to college nor where I grew up. So seeing most of my friends outside of my home--like my town where I live now, it requires work, right? Cause like you have to meet up and it's far whatever.- So there'd be some friends that I enjoyed seeing more than others, but I would kind of have everything on like a little bit of a schedule. Right? Like okay I haven't seen so and so in a little while, let me reach out. And now I'm like, do I want to reach out to this person? No? Okay. like it's--it's more or less obligation, or hey I really want to reach out to this person, I don't have time to try to go negotiate like meeting in the middle of a two hour distance. Why don't we just Facetime instead? And just being a little bit more flexible with that and really just- really trying to take advantage of really enjoying the different seasons and the different things going on. Something that I--we started, during like this past winter like winter of 2021, among my like really close friend group, was we looked up the themes of our birthday. Like you know each day is like national pizza day and national whatever?

CM: Yes.

KH: So we looked it up for each of our birthdays and we like did a whole party based on that theme. Just for the sake of it and it was so silly but it just--it made it exciting. And I think just being able to find like, little joys like that or little excuses to really be present in the moment, it sounds really cliched, and I'm not good at doing it all the time, but I think just trying to really make those moments and enjoy that is something that I'm continuing to take away.

CM: Yeah that's awesome, that is like such a good lesson and point. And I feel like, relates so much to after the pandemic and just dealing with everything like what you took out of it. And then, what would you want people like future generations to know about everything that's happened?

KH: I think that- this can be said about any moment in history, but like I'm sure that in 20 years folks are going to be looking back on this and being like it was so simple, you could have just done X. But it's hard to know when you're in the moment. And the capacity for human hope and optimism is big. So, the fact that you know we were in lockdown and we had two weeks to flatten the curve. And like I really thought that'd be it. Like I did not think it'd still be lasting. And so I think that being in something is definitely really different because your mind is trying to wrap- you're trying to wrap your mind around all these huge changes, while your natural inclination is to still go through your routine. And it's a- it's a really weird thing to reconcile. And so I think that you know, that perspective of it takes- it's harder to see that in hindsight and in reflection when you're in it, but really that, I think at the end of the day like being able to see yourself as you know, not only doing what's best for you and your family but really what's best for your community is- is really helpful. And I think if,- knock on all the wood.- we get through this and we're ever in another situation like this, just that reminder of like, how can we come together as a community and do what's best for everyone. And help us move through this, fully serve us well.

CM: Yeah, that's great. So now if you could give a quick timeline on when you were remote, because I know you have both sides of the coin, where you were remote and you're also in person, so if you could just give a quick timeline of everything.

KH: Yeah absolutely. So March I want to say like 13th or 12th like whatever that Friday was- was my last day in the office. I remember, you know, taking all my stuff, my laptop and everything home. I took a bunch of random folders and books home too--I don't know. And just be like okay, like I'm not sure when I'll come back. And I didn't come back to campus until August of 2020. I think, maybe I think I maybe drove up once to get a couple more things, but like it was like when everyone wasn't there- it was you know. So, we were fully remote from you know, the middle of March until the end of that semester, and then we continued to work remotely that summer. And then in August of 2020 staff had the choice, and faculty of being fully remote or coming in one to two days a week. So I chose to come in one day a week in the fall. And so I still had all of my meetings remotely. Even like if my, you know coworker was in the office, and we had to talk about something we talked remotely. We never were in each other's offices, we really distanced. Masks all the time on campus. And then the only thing I did somewhat in person was, I taught FYE ["First Year Experience"] in person. But even that was a little bit more of a hybrid model because we had some weeks where we were all as a class on Zoom. I had students in my class who were fully remote, so I was always teaching to people in the classroom and people on Zoom. And then obviously students would maybe have to go remote, for you know contract tracing or if they had COVID, so it's kind of was always in flux. And then in the spring semester, continued very much of the same. Coming in one day a week.

Everything you know, remote. I taught my “Foundations of Peer Leadership” class and that was hybrid so we had some in person meetings, some planned Zoom meetings. But same thing, sometimes folks were on Zoom. And then this past summer, starting in July or June we increased like two days a week or two to three instead of the one to two. And then in July, you know we—we increased back up to the four days a week—and because in the summer, we have Fridays off most of the time. So four days a week, and then in August we were back and running. You know, on campus full time and I now come into campus every day, I occasionally you know, if I need to or I don't feel well will work from home. But everything's on campus and I am back to having meetings in person and I teach my FYE in person. I still offer the option for Zoom meetings, because sometimes it's just easier. Or if the student doesn't feel well we don't have to miss our meeting, which is great, so I will occasionally Zoom with students but it's in person in my office. All of our meetings as staff are back in person, it's pretty edging towards back to pre-COVID.

CM: Yeah. So we can start with getting into like what happened in March 2020 when things—this kind of—we didn't have a choice about remote or not. So, can you describe the mid-semester transition in March 2020?

KH: Yeah. I think it was- it was a lot, it was heavy, it was hectic. You know my job in general is, you know, connecting with students, building relationships and just helping them navigate. And it's academic focused but life impacts your academics and just you know talking with students and talking through like okay like you know—our students after spring break if they didn't come back. So do they have all the materials they needed? Do they have an okay wifi connection at home? Do they have a quiet space at home that they could do work? Because everyone was home. Wifi wasn't cooperating, you know, maybe your younger brother or sister's in a Zoom meeting for their school, maybe your parents are on Zoom for work like, it's a lot. It's hectic and all of this is happening, while we're going through something that no one has any idea what's going on. We're washing groceries, we're like wearing gloves and masks in stores. It just- it was a lot. So I think from that perspective of like managing feelings and emotions, it felt really heavy from the perspective of like, the transition and support. I think that what—being able to pivot all of our classes and offer them remotely and change up curriculum, and be really understanding of life circumstances, that was something I saw across the board. You know, faculty really, you know understanding, and being so willing to work with students. And having you know their own as people, and as humans too their own stuff going and their own kind of challenges with wifi and Zoom and folks being home. Everyone really rallied together to support and be understanding. And take care of the students and each other and kind of really just make sure we- we made it through to May.

CM: Yeah, you kind of just touched on this, too. Was there a lot of things you had to change when it was online, for your curriculum and everything like that? And also for Promise were you still doing one-on-ones with students through Zoom during that time as well?

KH: Yes, so for my class it was a one credit class so it was definitely easier to transition into zoom obviously than a four credit class. But we changed up the curriculum a bit. We paused

our curriculum for the first week that we were fully remote and back. And we just talked about how people are feeling and how you know, we could best support each other. Really just trying to check in with everyone. But yeah, I had to rethink how I was delivering content. In general I don't want to have a class like that- where I'm lecturing all the time, it's really interactive. But it's even- it's even more- or it's even easier to get distracted when you're on Zoom right? Like it's super easy. And it's- I think it's harder to interact with each other, even though we were lucky that we had had half a semester of building good relationships in the classroom. But it's awkward to unmute yourself on Zoom, it's not fun. And that was definitely something you could tell. We also, with like keeping your camera on because it's such an interactive class, I asked students to keep their camera on. But I also was really understanding if for whatever reason it just like wasn't going to work with the space they were in. And wasn't going to pry or you know, take like- take points off. Like it just was whatever was comfortable. So that was hard too. If you're talking to like a black box, like you can't really read people. So I think that that was a huge thing of just trying to adapt how I could tell the class was going. And also just adapting to some of the activities, so you know breakout rooms, we still did some small group things. But we would do things where we would go around the room, and write on whiteboards and that was really hard to do. To just kinda rethink some of those pieces. For coaching, yes we were still absolutely doing one-on-one coaching meetings. I probably did even more coaching meetings than I would have done if we were in person, because how Promise works is, I work most regularly with our first-year students. And then as students, go on, if they, you know, are on academic probation or they benefit from checking in more frequently, we will check in more frequently. Otherwise it's as needed or a few times a semester. So- but it was a huge transition, so far more of my upperclassmen students were reaching out to me. And one of the first things we did as program was really just made sure that we had, just a sense of like are all of our students like okay. Like have we heard from everyone and is everyone okay. So that was, you know, a lot more contact than typical.

CM: Yeah I was going to ask like, was there a big difference between one-on-ones with the freshmen, because I know teaching freshmen during that time must have been so challenging. You know getting to know them, and having meetings with them. Compared to the upperclassmen did you see a big difference in who was reaching out more, stuff like that?

KH: So not as much in March of 2020 because I think everyone was just thrown for a loop. I found, because I was regularly connecting with my freshman already, that the upperclassmen were reaching out more because they were taking the initiative we weren't already meeting. But I don't think it was for lack of not wanting to. I also found that students were a lot less likely to miss our meetings, because it was through Zoom. One, I think because like, again, what else are you doing? Might as well meet with me. But also because it just being on Zoom made it a lot more accessible. In the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021 I definitely saw more outreach and need from our upperclassmen students, than our first years. I think, because our upperclassmen students knew what it was like before. And our first year students didn't, right? Like they obviously knew what school in general should be like, but this was their only college experience. It was, while not easy, there was less of that, "but this isn't how it's supposed to be." That was really hard for our upperclassmen students, especially our seniors.

CM: Yeah. How did teaching remotely during the pandemic affect your relationship with your students? We kind of just touched on that, but if there's anything more you'd want to say.

KH: Yeah I think it's- it's harder to build those like you know before class after class, just chit chatting, you know types of connections. With—I don't know if I'm stepping ahead, but with teaching hybrid, that was really hard. Because you can't read folks' expressions when they have masks on, it's really hard. I'd have some students on Zoom and some students in the classroom, it's incredibly hard to teach to both, when you're in that. And make sure like, can the Zoom people hear me, can the classroom people hear the Zoom people. Like what is all going on? So I think just making- getting a sense of if students are lost, where are they at, that was really, really challenging.

CM: Yeah. Would you say that structure changed more on hybrid versus when it was all on Zoom? Like I'm sure it was really hard to tie class in as a whole, when there's half the people on Zoom versus half the people in person, how did you manage dealing with that?

KH: Probably not well. Yeah it was challenging, especially because, you know, last fall and spring we were still social distancing and being really cognizant of like where we were at in the classroom. So a lot of activities and getting up and moving it was harder, and a lot more challenging. It was also more challenging to feel—to have the folks on Zoom feel like they're part of the class. My most successful classes were when there was like four or five folks on Zoom, and everyone else in the classroom. because then you can make the Zoom students their own small group, their own kind of community. And that way they could at least have each other. It's not great for full class integration, but it helped. Something that we also did was for you know, FYE in the fall I had an FYE mentor co-instructing with me. And for my leadership class in the spring one of my grad fellows co-instructed with me so what we did was make sure one of us was in the classroom and one of us was on Zoom. So that way there was at least someone on that plane to kind of share the screen and make sure that you know, all of that was going well. So I would say teaching hybrid was far more challenging than teaching totally in person with social distancing, or totally remote.

CM: Yeah. So kind of getting into the hybrid and everything, how was it, can you describe what factored into your decision for when you decided to come on campus once a week? And how you decided that.

KH: Yeah. I think I decided that—one, I was really missing my routine. And even coming in once a week was not super back to the routine, but it was better. And it was nice to be on campus and feel very much in that like brain space and mind space and just feel really centered. I also knew I would be teaching and you know, wanted to at least you know, have the opportunity, just to see my students in person in some capacity. And It was really important that we had, you know, decent amount of coverage on the floor and a decent presence and I didn't have any life circumstances that would prevent me from being able to be on campus for one day a week. So

it felt like the best choice to do the one day going in. And I appreciated the getting tested every week.

CM: Yeah. In regards to faculty when teaching remotely versus when you were doing hybrid, how did that affect your relationship with the faculty? Not being on campus and then coming back and seeing them. And were you worried about them throughout that time at all?

KH: Like coming back this semester?

CM: Like first when you were on Zoom how was that dealing with faculty and then yeah when you came back, how was that feeling as well?

KH: Yeah, I mean I think it's kind of similar to like working with any other staff member in the college or even some students. In some ways, it was easier to pop on to Zoom and you know just like connect that way, especially oftentimes faculty might not be here every day in a normal semester anyway right? If they're not teaching that day, they may not be here, especially folks who are adjunct and are teaching at other places, so Zoom made it really easy to connect. And I didn't see much of a difference with how often, or how available communication and faculty was—it was you know, pretty standard. I think everyone had in their minds they really wanted to make sure they were supporting students. And students weren't slipping through the cracks, especially our fully remote students. So I didn't really have any worries about that.

CM: Were there any particular moments of frustration that you remember teaching during the pandemic? I'm sure when it was hybrid that was definitely a big one.

KH: Yeah just little things like wifi.

CM: Yeah.

KH: Like one day my class wasn't affected by it, but I remember one day like Zoom went out—there is like a national outage or something—and you can't do anything when that happens [laughter]. So, I think, just that sense of like and this is such an, I don't know, a good example of like when you really, really boil it down like what was frustrating COVID, or what is frustrating about COVID is we can't control it. So Zoom went down, the wifi went down, there's nothing you can do and that feeling is like—can be really frustrating. Because I think we're used to feeling like we have some sort of control over our academics and our work and there's obviously things that are out of our control, but we're used to feeling like we have more control than we did in that instance, so that was frustrating. And just generally feeling like, you know, I'm kind of learning as I'm going with teaching hybrid. Am I doing the right things? Am I, you know, remembering all the things? Did I remember to charge my iPad? Am I going to be able to use it? Just kind of juggling all that.

CM: Yeah. How did you maintain a work life balance in the pandemic?

KH: Yeah so a little bit similar to what I said before. I was much better at it after like the initial transition in March 2020, it was much better last year. But just making sure that I kept all my work things at a desk, that I was only doing work at that desk. That I set, you know, like hours for myself—"Okay, this is when I'm going to work". And I think going into work really helped with that—to the one day week. And like okay I'm at work and then I'm leaving. And I just made sure that I scheduled things for myself and I tried not to be constantly working because I was, I was there, right? And really just being aware of okay, last night I definitely worked, like I answered emails later at night, let's like really close the laptop tonight and kind of trying to find that balance, but it was challenging.

CM: Yeah, I'm sure. And has the pandemic changed the way you teach in a more fundamental sense would you say?

KH: I think I always was striving to have- to teach in a multi modal or like a universal learning design fashion, like really trying to think about okay if i'm verbally speaking, the instructions, is there a visual? Am I like having students interact am I-just trying to make sure I changed it up and teaching hybrid and remote and all those things really made me realize how helpful it is to switch things up. It also made me realize the importance of building that connection and engagement, when we are in the classroom and taking time to do that so like really slowing down and just like building that, is really helpful, so I think I'm- I'm more aware of those things and just the ability to like kind of be flexible and adaptable. And there'd be many times when teaching remote or hybrid that like something that we thought would work when we were preparing the lesson, like just didn't or like Zoom wasn't working, or this video wasn't working and you just kind of had to like pivot. And so I think I'm much better at like, the pivoting and having kind of a half formed backup plan, just in case.

CM: Definitely. And then how is it being back on campus and coming back to campus in general?

KH: Yeah it's really nice. I thought that I'd have a hard time adjusting to going into work five days a week because I hadn't done it for so long, but it really you know hasn't been--it's been nice to be back to normal and to feel that energy. It's still so fun sometimes to walk across campus and see so many people. I never saw that many people last year--like ever. So that's really nice and to feel that sense of like things are kind of coming back to see students studying in the promise space to have students, be able to come into my office, to be able to pop into a colleague's office and just say hi or ask a question is just so much easier. And it- it really has been really nice to come back and there's a renewed sense of like, okay, we're here, it's exciting.

CM: Yeah happy to be here, definitely. That was kind of all the questions. Is there anything else you would like to touch on that I didn't ask or want to say?

KH: No, I'm good. Thank you.

CM: Thank you so much for doing this, Kait, it was a pleasure. Your insight is really appreciated and we're so thankful that you decided to do this project. I will send you the interview, once we hang up and I will also send you the Creative Commons agreement. It's the same format as the informed consent form, just via the email, and then it takes you to the portal and you just do the signature and everything and yeah, Thank you so much. It was great. This is awesome.

KH: Thank you. Have a good rest of your day.

CM: You too Thank you so much, Kait.

KH: Bye.