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A CASE STUDY IN RESILIENCY: HOW A UNIVERSITY

SURVIVED A PANDEMIC

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Nursing and Health Professions
and the School of Leadership and Advanced Nursing Practice
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

This case study was conducted to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the campus of a small private university in central Mississippi, where traditionally, relational community and interaction were key contributors to campus culture. Through document analysis, individual interviews with campus leaders, and focus groups consisting of members of key departments, the role of resiliency was examined during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging from the data were the four thematic categories of leadership, campus culture, engagement and interaction, and challenges. Key components in each category revealed the significance of resiliency of university leaders, faculty, and staff as they met the challenge of continued academic progress and normal collegiate activity in the midst of an unprecedented challenges.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

When one pursues a work such as this, they never do it alone. There are those who give encouragement, those who offer advice, and those who just listen while you vent over the frustrations of the process. I began the pursuit of this journey long before I enrolled in the program. The goal of obtaining this terminal degree was one I knew I wanted when I graduated with my first degree. At the time, my father was my biggest cheerleader. He told me whatever I wanted to accomplish, I could do it. I wish he were here to see this accomplishment. I know he would be proud

When I did enroll in the Ph.D. program, I did so with an army of supporters behind me. My husband, Jimmy, and my boys, Connor and Braden have traveled this road with me, and I will be forever grateful for them. I hope the boys will see that big goals can be accomplished, and it is never too late to pursue your dreams. I also hope they learn to be an incredible partner and encourager, by seeing how well their dad fulfilled that role each step of the way. My sister also cheered me along and helped me to keep an eye on what was most important, even when working on this dissertation was not the most important. You have always been one of my biggest cheerleaders. To my In-Laws whom I love dearly, thank you for the support and care you gave me during each trip to Hattiesburg. You guys mean the world to me. To my "Framily"… I love doing life with you and cannot thank you enough for your encouragement. You all are a treasured gift

To Dr. Jessica Bailey, my muse and my guide, I can never thank you enough for seeing the potential in this work and in me. Your constant encouragement helped me to see the end, and I am eternally grateful for your input in the process.

To my friends and co-workers who walked the COVID road with me, you all are amazing individuals who deserve huge gold stars. What we accomplished was nothing short of miraculous in the grand scheme of university life. To my COVID Clinic Staff (former Students included), you are appreciated more than you know. Thankfully, we all know who guided us and protected us along the way. May HE get the glory for this endeavor!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychology Association
COVID-19	SARS-CoV-2, Coronavirus Disease 2019
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletics Association
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
U.S.	United States
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic affected the campus of a small private university in central Mississippi. In an educational setting where social interaction is promoted and supported by academic activities, an investigation was conducted to identify contributing factors to maintaining a fluid response to uncontrollable circumstances. This work examined the influence of leadership determination and the resiliency of faculty and staff within the context of a learning environment being overwhelmed by a global pandemic.

This qualitative project was a case study using an interpretive theory framework. Yin (2009) suggests when examining a contemporary event or phenomenon, the case study is preferred. This method allows for direct observation of the interactions being studied and promotes the use of interviews with the individuals experiencing the event. The strengths of this methodology are the ability to utilize a variety of evidentiary documents, observations, and interviews.

Extensive document analysis will be conducted from correspondence and documentation during the time being investigated in this case study. Individual interviews were conducted with selected leaders throughout the university system. Focus groups composed of the University COVID Force members, faculty, and staff were formed and conducted. The interviews and focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The data were analyzed utilizing a thematic analysis method.

An interpretive paradigm was necessary for the researcher to investigate the phenomenon as it developed in a naturalistic setting of the campus. The researcher

developed an understanding of the experiences of the participants as the pandemic unfolded and increasingly required changes in everyday events. Working in this naturalistic setting, the researcher functioned as faculty, nurse, student advocate, and as a data collector to discover perceptions of the participants through their interactions.

The use of interpretive theory in this study provided the means for studying the pandemic phenomena from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Symbolic interactionism was used as the theoretical framework for the creation of interview questions, direct observations, and analysis of data. Patton (1990) claimed that symbolic interactionism focuses on the interpretation and meaning of shared interaction when investigating a group of individuals experiencing an event or occurrence.

Background

In November 2019, an illness made itself known in Wuhan, China. This illness would catapult into one of the world's worst global pandemics in history. The illness is believed to have begun in the fresh food and fish markets, rapidly spread across the globe. By January 2020, governments across the world were beginning to take note of the potential global impact of this disease. Thousands had died, and no known cure had been discovered. By March 2020, the illness had infiltrated the United States (U.S.) and began its march across the country. As it made its way throughout the U.S., businesses were closing, public gatherings were being discouraged, and large routine sporting events were being delayed and even canceled. The citizens of the U.S. began to fear the unknown and life, as most knew it, began to change dramatically. These changes were due to an illness now known as a novel coronavirus named COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

By March 11, 2020, life as we knew it had been impacted in ways few would think possible, including routine things such as school attendance and the process of learning. In higher education, colleges and universities were shutting their doors and beginning to grapple with online learning. Traditional resources, now unavailable, necessitated that faculty create new and inventive ways to educate students. While living in fear of contracting the little-understood illness, faculty and students had to develop resiliency to finish the tasks before them. A sense of chaos flourished in the closings of schools. Using untried educational formats struggles to create new policies to cover the demands of no longer being face to face in a classroom, the general fear felt by the public was all a new dimension for educators. What once had seemed well-choreographed in education, now seemed chaotic.

Students and educators, many out for Spring Break in the month of March, soon found themselves not returning to school. Education became virtual, and a vast majority discovered online educational platforms and systems. While necessary, the changes to the educational process were overwhelming to many. New virtual clinical experiences had to be quickly put into place. Colleges and universities across the country began online education in virtual classrooms and settings. Educators were forced to use technology in new ways, even though many educators did not understand the technological aspects of the platforms or software. They were forced to learn even as they taught, causing frustration and discontent.

Faculty began scrambling to determine what was needed to finish the semester successfully, meeting the educational needs of the students. Platforms such as Zoom, FaceTime, WebEx, and others brought faculty and students together virtually, and the

online classroom became the norm. Students dealt with similar plights of frustration in learning new technology and dealing with constant changes in schedules, formats, assignments, and even teachers. COVID-19 not only made teaching-learning difficult, but the fear of contracting the illness added additional stress that students and faculty had not known previously. A global health concern had never closed schools or businesses worldwide during their lifetimes. The initial chaos of the shutdown left students wondering if they would be able to finish their semesters, how they could get the materials needed for exams, and even questioning the ability to graduate on time.

In March 2020, as many were enjoying Spring Break vacations, a group of leaders at the University being studied were facing a question that most college leaders were facing nationwide. What do we do now? How can we continue to provide the level of quality education we are known for, and do it in a safe way for our students and faculty? The decision was made to extend Spring Break an additional week, giving faculty the opportunity to determine the next steps. Classes resumed the next week with an online format. This method of educating was new for many educators, but most took it in stride for the betterment of the students.

University leadership began the work of determining the next best steps for the university as a whole. Multiple task force groups were developed to oversee the day-to-day needs of the multiple campus locations, and long-term planning of how to continue to operate in the face of a pandemic. Groups such as the Medical Task Force, the Summer Task Force, the Fall Task Force, and the Operations Task Force, just to mention a few, quickly began planning and decision making on how to move the university forward.

The nursing and the physician assistant programs were unique in that clinical requirements still had to be met in order to meet graduation and accreditation standards. The leadership in each department began the task of assisting students and faculty in using virtual classroom technology, as best they could, with little lead time. The faculty prepared recorded lectures and had live zoom sessions, including simulated clinical opportunities. The students began the task of maintaining motivation in their studies while a huge sense of unknown loomed around them. Faculty concerns in nursing centered on the way in which students could meet the clinical requirements, with a comparable level of critical thinking, while being fully online. The goal was to help faculty prepare online clinical simulation experiences to fill the lack of face-to-face clinical time. With the use of online curricular aids and learning platforms (Evolve, Moodle, Shadow Health, Canvas) and many creative faculty, a plan was provided at each semester level that allowed the program to meet the mandated clinical requirements while retaining the needed rigor of the nursing program. These new strategies allowed students to complete the semester. Graduating students were able to graduate with a virtual pinning ceremony, received their Nursing Pin in the mail, and took their graduation photos so that the traditional class composite photo on the wall in the School of Nursing could be maintained.

The Physician Assistant program also dealt with issues related to clinical hours and the inability to have traditional classroom experiences. The leadership within the program worked to find sufficient clinical placements as many agencies were closing doors to students for fear of potential COVID-19 exposures. Some classroom experiences

had to be held in large campus auditoriums to allow for social distancing so that students could still meet face to face.

University athletes were also met with significant challenges related to COVID-19. Scheduled games were initially postponed or canceled, and athletes were not allowed to continue practicing as a group. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) established a COVID-19 Advisory Panel to guide the member schools in response to the virus outbreak. The panel consisted of leaders from the medical field as well as public health leaders and representatives from member schools. Their goal was to make decisions based on best medical practice and to ensure the safety of student-athletes and all concerned in NCAA athletics (Osburn, 2020). While initially deciding not to limit activities, the leaders recognized the potential impact of hosting large-scale sporting events, and with the advice of the CDC concerning the obvious fluidity of the COVID-19 virus, the decision was made to cancel all Division I, II, and III winter and spring championships. Extensions were granted to allow an extra year of eligibility to athletes who were unable to complete their 2019-2020 season, and each NCAA division was tasked to enact modifications to legislation and rules as needed to provide relief and help to student-athletes and member institutions in this unprecedented time (McQuire, 2020).

Within a few weeks of the online restart in March, University leaders began to understand the need to continue most of the educational processes online for the summer of 2020. Most classes would meet via Zoom; however, the Medical Science, Physician Assistants, and Nursing programs would continue face-to-face classes with significant regulations to ensure student, faculty, and staff safety. Laboratory interactions were quickly scaled back to reduce the number of persons in classrooms. Mask and face

shields were mandated and minimum distances of six feet between individuals were enforced. The necessary precautions heightened the awareness of a killer virus that we knew so little about and yet, the determination to continue was just as strong as the fear of the virus.

Resiliency became the constant as the new task force groups began their work. Each group had individual tasks, yet the underlying goals were the same: safety for all involved, consistency in the culture of the university, and high academic standards. As is traditionally the case, the people make the difference, and it was the people of the university who stood up and took on the challenge of moving forward, despite a pandemic.

Due to the magnitude of adjustments and adaptations being driven by the spread of the virus, leaders on the campus were on constant alert to the fluidity of the situation. While the COVID-19 pandemic was hugely significant for the entire population, university leadership was determined to continue in instructional strategies aligned with the traditional educational campus that was pre-COVID. Hybrid models for face-to-face classes were introduced where necessary, such as science laboratories and clinical rotations, due to space restrictions. The university used the CDC and state department of health guidelines, as well as state government mandates as a rule for how to proceed. Many departments began additional daily tasks related to cleaning and sanitizing. Mask mandates became the norm. The university purchased special handwashing stations to be placed throughout each building on campus, and gloves and personal protective equipment (PPE) were made available to those faculty and staff who felt it was needed.

This study explored the process involved in decision-making actions and outcomes influenced through the lens of resiliency. Through triangulation of data collection between a review of documents, focus groups, and interviews, the researcher identified the manner in which the campus leadership was able to continue operations. Results of this study could help shape future learning environments for students, faculty, and administrators during a time of crisis.

Table 1

Timeline of COVID-19 in Relation to the University

Spring Break 2020 was extended from one week to two to allow for University officials to determine the best next steps for the University as a whole. Faculty and staff used the second week of Spring Break as prep for online learning.

When classes resumed, all classes moved to an online format. The Campus, including all offices and student housing, was closed until further notice.

The semester concluded as originally scheduled. No graduation or special recognition ceremonies were held due to CDC and state restrictions.

Table 1 (continued).

The NCAA and college officials determined the Fall 2020 sports would be played in

Spring 2021. NCAA testing guidelines for athletes began being enforced as teams

returned to campus in early August.

August 5, 2020, Resident Life staff began to move back onto campus. COVID-19 antigen

screenings were done on all campus housing students returning to campus. Strict social

distancing and mask guidelines were followed as the campus reopened to a full

population.

August 23, 2020, classes began on campus with 50% classroom capacity. Faculty were

teaching face-to-face classes that were also being watched via Zoom to students who

chose to take classes online. Student Life activities were kept to a minimum as

necessitated by state and CDC guidelines. The Campus COVID-19 Testing Center

opened and was staffed by nursing faculty and students to perform screening tests on

individuals as needed for exposure or NCAA athletic guidelines.

The Chairmen of the various COVID-19 task force groups began weekly meetings to

monitor the progress of university functions and the effects of COVID-19 on the student

population.

Table 1 (continued).

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⬇

The Fall Semester ended at Thanksgiving Break, allowing for thorough cleaning of the campus over the semester break. Plans were finalized for move-in testing of all campus housing students and athletes to begin on January 13, 2020.

⬇

Spring Semester began January 20, 2021. Classrooms remained at 50% capacity with students alternating between face-to-face and online classroom experiences. The decision was made to forgo Spring Break but allow a one-day "Spring Holiday". The intent was aimed at decreasing the potential exposure students might have while traveling during Spring Break.

⬇

The Spring Semester ended as scheduled in May with the campus hosting six individual graduation ceremonies for the various schools and departments. Masks were required and social distancing was enforced, but students were able to attend a ceremony and invite a limited number of family and friends to participate with them.

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Summary

Chapter I began with a historical look at COVID-19 and how the virus and the eventual pandemic that followed impacted education and campus life at a small private university in central Mississippi. Each aspect of the campus was affected by the pandemic, in ways many had not considered until they faced the impact. This study explored the process involved in decision-making actions and outcomes influenced through the lens of resiliency. The chapter concluded with a timeline graphic showing the progress of time from March 2020 to May 2021 and what was happening in relation to campus activities at the time.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This qualitative research is a case study investigating how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the campus of a small university in central Mississippi. Of particular interest was how the resiliency of administration, faculty, and staff influenced the decisions being made to maintain a normal campus atmosphere and learning environment while adhering to regulations and restrictions enforced by COVID-19. The review of the literature was comprised of three major areas that inform and support this topic of study. The first area of review addressed the origination and spread of the virus to create a pandemic effect. This review led to a more focused investigation of how this viral spread began to impact learning institutions, specifically higher education campuses. This review concluded with an analysis of the existing literature on resiliency and the role of resilience in adaptation to a difficult environment with unpredictable changes. Electronic searches were conducted for scholarly manuscripts of these three conceptual areas. After much searching and reading, the most useful articles were chosen to include in this literature review.

The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of the resiliency of leaders, faculty members, and staff in the response to a global pandemic on the campus being studied. The primary research questions are:

(1)   What role did resiliency of administration, faculty, and staff play in the process of management of curricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

(2)   How does the resiliency of administrators, faculty, and staff affect the campus environment while attempting to comply with COVID-19 restrictions and continuing campus activities?

The literature chosen for this review provided a context for the case study and provided information to help define the most important aspects of the topic being studied. The search in the literature began with a review of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although limited, the topics in relation to how COVID-19 affected the process of higher education were reviewed. The final review was in relation to the concept of resiliency.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

An unsettling outbreak of pneumonia was experienced by staff at a seafood market in Wuhan, China in late December 2019. About 66% of the staff were affected with a cough, fever, fatigue, and even some gastrointestinal symptoms. The local health department declared a health alert, and the market was closed on January 1, 2020. In January thousands in China were impacted by the rapid spread of the disease and it also spread internationally. Wu et al. (2020) reported that the exact origin of the disease could not be determined, but scientists believed it was zoonotic, and that bats might be the origin of the disease. This disease has since been labeled COVID-19. The 2019-nCoV virus has an incubation period of 5.2 days with symptoms presenting as those in the seafood market workers. Initially, a fever may alert an individual something is wrong, and this what is followed by a cough and fatigue. As the disease progresses, multiple body systems may become involved such as the gastrointestinal tract, muscle aches, and neurological involvement. The virus has a propensity to attack the lungs as the major organ affected.

Ciotti et al. (2020) reported in April 2020 that this mysterious pneumonia originating in Wuhan, China, led to the laboratory findings of a novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, which was previously known as 2019-nCov. Since December 2019, the virus named COVID has spread to all continents. Dr. Marco Ciotti and his research group (2020) estimated the incubation period for the virus as being 5.1 days. They also reported that within 11.5 days of being infected, 97.5% will manifest symptoms of the virus. By this time, it was generally accepted that transmission of viral droplets was the main source of transmission in human-to-human contact. They agreed with previous reports, that although the exact origin of the virus was not yet established, the genomic analysis was evidence that SARS-CoV-2 was most notably related to viruses found in bats.

The rampant spread of this virus became evident quickly. The WHO reported on April 18, 2020, that COVID had affected over 2,164,111 people with 146,198 deaths in more than 200 countries (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020; WHO, 2021). Being characterized as a pandemic by the WHO, COVID-19 is recognized as the most significant health calamity being experienced by the global community since World War II. Sadly, the United States is leading in the number of COVID cases.

In early 2020, it was widely accepted that this new coronavirus was extremely contagious and was easily spread by close contact. Although health experts were able to agree there was much to be learned about this pandemic, prevention of the transmission was essential to any attempts to control the mounting numbers of cases. The restriction of mass gatherings became an important prevention tactic for public health officials (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020).

COVID-19 and Higher Education

Wuhan, China was not the only location for higher education institutions to be affected by the COVID-19 virus. UNESCO (2020) reported that as of April 6, 2020, 1,576,021,818 learners in 188 countries had been affected by the outbreak of the virus. School closures were taking place all over the world due to the contagious nature of COVID-19 and the vulnerability of students' exposure in educational settings. Toquero (2020) reported that in a manner of minutes transmission of the virus can take place through the spread of droplets or simply touching of materials that have been infected by a person carrying the virus with respiratory symptoms. Although it was soon discovered that the elderly and those with underlying health conditions were easily susceptible to the virus, it became evident by the spread of the pandemic that no one was immune to this mysterious new disease (Bender, 2020; Meng et al., 2020). Burki (2020) reported that as of May 2020, the worldwide impact of the COVID-19 had reached a staggering number of 5 million individuals with a confirmed diagnosis.

In spring 2021, Smalley (2021) reported that more than 1,300 higher education institutions in the United States had canceled face-to-face classes or made the transition to online instruction. This dramatic shift in the provision of education was due to the rapid spread of the virus. The College Crisis Initiative claimed that 44% of colleges and universities in the U.S. were offering only online instruction, 21% were offering a hybrid curricular model, and only 27% were attempting face-to-face instruction as before the pandemic struck. Most educators would agree that the coronavirus has created a disruptive environment on campuses that alters every aspect of normal campus life, including academics and athletics.

Recognizing the danger of the virus and its propensity for rapid spread, campuses across the United States adjusted their educational offerings to prevent close contact transmission. University administrators were challenged with making swift changes and taking care to provide continuous monitoring of an unprecedented pandemic. Observing how quickly the virus could spread in areas of individuals in close contact, university campuses were tasked with taking measures to prevent the spread of disease when possible (Keystone Academic Solutions,[KAS], 2020).

As the world was learning to social distance and wear masks, students, faculty, and administrators on higher education campuses were scrambling to adjust to the new COVID prevention strategies, while attempting to maintain an environment for learning. Neuwirth et al. (2020) pointed out that students and faculty globally were required to adapt to unprecedented challenges. They asked, "How should faculty approach maintaining rigor and delivering quality education as well as support their students' ongoing ability to engage in meaningful, interactive educational activities in the context of a crisis such as this pandemic?" (Neuwirth et al. 2020, p. 2). In their manuscript, "Reimagining higher education during the post-COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities," they point out that the evolving pandemic requires a new perspective of not returning to what was previously thought of as normal, but reimagining the design and delivery of academic programs. This research team specifically addressed the concept of resilience, stating "Providing a quality education during a crisis, in fact, a pandemic, can be seen as a tool for building resilience by providing a sense of normalcy and purpose to both students and faculty in sensitive and meaningful ways" (Neuwirth et al. 2020, p. 4).

Resilience

Resilience as a psychologic construct has been studied for years and the literature approaches this topic from many perspectives and disciplines. The literature on resilience confirms that researchers agree it is a complex topic. Many have provided their own definitions of resilience and there is a recognized Resilience Theory (Moore, 2021). Resiliency Theory promotes the idea that the driver of resilience is not the actual stressor itself but is how individuals deal with it. Much work has been focused on the role of resilience in family matters, children's development, organizational entities, and community issues. Resilience has been defined as "the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten its function, viability, or development" (Masten, 2018, p. 12).

Resilience Theory is not a new concept. Dr. Norman Garmezy (1994) is best known for his contributions to the theory in terms of his seminal work on relating resiliency to avoidance of mental illness. His work led to the belief of resiliency being a concept that changes with time. Resilience Theory today looks at how adversity shapes the way we adapt and manage in times of frustration or chaos. Catherine Moore (2021) examined Resiliency Theory from an analysis of research articles in psychology.

While generally recognized as a complex and dynamic issue that is difficult to define, many resiliency researchers have offered definitions from their analysis of resilience. The Longitudinal Resilience Assessment (LORA) study pointed out the significance of resilience being examined from a time-variable perspective. The LORA study was designed to measure resilience in a large participant pool, 1,191 individuals, over three years. The unique design of this study allowed an ongoing examination, rather

than a retrospective look at the topic of resiliency. This research team determined that resiliency is not just the absence of mental health issues but instead a process influenced by the amount of stress one experiences on a daily basis (Chmitorz et al. 2020).

Southwick, et al (2014) reported on findings from a panel discussion on the nature of resilience that researchers agree that individuals may be more or less resilient at different times in their lives and on different aspects of their lives. Resiliency perceived in this way is supported by the work of Dr. Norman Garmezy, (1994) who believed that the dynamic nature of resiliency changes over time in developing levels.

Although resilience has often been characterized as a personality trait, (Hu et al., 2015; Ong et al., 2006) researchers now perceive it as more of an outcome. They look at resilience as an absence of mental or somatic symptoms experienced after a traumatic event or extended period of experiencing stress (Kalisch, et al, 2017; Mancini & Bonanno, 2009; Sapeinza & Masten, 2011). For the purposes of this study, the researcher examined the perspective of the role of resilience in an organization, specifically the campus of the case study being examined. Organizational Resilience Theory is perceived as a culture of resilience. Everly et al. (2011) describe this theory as one of an entity developing psychological immunity as it adapts to challenges and changes by exhibiting optimism and self-efficacy. In order to create organizational resiliency, appropriate role-modeling is required. Everly claims that when even a few high-profile leaders in an institution demonstrate resiliency, others are encouraged to follow.

Shatte et al. (2017) investigated the positive effect of resiliency in the work environment. This group of researchers surveyed 2,063 employees in terms of resilience, stress, sleep issues, depression, and other factors. They determined that resiliency has a

protective effect on all possible outcomes for individuals in a difficult work setting.

Others have also recognized that the capacity to utilize positive mental attitudes during

challenging times is a characteristic of resiliency (Kwok et al., 2014; Shatte, 2012). The

Shatte research group argued that resilience is an acquired set of skills rather than an

inherent personal trait (Shatte et al., 2017).

Attempting to define resilience, Herrman et al. (2011) pointed out that definitions

of resilience have evolved over time. Their group examined the dynamic nature of

resilience and the interaction of resilience through the lifespan. They acknowledged that

resilience has been studied by psychology, sociology, neurology, and many other

disciplines. They agreed that conceiving of resilience as an adaptive response is most

appropriate. In the face of adversity, the ability to maintain positive mental health is at

the root of resiliency. They concluded that as an interactive concept, resilience is the

ability to overcome adversity or stress.

Windle (2011) analyzed resilience from a lifespan perspective and sought to

clarify a definition. Performing a concept analysis, this researcher examined differing

disciplinary perspectives and definitions. From the lens of psychology, biology,

psychiatry, and personal characteristics a determination was made that resilience is a

complex, dynamic process. In conclusion, the following definition was offered:

"Resilience is the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant

sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life, and

environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of

adversity. Across the life course, the experience of resilience will vary." (Windle 2011,

p. 12)

Summary

The timeliness of this topic reveals much health-related literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the general population, but gaps exist concerning the impact of the pandemic on higher education campuses. This literature review was conducted to help fully conceptualize the research questions. The review begins with an exploration of the COVID outbreak and its impact and moved into an exploration of the literature as it pertains to the pandemic's effects on higher education environments. This review concludes with an examination of the existing literature on the concept of resiliency. These conceptual areas were examined in the context of the potential roles they played in the case study being researched. Examination of this literature provided the foundation for the researcher to pursue answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the campus of a small private university in central Mississippi. In an educational setting where social interaction is promoted and supported by academic activities, an investigation was conducted to identify contributing factors to maintaining a fluid response to uncontrollable circumstances. This work examined the influence of the resiliency of faculty, staff, and students, within the context of a learning environment being overwhelmed by a pandemic, to maintain a determined approach to normalcy.

This qualitative study was a case study using an interpretive framework. Yin (2009) suggests when examining a contemporary event or phenomenon, the case study is preferred. Case Study methodology allows for direct observation of the interactions being studied and promotes the use of interviews with the individuals experiencing the event. The strengths of this methodology are the ability to utilize a variety of evidentiary documents, observations, and interviews.

This research method is implemented in this study as a case study approach due to the examination of events and processes surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Yin (2009) explains case study is the preferred method when examining contemporary events. A case study allows for direct observation of the events and interviews of individuals involved in the events as they unfold. The strength of this type of research lies in the ability to examine a plethora of evidence including documents, artifacts, observations, and interviews. Case study research encompasses a twofold definition: 1. "an empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life

context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" and 2. "Case Study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

<center>Role of Researcher</center>

The researcher is a registered nurse, who serves as an instructor within the school of nursing within the institution of study, as well as the Campus COVID-19 Testing Center Coordinator. With a healthcare background, the researcher is familiar with the disease process and needs of contact tracing of COVID-19, and how that can impact a university campus in regard to student and employee health. The researcher recognized her role as a participant-observer within this case study research. The researcher, by nature of her role, was immersed in the culture of the university as she witnessed the pandemic's effects on the educational environment.

Research Questions

    (1) What role did the resiliency of administration, faculty, and staff play in the process of management of curricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

    (2) How does the resiliency of administrators, faculty, and staff affect the campus environment while attempting to comply with COVID-19 restrictions and continuing campus activities?

Study Design

This case study took place within the campus of a private college in centra; Mississippi. The campus served as the location for interviews as well as focus group meetings. The documents for study are archived data within the institutional system. The study included the review of multiple forms of data to include: the University Task Force Chairmen's Committee meeting minutes, COVID-19 testing data, reports from campus work groups, individual interviews of faculty and administrators along with focus groups including key teams and departments within the university. The interviews and focus group meetings were conducted via the Zoom platform. The focus groups consisted of members of the University's Task Force Chairmen Committee, staff within the Athletic Office, and the staff of Residence and Student Life.

The individuals being interviewed were purposefully selected based on their individual knowledge of events within the context of the COVID-19 effects on the campus. Each interview was conducted by the researcher via the Zoom platform and recorded with a digital recorder application. Due to the researcher's role on campus and involvement in the COVID-19 precautions, access to faculty and staff participants and the Task Force members was a natural process of communication within the college system.

Participants

Approval was granted by the Internal Review Board of both The University of Southern Mississippi (Protocol Number: 21-337) and the University (Date of Approval Letter: 12/10/2021) where the study occurred. Once approved, the researcher began contacting the selected participants. The identity of the participants remains confidential,

however, their role within the university was stated to give context to their inclusion in the study. There were three focus groups used in the study. Focus Group One included members of the COVID-19 Chairman's Task Force. This group contains members of the University leadership team, as well as select members of the faculty leadership, along with the University's legal counsel and public relations team. Focus Group Two included members of the University's Athletic Department who worked closely with the athletes and the regulations imposed by the NCAA. Focus Group Three consisted of members of the Residence and Student Life Staff who worked closely with all university students, especially with those in student housing. This office was also tasked with contact tracing those students who tested positive or were exposed to COVID-19. This group helped to maintain a level of normalcy with various student activities and student culture on campus.

The first Focus Group included members of the COVID-19 Chairman's Task Force. This University leadership team contains members of the administration, the public relations staff, the University's legal counsel, and other leaders based on their areas of expertise. For each semester beginning in the summer of 2020, two individuals were chosen as the COVID-19 Coordinators for the Campus. These individuals were the liaisons among the departments for all faculty and staff. A medical task force was formed by members of the health sciences departments including nursing, the physician's assistant, and biology departments, and were tasked with the interpretation of testing data and helping to establish policy based on the guidelines from the CDC and the Mississippi State Department of Health. The Student Life leadership participated due to the ever-changing needs of students, especially those living in the dorms. The athletic department

was included based on the need for COVID-19 monitoring required by the NCAA. The

individuals volunteering for the Focus Group include:

Table 2

Focus Group One

University Job Title	Role
Summer Semester 2020 COVID Coordinator	A Dean chosen by the Task Force to lead the Summer Semester COVID-19 Planning Committee
Fall Semester 2020 COVID Coordinator	A Dean chosen by the Task Force to lead the Summer Semester COVID-19 Planning Committee
Spring Semester 2021 COVID Coordinator	A Dean chosen by the Task Force to lead the Summer Semester COVID-19 Planning Committee
University Legal Council	Responsible for all legal decisions and offering of opinions needed by the campus
University Provost	The Executive Vice President of the University, oversight of all academic matters
University CEO/CFO	Financial responsibility and day to day operations of staff and campus
University Associate Provost	Dean of the School of Graduate Studies
Dean of Students	Oversight of all campus student life activities
Public Relations Director	Responsible for all public relations announcements and messaging for the University on and off-campus
Dean of the School of Nursing	Oversight of the Nursing Program and served as the Chair of the Medical Task Force for COVID-19
Director of Computer Services	Responsible for all IT related campus technology

Focus Group Two consisted of members of the Athletic Department. These individuals were tasked with not only the day-to-day necessities of leading an NCAA Division II athletic department but also during COVID-19, they faced additional mandates and compliance issues. The leaders in this department felt the brunt of dealing with student-athletes and coaches who wanted to participate in sports activities, as well as families and alumni who traditionally had a strong presence within the department, playing fields, and facilities. The NCAA mandates focused the burden of COVID-19 testing on the department and training staff, as well as the newly formed Campus COVID-19 Testing Center. Those chosen to participate in the Athletics focus group are listed below.

Table 3

Focus Group Two

University Job Title	Role
University Athletic Director	Oversight of all Athletic Activities on campus
University Assistant Athletic Director	Oversight of all Athletic Activities on campus, and campus NCAA Compliance Officer
Head Trainer for Athletics	Head trainer for the Varsity Athletic programs
Athletic Trainer	Trainer for the Varsity Athletic program
Administrative Assistant for Athletics	Assistant to the Director assists in scheduling and communication of events

Focus Group Three consisted of individuals whose primary role includes Residence Life on campus and all Student Life planning and activity oversight. This vital group wore many hats during the pandemic and became ground zero for contact tracing

among the students who lived in the dormitories and apartments on campus. The day-to-day processes of planning student life activities were now laced with the COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines for the time. Members chosen to participate in the Residence Life Focus Group are listed in the table below.

Table 4

Focus Group Three

University Job Title	Role
Director of Student Housing	Oversight of Residence Life, and responsible for dorm student contact tracing
Assistant Director of Student Housing	Assistant to the Director
Student Life Coordinator	Plans and assist with Student Activities, rush, and campus life
Residence Life Assistant (RA) 1	Student employee of the university who lives in the dorms and helps with oversight of the residents.
Residence Life Assistant (RA) 2	Student employee of the university who lives in the dorms and helps with oversight of the residents.

Individuals chosen for the in-depth interviews were selected using purposeful sampling, based on the role in which they held during the pandemic. The individuals hold various leadership, faculty, and staff positions throughout the University. Ranging from the head of campus security to the head of campus dining to the head of physical facility management, each of these individuals adds context to the level of resiliency each area of

the campus had to possess in order to complete the task at hand, the day-to-day

management of a university in the midst of a pandemic.

Those chosen for interviewing are each from various levels of leadership within

the University. Their occupational roles placed them in unique positions during the

management of a pandemic. The researcher sought to include a variety of individuals,

each with their own vital function essential to the success of the university. Each one had

to restructure their roles to encompass the effects of COVID-19 on their work area. The

individuals chosen to participate in the interviews include:

Table 5

Individual Interview Participants

University Job Title	Role
Head Athletic Trainer	Responsible for all athletes on campus
District Manager Campus Dining	Responsible for meal service for the university
University President	Responsible for all University operations
Custodial Staff Member	Responsible for cleaning campus facilities
Campus COVID-19 Coordinator	A Faculty member chosen to oversee the campus COVID-19 response
Head of Campus Security	Responsible for all aspects of safety and security on the University Campus
Faculty Member	Random Volunteer from the Faculty Senate of the University
Faculty Member	Random Volunteer from the Faculty Senate of the University
Faculty Member	Random Volunteer from the Faculty Senate of the University

Data Collection

The document review portion consists of observation of the minutes from the COVID-19 Chairman's Task Force. Since the origination of this Task Force, they have led the University in decision making that has affected every aspect of the COVID-19 response. Additionally, weekly summaries of the campus COVID-19 case data and notification emails were reviewed. The University's master plan of evaluation report related to the COVID-19 response was also reviewed and coded for thematic analysis and validation of the study. The data was stored on an external hard drive and kept secure by the researcher in a locked office.

The Focus Group discussions and individual interviews were recorded by multiple methods to include a Zoom platform recording, as well as with a digital voice recording app. Each recording was individually transcribed by the researcher with each transcription kept secured on the researcher's external hard drive. The hard drive and any paper copies have been kept locked in the researcher's desk in a locked office.

Interviews

The interviews were then be transcribed and analyzed based on the individual responses from the participants. The individual interviews began with the participant being given a list of scholarly definitions of resilience and asked which definition he/she most closely aligned. The tables below list definitions used for determining each participant's understanding of resiliency and the additional questions included in the interviews.

Table 6

Definitions of Resiliency

1.	Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress, the ability to "bounce back" (APA, 2020).
2.	Resilience is something that embraces positive adaptation, with protective factors and assets that moderate risk factors and therefore reduce the impact of risk on outcomes (Friedli, 2009).
3.	Resilience is a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event. (Bonanno et al., 2004, 2011).
4.	Resilience refers to as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luthar et al., 2000).

Table 7

Questions for Individual Interviews

Question 1	Please choose the definition of resiliency that you most closely align with.
Question 2	Describe the culture on campus prior to COVID-19.
Question 3	Describe the impact you feel COVID-19 had on the campus as a whole.
Question 4	In what ways do you feel you were successful in dealing with the impact of COVID-19?
Question 5	In what ways do you feel the campus leadership excelled in their handling of the pandemic?
Question 6	What do you feel you learned the most about yourself and your peers as you have now lived through a year of college in the midst of a pandemic?
Question 7	What do you believe was the hardest aspect of fulfilling your particular job responsibilities during the pandemic?
Question 8	What was the biggest change from your normal work routine during the pandemic?
Question 9	How has COVID-19 changed our culture as a university?

The Focus Groups also began with each participant being shown the list of resiliency definitions and asked to state which they most closely aligned with during the time of the pandemic. The definitions used can be found in an earlier table within this chapter. After choosing the definition, each was asked to give their particular role within their department to add context to the reason for their being chosen to participate. The following table shows the additional questions that led the discussions within each focus group.

Table 8

Questions for the Focus Group Discussions

Question 1	Please tell me about your role as a group on campus, what responsibilities do you have?
Question 2	Describe those first few meetings as a group, knowing you all have different roles and backgrounds, what did you each feel the main goal was at the outset of your work?
Question 3	What were your biggest concerns at the onset of the pandemic?
Question 4	How did you feel about returning to work after the initial closure last spring?
Question 5	What would you consider to be the biggest challenge faced by your department/committee?
Question 6	How do you feel your department/committee was impacted the most during the pandemic?
Question 7	This group faced many decisions during the pandemic. How did these decisions affect you personally?
Question 8	Describe the impact you feel COVID-19 had on the university as a whole.
Question 9	Looking back on the experiences of the last year, describe any changes in the culture of the university.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data collected for this case study followed a conventional coding process. Working directly with the text of the transcribed data, codes were assigned and refined to determine themes. The researcher worked with a peer coder to achieve inter-coder agreement in the process of analysis.

The first step in the analysis process was the examination of documents relevant to the case study. The researcher used this information to form the context of the next levels of analysis of individual interview transcripts and focus groups' transcripts. The analysis will follow the thematic analysis methodology developed by Braun and Clarke (2013). These authors introduce a pattern framework approach to qualitative analysis that allows the researcher to move through data with a focus on pattern recognition (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Using the transcripts, the researcher read and re-read each transcript, line by line, as well as re-watched the Zoom recording. This continual review was done to begin the process of assigning initial codes to the text. These codes were examined carefully to determine if there was any overlap or if codes could be eliminated. Once the coding structure had been established by the researcher, a comparison was made with the peer coder to determine the codes together that most clearly supported the developing themes. Eventually, themes emerged from the data analysis, so that the researcher could develop a narrative that told the story of the case being studied (Creswell & Baez, 2020).

Process Flow of Data Collection and Analysis
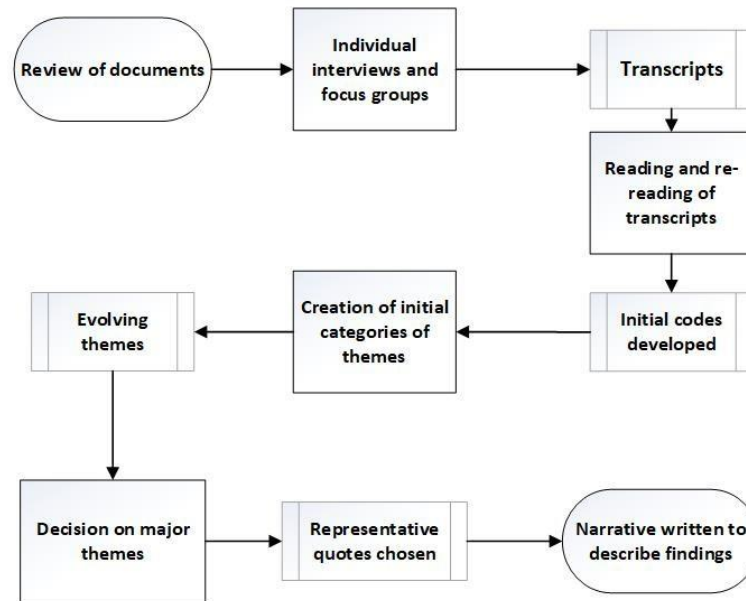
Figure 1. Process of Data Collection and Analysis.

Credibility and Consistency

Qualitative validity was addressed by using an audit trail, triangulation of data collection, peer coding and debriefing, and member checks. The researcher kept a detailed journal of all planning, coordination, and activities related to this investigation. Triangulation of data collection began with thorough document analysis, moved into individual interviews, and concluded with focus groups. A peer coder was involved in the initial coding of transcribed data and continued participation through negotiating the establishment of themes derived from the codes. Finally, member checking was achieved by sharing thematic documentation with participants to assure that the interpretation of

transcripts were accurate representations of their words in the interviews and focus groups.

Summary

Chapter III began with an overview of this case study research. A description of the study methodology followed with specific details of how participants were chosen and the questions to be asked. Specific descriptions of data collection and analysis were offered, and the chapter concluded with a statement of how trustworthiness was established.

CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the process of decision-making and related outcomes influenced through the lens of resiliency. The researcher identified the way in which campus leadership was able to continue operations through the analysis of data collected in the review of documents, individual interviews, and focus groups. This chapter focuses on answering the research study questions:

(1)   What role did resiliency of administration, faculty, and staff play in the process of management of curricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

(2)   How does the resiliency of administrators, faculty, and staff affect the campus environment while attempting to comply with COVID-19 restrictions and continuing campus activities?

Chapter IV begins with a description of the setting and participants involved in this case study. The remainder of the chapter provides the results of the case study that answer the research questions. The chapter will end with a summary of the research findings.

Setting and Participants

The setting of the study was the campus of a small private university in central Mississippi, an educational setting where social interaction is promoted and supported by academic activities. Participants who contributed to this case study were the members of campus leadership, including faculty and those in staff leadership positions. Representation from ancillary services were also included with the addition of the managers of Campus Dining and Physical Facilities cleaning services.

Extensive document analysis was conducted prior to interviews and focus groups to provide a context for the case study investigation. Documents reviewed included a representative sample of the Task Force minutes, emails among Task Force members, COVID-19 case and testing numbers, and the University's summary document of the response to COVID-19. Additionally, documents from the CDC and the Mississippi State Department of Health were reviewed as well.

Individual interviews were conducted with nine participants. Each interview was conducted and recorded verbatim on the Zoom platform. Transcripts were produced with verbatim text for each interview. The duration of the interviews ranged from 18 to 48 minutes.

Three Focus Groups were conducted based on the areas of leadership and responsibility. The first focus group consisted of the Campus COVID-19 Task Force members. The campus leaders put together a group of individuals to lead various committees on campus, each with a specific COVID-19 related purpose. The chairmen of each of those committees served on the COVID-19 Task Force. This group was tasked with a decision and policy-making responsivity for the campus throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The second focus group consisted of the campus athletics leadership team. These individuals were tasked with not only the day-to-day operations of a university athletics program but also with new NCAA requirements and compliance related to COVID-19 testing and imposed guidelines.

The third focus group consisted of members of the Residence and Student Life leadership team who were responsible for housing and safety of students while on campus. They also became the primary contact tracing group for the institution once

students had returned to campus in August of 2020, as well as the meal delivery and care team for those students who were quarantined or isolated due to COVID-19.

The focus groups each lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. Each group was encouraged to discuss their role in leadership during the pandemic and the additional tasks they had to fulfill related to COVID-19. Questions also centered around the roles of each participant and how they perceived the influence of resiliency in these roles.

Each interview and focus group was transcribed and the transcripts were saved to a password-protected computer, which was maintained in a locked room. The recordings were also saved to allow for further viewing while transcribing. These transcripts and recordings were then saved to an external hard drive that was placed in a locked desk within a locked office. Each participant signed an informed consent document as was required for their participation. Research approval was granted to the researcher by the Internal Review Board from two separate four-year institutions in Mississippi.

<div align="center">Findings</div>

Each individual interview and focus group began with having each participant define their version of resiliency based on a list of four definitions found in the literature. Participants resonated with definition number one which was, "Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress, the ability to 'bounce back'" (American Psychological Association [APA], 2009). The second most commonly chosen definition was, "Resilience refers to as a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity." (Luthar, et al., 2000, p. 543). The two remaining definitions each were only chosen by one participant, "Resilience is something that embraces positive adaptation,

with protective factors and assets that moderate risk factors and therefore reduce the

impact of risk on outcomes" (Friedle, 2009, p. 23). Resilience can also be described as a

stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event (Bonanno et al., 2004,

2011).

Analysis of text within the transcripts revealed four broad categories. These

categories included: Campus Leadership, Campus Culture, Engagement and Interaction,

and Challenges. Within these categories lie individual themes that will be described.

Individual quotations will be used to add validity to the concept of resiliency.

Campus Leadership

When considering campus leadership during COVID-19, there is an

understanding that no one individual made the decisions on policy and guidelines. These

decisions were a group effort among the task force. The implementation of the policies

then fell to many who were now given additional responsibility within their current role.

One participant noted that strong leaders had been placed in positions of authority, while

another felt all policies needed to be implemented from the top down. Generally, there

was a sense that appropriate steps had been put in place to safeguard decision-making.

The campus understood those making the decisions were methodically handling each

issue while taking a measured approach to the implementation of the guidelines.

Each task force meeting began with a review of weekly case data, including the

numbers reported from individuals tested off campus as well as the results from the on-

campus COVID-19 testing center. The on-campus testing center was responsible for

testing students who had been exposed, doing random testing of the campus population,

as well assisting the athletic department in maintaining athletic compliance of all athletes

on campus with weekly testing. Between August 7, 2020, to May 20, 2021, the on-campus testing center conducted 11,249 tests. Each semester that year included move-in testing for all dorm students and athletes. The enormity of the workload in regard to the testing is yet another example of the resiliency shown by the faculty and staff who ran the testing center.

Participant C-6 stated of the university leadership, "Given the circumstances and the continually changing information, I think they acted as prudently as they could while trying to keep the campus open and keep students progressing through." The concept of keeping the doors open was reiterated in Focus Group 3 while discussing the need for keeping students on campus to allow for minimal loss of revenue so that the college could continue to operate.

Participant C-1 stated, "I would say that the sense of collegiality, the teamwork was really, really good… People used their specific expertise to address the problems that we had… I think we did a good job in the matching up of people's strengths to the needs that we had at the time and the things that we were facing at the time." Additionally, this individual shared, "In leadership, when you have issues, you go seek out someone who has been through this before and with almost anything that goes on, on our campus, or in our organization, I could find somebody that's gone through this before. But, with this, the biggest challenge I had was if I called somebody and said, what do I with this, the answer on the other end was, well, this is what we're doing, but we've never done it (before) either. There was no one with experience to call." In summary, the interviewee stated, "Leadership is helping your organization and yourself and your people adapt to change and deal with change, and struggle with change, and get them through change."

The comment of this participant adds to the context of the definition this participant had

chosen, in that resilience is a dynamic process of adaptation in the face of adversity.

One of the resiliency definitions addressed the idea of a stable trajectory of

healthy functioning. The idea has been made evident in this case by participant C-4 who

stated, "I think we did a good job of just staying ahead of things and trying to make sure,

you know, we were looking at all eventualities, so that was we were preparing for

whatever came up." Then C-6 added, "They did a good job of staying up to date with the

most current information, and then enacting whatever protocol was required and

communicating that to the campus. They did a good job of doing what they could to

operate as normally as possible, given the restrictions they were put under."

Campus Culture

Most of the participants readily described the campus culture as one of cohesion,

collegiality, and teamwork. The campus is known for its relational atmosphere and the

ease of partnership among departments. Participant C-3 stated, "It's really a face-to-face

sort of campus… I think community is what our campus is known for. It is a busy old

hive of a small community. If you look on the quad, you see folks playing frisbee and in

hammocks, you know, just constant activity no matter where you looked… a kind of a

community… a network, a little family." In agreement with the family description, C-5

said, "It is a family organization here, that is why I am still here because it is a family

bond." This participant also noted, "We were one big family that helped each other out,

looked out for one another, and I think that is one part of what pulled us all through…

We just did what we needed to do… You know, we worked together. We looked out for

each other and it was for the common goal." This level of resiliency was a common

thread among the participants. Another example of this came from C-7, "There was a real sense of we will band together, we will do this thing… a real sense of we will come together, and we will face the thing and see where it goes together." Participant C-8 added, "I feel a sense of community because we have a similar belief system… We can call on each other, this big global sense of 'we've got each other's backs'."

When considering campus culture during the pandemic, one participant noted that day-to-day campus life began as an adjustment to the guidelines and policies, "We all came together. We all fought through the process, the move-in testing, (starting the semester) was an all-hands-on-deck long, and arduous task. But we did what we needed to do in order to protect our community going into the new semester." Participant C-8 added, "I think we were successful because we didn't have to close down. Not just because of the financial benefit, but we were all under the same quilt, so to speak. We were all hovering together." A participant in Focus Group Three noted, "when we came back (in August 2020), it began as a grind that turned into a long-term struggle, that became a long-term marathon, and it still is."

Participant C-2 also acknowledged the change in the instructional culture in that, "I think we did a fairly good job given that, none of us knew what we were doing. I think most faculty and staff killed themselves to push this thing forward. I think the students also adapted as well as you can expect an 18 to 19-year-old to adapt."

In regard to our campus athletics, one participant noted that while we were living with a pandemic, we were still able to play games and compete for championships. "Our kids are still being able to do what they came here to do, participate in athletics and from a bigger picture, not just athletics, but the regular" student standpoint. It might not have

been ideal, but we're still trying to give them the best experience that they can have from a collegiate standpoint" per participant C-4. A participant in Focus Group Two added, "I think our coaches did a good job and I think the staff did a good job of making sure they understood what we were doing and what was in the best interest of themselves, the institution, their own families, and the students as well… I think we had to be encouraged and to be positive of the things that we were doing were the right things. Our department bought in and did what we asked them to do." Another participant in this group stated, "I think you guys were more than willing to go the extra mile and do whatever we needed to do to take care of the students… You put priorities where they needed to be in the moment." This positive adaptation was just an additional example of how the leadership worked to reduce the impact of risk and showed their level of resilience.

Engagement and Interaction

The faculty readily noted the importance of students and how they were continually at the forefront of our intentions. Students are our first priority and engaging with them has always been a focal point for campus leadership. As a university known for its relational, open community, COVID-19 caused a shift in the ability to interact in a way that isolated many. Faculty felt a disconnect to the student population, especially when social distancing prevented office and classroom interaction due to social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. The intent of faculty remained to equip students academically, regardless of the delivery method. Both students and faculty showed resiliency in adapting to the changes in educational delivery and adhering to the ever-changing policies in order to meet academic goals. Participant C-3 noted, "I need to be in the classroom, that is for sure. I absolutely need to be in the classroom." This sentiment

was echoed by many who felt a disconnect from the typical faculty-student interaction. "It changes the dynamic when you are not all up in there together (in classrooms and in offices), it just is not the same. And then the students could not come into our offices. We lost a level of comradery as a department."

The Residence Life focus group spoke to the need for student interaction outside the classroom. Because of the need for distancing, student events were often canceled. At any point, they were allowed to gather or interact as a group, the students wanted to be together, as evidenced by, "Anytime there was an event, that normally would have had just three participants, now the students showed up in mass because they wanted to be together. They wanted to spend time together and see each other. We could have said, 'Hey we are going to go walk across the quad' and twenty people would have shown up... we literally had 200 people show up for a volleyball game."

The administration also voiced concern over the lack of engagement, participant C-1 stated, "when you're stuck at home or you're quarantined or… with a face mask on, I really felt shackled., You know, I couldn't go out and engage with people… I cannot still, to this day, do this job the way I want to do this job- by engaging with people. Because I have to be extra careful, and I have to, to set an example." Though the times of distancing and isolation were necessary depending on the current policies and guidelines, faculty and staff understood these things were being done to keep the campus community safe. The resiliency shown in order to mitigate risk helped to keep the university open and students moving forward with their academic goals.

Challenges

A common theme among participants in regard to frustrations faced during this time period were the challenges of furthering curricular education and maintaining the educational progress of students. One major frustration centered around technology. Online delivery became the norm causing many faculty who had little expertise in this area to become proficient in a short period of time. This multifaceted challenge was significant in that not only was time short, but resources were also in short supply due to the greater demand of online educational tools. A Focus Group One participant stated, "From the technology standpoint, we were trying to get as many resources in as possible, as fast as possible, because we were competing against all the other businesses and schools that were looking for cameras and classroom technology… we were working against the clock." Leaders worked tirelessly to obtain the technology needed and have it installed in classrooms. However, faculty felt the challenge of insufficient training on the new technology and worried that the educational process could suffer as a result. Participants freely shared their frustrations in regard to the amount of time they spent learning to use the new technology and the lack of support from the institution. Participant C-2 stated, "The amount of time I had to spend doing things outside of class like it at least quadrupled my class prep time. Cause like I said, had to make videos, and never having done that… the learning curve was so steep. And even after I figured it out, it would not function… What I thought was going take me one hour, turns into three." Another Participant stated, "A lot of it was just adapting to our classroom limitations technology-wise, and then also bringing a lot of our faculty who aren't as tech-savvy up to speed with how to use tech and installing the right kind of tech in the classrooms." Yet another participant summarized it in the following terms. "I would have liked to have

seen more technology support institutionally…I was having to figure out so much on my own in terms of tech… It would have been so nice to have more support on that front. But there was no training, no demonstrations on how to work it." Though the intent of obtaining and using the new technology was well thought out, the operationalizing of that intent left much to be desired. The use of all the new equipment became an additional stress for many members of the campus community.

In addition to the learning curve of technology, the workload for faculty and staff seemed to grow exponentially. One participant noted, "They will work you until you drop and the reward for your work is more work. And so, as resources have somewhat dwindled, instead of hiring more people, they just put more work on you. It was just too much. The sheer amount of work was almost insurmountable."

In regard to campus dining, the staff often had to cover extra shifts and work in unfamiliar ways, during the times of the highest outbreak. One instance was noted when the cafeteria was closed for in-house dining and all residential students had to have brown bag to-go meals for several days. Additional challenges noted from Participant C-5, "We were unsure of where the labor was coming from on any given day. We also never knew what (food) was being delivered. We never knew what we were going to get on the truck. A popular campus dining option actually ran out of chicken for one week, four different kinds of chicken. Luckily, we had a two-week supply in the back of the freezer… We realized we had to be more flexible. Every day seemed a little bit different… When the trucks showed up, the delivery trucks were sometimes a day late or more, because they couldn't find labor. We just had to get creative. We told people don't get mad just accept

45

it." That type of flexibility became the norm. "You quickly realize what the priorities are and work to accomplish the mission despite the challenges."

Another frustration voiced by some participants was the apparent lack of communication. This issue seems to be a point of conflict within the data, in that the leadership felt the consistent level and methods of communication were done well, some faculty felt there was a gap in the messaging to the campus community. For example, one participant stated, "Dissemination of information has been our weakest point… At each stage, processes change, it seems to have gotten progressively worse." C-3 stated, "I think, in terms of communication, with staff (and faculty) I would give a lower grade in communication. I think the communication with students was good, but with the faculty, it was lacking." Generally, there was the understanding that procedures and policies were often changing; however, the campus leadership has maintained a web page on the main campus website that was updated daily with the most current COVID-19 statistics and information.

The following quote from a study participant summarizes the data in regard to resiliency. "I think that being resilient is threefold… You are presented with a situation, and your initial step one, your initial response could have gone many ways. It could have been, 'oh it's going be fine, we'll just do our own thing, no problem.' Or we could have gone to the other end of the spectrum and you know, clamped down, shut everything down. But I feel like because we are who we are, we really want our students to have the most positive experience that they can. I feel like we found the middle ground. I feel we decided on governmental organizations to follow. And I feel like because we made that decision, we have been consistent throughout the entire thing. I think we have

46

demonstrated who we are. We know what is going on and we have thought through things. We were not just making arbitrary decisions, nor is just one person making arbitrary decisions. It is a process and has been a step-by-step process from the beginning, and I think that has demonstrated not only to other universities, but to our parents and our students, that we are resilient, and we've weathered the storm."

Summary

This chapter began with an explanation of the setting and participants who participated in the research. The data was discussed as well as the themes which became apparent in the review, including Campus Leadership, Campus Culture, Engagement and Interaction, and Challenges. Each theme was then supported with quotes from participants and how they each defined resiliency within the context of their experience.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the campus of a small private university in central Mississippi. This case study explored the process involved in decision-making actions and subsequent outcomes that were influenced by the resiliency of those involved to achieve this purpose. The following research questions were employed:

(1) What role did resiliency of administration, faculty, and staff play in the process of management of curricular activities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

(2) How does the resiliency of administrators, faculty, and staff affect the campus environment while attempting to comply with COVID-19 restrictions and continuing campus activities?

Chapter IV provides an analysis of the data collected and the findings that reveal the influence of resiliency in administration, faculty, and staff. These data illuminate the role of resiliency in a campus striving to maintain a normal campus atmosphere while adhering to ever-changing regulations and restrictions imposed by COVID-19. One participant stated, "every day was different".

Data analysis began with a thorough review of documents relating to this case study. This analysis helped provide a context for the remainder of the investigation. Thematic analysis was utilized for analyzing the transcripts created from the individual interviews and focus groups. Initial codes were created, which led to the establishment of four major categories. These categories were initially generated, refined, and later

validated by emerging themes. Consultation with the peer coder continued through the selection and establishment of these themes.

Analysis of the data revealed four major categories of themes. The categories were labeled as leadership, campus culture, engagement and interaction, and challenges. Within each of these major concepts, the influence of resiliency was embedded in the data provided by participants. All the participants recognized COVID-19 as their unified adversary. The responses are evidence of the dynamic process required to maintain a positive attitude during the pandemic and to keep pressing forward for the good of the students' learning environment. Adaptation through resiliency was a common theme.

Limitations

This case study was limited in focus by the fact that the researcher was studying only one campus. The sampling was purposeful, and it was not assumed that the participants represented other administrators, faculty, or staff on other campuses. Generalization of the findings for other groups was not the focused purpose for this researcher.

The present case study was also limited by selecting a window of time during the beginning of the pandemic with the alpha variant. Subsequent variants of the virus, Delta and Omicron, were not explored. Rich data concerning the extension of the pandemic through subsequent variants might be obtained in future studies.

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this research was to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the campus. In this case study, the campus known for its sense of community where social interaction was promoted and supported was dramatically affected by

COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions. This study examined the influence of resiliency in administrators, faculty, and staff to maintain a dynamic response to uncontrollable circumstances that threatened the viability of campus life.

Dr. Marco Ciotti and his research group (2020) report that since December 2019, COVID19 has spread to all continents. It became generally accepted that transmission of viral droplets was the main source through human-to-human contact. The dangerous spread of the virus became evident when the WHO, declared this a pandemic with the most significant health consequences experienced across the globe since World War II (WHO, 2021). Restrictions of mass gatherings became an important focus for deterring the transmission of disease (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020).

School closures were being experienced globally due to the contagious nature of COVID-19 and the obvious vulnerability of learners' exposure in educational settings. It was discovered that in a manner of minutes, the transmission of COVID-19 can take place by simply touching materials that have been infected by the person carrying the virus (Toquero, 2020). The rapid spread of the virus created a disruptive environment on campuses that altered all aspects of normal college life, including academics and athletics. Campuses were charged with taking extreme measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (KAS, 2020). School administrators met the challenge of making necessary changes, with limited and uncertain information, to provide constant monitoring of an unprecedented pandemic.

One of the members of the leadership team at the college spoke to this phenomenon as "there was no one to call." This administrator explained that he/she had a cadre of professional peers and colleagues around the country who served as a network of

consultants on difficult matters. However, in this instance, no one had experienced a pandemic, and no one had proven advice to give.

A participant managing food services described this unprecedented time in terms of "it's a new day, every day." They never knew who would be able to show up for work. No one knew for sure if the delivery trucks would come with needed supplies and who, or how many would need food provided on a particular day. All this chaos required resiliency to adapt to every changing day.

Leaders on higher education campuses were striving every day to adhere to the new COVID-19 guidelines and strategies. At the same time, they were challenged with attempting to maintain a "normal" environment for learning. Neuwsirth et al., (2020) were quick to acknowledge that faculty and students were being required to adapt to unprecedented changes.

Based on the data received, it was evident that resiliency drove the administration, faculty, and staff to do whatever it took to adapt to the ever-changing guidelines and restrictions while attempting to keep things "normal" for campus life. Many participants were quick to describe the tenacity of the faculty to work as a team in a campus culture of the community. They adapted to changes in instructional strategies and delivery along with increased workload and longer hours of course content preparation.

Of particular significance to this case were findings in Neuwirth et al. (2020). The Neuwirth research group focused on the concept of resilience and recognized the pandemic as a crisis, providing the adversity in an educational environment to produce a tool for building resilience and faculty and students. The concept of resiliency in the

campus leadership faculty and staff was overwhelming, as well as a pervasive sense of a dynamic process of adapting to constant changes through resiliency.

An environment of uncertainties created frustrations and challenges for faculty and staff. One of the biggest challenges was the need for immediate transition in educational delivery. This transition required more advanced uses of technology in an environment that had been structured for face-to-face classroom instruction. Faculty experienced a quick and steep learning curve, especially those faculty who lacked technological training in educational devices and online platforms.

Resiliency theory (Moore, 2021) drives the idea that resilience is not perpetuated by the actual adversity itself, but it is how individuals deal with it. Specifically, how does adversity shape the way we adapt and manage in times of chaos and frustration. The participants voiced an understanding and acknowledgment of COVID-19 as their unified adversity. They described the campus culture pre-COVID as one of community and family-like. This culture permeated their response to the pandemic and the adaptations that were required. They described a "can-do" attitude that manifests itself in a determined sense of "we are who we are" and will do what it takes to press forward under these circumstances.

Organizational resilience theory provides a framework for developing a culture of resilience. (Everly et al. 2011) describes this culture as an organization developing a psychological immunity as it adapts to challenges and changes by exhibiting optimism. and self-efficacy. This adaptation requires appropriate role modeling. Everly claims that when high-profile leaders demonstrate resiliency, others will follow. A participant holding an upper-level leadership position talked about the need to be a role model and

exhibit the same behaviors expected of the staff and faculty. "If I was asking them to do it, I had to model it as well." The leader's responses indicate a thorough understanding and appreciation for remaining optimistic during the pandemic frustrations.

Some have argued that resilience is an acquired set of skills (Shatt et al., 2017), and the capacity to maintain positive mental attitudes during challenging times is a characteristic of resiliency Herman et al., (2011) examined the dynamic nature of resilience and described resilience as an adaptive process. This research team claimed that in the face of adversity, the ability to maintain positive mental health is the root of resiliency. They concluded that resilience is the ability to overcome adversity.

Overall, one of the recurring concepts present in all the interview transcripts and focus group transcripts was the determination to stay focused and positive for the students, mental and physical welfare. The university team as a whole had common goals of staying on campus, face to face in classrooms, and having the lowest COVID-19 cases among the campus population. However, without a positive attitude and "grit" as one participant referenced, we could not have accomplished these goals.

Reflection of the Researcher's Experience

The researcher is a registered nurse who holds a position on campus as an instructor of nursing, as well as a member of the COVID Task Force and Coordinator of the Campus COVID Clinic. The researcher is familiar with the campus policies and procedures. Given this prior experience, the researcher was able to assume the role of participant-observer in this case study. Since the purpose of the study was to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the campus of a small private university in central Mississippi, data were collected in the naturalistic setting of the campus. The researcher

made every attempt to immerse herself into the culture of the campus in areas in which she was not previously familiar. The researcher was aware of the particular biases and assumptions that naturally occur in a qualitative study of this type. The researcher worked to maintain an element of neutrality throughout the study process.

Conclusion

The results of this study have implications for educational programs and campuses when dealing with unprecedented challenges. Attention needs to be given to the further study of the impact of subsequent COVID-19 variants and the role of resiliency in coping with continued restrictions and regulations that impact normal campus life. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of explicitly modeling resiliency by the leadership, faculty, and staff to positively influence student campus life in academics and athletics.

Summary

This case study has examined the role of resiliency in administrators, faculty, and staff to maintain a dynamic response to uncontrollable circumstances that threatened the viability of campus culture and the traditional collegiate experience. This influence of resiliency set the stage for the leadership, faculty, and staff to meet the challenges of COVID-19 restrictions and regulations head on each day in an ever-changing environment of a global pandemic.

This case study has contributed to the literature by providing new information on the influence of resiliency in the administration, faculty, and staff while dealing with an adversary named COVID-19. It has drawn attention to the significance of the ability to press forward in a dynamic process of adapting to challenges presented by a pandemic.

54

Finally, this study has provided a descriptive foundation upon which future studies may be built.

APPENDIX A –IRB Approval Letter

Office *of*
Research Integrity

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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 21-337
PROJECT TITLE: A Case Study in Resiliency: How a University survived the Covid Pandemic
SCHOOL/PROGRAM   School of Leadership & Advance Nursing Practice
RESEARCHERS: PI: Mary Ellen Stewart
                        Investigators: Stewart, Mary Ellen~Anderson, Patsy~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 25-Jan-2022 to 24-Jan-2023

Donald Sacco

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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