

Narrator 1: Testing, Testing. Audio recording, take one. Day 401 in the Quarantine.

Narrator 1: I'm just so tired. Finals are coming and the stress just keeps piling. I'm stuck at my parents' house and haven't really seen anyone my own age in over like a year. Like, I just sit in front of my computer all day. And it feels like I'm doing nothing, even though I'm going to class and doing all the homework. I just- you know...it's not the same.

Narrator 1: Ugh (sigh), I just wish I could know if what I'm going through is normal.

Narrator 2: What would you like to know?

Sound: Bright sound effect/jingle

Narrator 1: Who said that?

Narrator 2: I did. I can show you how other college students are dealing with the pandemic.

Narrator 1: I'm sorry, who are you?

Narrator 2: That's not important. What is important is that most college students, who have not sought out a technical education, do not have the necessary skills to transition to an online education.<sup>1</sup> Non-tech savvy students don't have the readiness to be successful in an online environment<sup>2</sup>.

Narrator 1: That makes sense, I guess.

Narrator 2: Let me introduce you to Paul. A student at UCLA who is currently living in California with his aunt. The strains of quarantine life combined with school stress has led Paul to decide to take a gap year. He's finding it hard to adjust, which could have long term impacts because of his digital disadvantages.<sup>3</sup>

Paul interview clip: Spring [quarter] started... and it was really... how do I put it... 'suboptimal,' I would say. I get a lot from classrooms. I actually really do enjoy school... but I need to be in that classroom. Trying to watch a lecture online took so much focus and like so much energy that one hour of school would drain me for the entire day... I had to make five times the effort to learn half as much. It's really really frustrating and just kind of exhausting, for both sides... the teachers and the students. It was definitely the right decision to take the gap year."

Narrator 2: So, as you can see, some students have suffered from not being able to translate their offline skills to online ones: they're just not learning effectively in an online environment.<sup>4</sup>

Narrator 1: Yeah, that's exactly the problem I'm having.

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<sup>1</sup> Kotamraju 2004; Hargittai, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Puckett, Forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson et al. 2015

<sup>4</sup> Puckett 2021: Week 5

Narrator 2: It sure is a common one. You see, some consider technology to be a bridge for gaps, but in this case, it has proved lacking and unhelpful<sup>5</sup>. For instance, Paul could not get the help he needed, so he felt like he had to put himself a year behind. The move to technological learning set up disadvantaged students like Paul to fail.<sup>6</sup> Technology isn't the sole solution to complex issues of education, and they only serve to create more disadvantages between those who can and those who cannot benefit.<sup>7</sup>

Narrator 2: Now, let's travel a bit.

Narrator 1: Where are we going?

Sound: car noises

Narrator 2: We are going to midwestern USA, where we meet Lydiah, a nursing student at Southern Illinois University, who has experienced a drastic upsurge in her technology usage during the quarantine.

Lydiah Interview clip: "I think my last screen report from my phone was like nine and a half hours. And that's just my phone... That's in a day. And a lot of the time I'm on my phone while my laptop is going. So I am having constant exposure to some sort of screen. If I'm not on my phone, I'm watching YouTube or Netflix, or I'm or I'm on class. So I am exposed to a screen. I want to say like, pretty much the entire day, like 20 hours a day."

Narrator 1: I don't think there's a second of the day that I'm not in front of a screen. Well, I guess except when I'm sleeping.

Narrator 2: Exactly. Despite Lydiah's constant access and excessive exposure to the Internet, she is still finding it difficult to comprehend the material presented within the Zoom classroom.<sup>8</sup> Not only is this disconnect effecting her ability to learn but it also is impacting her mental health. Lydiah explained that the struggle with the online platform is decreasing her motivation and excitement to learn and is causing her to feel insecurity; feelings that did not exist prior to the pandemic.

Narrator 2: Although students like Paul and Lydiah have been struggling with the transition, it's important to acknowledge that some students have had a smoother transition. These students are

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<sup>5</sup> Light 2001

<sup>6</sup> Puckett 2019

<sup>7</sup> Puckett 2021: Week 4; Pucket 2021: Week7

<sup>8</sup> van Deursen & Helsper 2015

often privileged in some sense, whether that be already having a comprehensive technical education, attending a prestigious university, or coming from a high socioeconomic background.<sup>9</sup>

Sound: Seat belt warning on plane sound effect

Narrator 2: Buckle up, because this going to be a long one. We're going to Seoul, South Korea!

Narrator 1: I've always wanted to go to Korea!

Sound: airplane noise

Narrator 2: Meet Joseph, a recent NYU graduate, who spent the early part of the Quarantine taking online classes across the globe in South Korea. Acknowledging his privilege, Joseph admits that he had no issues with access but rather had an advantageous experience because he lived in Seoul, a city known for its fast internet speed.

Joseph interview clip: I mean, I'm definitely privileged. And like, cause, you know, not only did I have like an actual laptop while I was in like New York the entire time, but, I was always in an environment where I had like, perfectly good Wi Fi. You know, I live in South Korea, which has like the strong like the fastest Wi Fi internet, like the internet speed on the planet, I believe. So it hasn't really, like, affected me like, of course, like every zoom call will have like a few hiccups here and there, but I've never been hindered because of the amount of technology that I've been privileged to have.

Narrator 1: Seoul is known for its fast internet speed? Who knew?

Narrator 2: Privilege is a key word with Joseph. He understands that not only having access to the internet is beneficial but more importantly he knows that having the fastest and most consistent internet in the world is what makes him in a more advantageous position than most<sup>10</sup>. It is also crucial to emphasize that Joseph lives in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, a populous urban area. And urban areas tend to have better digital access than their rural counterparts<sup>11</sup>.

Narrator 1: Hmm, I never thought about it but if I lived in an area with stabler Internet, I guess like Seoul, then some of the stress of online school could have been taken away.

Narrator 2: Thanks for taking that journey around the world with me.

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<sup>9</sup> Margolis 2008; Rafalow 2018; Umoja Noble 2018

<sup>10</sup> Gonzales 2016

<sup>11</sup> Carlson 2016

Narrator 1: No, thank you so much! I feel much better. I at least no I'm not a freak for struggling with learning online.

Narrator 2: Of course, you're not a freak! I'm sorry that I was only able to show you three of your fellow college students because there are so many students out there. And although they may be isolated from one another, their experiences might be more similar than you'd think.

Narrator 1: Yeah, I'm starting to get a sense of that. I guess there's kind of a shared struggle in the experience of being a college student during the Pandemic, no matter where you're from.

Narrator 2: Exactly! If I could leave you knowing one thing, not every student is able to have an equal comprehension level online as they did in a physical classroom. Due to the increased reliance on technology in education, students are facing varying degrees of benefits and harm stemming from their extenuating circumstances, such as technology access and education. In general, technology makes it more difficult to learn despite it being promoted as a way to enhance the learning experience.

Narrator 1: Right! And don't be hard on yourself if you've had a difficult time adjusting to the online education platform. It is completely normal. You wouldn't expect someone to become an expert coder the first time they come in contact with a program.

Narrator 2: As the pandemic starts to subside and normalcy returns, online education will most likely remain. Despite the lifted weight of Covid gone, administrators and faculty who are still engaging with students online should remain compassionate to their student's digital insecurities and other circumstances that will affect their educational experience.

Sound: Slow piano music

## **Resources**

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