Multi-Course and Faculty-Student Collaboration: Reflections on Implementing a Qualitative Research Project with Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

In this paper, we reflect on the development, integration, and implementation of a course-based, primary data collection fieldwork project for undergraduate anthropology students at the University of Guelph. Integrated across three courses taught between January-April 2022, we developed this project to provide students with the opportunity to build research skills and to broaden their understandings of how anthropological methods can be mobilized in timely, immediate ways, while at the same time engaging with diverse lived realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. We point to key factors that allowed for the success of this pedagogical experiment, which include established high levels of trust among involved faculty members; careful attention to timelines and organization; the distribution of project work among the faculty team; and choosing a topic that was timely, relevant, and engaging for students.

Keywords: experiential learning, COVID-19, online fieldwork, collaborative pedagogy, undergraduate education, qualitative research

Introduction: Animals and Nature During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Developing meaningful qualitative research opportunities for undergraduate anthropology students can be challenging at the best of times, requiring particular attention to logistics, skills development, and the overall research goals of a project. In this paper, we reflect on the factors that led to the successful development, integration, and implementation of a primary data collection and online fieldwork experience for undergraduate anthropology students at the University of Guelph. Integrated across three courses, the project focussed on gathering stories of engagements with animals and nature during the earlier period of the COVID-19 pandemic. We first outline how we came to the idea of the project, followed by a discussion of the logistical steps taken to develop and implement it. This is followed by an overview of some of the gathered data and a consideration of student experiences with the project. We discuss key factors that allowed for the success of this faculty-student collaboration and pedagogical experiment, which include established high levels of trust between involved faculty members; careful attention to timelines and organization; the distribution of project work among the faculty team; and choosing a topic that was timely, relevant, and engaging for students.

This project emerged for two key reasons. First was a pre-existing correspondence between authors Auerbach and McIlwraith. In the Winter 2021 semester, McIlwraith taught an introductory anthropology course using Auerbach's *From Water to Wine* (2020) as the course ethnography. Set in Angola and drawing on sensory approaches to the ethnographic portrayal of urban middle-class lives, McIlwraith and Auerbach corresponded about questions that the book raised about teaching. This initial correspondence led to discussions of Auerbach's Archive of Kindness project. Initiated in late 2020 with second-year undergraduate students, the Archive of Kindness project focussed on micro-level interactions and everyday kindnesses that emerged during the initial COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. Students in Auerbach's class collected and curated over 1000 stories of micro-kindnesses, while building their practical skills in research and writing. Auerbach notes that "[it was] one example of a project that succeeded in shifting students' perspectives by helping them to focus on something positive during a very frightening time" (2022:89). The most visible output of this project is the book, *The Archive of Kindness: Stories of Everyday Heroism during the South African Lockdown* (Auerbach & Longwe 2021), which pairs short vignettes collected by the students with illustrations done by a Malawian artist who was a fine-arts student completing his degree in Cape Town during the pandemic.

McIlwraith and Auerbach's discussion of the Archive of Kindness led to broader meetings that included Finnis, Gagné, and Steffens. The University of Guelph anthropologists were struck by the potential of this kind of project for our students, both for skills development and in terms of the potential for offering hopeful insights into pandemic experiences. In mid-2020, Finnis had co-created a collaborative, multidisciplinary pandemics course that brought students, faculty, and alumni together to explore some of the multiple dimensions, implications, and questions around COVID-19 (Finnis, Lachapelle, & Gregory 2021). We were interested in building on aspects of the idea of collaborative teaching, and on the Archive of Kindness project. Together, Finnis, Gagné, McIlwraith, and Steffens decided to initiate a project across three courses at the University of Guelph. Since our individual research interests encompass themes including animals, environment, space and place, and health, we decided to focus the project on everyday encounters with animals and nature during the pandemic. This also gave the project a 'Guelph' flavour, given that a veterinary school is a core aspect of the University's identity. It also aligned with the University's increasing focus on One Health research.

Second, there have been various discussions about the teaching implications, challenges, and opportunities of COVID-19, both within and beyond anthropology (e.g., Cheuk 2021; Christian, McCarty, and Brown 2021; Daurio and Turin 2021; Jacobs et al. 2021; Jenks 2021; Kim et al. 2021; Mandache et al. 2021; Russell et al. 2021; Santos 2021) as well as about the stresses, challenges, and uncertainties that students have, and continue to experience, in the context of the pandemic (e.g., Lee, Jeong, and Kim 2021; Moore, Petrie, and Slavin 2022; Salvador et al. 2021; Villani et al. 2021). We were aware that the combination of uncertainties about the pandemic, changes in teaching formats and approaches, and pre-existing vulnerabilities (Santos 2021; Kelly 2022) had affected, and continued to affect, our students. As Russell et al. (2021) have noted, the pandemic demands attention in anthropology classes. Moreover, as Jenks (2021) discusses, it creates spaces for the collaborative development of anthropological course materials. Rather than operating as though the pandemic was not continuing around us, we decided to integrate it into our courses in a meaningful way. Our goal was to create something that could potentially be positively "pedagogically transformative" (Russell et al. 2021:39) by recognizing the effects of the pandemic while simultaneously developing students' academic skills, building engagement, and providing spaces that acknowledged the very real stresses that students were experiencing.

In the remainder of this paper, we discuss organizational processes and pedagogical goals, followed by a consideration of student experiences and outcomes. In doing so, we demonstrate the extent to which student work and classroom learning can integrate professional skills development and the opportunity to take those skills from project implementation through to publication and other forms of public dissemination.

Trust and the Development of a Multi-Course Collaborative Research Project

Sharp, Stanley, and Hayward (2011) have noted that trust is crucial for successful collaborative faculty-student research. A key factor in the development of our project was the pre-existing high levels of trust among the four University of Guelph faculty members. When we first started discussing a potential multi-course project, we listened to each other in terms of possibilities, challenges, and concerns. We wanted to ensure that each of us was involved in an equitable way and that we were all equally committed to developing and following through with the project. Clear communication was central to all stages of the project; we communicated through face-to-face conversations (in person and remote), emails, and instant messaging, depending on the nature of the question or issue.

We structured the project across three courses, ANTH*2180, SOAN*3380, and ANTH*4700.[1] This involved both collaborative and individual work. For example, we collaboratively developed the interview guide (see Table 1) which was used by students in all three courses. Recognizing that it might be difficult to find times to set up interviews, especially given how many students were involved across the courses, we also gave students the opportunity to gather written narratives from participants based on the interview questions. Finally, we created an interview transcript template for students to use. This template included space for students to (optionally) write out their thoughts, impressions, and observations of the interview experience. Assessment and pedagogical goals were modified for each course so that students at different academic levels could build research skills, with

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[1] At the University of Guelph, anthropology courses are designated with ANTH codes. SOAN refers to Sociology and Anthropology and means the course is open to both sociology and anthropology students. Some of the participating students were anthropology majors, but some were taking the courses as part of a minor, or as an elective. Each course met for approximately three hours a week over the 12 teaching weeks of the semester, either in one three-hour session (ANTH*4700) or two 1.5-hour sessions (ANTH*2180; SOAN*3380).

the depth and breadth of these skills increasing for students further along in their degrees. Table 2 maps out the integration of the assignments into different courses and provides information about each course.[2]

Table 1. Interview guide

Background questions
- How old are you? - Would you be willing to share your gender identity with me? - Can you tell me generally where you're located and/or generally where this story took place?
Interview questions
- Can you tell me any stories you have about interacting with any animals, or nature, during the pandemic, or about encounters you've had with animals (or nature) during the pandemic? - a) Prompt 1: For example, do you have any stories that surprised you about a companion animal (new or old)? Or wild animals you encountered? b) Prompt 2: Have there been times when COVID-19 changed how you would have interacted with an animal(s) or nature compared to prior to the pandemic? - What did these interactions mean to you? How do you think they have affected your experience of the pandemic? - Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or tell me today? Or another story you'd like to share?

At the University of Guelph all class-based research projects go through the university's Research Ethics Board (REB) process. Although this can technically be done once classes start, in practice it is best to apply for approval prior to the beginning of the semester when a project will be enacted.[3] As a result, led by McIlwraith, in October 2021, we began writing our ethics application and associated documents such as recruitment scripts and consent forms. McIlwraith's role in leading the ethics process helped with the division of labour in preparing for the project since Finnis, Gagné, and Steffens were focussed on revising course syllabi and assignments, as well as coordinating timelines and activities across our courses. The central ethical issue in the project was ensuring that participants understood that their anonymized narrative contributions would be seen by students in other classes.

Table 2. Project integration across different courses

Course code/title	Course level and role in the undergraduate anthropology programs	Number of registered students	Instructor	Project integration and assessment components
ANTH*2180 – Public Anthropology	2nd year; required for anthropology majors and minors	167	Steffens	Integration: A class workshop and assessments. Gave students an opportunity to conduct real-world public anthropology Assessments: Submission of 3 interviews/narratives (10%), and a reflection (5%) Assessment Breakdown (15% of total marks): Interviews/narratives:

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[2] In Winter 2022, the first two weeks of the semester were held online, and then most classes at the University of Guelph transitioned to a classroom-based format. However, some flexibility was maintained, with some courses offering a hybrid option and/or moving between online and classroom-based sessions depending on circumstances.
[3] The South African project received ethical clearance whilst in motion, reflecting the flux of the first wave of COVID-19 teaching.

				– Recruitment of, interviewing, and transcribing interviews of 3 persons (7.5%) – Provided rich notes for each interview (2.5%) Reflection: - 250-word reflection on they learned throughout the process, specifically on the use of semi-structured interview in public anthropology, and how the assignment allowed them to reflect on their own experience (5%).
SOAN*3380 – Culture, Society, & Nature	3rd year elective	34	Gagné	Integration: Project aligns with the overall course theme and is integrated through theory/content/readings, methods/analysis lectures, and assessments. Assessments: Submission of 5 interviews/narratives; 500-word reflection on the dichotomy between nature-culture based on the interviews/narratives collected. Assessment Breakdown (20% of total marks): - Collecting and transcribing interviews: 5% - The reflection integrates a preliminary analysis of the interviews and makes connection to the theme of the course: 12% - The discussion integrates references to the course readings and films screened in class: 3%
ANTH*4700 – Issues in Contemporary Anthropological Theory	4th year; required theory course for anthropology majors	9	Finnis	Integration: Project integrated through theory/content/readings, methods/analysis lectures/workshops, and assessments. Assessments: Submission of 7-10 interviews/narratives; preliminary analysis; final research paper drawing on the overall data set.[4] Assessment breakdown (55% of total marks): - Collecting and transcribing interviews: 12.5% - Preliminary analysis and discussion of interviews (written + in-class discussion): 12.5% - Final analysis paper: 25% - Reflection on the process/insights gained: 5%

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[4] Given the amount of data that the project generated, it was not realistic to ask students to code and analyse the entire data set. Instead, they were given instructions on working with a subsection.
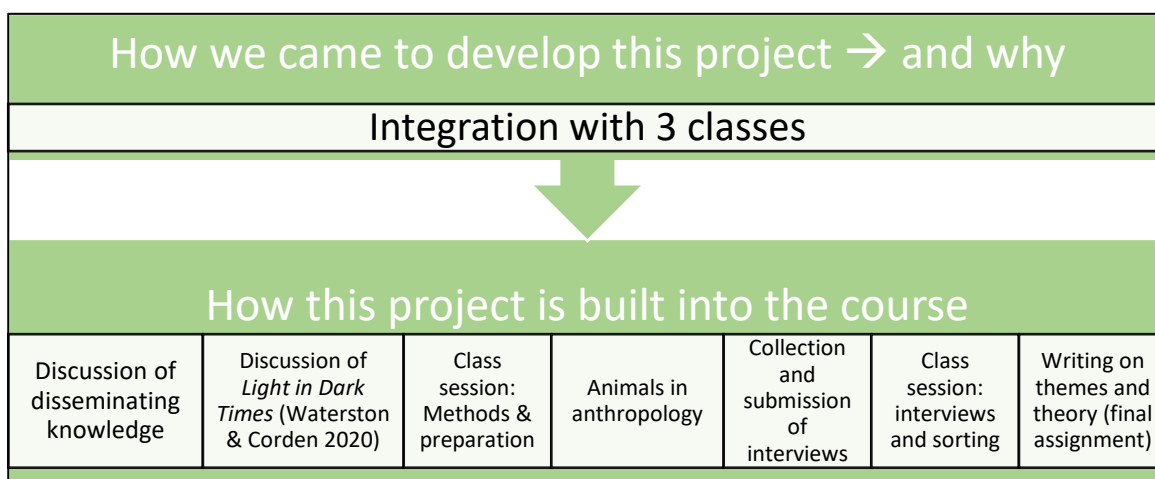
We received REB approval in November 2021. The approval covered only online or phone interviews which was consistent with the University's requirements for student researchers eighteen months into the pandemic. Early in the semester, some students asked if they could interview housemates, and if so, would they be required to do so over the internet or the phone. We had not anticipated this question (although we should have!) and were able to obtain permission from the REB for students to do in-person interviews with people with whom they were already sharing living accommodations.

The project also required fostering a sense of trust among students, particularly in terms of demonstrating that we trusted their capacity to undertake real-world research (Sharp, Stanley, & Hayward 2011: 207). We built this by focussing on skills development and ensuring that the project was integrated with course assessments, readings, and learning objectives in diverse ways, rather than being 'tacked on'. Thus, some of the individual work for the faculty partners involved restructuring our courses in terms of skills development, assessments, and thematic explorations.

In our anthropology undergraduate program, students are required to take a qualitative research methods course. Given the number of students at different levels across the three classes we could not guarantee that all had already take this course. Therefore, we added introductions to or reviews of interviewing techniques, along with other revisions to the structure of each course. In ANTH*2180, Steffens replaced an op-ed writing assignment with an interview/narrative assignment. He had students collect 3-5 interviews/narratives each, transcribe the interviews, provide interview notes, and write a 250-word reflection. The reflection asked students to discuss what they learned about conducting semi-structured interviews for public anthropology and to consider how the assignment allowed them to reflect on their own experiences during the pandemic. To prepare students for the project, Steffens conducted a workshop for the class explaining the project and how to conduct semi-structured interviews.

In SOAN*3380, Gagné offered a talk about interviewing in qualitative research. Students then collected 5 interviews/narratives and wrote a 500-word reflection that discussed how their material intersected with nature-culture dichotomy discussions, which were core to their overall course theme and readings. Students were also invited to refer, whenever relevant, to their interview material and collected stories in classroom discussions. Finnis had not taught ANTH*4700 since 2016 and took the opportunity to entirely restructure the course content and assessments to integrate the project throughout the semester. The course did not solely focus on thematic material related to the project, but project-related aspects were incorporated into 6 out of 12 class sessions, and project-related assessments accounted for 55% of students' final grades. She showed Figure 1 in the first class meeting as a way to explain the project's origins and broader structure, to demonstrate to students how it was integrated throughout the semester, and to show how skills-building supports were part of the process. In addition to a class session on interviewing, she held a class workshop on approaches to coding, analysis, and writing, to prepare students to analyse the collected data that they would draw on in writing their final research papers. Finally, Auerbach created an introductory video that we could share in our classes to introduce the origins and goals of the Archive of Kindness project, and she encouraged students to reach out to her if they wanted to know more.

Figure 1. Integrating the Project into ANTH*4700

How we came to develop this project → and why						
Integration with 3 classes						
How this project is built into the course						
Discussion of disseminating knowledge	Discussion of *Light in Dark Times* (Waterston & Corden 2020)	Class session: Methods & preparation	Animals in anthropology	Collection and submission of interviews	Class session: interviews and sorting	Writing on themes and theory (final assignment)

Faculty did not collect data for the project, and instead focussed on the logistical and training aspects. In total, students in the three classes collected over 650 interviews/narratives. This is a remarkable data set which illustrates how effectively a course-based research project can generate data while positioning students as partners in research rather than simply as consumers of knowledge (Levy, Little, and Whelan 2011; Dickerson, Jarvis, & Stockwell 2016). As Weston et al. (2022:134) have noted, there are "certain moments where a single or singular perspective misses the multiplicity and diversity that is inherent to the social context at hand." In our case, it is unlikely that we would have been able to gather such a rich depth and diversity of interviews in such a short period of time had it been the faculty members conducting the interviews.

The length of the typed submissions varied. Many were approximately one page (single-spaced), while others were five pages or more. Some covered one experience, while others included several stories and reflections. Since students were not restricted to in-person interviews, they were able to take advantage of online connectivity options. This meant that although most of the interviews focussed on experiences in urban Ontario, students also interviewed participants who discussed experiences in other urban areas of Canada, in rural locations, in First Nations communities, and in other countries, including India, New Zealand, and Tanzania.

Examples of Project Findings

Although to the goal of this is paper is not a discussion of the research findings, in this section we briefly discuss examples of interviews conducted by students. These examples were chosen and written about by the student co-authors for this paper. They are intended to demonstrate how rich and meaningful the data collected in these sorts of projects can be. Despite the many difficulties faced during the pandemic, participants often chose to share experiences that focussed on optimism and hope. The timing of our project, almost two years after initial lockdowns in many parts of the world, meant that participants were able to reflect on different phases of the pandemic and how they coped in different ways.

For many participants, time spent in nature directly influenced mental and physical health. One 19-year-old woman, interviewed by Perry, discussed how pandemic restrictions encouraged her to find space to improve her mental health through engagements with nature.

> I feel as though I developed a new appreciation for nature. Being cooped up inside made me realize how much more I wanted to be outside. It became a form of therapy for me…I discovered a new passion for walking around and discovering new different places outside where I could go to meditate and heal.

Another participant, also interviewed by Perry, shared how they were able to improve their mental and physical health by exercising outdoors. In both cases, participants assigned purpose to their time spent in nature and saw improvements to their health through deliberate lifestyle changes.

> At first, I was running out of anger, but it soon became a form of therapy for my body and mind. Over the next few months, I visited a lot of hiking trails across Ontario. Every day I visited a new trail, except on the weekends. I noticed myself getting into better shape, and I noticed my mind feeling clear. It was a nice feeling. I never quite felt it before. My body and mind reached a state of ultimate happiness.

For some, animals were also a source of mental health support, and as a coping mechanism to combat the social isolation that COVID-19 created in their lives. For example, one 52-year-old woman shared how comfort from an animal helped her to cope with workplace stresses brought on by the pandemic. She said,

> So, the story I think the most of is about my son's cat, Stormy. I came home from work one day, it was a really bad day and she just seemed to sense that I wasn't myself, so she came in and she climbed up on me and just sat there and purred and kind of eased everything for me…That was a bad day that day, because I had a resident pass away that had meant a lot to me. A resident is someone that I look after in long term care, as a personal support worker. I just took comfort from it. When you can't have comfort from others, like other human beings, it's nice to have animals.

Another participant shared that "[having a dog] definitely made my pandemic experience more bearable…made me feel less lonely when I was stuck at home for so long." Relying on one or more animals to provide comfort and companionship during a time of social isolation and/or in the absence of real human relationships seems to have helped many of our participants through the everyday challenges that COVID-19 created.

The above quotes focus on individual experiences, but others spoke of building community, despite the social isolation experienced during the pandemic. A 21-year-old Two Spirit Anishinaabe participant, interviewed by Margarit, discussed how downtime during lockdowns and restrictions allowed them to build deeper connections to their community, which had not necessarily been possible prior to the pandemic. This participant said, "The people around me were all experiencing the benefit of the land right now and we're all…finding ourselves returning back to our original pedagogies because…the COVID isolation has caused us to reconnect with our communities in ways we weren't able to before," and later added, "I've…been taking all my kin out and a few of my friends and their kin out to Springwater Park and making sure they spend time on the land while I tell them stories about how the birch got its stripes and about how the pine trees are there to help the birds sacrifice themselves for the Anishinaabe people." In this sense, nature facilitated the experience of bringing people together to rediscover their heritage and teachings. Although the pandemic was a time of stress, for some it was also a catalyst for creating solidarity within communities and working towards the collective good. This participant continued, "We're watching our entire communities get vaccinated and take those steps together that we're all pushing to be better, and I've watched all of my communities really push to…be stronger as a whole over the last year."

While the above stories demonstrate how people accessed the animals and/or the outdoors to manage the uncertainties and anxieties of the pandemic, in other cases, people lost access to some of these spaces, which furthered a sense of disconnection and distrust. Archie interviewed one participant located in Southern Ontario who discussed his frustration when his local conservation authority decided to lock people out of hiking trails. He said,

> We [my wife and I] just hopped the gate and went for a walk, and then realized that the entire conservation area was basically closed…we saw that they had security parked on the beach, walking trails, making sure that nobody was coming in and out of the forest…we were like 'Oh my god, we're gonna get in major crap here or get a fine' so we ended up turning around… then we realized after the fact the provincial government was heavily fining people for walking on trails at the start of the pandemic, which they've stopped doing.

In response to being "locked out" of their neighbourhood access gate to the conservation area, this participant discussed acts of civil disobedience.

> But that gate is now still regularly locked and so even though we pay for a pass to go in through there, we're told that we have to go in through the front gate. This is kind of like the back door gate and now after 39 years of living in [community name], and using this entrance, now it's always got a chain around it, and it feels very unwelcom[ing]. I'm not gonna lie, I've cut the chain off with bolt cutters a few times pushing [baby] in his stroller through there. And I'm not the only one that's cut it off. A lot of people have cut it off, but they're [the Conservation Authority] relentless.

This participant went on to explain the feelings of frustration and isolation that this engendered, and how, rather than making him feel safe, contributed to a feeling of distrust towards those in positions of power. He continued,

> I'm a progressive guy. I like science, I tend to trust with things that Health Canada says, you know? But when you start seeing stupid things like that, where you're being, you know, discouraged from going for a walk outside when you're not even around people… it can make someone like me that typically trusts the government and to follow science…skeptical of, you know, the actual science.

Research into trust, distrust, and uncertainty with regards to governance and/or science during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Cairney & Wellstead 2021; Chan 2021; Latkin et al. 2021) includes considerations of the strains that crises and perceived level of threat can exert on trust (Jennings et al., 2021). Interviews such as the above demonstrate some of the complexities of these dynamics, where small, seemingly straightforward policy decisions can contribute to distrust, particularly when these decisions do not appear to make sense.
Although the COVID-19 pandemic has and continues to pose various challenges, many of the stories people told about their encounters with nature and animals also demonstrate optimism, hope, and strategies for coping at the time and for potentially thriving in the future. In collecting these interviews, students were able to connect with diverse, rich, and meaningful narratives that speak to a diversity of experiences during the pandemic. Being able to reflect on experiences reminds us that even while we recognize the ongoing scope of pandemic challenges, people have found ways to respond that should not be overlooked.

Student Experiences with the Project

In this section we focus on the experiences of students enrolled in ANTH*4700, who were asked to write a 2-to-4-page reflection on their engagements with the project. We integrated this into this course because these students were the most intensely involved in the project, collecting, analysing, and writing about the data. Moreover, as this is a required course that anthropology students must take in their final year, we wanted to understand if the project affected the ways students thought about their degrees. Students were prompted with questions such as: What did you learn from this assignment in terms of insights into anthropological methods/practice? From the process of analysing/thinking about data? Did the project provide you with unique insights into the COVID-19 pandemic? They were also encouraged to take their own directions in the reflection.[5]

Han and Rideout (2022) have argued that when course design integrates relevant, valued work and experiential learning experiences, it can enhance student engagement and development. In ANTH*4700, this was demonstrated through reflections that tended to focus on skills development, and the opportunity to enact methods and analytical techniques that students had read about, but had not necessarily been able to practice in a comprehensive way, and at a broader scale.[6] Some students noted that the project had given them the opportunity to connect with people they otherwise might not have met, pointing to the value of encounters with difference (Gardner 2020); others stated that it gave them better understandings of the experiences of people they already knew. Collecting and then analysing primary data was framed as particularly valuable, as having long-lasting positive outcomes, and as leading to a better understanding of the discipline and its possibilities. Engaging in a primary data collection project also can contribute to a sense of empowerment and a further entry point into academia (Sharp, Stanley, & Hayward 2011: 210), and Russell et al. (2021) have noted that for students, pandemic engagement can demonstrate the specific possibilities of anthropology. As one student wrote,

> As I started to conduct my interviews, I really began to think about what it might be like to be an anthropologist doing field work. I had considered it before theoretically, but I have never had the chance to actually conduct my own interviews and work with primary data. The process at first was daunting, as I had no prior experience and was not fully sure of what I was doing…I learned that the only way to proceed in a situation where you have no idea what to do is to just start doing it.

Another student discussed developing her anthropological voice,

> I learned a lot from this project including my interview voice, my preferred transcribing process, my preferred coding process, and the different avenues one can go in regard to data analysis. I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn what kind of anthropologist I can be and work on my skills and appreciation for the discipline.

As part of ANTH*4700, though not specifically related to the overall project, we had discussed questions of marginalized and underrepresented voices within anthropology. One student addressed some of these issues within the project, and the ways she was able to build skills and think through issues of representation and anthropological critique, writing,

> Ultimately, I found this assignment to be very rewarding as it taught me not only how to hone my interviewing skills, as well as my analysis techniques, but also challenged me to engage with the ways we can improve how we as individual researchers and in the anthropological discipline [represent] marginalized voices that may otherwise be neglected in our study.

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[5] Students could opt-in to having their reflections potentially being included in any subsequent pedagogy-related publications. They were asked to fill out a document at the end of the course indicating consent (or not), with the reminder that the decision would not affect their grades. Only Finnis has access to the names of students associated with specific quotes, to maintain confidentiality. Finally, students were invited to be co-authors in the writing process. Three students elected to participate in writing this paper.

[6] Students have opportunities to develop projects and collect and analyse data through one-semester independent study courses, two-semester honours thesis courses, and as undergraduate research assistants. Some courses also integrate small-scale qualitative data collection activities as part of course assessment. However, broader, multi-step design, fieldwork, and analysis projects can be difficult for students to develop and realize, particularly within one semester. One of the advantages of this project was that faculty were able to undertake important but time-consuming steps, such as the REB application, in advance of the semester.

Student engagement with course material can affect academic performance and achievements (Edwards et al., 2020; King, Truyts, and Faithfull 2022). Loss of student engagement throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, related to online teaching and other stressors, has had implications for motivation, educational experiences/academic achievements, and increased negative feelings (Kelly 2022; Salvador et al. 2021). Increased engagement with the class, class material, and/or the University as an institution was also a key outcome of this project for some ANTH*4700 students. One student wrote, "Participating in a collaborative project also increased my feelings of engagement with the university, which was very low until a few months ago…I would say that this project has added value to the final semester of my undergraduate degree, because it is a real project that is being developed by anthropologists," and another wrote, "In general, this is one of my favourite projects I have had the pleasure of working on within my university career, and unlike many other projects, is one that I will likely remember for the rest of my life."

This engagement also incorporated aspects of student connection with each other, which is important for academic thriving (Han and Rideout 2022). Opportunities to prepare for data collection, through in-class interview practices, and to share preliminary analyses in a later class session generated engagement with the project and the overall course. As one student wrote, "I also loved hearing about what my classmates found interesting in their own coding when we reflected on the narrative process in class, and I am thankful that we had such an engaging class that was able to create a really positive seminar space."

Although not all students incorporated reflections on how the assignment shaped their understandings of the pandemic, some did explicitly address this. One student wrote, "I think a lot of research surrounding the pandemic will ultimately revolve around the negative consequences of it, so it was nice to participate in a project that reminded us that there is good in the world," which echoes some of the perspectives of Auerbach's (2022) students. The project also helped build a feeling of connection during a time of uncertainty, and, as one student put it,

> I was able to see how a traumatic event can influence the relationship between humans and the environment, and it gives me ideas for future investigation. I was able to garner new insights into the experience of COVID, as many people felt so alone during this time, it almost makes you feel less alone because you know everyone else was feeling the same way. Although it's obvious that we were all struggling during this time, hearing narratives and true stories really makes a big difference in how I was able to finally feel that connection over a traumatic event.

For some, the central focus on animals and nature during the pandemic led to making connections in unexpected ways, even if students were initially uncertain about the project theme. One student's reflection highlighted the value that project had for building understanding through empathy (Gardner 2020; Russell et al 2021). She wrote,

> Hearing stories in the specific context of how nature or animals informed their experiences was interesting because prior to this project, I had honestly never considered how animals or nature may impact experiences with the pandemic. When this project was presented, I was at a loss because I honestly don't know how I would answer if I were being asked these questions. One thing I learned, however, is that as small the interaction, or as seemingly meaningless an experience may be, it still may hold immense value in the overall understanding of a specific issue. In this way, this project was a valuable experience for me, as it allowed me to look inward at my own experiences with nature and animals and how this may have impacted my overall experience with COVID-19.

Finally, one student submitted a very personal reflection on the struggles experienced by her family throughout the pandemic. Similarly, her reflection addressed issues of empathy, where the project helped her to sort through some of these experiences, and to remember that people "had such interesting and unique experiences that really opened my eyes to how we were all managing and dealing with the stress of the pandemic."

Insights and Outcomes: What Did We Learn About Developing and Enacting a Collaborative, Multi-Course Primary Data Collection Project?

Anthropological fieldwork possibilities, for students and faculty alike, have been significantly affected by the pandemic, with implications for access to experiential, hands-on learning options (Santos 2021). Nevertheless, Cheuk (2021) has noted that online ethnographic projects, spurred by the necessity of pandemic teaching and learning changes, can deepen public engagement and offer new possibilities. In Cheuk's case, online fieldtrips and an online symposium allowed for higher rates of community participation in an ethnographic project. In

particular, the online symposium eliminated the need for participants to drive the distance to the university campus.

Other fieldwork activities, including observational journals (King, Truyts, and Faithfull 2022) and personal reflections (Russell et al. 2021) offer students insights into both the experience and realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, and into the processes of and possibilities for anthropology. As King, Truyts, and Faithfull (2022) demonstrate through their discussion of students' observational journals, these activities can also generate rich, insightful, and engaging data. In our case, a project across three courses generated a wealth of pandemic stories and narratives, covering a range of experiences that highlighted the frustrations, small joys, losses, values, and priorities that emerged as people coped through engagements with animals and nature. We continue to code and analyse this rich data set, in collaboration with students, as one of the next steps of the project.

The process of collaborative course development has challenges and benefits. A project like this requires a commitment beyond the course timeframe, both before and after the semester. For the Guelph faculty team members, it was crucial that we worked together to coordinate projects and semester timelines, and to integrate the project at different academic levels in ways that would be appropriate, meaningful, and comprehensive. We also engaged with our South African colleague to ensure that the project we designed aligned in some ways with her interventions, which was crucial both for the project and for the development of an emerging international collaborative relationship between anthropologists based at different universities. We needed to ensure that students felt prepared to do the data collection. And, for ANTH*4700 students to have adequate access and time to code interviews and narratives collected by other classes, we needed to stagger due dates and content schedules among the courses. Each of these aspects required discussion and planning.

There are several benefits of this kind of collaborative project, pedagogical and otherwise. As faculty, we do not usually get involved in the design of our colleagues' courses, but working together encouraged innovation to build a robust, collaborative project that was appropriate for students at different levels. Working as a team also helped to streamline the process, dividing aspects of project development among us, and allowed us to start thinking about how we can build on this project in future years. Auerbach's work in engaging her South African students and eliciting positive responses during a time of difficulty provided an inspiring foundation from which this project could develop, encouraging faculty and students to explore alternate methods of education together, while responding to current events. We are particularly excited about the possibilities that this kind of multi-course project model will create for ongoing faculty-student and potentially transnational collaborations, both within the timeframe of courses and outside of it. Finally, this project was fun to develop – it allowed us to work together, to learn from each other's pedagogical strategies, and better understand how we approached teaching and course development. The work that it took to coordinate everything and alter our course structures was facilitated by our genuine interest in the project, our enthusiasm for its possibilities, and our enjoyment in working with each other. Indeed, we found it a "a thought-provoking pedagogical experience" just as Auerbach (2022: 86) did with her Archive of Kindness project.

This kind of project also has benefits for students. They gain the opportunity to undertake primary research with project activities that build and reinforce anthropological skills, and that demonstrate that fieldwork does not have to be long-term to have anthropological value (King, Truyts, and Faithfull, 2022). It offers them the ability to develop rich insights into lived experiences that relate to important public issues, and as the project continues, there are ongoing possibilities for student engagement in the analysis of the data and in co-authorship (including this article). In the Fall 2022 semester, for example, one student who had participated in the data collection in Winter 2022 took an independent research course that allowed her to further build coding, analysis, and writing skills while working with the broader data set. Overall, the multiple benefits and successes of this project have encouraged us to continue to integrate it into our classes for at least another year and offer us a framework for building on future collaborative, multi-course pedagogical activities.

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