

Project Title: Documenting the CSUSB COVID-19 Experience

This interview focuses on the experiences of a graduate student at California State University San Bernardino during the COVID-19 pandemic. The topics covered include the efficacy of virtual learning, challenges of the pandemic, working remotely, and change in everyday norms. CSU's decision to switch to a virtual model of education affected the college experience for the interviewee, interviewer, and many other students.

**Interviewees:**

Carissa Rieger

**Interviewer:**

Jamie Nord

**Interview Date:**

October 12, 2020

**Location:**

Zoom virtual interview  
San Bernardino, CA  
La Quinta, CA

**Interview Summary completed by:**

Jamie Nord, 2020

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**Topic:**

This interview covers everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic, including graduate education, employment, and relationships.

**Keywords:**

- COVID-19, pandemic, graduate school,

**Comments:**

None

**Interview Index:**

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
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M4A	00:21:41	This interview covers everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic, including graduate education, employment, and relationships.

**Related Materials:**

None.

**Full interview transcript can be found below.**

Jamie: Hi, Carissa! Can you hear me?

Carissa: Hi, yeah, I can hear you.

Jamie: Great! Thanks so much for coming on here today and doing the interview.

Carissa: No problem. Did the informed consent open right?

Jamie: Yeah, I was able to download it and it looks great, so thank you for signing that.

Carissa: No problem.

Jamie: Um, so I guess we can just jump right in, because I know you have class later or something. Okay, so what is your program of study at Cal State?

Carissa: The master's in clinical counseling.

Jamie: Okay.

Carissa: For psychology.

Jamie: And, um, what do you remember about the day this past March when Cal State announced their response to go virtual, um, due to the pandemic?

Carissa: I remember being sad, because I was at school, so I was like with my classmates and I was like, we were like saying goodbye, but I didn't know how long we were saying goodbye for. I kind of thought we were saying goodbye for a couple weeks because it was going to be spring break, so they were saying like 'we'll just give you an extra week of spring break.' So, I kind of felt unsure how long I was not going to be able to see them again for. Umm, and I just didn't expect it to be this long.

Jamie: Yeah, I remember it was like right before spring break and everyone was trying to get out of finals.

Carissa: Yeah.

Jamie: It was so crazy!

Carissa: Yeah.

Jamie: Umm, what has it been like learning virtually for you since this past March and have your classes translated well to the online model?

Carissa: Yeah, so, umm, okay so the first part is how has it been? I would say the last quarter when we like transitioned to virtual really abruptly, it was more of a mess and it was a lot tougher and my teachers overdid the assignments, overdid the readings, and overdid the discussion boards. And really, they didn't know how to teach online, so they were struggling with it. And this semester has been a lot more smooth. So being virtual online this semester honestly hasn't been as bad, like I don't hate it. Umm, but to answer your second question, my classes translate, I think they do translate okay to be virtual. One thing is, umm, in a lot of our classes in counseling, we do a lot of work outside of the classroom, like readings or doing our room presentation. And then we come in the class time, we spend a lot of our class time doing group discussions, not lecture, umm, less lecture than my undergrad. So, uh, the discussion part has been a little harder, because it's hard to, like, take turns and know when you should unmute your mic. So, I think that's when the discussion board online portion has come in handy. Umm, so, I think it's translated okay, but there's a lot less class discussion than we used to have.

Jamie: Yeah, I think it's a little bit awkward on Zoom sometimes when you see everyone's faces or someone doesn't want to have their camera on or they're not able to have it on for some reason. It's definitely really different.

Carissa: It is. It can be awkward.

Jamie: And you're right that, like, last quarter the professors didn't have much time to really adjust their syllabus. And, you know, they didn't really didn't have time for any training, and it was just spring break and then back to school after that one extra week off and it was just kind of, everyone has to sink or swim.

Carissa: Yep, exactly.

Jamie: Make the best of it.

Carissa: It was stressful.

Jamie: Yeah, I think it was stressful for everyone. Umm, so I guess that kind of leads into my next question. How do you think that you've been handling the stress we've all been experiencing, and do you have, like, any specific methods of coping with it?

Carissa: So, I would say last quarter I was really bad with handling the stress. This quarter, or semester I should say, umm, I've been better with – sorry my dogs are barking in the background.

Jamie: It's okay, we've all been there.

Carissa: I've been better with balancing my time, I guess, with school, my internship, and family time. I feel like maybe since it's a semester too, I don't have all of my homework and all of my tests and all of my essays like bunched up into one week, so I feel like that's been spread out, which has been better. Umm, but I guess one coping strategy is going on walks at night – sorry, I feel like I just got dust in my throat. My allergies.

Jamie: Oh, it's okay! Take a sip of water. Don't worry.

Carissa: Sorry, I feel like something just flew in my throat. I think that answers – hold on. Sorry, I'm having like a cough attack. Something flew in my throat.

Jamie: It's okay! I want you to be able to breath!

Carissa: I know, I couldn't talk for a second there.

Jamie: I think that's a good idea to kind of just take walks and kind of clear your head and, you know, get some fresh air after maybe kind of being inside all day on your computer.

Carissa: Yes, it's a lot of computer time.

Jamie: Yeah. So have you had to acquire any new skills, umm, since we're using more technology?

Carissa: Yeah, I mean, I've had to learn how to, like, set up my own Zoom interviews, I mean Zoom meetings, for my internship.

Jamie: Yeah, this is the first time I've set up a Zoom meeting.

Carissa: Yeah, well, I've had to for the therapy sessions for my internship. I've had to learn how to record myself on Zoom to download that as my presentation, because we're still doing PowerPoint presentations in school. So, like, instead of standing in front my class, we're doing Zoom presentations with our PowerPoints and recording it – sorry. Yeah, I've had to learn more about Zoom.

Jamie: Yeah, I think it's been a really useful tool, but there is a learning curve to it.

Carissa: It is.

Jamie: So, how are you staying connected to the campus community during this time?

Carissa: I'm not.

Jamie: Oh no!

Carissa: I mean, I'm not like attending any webinars right now. I'm kind of just doing my homework, doing my internship, doing my work for Dr. Forcino. Umm, I haven't been really.

Jamie: Do you at least like stay in touch with any of your classmates or anything like that?

Carissa: Yeah, yeah, so all of my class were in like a group chat, so we all talk all the time, so I guess that's one way that we keep in touch. We talk about things that aren't even school related, like umm family, like one of my classmates is pregnant. So, we talk, but I don't, like, attend any club meetings or webinars or anything right now. I just feel like that's not my priority, like if I have free time, I want to get off my computer, so.

Jamie: That makes sense. That's understandable.

Carissa: Yeah.

Jamie: Umm, do you think it's been hard to not be able to be on campus, though? And have the campus be closed off? You know, how has that been different for you?

Carissa: Yeah, I'd rather be on campus, because I'd rather be able to attend things in person if the pandemic wasn't happening, umm, sorry. Umm, I'd rather be all online, I'd rather my internship be all – I mean, in person. All in person. But, I don't want to get sick either.

Jamie: Right, of course, you want to be considerate of your health and the health of others around you.

Carissa: Yes.

Jamie: And I think the campus is pretty much closed completely, so I don't really think even if we wanted to be there, we can't. We aren't really supposed to be there.

Carissa: No, yeah.

Jamie: Umm, how has the quarantine, isolation, and social distancing affected your life and relationships with family and friends?

Carissa: Umm, I would say with family in a sense it made us closer, having a lot more together time. With friends, I still try to talk to them over the phone. I have a few friends who, when I was in person doing online school, I mean in person school, before the pandemic, I didn't really get to see many of my friends a lot, so I would rely on texting and phone call and Facetime with them anyways. So, a lot of my friend time, like has stayed the same because I am so used to being busy. Right now, I'm busy but I'm home. Before, I was busy but I was at school. So it hasn't changed my friends too much. So I guess it made my family closer, maybe.

Jamie: Yeah, you've gotten to spend more time with your family and just be at home. Has, you know, what you do with your family changed though? Because, you guys probably do have to stay at home more. So is it a little bit different in that sense?

Carissa: Yeah, so umm, when we were in more, like, the quarantine style...right now a few of us, like my mom and dad and sister have started going back to work slowly, but we were cooking a lot more together. We were, like, taking turns cooking for each other for the dinners and, umm, picking movies out at nighttime. Or like TV shows, watching TV together. Yeah, so like, it's just been more cooking together and watching TV's and I've been going on a lot of walks with my mom and the dogs. We have three dogs right now. So, that's all been increased, I would say.

Jamie: Umm, do you know anyone, like any of your friends or family that have contracted the coronavirus? And you don't have to answer if you don't want to. All these questions are... I want you to be comfortable.

Carissa: I don't know anybody close to me who has. No, not really.

Jamie: That's interesting, because I don't really either. No one like in my immediate circle.

Carissa: No, me neither.

Jamie: Knock on wood, thankfully.

Carissa: Yeah, thankfully. I just have like my friend Mackenzie, her uncle who lives in Texas got it and he didn't, I mean he survived. He was fine, but he got it pretty bad, like it took a whole month for him to recover. So, it's the only person I was like 'hey Kenz, how's your uncle?' But I mean, I don't know him. I've never met him; he lives in Texas. Other than that, I don't know anybody that I could name.

Jamie: Yeah. So we talked a bit about the school transition. What has the transition been like for your place of employment?

Carissa: For my internship or for my job? Is that what you mean?

Jamie: Yeah, like any internship and / or jobs.

Carissa: Well, my job was supposed to be in person and that got put online and since it's been virtual, I've had a lot less hours, so that was negatively impacted. My internship was supposed to be in person and since that's all virtual too, it actually hasn't been that bad. But I'd prefer to be in person just because my coworkers, my colleagues, I haven't gotten to know them too well and I wish I could just, like, chat with them and hear how they're doing and tell them how I'm

doing. So I'm lacking connection between my coworkers there, my internship, so that I'm missing out on I feel like.

Jamie: Yeah, do you think you're not getting as much out of it as you would if you were in person or do you think you're still learning a lot, you're still gaining a lot of experience?

Carissa: I'm still gaining a lot of experience, but I feel I would be getting more in person. So I think it would be better in person.

Jamie: Yeah, that makes sense.

Carissa: My clients are all young and I feel they don't get as much privacy at their homes as if they were in the office behind a closed door and mom had to wait in the lobby. Mom wasn't walking behind them in a session. So, umm, I feel like they would get better therapy, too, in person.

Jamie: Do you think that, umm, since you've been getting lots of experience in telehealth, do you think that's going to be a valuable skill in your career moving forward though?

Carissa: Absolutely. Yeah, I think it's going to be great to have on my resume and to say that I'm really good at it in a sense. I know about it well. I think that really will be a virtue in the future. And not just even for another pandemic in a sense, but for a client who can't physically, maybe they're in a wheelchair and they can make it to their session to do telehealth. Or they have so much social anxiety, they can't make it out the door. They want therapy, but they want to stay home for it. So I think it will be really beneficial to have this knowledge.

Jamie: Yeah, that makes sense. What do you think has been the biggest overall challenge, if you had to pick one thing about life during the pandemic, what is the single biggest challenge you've faced?

Carissa: One thing I'd say is being active. I feel like I'm so sedentary, like I sit at my desk in front of my computer for school, for internship 20 hours, for my work, for doing my homework, for listening to my lectures outside of class, for everything I feel is so online, I'm sitting so much that I'm not as active. Like just walking from class to class when you're at school or walking from your car to your classroom from the parking lot. So that's why I feel like I'm trying to fit in nightly walks, because my walking – I don't have a FitBit on to know how many steps I'm taking, but my steps have to be really low, so I feel like that has been-

Jamie: I feel that way too!

Carissa: Yeah! Like I don't know how people are getting 10,000 steps a day right now unless they're outside for 10,000 steps.

Jamie: I'm not getting 10,000 steps for sure.

Carissa: Yeah, I feel like that's been really hard and I feel like another thing is missing connection and feeling safe in public. Like it's hard to just feel safe in public. I'm not going to go to the movie theater and feel comfortable. You know what I mean?

Jamie: Oh true.

Carissa: Yeah like I miss just feeling comfortable going to a restaurant or grocery store or movie theater, like you don't feel comfortable doing that right now.

Jamie: Yeah, so even if you could go to the movies, you wouldn't really want to.

Carissa: No, I'd wait for a little while.

Jamie: What do you think about Cal State's response and the way that they've handled the pandemic situation? Because, you know, they were one of the first universities to announce they would be going to a virtual model for this academic year, 2020 to 2021 academic year for at least the fall semester.

Carissa: Yeah.

Jamie: So they made that decision really early. What's your opinion about how they handled that?

Carissa: I don't know, I think it's hard because in one aspect I think they made their decision too soon. Like maybe they should've waited. Another aspect is like, these are adults, like maybe if you had all the adults sign an informed consent like I'm willingly going in person to school. I don't know, I feel like some people might be able to go to school and there could be a hybrid. I feel like they didn't even try to do a partial hybrid online, in person thing. They just fully decided pretty quickly to just not even try any other options. But, on the other hand, I guess it's better to know sooner than later. But, I don't know. I remember last quarter I was pretty upset when I found out they did that. I was like 'what the heck like they're making the first whole semester online?' Like I was more upset. This quarter I'm not surprised.

Jamie: I agree. I remember being really surprised too when they announced it and honestly I still felt a little bit surprised when they just announced spring semester being all virtual too. I don't know why I was surprised but I still was.

Carissa: Yeah, I was kind of surprised, but I was kind of not. I just felt like they thought maybe it's easier for all these teachers who just got trained on online schooling to just complete the whole year like this. I don't know and maybe like switching to semesters, it was just easier for them to just stick with one routine for a whole year. I don't know.

Jamie: I don't know people with like science labs are going to be doing their classes. I just don't know, I can't even imagine trying to-

Carissa: I think they might be in person.

Jamie: Oh.

Carissa: I had one girl in a class of mine and when she logs onto class, she's in a lab coat in the classroom with a mask on and like goggles on.

Jamie: Oh.

Carissa: She's a Bio major.

Jamie: And they're just social distanced?

Carissa: I think so. I think she's in the psych lab. We have like a whole basement as our lab for the bio students and I think she's in the basement.

Jamie: Yeah, I knew they were thinking about some classes being in person but I wasn't sure if they ended up doing that or not, because I feel like there's still a risk about having multiple people in the same room inside.

Carissa: Yeah. They have their masks on and gloves on and goggles on and stuff like that, but yeah, I don't know how many people. I just see like her and one or two past behind her sometimes in class.

Jamie: Well, is there anything else you would like to share about your COVID-19 experience?

Carissa: I don't think so. I hope it's over.

Jamie: Okay.

Carissa: Over soon.

Jamie: Yeah. Well, that's all my questions that I have for you today. Thank you so much for doing the interview.

Carissa: No problem. That was easy.

Jamie: Yeah, that's everything.

Carissa: Yeah, sorry I was having like a coughing fit in the middle. I don't know if I swallowed my own saliva wrong or if like dust went in my throat. Something got caught. My back of my throat was like tickling me. Sorry about that.

Jamie: Don't worry about it. It's okay.

Carissa: I'm also having allergies right now.

Jamie: Yeah, take some, I don't know, Zyrtec or something.

Carissa: Yes, I need to take Zyrtec. My dad was just telling me.

Jamie: Alright, well, I hope you have a good rest of your day, and yeah, just thank you for doing the interview.

Carissa: No problem. Okay, you too, have a good day.

Jamie: Alright, bye.

Carissa: Bye.

## Interview Transcript

### **Interviewees:**

Carissa Rieger

### **Interviewer:**

Jamie Nord

### **Interview Date:**

October 12, 2020

### **Location:**

Zoom virtual interview

La Quinta, CA

San Bernardino, CA

### **Length:**

00:21:41

### **Media format:**

M4A

### **List of Acronyms:**

Carissa = Carissa Rieger

Jamie = Jamie Nord

### **Interview Transcript completed by:**

Jamie Nord, 2020

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**Start of Interview:**  
00:00:00

**End of Interview:**  
00:21:41