



**OLD DOMINION
UNIVERSITY**

Department of Communication and Theatre Arts



The Campus Conversion: A Head Start in Going Online

by Jessica Ambrose



In life, being prepared is key for facing any challenge. For cities, this can mean prepping for a natural disaster or a fire drill for a school. Yet, colleges are

now facing a new crisis that no one had expected: a pandemic. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc throughout the world, creating a unique situation that has changed how we live our normal lives.

The main question for universities has centered around the best responses to this crisis. For Old Dominion University, the response was swift as they quickly took the safety of students as their utmost priority. This response resulted in all classes going online for the remainder of the Spring semester. Ranking among the "Best Online Programs" in the nation by U.S. News & World Report, Old Dominion invested well before the crisis in distance learning, and those decisions have paid off immensely now.

In the Department of Communication & Theatre Arts, the online transition has been as seamless as possible thanks to the dedication and hard work of the faculty and staff. Some faculty members were lucky enough to have online teaching experience, but for many instructors, this was new territory. Those with extensive online expertise aided in creating "how-to" guides, provided resources for their colleagues, and even hosted Zoom meetings to discuss lingering questions or concerns.

"The Department's commitment to online education saved us a lot of grief and gave us a head start to better serve

our students," said Kyle Nicholas, Master Lecturer in the Communication & Theater Arts Department.

For some professors, the hardest part has been the disconnection with students. "What I found most helpful was checking in with my students to see how they were doing and what they needed and trusting my gut. I sent out a short survey about what would work best for my student," said Sara Morgan, Senior Lecturer in the Communication & Theater Arts Department, "While I couldn't do everything they asked, it did let me know what they needed, and I was able to adapt my course content to be the best it could given the situation."

Nicholas also credited the Department Chair, Avi Santo, with the Department's successful transition, "The pivotal contribution has been Avi Santo's guidance and tireless work. You need real leadership in a crisis, and this is about the toughest test a Department Chair can face. His open communication and willingness to keep working and keep focused on the human beings caught up in this pandemic was calming and inspiring."

In turn, Dr. Santo credits his faculty and staff for their ability to rise to the occasion rather than let the frustration of the current moment overwhelm them: "We really came together as a community and trusted in one another for help and guidance as needed, but also in our collective ability to teach compassionately, empathetically, and with flexibility in these environments and under radically changed circumstances, but nonetheless, to continue to be excellent teachers and mentors to our students."

Santo also noted the Department's preparedness and experience with online teaching not only helped it adapt quickly in Spring, but would continue to be a source of strength moving forward: "There is little doubt that communications - in all forms, whether strategic, interpersonal, performative, or creative - will emerge as an even more integral field in whatever world we create in the wake of COVID-19. People and organizations need to figure out new communicative practices and strategies and many folks are longing for creative storytelling both in and about this moment."

It is due to this history of leadership, online expertise, creativity and cooperation that ultimately aided the Department's successful online course transition, even in programs such as Film, Dance, and Theatre where face-to-face class interaction is the standard.

Santo adds, "Many of these forms of communication will involve digital interfaces, and many involve ways to communicate with one another under quarantine, whether that be about our feelings, our desires, our needs, or about how our day is going. Our Department already addresses many of those communicative challenges and opportunities, but the fact that we can do so online in both synchronous and asynchronous formats, and do so well, both ensures that we can continue to train a next generation of communication thought leaders and practitioners, and we can train them in environments that are going to be more integral than ever before."

With the students always in mind and quality leadership guiding professors, though this semester has been no easy task, it was never impossible.



Behind the Scenes / Ahead of the Curve by Madison Michel

When watching a theatrical production, many just see what is being portrayed on stage and do not think of much for what goes on behind it. An Old Dominion University theatre student exemplifies what it means to work hard behind the scenes in order to produce a successful production, through technical elements and effective communication.

Brandi Shook first started her interest in theatrical production in high school, when she worked with props and behind the scenes of shows. She became more involved in community and college theatre, finding a passion for the management side of it and knew this was something she wanted to do.

“The point of a stage manager is to be the hub of communication, so I am the one who is facilitating conversations and making sure that things that are supposed to happen do happen,” said Shook.

When going through what is called “tech week,” Shook is responsible for putting all the technical elements into the show and making sure everything and everyone is in place and departments are communicating effectively. “Oftentimes, this can mean calling holds - which means stopping and re-running things - just to make sure everything goes smoothly.”

In February, Shook was nominated for two productions, *HOMEsick* and *Getting Out*, that she had stage-managed at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. She had gone through multiple interviews and had the opportunity to partake in practical work through stage-managing the 10-minute play festival that is an all-student produced production. Shook received a top-four award in stage management. From this opportunity, “I got to meet



other stage managers and professionals which was really great for networking,” Shook said.

Shook is founder and president of the Technical Theatre Association at ODU and part of what the association does is

work with students who are interested in technical theatre, offering training workshops to make students well rounded in the field giving them opportunities to try different things. “I think sometimes you find something you like and you just kind of stay in it,” Shook said. “You can find something you love that you never expected so just joining on-campus clubs, and reaching out to the theatre department to get involved is a great start.”

Shook is currently working on *The Laramie Project* as a production and stage manager. It follows the story of Matthew Shepard, a homosexual college student who was murdered in 1998 for his sexual orientation. Due to COVID-19, this project has been postponed until next year, and Shook is currently looking at recruiting more cast members in the fall due to the date changes.

“It is definitely a production that we feel is extremely important to still produce,” she said. In the future, Shook is hoping to continue working in stage and production management and continue her interests in musicals and activist theatre, hoping to make a difference through her work.

KUDOS!

BRENDAN O'HALLARN recently published an article "[#ODU2ODU: Testing the Benefits of a Partnership between Sport Management Classrooms](#)" in the *Sports Innovation Journal* with James Strode of Ohio University.

PRIYA VASHIST's film script *The Great Dismal* was accepted into the 2020 UFVA conference for Panel Presentation and the Juried Script Competition.

BRITTNEY S. HARRIS, assistant professor of Theatre, has received the University of Georgia's [Robert C. Anderson Memorial Award](#).

The College of Arts & Letters recently held its 2020 Faculty & Staff Awards and Outstanding Student Recognition ceremonies. The following Department faculty members and students received recognitions:



DR. ALLISON PAGE
2020 Joel S. Lewis Award for Student Mentoring



SARA MORGAN
2020 Robert L. Stern Award for Excellence in Teaching



EMILY GREGG
Outstanding Student in Communication – Dance



KRYSTAL GONZALEZ
Outstanding Student in Communication – Theatre



VICTORIA VANDENBROUCKE
Outstanding Student in Communication – Cinema & TV Production

Share your accomplishments [HERE!](#)

Our Newest LSDC Alumni

Congratulations to our 2020 graduating students in the Lifespan and Digital Communication Masters program!

- CASEY MOORE**
- RICHARD REYES**
- JESSICA O'NEILL**
- NADJA BANGOURA**
- IRENE BARGUNENO**
- PHIL HARPER**
- DANYELLA JONES**



LSDC 2020 GRADUATION CEREMONY & CELEBRATION



TEN YEAR MA-LSDC RETROSPECTIVE

Film's Dr. Arnett Retires



Our colleague, **DR. BOB ARNETT**, has decided to retire at the end of June with his wife, Dr. Jane Merritt of the History Department. Department Chair Dr. Avi Santo shares his gratitude: "I want to express tremendous appreciation for the work Bob has done over the years in developing our film

studies and screenwriting curriculum as well as in serving as the advisor for the Film & Video minor. Dr. Arnett's expertise in American cinema, Neo-noir, and screenwriting will be sorely missed."

Dr. Arnett has taught film history, film genre, and screenwriting courses after earning his Ph.D. from University of Southern Mississippi. He has published in journals such as *Film Criticism*, *The Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *The Journal of Popular Film and Television*, and *Creative Screenwriting*. He also contributed a chapter to a book titled, *The Philosophy of Michael Mann*. Robert also writes feature film screenplays, which have won awards and brought him representation in Los Angeles. We wish them both tremendous happiness in the next stage of their lives together. Please feel free to reach out to Bob and Jane to wish them well in their new adventures.

OUR PEDAGOGY IS PERSONAL PROJECT

The "Our Pedagogy is Personal" Project is a new video series we're assembling to engage current and prospective students and encourage their continued enrollment in classes in this challenging time.

Thanks to all those who have submitted videos so far, and we're still taking more submissions.

All that's involved is shooting a short 2-3 minute video curating something that touches upon what you teach or talk about something/someone you love (a favorite play, dancer, film, TV series, game, book, activist, pop culture reference, spiritual guru, mentor) and how that informs the types of classes you teach or something you do in the classroom.

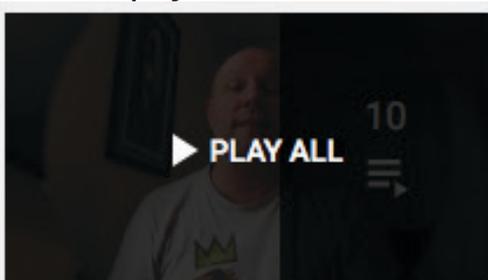
We plan to upload these videos to our website and share them via social media through the end of June, releasing 2-3 videos per week.

All that's involved:

- 1) Shoot a 2-3 minute video. You can use your computer, cell-phone camera, or record yourself in Zoom.
- 2) Upload the video to your Google Drive or to YouTube and share the link with [Dr. Santo](#) and [D'An Ball](#).

No need for slick editing or add-ons... just personable content. Current and future students want personal connection right now, and seeing how faculty translate personal passions and pastimes into teaching may go a long way towards making lasting connections!

Check out our playlist so far:



Our Pedagogy Is Personal

[VIEW FULL PLAYLIST](#)

MAY/JUNE

5/19.

ODUAA *The Last Dance* virtual event.
7:30-8:30 PM [Register Here](#)

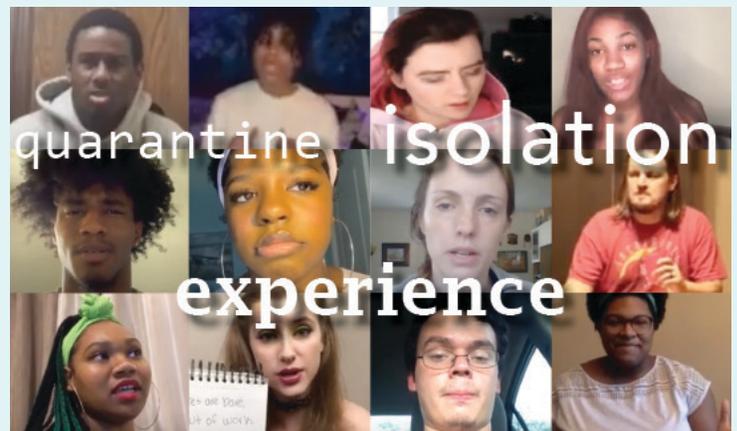
5/22.

Department Meeting. 2-4 PM [Zoom Link](#)

5/26.

Department Adjunct Meeting. 3-4 PM [Zoom Link](#)

THE QUARANTINE EXPERIENCE



Students in Professor Katherine Hammond's Acting II class composed and performed powerful & moving works about their quarantine experiences. [See them all HERE.](#)

Featuring works by Brittany Bridges, Brandy Clark, Stanley Grizmal, Autumn Ibanez, Brian Jinright, Koby Lomax, MK Martey, Megan Miranda, Alexa Polk, Tre' Porchia, Kennedy Ross, Austin Suarez, Ladeijah Smith.