Charlie 0:02

Hello and welcome to listening award podcast examining blended learning for the Coronavirus pandemic. I am Charlie a third year biological science student.

Georgia 0:10

I'm Georgia, a postgraduate Film Studies student

Grace 0:15

and I am Grace a second year Politics, Philosophy and Law student. Really excited to have you here. Hope you enjoy

Charlie 0:37

Hello, and welcome to this, this very special episode of Listening at Warwick with the three of us, you've seen us all present, but here we have Georgia, Grace and me, Charlie, and we are talking about everything, and anything, in regards to online learning I guess, instead we are just reviewing all the topics that we have gone over with our respective interviewees. And, you know, we're just going to take a big old look at our opinions on online learning in the past year at Warwick. So let's head straight into it.

Grace 1:09

So it's actually interesting, cuz we were all in different years. So Georgia was obviously doing her postgrad. Charlie, you were doing your final year? Yes, your third year, final year of uni. And like you had quite a few labs and stuff. Am I right?

Charlie 1:25

Yes.

Grace 1:25

So in person, like the majority of it?

Charlie 1:30

Yeah, kind of. So, what is interesting, yeah, as I was, I was a STEM student. And that kind of has the notion of you've got to go in with like, humanities, you can just have seminars online and stuff. But I've got a half the practical aspects. And it was weird, because the first half, I actually had to go away for a week to do one of my labs, which was fine. It was like a nice holiday. It's all very COVID secure, but that was like half my module done. And then the rest, kind of, we had to wait until restrictions allowed it because the rest of the department kind of prioritise not undergrads for the labs, which makes sense. But it was interesting, it was still mostly online without like, the last half of term three, being able to go in and do stuff.

Grace 2:14

I don't know, did you feel sort of like at a disadvantage, because obviously, you said they prioritise postgrads, or you just sort of like, I'm getting used to this. This is what is . . .

Charlie 2:25

It's kind of, I was very fortunate last year, because my undergraduate like dissertation, I did have a space to do it. But there's quite a few students in my year, there's about 300, biologists in total in The School of Life Sciences doing their third year projects, and quite a few of them had to switch to a dry project, which is basically just like a regular dissertation where you just do a literature review. And quite a few of them because of lack of space had to switch to that. But I didn't, so I was lucky. Had things gotten any worse, like if I was like doing like, my fourth year dissertation stuff that would have been the risk that I really couldn't have done anything. So I feel fortunate, but I feel like the risk of like being, of having a less quality, educational practical degree would have been, was a reality for many students in my year. It was actually kind of, you kind of had to deal with it. There's not really much you could do when they said COVID restrictions can't let's do this. You kind of just couldn't go well, well, I want to do it anyway. You just got to deal with it.

Grace 3:25

Yeah, that's true.

Charlie 3:28

Yeah. How was it for like Humanities like, I guess the library is quite an important resource, and you've got quite a lot of reading to do? But that was closed mostly, yeah?

Grace 3:38

Yeah, no, it was. So it was. Yeah, very difficult in that sense, because, like, I think I probably said this on other episodes, but like, throughout my educational experience, I've never worked at home ever, like from Year 11, from Year 10 onwards, basically, I would always go to the library or like use facilities at my sixth form or a secondary school. So it was that completely new trying to adapt to, you know, working from home and trying to get things done. And just, yeah, I felt like it was very much but yeah, not having a library was interesting to say the least, because it was one of those things where occasionally the library would like, if the library was open, it's one of those things I'm like, should I be going to the library because I didn't really want to be in contact with so many people. And you know, so it's like, yes, the library was there as a resource. But is it wise for me to be using it that type of thing. So I think it was interesting to navigate in a sense of, it just got to a point where, like, they open different facilities on campus. So I would start using like, I think it was like a sports hall. Like I'll just go there, get my work done. And those were probably the times that I felt the most productive locked out, like where I was the most productive because I was able to say, okay, cool, I'm going to do my work on campus. When I get home that's chill time, that's Grace time, etc. But yes, it was very interesting to navigate, but obviously didn't have a dissertation to do. So, Georgia, you can let us know all about that.

Georgia 5:06

Yeah, no, I feel like it's really good that you sort of had, I don't know that you were able to kind of split that up a bit and have this sort of time. Like, where, I guess spaces were relegated to different things you don't have to work at home, you work outside of home, obviously. Yeah, but I, I guess I didn't start my dissertation until kind of term three but thats how the dissertation sort of works in Humanities. I think when I started my dissertation, they were doing the same way you go and sort of pick up that you weren't really allowed into the library fully. So that was weird. It's sort of strange. I don't know if the library was weird the whole year. It was weird to go in there. And for it to be so completely different. Um, but yeah, I, I'm the kind of person who I just do my work at home because I can't be bothered to go out to the library. So in many ways, I guess it's yeah, it was kind of convenient for me. And I didn't really have to move around a lot. But it was also just kind of strange. It's just a strange year all round. This is sort of completely different from from Charlie's sort of lab trauma.

Charlie 6:28

It was, it was traumatic.

Georgia 6:32

Yeah, no, I can imagine.

Charlie 6:33

One thing I noticed about working from home this year is that I've never been so behind in my life, at work at all. I don't know if any of you agree. But I finished, I had some modules in term one lectures, I only finished all the lectures about week four of term two for the first term. And then I just start all the lectures, I've missed the first four weeks of term two starting again. And that was just horrendous I've never been so behind in my life at work. I don't know if any of you can relate.

Grace 7:03

No, I literally, I will say this, with the episode that I just last recorded. I was talking to the girls about just how it's so crazy, because like, we're all pretty like academic, you know, usually, like really well-driven, or to some extent or whatever. But all that seems to sort of just go like I kind of think I lost myself in the middle of everything at the centre is like, who am I? Like, I like the thing that would usually drive me or like, yoy know, let's get this degree, let's do what needs to be done. I can't say that motivation was mostly there for the whole of like, for the whole second year, I think it was crazy. Because I couldn't tell if I just didn't like the modules that I chose, or it was just because of the pandemic. And I just do you know what I mean, like, it got me very much doubting and like this degree that I was very much like, yes, PPL this is, it's my dream course, get me on it. You know what I was talking about in my personal statement? It was very much like, oh, wow, like, do we still have that same passion? Or am I sort of just plodding through, you know, just trying to get through? It was very crazy to come to the realisation, but I think, yeah, I think, I, so what I'm trying to say is Charlie, I agree with you. I do agree with you. I've never, I've never felt this way about education before. But that was a natural progression with the degree or was because the pandemic but

Georgia 8:32

Yeah, I feel like I've been in a slightly different position, where somehow I've been a bit like, more projected this year than I was like, any other year that I've been at University. I don't know if that's because I, I don't know, I'm doing a master's degree, and I was like, better myself. Oh, like, the environment was just better for me. But yeah, I definitely felt that sort of ending my third year last year, the very start of the pandemic. I felt like it had sort of a huge impact on, I don't know, my motivation to sort of finish writing a lot of like, important essays that I had going on at the time. And I didn't have any exams or anything, but like it was just, it was just a weird time all around to be in education. And the fact that no one really knew what they were doing, it snowballed into this bigger thing. And I feel like, because of the ending of last year, sort of lecturers and the university were bit more prepared, for, for what this year was going to be like. But obviously so the restrictions, and like the iffyness about everything going on, that it felt that like, I dunno, for a week to week basis I felt like I didn't really know what was going to happen the next week, and I didn't know if things were gonna completely change. And I think for me that encouraged meto be kind of was on top of things, to sort of compensate for that.

Charlie 10:11

Obviously, you were doing like a master's degree. So everything you do for that degree's in that one year, but do you feel that you've got like, the same like quality of teaching or like of education that you would if you'd done it, hypothetically, a different year?

Georgia 10:24

See, the thing is, I'm really lucky in that I'm on a really small course. And at the start, I felt like the teaching, the blended learning was really good for me. And the seminars that I had online were also, they all went really well, and I don't know, my lecturers, were, I don't know, more than helpful with everything. But I do think that, I think lectures get a bit more sort of lost in translation when they're pre-recorded. And it's a lot more difficult to kind of convey things, when you can't get feedback on the spot and be like, 'Hey, I'm not clear on that thing just said. Could you sort of repeat or explain it a bit more?' So I think, in general, the quality on my course was, was kind of as good as it could have been, but I would never take it over just in person teaching.

Charlie 11:30

No, I'm guessing, having been in the previous recordings, the episodes, I'm assuming that we all agree that in, in person teaching, we kind of prefer over all the online stuff. There's just a lack of structure in the day and having the onus to not have like scheduled lectures, and then be on campus for the entire day. And then going home, you're just sort of stuck at home the entire time. And we're all human, there's so many better things we want to do than just sit down and watch like a lecture. And it's, I don't know, I'm hoping for the next year, I think Warwicks current policy is anything over 50 people are like has to be online. But do you think there's gonna be like room for that to change?

Grace 12:12

I don't know, but I didn't know that about Warwick. I was looking at the website the other day, and I was trying to figure out what we're doing to this next academic year. But yeah, that would be a good idea. But I think, I don't know, I think the lectures are probably going to be probably still online. But I think in terms of just suggestions in, like, moving forward, I feel like there should be set days where the lectures are uploaded. And if anything, it should not reach the one hour, like one hour, 20 minute mark, cuz it's like, who is sitting that will maybe like live lectures is a good idea, I think, but obviously, I understand that's a lot harder to do. But I think live lectures just work. In terms of at least, I had the liberty of saying I'm going to stop, do it, let me watch one lecture for five hours, because it's very tempting, you know? So,

Charlie 13:05

yeah, no, definitely, if online lectures continue, then they definitely need to work on the format of them. Because all the regulation of them because sometimes I'd have a lecturer and it gives three 20 minute videos. And that was the recommended format. But then I had this one module, and this one person uploaded a two hour video for one lecture. And there needs to be some sort of regulation, I feel.

Grace 13:27

 Yeah

Charlie 13:28

I know. It's kind of scary, because apparently, it's it's allegedly cheapest, but it kind of does make sense to be cheaper to have just an online course. So there is an incentive for most universities to keep most courses online. Although that does kind of

Grace 13:43

sense of the debasement, yes. Right. Because it's one of those things where, like, because I think when I talk about this, and like, we've got to extend grace, because we didn't expect ourselves to be in a situation like this ever. Just got to work with it. But then it gets to a point where it's like, if we can, you know, have things in person, because it's cheaper for the running of the university. Should we do that because I'm sure if students wanted to sign up for you know, online university, they would have applied for online universities like Open University, for example. So it was like, we shouldn't be at the because it's more convenient to lecturers and lecturers are able to get so much more done, etc. We shouldn't just, you know, sort of side with that, because students are enjoying it or not even enjoying it got to a point where I've spoken to quite a few students and students who have lost their love for their like, they've lost their love their passion for their degrees, because everything is so tedious, everything is so, you know, I've just got to get through and get through this day and there's not really much to look forward to because societies which is a very big part of university, everything was online. You know, I was on like, what Yeah, I was only an Exec last year and doing events, it felt like I was very much doing events for myself, like, people weren't showing up. If people were showing up, it was very lets get this done where, there's there was no sense of community, there was no sense of fun, like, this is something that we should do you know, that type of thing. So, the university experience has very much been sucked out, which obviously, there's and there's the hardest thing to speak about this, or the hardest thing to reconcile with, there's no one to blame. So it's not like we can say ah, but we blame it on the lecturers, we blame it on the students. There's no one to blame. We can't even blame it on Boris, you know, so one of those things where we just got to learn to navigate and just try to have fun in the moment and actually recognise that we can still try to somewhat find a sense of happiness in the moment, because if we're complaining, it's a very unsustainable lifestyle, you know, there's always something to complain about.

Charlie 15:54

Yeah, the last year of university, it was kind of, mostly joyless. I'm usually active in like two societies. And I couldn't do any of them because they both relied on being heavily in person. So when it came to that, I was such, just like a dry, it felt like a chore, having to turn up and do something, and then having to turn up and do all my degrees. And there's just like, I felt drained all the time, because I was just sitting at a laptop for like, nigh on 12 hours a day doing something, it's not healthy to have that sort of separation from people.

Georgia 16:25

Everything, everything was sort of compartmentalised in just one location, like a ?, like be that, like your social life, your work life, your like education, everything is just there. And the fact that you can't just engage with people on a personal level, it's so difficult, and it's just so tiring, like you said, it's draining, I would have like, even calls with my friends who I hadn't seen in like, months, and I would come out of them feeling so tired, just because like it was, it was so nice to see them just kind of more the same. Yeah, I think that's something that people haven't really talked about. But like, everyone knows that it's different to talk about to talk to people online rather than in person. But I don't know, I feel like we don't acknowledge enough that it's just a bit tiring. But it can be really difficult to keep up with people and that way.

Charlie 17:28

Yeah, definitely

Grace 17:29

Very tiring, like, and it's just draining like, I don't know, it was hard in the sense of like, I want to be speaking to my friends. But, I don't also like the feeling of feeling like, oh my gosh, you know, like I want to be present. But it's just very draining when you're going from small screens or big screen back to a big screen to a smaller screen, then to an even smaller screen. And it's just like, where's the balance? I think it was really hard to find that sense of balance, just, I think, but what I'm starting to realise is, I don't think that was necessarily a lockdown thing. I think that was just part of adulting, that slipped my phase of going through adulthood just happened to be at the same time as lockdown. So it all very much felt like this is very foreign to me. This is not; Is this real life? No one talks about this, you know that type of thing. So

Charlie 18:21

I know, one benefit is that quite a few of my friends have graduated last year and this year, and it's always gonna be more difficult I'm not seeing them now they're at uni. But since I've already had an entire year to prepare that I'm not going to see them in person I can keep in contact with them online. That was probably the only good thing to come out of the pandemic, the fact that I already know the skill of keeping in touch.

Georgia 18:43

Yeah, super strange because I sort of ended my undergraduate degree and like, all of my friends live with me. And because of lockdown, we were like together 24/7. And to go from that to not, I don't know, to not seen him for like almost a year has been just like insane, such a strange condition. And so I guess yeah, it's good in like some ways that you've been able to assimilate to that. But i think it's sad isn't that.

Charlie 19:17

Yeah. How did either of you maintain like, some sense of sanity like an like a work life balance when everything is on a screen? Because I didn't to be honest.

Georgia 19:28

Me neither.

Grace 19:30

I think my thing is like, my, my flatmates like hated me for this but not really, but they would like yeah anyway, what I would do is like, if I was just feeling overwhelmed, I'd go have a shower. So like during like the November pandemic, not pandemic, the November lockdown. I was at one point I was probably having three showers a day it's really bad, but that was the only time that I could like, I would just sit in the bath and just like don't like put my phone in my room and just get away from like, you know, like watching YouTube or, you know, that type of thing, but this we are not in even a lockdown. But this time around, I decided to sort of like start reading a lot more. But obviously, it's a lot harder to read when you're reading 200 pages a week for your degree. So now I'm very much just trying to find new pastimes like painting my nails for example, you know,

Charlie 20:27

Lovely.

Georgia 20:30

I feel like getting a new hobby to cope was like such an early pandemic vibe, it was like I'm going to start crocheting

I'll become a completely different person just to pass the time.

Yeah, I yeah, I like falling. don't really remember. Any sort of the winter lockdowns just because they were so, I don't know, they were so the same. And everything was sosort of mundane. And I think it was so different to kind of the first lockdown. And I've heard so many people saying this before it's like because it was like the winter. And it was so dark all the time, it was so depressing. And like, yeah, I couldn't even tell you like one thing that happens during like, the first three months of the year.

Charlie 21:23

No. Horrible, like, I really did not adapt well to those lock downs, like quite a few sort of like anxiety surrounding my housemates, we all have very different attitudes towards the lockdown. And that kind of just, I don't know, it kind of meant I just couldn't leave my bed. I felt like I couldn't leave my bedroom as a sort of like, way and I couldn't cope with that. And I just had my laptop as sort of the way of escaping, which kind of just made it worse as horrible. So it's like, in hindsight, maybe I should have learned crochet.

Georgia 21:56

Yeah, it is weird.

Charlie 21:59

What do you what are your opinions on like the technology that would be fun to use to cope with because obviously, Zoom was a godsend in March last year, but obviously, there's a lot more things. We're using Microsoft Teams right now. But what do you think? What do you think of Teams, because that is 90% of my social life was 90% of my social life.

Grace 22:18

I think that people tend to have bad things to say about Teams. But I think Teams got the job done. Teams did what it needed to do. And like, especially for like, exec staff, like it was very useful for everything to just, I think it was easy to navigate. And I'm happy for Teams, you know? I don't know what you guys think about Teams.

Charlie 22:41

It's lucky? Because I remember it first being put on like a school laptop when I was in sixth form? And being like, what is the point of this? Like, I'm never gonna use this. And then like, fast forward three years, it's like, oh, this is incredibly useful.

Grace 22:57

Yeah.

Charlie 22:58

But you do get quite fatigued out of it. Because it is just another video chatting thing. And when you go from like Teams to Zoom to like messenger calls, or whatever, it's, it gets annoying, but it's fortunate that we actually had these kind of technologies because this has happened 20 years ago, I think the pandemic could have been dealt with a lot differently. Like, do you have anything else to like, say about, like, how online learning has been dealt with at university, like we've all had seemingly very different experiences of it this year.

Georgia 23:34

I feel like the overarching thing is like, I get the sense of empathy for everyone involved. I think sort of the lecturers at least I had did the best that they could with a bad situation. And I understood that we were kind of going for it and we understood that they were going through it and and that made it easier that, that it was just a collective experience of just just pure shit really? I think that's my biggest takeaway. Just it was difficult for everyone, even if, even if they have different ways of dealing or experiencing that. Everyone's got involved in some way.

Charlie 24:20

Yeah.

Grace 24:21

yeah, I think I just agree with Georgia. I don't know it was very interesting to navigate. And I think lockdown really put life in perspective, but going into this academic year, because you guys are basically finished with Wait Charlie are you doing the post grad or ?

Charlie 24:37

I'm doing the integrated masters so it will be slightly different to the first three years, but I'll still be around.

Grace 24:44

Okay, that's it. Yeah. So I think going into my final year I'm very much just like, I kind of know I want to do and just like I want to do things the right way in the sense of actually be able to find that balance. actually be able to enjoy myself in the middle of it, you know, do things that I want to do, grow, you know, that type of thing. So, yeah, it should be exciting.

Charlie 25:09

Yeah, let's hope. Yeah.

Georgia 25:11

I'm really excited for you. Yeah. I spent so much of this year feeling bad for like us, you know, to had to like, go into university experience in the pandemic, like, I can't even imagine how difficult that was, to be put in a flat with people and there the only people you could talk to. And if someone got ill everyone would get ill

Charlie 25:35

I know like Rootes must have had a field day, because everyone was in self isolation all the time.

Georgia 25:42

I hope things are better for you next year.

Charlie 25:47

I hope so to be very different. Like, it will be a lot more different to like last couple years last year.

Grace 25:55

Yeah,

Charlie 25:56

and hopefully we don't have to go back in like onto lockdown again.

Grace 25:59

 Hopefully.

Charlie 26:01

But we'll still definitely, I think, feel very much the effect of it. I don't think the university is going to go back to normal just like that. Especially, I'm not sure if you two think this is a bit crazy, that students are used as a scapegoat for all government policy. So it's like, oh, there's a massive spike in cases. Let's blame the students.

Grace 26:20

Yeah.

Georgia 26:22

Yeah. No, absolutely, I feel like I feel like we're a scapegoat for anything bad that's going on really aren't we.

Charlie 26:28

Yeah, we really are.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai