Linking COVID-19 with Classroom Disciplines to Promote Civic Engagement & Voting

The below list of questions and ideas about how to connect the COVID-19 pandemic was shared through Paul Loeb's listserv. Consider how you may use these questions in your own classes to spark discussion and help students connect their education to their role to play in their community. Faculty interested in contributing ideas to Paul's list be shared can contribute at this [Google form](#).

Allied Health fields How the disease has spread, but also the impact of public health funding cuts, access to health care, the impact of universal sick days or their lack, how we handle infected non-citizens, how we do or don't assure the safety of health providers, how we ensure sufficient supplies of key equipment from masks to ventilators and hospital beds. Should we have [loosened nursing care fine enforcement](#), as the administration did in December. How our particular health model has handled the epidemic, and what we can learn from other countries [like Korea](#).

Anthropology: How do language and culture shape the different responses to the disease that we see in different countries? How can this disease specifically which most severely affects the elderly reflect the ways in which societies value and support aging? How do our tendencies toward tribalism impact our individual or common responses?

Arts programs: Given the current practical constraints, how can artists respond to the crisis in ways that help give us the imagination to respond. With social distancing closing music venues and theatres, how should we collectively support artists and others who can no longer make a living?

Biology and Environmental Studies: how do viruses like Coronavirus gestate and migrate? Climate change hasn't been listed as a trigger in this case, but it has increased the spread of viruses like Zika, malaria, dengue fever, chikungunya and West Nile. How do we create policies to mitigate these kinds of risks? Has there been enough funding for these efforts, and how would you raise the revenue if you believe there should be more.

Business & Economics: Lessons from the epidemic about the appropriate balance between private enterprise and public investment? About the vulnerabilities of global supply chains and how to address them? About a fundamental model that assumes endless growth? How should we support [local businesses that are threatened with going under](#) due to external catastrophes--like the small shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues in Seattle or Milan, or artists who can no longer perform, or Seattle's [weekly newspaper](#), 90% of whose revenue comes from now cancelled events and ads promoting these events. How should governments and corporations support businesses and individuals in these contexts, and how have they. Who has the responsibility [for workers who aren't given sick days](#), and what are the consequences if they stay on the job?

Communications and Journalism: What's the responsibility of journalism and communication in covering an epidemic like this? Giving key practical information? Holding elected officials accountable? Tracking impact in local communities? Tracking and challenging disinformation or the lack of clear information? What do you think of the job they've done so far? Is effective coverage damaged by the erosion of local newspapers in the past fifteen years? What happens when the [basis of local ads dries up](#) because local events are cancelled and people aren't going to stores? Is there an appropriate government role to help support local publications, whether weeklies or dailies, like New Jersey's nonprofit [Civic Information Consortium](#)? How do we prevent this from [further destroying local newspapers](#)?

Computer Science: How South Korea has been using [apps and GPS tracking](#) to follow and contain the spread of the virus. Whether this could be a model here? Could we do this without accentuating a surveillance society? How coronavirus is affecting the logistics of how people can vote.

Education: How should K-12 and higher ed institutions balance public health and community needs in this situation? If schools are closed, how do you handle students who depend on their schools for meals, jobs, or special needs services? How should we prioritize education funding vs the social services that support many of the students? Has our education system given us a sense of common connection or emphasized individual academic achievement, and if the latter, does that compromise our ability to function together in moments of crisis? How should we educate students to think about big picture public choices and their role in shaping them?

English, Composition, ESL, Public Speaking and Rhetoric: Have students write or give talks about how what elected leaders are saying, and how those from different political perspectives frame the crisis. Explore documentation for various claims and the assumptions behind various arguments. Interview fellow students or their families by phone, and describe their experiences. Explore how information and disinformation has travelled and its impact on the epidemic's spread, including the initial suppression of information in Wuhan. Read accounts of previous epidemics, or novels like Albert Camus's The Plague. Write essays assessing what the government has done or is doing about the crisis, who is acting and how. Create arguments for policies you believe should be enacted.

Environmental Studies: How is the way this virus has spread similar or different to viruses like Dengue Fever and Zika whose prevalence has been increased climate changes. How is COVID a warning for climate change disasters, and how could they interact. How could it affect climate change solutions, including in areas like transit?

Geography: How can Geographic Information Systems be best deployed to visualize the spread of disease? How have migration patterns, population shifts, urbanization, and transportation technologies made our lives more and perhaps in some ways less susceptible to epidemics?

Government, Political science and Public Policy: Similar to Allied Health--how do we make policy choices affecting key health decisions. How much should we invest resources in planning for emergencies like epidemics, vs dealing with other priorities. Should we subsidize testing, sick leave, additional nutrition and unemployment benefits for affected populations? Whose voices and interests shape decisions to invest or disinvest in preparedness. How should we incentivize production of critical drugs or vaccines if the market may not pay back all the costs? If the virus doesn't recede quickly, how do we conduct the 2020 campaigns and elections in a manner that doesn't put more people at risk?

Graphic Design: What are the most effective ways to visualize the spread of disease? Social Distancing? Hand-washing techniques? How has graphic design contributed to awareness of the disease and the actions needed to to stop it?

History: How have outbreaks and epidemics been managed and mismanaged in the past? How have communities responded during and after these destructive events? Comparisons between COVID-19 and the 1918 flu, [for instance](#). Examples of how other previous threats have been combatted, like Ebola, SARS, and the H1N1 Swine Flu.

Hospitality & Travel Industry: How should international travel, hotels or the cruise ship industry address the potential for global pandemics? How do you assure worker and client safety? Are there regulations that would

have helped or could help in the future? Is there a public responsibility to bail out industries focused on recreation?

Industrial engineering: See business. How we create and manufacture the technologies needed to combat this virus, like medical supplies and tests. How governments work or could work with manufacturers to speed production in a crisis. How we have or haven't adequately prepared for this crisis.

Law and Criminal Justice: How do pandemics like this affect prisoners? Immigrants and their rights? How do you balance the necessities of public health with the social needs of communities, and the economic needs of the businesses that will be shut down? How do you address the urgencies of defeating the virus without avoid creating precedents for problematic governmental actions in other spheres?

Psychology, Sociology, Social Work, Religion: What kinds of approaches work to further voluntary social distancing? How do we maintain health and hope with the stresses created by these situations? How do we create community models to support the health and hope of others? How should we as a society address the isolation created by social distancing? How do congregations keep community while maintaining safety? How do we deal with the vulnerable in times of acute crisis? What are the appropriate roles for elected officials in promoting effective approaches on areas that depend on voluntary action? What are the social impacts of social distancing, and are there alternatives—perhaps online--that will be safe but that will still nurture community?

Philosophy and Religion What will the epidemic teach us about who we are as a society? Can we apply philosophical and religious lessons about our connections with each other to the current situation? What choices would they suggest?

Statistics: The role of statistics and data in understanding this crisis. How political leaders and the public are using or misusing them. The relationship between statistics and public conversation on the key issues related to combatting the virus.