

# The Zoom Life Is Here to Stay!

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COVID-19 has brought monumental change in the world affecting virtually every aspect of life. It has changed our health and educational behaviors globally and instituted a sense of extreme caution with a profound influence on the profession of dentistry. In early 2020, many states deemed dentistry nonessential for a period of time when only emergency treatment could be rendered to patients. Personal protective equipment that was extensively available for everyday use has become a scarcity today. Esoteric terms like *flattening the curve* and *social distancing* have entered our normal vocabulary. Like dentistry, the field of higher education faced challenging questions of whether to move fully virtual, continue with in-person instruction, or pursue a blended model. Traditional methods of teaching quickly transitioned to creative modes of information and content delivery by brute force. Homes have turned into classrooms and preclinical laboratory space. The way we teach, learn, and provide patient care during the COVID-19 global pandemic looks and feels drastically different from the pre-COVID-19 world. While this has taken a major physical and emotional toll on us all, some of the creativity and innovation the pandemic demanded of us in dental education is clearly here to stay.

At Indiana University School of Dentistry (IUSD), in-person didactic and clinical education ceased fully from mid-March to July 2020. Faculty, staff, and administrators worked tirelessly to develop a new digital curriculum within weeks that would ensure we were sending our graduating class of 2020 into the health care workforce as safe and competent dental professionals and limit the learning loss our continuing students would potentially face. The collaborative spirit was alive

and well during this time of intense change. Full-time and adjunct faculty were willing to provide prerecorded and live online lectures, facilitate new small group learning activities, and demonstrate clinical techniques over Zoom to students eager to stay engaged in their educational journey. Students received high-quality instruction from clinicians and other content experts that they would not normally encounter while safely nestled in the comfort of their own homes.

When we resumed routine patient care in July 2020, faculty, staff, and administrators continued planning for a hybrid online/in-person 2020-2021 academic year with safety and quality at the top of their mind. Didactic lectures remain online; for students, these lectures are far more comfortable than cramming into a large lecture hall. We know that limited student-faculty interactions take place in a large lecture hall setting in which one faculty member is teaching to 100 or more students simultaneously.

In 2020, faculty members from the College of Dental Medicine at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, California, published evidence that dental student outcomes remained steady or improved with the transition away from a traditional lecture-based curriculum to a new online hybrid preclinical curriculum.<sup>1</sup> At IUSD, preclinical lab courses are taught in-person again, and in response to COVID-related changes, we have developed a team-based clinical care model to improve collaboration between D4 and D3 dental students that we hope will also improve continuity of care for our patients.

We would not argue that dental education should be delivered 100% remotely in the future, but dental students sitting in large lecture halls for a significant number of hours each week should remain a relic of the pre-COVID era. We are very proud to have weathered this storm together with our colleagues and hope to see many elements of our innovation become routine parts of dental education for years to come.

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## REFERENCES

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