



College Students Discuss an Important Location to Them During the Pandemic Through Building Websites

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, many college students, including low-income and racial minorities, experienced stressors related to their physical and psychological health, relationships, finances, and academic status. Moreover, most students had possessed difficulty previously in writing about their personal and communal identities and needs; exploring place-related rhetorics; and engaging in digital composition practices, including creating a website. This article presents an exploratory case study, which applies a mixed-methods approach employing a convergent-parallel strategy, involving an assignment where students used digital composition practices to build a website about a place, such as their hometown or a local park, that was important to them during the pandemic. The study involved 65 low socioeconomic status (SES) students from a rural university with a Native American subpopulation. For the assignment, students explored their identity and background, as well as how they and their location of choice were impacted by the pandemic. As outcomes of formulating a website about two difficult topics for the students to raise, their identity and the pandemic's impact upon themselves as part of the greater, epic crisis, students learned to think critically; examine their personal and cultural pandemic-related concerns; research information about their place of choice; make creative decisions about their website; draft, compose, and revise digital work; and reflect upon their project. In completing a website about an important location as the study's aim, students became more willing to consider their background and the pandemic's impact on them and to gauge the 24 potentially related stressors they experienced tied to their physical and mental health, familial and social relationships, financial outlook, and academic goals. The author delineates the website assignment's objectives, and both students and faculty raters measured students' writing outcomes upon completing their site.

Keywords: place, environmental issues, identity, COVID-19 pandemic, stressors, websites, digital composition

INTRODUCTION

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, at first, many people, including college students, attempted to ignore it. Then, becoming worried, some experienced negative thoughts about the virus's potential implications for them and those around them, including for

Citation: Hembrough, T. (2024). College students discuss an important location to them during the pandemic through building websites. *International Journal of Instruction*, 17(1), 339-360. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2024.17118a>

their physical and mental health and lives. Overall, these people hoped that their circumstances might remain unaltered while still fearing for their future (Horesh & Brown, 2020; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Pandemic-linked worries were crippling for some students and impacted their academic and greater status (Chand, Devi, & Tagimaucia, 2022). Nonetheless, most students did not have a way to convey their pandemic-connected stressors to others who might care about and be able to assist them, including teachers and classmates. Instead of asking any potentially willing students to discuss their identity, background, and any stressors they were experiencing, many faculty were focused on other goals and curriculum, to their students' detriment. As a population subset, many students were confined to their residence because of the virus, as well as being forced to shift from in-person classrooms to remote learning. Such students, with their schoolwork, jobs, and personal lives altered, reported psychological distress. In Wang's and others' study (2020), 48% of students were depressed, 18% had suicidal ideation, and 85% noted sleeping changes, and in Goldrick-Rab's and others' study (2020), 52% of students reported anxiety. During this period, college presidents declared that academia's top requirement should be to address marginalized students' needs. According to the National Center for Mental Health in Schools (2020), for racial minorities, who graduate at lower rates than their Caucasian peers already, the obstacles to matriculation were exacerbated by the virus. Nonetheless, despite many students' sense of distress across all demographics, only 10% sought college health services, including counseling, and only 4% utilized other outside facilities (Wang et al., 2020). During the pandemic, students garnered less social support but possessed greater stressors (Elmer et al., 2020). In such a context, writing teachers, although not replacing a medical professional's role, must look for ways to connect with their students and create assignments to engage them (Kecojevic et al., 2020). During the pandemic, instructors could not conclude that students would interact beneficially with other students on their own, especially when their coursework went online (Chu, 2020; Kaslow et al., 2020). Indeed, despite the COVID-19 virus's introduction being an international event occupying most news broadcasts, many students were unable to communicate about their experiences, including through their assignments. Traditionally, writing has been a field in which many teachers espouse discussing current events and controversial topics to encourage critical thinking, as well as the potential for community action (Tanaka & Gilliland, 2017). Such conversations, especially if they become personal, may prove difficult for some students to broach, such as those living through a pandemic. Nevertheless, even if some students wished to remain silent in class, this does not mean that all necessarily rejected the possibility of someone listening to them and addressing their needs during a traumatic time.

This article involves a case study of students enrolled in a rural, Oklahoma university, who took an analytical writing class and built a website about an important place to them during the pandemic. In responding to a survey, at first, many students, including Native Americans, preferred not to discuss the pandemic in their classes, including its effects upon themselves and their family; were fatigued of the subject; thought their beliefs on the topic would be insignificant; and felt the virus was an unimportant issue to cover. However, for the study, students were able to explore and document their virus-

related anxieties about their physical and mental health, social relationships, finances, and academic status to whatever degree they felt comfortable through formulating a website about a key place to them affected by the pandemic. Through the website, students described their relation to their chosen setting and its history; how its sustainability was necessary; what audience members might do in visiting; and how the location, and by implication, the students themselves, were impacted by the virus. Within the website, students included alphabetic written text interspersed with images, maps, videos, audiorecordings of themselves reading their work, and online hyperlinks to other websites. Through writing about place, students can emphasize their identity, stressors, and values in showcasing a locale representing their interests instead of focusing on themselves personally. For students, constructing websites also widens the topic being studied; promotes interaction with classmates and teachers; bolsters critical thinking, writing, reflecting, and technological skills; fosters personal expression; supports composing for a general audience; and creates a sense of fun (Hembrough, 2019b). Through a case-study design, this article investigates Native American and Caucasian students' 24 stressors related to their physical and psychological health, relationships, finances, and academic status. Additionally, this article examines students' engagement in composition practices in order to formulate a website about a valuable place to them impacted by the pandemic. Furthermore, the author offers writing teachers a digital strategy for connecting with students in similarly traumatic periods as the pandemic by having them build websites. The article discusses the place-based, website assignment and reflective essay as a model that might illuminate larger patterns of interest by considering how an experimental assignment influenced students' critical thinking, discovery and analysis of their individual and collective concerns surrounding the pandemic, creativity, and prowess in fashioning a digital text.

Literature Review

The pandemic affected students' physical and psychological health, jobs, classes, and lives by adding to their already high rate of mental health issues, yet most students were not given the opportunity to communicate their concerns with teachers and classmates. Almost 60% of students lacked basic needs. Thus, they faced hardship in focusing on their schoolwork. Notably, 42% suffered from food insecurity, 48% faced housing insecurity, 16% were homeless, 42% lost a job, 28% worked fewer hours, 36% attended to family members more often, and others faced parenting challenges (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Relevant to the study, of the races, Native American students had the highest rate of basic needs insecurity at 74% (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020). Students with mental health concerns also have less academic success (Kecojevic et al., 2020), and during the pandemic, almost 90% reported attending college was a large stressor (APA, 2020), the context of which many teachers failed to address. According to Wang and others (2020), 74% of students could not concentrate on their courses, and 59% experienced conflicts with online learning. Additionally, some students worried about grades as 12% changed majors, and 11% dropped classes. During the pandemic, many universities moved to online learning. However, some students disliked remote learning because they lacked a connection with their peers with whom they might communicate (Alqudah et al., 2020; Hazaymeh, 2021; Rohman et al.,

2020), including about their pandemic worries. Yet, even online, teachers who make the effort to do so can formulate their courses to provide students with a sense of fellowship (Chand, Devi, & Tagimaucia, 2022; Hindun et al., 2021; Sathishkumar et al., 2020), as well as spaces to discuss topics of concern, such as the pandemic (Wang et al., 2020). Through assigning tasks like a website depicting a valuable place, instructors can assist students, who do not know one another or have the same major, in starting dialogues. During the pandemic, over 80% of students worried about what the 2020-2021 year would bring, with two-thirds doubting they could plan for their future (APA, 2020). Nevertheless, for teachers, connecting students with classmates supports those with anxiety (Chu, 2020). Despite the risks of overdisclosure, through relaying events involving stress, trauma, and illness within a narrative framework, students can write about their personal and cultural experiences in creating a place-based website in order to understand and address their individual and larger trauma and reach their community for reasons including advocacy. Because of place-based composition design's openness, students can investigate location-oriented topics from economic, political, multicultural, feminist, and environmental lenses while tackling rhetorical concerns including argument, audience, organization, style, and source use, all goals for analytical writing. Students who feel close to their surroundings also possess a higher, personal, life-satisfaction rate (Frauman & Shaffer, 2017). Overall, writing classrooms offer fitting forums for teaching place-based writing due to their cross-disciplinary nature (Goggin, 2013). Thus, writing teachers, such as House (2016), call for instructors to implement place-based, composition-design models to support students in sharing their identity.

Engaging in place-based composition supports students in meeting not only personal and communal goals, but also writing outcomes. In the classroom, students can offer a range of knowledge and skills, as well as presenting diverse ideas and attitudes in their place-based writing (Sybing, 2019). In a study of students enrolled in a composition class who composed an essay about an environmental subject, they were able to organize their text, formulate an argument, and compose work about a relevant topic (Setyowati et al., 2019). In a similar study of students writing about sustainable topics, they considered audience, reflected on their assignment, and showed a higher comprehension of both sustainability and writing conversations (Goggin, 2013). Comparatively, in another course, teachers implemented place-based composition to present a unified, pertinent curriculum and assist students in writing about locations connected to their backgrounds and coursework (Hembrough, 2019a). Moreover, in a professional writing class, students generated a website introducing tourists to a natural location to prompt the former to participate in critical thinking, research, peer review, composing, and revision (Hembrough, 2019b). The current literature contributes to dialogues about both students' stressors during the pandemic more widely and the value of place-based writing, including in digital contexts. Nevertheless, a gap in the research exists as to the nature of students' stressors during the pandemic in the study's region, as well as how students might benefit from fashioning a website about a valuable place for themselves, especially during a difficult time. This article investigates students' pandemic stressors and an assignment they completed for a writing class, a website portraying their identity,

stressors, and an important location for them affected by the pandemic. The study asked these research questions:

- 1) What stressors related to students' potential A) physical and psychological health, B) relationships, C) finances, and D) academic status were regional students experiencing during the pandemic?
- 2) How does assigning a website impact students' following outcomes: A) critical thinking; B) examination of their personal stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place portrayed; C) creativity; D) ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work; and E) potential to reflect?

METHOD

Research Methods

Together with its aims and an understanding of the literature, the study explored how students' construction of a website about a significant place, amidst the pandemic, would influence their potential to utilize digital composition practices and illustrate their personal identity and stressors and cultural concerns. Having Institutional Review Board approval, the author utilized an exploratory case study employing a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data by applying a convergent-parallel strategy. An exploratory case study gives researchers a learning opportunity to locate ideas, identify perceptions, and broaden a phenomena's knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study investigated students' set of 24 COVID-19 pandemic-related stressors as a recent phenomenon. Thus, the author's selection of an exploratory case study as a research design was fitting. Also, the authors' choice of a mixed-methods study utilizing a convergent-parallel strategy for data collection and analysis enabled the research questions' contemplation via multiple research phases and method types. A mixed-methods study depends upon both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (the descriptive and conceptual findings collected through the study's questionnaires, participant assignments, and observation) research methods to explain the study's results and analyze them further. To gather results, the study relied on diverse data forms, including pre- and post-surveys with Likert-style and related open-ended questions, students' websites and reflective essays, and Zoom observations of students engaging in the assignment, altogether portraying students' interaction with critical thinking, research, drafting, digital writing practices, and reflection. The pre- and post-surveys consisted of 110 questions each and featured both Likert-scale questions with answers ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" and open-ended questions enabling participant commentary and elaboration (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Together, the Likert-scale and coinciding open-ended questions focused on students' identities and backgrounds, pre-pandemic and pandemic stressors, preferences for discussing the pandemic in their classes, and familiarity and interest in creating websites. With the timeline, the author compared students' stressors from up to six months before the pandemic began to be discussed in the U.S. in January 2020 versus those within the pandemic from January 2020 to July 2021, when pandemic conversations were at a high point. Data collection occurred in early April 2020 through July 2021, and in comparing students' stressors between the pre-pandemic and

pandemic timelines, the author's aim was to measure whether students' types and stress levels rose, fell, or remained the same. Some survey stress factors were affiliated with Lester's (2014) "Stressful Life Events Checklist" targeting college students. The author employed a convergent-parallel approach to the exploratory study by simultaneously collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and merging it at the end by pairing each set of associated survey questions, Likert-scale with open-ended, to yield additional information concerning students' elaborations upon their Likert-scale responses (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The rationale for selecting the convergent-parallel approach is that the interlinking analysis of quantitative and qualitative data offers a broader understanding of the research questions and supports the author in analyzing participants' ideas in depth. To offer further credibility to the study's claims, the author collected an adequate participant sample, contemplated the research questions over an extended time frame, and analyzed and rated students' websites and evaluations as other methods of considering the findings. As a step in evaluating students' materials to collect qualitative data, the author and two other researchers analyzed and rated students' websites and reflections for themes commenting upon their stressors, identity, and writing skills (see Cohen, 2017). Lastly, the author formulated a rubric to measure students' website outcomes.

Research Site and Sample Demographics

Concerning the study's timeline of events connected to the pandemic, in March 2020, the university campus closed, and courses were shifted online. During the fall of 2020, the campus continued to be closed, and classes remained online. In spring and summer of 2021, the campus was open, but most courses remained online. Study participants were enrolled in one or more classes that were moved online and/or conducted in an alternate remote format after the pandemic began. The author conducted the study at an Oklahoma university serving the state's lowest income counties. The university town is also located in the Choctaw Nation's capital. Most undergraduates are first-generation students, and 30% are Native American. As the graduation rate, only 11% of students finish within five years, and only 28% receive their diploma at all (Deidentified University "Factbook," 2022). At the university, many rural and racial student minorities face persistence issues as peripheralized populations (see Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). The study's 65 participants ranged in age from 17 to 56, with 68% ($n = 44$) in their twenties. Men were 31% ($n = 20$), and women were 69% ($n = 45$). Caucasians were the majority, at 54% ($n = 34$), and 31% ($n = 20$) were Native American, including Choctaw, Cherokee, and Chickasaw, with the other students also being racial minorities. Over a third ($n = 25$) of students came from rural backgrounds, with 55% ($n = 36$) being from a small town. Refer to Table 1 for demographics.

Table 1
Students' demographic characteristics

Occupation Status	Student 25% (16)	Part-time Work 37% (24)	Full-time Work 38% (25)		
Age	17-21 45% (29)	22-25 15% (10)	26-29 12% (8)	30-40 18% (12)	41-60 9% (6)
Marital Status	Married 29% (19)	Cohabiting 5% (3)	Separated/Divorced 1% (1)	Single 65% (42)	
Financially Responsible for Children under 18	None 75% (49)	1 Child 11% (7)	2 Children 6% (4)	3 Children 8% (5)	
Annual Household income	\$0-15,000 9% (6)	\$16,000-30,000 18% (12)	\$31,000-45,000 14% (9)	\$46,000-60,000 23% (15)	\$61,000-76,000+ 34% (22)
Residency, Town Size	Under 5,000 37% (24)	5,000-10,000 12% (8)	11,000-20,000 25% (16)	20,000-50,000 20% (13)	60,000 + 6% (4)

Note. $N = 65$

FINDINGS

The study produced findings connected to the research questions. The first question dealt with the nature of students' 24 stressors during the pandemic, including these: A) their physical and psychological health, B) relationships, C) finances, and D) academic status. The second question was concerned with how assigning a website impacted students' outcomes in these areas: A) critical thinking; B) an examination of their personal stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place; C) creativity; D) ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work; and E) potential to reflect. See Table 2 for a summary of the findings.

Table 2
Summary of findings from two research questions

1) What stressors are students experiencing during the pandemic, including these: A) physical and psychological health, B) relationships, C) financial conflicts, and D) academic status?	A) Between 3% and 40% of students experienced physical and psychological health stressors during the pandemic. B) Between 2% and 49% experienced relationship stress. C) Financially, between 8% and 52% experienced monetary stress. D) Academically, between 9% and 14% had stress concerning their school status.
2) How does assigning a website impact students' outcomes in these areas: A) critical thinking; B) examination of their personal stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place; C) creativity; D) ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work; and E) potential to reflect?	A) Raters determined that all students were proficient in meeting the website's outcomes concerning critical thinking. B) Also, all students were proficient in examining their personal stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place. C) Concerning creativity, all students demonstrated this attribute. D) Additionally, 97% of students gained the ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work. E) Likewise, all students showed the potential to reflect upon their work.

Finding for First Research Question: Students' 24 Stressors During the Pandemic

Students experienced numerous stressors before the pandemic, as well as during it, including those involving their physical and psychological health, relationships, finances, and academic matters. Pre-pandemic, physical health-wise, students were worried about a change in eating habits (15%, $n = 10$), a family member's demise (17%, $n = 11$), a family member's injury/illness (11%, $n = 7$), and a personal injury/illness (8%, $n = 5$), and a pregnancy (1%, $n = 1$). Psychologically and existentially, students were anxious about a psychological condition (25%, $n = 16$), a sleeping issue (23%, $n = 15$), an existential issue (20%, $n = 13$), and a substance abuse issue (5%, $n = 3$). Relationally, students were concerned about a socializing problem (26%, $n = 17$), caring for a partner and/or child (25%, $n = 16$), an argument with a parent (14%, $n = 9$), a conflict with a partner (11%, $n = 7$), a personal separation/divorce (5%, $n = 3$), a sexual issue (4%, $n = 3$), and a roommate conflict (3%, $n = 2$). Financially, students were worried about a reduced income (28% ($n = 18$), work conflict (25%, $n = 16$), an environmental sustainability issue (20%, $n = 13$), a housing problem (15%, $n = 10$), transportation issue (8%, $n = 5$), and legal issue (3%, $n = 2$). Academically, students faced stressors, including choosing a career (14%, $n = 9$) and having conflicts with a teacher (5%, $n = 3$). During the pandemic, these figures in all 24 stressor categories grew. Physical health-wise, 40% ($n = 26$) of students were worried about a change in eating habits, up 25% ($n = 11$); 25% ($n = 6$) were concerned about a family member's demise, up 8% ($n = 5$); 26% ($n = 17$) or 15% ($n = 10$) more of students dealt with a family physical health issue; and 22% ($n = 14$) or an additional 12% ($n = 9$) suffered from a personal injury/illness. Additionally, 3% ($n = 2$) of students navigated a pregnancy, up 2% ($n = 1$) from before the pandemic. Psychologically, 32% ($n = 21$) of students were anxious about a psychological condition, up 7% ($n = 5$); 37% ($n = 24$) about a sleeping issue, up 14% ($n = 9$); 31% ($n = 20$) about an existential issue, up 11% ($n = 7$); and 6% ($n = 4$) about a substance abuse issue, up 1% ($n = 1$). Relationally, 49% ($n = 32$) of students were concerned about socializing, up 23% ($n = 15$); 29% ($n = 19$) about caring for a partner and/or child, up 4% ($n = 3$); 20% ($n = 13$) about an argument with a parent, up 6% ($n = 4$); 20% ($n = 13$) about a conflict with a partner, up 9% ($n = 4$); 5% ($n = 3$) about a personal separation/divorce, up 2% ($n = 1$); 4% ($n = 3$) about a sexual issue, with no change; and 9% ($n = 6$) about a roommate conflict, up 6% ($n = 4$). Financially, 52% ($n = 34$) of students were worried about a reduced income, up 24% ($n = 16$); 38% ($n = 25$) about a work conflict, up 13% ($n = 9$); 32% ($n = 21$) about an environmental sustainability issue as an issue related to the website project involving place-based writing, up 12% ($n = 8$); 25% ($n = 16$) about a housing issue, up 10% ($n = 6$); 9% ($n = 6$) about a transportation issue, up 1% ($n = 1$); and 8% ($n = 5$) about a legal issue, up 5% ($n = 3$). Academically, 14% ($n = 9$) of students also faced difficulty in choosing a career, a number remaining flat, while 9% ($n = 6$) had teacher problems, up 4% ($n = 3$). See Table 3 for student stressors.

Table 3
Student stressors

	Pre-COVID-19		With COVID-19		Rate of Change	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Personal Stressors						
An income reduction	28	18	52	34	24	16
Socializing issues	26	17	49	32	23	15
Eating issues	15	10	40	26	25	11
A job conflict	25	16	38	25	13	9
Sleeping issues	23	15	37	24	14	9
A psychological condition, such as anxiety/depression	25	16	32	21	7	5
Environmental sustainability	20	13	32	21	12	8
An existential issue	20	13	31	20	11	7
Caring for a partner/child	25	16	29	19	4	3
Family member's injury/illness	11	7	26	17	15	10
Family member's demise	17	11	25	16	8	5
Housing issues	15	10	25	16	10	6
Personal injury/illness	8	5	22	14	12	9
An argument with a parent	14	9	20	13	6	4
A conflict with a partner	11	7	20	13	9	4
Difficulty in choosing a career	14	9	14	9	0	0
A roommate conflict	3	2	9	6	6	4
Issues with a teacher	5	3	9	6	4	3
Transportation issues	8	5	9	6	1	1
Legal issues	3	2	8	5	5	3
Substance abuse issues	5	3	6	4	1	1
A personal separation/divorce	3	2	5	3	2	1
Sexual issues	4	3	4	3	0	0
Being pregnant	1	1	3	2	2	1

Note. *N* = 65

Finding for Second Research Question: Students' Website Assignment Outcomes

Despite the high number of students experiencing pandemic stressors surrounding physical health and psychological issues, relationships, finances, and academic matters, most did not speak or write about the pandemic in their classes, and neither did they wish to before engaging in the website assignment. Overall, 48% (*n* = 31) did not talk or write about the pandemic in their other courses previously. Contributing to the picture, only 35% (*n* = 23) studied with teachers who provided opportunities where the former could converse about the pandemic. Moreover, only 8% (*n* = 5) of students raised conversations about the subject on their own in other prior classes. When surveyed as to whether they would like to discuss the pandemic in any past class, including the possibility of sharing its effect on themselves and their family, half (*n* = 32) disagreed, and nearly the rest (*n* = 23) were neutral. As contributing factors to students' preference to avoid discussing the pandemic before the website assignment, 32% (*n* = 21) did not feel that their opinion about the virus would be valued, while 40% (*n* = 26) were ambivalent. As additional factors connected to students' desire to circumvent pandemic

topics in other classes, a majority ($n = 40$) were bored or tired of them, and almost a quarter ($n = 14$) were neutral on the topic. Likewise, over a third ($n = 27$) believed pandemic conversations were irrelevant to their major or coursework, with 28% ($n = 18$) being neutral. Comparatively, 26% ($n = 17$) did not perceive the pandemic as being a necessary current event to broach in class, with more than a third ($n = 24$) being neutral. Finally, 34% ($n = 22$) of students did not wish to cover pandemic ideas in other classes because of privacy issues, while 28% ($n = 18$) were neutral.

According to the pre-survey, 85% ($n = 55$) of students were reluctant to discuss their background and stressors during the pandemic in their other classes, and 5% ($n = 3$) were neutral, and many students remained hesitant about discussing their identity and pandemic stressors prior to the class's website assignment when they were asked to explore an important place to them affected by the pandemic. However, in constructing a website, most students rose to the task and fulfilled the assignment's standards to an average or better degree according to both their own estimations and those of raters in these outcomes: 1) critical thinking; 2) examining personal and social concerns related to the pandemic, as well as students' locale; 3) creativity; 4) drafting, composing, and revising digital work for an audience; and 5) reflecting on the project. Students engaged in critical thinking by conducting prewriting tasks, including contemplating their personal anxieties and documenting how a particular location was valuable to them and what it offered. Students implemented creativity in illustrating scenes with sensory detail depicting themselves spending time in this place. Students examined concerns related to the virus, as well as their chosen locale, by searching the internet to procure information about COVID-19 and its effect upon their space. Students demonstrated their ability to draft, compose, and revise their work before posting it on their website by undergoing peer review and tutoring to improve their project. Further, they practiced digital literacy by formatting and displaying alphabetic written text interspersed with images, maps, videos, and website hyperlinks for an audience interested in learning about their place, its connection to the pandemic, and its value in being sustained. Lastly, students formulated a reflection essay prompting them to ponder their website's results and assess their learning outcomes. Overall, as a result of the website assignment, most students felt willing to discuss their background and various personal pandemic stressors, as well as exploring how the pandemic affected their location. Some students shared personal information, such as how their physical and psychological health, education, job, and social life had been affected, and all focused on how the virus influenced their locale, such as through venue closures. In the reflection essay, students expressed that they enjoyed sharing their places with others in a public audience, who might benefit from the former's experiences in learning about and visiting the location. Moreover, many students reported they would continue to update their websites, an outcome stretching beyond the class's bounds.

In the end, the students demonstrated a willingness to provide basic biographical information and a photo of themselves, as well as formulate a website. In the post-survey and reflection, students expressed meeting the assignment's outcomes in 1) utilizing critical thinking, such as by identifying and discussing information concerning the pandemic; 2) exploring their personal and social concerns related to the virus and

their locale; 3) portraying creativity; 4) drafting, composing, and revising digital work; and 5) reflecting. At least 40% ($n = 26$) responded positively to most of these factors, indicating their interest in fashioning a website about a valuable place, as well as covering the virus's effect upon it and themselves. Specifically, students identified that the website project bolstered their capacity to 1) think critically (52%, $n = 34$); 2) explore their personal and social concerns related to the virus (41%, $n = 26$), as well as their chosen locale (62%, $n = 40$); 3) be creative (56%, $n = 36$); 4) draft, compose, and revise digital work (for the different smaller factors, an average of 49%, $n = 32$); and 5) reflect (for the different smaller factors, an average of 50%, $n = 33$). In reflecting, many most students also believed the assignment proved useful beyond the class in learning about creating websites, promoted or reinforced work in their other courses, and promoted or reinforced their job interests and tasks. Meanwhile, most also enjoyed the website assignment. See Table 4 for students' self-reported website outcomes via the post-survey achieved at a satisfactory or a competent, good, or satisfactory level.

Table 4

A survey of students' self-reported outcomes upon completing the website

Academic Outcomes for Website	Achieved at a Competent/Good/ Proficient Status	
	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Critical Thinking</i> : Strengthened exploration and research of personal and social concerns related to location	34	52
<i>Examination of Student's Personal Stressors and Concerns Connected to the Pandemic and the Place Portrayed</i> : Strengthened ability to identify and discuss personal stressors and information concerning the pandemic	26	41
<i>Examination of Student's Personal Stressors and Concerns Connected to the Pandemic and Place Portrayed</i> : Facilitated ability to identify with important location and discuss relationship to it	40	62
<i>Creativity</i> : Strengthened creativity and style	36	56
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened ability to write to inform, persuade, and entertain audience	31	48
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened digital, multimodal writing skills	32	49
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened ability to organize both individual texts and the textual content of website	34	52
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened drafting, composing, and revising skills	33	50
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Improved ability to correct grammatical/mechanical errors, such as by utilizing peer and tutor feedback	31	47
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Proved useful in learning about creating websites	38	58
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Promoted or reinforced work in other courses	26	40
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Enjoyed the website assignment	34	53
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Promoted or reinforced job interests/ tasks	31	47

Note. $N = 65$

Besides asking students to assess their website outcomes, raters evaluated students' results. Raters assessing the website assignment found that students performed highest in the outcomes of an Examination of Student's Personal Stressors and Concerns Connected to the Pandemic and Place and Portrayed, with at least 78% ($n = 51$) attaining a proficient rating as the highest possible category, and Critical Thinking, with at least 62% ($n = 40$) being rated proficient. Likewise, the assignment's requirement for students to show their Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work as an important outcome led them to become more familiar with process writing and digital composition in building websites, with an average of 60% ($n = 39$) of students proving proficient in this area's factors. Meanwhile, most students gained the ability to reflect on their work because of the website assignment, with 60% ($n = 39$) showing proficiency in this area. Largely, 97% ($n = 63$) of students met all website guidelines satisfactorily or at least with the ability of a novice writer, with creativity ranking last in the categories (51%, $n = 53$). Interrater reliability coefficients for calculating the rubric are as follows: Critical Thinking .732; Examination of Student's Personal Stressors and Concerns Connected to the Pandemic and Place Portrayed .764; Creativity .631; Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work .687; and Potential to Reflect .661. (All coefficients meet the standard for level of agreement, but some may have been lower than others due to the difficult nature of assessing together the website's multiple unique sections.) See Table 5 for raters' assessment of students' website outcomes.

Table 5
Raters' assessment of students' website outcomes

Website Outcomes	Failure % / n	Novice % / n	Competent % / n	Good % / n	Proficient % / n
<i>Critical Thinking</i> : Strengthened exploration and research of personal and social concerns related to location		6(4)	29(19)	3(2)	62(40)
<i>Examination of Student's Stressors and Concerns Connected to Pandemic and Place</i> : Facilitated ability to identify with a place and discuss relationship to it		1(6)	4(14)	14(9)	78(51)
<i>Examination of Student's Stressors and Concerns Connected to Pandemic and Place</i> : Strengthened ability to identify and communicate information concerning the pandemic		1(6)	4(14)	14(9)	78(51)
<i>Creativity</i> : Strengthened creativity and style		3(2)	18(22)	28(11)	51(53)
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened ability to write to inform, persuade, and entertain audience		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened digital, multimodal writing skills	3(2)	8(5)	12(8)	18(12)	58(38)
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened ability to organize individual texts and textual content of website		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Strengthened drafting, composing, revising skills		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)
<i>Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work</i> : Improved ability to cite sources and correct grammatical/ mechanical errors, such as by utilizing peer and tutor feedback		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Proved useful in learning about creating websites		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Promoted or reinforced work in other courses		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Enjoyed the website assignment		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)
<i>Potential to Reflect</i> : Promoted or reinforced job interests/tasks		2(1)	12(8)	11(7)	60(39)

Note. $N = 65$

DISCUSSION

The study produced findings resulting from the two research questions. As described, the first question dealt with the nature of students' pandemic stressors, including these: A) physical and psychological health issues, B) relationships, C) financial conflicts, and D) academic status. The second question concerned whether a website assignment would benefit students' outcomes in A) critical thinking; B) an examination of their personal stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place; C) creativity; D) ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work; and E) potential to reflect. Findings indicate that the website assignment supported students in discussing their identity, addressing their pandemic stressors, and achieving positive writing outcomes, including implementing place-based writing and formulating digital texts.

Discussion for First Research Finding: Students' Stressors During the Pandemic

According to the first finding, the study revealed that, as in the larger literature, the students experienced 24 pandemic stressors. Although the author had theorized that students faced various pandemic stressors, the author had not foreseen their depth and magnitude. Coincidentally, the study proved valuable in indicating the nature of students' pandemic stressors, as well as the existing stressors they possessed before the pandemic, a topic undocumented for the geographical area. Indeed, students' pre-pandemic rates of stressors were higher than the author expected, with between 20% to 28% of students reporting stress in the specific factors of environmental sustainability; a sleeping issue; the need to care for a partner/child; a job conflict; psychological condition, such as anxiety/depression; socializing issue; and income reduction. To generate the first finding, the author utilized the pre-survey and post-survey, where students reported their stressors both before and during the pandemic, and the surveys provided pertinent information about students in the study's region, as well as utilizing similar questions to the scales that other researchers were developing in the same period, including those by the APA (2020) and Goldrick-Rab (2020), measuring people's pandemic responses.

Largely, as the first finding, most students experienced increased anxieties during the pandemic because of their shift to remote learning and the virus's impact on their physical and psychological health, relationships, income, and schoolwork. In the study, 26% ($n = 17$) of students dealt with family physical health issues, 22% ($n = 14$) suffered from personal injuries/illnesses, and 25% ($n = 16$) navigated a family member's demise. Proceeding, 52% ($n = 34$) were concerned about a reduced income, 38% ($n = 25$) were anxious about a job conflict, 29% ($n = 19$) were worried about caring for a partner and/or child, and 25% ($n = 16$) were bothered by housing issues. Similarly, nationally, the APA (2020) found that 42% of students lost a job, 28% worked fewer hours, 36% attended to family members more often, and others faced parenting challenges. Additionally, for the APA, 48% of students faced housing insecurity, 16% were homeless, almost 60% lacked basic needs, and 42% suffered from food insecurity. The current study's statistical findings are comparable with the APA's, with an additional 10% of current students worrying about finances even if only 38%, or 12% less than in the APA's study, faced job loss issues. Likewise, 29% of the study's students worried about caring for a partner and/or child, a rate similar to that of the APA's study, where an additional 7% of students were stressed about attending to family members more frequently. In the current study, 25% of students were also stressed about their housing, a figure only almost half of what the APA reported, yet many current students also dealt with crowded, multigenerational housing arrangements. Likewise, 40% ($n = 26$) of current students were upset about their eating patterns, on par with the 42% suffering from food insecurity in the APA's study. Compared with the current study's Caucasian students, the Native students faced the most elevated rates of basic needs insecurity in food, housing, and finances, and of all the races, Goldrick-Rab and others (2020) found that Native American students nationwide had the highest rate of basic needs insecurity at 74%. The study's Native students might have fared even worse except that their tribes provided additional community resources. The author expected that the Native students

would have more stressors than the Caucasians, but the latter also had high stress rates, foreseeably due to the geographical area. In the study, students' psychological and other needs also matched those of the larger literature. Of current students, 49% ($n = 32$) were apprehensive about socializing; 37% ($n = 24$) were vexed by sleeping issues; 32% ($n = 21$) worried about a psychological condition, such as anxiety or depression; and 31% ($n = 20$) were concerned about existential questions. In Wang's and others' study (2020), similarly concerned with students in the Southwest region, 85% noted sleeping changes, 48% were depressed, and 18% had suicidal ideation, while in Goldrick-Rab's and others' study (2020) of students nationwide, 52% reported anxiety. In both outside studies, students reported greater psychological stressors, yet this could have been due to the other studies being conducted at the pandemic's beginning, when the nation's population also reported greater stress. Academically, during the pandemic, current students also suffered, with 14% ($n = 9$) having difficulty in choosing a career and 9% ($n = 6$) facing issues with a teacher. In Goldrick-Rab's and others' study (2020), some students worried about grades as 12% changed majors, and 11% dropped classes, and so these findings are similar.

Discussion for Second Research Finding: Students' Website Assignment Outcomes

In the second finding, the website assignment benefitted students' outcomes in A) critical thinking; B) examining their stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place; C) creativity; D) ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work; and E) potential to reflect. Before the study began and students were presented with the website assignment, many had suffered from a range of stressors affecting their physical and psychological health, relationships, finances, and academic status, but they preferred not to discuss them in any class. Specifically, in other campus courses, 48% or almost half of students preferred not to discuss the pandemic and any stressors they experienced, including whether the pandemic affected them and their family, and 45% were neutral. This left only 3% of students willing to discuss the pandemic in terms of themselves and their background. Comparably and perhaps unsurprisingly, students' responses mirrored that of the larger culture, attempting to ignore the virus if fearing it (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). According to the survey, students' top two reasons for wishing to avoid talking and writing about their pandemic stressors were that they felt overwhelmed by the pandemic's media coverage and thus did not wish to investigate the topic further, and that they desired to avoid disclosing private information about themselves, including how the pandemic affected their physical and mental health and finances. Nonetheless, altogether, it remained discouraging that students had not been enrolled in previous classes where all teachers made an effort to broach pandemic conversations, that students did not feel their opinions about the pandemic would be valued, and that they did not believe pandemic discussions were connected to their major or coursework, as the pandemic affected all social aspects. To gather information about students' willingness to discuss the pandemic, the author used the pre-survey, which offered the option for short-answer responses providing further information, and this use of a mixed-method instrument assisted the author in successfully understanding more about students' preferences about holding pandemic conversations and under what circumstances they might participate in these dialogues.

Despite students' range of stressors and reluctance to discuss them, in producing a website, they were amenable to considering various stressors linked to their background, SES, location, and career goals by discussing how these factors affected them personally and communally during the pandemic, a finding supported by literature indicating that writing about place supports students in discussing their identity, stressors, and values (Hembrough, 2019b). Students put aside any topic fatigue or resistance concerning exploring pandemic issues in order to produce a website they believed others, such as those in their community, would value and to contribute ideas to social discussions worthy of critical attention. Despite the risks of overdisclosure, by relaying events involving the pandemic through a narrative framework and within a caring classroom, students were able to write about their personal and cultural experiences in creating a place-based website in order to understand and address their individual and larger trauma and reach their community for reasons including advocacy, which students believed was a valuable outcome (see Frauman & Shaffer, 2017). Students drew upon a wide range of knowledge and circumstances in conceiving the assignment, providing them with validation in sharing their diverse ideas and attitudes about themselves and their location during the pandemic (see Sybing, 2019). By engaging in place-based writing and formulating a website, students participated in a unified, pertinent curriculum supporting them in portraying locations connected to their backgrounds, coursework, and futures (see Hembrough, 2019a). Because the number of students with environmental concerns during the pandemic also grew, completing the website promoted their conversations about the significance of addressing their location sustainably. Through the website, students focused on the history, nature, events, and tourism connected to their place. Some depicted hometowns of a few hundred people important to the Oklahoma Land Run, linked their family tree to their destination, and outlined how their ancestors established their village. Others portrayed the history and import of sacred areas integral to their Native American tribes. A portion painted the beauty and need for conservation of parks, where students swam, fished, and camped. Indeed, students reported feeling closer to their surroundings and more satisfied with their lives in their location due to engaging in the assignment (see Frauman & Shaffer, 2017). Students built a website showcasing alphabetic written text, pictures, maps, audioclips of themselves reading, and links. Thus, they expressed their reaction to their location and its value, especially within the pandemic, through a website casting light upon cultural events associated with their identity (see Molloy, 2016).

As outcomes, students 1) utilized critical thinking; 2) examined their personal and social concerns related to the virus, as well as their locale; 3) portrayed creativity; 4) drafted, composed, and revised digital work; and 5) reflected. Overall, at least 40% ($n = 26$) surveyed believed the website assignment produced growth in these areas for them to a satisfactory degree. In a similar determination, raters assessing students' websites found that 97% ($n = 63$), or the majority, also fulfilled the five website outcomes. Students' self-reported and the rater-evaluated outcomes had great overlap in indicating students' ability to meet the assignment parameters satisfactorily or better, showing that the assignment assisted almost all in meeting outcomes valuable to the larger class. Additionally, the author's ongoing ability as the course's instructor to observe students

engage in the assignment through the use of Zoom in the online classroom supported a more in-depth understanding of the questions, obstacles, and successes that students faced. At the class's beginning, almost no students possessed a background in building or contributing to a website, and few had reflected on noteworthy places for themselves, including practicing place-based writing. Nonetheless, all enjoyed the website assignment's writing aspects, including the opportunity to be creative, share their adventures with their location, and research its history. Constructing a website led students to widen their topic's area being studied, including how their place was impacted by the pandemic; have fun; gain a sense of fellowship with one another in sharing their work (see Sathishkumar et al., 2020); and evaluate and strengthen their writing capabilities, including participating in digital composition (see Hembrough, 2019b). As instruments, the post-survey and students' reflective essay were utilized to convey their response to the assignment, along with their outcomes. Information from the survey's short-answer questions corresponding to the Likert-scale questions and the reflective essay allowed students to explore their website's topic and purpose, what they learned, what they liked and disliked about the assignment, what was difficult, and how the assignment related to their other courses and job. Overall, employing a mixed-method methodology supported the author in gathering and evaluating the data in a deep manner providing an expansive view of students' pandemic stressors and the website assignment's parameters, as well as students' reactions to it.

The website supported the five assignment outcomes. First, the assignment led students to think critically in tackling the pandemic and formulating relationships between people and the places relevant to them (see Hembrough, 2019b) by drawing upon their stressors, backgrounds, and experiences in generating materials about themselves and their locations as affected by the virus. Such mental investigation of one's location is necessary because society tends to dismiss environmental topics. Second, in examining students' personal and social concerns related to the pandemic, they considered how their anxieties were joined to the larger setting and researched their surroundings, as well as the virus. Third, the assignment prompted students' demonstration of creativity since building the site propelled them to select amongst various modes, formats, and emphases in showcasing their materials. By utilizing a website capitalizing on oral and visual, as well as written, communication methods, some students, already at risk because of their educational, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds, discovered a space for telling their stories involving the death/injury of family members, job losses, homelessness, and suicidality. Fourth and fifth, the assignment bolstered students' ability to draft, compose, and revise work, as well as reflect upon their results and strengthened their potential to implement new technology in constructing digital texts. Indeed, rendering digital work is more elaborate than producing "traditional," alphabetic print texts. Moreover, the former process encourages students to understand and undertake the acts connected to producing diverse kinds of digital texts (see Jacobs, 2013). During the assignment, students utilized process writing by deciding upon their website's focus; identifying, drafting, peer reviewing, and revising information about themselves, their place, and the pandemic; presenting their website to their peers and the public; and reflecting upon their outcomes (see Hembrough, 2019a). Students

formulated their website by generating and organizing individual sections that, combined together, presented readers with a communication experience including alphabetic written text, pictorial, and audial elements. Indeed, students noted that introducing digital elements to their website, including photos, audio, backgrounds, and color palettes, increased the complexity wrought. Likewise, in the reflection, students declared that featuring pictures of themselves and their location, as well as a voice recording of themselves discussing it, aided them in sharing further information about themselves and their setting capitalizing on these modal offerings.

Holistically, in the post-survey students rated their ability to meet the assignment outcomes at a satisfactory rate or as being competent, good, or proficient less often than did raters in each case. Nonetheless, in assessing themselves, many students were able to identify their success in meeting various website assignment outcomes. For the outcome of Critical Thinking, 52% ($n = 34$) of students reported meeting this competency at a satisfactory or better rate, compared with raters', who identified that 94% ($n = 61$) of students fulfilled this outcome. In this result, many students underestimated their ability to meet the outcome of Critical Thinking, with a difference of 42% between students' and raters' reportages. For the outcome of an Examination of Student's Personal Stressors and Concerns, 41% ($n = 26$) of students believed that they were able to strengthen satisfactorily or better their ability to identify and discuss personal stressors and information concerning the pandemic, while 62% ($n = 40$) reported that the assignment facilitated their ability to identify with important location and discuss their relationship to it. Comparably, raters found that 96% ($n = 80$) of students were able to examine their personal stressors and concerns satisfactorily or better. Favoring raters, this is a difference of between 34% and 55% for the two different, smaller factors. For Creativity, 56% ($n = 36$) of students judged they met this outcome satisfactorily or better, while raters believed that 97% ($n = 63$) of students fulfilled it, with a difference of 41% ($n = 27$). Proceeding, for the Ability to Draft, Compose, and Revise Digital Work, an average of 49% ($n = 32$) of students felt they fulfilled the outcome's requirements in the five factors of strengthening their ability 1) to write to inform, persuade, and entertain an audience; 2) utilize digital, multimodal writing skills; 3) organize both their individual texts and the textual content of their website; 4) draft, compose, and revise their text; and 5) correct their grammatical/ mechanical errors, such as by utilizing peer and tutor feedback. Meanwhile, again at a higher rate, raters identified that an average of 87% ($n = 57$) of students were able to engage in process writing for this outcome's combined factors by drafting, composing, and revising their digital work, with a difference of 38% ($n = 25$). Finally, for the Potential to Reflect, an average of 50% ($n = 32$) of students felt the assignment itself fulfilled the outcome's requisites satisfactorily or better in the four factors of 1) proving useful in learning about creating websites, 2) promoting or reinforcing work in other courses, 3) fostering enjoyment, and 4) promoting or reinforcing job interests or tasks. Again at a higher rate, raters found that an average of 83% ($n = 54$) of students or 33% ($n = 21$) more met the outcome's parameters in the subcategories. Overall, the reason why the students rated themselves as having lower outcomes than did the raters may have been due to the fact

that the students had limited experience with creating websites, as well as evaluating their work for a grade in comparison with peers.

Beyond this study's scope, writing teachers internationally must search for ways to interact with their students, including low-income and racial minorities; create community; and formulate assignments of interest, especially during hard times (see Kecojevic et al., 2020). As the study indicates, writing teachers, as well as faculty in other disciplines, should consider raising the topic of current events, such as the post-pandemic world, in their classrooms in order to establish a unified, pertinent curriculum (Hembrough, 2019a) and promote critical thinking, a comprehension of sustainability conversations, and the potential for community action (see Tanaka & Gilliland, 2017). As the study shows, through place-based composition design's openness, students can explore location-oriented subjects from economic, political, multicultural, feminist, and environmental lenses while addressing rhetorical areas including argument, organization, style, research, audience, and digital formats, goals for analytical writing (see Frauman & Shaffer, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The mixed-methods study produced findings linked to two research questions. As described, the first question dealt with the nature of students' stressors during the pandemic, including those related to the following: A) their physical and psychological health, B) relationships, C) finances, and D) academic status. The second question concerned how a website assignment would influence students' outcomes in these areas: A) critical thinking; B) examination of their personal stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place portrayed; C) creativity; D) ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work; and E) potential to reflect. Summarily, findings indicate that the website assignment promoted student outcomes of a personal and communal nature and those linked to students' writing practices by assisting students in addressing their stressors, implementing place-based writing, and formulating digital texts. Concerning pandemic stressors, between 3% and 40% of students experienced physical and psychological health stressors, between 2% and 49% experienced relationship stress, between 8% and 52% experienced financial stress, and between 9% and 14% had stress concerning their academic status. As website assignment outcomes, raters determined that all students were proficient in demonstrating critical thinking, examining their personal stressors and concerns connected to the pandemic and their place, utilizing creativity, and reflecting on their work, while 97% showed the ability to draft, compose, and revise digital work.

Study limitations and future directions can also be considered. As a limitation, the study did not measure students' existing ability to create a website before engaging in the website assignment because there was not an ability to do this, but subsequent studies might do so in comparing students' ability to build a website and related outcomes both before and after engaging with the current assignment. As a future direction, researchers might explore to what degree students like to write about their identity and background in any class, including about their stressors and traumatic experiences. Indeed, both faculty and students find that discussing politics, race, class, gender, and religion to be

tension-provoking in many instances in the classroom, especially for students who do not represent the majority or are not outspoken. Finally, as this study indicates, it is important for instructors to foster a supportive environment where they and their students can be in dialogue in order to establish community, minimize group differences, and support students in learning, especially if they are online and facing a post-pandemic world. Students' outcomes can differ due to income and rural and racial disparities, and because of a pandemic, such divergences are only projected to grow. Yet, for the study, assigning students to engage in place-based, digital writing via constructing a website assignment supported them in exploring and documenting their stressors and the effect they produced on a location central to them prompted them to acknowledge the role the pandemic played in all of our lives.

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