

## Transcript of Interview with Paul Uligh by Elisa Aguilera

**Interviewee:** Paul Uligh

**Interviewer:** Elisa Aguilera

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**Location (Interviewee):**

**Location (Interviewer):**

**Transcriber:** This transcript has been provided by Otter.AI with a 2nd pass for accuracy provided by Bryan Paintiff, HST580 intern, at ASU.

**Abstract:** Dr. Paul Uligh is a mathematics professor at St. Mary's University. Paul then breaks down how the professors had to adapt to be able to continue teaching their courses online following the pandemic lockdown in the spring of 2020. Paul talk about how the university listened to what the professors needed and did all they could to support instead of forcing certain methods on them. One way that Dr. Uligh used technology to improve his courses was having a shared OneNote. Later in the interview, Paul says that a good thing to come out of the pandemic was the use of OneNote pushed him over the hump to be more digital in his courses. Paul ends the interview talking about how he know that everyone is struggling after the pandemic and that if you need something, say something, the professors are here to help students through it.

**Elisa Aguilera 00:01**

Hello, my name is Elisa Aguilera, I'm a student in my history class, we're gonna do this archive for #coveryourfangs. Here's an interview with Dr. Uligh. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

**Paul Uligh 00:15**

Hi, my name is, my name is Paul Uligh and I'm pulling these questions over to make sure I can see them all in one place. But my name is Paul Uligh, my area of study that my professional areas mathematics, I've been teaching mathematics at St. Mary's University for 24 years. I was an undergraduate at St. Mary's in the late 80s. I started in St. Mary's at 87 and graduated in 90. Got a bachelor's degree in mathematics, did my graduate work at Rice University and then came back to St. Mary's, have been in the math department since then, while I was at St. Mary's the first time, I wanted to be a computer science major, but I got turned to the dark side so I switched to math. And then after I got back to St. Mary's, I realized that I still love computer science. And I started a computer science degree in the year 2000 I believe it was. And finished in 2017. It took a long time because I was teaching and raising kids and the family, and I got a master's degree in computer science in 2017, from St. Mary's University also. So my hometown is Floresville, Texas. Floresville's small town it was much smaller when I was a when I was a kid. But it's grown a little bit lot of people moving from San Antonio out to that area. San

Antonio, San Antonio was the big town that we would go to of course when we had to do big shopping. It's Floresville is about 30 miles, the the sign says 30 miles from the south side of San Antonio. Floresville [inaudible] highway 181, which was the old road to Corpus Christi. So if you wanted to go to the coast, you would take that road down through there. In the before I was even born, though the highway 37 was built, which is the new road to Corpus Christi. So still a lot of traffic, a lot more traffic now with the [inaudible] shale stuff going on. Unfortunately, growing, I still have a mother who lives down there in the same farm that she my father raised me on. So I grew up with on a farm with cattle and chickens. And getting up early and building fences, long walks to the school bus in the morning of the dark. I don't know what else to add.

**Elisa Aguilera 02:34**

Thank you so much. Thank you so much for sharing a little bit about yourself. Okay, so in this interview, I'm gonna ask you more about your perspective, as a professor during the pandemic, how'd it work, the changes and everything. So first, can you tell us how St. Mary's tried to accommodate to the situation like how it look like when the pandemic began?

**Paul Uligh 02:57**

I'll tell you what I saw. And when, when and what it felt like. And when the when the when the when the reality of the pandemic appeared, right. I mean, there was there was lots of discussions Is it is it coming? Is it out as we're going to be? What are we going to need to do. But then the reality of us really needing to lock down in that very first, very first round back in the spring of 2020. That happened all essentially during spring break. It was the year we didn't have really have spring break, because we realized what was coming. And I remember every day being in the comments and working with the folks that ATS Jeff Schomburg and his group. And they were doing everything possible to touch faculty and to help them create a vision for how their courses we're going to adapt to the new reality which was going to be virtual, going to be operating by zoom. We were very fortunate that they had tooled up on zoom by that point, and were able to get a lot of us tooled up on it. They had hardware, they have the cameras. In fact, the camera I'm using for this video that's on this computer. That was one of the cameras that they provided for faculty, microphones, headsets, and this headset it's one from my kids for my birthday. It's nice to sound. But I have one in my office that actually has a little microphone that comes down. I don't know what it looks like it's kind of weird. But all did everything they could to get us the hardware we needed to be able to work. And this is sort of at right at the beginning right? When we started that. That wasn't the end of it. They really turned turned every leaf to be able to try to help people. They had a nice pile of document cameras too because there were a lot of people who had this vision that well I'm still going to be I still want to be able to write things for my students and dynamically as we as we go. And what a lot of people imagined, well, if I can't write on the board, I'll just write on a piece of paper. And I'll use a document camera as a camera to be able to capture that. So they were helping people, they were not taking their vision and forcing anybody, they were helping faculty find their own vision, and understand what's available and find what would work. And that was really amazing. It felt like the folks that ATS were very strongly supported by the administration, and

the university in terms of let's do what we got to do to make this work for the faculty. So because we know they're gonna make it work for students, that was the that was the big that was the big piece there in the spring of 2020.

**Elisa Aguilera 05:44**

Okay, it's good now that you're talking a little bit about how you learn about zoom, because the next question is, what is something that you as a professor had to learn?

**Paul Uligh 05:56**

So I had to learn or found myself choosing to learn there, there's certainly a, I guess, one of the big things we all have to learn is that learning is not an option. You have, everybody has to learn. And we all choose what we want to learn that and how well we're going to learn it, what we're going to do with it, so that my colleagues who took the document cameras and worked with those, that was one approach, there were others who turned the camera and projected onto a onto a whiteboard, or a chalkboard and it still worked on a whiteboard or a chalkboard, and then use the camera to sort of track that to the class. That's certainly a very workable solution. What I ultimately did was follow suit with one of my colleagues, well two of my colleagues Mike [inaudible] Dr. [inaudible] and Kat Clemons, who were already, for various reasons using OneNote, to be able to capture their notes in class, and use it as a virtual whiteboard. And I follow that suit. And so what I guess if you go during that, that I had to learn how to really make OneNote work. And I spent an untold number of hours that I convinced myself to enjoy, and I actually did enjoy digging through YouTube pages, instruction manuals on OneNote, to be able to utilize OneNote, to be able to deliver course content. And I think that was a huge benefit. huge benefit for myself, for my students. Everything I ever did in class was then always right there in OneNote. In what OneNote calls the shared classes notebook, so any student can go back and look at anything we did there.

**Elisa Aguilera 07:40**

Okay, what would you see was the hardest part of learning how to teach students through a screen?

**Paul Uligh 07:45**

The, the screen part. There's a huge difference. As enjoyable as it is on a one on one, like when we're doing FaceTime on on Apple, or are you doing a video call with one person. When it's a classroom full of people, that's, that's really challenging. And I understand the complaints, both on both sides, right? Faculty who say, well, students didn't turn their cameras on and or they had their cameras on but they would just get up and leave the screen and go do something and be gone for a while and then come back. Right. Right. There's a there's a, there's a sense that the students who say, yeah, the teacher just is like, they were just was like watching a TV show, they were just talking, it didn't really matter what was going on kinds of things. And there was really, it was really challenging, because I subscribe to the philosophy of Parker Palmer, who says that to teach is to create a space for the practice of the community of truth. And the biggest part of that is create a space and Zoom, that is not the space. This is

not, you and I are not in a room, although we might call the Zoom room. And we might have breakout rooms that you and I aren't in the room. And so had to re envision that. And I have a lot of help from a really good colleagues in philosophy like skipper and also father Conrad [inaudible] really helped me sort of really dig around on this idea of what is what is this space that I'm creating. And a big part of that space is the relationship. It's the relationship between the teacher and the student that we've built. That allows the teaching and learning process that feedback with the teaching and learning to happen. And that was, that was one of the big things and I and I, you know, when you look back in time and try to project things backwards, it's not clear whether I stumbled on it by accident and just thought, that's a really good idea and I'm gonna do that. Or if I actually saw the wisdom of that. You remember in our classes, we did it check ins. Every, so every day at the beginning of class, and I still do this to a good extent. I'll walk around class and call each student by name, so how are you doing today? Everything going right what is going on. And I, it, it may actually have been a little bit better than what may have happened in the classroom before when it was everybody just kind of falls in, I run it and start doing some math and then we all run out. Now everybody's sort of saying hi to each other. It's really a beautiful thing now that now that we're sort of back in person, go to class, talk to everybody in the room, there's lots of talking going on. I don't even think about trying to stop it. I just every now and then I'll interrupted here, I've got some math to tell you, I, I hate to interupt. But it's those, it's those connections. Teaching through a screen challenged us to think about that in new ways.

**Elisa Aguilera** 11:05

Okay, for the next question. Let's see, like the positive side here. And I wanted to ask you, as a professor, is there a thing that you have liked so far during the pandemic, or like that you like that you've started doing because of the pandemic?

**Paul Uligh** 11:22

There were, okay, so the pandemic was horrible in terms of its devastating effect on people and their health. But, you know, there's there were some, there were some good things about what happened during the, during the, during the pandemic, that that don't add didn't in no way outweighed the troublesome evils that were going on. Not having to commute to work every day.

**Elisa Aguilera** 11:47

Yeah,

**Paul Uligh** 11:48

I know, almost everybody I talked to, they're like, yeah, but that half hour or hour, each way of my life is lost in driving in difficult traffic. The, so another thing is the peace, right? When we were when everybody but everything was kind of shut down. As bad as that was for the economy and the people so that there was a quiet, in that there was a there was a there was at least some space to find some peace with things. Now everybody's situation could be different, you know, I have a lot of sympathy for parents with young kids get a two year old and you were in lockdown with a two year old for a year, or

be a three year old at that point, that's going to be really challenging for you and the two year old and three year old, trying to grow and be in the world and move around, and they need a lot of attention. And so that doesn't give a lot of time for that kind of space and peace, trying to understand somebody's peace would be a luxury. But that was kind of a nice thing.

**Elisa Aguilera** 13:00

Thank you, what is something that you do now that you did not do before the pandemic?

**Paul Uligh** 13:07

So, the pandemic with the OneNote and doing that with my classes really pushed me over the hump on being digital, I everything I do. I go to a meeting, someone hands out papers. I hate to be rude. But I sit there with my iPad, and I take pictures of them so that they're in OneNote. And I don't have to carry the papers around, I give the papers back. Being digital is made all the difference. Sitting at this computer, I can access all my notes from work on my phone, but I know when I travel, I can I can actually access OneDrive and OneNote from here I can access all those. And I think it makes it really makes a huge difference in my in my thinking about how I manage information and the like. So the digital that the whole the whole notion of digital being being paperless.

**Elisa Aguilera** 14:02

Okay, and for the last question, is there anything you want students to know about the professor's perspective or your personal perspective?

**Paul Uligh** 14:14

I'll speak to my personal perspective, although I could easily put my arms around a bunch of colleagues and they would say they would say the same thing. We know everybody's suffering with what's happened to them, through the pandemic this last year. And even with the trailing effects of what's happened. There's a there's a lot of students, faculty, people in our community families that are all that are suffering from the effects of the pandemic, in terms of loss of family members, loss of jobs, and even just a loss of a sense of normalcy in their lives. President Biden was talking about that with the town hall meeting tonight that they did on CNN. It was live, he was saying, one of the big reasons a lot of people haven't gone back to work is because they're suffering because they're feeling down. It's code for all of us are depressed. We're, we're, it's like, our world has collapsed on us, we're trying to find or find our way again, I just want to say that from from myself as a faculty member, and for most of my colleagues, and I, oh, I know what it says definitely not. I think it's pretty much all of them. We understand everybody's really suffering with this and we want to be very supportive. Like I said, in our classes, when all this was online, it's, you know, supportive, but with standards. This is a calculus class, I'm going to support you in every way I can. But you still got to learn the calculus, we got to get through calculus, so that you can get to calc two and you move on to the engineering class, or that biology class, or the like. And it's that message. We love you guys. But we also have standards. And so that's part of that love. We understand everybody's everybody's hurting. Let's all stepped up to the plate keep things

moving. If you need help, say something, if you see somebody that needs help, say something that was the Job Lewis message during the pandemic was his favorite thing. If you see something, say something, do something. That's right.

**Elisa Aguilera** 16:34

Thank you so much for the interview and for having the time to make like the interview. Do you want to add anything else for like the questions, something else? A comment, quote?

**Paul Uligh** 16:48

No, I suppose I really, really pleased to do this. And I want to apologize for the 5000 word transcript, you're gonna have to go through with everything I talked about, on and on and on. It's really a pleasure to do this. I hope this assignment goes well. And I'd love to hear some about how it all went. But it's all said and done.

**Elisa Aguilera** 17:07

Thank you so much.