

Higher Ed Rewired

Season 2, Episode 1

COVID-19: A Teachable Moment

Host: Annet Rangel

Guests: Michael Jorgensen, Steven Kurtz and Lorne Blanchard

College campuses are part of their larger communities, which positions them to be leaders during times of crisis. The border of the college facilities does not isolate itself from what is taking place beyond the gates into the surrounding community. In fact, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (2005), The Camp Fire in Chico, California (2018) and COVID 19 (2020) are historical catastrophes affecting the university in unprecedented ways and they have stepped up to during these critical moments. The resilience of the faculty, staff and students that at California State University, Monterey Bay during COVID 19 is evidence to how faculty students leaned into this extremely traumatic event to become a teachable moment.

Michael Jorgensen, Faculty, California State University Monterey Bay

Steven Kurtz, student, California State University, Monterey Bay

Dr. Lorne Blanchard, Executive Vice Chancellor, California State University Office of the Chancellor.

COLD OPEN:

Michael Jorgensen: So this is a ventilator, can you see it?

Annet Rangel: This is professor Michael Jorgensen. He's a faculty member at California State University Monterey Bay.

Michael Jorgensen: So what I wanted to do today, to the class, is later in the week we're going to get more in the details of this but today was my one and only day

**What you're hearing is actually a recording from one of his zoom classes he hosted for his Physician Assistant graduate students back in March...
...as the threat of the coronavirus pandemic was growing.**

Michael Jorgensen: I want you to be thinking about if you were a volunteer, if we're at a critical situation and you found yourself in an emergency room and you were around one of these things, how could you find yourself to be useful?

Around this time, COVID-19 cases were spiking...so this class served as a just-in-case prep course in in the event that these students would be called into action

Steven Kurtz: He utilized his garage. He utilized a mannequin. He borrowed a ventilator, and he was able to show us how to do that in real time.

You're hearing Steven Kurtz now. He was a physician assistant graduate student at Cal State Monterey bay when Covid-19 hit in March.

Steven Kurtz: So it was great for him to come in and offer additional training via Zoom for how to manage a ventilator in a COVID setting or how to be involved and what that's gonna look like.

Kurtz was among the many students attending Professor Jorgensen's virtual "Covid Bootcamp"

Steven Kurtz: You spend this much time going through training and through undergraduate and getting into PA school and then going through all of the training in the hours required for that and I think most of us felt sidelined during the pandemic where we could be out there helping. We could be helping our community.

Annet Rangel: This was a feeling shared by many in higher education as the looming threat of a global pandemic approached.

For this student and professor at Cal State Monterey Bay, Covid-19 became a real-time case study for their program and university to muster all their training, all their practice and all their resources to benefit the community.

The crisis became an opportunity.

<BEAT>

So, let me put this into perspective for you. The schedule of a PA student is BUSY.

You've got a full plate of coursework, plus clinical rotations...and in this case... on top of all of *THAT*...there's a pandemic that's turning the education system on its head.

And yet...despite the circumstances...Kurtz, along with many other students, felt the need to answer the call.

Steven Kurtz: I think for us, because we're in the healthcare profession. That's the reason that we were drawn to it in the first place, is that we need to be out there. We need to be helping people. We need to be improving the health in our community.

[THEME MUSIC STARTS]

Higher Ed Rewired is a production of the California State University. The largest, most diverse four-year public university system in the country and an engine of social and economic mobility. Each episode examines groundbreaking research and exciting innovations taking place across the nation that are transforming the pathways for student success.

Annet Rangel: Welcome to the second season of Higher Ed Rewired, I'm Annet Rangel, your host for season 2.

And what a time to be innovating in higher education.

Between all the virtual instruction due to the pandemic, a new national sense of urgency around inclusion and equity heightened by the Black Lives Matter protests ... not to mention our ongoing aspirations to make higher ed better for more people ... it's quite a time to be launching our second season.

<BEAT>

Today, for the first show of our new season, we're looking at crises...

and how higher education has risen to lead their respective communities in the face of tragedy.

[Fade music out]

[Static]

[Hurricane Katrina news clip]

It's been an incredible day all along the Gulf Coast. When Hurricane Katrina landed

[Camp fire news clip]

The camp fire continues to rage in Butte County this morning with crews working tirelessly as the fire enters its third day.

Annet Rangel: Hurricane Katrina in 2005...The fires near CHICO in 2018.

And now...

[COVID-19 news clip]

And now to the latest on the coronavirus. The United States is reporting the highest number of deaths in a single day, nearly fifteen hundred.

...a global pandemic.

<BEAT>

Dr. Loren Blanchard: When you're in the midst of a crisis, it's very difficult oftentimes to understand that there can be a silver lining that comes from crises.

Annet Rangel: This is Dr. Loren Blanchard. He's the executive vice chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs for the California State University.

Dr. Loren Blanchard: You definitely find yourself at a point where you feel like you're suffering through and you're trying to make your way through that, that oftentimes it's hard to see down the line that there is going to be value and that more importantly, that there's going to be a renewed sense of purpose when you come as you come out of the crisis.

Annet Rangel: As an executive vice chancellor, Dr. Blanchard develops and oversees educational policy across the CSU's 23-campus AND leads the Graduation Initiative 2025 — the system's groundbreaking strategy to double graduating rates and eliminate equity gaps.

But before coming to the CSU, Dr. Blanchard held a leadership position in the chancellor's office at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center.

While there, his work focused on hurricane Katrina recovery.

Dr. Loren Blanchard: A lot of the work that I did, certainly in Louisiana during the time of Hurricane Katrina, which was just absolutely devastating to New

Orleans and really the the lower area of southeast and southwest Louisiana, to the point where everything stopped academically for an entire semester because, I mean, in many instances, buildings and some of our campuses were completely submerged under water. I know that's hard to believe, but you did two and three and four story buildings that were completely submerged.

Annet Rangel: The storm and floods devastated local communities ... with both the physical damage inflicted and uncertainty and fear left behind.

But regional higher ed institutions seized this as an opportunity to *support* the people within their neighborhoods.

Dr. Loren Blanchard: How do you bring the people back? And when I say bring them back and I don't mean just physically, I mean, how do you restore a sense of confidence, a sense of faith and a sense of recognizing that through this you will overcome. We spent a lot of time working on that and working through that kind of philosophy with our faculty, with our staff, with our students. And eventually what we found is that with that renewed sense of purpose, that many of the individuals, especially students, wanted to figure out a way how they could come back and help to rebuild the city of New Orleans and frankly, to rebuild the campus. Right? And so we found all these opportunities for service learning. We found all of these opportunities where community service and community outreach and that became another arm of who we constituted ourselves as being in higher education, that we are a part of the rebuilding of a community, that higher education played a major role in that.

Annet Rangel: It was bigger than just ensuring the success of the university and its students... it was now about bringing the community back to its feet, and rebuilding the city of New Orleans.

Dr. Loren Blanchard: During Hurricane Katrina, there was disproportionately a number of people of color who died during the storm. And, you know, a lot of people were under the impression that they died as a direct result of drowning from the storm. But that wasn't the case like this that they had these preexisting health conditions, be it heart disease, diabetes, be it asthma. These are really considered to be minority health disparities, that really, regrettably, took the lives of many people of color during Hurricane Katrina. So the question became, what can we do as a higher education system to make sure that the next time a crisis like this occurs, that we won't have the same kind of health outcomes that we have experienced as a result of Hurricane Katrina?

Annet Rangel: To address this disparity, faculty and students partnered with philanthropic groups to find solutions to better support Louisiana's most vulnerable populations

Dr. Loren Blanchard: We were able to go into communities throughout the state of Louisiana and implement programming, that not only designed to improve health outcomes, but also health consciousness among people of color and making sure that they had access to medical care and health care and dietary care and exercise care. And it was just remarkable to see that it was the students playing a major role in this, partnering with the faculty members to go there and make that critical difference. That wasn't for themselves. It was really for others. And there's just something beautiful about knowing that in the midst of a crisis that you can look beyond yourself and really help others and in the large sense you're really helping the larger communities.

Annet Rangel: These are lessons that Dr. Blanchard carries with him into the new crisis we're facing today: COVID-19

Dr. Loren Blanchard: This certainly is a crisis. But we're also looking at how can we use this to make sure that we are going to be agents of change, the next time another pandemic of this nature happens...we won't see similar outcomes that we see happening now.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Annet Rangel: So...how can higher ed leaders help students and faculty across the California State University's diverse campuses feel supported during this pandemic?

The answer is simple: avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and...LISTEN carefully.

Dr. Loren Blanchard: There are two North stars as we work our way through this pandemic one. And first and foremost is maintaining the health and safety of our campus communities. Obviously, faculty, staff, students and anyone within that neighboring area as well. The second north star is our ongoing commitment to student success. They are tied together. And so what I mean by that is that, you know, when you when you look at what it takes for students to be successful, virtually, that we want to be very mindful of not only the technology needs, but

also the Wi-Fi service and the access needs that they have in place as well to ensure that all of our campuses are being as responsive as possible.

Support services is the other side of this. But it's also ensuring that they continue to know that they are part of the campus community and that the kinds of support services that they've needed before, be it advising, be it tutoring, be it the work with the cultural centers and the kind of support that they provide, that all of those are still in place. And then more importantly, that it's not where the student has to go out and do the outreach to gain the services. It's the staff and the faculty and the other peer students that are on the campus that are reaching out really. They're not on the campus, but through the virtual modality. They are reaching out to the students and really drawing them in and letting them know not only are they supported,

But more importantly, what more do you need to make sure that you're able to persist through this this semester and the following semesters until we can get beyond the pandemic?

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Our belief is and will always be that once we admit a student to the CSU, that we have an absolute responsibility to ensure that those students are not only going to master the knowledge, skills and dispositions that's associated with their degree program and obtain that degree, but that also that they're attending a degree of value and they're supported all throughout their timeframe to ensure that their aim to get that degree of value. You know, if we found you qualified enough to enroll you and admit you CSU, then we've got a collective responsibility to make sure that you're going to graduate and that you're going to go on to make a critical difference in this world.

[Music posts and continues to next story section]

Steven Kurtz: So we were working constantly into the evenings emailing and calling and coordinating and calculating...we're constantly working on different things that we thought were going to be useful.

Annet Rangel: This is Steven Kurtz, again. Physicians Assistant student at Monterey Bay, you heard him at the top of the episode.

Steven Kurtz: We could be helping those that are displaced at this moment. Those that can't leave their homes. There are a lot of opportunities during that moment.

Annet Rangel: At the start of the COVID-19 crisis, he and his classmates at Cal State Monterey Bay were eager to jump in.

And Monterey County officials needed help. The worry was that a surge of Covid-19 patients would overwhelm local hospitals.

So Kurtz, along with his classmates and professor Michael Jorgensen, began mapping out an *entire* emergency plan ... to create an *overflow* hospital, called an Alternate Care Site, or ACS.

And it's a lot to figure out — logistics, building materials, supplies, transportation. Let alone what the patients are going through.

Steven Kurtz: What are the guidelines? What are the criteria for admission? So it was completely unprecedented, unfounded.

Annet Rangel: Instead of reinventing the wheel, Kurtz decided to learn from leaders in New Orleans who had already accomplished what Monterey County was setting out to do.

Steven Kurtz: So I reached out to them to find out what they were doing and how they were doing it and what their admission criteria was. Another piece of the puzzle was to figure out the supplies that would be needed for the ACS. So all of your medical equipment, how many beds did you need? How many do we need ventilators? We had several students working on trying to figure out what other facilities were doing and what supplies they were utilizing and how many of those we needed and where the funding was going to come from. So I think we... we all kind of came together and divided this up kind of at the lead of Professor Jorgensen.

Annet Rangel: Professor Michael Jorgensen was the Cal State Monterey Bay faculty member leading the effort.

You heard him at the top of the episode...while he was leading a zoom class that helped familiarize his students with a ventilator.

Steven Kurtz: Professor Jorgensen has many talents, many skills and many experiences. So this is not his first rodeo kind of operating kind of an emergency setting. So he comes in knowing this information and being able to provide a unique perspective.

Annet Rangel: He was recruited by the county to spearhead the project because of his unique health care experience in the military and in conflict zones with Doctors Without Borders.

[MUSIC ENDS]

Michael Jorgensen: I was working very closely with our senior medical officer for the U.S., Dr. Craig Walls. And as we were working on the design layout of the ACS we were realizing that the supply, the construction...this was going to require a lot more person power.

Annet Rangel: This is Professor Michael Jorgensen.

He was out delivering PPE to Natividad hospital when he bumped into Dr. Walls, its chief medical officer.

Michael Jorgensen: It was a Friday...and that evening he reached out to me and he said we need to create a supply list for an entire up to 900 bed facility. How are we going to create this document that, as far as we knew, did not exist?

But Jorgensen knew he couldn't do it alone...that's when he asked for some back up from his students.

Michael Jorgensen: I know what it's like to be around the immense amount of resources to learn from, but it's not beneficial unless you have students that really want to be engaged with it. And I was actually very, very apologetic with them to ask them. I was asking for such huge favors. And remember, they were still they are still in the P.A. program. We were not in a hold. They were still actively engaged in curriculum. And yet, as I'm sitting there somewhat apologetically saying, I'm so sorry, but I really need your after hours extracurricular help on this. I remember on the chat, on the zoom, it was basically just these like one liners, like just put us in professor. And it was really kind of an emotional thing, like just stop apologizing and just send us. And it was like a moment I personally will never forget.

Annet Rangel: Yes, I'm so happy that you brought in the student aspect, I really am excited to talk to you about that. You're bringing in students and making sure that they're on the field and they're becoming part of this process to set up the ACSs. So can you tell us a little bit what the students' jobs specifically are and setting this up and what they did for help you?

Michael Jorgensen: Over the course of about 48 hours, they created this incredible document that required them not only to compose it themselves with the information that I'm aware of, but they were also in direct communication with New Orleans and their convention center that they were using at that time. Some of the other components that were very interesting as well was they needed assistance in terms of generating volunteers, so who's going to staff this hospital? You can have all these patients but who are the nurses and the medical staff who are going to run it? So, we had students that got engaged at the local hospital level in terms of this amazing amount of people that had medical backgrounds, both past and present, that wanted to get me on the list. I want to be a resource for your ACS. So, we had students working on that. Other factors, there is a need for public relations. There had been kind of some possibly communication gap with the setting up of a separate facility in Monterrey at the fairgrounds. And they wanted to make sure that there was a really good understanding of the community as to what are we building? When are we building it? And why are we building it?

Annet Rangel: Simultaneously, the ACS plans continued to come together.

Professor Jorgensen drew on his military training and his time with doctors without borders.

While putting together the site's blueprints...he consulted with some of his prior colleagues...

Michael Jorgensen: I reached out to my former bosses from Doctors without Borders who were overseas at the time. I said, we're gonna design this like a cholera camp. We're gonna keep it simple just the way it works overseas. And they sent me all the layouts and how we had done it before abroad. So you basically, we would run this the way we would do a Cholera and ebola campaign treatment. And so, that was something that I kind of reached back into my own personal tool set that would, hope, would be beneficial for maintaining a safe ACS environment.

Annet Rangel: They got through all the steps, but just before the ACS was called into action...the county hit the pause button.

The curve had been bent, case numbers were steady ... and the ACS wasn't needed.

Michael Jorgensen: The hospital was designed...we had the beds, we have this running supply list, we now know exactly what's going to be needed in terms of the amount of beds, etc...we had everything ready to go. But before we pull that final trigger, they put us in a holding pattern in all honesty, it's you know, it can be frustrating because you want to see your development come to the final fruition, in that helping people...But then you also have to step back and say, well, if it's not needed yet, that means more people are alive. And so, it's this very interesting...I don't know if dichotomy is the right word, but you have to take...you know... it's not needed. And that's a good thing.

[MUSIC STARTS AND CONTINUES ...]

Annet Rangel: We've seen it during hurricanes....fires...and now pandemics. Colleges and universities stepping up to lead through a crisis.

Higher Ed leaders asking, what's the silver lining? What can we change and innovate in the community we serve?

Because that's what it's all about... when students are put first, they rise to the challenge and become leaders...deepening the relationship between communities and institutions

Dr. Loren Blanchard – who we heard from earlier— perfectly encapsulates this notion...that even unprecedented times, can be turned into a teachable moment...

Dr. Loren Blanchard: there's so much beauty in the California State University and it's in certainly in the relationships that are formed and that these are really authentic relationships that we see formed between faculty and students, between staff and students, between administrators and faculty. And, you know, it's that in that in that spirit of authentic relationships that I know very convincingly that while we've got this pandemic and while we've got other sets of crises being at the wildfires and B of health crises. Right. That I know that because of the power of who we are and because of the care that we have for one another, that we're going to overcome this. And I just can't wait to see the day five years from

now or less who the CSUs will be at that juncture. We're not going to be who we are today. I'm convinced we're going to be strikingly better.

[THEME MUSIC FADE UP SLOWLY]

[CREDITS - OUTRO PROMO]

Higher ED Rewired is a production of the California State University Office of the Chancellor as part of the CSU's Graduation Initiative 2025. This podcast is made possible in part by the support of the College Futures Foundation; more graduates for a thriving California. Learn more at CollegeFutures.org. To hear more stories like this, listen at HigherEdRewired.com or subscribe wherever you get your podcast.

[THEME MUSIC FADE DOWN]