



Studying the “Zombie Apocalypse”

While most English and technical communication courses migrated to online-only formats during the pandemic, one English professor was determined to safely conduct in-person meetings in spite of the pandemic. In Fall 2020, Dr. Kathryn Dolan taught ENGL 3327 American Gothic: The Zombie Apocalypse as a hybrid course—that is, partly online and partly in person.

On Mondays and Fridays, the meetings were online, but the discussions and presentations on those days—mostly within the text chat feature of Zoom—were still spirited, Dolan said. On Wednesdays, Dolan met with her students in person, on a rotating basis of one third of the class at a time. Many of those meetings took place outside when the weather permitted, and Dolan said that she was diligent in making sure masks stayed on and students stayed over six feet apart.

“In my mind so far, this hybrid method is really coming pretty close to what my classes have always looked like. There are the little lectures/slide presentations, group presentations and individual presentations, and the delightful chats and discussions over the texts. They’re just happening in slightly different chunks.”

Margaret Schuey, one of Dolan’s students, understood the risks of being in contact with others. To alleviate her anxiety, she had both the official COVID test and the antibody test. She described them as “uncomfortable but not painful.” During her first semester at Missouri S&T, Schuey was thrown headfirst into pandemic pandemonium. She described herself as “not a traditional college student.” She has a house and a job. Although new to Missouri S&T, she had been taking college classes on and off for about ten years.



Margaret Schuey

“I’ve gotten used to online classes. I used to hate them, like hate them, hate them, hate them. I couldn’t keep up. It was awful! But now I’m starting to like them. I like being able to stay home; I get a little more done.”

Schuey didn’t know she was taking a “zombie class” until the first meeting. Originally, the course was advertised only as “American Gothic.” She was pleasantly surprised by the theme and its relevance. The course made her think about the similarities between the zombie literature and films she was studying and the 2020 pandemic.

“The course is designed to give us a place to play around with all of our hidden (and not so hidden) fears,” Dolan said. “And in the case of this offering in particular, it’s so timely. Everyone is thinking about global pandemics, big protests in the streets, trusting/not trusting one’s own government. In some ways, our texts are giving us a chance to discuss some social issues of concern right now.”

Both Schuey and Dolan found ways to keep busy and entertain themselves during the pandemic. For Schuey, it was audiobooks and Netflix. Dolan took up gardening, a worthy hobby for a food studies scholar. However, she had to battle a pesky crop-eating woodchuck in her yard. At least it wasn’t a brain-craving zombie.

