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Alexandria Holen & Martin Moreno Interviewing Abby Miller

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Humboldt in the Time of COVID
Alexandria and Martin interviewing Abby Miller

Ali: So I'm Ali by the way

Abby: Nice to meet you

Martin: And I am Martin

Abby: Nice to meet you as well

Ali: So before we begin I just wanted to start off with a quick intro about what we're doing and everything and so just a quick rundown of what we I've already told you kinda is that this is a smaller project within a bigger project and so what the hopes of this project will be is that it will all be taken into the Humboldt room in the library and saw all these accounts and information will be useful if a pandemic hopefully it doesn't ever happen again but we don't know we'll have all this information just to help future people who are dealing with the same things that we're dealing with and so I think even in the last interview that we had there were talking about how we think the Spanish flu or something is in the Humboldt room and so it's like cool seeing like what they were doing while we were doing and you know what I mean so it'll just be good seeing how everything goes and then it will continue if there's like a whole other section works the parts within the Humboldt room may be transferred into the Clark County Museum I believe they didn't haven't really given much information on that because it's a still a pretty new project in the works and we were told that within the Spring semester they'll be a lot more like projections so like we're kind of you're like an guinea pig. So, it will be interesting to see how that translates into that but they didn't really give us much information about that so your story may or may not end up in a museum but yeah am I missing anything else Martin?

Martin: No I think you got it pretty good.

Ali: So I just want to start off with, what is your preferred name and your pronouns?

Abby: My preferred name is Abby, legally it's Abigail, but I go by Abby and it's just I've always gone by. My preferred pronouns are she/her.

Ali: How long have you been a college student then?

Abby: I am a senior, so I only have one semester left. I've been here almost four years at Humboldt State.

Ali: So what drew you to Humboldt State?

Abby: I was born and raised in Humboldt County and so I did the early fall acceptance, a way you can go and if you are a local high school student and met all the minimum requirements you were accepted. So, I did that with a few friends, we got excused from high school here locally. I knew I was accepted by October, so I just put in an application and everything I haven't decided. Mostly

because I wanted to also play volleyball in college and I was really working with the coach at Humboldt State and a few other coaches at other colleges but I really wanted to stay at home because it's cheaper for me and I still live at home and it was just like I felt like it was nice to be in a community that I'm so familiar with and that has given so much to me, that I wanted to still like continue to be a part of and be able to give back to them while I was still in college. But two years into my volleyball career as a sophomore I stopped and then I started doing more volunteer work in the community planned and focused more on physical therapy. It wasn't initially planned but I was glad that I did because I think that it's helped me grow into the person that I want to be.

Ali: Were you at Humboldt for all of those years?

Abby: Yes! I have taken a few classes at RJC, College of the Redwoods. Just so that could get some requirements here and there for graduate schools done but I have primarily only gone to Humboldt.

Ali: Then have you liked your experience at Humboldt State or it seems like you have been but is there anything that you wish you could change or anything that you wish you could add before COVID?

Abby: Landscape wise and very unique I was actually talking about this with a friend that I feel like our campus is sometimes hard to access for those who have disabilities, physical. My grandma going up there and seeing because we did High School graduation in the Redwood Bowl and it was really hard on my grandpa he had a stroke was in a wheelchair so it was really hard for her to bring him up there to see these moments because of our campus and some that we can't really change but that's something that's its I wish it was more accessible. I know I had to sprained my ankle volleyball and I was having to do that. He was like this was in the spring and it was like one of those Springs that we had. It was just pouring. I remember like I couldn't really walk because you know campus. But overall the professors I've had have been wonderful. There have been a few that didn't want to be here, but they are clearly not there anymore. But that's life, there are going to be people who you may or may not like. One thing, I don't know if this can be changed, but being from McKinleyville a lot of people stereotype, that aren't from Humboldt County, stereotype people that are from Humboldt County and are from McKinleyville specifically - I don't know if you guys know what I'm talking about - but it's just real. I have listening and I've been sitting at several classes not major bass but just the lower GE's are a lot of people, they stigmatized the people from McKinleyville as being racist or being a part of the KKK and the only thing that bothers me about that it's just that I don't see myself as doing any of those things. I've been born and I've been raised in this County and that's really hard for someone to come in, that hasn't been from here, and point a finger at someone else. I'm not saying that these things do not happen because I'm sure and I know that there are people in this county that are like that, but that's not me and as you know my best friend went to Hsu with me. She graduated last semester and she felt the same exact way and it's like that's not representative of the whole population, at least in McKinleyville. I feel bad for those people of how those experiences but I also just bums me out because like that's not who we are as a community and it just makes me sad so I wish there could be something else that we could do like maybe community-based or just like between the colleges and the and the community I wish I could be maybe more interconnected or so people don't have like these stigmas, you know, of who we are because I'm a

local and there's a lot of locals at the school not as many as there are from other people from other areas but it's just like I don't believe that any of us are like that. I know there was one girl that stood up in the class and said I was born and raised here - in one of my lower GE classes - and she said I consider myself or any of my friends like that. So, this is just one really negative thing that I do know that a lot of locals feel the same because they feel like for it's the future actions that certain scenes of had have been misrepresented over the whole population of the entire town. I went to high school in McKinleyville and I know a lot of people from places like Fortuna and Ferndale that they really give off that Vibe and that's definitely not okay. I don't stand with them and I'm not friends with them but the fact that these people have to unfortunately have these negative experiences make some maybe think negatively about my town like I've lived in my whole life and I know that not everyone is good at being open minded because that takes a lot of time and you can't just say we are more open-minded, you know. It's something that I think, if we ever go back to in person, has to be something the community and school needs to work on.

Ali: I never even heard that perspective so that's really exciting to hear like a new perspective.

Abby: And I don't know if a lot of locals would give you the same answer just because it's something that is so controversial at times.

Ali: So and then on a different note how did you first get involved with the pre PT Club?

Abby: Yeah I think I was a junior so I've been wanting to do pt when I first started as a freshman and then I remember sitting in my foundations class and Whitney came in and was talking about pediatric PT and I was super excited about that. Even though now I am kinda changing my course, I don't know if I want to do peds but I just remembered I was so excited to be in that class. She was talking about the club and I really had wanted to be a part of it but because my schedule was packed with doing volleyball and I was working part-time and full-time student like it was just not really working out with my schedule. So when I finally dropped volleyball, my biggest thing was that, you know for PT school you need to get your hours, so I wanted to be involved as much as I could and growing up in high school I was involved in 100 different clubs in student government. So, I really like that and I like collaborating with other students, especially if they are passionate about physical therapy. So I was like "I'm going to do this I want to make sure that I'm going to have time now to make this into my schedule" and that's how I had originally started going to meetings. I heard about it through Whitney primarily because I took her class, other students who were in the club and I followed the Instagram page but I never ever made it. So, finally I did start making it and I was super excited and glad. I think it was either the end of my sophomore year or the beginning of my junior year and then I got involved the following semester after as an officer.

Ali: What was like your experience with this club before COVID? Like the general setup of meetings or like different events that you guys did and like what was everything that you did before covid all happened.

Abby: So when I first started they had meetings and it always changed every semester because everyone's schedules change but it used to be like once a week or every other week when we would have a meeting and we would go in person you would. We would reserve a classroom, you

collaborate for an hour, we go over things, the go over questions that people may have or how to get observation hours. We did try to do some fundraising/volunteer things such as trying to organize a canned food drive, but it didn't get approved. We kind of ran out of time at the end of the semester and then I know that once I became an officer it was really focused around just like trying to connect student to people in the community that could help them with observation hours because that's like a big deal and students may don't know how to get those hours outside of practice. In order to help students who were below junior standing to find places, because it is something not a lot of students want to leave for the end of their undergrad. The meetings were in a small classroom setting, we didn't have a huge turnout but we did help this one girl who was looking into OT, so we were able to set her up with a traveling OT that I knew of and she was really great and so just like connecting people to resources. We also showed them like resources on how to study for the GRE and connect them with GRE resources from what people have done in the past. I know that the website that is currently trying to be made in practica, there's something that they are recreating that we did and it a year by year schedule for what classes pre-pt should take. I know we tried to organize a Bigfoot 5K, but we didn't get that organized. We definitely tried doing fundraising t-shirts but you know what the small members are we had it was just hard to get through things rolling. We mainly serve as an Outreach for those students who want to show up and ask questions. We also have in person and zoom quest speakers.

Ali: What does your typical day look like now? Not with the pre-pt club, but your student life?

Abby: At the beginning of the semester I was laid off from both of my jobs, because of COVID. I had a job with the local parks and recreation program, but you can't run recreation activities now. I was working with Mad River Community Hospital as a physical therapy aide and they laid me off because I was kind of the extra aide that they really did truly use my skills but they couldn't justify the hospital, being able to pay me. I wasn't working and it kind of stressed me out because I've always just been doing a lot of stuff and suddenly everything just was like "oh it's all online". I wasn't as busy as I used to be in that kind of was a huge adjustment for me going from like you know having club meetings, volunteering, I was a part of the fall risk assessments that Justice Orega organizes was and I was also doing the Matter of Balance; which was the program I think Whitney and Justice were kind of was starting up. I was busy with all those things and then COVID really put that all to a halt. It was really hard getting adjusted to going from doing a lot of stuff then to doing nothing. When we were in shelter in place in March, I didn't get outside that much and I was - I wasn't depressed - but it definitely brought down my mood. So having to figure out how I like to prioritize time to go outside and away from my house was a huge thing. Typical day like now, before I had work, I would sleep in a lot later than I normally did and do some classwork then I would go outside or exercise outside when it was really nice weather or to get outside and then come back in and I would do a few more assignments. That is what my day really looked like. Then I did get a job without looking for a job, but I got a job here at the local gym in Mckinleyville. I haven't worked since March, so I haven't done school fully online and worked, so that was stressful for like a week. But then I got the hang of it then I finally got adjusted and it was totally fine. I think it was good because it was like I was something that I had a regular routine. I have set a work schedule. I had to be somewhere at a certain time and it got me out of the house because most of my friends, all my friends, moved away after COVID. Plus the friend I told you about, that she's also a local, she graduated and was working full-time so it's not like I really had a lot of people to hang out with a lot of my friends. My other friends, they

have their own lives and so it's just become really hard and so I think it was good for me to get into a place where people go and a lot of people from Humboldt State work there too. Then we went to the Purple Tier. So with purple tier, the gym decided not to put out the equipment outside because Humboldt weather is not the best all the time. So we're doing outdoor classes but if you don't run those classes you don't work. I was a front desk person and I also was a Floor Tech which was cleaning all the weights for everyone. So we got told the week of Thanksgiving that most of us won't have jobs until we get back to the red tier. So, that was a disappointment but I am realizing it is for the best, because finals are coming and I have a lot of paper to write. My hours before would be working at really early shifts or working the closing shifts, so it was pretty easy for me to get my homework done still while working. But like I don't want to be unemployed but like for finals it was kind of nice because we have a lot going on right now. It's a lot online. I don't know. My life has literally changed so much that it is no longer that in person, it's definitely a roller coaster ride and my schedule has had to change so much. I don't think it has affected my grades, it's just impacted how I study and how productive I am now because before I usually get all my stuff done at school. I would get my homework done between classes, so when I came home I didn't really have much to do. Now it's all at home and I sit for long hours. When you are at school, you're at least able to get around and walk. So it's just been a big adjustment.

Ali: And so now, that's what your typical day looks like. What does a typical club meeting look like now?

Abby: I think it's been like more stressful setting up meetings and meeting up with the people. We have like all the officers have group chats that we talk to but it's not the same. It's hard reaching out to people versus like we used to do; post a lot of posters on campus and post on our Instagram page like always. But word-of-mouth was the best because I could stand up in the front of the class because all my classes were happening in person and mention it once every two weeks for one of my classes. Now most of my classes are asynchronous, so now I can't stand up in front of class anymore. I can't tell you guys there's a meeting for all the kines pre-pt students. So, personally, I am fairly happy with our turn out to our meetings. Now we have to meet with the officers to talk about what we want to go over in our meetings and then we set a date and then we advertise the crap out of that date. Like I have been sending emails out to pre-pt majors to reach people that way, we've been trying to post on Instagram, texting anyone that we may know. We've been doing like drop in meeting from 5 to 7, so people can come in to ask a question and then leave if you want and that's why I kind of like that for a little bit better for our members who have a harder time getting to our meeting because I remember I was in that place a few years ago. So the time is more flexible for members. We just recently had our first guest speaker via zoom and that was pretty cool. I can send the video out in an email, so it can reach more than the students that were able to come during that time. She gave her consent to be recorded because she also wanted a copy. She is a pelvic floor PT and so she had a presentation that it was actually really cool even though we weren't in-person because she lives in Pennsylvania. I was actually surprised at how many students showed up because it was virtual but I think that in a way it is more accessible to people. I mean yeah it is just harder as far as the advertising I think for the meetings and getting people to show up, but I think we have been doing okay for ourselves. I'm glad that we can be that resource for people who don't know much about PT and how to get where they wanna go.

Ali: Well those are all the questions I have for you, but I think Martin has some for you.

Martin: So my question is, what are the biggest challenges that COVID has brought you?

Abby: Honestly the back and forth that California has been going through of being shut down or open. I know that we can't control that but I think like compared to other states I feel like California may have went through it more roughly than other states because you know like this people that are worse off than me that you know like a working two or three jobs and going to school and they need that money to support a family. I've been grateful, because I just work as something to do due to being able to still live at home. I really don't have a lot of big bills to pay, but like the biggest adjustment was going from having a job to not having a job and having a job. Like I said switching my schedule around so many times this year and it's not really been consistent and I think that consistency is important for humans, but I think it also shows how adaptable people can be. Honestly I am one of those people where I like to plan and know what's happening, so that was a huge adjustment that I needed to get used to and now I am more like nothing surprises me now. I try not to get upset if it doesn't go my way, so I am just trying to go with the flow. At first I was upset because of work, but now I have more time for homework which was a stressor before COVID.

Martin: What was the biggest challenge the club has faced in COVID?

Abby: I touched on this a little, but reaching out to students. Volunteering stuff as much because I don't really know what's open and it's hard to connect with organizations sometimes that need you to be in person. I was trying to set up something with the high school but then the high school and it just fell through due the lack of communication and craziness that school was facing. We wanted to Zoom into their classes and give a presentation on what physical therapy is and what Humboldt State has to offer within the kinesiology major and within physical therapy. I have done this for years and used to go to my old middle school with 7th and 8th graders and I wanted to see how the club could approach it. Overall, I was pretty understanding of why the school didn't contact me because time is very important right now because not a lot of kids have access to the internet. So reaching out to people, volunteer hours for our club members and trying to give back to the community right now are very difficult.

Ali: You mention that reaching out to people is hard, is social media not effective?

Abby: We have tried Instagram, that's the only thing that we really have for social media accounts. The website is being developed and once it is, I think it's going to be super helpful with a lot of questions they may have. However, with Instagram and emailing being out only platforms it is difficult, because people don't read their emails sometimes and not everyone has Instagram. So that is something we could improve, but social media is a hit or miss.

Martin: Do you know how other clubs have adapted to COVID?

Abby: I'm terrible and only a part of one club. I believe other clubs are doing the same thing as us, because it is the easiest. Within the training for becoming an officer, they had setting up a zoom meeting about it.

Marting: Has COVID affected what you are going to do after graduation?

Abby: Kind of. I am going to a grad school that is Arizona, so I am moving from Humboldt all the way down to Phoenix. The campus is one building, because it is only 32 students, so there will be about 3 other classes you get to see because it is a 2 year program. So from what I understand is that we are still able to go onto campus for labs and practicals in order to get the hands on training, but you still have to wear masks, gloves, temp taken. I don't think a COVID screening is needed for every time you go in, but a lot of schools in Arizona are doing this. It's not different than going to the doctor or the dentist. So other than that nothing has changed. My program is a little different because they are switching to a hybrid program, so they are getting an accreditation from the AAPTA to be switched to the hybrid structure. Then they are going to put as much as they can online and whatever they can't do online, they will do in person classes. I have a friend in PT school right now and she said it was a hard switch, because her professors - like a lot of professors during this time - decided that students have more time now because they are at home. She says that they are super cautious because they are such a small population that 1 positive can make it become a hot zone and can just make everything go back to online. It does impact the graduate experience that I was imaging. But it makes me grateful that I am graduating online, because I know what I need to do to make grad school go more smoothly. I don't know how clinicals will work, but I know you have to still do them. I am just worried about how much hands on training I am going to get and this is why I choose this school, because it's so small and it's just PT students. We don't have to share with OT or PA, so we can go into the lab whether we may need it. So it has been an adjustment trying to get used to that this is the reality of it now. I am just glad that Humboldt State is helping me get an idea of what I am getting myself into. Plus I am going to a new state, so I don't even know what Arizona's COVID guidelines are.

Ali: What is the program's name?

Abby: Franklin Pierce University, so their main campus is in New Hampshire but they have a second campus in Goodyear, Arizona which is near Phoenix.

Martin: Do you know if other students are having the same experience as you?

Abby: I only talk to a few other students, but they have had similar experiences as far as they feel overwhelmed, stressed, exhausted and unmotivated. I have a class where we meet once a week for extra credit, so it is always different because it isn't mandatory. In that class there is a check in with the professor and it is always stressed and burnt out before Thanksgiving break. Before Thanksgiving break, I was doing okay but after it just was like hitting a wall and was unmotivated and I feel like a lot of other students felt this way too. There's one class where a lot of students feel like the professor has been checked out and it makes me angry because it just feels like he isn't being as attentive of a teacher as they should be. A lot of students agree that they aren't getting the same quality of education as we did when we were in person and I feel like I would have gotten a lot more outta this class if it was in person. Especially since it is an important class to have going into physical therapy school, but I guess I can just relearn all of it there. It is just too bad because I was very excited about this class and it just wasn't what it ended up being. I was kinda done after the first exam, but I tried again and the second exam I was done. It was a 30 question exam that took 6 hours. I even took it with this professor because they are known for

being hard and I wanted to be pushed. The professor even acknowledges that he is having a hard time, because they are able to teach better when they can see body language, but with COVID that is unrealistic. So they are having a hard time adjusting too. I know there are professors out there that are more forgiving, but I think this a good example of a negative experience that students are facing. I know this is what a lot of people are feeling in the chem, bio and physics classes right now and I understand the unit to study hour ratio, but that ratio is not different being online. I feel like students are giving up and I know a lot of students are even dropping out, but they will come back when it is in person. I had a group project this semester and one of my group members is a mother, so during our zoom meeting her kids would just be yelling because they were super little. So, I think this is an example of how hard it is to separate school and home life now. I hope a lot of people aren't feeling like this, but I don't think it is the reality

Martin: My next question is kinda off topic, but have you learned any new skills?

Abby: I used to never pick up the textbook before COVID, but now I am able to stay on top of my readings for two of my classes. I think I have learned a lot through the textbook, especially in my family psychology class. I also like how professors are allowing us to use the internet or textbook because we will have those resources in the real world. I have learned some more skills for my computer now. Also prioritizing my mental health was something I started doing and valuing my connections with people.

Martin: Has this experience taught you anything?

Abby: I think we just need to be more flexible and not too set in our ways. Learning to let go a little bit more and being able to let things slip through the cracks. As long as you tried your best.