

Heritage Conservation Learning in the COVID World - Challenges and Opportunities

ICCROM-Athabasca University-IIC webinar

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Post-webinar Reflections

Social Media Information

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/lccrom-Heritage-Conservation-Learning-in-the-COVID-World-118401196577564/>

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Webinar Questions & Responses

How ICCROM can support and provide opportunities for the emerging heritage professionals who are passionate to learn and get formal trainings especially in this pandemic situation?

ICCROM is adapting and strengthening its online and blended capacity building in heritage conservation; it will increase online sharing of knowledge resources for the benefit of the heritage conservation professional community; it will continue to promote (online) networking of emerging conservation professionals with the global community, as well as to raise awareness in all its Member States about the importance of supporting heritage and its caretakers during such critical times. Depending on their area of interest, emerging professionals might also be interested in undertaking an (online) internship at ICCROM. Please keep checking ICCROM's website (www.iccrom.org) and social media platforms for updates. Learning opportunities can also be provided by organizing online lectures, such as INTACH Conservation Insights 2020 series: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCznJO6AjqqWH2KwBJmhn6ag>. Another possibility could be providing financial support to institutions that organize/provide free programs and lectures.

Given the importance of hands-on work, would graduation be delayed in order to ensure that students have sufficient practical experience? Since job availability is highly limited as well right now anyway.

It depends on institutional policies. For example, at the Arts Academy in Split, this option was not considered. However, students managed to catch up on the work during the summer examination period. By extending institution's working hours, where possible and if necessary, students could have sufficient time to complete their practical projects.

What are the employment prospects for students completing their studies during the pandemic? How will their adjusted/interrupted training be accommodated in future hiring pools? How can we assure they remain competitive candidates for what limited jobs will still exist after the downsizing of the sector?

Particular needs of students and emerging conservators impacted by the pandemic are being considered by some professional organizations. For example, in Canada, action plans, including advocacy, are in the works.

Students can refer to the Suggestions from the Association for North American Graduate programs in Art Conservation (ANAGPIC) in order to understand that knowledge and skills could be acquired besides those related to treating artworks, which add to their competitiveness (art history, science, photography, imaging, programming, and communication among others): <https://www.iiconservation.org/content/preparing-graduate-study-while-sheltering-place-suggestions-association-north-american>

In some countries such as Colombia, with or without COVID-19, the hiring and job opportunities within the sector was and still is limited. Looking at the bigger picture, there will always be a need for capable and skilled professionals.

Like any industry that is undergoing transformation, it is critical to look at the types of skills, experience and knowledge that can be applicable to other fields. Perhaps the sector also needs to review broadening training and education outputs to ensure/explore how they have appeal outside of heritage/conservation.

Regarding the difficulty of establishing networks when we only have online teaching available: should we as teachers think differently about how we promote/establish networks? Our students are very successful at creating online networks. What can we learn from students in this respect?

Definitely. COVID-19 crisis only accelerates some communication trends as networking through social media. Teachers, educators, and trainers should learn from it and should start using these platforms as academic resources.

This is an area where educators could/should be learning from their students to know what types of apps and networking channels they are using (and how they use them).

Is it possible to set student practicals online so that students could complete them at home; then they present and critique the presentation of their practicals online, so as to get some practical direction?

This is of course possible for the work on mock-ups. A version of such practicals can be done online that is not “live” per se, using items sourced by the students from their homes or local thrift shops. There are numerous restrictions related to working on ‘real’ object at home. While students may not be working on high value items and may therefore miss out on the psychological effects associated with that aspect of museum work/conservation project, it still helps them become familiar with materials and techniques. A “live” version would make it easier to provide direct feedback on technique so that the student can make adjustments in real time.

Working with home items for practice are great for honing the skills perhaps, but the environment and available materials might give learning students the wrong perception and false confidence. How could we ensure students stay balanced when practising from home?

Just as with all conservation teaching, it is important to teach students the importance of context and to discuss the difference between objects that are still being used by their owners vs. those in museums, between those owned by individuals at home vs. those owned by a collector vs. those in the public trust, etc. Seize the opportunity to explore and debate the importance of context, something that students without previous museum, built heritage, or conservation experience tend to neglect in their eagerness to learn the “one right way” of doing things. Working on their own belongings might give them insight into the perceptions of private clients! Providing guidance is critical. That is why teachers not only “supervise” what students are doing. Teachers and students interact with each other. These interactions cannot be completely replaced online but are possible as well. It is important to understand that remote learning is not the same as alone learning.

What is the ideal size for an online class for students to be able to interact successfully with each other and manage to create a successful group? Is it the same as a face-to-face class size?

It depends on the type of courses. Theoretical classes could support larger groups of students than practical ones.

Research shows that a maximum of 12 is most effective, especially for instructors new to teaching online. For group work, even smaller groups can be formed.

Experience has also shown that teaching smaller groups online, such as a group of 10 students, has worked well.

What do you do regarding time-differences in an international group?

Try to schedule real-time activities in the best possible time to maximize participation. For courses that are part of a curriculum with a cohort of students, it is better to find a time that works for the majority of the students in the cohort. For stand-alone courses, the offering times could be changed from year to year in order to accommodate students in different parts of the world.

This is also applicable to international online events such as conferences/webinars/short courses & trainings. For example, at the 2020 IIC Edinburgh Congress, which took place online, all the lectures started at 3 PM CET, as that was deemed most convenient for the majority of the participants.

Another option, especially in the case of webinars, is to record all activities and make them available for those who could not attend. Make sure there is timely and effective communication and follow up (content assimilation, questions, assignments, etc.) for those who could not attend the real-time event. Repeat the activity so that all time zones can be suitably covered. It is becoming common practice to record sessions and organize different synchronized meetings or multiple sessions at different times.

Do you worry that the global lock-down will deter or discourage future generations from becoming conservationists as sites and countries are harder to access due to COVID19?

This may depend on the country; however, the increased number of videos about conservation (that could be made publicly available) as a result of the switch to online learning could actually increase peoples' exposure to the world of conservation.

The COVID-19 situation is considered temporary. The world will return to normal and that travel will be possible again. Regardless of COVID-19, heritage sites/resources need constant care and maintenance, and there will always be a need for experts to carry out the conservation work. Heritage will prevail as a social resource and there will always be a need for its management. However, this crisis is making clear the need for the improvement and application of tools to articulate sustainable and social development with collections and museums.

Larger worry; however, might be more long-term. Every conservator goes through primary/secondary education before they study conservation. Over half a billion citizens around the world do not even have access to these levels of education.

Will you permanently adopt any of the online tools that you have had to start using during the pandemic to your courses/curricula, once it is safe to have on-site instruction again?

Some are planning to improve their online teaching (regardless of the pandemic) using the research, ideas, resources and tools that have been generated by the vastly increased number of instructors teaching online during the pandemic.

Some have adopted the virtual classroom and are using it as a repository for the teaching/learning materials. Also, they are recording some of their lectures and posting them to the virtual classroom. Thus, the classroom time can be used for group discussions, exercises etc. Certain practices and exercises work better using online platforms. On the other hand, online sessions open access to people in different places you cannot reach face to face.

At ICCROM, online/blended learning was already being discussed as a way to widen its user base and reach a larger audience. Of course, this will be in addition to well-established in-person capacity building.

What if the Covid-19 crisis is over? Would you still do the teaching online (apart from all which require your senses/practical skills) or is online teaching the second best in your opinion?

There is always a role for online learning in order to make conservation learning accessible to a broader range of students and heritage workers. There is much content that can successfully be taught online.

Some of the online teaching activities could be kept. However, for some, it is still important to have personal contact with students in order to understand their abilities and provide better guidance to students.

Some are planning blended offering of their courses. Education is based on interactions, and obviously, face-to-face interactions cannot be replaced. For some types of seminars and lessons, online platforms are better, so a blended approach works well.

Due to the COVID crisis, some universities are being pressured to work harder towards overcoming the infrastructural and economic barriers (as well as online teaching/tech capacity of staff) so this could be considered as a possible positive outcome of the pandemic.

Some students are complaining about online presentations as is something which they are still trying to adapt to. Are there any trainings or any sort of exercises which are being run by lecturers in ensuring that their students get used to this and are well prepared before going for formal presentations online?

Every course or stand-alone presentation should start with a short list of instructions about how to use the technology, how to engage with the speaker and each other, etc. An IT resource person should be available to troubleshoot before the session starts and, preferably, during the session. Experience shows most students of all ages catch on quickly.

In some countries, basic trainings are organized (through webinars), but that should happen quickly. Otherwise, students and teachers manage to get a grasp of the new tools through trial and error.

In other countries, not as specific training courses are offered. Rather, limited exercises are made available as part of the development of communication skills within regular seminars. It will be useful to develop an "online communication for heritage" course at some point.

Will there be a surge on continuous education courses after the dust settles? How about options for remote PhDs?

More and more online courses are expected to be provided, as the pandemic has opened our eyes to the technical possibilities for delivering such forms of training and education.

Universities and education in general terms are going to change permanently. Undergraduate, as well as postgraduate seminars, will follow these changes. Post-COVID will tell but it seems that both remote and in-person learning will co-exist from now on.

Is there any way to address the amount of time students spend in the lab that is not scheduled lab time? Some programs encourage students to come in and work independently.

Finding safe ways to use labs is one of the answers and looking for "homemade" experiences and experiments would be another way to address this.

Can anyone speak to any experience in virtual conservation training in a non-academic setting, for example, professional development training? What ways can you engage your audience when there is no community platform (as at a university), when you may only have 1-4 training sessions with any given group of participants?

From 2007– 2018, for example, some online professional development training in collection care for museum workers were conducted in Canada and the USA. In Canada, the online training was part of a provincial museum association’s certificate program. They provided the platform and all the administration. The in-person version of the course took place over three full days; the online version took place over 10 weeks. In the USA, for example, two conservation-related professional development courses were offered for an organization offering online learning to anyone interested in the subject. Most participants were from the USA, but there were also participants from other countries across the world. These courses on specific topics spanned 4 to 6 weeks. Again, the organization provided the platform and the administration. In both cases, the class met for online chats for one hour per week. Another example is a two-hour collection care session for Indigenous community members that was offered in 2020 via Zoom for the first time. Feedback from the participants will help to understand if their needs were met in this much shortened format.

With professional development trainings, it is also important to create an online platform, online discussion groups, and follow-up projects. Keep in mind that, in any case it will be necessary to have someone to manage/moderate in order to ensure sustainability.

How can you balance interactivity with technological demands? For example asking students to turn on cameras or participate in Zoom polls can really slow down individual internet connections, making the class inaccessible for some.

This is certainly true even if it is not always the case. The point is “interactivity” does not necessarily mean the use of virtual resources. Asynchronous sessions and exercises are also ways of interaction.

Synchronous online discussions with students can take place using old-fashioned chat functions, with no video. In these chats, students and their teachers can have lively discussions, create lasting networks, and have fun. For an even playing field, exploring this option is recommended. An important area to explore and look for experiences that can be shared is another option. Perhaps students could be asked to complete quizzes before or after the live online session.

Speaking from a university where we teach conservation mainly in English, but with awareness of other official and Indigenous languages, I wonder if for faculty and students from other countries, if the globalizing moment of COVID is displacing emphasis on local language based teaching in conservation. Are online resources being created in other languages, and how to make sure these are made available? Language is key for so understanding many aspects of intangible heritage. Increased use of English can also reinforce hierarchies we should be striving to question and unsettle.

Very important point. ICCROM strives to provide knowledge resources in as many languages as possible. Please check the RESOURCES area of the website:

<https://www.iccrom.org/resources/publications>.

Many share these concerns and would support any effort to develop conservation training and online resources in languages other than English. This is an essential part of decolonizing the heritage field.

Others are very happy with the number of webinars offered in English, as that enables them to follow the conversations. Accessibility would have been limited if they were offered in other languages (other than people's own native languages).

Some also agree with this point and not only because of the COVID. In some countries, there are many different Indigenous languages and no bilingual university programs (for example, there are 63 languages in Columbia). It appears that multiculturalism is getting flat, and the current crisis is only showing old problems about equality, access, and in general terms, education itself. Another example is that despite there being over 500 languages spoken in Nigeria, including 3 major ones apart from the official language, English, classes are all taught in English. It is believed anything related to heritage studies should also be sensitive to this intangible heritage; however, this is not frequently occurring.

Do you maybe think there is a danger that experienced practitioners with loads of practical conservation knowledge are overestimating the abilities of inexperienced students? It is easy for someone already practised in using certain tools to watch a video of a technique and mimic it... maybe not so easy for someone who has never even held such a tool.

This could be an issue for newcomers to teaching; however, anyone who taught conservation pre-pandemic is familiar with the need to start at the very beginning, such as how to roll and use a swab, whether teaching in person or online.

Everyone started as scared professionals without a lot of experience, and yet everyone learned from school (training) and through experience. That is the meaning of making a career. It is different from pure studying. People learn by making mistakes, failing, falling, and getting up again. Watching videos can help, but people will always need to try on their own.

In many countries, students have gone back to their home countries/states, and might now not have the opportunity to come back to the location of the university. Could educational institutions tie up with local museums in their respective states for students to and provide/facilitate internships for practical experiences?

This is a good point. The suggestion of linking up with local museums seems like a great idea. This can work where a) the museums are permitted to host interns, and b) the museums have in-house conservation expertise.

It also depends on the pandemic-related policies that are in effect at museums. Some museums might be reluctant to allow people other than their staff to enter their premises. In some countries, museums might be fully closed.

Although difficult, it might be possible to get remote access to museums in some countries for teaching purposes.

Access to ICT and other relevant resources is a challenge to continue with heritage conservation teaching and outreach program with local schools. Is there any assistance of any kind available to enable local people especially young learners living adjacent to world heritage properties continue accessing necessary conservation education?

Pre-pandemic (and hopefully soon, post-pandemic), there are excellent examples of this kind of community engagement supported by national and international organizations. See for example Francesca Guiducci's recent IIC presentation "Finding Sustainability in the Desert: Conservation of the Archaeological Site of Dangeil, Sudan, and Associated Collections":

<https://www.iiconservation.org/congress/2020edinburgh/blog/session-6-sustainability-and-climate-change>.

It is not a challenge just for heritage conservation teaching. It is a challenge for education in general. All education bodies should be working closely with ICT enterprises to look for ways to narrow this gap. This also means putting pressure on institutional leaders to make this priority. There is funding available; however, it seems that proposal writing might not be a strength of many academics.

Other questions & concerns to consider

If students were to receive their degree later, how can they finance this?

What are the conditions in conservation science training, and science that supports conservation learners? With many labs shut down, is this aspect of education disproportionately impacted?

It is very difficult to replace practice teaching with online alternatives. Should educators also discuss/consider if there are classes/workshops/summer courses that conservation programs could organize and lobby for (find funding for), for those students who graduate this year and the next, so the groups of students affected most strongly by the COVID-19 pandemic in their practice education?

Throughout our different responses to recover from the situation, will there be any chances where our structure could be diverted away from our primary goals and proposition?

Although it is possible to learn bench techniques online - it all depends on how the IT and cameras can show close interactive learning. Some things need to be touched and felt to establish and be able to restore /conserve - hence this is not the best possible solution and where and when possible hands on training should not be substituted for online. What guarantee are we going to receive for students that they all can afford and have the necessary IT requirements?

General Comments

As with architecture, it is extremely difficult to teach students the SCALE of artifacts online (especially very high buildings).

There are indeed particular challenges associated with teaching built heritage conservation online. Videos of instructors approaching and surveying structures and landscapes could be part of the solution but are difficult to do effectively without the assistance of a professional videographer. And people would still need access to the site.

Remote learning, in my point of view and previous experiences, has several advantages than seat learning. But, it needs and deserves discipline.

Both need discipline. Only a different kind. This needs to be addressed with great consideration for the different living situations of students. Many students do not have the luxury of a quiet corner in their homes. Many still come to campus (closed) to find any spot where they can grasp some university wifi hotspot even if it means doing their work under an umbrella. Saying that it “deserves discipline” could seem a bit uncaring.

In some countries, one of the main problems is that not all of our students have access to internet, computer, or different devices. There might not be government programs that give such facilities/resources to students.

That is understandable. The solution in some cases may be to fund the technology but in others, where communications infrastructure is lacking, it will be to find a safe way to get trainers and resources into the communities.

In some countries, both government and Universities are trying to solve this gap. For example, in the beginning of the pandemic, Universidad de los Andes send internet kits (mobile phones with data and laptops) to almost a thousand students.

For some, this lockdown has come as a hidden blessing. Now more information and webinars are available. In addition, many conferences/seminar are being held virtually, because of only that people are being able to participate. Otherwise, costs for travel, staying and others, people from developing countries could not afford.

It is true. More options are available (maybe too many) and more people are getting access to different resources. That is a good thing. And we need to see which of them can be sustained and explore how to do that.

From a museum situation where everyday is a learning opportunity for both myself and colleagues, I have noticed that the technicians will watch on line videos on YouTube to learn how to repair AC equipment for example and I know there are many videos out there on fixing cars for example. Probably we all need training in producing practical videos which is related to TV/ film production and needs a more studio set up.

This sounds like a good idea. But the authors should be instructed to be cautious in how they represent the conservation work. Conservation is not something that anyone can do at home –

specialized knowledge is required to practice this profession. Conservation is not easy and fast, as one might conclude after watching a five-minute video. Most treatments take long time to perform. Also, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions.

The development of quality educational materials is a priority and it will be a line of work/research soon.

There is an increase in knowledge with online learning, but for in-situ practicals, there will be need for students to do practicals in a seat-in / in the field environment.

Students will have strength over and above practical experience which is possibly diluted by practical/theoretical course balance.

We also perhaps need to address employers' very high expectations for years of work experience which is just not possible in this COVID world right now.

We do a lot of in house training for museum technicians and collections care staff. We are using Zoom for webinars, these can include video clips. Group size has been reduced and practicals take place in large rooms so that people can keep their distance. We wear face masks. Practical sessions are still required.

It would be great if these webinars and video clips could be shared more broadly!

Due to its scope and mortality, we have faced COVID with fear and uncertainty, but perhaps we will have to think about strengthening personal protection measures and continuing with controlled in situ activities, just as medical professionals do.

Indeed, protocols of biosecurity and PPE will be developed for conservation practices. It might be necessary that research groups are working on adapting equipment and garment for these specific purposes.

Distance education has a lot of problems, such as the problem of good communication through group learning. Since March 2020, all my education and work is via the Internet, so I feel a lot of frustration and also I feel that I live in a virtual world, and I am close to losing any passion in education and work.

There is a difference between feelings and learning objectives. Emotions can be and generally are a spark for educational processes. But even without this spark, the most important thing is to complete learning objectives. Rarely one has perfect emotional conditions. Students should learn to work with those who they do not like, or even teachers they dislike. Students should adapt to deal with frustration because it is often there.

Another problem is that some students have had to leave their studies in order to get a job to help their family because of the economic crisis that the COVID brings to our countries.

In many countries, this situation is nothing new. Most of the students must have to get a job if they want to pay or complete their studies. The problem is many of them have lost their jobs which would result in a decrease in the number of students in the coming terms. In the long term, the low enrolments means some programs will probably not survive.

Please consider spreading your knowledge and the expansion of enquiry, to the developing world. Access to the internet is not always a given.

Internet access is a problem in some countries. However, this pandemic has been useful for some governments to address this problem and find real-life solutions. It is still a long way, but this topic is finally on the table and now internet access is a priority on the government agenda.

As a student, I can assure that it is quite easy to follow theoretical lessons. The real problem is the lab. We need to do 450 hours of lab per year, and with this pandemic and lockdown we have been stopped, we cannot go to lab and we will not finish the academic year in time. We tried to do some learning experience online for the lab, but it will never be the same thing. We chose Conservation and Restoration because we love touching and feeling the operas, now we cannot, so we students live this situation with frustration.

This is a completely understandable frustration and there is no easy way to resolve it during the pandemic.

Maintaining both modalities will be the challenge of the institutions. Not either/or but both/and (online & in-person).

Definitely. Universities are moving in that direction and preparing for the coming terms. Some labs and workshops might be open with some biosecurity restrictions to keep social distancing and so on; however, teachers are asked to bring remote alternatives to those in-person classes. Some universities are investing in remote/recording equipment for live sessions.

Useful Resources

ICON, Together at Home Webinar Series

<https://icon.org.uk/groups/book-paper/conservation-together-at-home-webinar-series>

INTACH, Conservation Insights 2020 Lecture Series

http://heritageici.intach.org/?page_id=2222

AIC & FAIC videos

<https://www.youtube.com/c/AmericanInstituteForConservation/videos>

The C Word – The Conservators' Podcast

<https://thecword.show/>

Connecting to Collections Care Online Community (webinar archives)

<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/archives/>

QLab: Free webinars for those interested in material durability testing:

<https://www.q-lab.com/resources/education.aspx>

Teacher Academy - Improve your teaching skills

<https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/index.htm>

Project-Based Learning to Enhance Key Competences

<https://academy.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/web/pbl-key-competences/home>

Europeana Classroom - Educational resources using digital culture

<https://www.europeana.eu/en/europeana-classroom>

REALM project - Reopening Archives, Libraries and Museums

<https://www.oclc.org/realm/home.html>

Padlet - A virtual board for collaborative projects

www.padlet.com

Mentimeter - For surveys and polls

www.mentimeter.com

People Art Factory - Digital Exhibition design platform

<https://peopleartfactory.com/>

Thinglink - Tour Creator - For 360° tours and interactive presentations

<https://www.thinglink.com>

<https://arvr.google.com/tourcreator/>