

SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY: The COVID pandemic presented many reporting challenges for journalists. In your opinion, what are the biggest lessons learned for journalists (and journalism) as a result of reporting throughout the COVID pandemic? Please provide specific examples.

In my opinion, the biggest lessons learned for journalists and journalism as a result of reporting throughout the pandemic was learning how to present news in a more digestible and kind way. I think it was and still is super important to present news in a thorough, direct yet compassionate manner that takes heed to the times we are living in and feels humane. For the first couple years of the pandemic, it was a challenge for myself and many other journalists, especially those in Broadcast, to truly connect with people and feel united. I personally had the challenge of reporting on topics like death rates, school shootings and family hospitalization which took a toll on me mentally and emotionally. It was hard to separate myself from my schoolwork and assignments.

Finding a work-life balance that protected me mentally was tough. I also felt like I was just reporting to report. Furthermore, the things I was reporting on were so daunting and tragic, I wanted to bring some hope, passion and solidarity to my news packages and audience. I did this by finding ways to spin stories that ended on a high note. For example, in one of my stories I reported on the number of deaths COVID had in my hometown but at the end of that story, I told the story of a local community member who saved her grandmother's life by donating one of her kidneys due to her grandmother's failing from COVID. Finding humane and holistic approaches that inspired hope amongst readers and viewers was the most challenging thing I had to overcome during the pandemic because as a journalist, I lacked it myself.

(Essay by Kiara Patterson, Howard University, Washington, D.C. , winner of the 2023 Bob Shilling Memorial Scholarship).