

THE #IWILLOVERCOMECOVID19 PROJECT

by

Godgive Umozurike

A Senior Honors Project Presented to the

Honors College

East Carolina University

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by

Godgive Umozurike

Greenville, NC

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Approved by:

Dr. Sheena Eagan

Brody School of Medicine Department of Bioethics and Interdisciplinary Studies

Introduction

My original Signature Honors Project “In the Shadow of Ebola“ focused on humanizing the 2014 - 2016 Ebola epidemic through an immersive and interactive art installation. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, my original project is no longer feasible and has transitioned to an online participatory installation entitled “The #IwillovercomeCOVID19 Project.” This project aims to humanize the COVID-19 pandemic through combating the social isolation that many individuals feel during this time, as a result of social distancing, by providing an online community to interact with others. In this write-up, I explain this transition and provide context for these decisions.

Description of Original Project “In the Shadow of Ebola”

According to the Centers for Disease Control, there are 28,652 reported cases of patients diagnosed with the Ebola virus with a total of 11,325 reported deaths. Although statistics are helpful in obtaining a simplified overview of disease outbreaks, they cannot reveal the cultural nuances, livelihood, and suffering of those whose lives were lost and drastically changed. As addressed in *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, Paul Farmer states that “knowledge of suffering cannot be conveyed in pure facts and figures with reporting[s] that objectify the suffering of countless persons. The horror of suffering is not only its immensity, but the faces of the anonymous victims who have little voice, let alone rights.” Therefore, my original Signature Honors Project “In the Shadow of Ebola” was designed to examine the human dimensions of the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa. From an extensive literature review and examination of academic publications, case reports, visual art, documentaries, personal narratives/essays, and medical short stories, my work presented the often-neglected stories of Ebola survivors and victims. To reach a larger audience, these stories

would have been expressed as a multimedia art installation modeled after the treatment facilities designed by Doctors Without Borders. This installation was designed to invite participants into an immersive space that will force them past the dehumanized statistics while simultaneously confronting them with the reality behind those numbers. In recognizing that patients were not the only victims, this work aimed to juxtapose multiple perspectives.

After conducting the literature review throughout the first semester, the layout of the installation was determined at the beginning of the second semester. In this layout, the installation involved the construction of two treatment rooms inspired by the treatment facility specifications of Doctors Without Borders. The installation layout and some of the original visual art pieces (memorial, treatment room enhancements, etc.) would be created through a collaboration with ECU's Innovation and Design Lab. The graphics and printed materials would be created in partnership with the School of Art and Design, with printing done in-house. The physical components of these treatment rooms (to include a cot, chairs, buckets, blankets, room dividers/temporary walls, and grave markers) would be purchased locally or online. Funding to purchase these materials originate from an Undergraduate Research and Creativity Award (URCA) I was awarded for the Spring 2020 semester. Much of the multimedia component would be low to no cost through utilizing public images and documentary film clips broadcasted through projectors. As a portion of my work aims to engage with a broader audience, I explored a variety of venues including the Evelyn Fike Laupus Gallery, the Intersection of Arts & Sciences at RCAW, and an exhibition during National Public Health Week. These venues were purposefully selected to serve ECU's mission of education, community outreach, and cultural enrichment.

Transition to an Online Medium

In the second semester, the development of materials and construction of the art installation began. Unfortunately, with the development and further progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, my experiential art installation is no longer possible. As the virus is primarily transmitted from person-to-person, especially when individuals are in close contact with one another, it would be irresponsible to implement the project in its current state as it would not adhere to state health guidelines of social distancing that prohibits gatherings of more than 10 people and maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from others. Additionally, East Carolina University, like many academic institutions, have closed their campus to students and have transitioned to an alternative course delivery online. Due to campus closures, the explored venues are no longer accessible, and, therefore, the art installation would not have a location to be constructed and presented in. In considering these new conditions, I have transitioned to a participatory online art project.

In this new online medium, my project retains the overarching topic of the human experience of an outbreak of infectious diseases. Although my original intent was to focus on the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, I have pivoted my focus to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this is a deviation, my mentors and I saw a unique opportunity to humanize a global outbreak that we are currently experiencing collectively. For this new online medium, a Facebook Page was created as this format not only provides moderation features and a familiar layout, but also utilizes social media. To garner participation, it is imperative to use a medium that is easily accessible and familiar to participants. As such, utilizing Facebook, a platform that individuals have already adopted to connect with others, is effective.


Description of New Project “The #IwillovercomeCOVID19 Project”

My new Signature Honors Project “The #IwillovercomeCOVID19 Project ” provides a way to humanize the COVID-19 pandemic through combating the social isolation that many individuals feel during this time as a result of social distancing. As we continue to undergo this new reality, this project was created in hopes of reminding others that we can overcome this uncertainty and isolation by focusing on the positives that remain while simultaneously remembering that we are not alone in our experience. At this moment, we are all sharing a communal experience. While each person’s experience will have unique stressors and unique joys, we are in this together. My project seeks to remind us of these things through creating a community of understanding and fostering positivity. As this digital intervention takes the form of a Facebook Page, individuals are able to connect with others through a screen rather than in person. In doing so, not only do we adhere to state health guidelines and are taking preventative measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, we are able to maintain the participatory element of the original project. To do so, we have created a call/answer where upon visiting the page, individuals are met with the following pinned post: “You can be a part of this project and this positive community by following our page, posting our Facebook wall, adding to our story, and using the hashtag “#IwillovercomeCOVID19.” Share your quotes, photos, or videos to show how you will overcome COVID-19. Read what others post, enjoy the videos and images, share with friends and make this positivity a part of our social media on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.” Through this post, we provide an explanation for the project for site visitors while encouraging engagement from page followers to engage and support one another. Additionally, due to the change to an online platform, the funding granted by the URCA will be donated to those in need during this time. A link to the Facebook page, with images describing the layout and appearance of the page, are noted in the Appendix.

Appendix

Link to the Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/IWillOvercomeCOVID19/>

Appearance of Profile Photo and About Section when Facebook Page is shared:

	<p>I Will Overcome Covid19 Project</p> <p>I Will Overcome Covid19 Project. 127 likes.</p> <p>The “#IwillovercomeCOVID19” project provides a way to humanize the pandemic, to combat the social isolation that many of us may feel by building community and understanding of each other during these uncertain times.</p> <p>www.facebook.com</p>
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Appearance of Cover Photo for Facebook Page:

