

## Transcript of interview with Dr. Miguel Cortina by Elisa Aguilera

**Interviewer:** Elisa Aguilera

**Interviewee:** Dr. Miguel Cortina

**Date:** 11/11/2021

**Location (Interviewer):** St. Mary University, San Antonio, TX

**Location (Interviewee):** St. Mary University, San Antonio, TX

**Transcriber:** Howard Clayberger

**Abstract:** Elisa Aguilera, an international student at St. Mary's University in Texas, interviews Dr. Miguel Cortina, a professor from the aforementioned school. Elisa's interview with Dr. Cortina highlights the experience of an international professor at the University during the pandemic, and how in a diverse student body and faculty, all still experienced change and hardships that required adaptation.

**Elisa Aguilera (0:02)**

Hello, my name is Elisa Aguilera, I'm going to do this interview with Dr. Cortina. This interview is for my history class. We are doing an exhibit for #coveryourfangs. And first, I want to let him introduce himself.

**Dr. Cortina (0:15)**

Hello, everyone. My name is Miguel Cortina. I'm the instructor for mechanical engineering. I'm from Colombia. I have been here in St. Mary's since 2017. Now I work as an instructor full time. I teach classes for the first semesters, like engineering graphics and engineering mechanics.

**Elisa Aguilera (0:43)**

Okay, so let's start with the questions. The first one, can you tell us how St. Mary's tried to accommodate to the situation and how it looks like when the pandemic began?

**Dr. Cortina (0:55)**

The pandemic took us for surprise to everyone. Professors, students, and Mary's. So, at the beginning they did what everybody else was doing, they sent us home, they move all the classes online. And as we were going through the pandemic, they started giving us so much software to recall our classes to do our presentation, things like that. St. Mary's provided some resources, obviously, those resources were more than physical, because also we had the chance to, in case you need, to talk to someone. They offer those counseling services too. St. Mary's is trying to

provide us as many resources as possible, the thing is that this was new for all of us, so we didn't know what we need.

**Elisa Aguilera (2:02)**

As a professor, do you know, or do you have something in mind that you had to learn to be able to teach like, online and everything?

**Dr. Cortina (2:11)**

One of the things was the hardest for me, I guess it was at first getting used to talk to a black screen. Because sometimes when you're on the Zoom, some students, they have the cameras off, so you're just talking to a bunch of black squares. That human interaction was missing. So, I had to get used to that. Because it's not the same when you're in the classroom, and you're explaining something, and you can sometimes tell by the students' expression that you need to explain more, you need to go back, or you need to move faster. But here, you're just like, in the dark, so you're trying to do the best you can with the situation. I guess that's what was one thing that, that I have to learn. There are things like learning all the technological aspects. Like how to create classes on Zoom, how to create videos, how to grade. Grading was something that I had to adapt because it might take me some time.

**Elisa Aguilera (3:30)**

What was the hardest part of learning how to teach students through a screen? Do you now see it as a skill?

**Dr. Cortina (3:38)**

What I just told you. The lack of human interaction that you don't know, how your student is doing, how is feeling or how she's feeling. I guess that was the hardest part because you're talking to a screen and that can be difficult sometimes. Also, something that I noticed, I don't know if this was common for professors, but I noticed some students just connected to Zoom but they never interacted, they never submitted work. It was kind of a strange situation because you're trying to reach, you're trying to help them out. But is impossible. I will say that part of the interaction, Professor-Student was the hardest. Do you now see as a skill? Yes. Because, unfortunately, I probably notice all this means at the end, like the first couple of weeks I probably didn't pay enough attention. I just, I used to talk to myself. Maybe the student is shy, maybe he's not interested in the class. But then, one week, two weeks, three weeks, then the whole semester, then something is going on. I guess I can see that as an skill in that sense. And in terms of the technology, I think there are a few good things that we can get from this pandemic. Like all the Zoom sessions, or the recording capabilities, the fact that you can create videos, I think that's something that you can see as a skill now and can use in my future.

**Elisa Aguilera (5:32)**

And this can be a personal question, or it can be as a professor, but what is one thing that you've liked so far during the pandemic?

**Dr. Cortina (5:42)**

I guess as a professor, I would say the resources that we start using, I know I complained about grading before. But now that you get used to it you can find the advantage of this. For example, grading homework on canvas. I mean, digital is easier. Or at this point, I find it easier than on paper, because you have everything in there. You go to Canvas and have everything. I don't have to take it to the classroom or forget it on my office. I would say all the technological resources developed during the pandemic. I think there are some that are very useful, and I am planning to continue using them. At a personal level. I guess the fact that I could work from home gave me the chance to pick up my kid from school, during the pandemic. It was usually my wife's job or someone else's because I had to be here. But I had the chance to do that, and that was really nice. I liked that.

**Elisa Aguilera (7:00)**

What is something that you do now that you did not before the pandemic?

**Dr. Cortina (7:09)**

I started using more resources associated to canvas. Like for example, giving quizzes in there, given the exams through there. Probably be more lenient with the students. As I am from Colombia, I thought everyone has everything here. And it was really shocking, knowing the fact that there was student who did not had a computer, or didn't have a reliable internet connection. I mean, you don't expect to see those type of things. It was like "oh, the United States!" everything's there. That surprised me and probably, now I'm more aware of those situations. I tried to be more lenient on the students for those type of things. And besides that, all the resources that I mentioned, I think they are good tools. And I think if you know how to use them, they can make a difference of teaching.

**Elisa Aguilera (8:21)**

Okay, last question. Is there anything you want students to know about a professor's perspective?

**Dr. Cortina (8:30)**

I know it's hard on you, but it's also hard on us. I guess it's not a competition of who has it hardest. But I will say the fact that sometimes, what I was saying at the beginning, that lack of human interaction, that's a least for me, that's hard. Like talking to a screen without knowing how

the students are doing. It can be hard sometimes. Because I like to teach, I like to see my students growing. I like to interact with them. I like to help them. Yes, of course, at some point, I have to do my job and I have to grade, the pass and fail it's part of the job. Probably not the funniest. But I like to interact with the students and the fact that sometimes that can be impossible through Zoom is hard. And sometimes when I ask you guys. "How are you doing?" Or "Do you have any question?" is because I feel like you might have, but through the screen, it's really hard for me to tell. I would like to understand or to know. When I do this thing is because, I'm pretty sure this is a situation with all the professors it's because we want to help you. It's not like we're trying to push you, or we want to bother you. No, is because we are concerned. I mean, yes, we are your professor, but we're also human beings and we are concerned. I know this was hard for you. So, if we can do anything to help, we will help. But you have to tell us.

**Elisa Aguilera (10:33)**

Thank you so much.

**Dr. Cortina (10:35)**

You're welcome.