

# Teaching through a pandemic

## Members share their experience (2/2)

Hello from Mount Royal University in Calgary!

“ This year was my first here at MRU and what a year to start! One of the most interesting/challenging aspects this year was teaching our 3rd year Human Osteology lab course remotely. I was fortunate to have support from our Faculty of Arts Endeavour Fund to put together a full class set (30 students) of 'Living Room Lab' kits. Each Living Room Lab came in a bright blue duffle bag (MRU colours, of course) - within which, the centerpiece was one full plastic skeleton model. In addition to the model, the kits included calipers, a flexible measuring tape, a laminated graph paper osteometric 'board', and many active learning materials that really helped build some fun and creativity into this online course. We started the term learning about bioarchaeological methods by excavating cookies with 'inclusions' (...chocolate chips). According to a student this was "[t]he most hilarious activity... because I had to explain to my family exactly why I was meticulously destroying a perfectly good cookie with the end of a paperclip". I also designed and printed juvenile schematics on fabric and we colour coded epiphyseal fusion with Crayola Washable Markers to quiz each other on sub-adult age estimation. Playdoh activities were another big hit as we modelled growth centers, as well as ranges of morphological variation to help visualize sex estimation techniques. One of my personal favourites had us taking our own (and family members') dental impressions using Dubble Bubble gum; we used these impressions to learn about dental morphology and explore metrics and sex estimation questions together as a class. I learned a lot while remote teaching this year and was particularly reminded how important it is to have fun in our classrooms (especially during difficult times). Students instagrammed and tweeted about things we were working on and even involved their families; the activities provided them with much-needed breaks from their computer screens and online meetings.



Students commented that it “[f]elt like we were actually applying our skills that we could use in the real world” while also exploring their creative and artistic sides. While there is really no substitute for being in-person in the lab (stay tuned for a pedagogical collaboration on this with Dr. Julia Gamble, University of Manitoba), I believe these remote pivots have challenged us to develop new and improved techniques that will make osteo labs more accessible to all students. I am looking forward to integrating this style of teaching/learning in all my future human osteology courses. Please reach out if you want to know more about the Living Room Labs.

– Rebecca Gilmour, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Mount Royal University