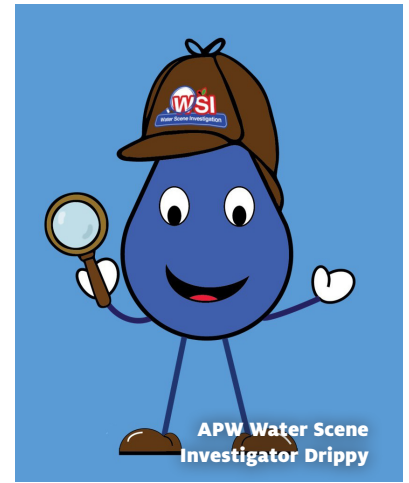


L to R: Sharon B. Megdal and Claire Zucker during the May 6, 2020 Brown Bag webinar



## Reflections: Spring 2020 and COVID-19 – The Work Must Go On

by Sharon B. Megdal

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This has been a spring like no other. Who could have anticipated how our professional and personal lives would be severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic? Like most, in mid-March we at the Water Resources Research Center quickly pivoted to working from home. The WRRRC has been fortunate in that, for the most part, we have been able to keep our programs going by making the switch to remote delivery. We surely have faced challenges. Professor Jean McLain had to close her laboratory. We had to postpone and reformat our annual conference, which had been scheduled for late March. Arizona Project WET Director Kerry Schwartz and her staff had to re-plan its student-focused activities, along with its entire summer program of teacher workshops. Students could not engage in internships and attend classes and laboratories in person. As I think about the work staff and students have engaged in since the mid-March closure of the University of Arizona campus, the phrase “the show must go on” comes to mind, except that I replace the word “show” with “work”. Though according to Wikipedia, the original phrase can be used “to convey the idea that an event or activity must continue even if there are problems or difficulties, with or without regard to actual show business,” nevertheless, I prefer the word “work” because it emphasizes the seriousness of our commitment.

While it has not been easy, WRRRC staff and students have worked hard to make sure there has been little-to-no interruption in our programmatic activities. Because we had been live-streaming all of our Brown Bag seminars and had worked with speakers from multiple remote locations as we delivered our pre-COVID-19, pre-conference briefings, pivoting to fully remote seminars was relatively easy for us. Since the cessation of in-person seminars, WRRRC staff has worked closely with speakers, including yours truly, to make sure they are comfortable and prepared. WRRRC Associate Director Claire Zucker has gone to great lengths to create a warm and conversational setting, as shown in the photo of her moderating questions after a presentation. As Claire has pointed out, we have switched from an in-person seminar, also available for remote viewing, to webinars, which at some future date may have live audiences. Attendance has been robust, and I can speak from the experience of delivering the May 6, 2020 webinar on wicked water problems that I felt very engaged!

Of course, migrating our entire conference to a virtual format has been a much more significant undertaking. Yet, here I am writing this column for inclusion in the conference packets. The virtual conference will be live, that is live from all of our (home) offices. Much thought and planning went into designing the June 18-19, 2020 event so that it would be engaging and not require anyone to sit at a computer all day. We found ways to incorporate polling of attendees’ perspectives, and include speaker Q&A throughout, and add multiple happy hour options on the first afternoon. I invite those who read this column before the conference date to consider registering for it [here](#). We thank our sponsors for remaining with us, thereby enabling very low conference registration rates, and we thank the conference speakers and registrants for their willingness to take this adventure with us!

We are fortunate for the staff dedication that enabled us to move to virtual program delivery. As just one example, Director Kerry Schwartz and Arizona Project WET staff and student workers diligently worked to create a virtual Water Festival to replace their in-person signature event for 4th graders. They developed engaging online curriculum, some of which stars [Drippy](#), who will guide you through installing your aerator. The Arizona Department of Water Resources' feature on Arizona Project WET's curriculum for home-bound students can be accessed [here](#).

I cannot do justice in this short piece to all the projects and activity in which WRRC staff and students have remained fully involved. One of our annual activities is drafting the WRRC Annual Report and Highlights, which contain more details. As we finalize the 2019 documents, I am grateful for the hard work of all WRRC personnel and partners. I could not be prouder of the accomplishments of our dedicated staff, students, and partners, past and present. Please take a look at our reports, which can be found on our [website](#) and which present the ways in which the WRRC strives to achieve its mission to tackle key water policy and management issues, empower informed decision-making, and enrich understanding through engagement, education, and applied research.

As for me, as I reported in my prior two [Reflections](#), my Spring semester sabbatical started off as planned with some invited lectures in Singapore and Israel. But my plans were upended by COVID-19, and I have been busy with a variety of activities since my March 8, 2020 return to Tucson. Some sabbatical lectures have moved to virtual platforms. In addition to reconnecting with staff and Cooperative Extension personnel through regular weekly Zoom meetings and working with several Ph.D. students on their dissertation research, I have participated in some special university projects. One of them focused on maintaining continuity of community-engaged research, education, and outreach during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Though these reflections accentuate the positive, circumstances have been challenging for us all. Working from home in casual clothes with our four-legged assistants has its positives, but it can get old. We yearn for the time when we can again interact regularly and travel to professional meetings, for the challenges of water management are not abating.

In closing, I'd like to note the lyrics from the Queen song, "The Show Must Go On".

*Empty spaces, what are we living for?*

*Abandoned places, I guess we know the score, on and on*

*Does anybody know what we are looking for?*

While the rest of the lyrics are mostly about romance, it mentions learning, turning the corner, and the dawn breaking. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives. That is the bad news. The good news is that, collectively, we have demonstrated that the work will go on. We will turn the corner and there will be light as we emerge from these strange circumstances. We look forward to interacting with you virtually but even more to seeing and working with you again in person!



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