Ten things to know about our COVID-19 world

GPS webinar series explores the global policy implications of the coronavirus

By Wendy Hunter Barker | GPS News

It is not hyperbole to say that the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has impacted nearly every facet of our lived experience as global citizens. From personal and community health, to employment and one’s ability to earn a living, to freedoms including travel and consumerism, we have all been affected.

The lessons we are learning about COVID-19 are coming fast and furious. While we have lived with this virus for less than a year, and the epidemiological knowledge changes by the day, clear trends are already emerging in the social sciences.

The UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) recently produced a nine-part webinar series to explore “The Global Impacts of COVID-19.” The series featured relevant research from the school’s renowned faculty, as they shared key take-aways and established knowledge on how the pandemic has already
Here, we highlight 10 lessons learned from the webinars, which ranged in topics from the global economy, to healthcare, to the environment:

1. **U.S.-China Relations**

“The COVID-19 pandemic has been a test of the U.S.-China relationship — and the relationship has failed this test,” according to Susan Shirk, research professor and chair of the 21st Century China Center. The U.S. and China put aside political differences and had high levels of cooperation during SARS, which helped bring the virus under control relatively quickly when compared to our current pandemic. However, domestic missteps in both China and the U.S., coupled with the fraught diplomatic climate between the two countries has led to mutual suspicion and blame, and has ultimately impacted global health.

2. **How Nations Respond**

“Countries are taking measures that are very different and we need to withhold judgement on what is the right thing to do for a long while,” said Ulrike Schaede, a professor of Japanese business at GPS. Countries are motivated by a variety of factors, each specific to their economy, culture, national identity and capabilities. A singular ‘correct’ course of action in response to COVID-19 outbreaks is unlikely. “There are many ways to get this right, as well as many ways to get it wrong,” GPS professor and director of the Korea-Pacific Program, Stephan Haggard said. Time, and a careful country-by-country analysis, will tell who weathered this pandemic best.
3. **Mexico**

The Mexican death rate from the virus is relatively high. There are many factors that contribute to this, one being the high rates of obesity and diabetes in Mexican adults. These comorbidities can be seen in other countries with unequal health systems, including the U.S., which suffers from pronounced health inequity. In the U.S., the virus is disproportionately affecting Hispanic and Black Americans who have social determinants that lead to increased cases of diabetes, hypertension and more.

4. **The Global Economy**

Governments around the world have spent a copious amount of time and energy ensuring their citizens continue to have income during this pandemic, and yet the global economy continues to suffer. The reason is simple: it is supply, not demand, that is driving the contraction. “The stimulus is getting money into people’s hands, but the stimulus can’t help the supply chains, and it can’t help get goods moving again,” said Renee Bowen, associate professor and director of the Center for Commerce and Diplomacy. Until goods begin flowing again, the global economy won’t recover.

5. **Healthcare and Biomedical Research**

Everyone around the world seems to have their eyes trained on the development of the COVID-19 vaccine, and yet, there is much we could be doing to benefit societal health right now. According to Associate Teaching Professor Gordon McCord, we can, and should, be investing in the public health system. “There is a lot we can be doing to emulate the success of countries in the Asia Pacific region while we are waiting for testing, treatment and vaccines to come online. There’s a lot that we know how to do to invest in international health systems and investing in front line workers,” suggested McCord.

6. **Energy and the Climate**

With local commutes suspended and commercial airlines grounded, people in highly polluted areas are joyous at seeing the blue of the skies and
mountain ridges in the distance. Should we be hoping for a greener future? “This is a very painful way to reduce emissions, and we don’t know that it’s going to have a long-term systemic impact,” Assistant Professor Michael Davidson said. In order to keep their economy moving, China has approved the building of a number of coal plants. And the high-level diplomatic talks that were scheduled this year, with CO2 emissions as a top topic of discussion, have been postponed. When they resume, will climate stay a priority? Or will trade and the revival of the global economy take center stage?

7. Labor

“The workplace post-COVID is not going to look like the workplace pre-COVID ever again,” foretells Josh Graff Zivin, GPS professor and director of the Center on Global Transformation. Changes in floorplans, the viability and desirability of working from home, and how managers train and supervise their staff are all going to change and remain altered for the foreseeable future.

8. Domestic Unrest – America at War with Itself

“American citizens reacted very differently to COVID ... in what they thought the government response should be based on whether politically they were on the left or on the right,” mused Barbara Walter, GPS professor and director of Political Violence @ A Glance, an award-winning online magazine. Where people are situated in the economy has a lot to do with how they are reacting, and this plays out in the protests we are seeing, according to the panelists. In the U.S., mobilization on the right is increasing, while the left is mobilized, but fragmented.

9. Education Systems Respond

“At one point in March, there were 1.5 billion children out of school worldwide. This has never happened before,” said Emiliana Vegas, a senior fellow and co-director of the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. This then begs the question: will this further exacerbate the learning gap between higher socioeconomic and poorer children? We are still waiting, but previous research suggests it will. The question will then become: what can we do to mitigate that effect?
And takeaway #10 from the seminars? It’s an important one. **Your voice is needed.** We are entering an unprecedented time in modern history, and we need informed, committed people guiding the future of our global society. Keep learning, keep inquiring and raise your voice to be heard. For our part, we at GPS hope this webinar series helped you in that endeavor.