

Searching for "The Real" in the Age of Coronavirus

By [TOM FLANIGAN \(/PEOPLE/TOM-FLANIGAN\)](#) • 18 HOURS AGO

Determining what's real and what's not is always hard during an emergency. But things are even tougher during the current coronavirus pandemic because of politics. That was the topic during a Florida State University class on national security transformation that happened online April 15.



The National Security Transformation class took place under the auspices of Dr. Mark Schlakman, senior program director at FSU's Center for the Advancement of Human Rights.

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One of the class speakers was Laurence Hopper. He's quarantined in Bologna, Italy, which was among the earliest nations ravaged by the disease.

"It seems like it's getting better here in Italy. There are fewer cases every day and hopefully we'll be pulling out of it. They're already starting to loosen up some of the restrictions."

But Hopper said that was after the country made happening in America, was allowing those restrictions to vary by location.

"It was very bad in certain areas, but not so bad in other areas. But then the Italian government realized that people travel and they're bringing this thing everywhere."

Another voice from the front lines of the COVID-19 battle was Dr. Chris Grantham. He practices at Saint Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx, New York; the U-S state hit hardest by the disease.

"We're not a hospital with deep pockets. We serve an underserved population; 85% Medicaid and we're not connected with these big institutions that have great endowments, so we're dependant on state and federal money."

It's a situation that leaves Dr. Grantham and the rest of the hospital staff teetering on the brink of exhaustion.

"You know it's hard to get the downtime that you need. Pretty much I rest when I can. You know we're still going full speed here."

Dr. John Fogarty, the dean of the Florida State University College of Medicine, was concerned about how even the international resources fighting the illness have become political footballs.

"We have the CDC, the National Institutes of Health, relationships with WHO, the national stockpile and reserves of things. I think these, because we haven't had something like this that affected the United States, have really gone wanting and we're discovering that goes back through several administrations of both political parties."

In recent days, demonstrations have happened at several state capitals, participants demanding that restrictions be lifted and businesses reopen. Dr. Fogarty had this reaction.

"I think unfortunately that the economy is only going to be able to be open if we can test universally and have a vaccine against this."

Still, a COVID-19 vaccine may be far off. Meanwhile, there are more immediate needs. Tish Stropes is vice president of the Fisher House Foundation. It provides temporary housing for families of hospitalized military personnel, sort of a Ronald McDonald house for service member families.

"We've taken the families and moved them all into hotels. And we're transforming all of our Fisher Houses into locations that will now house our healthcare workers," she remarked.

And all the class participants agreed that's an example of something that totally transcends politics.