

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt extremely frustrated, heartbroken, worrisome, and stressed. I remember taking one online class my second year of college and after that experience, I told myself that I would never want to take another online class ever again. I know that as “youngsters” we’re known for always wanting to be on technology, but I can safely say that although this assumption exists, a lot of us students actually prefer to have in-person classes. Then suddenly, one year later, BAM. All six of my classes are now taught solely online. This shift began right as our spring break had ended. I remember the first few days of this shift from in-person classes to online classes, our physics professor emailed us and warned us that we would need to be a lot more proactive with online classes, as the format naturally intensifies the workload. Automatically, I was worried and stressed of how I would even be able to complete my third year of college. At first, I thought I was doing pretty well and keeping up with all of my workload. During this time, I surely missed seeing everyone in person, but because the workload suddenly hit all of us students and faculty, I allowed the overwhelming amount of school work to distract me from the emotions.

At the commencement of this shift, I was still living in an apartment complex which our university provided for us. I thought to myself, “Okay, so we would have online classes for the next few weeks, I would still be able to work my on-campus jobs and make money, and continue my *somewhat* modified routine.” By the next day, the Governor of Maryland (which is my home state) issued a mandatory stay-at-home order effective at 8 PM on that day. Then, the reality hit me. At this moment, I had to decide whether I wanted to stay on campus, continue my school work and on-campus jobs, or if I wanted to see my parents and assure their safety. I was so on-the-fence about my decision that I had to call my parents, and my two trusted friends just to help me decide what I should do. For the most part, my parents and friends highly advised that I go

back home as we were all uncertain of what's to come. This meant that I only had a few hours to pack up every necessity so I could safely go back home. There was so much running through my mind during this time that I was literally panicking around my apartment complex trying to pack up what I needed. Without knowing how long I would have to stay at home, I really only packed some clothes and all of my school work. A week passes by and suddenly we receive an email from the President of our University: Wednesday, March 18, 2020, I read "We will now be extending the online-only class period through the end of the spring semester, including final exams." My heart sunk as I read this email. At the start of the previous semester, I had just started a Student Leadership Position on campus and felt immensely proud of myself of how much I have grown as a person. In this position, I met and gave tours to prospective students and their families, practiced my social skills, practiced more professionalism skills, spoke in front of large crowds, and was finally getting involved on campus, and now, that was ALL stripped away. I truly enjoyed my Student Leadership Position as a Student Ambassador. Despite how frustrating the job may be sometimes, I was just learning to love every moment of it and now...I don't have that...I can't have that, because no one can physically be on campus anymore.

During my first few semesters of college, I had a very introverted personality, was extremely shy to socialize with new people, and really just stayed in my own little shell. I had so much trouble transitioning to the on-campus college life that I moved back home for two semesters and commuted to-and-from my university. After I started building the confidence to attend extracurricular activities and on-campus events, I began to build more confidence within myself and grow comfortable with the overall campus. It was the beginning of the school year, August 2019, that I had really become more sociable, more independent, and overall, more self-confident. Just in the span of seven months (August 2019-February 2020), I had gained so much

more confidence in myself, learned how to take matters into my own hands, handled various situations in bolder ways that I never imagined I would take, and suddenly March 2020 comes around, and all this confidence and positivity that I made for myself could no longer be utilized because we were all mandated to stay indoors and stay away from big crowds.

Between 2017 and 2019, I faced many social and internal conflicts, but after gaining a spark in myself and building more self-confidence, I finally decided that 2020 would be the year that I do something completely out of my comfort zone, and study abroad. 2020 was going to be *my* year that I would finally travel on my own, learn and experience different cultures for a duration of months, and continue to fulfill my personal dream goal of stepping foot on every continent. In simple terms, the COVID-19 CRUSHED this endeavor of mine. My history class and I were scheduled to travel to France during our spring break to learn more about European history between the years 1914 and 1989, but the COVID-19 CRUSHED this opportunity. I remember, just *the morning* that we were scheduled to leave, our President of the university decided to cancel all spring break trips for the sake of our safety. At the time, I was extremely heartbroken because I had already packed my luggage, had renewed my passport, and was so determined to depart on that same afternoon. I thought to myself, “Okay, this is one cancelled trip – I should still be set for traveling over the summer and fall semesters.” Since October 2019, I have been endlessly working with our university’s Center for Global Education to complete an internship over summer 2020 in Costa Rica. The morning of March 20th, 2020, I received an email from my Study Abroad Advisor stating that all summer abroad trips were suspended. I know what you’re thinking, “suspended” only means that the trip is temporarily ceased; However, as soon as I received a confirmation email eleven days later about the cancellation of this opportunity, then I became even more frustrated and heartbroken because I put so much time

and effort into this opportunity while trying to balance six online classes, and physically and mentally take care of myself. As soon as I read the confirmation email, I wanted to cry. Day in and day out, I put so much time and effort into this internship opportunity and now, I won't even have the chance to intern abroad, expand my global perspective, and gain more self-confidence. Fortunately, the same study abroad program offered a virtual internship opportunity which students can pursue in replacement of a traditional internship. After even more effort and diligence, and contacting my superiors for approval, I have now landed a virtual internship opportunity which I will complete over the summer. Although I won't have the chance to be in Costa Rica for the internship program, I can gladly say that I will be one of a handful of students in the first generation of completing a virtual internship program.

At this moment, I am still anxious to find out what might happen for the fall semester. I just finished all of my spring courses and will be starting my fourth and final year of college this August. In addition to my newly gained self-confidence and independence, I have been working towards a semester abroad in Spain. Thanks to this pandemic, my on-ground time for the fall has been cut short, but I still pray every day that I am able to pursue this endeavor, no matter the duration of the trip. Graduating seniors and alumni of the university have endlessly shared their amazing experiences abroad and I feel like this upcoming fall would be my last chance at a study abroad opportunity. Do I wish that I would've studied abroad sooner? Admittedly, yes. However, I know that God has a plan for everyone, that things will work out for the best, and that I just have to trust the process.

I know that my frustration may come off as "self-centered," but I want others to learn and understand that the skill of being adaptable is so crucial. Not just in the time of a pandemic, but we can learn from this moment in history, how to be versatile and adapt to change. When faced

with challenges, the only thing we can do is face it, embrace it, and go with the flow no matter how damaging it can be to ourselves. As I wait for a decision about the fall semester, I just hope and pray that everything can eventually be “normal” again - whatever “normal” may be. Without a doubt, it has been strange going to grocery stores and seeing everyone wear a face mask and since this *is* the new norm, I just wonder if society can ever return to what we did in previous years. Again, I know that we just have to be patient, be adaptable, and as the common saying has been, to “stay safe” and “social distance” ourselves for the hopes of decreasing the spread of this deadly virus.

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