



Telling Our Stories: Western's Response to COVID-19

Story ID: 30

Story date 12/01/2020

Name Julia Stick

Affiliation Student

Story contribution

It's difficult to explain how college has been during the COVID-19 pandemic. Everything is touched by this virus. I can't join in-person clubs or groups, because my college campus is closed. I can't sit down at a random table in the commons and chat with new people, because tables are restricted to one person. When I walk to my campus from my housing every two weeks to get my COVID test, I pass people, and I don't think they can tell I'm smiling under my mask. It's incredibly lonely living life as a freshman who can't meet people or even see my professors in person. I'm currently living on campus, but I feel like my building is empty, because we aren't allowed to sit in large groups or socialize in the common spaces. I'm currently taking four classes, but I don't really feel like I'm in school. I'm learning things, of course, but it's not exactly what I anticipated when I imagined myself getting a higher education.

If I could summarize my overall emotion when it came to this pandemic, it would be frustrated. I'm frustrated. I'm frustrated that I'm not living the average college experience, I'm frustrated that people aren't wearing their masks, I'm frustrated that this is happening. I'm angry. I feel like I am one of the people in the United States who is doing everything right, yet I'm still having to live an isolated abnormal life because people are not taking COVID seriously. I'm frustrated because people are dying, and nurses don't have the right protection they need to do their jobs. Everything about this pandemic feels so preventable, but it's been almost a year since COVID has entered the country, and we've only gotten worse. I have witnessed close friends and family members laughing at the death rates and restrictions - they ignore the rules and travel, they go to the club every other night, they sure as hell are not doing their part in remaining masked and distanced. Sometimes I truly just want to scream. This pandemic has brought to light a lot of issues that the American government has, and has had for a while. Too little trust in science, lack of funding for hospitals and healthcare, ignorance about what the virus is, far too much weight leaning on the working class, encouraged prejudice against a certain race or class, and a ridiculous lack of empathy for the sick and dying from the Executive branch. It happened in the eighties, and it's happening again. It's like we're failing an open-note test.

When I applied for school halfway across the country, I imagined myself with people -in person. I imagined studying late at night in the library, and hanging out with club members in the grassy commons, and meeting and smiling at people in my building. What I imagined is very different from what I got. No one's expectations meet reality, and I knew that going into school. But I didn't imagine this. When I go down the hall to do laundry, I am rarely met with people -and if I am, their faces are covered, and they tend to look down at their phones (I do too, I know). It's almost like we're all antisocial and nervous to get each other sick, and it's tearing us apart socially. A college campus is supposed to be energized, crazy, loud, social -but mine is not. I can't speak for all of my campus, but I think we are just praying that our efforts pay off and that we can go back to "normal" sometime soon -we're powering through this part.

Though I have cried about COVID, for myself and others, this whole thing has given me a perspective I have never had. I am incredibly grateful that I am able to be here. To be in college, and to be in on-campus housing. I am grateful for the people who wear masks in the United States and reject large



Telling Our Stories: Western's Response to COVID-19

Story ID: 30

social gatherings with friends and families. I am grateful to schools, like mine, who restrict groups and seating, because all they want is this shit to be over with. I am grateful that my family members and friends, as well as I, have remained healthy and (somewhat) sane.

I do think that COVID has made me a better person. I think it's made me more cautious of illness and personal sickness, as well as my role in preventing harm to others. I have gained a significant amount of respect for those in the medical industry, for their endless days of dealing with the sick and not being able to see their families every day. I have also gained respect for those in every day, "average", jobs -fast-food workers, wait-staff, shelf-stockers, teachers, and more. The ones getting the short end of the stick from their government are often the ones giving the most back to their society. If I could go back in time and undo COVID, I would, but I do feel I have grown and matured as a person when it comes to this virus.

It's not been easy, and these next few months will most likely be just as hard, but I remain hopeful things are going to get better. I pray things will be normal and boring once again.

End of contributed text