



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

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When COVID first started spreading in the US and was becoming an issue, I assumed it would be a somewhat more intense version of the flu and that it wasn't really something to worry about. That changed pretty quickly when I got home after finals had all been cancelled and got the email that classes would be online in the spring. After that I quickly had to settle into the "new normal" as everyone was calling it. I was back home with my family, which was disappointing, as I had spent the first two quarters on campus getting used to being without them and being my own person. Having to return to being part of a family again made my brief independent period feel like a phase instead of what I was supposed to be experiencing during college. It is frustrating to be dealing with classes online during this period. Whereas before, while being an introvert, I could have social interactions or make friends with people I would talk to before, during or after class, or people I saw regularly on my daily routine, now there is no time for that in class. Classes online either remove all interactions between students, or it is only present in class discussions or breakout rooms when group work is needed. I haven't found there to be a chance to bond with other students because there's no chance for us to get to know each other outside of what we need to talk about for class - there's no chance to say "Hey, we're heading in the same direction, want to walk with me?", or perform any other small interactions that form a bond and possibly a friendship, such as asking them before class what they thought of the homework assignment. That's how many of my friendships began and although I have joined clubs and attended meetings on zoom calls, it is still harder to make friends one-on-one when you're always in a group. It's sad to have lost that experience now and wonder who I could have become friends with if circumstances had been different.

End of contributed text from Hannah Durland