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Extra Credit Assignment

### A Collection of my Scattered COVID Thoughts

There is something innately indescribable about the energy of a building filled with 650 students. There is constant noise and motion, and while you eventually get to know the people around you, it is easy to go a day without seeing anyone you recognize. Even more unnerving, however, is the same space devoid of people. I experienced an empty North Hedges at the beginning of the year during RA training, but this is different. Doors are still plastered in door decs and fairy lights are visible in the windows. Everything looks lived in, but there is hardly a soul around. It seems like something out of an apocalypse novel.

I can almost pretend that all of the residents are just out for the night and will be back by morning. In fact, that's what got me through the first few days. All of the initial changes seemed small. There weren't many people around, but I could just tell myself that it was Spring Break and people just weren't back yet. A few people disregarded the University's warnings and came back to move out. I told myself that they were just moving to a different dorm. I was able to live in my own world of denial for a few days, but eventually I had to come to terms with things. The other RAs started filtering out and moving home. They all had their reasons to go, and as they left I began to lose my reason to stay. I love my job and I love our residents. I came into this situation with them at the front of my mind. I told myself that I would stay long enough to make sure that they were all okay and making a safe transition. As my closest friends started to leave, I realized that I wasn't doing myself any favors by clinging to a job that was constantly changing.

I no longer have residents to follow up with or events to plan. There are no more casual conversations with the people I have been building a relationship with over the last few months. I don't even get to talk to the RAs on call when they walk by my door. I now spend my time at the desk telling people that they can't come into the building. I make a lot more money, but I no longer have any of the things that inspired me to do this job.

There are parts of post-COVID campus that are actually pretty fun. Rendezvous is open for grab and go, so those of us left sometimes have picnics outside in the sun. You get a little sick of eating the same things every day, but at least there's one constant in life. There's hardly anyone on campus, but the people who you do walk past are friendly and always at least send a smile your way. Honestly, the worst part is that people still walk their dogs on campus and now I can't pet them. No matter how this whole situation ends up, at least I won't be as confused as the dogs who all of a sudden aren't getting any pets from strangers.

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At the end of last week, I packed up my room. Leaving Jefferson and North Hedges for the last time was a lot more challenging than I thought it would be. Deep down, I feel like I have quit and left the others to pick up my slack. I know that this isn't the case, but the voice in my head won't let me ignore it. Home is just as weird as the dorms were. My mom and sister are here but we don't have friends over and everything seems much quieter. We live a block away from an elementary school and I haven't heard a single kid play (mostly because they roped off

the playground). I miss having my own space and freedom to do whatever I want, but I am grateful to be able to be with my family.

As it turns out, studying and keeping on top of classes is hard when you are at home. My family doesn't have anything to do besides spend time together, and their idea of fun family activities does not include writing a 10 page paper. As time has gone on, they have gotten better at giving me space to work, but it is still a struggle. I am used to having my own room where I could close the door and be left entirely alone. I am used to being able to go to a common area in the dorm and work with a friend, or walking to the plant growth center for a quiet change of scenery. I can now either study at the kitchen island or on the couch. Shockingly enough, I'm not very productive in either place.

My sister is a senior in high school. She is bummed about missing out on her last year and her senior soccer season. It is hard to have to watch her work through it, but the support of the community has been immense. Every Friday there is a car parade to recognize all of the seniors and someone paid to have their senior pictures printed on posters and put on the fence around the track. I am grateful that the community has come together for the seniors, but I also feel like everyone else gets forgotten. Yes, they are missing their senior year, but they also live in a place with no active cases where they can still get away with hanging out with their friends every day. Us college kids aren't even necessarily in the same state as any of our friends. I don't want to play the victim, but rather show that we are all victims. Everyone has had to sacrifice things during this pandemic.

I am one of the few to still have a job for this summer. I live in a tourist town where every business is struggling to find a way to have enough income without the support of the thousands of people who come through on their way to Yellowstone. Many places won't be hiring because they cannot afford to pay more employees. Other places, like the rafting company that my friends work at, won't even be able to open until half way through the summer. I will be working with the Forest Service, a position which isn't too greatly effected by the virus. I am having to spend more than I wanted on housing because of policies that have closed down half of the beds in the bunk house I was planning on staying in. Even though I will likely end up spending most of the money I make before the school year even starts, I am incredibly thankful to have a source of income to look forward to.

This situation has made me more aware of the things in my life that I once took for granted. I am lucky enough to be able to go to college out of state. I am lucky enough to have the support of the other RAs. I am lucky enough to have a safe place and loving family to go home to. There are so many others who don't have that opportunity. I hope that this situation triggers a revolution in the way we all see the world. I hope that we become more accommodating and understanding of others. I hope that we work to improve our impact on the environment. I hope that we improve international relations and realize our need for strong, competent political leaders. Do I wish I was still on campus going about my day-to-day life? Absolutely. But I can still be hopeful for the changes that COVID-19 brings to our communities.