

A Day in the Life of a College Student During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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One of the most intriguing things about the COVID-19 pandemic is the fact that the everyday events that have taken place when the pandemic started and continue to take place are things in which will be immortalized forever in things like newspaper covers, textbooks, museums and many more. There is no question that this pandemic has altered the world as we know it. Many aspects of life we didn't pay much attention to are now things in which we could have back. While many of these new challenges we face with the pandemic come from the external world all around us, it's also important to realize how much of an emotional toll this pandemic has played on the lives of everyone. Everyone has had their own unique experiences going through this pandemic and I believe it's incredibly important to understand these experiences and talk about them in order to understand how this pandemic has completely affected our society as we know it. For myself, I've been able to recognize an array of different impacts that have come from this pandemic due to my experiences being a college student during this time. With that being said, it seems appropriate to share some of my experiences during this pandemic. In fact, I was able to see how my life changed around me during this pandemic by simply going through one of my days in college.

I want to go back to a Monday in February of this year (2021). Of course, the typical day started with the loud beeping of my alarm clock at eight in the morning. I rolled out of bed in my dorm and started to get ready for class. This class was one that was in fact in-person, so I made my way to the classroom. I headed to the library for my class and the first thing I noticed was how empty the parking lot was. While eight in the morning on a Monday on campus is not exactly the liveliest time, I was still perplexed at how empty campus looked. This of course was because of the fact that like many professors from all across the United States, many professors at Hampden-Sydney allowed the ability to have virtual classes. Just the sight of the empty lot reminded me of the fact that we are continuing to live in a world in which virtual meetings are things in which are constantly used as a primary means of communication.

I then got out of my car and immediately regretted not wearing a jacket as my every breath was turning into a dense cloud of air from my warm breath. I rushed inside to the library quickly but as I made my way to the wooden front doors, I had this immediate feeling that I had forgotten something. As I made my way through the doors, I was met with many people staring at me. When I looked around at all the different people with all the different types of face coverings, I soon realized what was going on. Like many people have done before, I forgot about my mask. After I understood my mistake, I headed back to my car and was filled with an immense feeling of embarrassment. This feeling of embarrassment is something similar to the common mishaps we experience in everyday life. These are things like feeling embarrassed when you pull a door open when it needs to be pushed or spilling a drink in front of a group of people. What makes the feeling

of forgetting a mask worse is the fact that it is driven down our throats every single day in society to wear a mask and many people have incredibly strong views towards masks. This is not just a feeling of embarrassment because you feel like you made a fool of yourself. Rather, this feeling of forgetting a mask in public is one where people are getting legitimately judged by those around them in front of their very eyes.

We are given so much information daily about COVID and all the things to do and not to do. Out of all the information given, it's apparent that a detail that has been given the most amount of attention is the idea of wearing masks. This has driven people to a point where society has practically been divided over this issue of masks. Masks have become such a huge part of our lives that we have gotten to the point where we all have our certain viewpoints on them. Everyone gets information about masks from all different places, so this hysteria that has come about around the idea of masks has created even more tension and divide within our society. Now that practically everyone in the U.S. has a very strong opinion about masks in some way, society has gotten to a point where a simple mistake of forgetting your mask when you walk inside a building can lead to you getting ridiculed. This ridicule of course comes from the multiple beading eyes that come from those who watch your every step and don't take their negative stare away from you until you realize that you have forgotten to put your mask on. When I walked into the library and forgot my mask on that Monday in February, I too experienced that feeling. While I do understand the importance of why we are wearing the masks and I don't deny that they do help, it is incredibly interesting to see how something as simple as wearing a mask has split our society during this pandemic.

I of course want to switch gears and talk about the rest of that particular Monday in February. After I was finished with classes for the day, I headed back to my dorm and felt my phone vibrating in my pocket. The call came from my mom and she was talking about how my 21st birthday was coming up soon. We got to talking about what I might want and the things I might want to do for it. One thing that came up in the conversation was how we obviously wouldn't be able to have all my family over for a party. I was upset that I wouldn't be able to celebrate with my family, but this was the unfortunate reality. Ever since this country shut down when COVID hit, my family along with all other families were no longer able to have the large family gatherings for things like holidays we were once used to. I can remember the feeling I had when my mom told me the news that our family's Christmas gathering was cancelled. This was a tradition that has gone on for decades, so this harsh reality check with the pandemic prepared me to get over the fact that I wouldn't be able to celebrate my 21st birthday normally like my mom, dad, or sister did. These are the new norms we have to face in this pandemic. Just that simple phone call with my mother was able to make me realize that this life we are living in is one in which we have to overcome adversity every single day. While life is already difficult, the pressures from this pandemic puts everyone in a situation in which you always have to be on your toes.

Since it seems like I've only focused on the negative things that have come from this pandemic, it seems appropriate to continue to go through the rest of that Monday in February and see all the beautiful things that have come from this unique time. As I walk into my dorm, I see my roommates in the living room both sitting on our brown couch. I'm met with them arguing about a basketball

game. Needing something to do, I too decide to get in on the debate. I then end up video calling my friend who goes to another school about the sports debate because his favorite team was involved. Before you know it, everyone from all sides is trying to get their two cents in. Our loud voices are ringing through the room and my phone begins to echo with the voice of my friend because he's yelling too. At this point, my friend who goes to another school is completely engaging with me and two other people he has never spoken to before. I think it was interesting how my first instinct was to call my friend at that particular moment. Before the pandemic, I feel like I would have just kept the conversation in the room. With technology being such a crucial thing during this pandemic, we are at a point where we have such a heavy reliance on technology. Since we are at a point where most of our everyday social interactions are with the use of technology, it's interesting to see how social interactions as a whole are starting to evolve. While COVID has in many ways separated us from the ability to socially interact in person, technology has allowed for interactions to stay alive.

Speaking of technology, I got right on my phone after the sports debate settled down. I was scrolling through social media and saw the usual things. There were the usual birthday posts, sports updates and celebrity gossip. Right before I was going to lay my phone down and start on some homework, I noticed a picture of multiple teachers I knew from high school. They all had their masks on and were proudly holding up an index card. This index card was of course the card in which proved that you had been vaccinated with the first round of the COVID vaccine. To me, I just immediately had the feeling of astonishment because it blew my mind and still blows my mind that science has gotten to a point where we have the ability to come up with things like a vaccine within a few months of a deadly virus hitting our country. Not only was it interesting to see that the vaccine was available, but also because teachers were already able to get it. With me being a few hours away from my hometown, it was still comforting to see that the teachers I had growing up were being looked at as a priority when it came to getting the vaccine. Once again, just the simple use of technology through a picture was able to give me comfort.

If there is one thing someone should get out of this pandemic, it should be that everything that is going on around us is not all bad. It seems as though society has gotten to a point where we have gotten comfortable with always feeling sorry for ourselves and only focusing on the negatives from this pandemic. While there is no question that this country and many people around the world have gone through a lot during this time, I think one of the best things a person can do is to realize the good that has come from this.

