

Through Unprecedented History

By Joshua D. Capell '21

After living through the pandemic for a year, it's hard to remember what life was like before the world got turned on its head. Snapchat memories from spring break, tailgates, even just that casual Tuesday night at the bar appear alien. Little did we know that those would be the last times we would be free to do what we want without senseless, arbitrary rules.

Looking over the COVID news since Moderna first announced a vaccine, something has stuck out to me. When the company reported a 94% efficacy of their vaccine, people were quick to criticize the vaccine because it wasn't higher. What people didn't know was that the flu vaccine has historically had a 40-60% efficacy, yet there has never been outrage over that level. At the time of writing this, more people have received at least 1 vaccine dose than have died (82 million vs 520,000). Now, as Johnson & Johnson prepares to roll out their 1-dose vaccine and an estimated 8.5% of the population fully vaccinated, things appear to be getting better.

While things seem to be getting better, there is also cause for concern. When I first heard about having to wear a mask even after being fully vaccinated, I saw a problem. Requiring people to continue to wear masks, even after being fully vaccinated, disincentivizes people to get vaccinated. Why should I get vaccinated if I still have to wear a mask?

My earliest memory of this virus was one that I didn't realize until months later. About a week before spring break in 2020, my roommate said he could tell he was getting sick. He tried fighting it before it set in so it wouldn't be as bad. The very next day, he struggled to make it out of bed and walk the 3 steps from our room to the bathroom. For 3 days he laid in the same position in his bed. I don't think he was awake for more than a few hours each day, maybe just long enough to use the bathroom if he had enough strength. After those 3 days, he finally had enough strength to make it to the health center. When he came back, he said he took multiple flu tests to see if he had some strain; all came back negative.

It wasn't until weeks later that I realized what he had after scrolling on Twitter reading about people who had COVID. Multiple stories said what I saw my roommate go through; fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat, plus whatever else I couldn't see. I thought about his experience and then why I hadn't experienced the same. At most I had allergy symptoms, but I already have allergies and it was starting to get warm again.

I'm far from a medical professional and it could be just a coincidence that all of these symptoms are COVID symptoms too, but all of this has long made me think that this virus had been on the Hill long before we cut last spring semester short. Most residence hall living conditions on campus pose a far greater threat to student health than this virus.

