**COVID-19**

Sarah Hickey  
Department of English, East Carolina University

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Dr. Cheryl Dudasik-Wiggs

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Since March 2019, over 1,318,359 North Carolina residents filed for unemployment amid the COVID-19 pandemic, but me, an 18-year-old college student has worked from the initial breakout to now. Working during this life-changing pandemic has been hectic, eye-opening, and frustrating.

Hectic is one of the best ways to describe how fast things changed from 0-100 in a matter of days. Working in a restaurant as one of the head to-go personnel, my co-workers and I quickly realized it was up to us to keep this family owned, local restaurant up and running since we were forced to move to to-go only. With 10 of us taking phone calls, putting in online orders, bagging, cashing people out, and running food out to various cars while 10 people in the kitchen handled 100 plus orders every hour, you may realize just how stressful it was in that environment. In the beginning, the majority of costumers were understanding, patient, and thankful that we were out at high risk providing a meal for their family, but as it went on, the number of rude, disrespectful, and impatient costumers began to grow. Trying to cautiously find a way to operate at such high demand with little staff and a deadly virus around us, the number of adults who yelled in my face and threw fits over simple mistakes was simply astonishing.

Now I am certainly not the first person to share their interactions with rude costumers in the restaurant industry, but to see how costumers continued to treat 17 to 19-year-olds who were now labeled essential workers was a huge eye-opener. I truly do not believe anyone will ever be able to fully understand the amount of pressure and stress it was to work in the restaurant industry in the initial lock-down unless you had to experience it first hand. My co-workers and I heard the same complaints every single day: “Where is my food?” “Why have I had to wait an hour for my food?” “How come they got their food before me and they pulled into the parking lot after me?” were just some of the few nicer ones. With this, it opened my eyes and allowed me to fully realize that no matter the circumstances, the majority of people will only ever care about themselves. And this has not changed one bit throughout the entire pandemic, from to-go only to in person dining, the complaints went from frustration to having to wait to, “Do I really need to wear a mask to walk to my table?”

As I went to school and lived on campus, I quickly realized that I was exposed to less people in the dining hall then I was at work. We were then sent home and I realized that I could not work at that restaurant anymore due to the stress it caused. I quickly was able to find a new job at a local gym, expecting it to be an easier, laid back position with members who respected our rules. I quickly learned that it was not the case there either. I’ve seen people yell, roll their eyes, storm out, and cancel their membership all due to us asking them to wear a mask when walking around and to check their temperature as they walk through the door. Frustration is the only emotion I feel when I have to deal with these members. This pandemic has been going on for almost a year and people still want to refuse and deny the severity of it. It hurts to think about the doctors and nurses who have not been able to see their loved ones during this entire thing but continue to go into work to save lives.

While I hope and wish this pandemic will come to an end soon, I can’t help but think where we would be right now if every American complied with the rules and wore a mask. This year was nothing I expected nor wanted, but it has taught me some of the most valuable lessons that I will never forget. I hope one day people will realize how lucky they were as the stay at home workers while the essential workers were treated horribly.