**COVID-19 Essay- Jessica Norment**

 In 2020, COVID-19 became a pandemic in the United States and in many other areas of the world. I remember in my freshman year of college around March 2020, we got the first word about the illness being exposed to the US. I can distinctly recall the moment when I read the article about the illness and when I brought it to the attention of my roommate. I asked her, “what happens if it comes to North Carolina?” and she said the chances of that happening are very limited. I remember how worried I felt about the illness, but I pushed it to the back of my head. Not long after, I flew home to New Jersey for Spring Break. When I got home, my mom warned me that this could be bad and to be careful. Since I am not far from New York, I remember hearing more about COVID and hearing more about people getting infected. When this occurred, I texted my roommate and said, “I don’t know how things are for you down South, but things are getting worse up here.” It wasn’t long before we got the email from ECU that we are getting an extension on our Spring Break, which eventually led to closing the school for the rest of the semester. At first, my friends and I celebrated. No more school? Summertime already? How could anyone complain? However, little did we know how long this would last for. I did not find online classes that challenging during the end of my freshman year, mainly because no one knew what they were doing, so it did not feel serious. Summer seemed to drag on and since I was so far away from my college friends, it took a toll on me.

 I spent my Summer quarantined with my family and boyfriend. We passed time well because we are fortunate enough to have Wi-Fi, Internet, TV, a pool, and other things. It was hard to imagine those who don’t have a lot of these things and I often found myself sympathizing for them. My mom began to work from home and my dad seemed less stressed because of the shortened amount of work he had to do at his job, since not many people were going to the airport at the time. We spent a lot of bonding time together, but when it came time to return to school, I was more than ready. However, our in-person classes lasted shortly before the school pushed us back into distance education (online classes). While I did have my in-person classes, it felt very strange having to wear masks and be socially distanced. I enjoy socializing and making friends in the classroom, so it felt strange to be constricted.

 After we got moved to online classes this year, I found myself adjusting to it. After a little while, I did not find it as challenging and began to enjoy it. I enjoyed having the freedom to lay in bed wearing comfortable pajamas while attending class. I also enjoyed being able to relax and hang out with my friends in my close friend group whenever I wanted. Luckily, I did not have many difficulties transitioning into online classes. I believe that it helped that the teachers were new to this as well because we were all dealing with and adjusting to it together. This pandemic brought no long-term changes to my education; I am still in my same major and I still have maintained great grades. Through the pandemic and quarantine, I even picked up some new hobbies that I’ve never considered before. For example, I got into writing on an app called Wattpad. Right now, I am working on a Harry Styles fanfiction and currently have 100,000 reads! My book is only growing, and I am thankful for the time that I have had in quarantine to pursue this.

 However, a few weeks ago I was diagnosed with COVID. Before, I never took it that seriously because of the things I had been hearing about how young people can’t get as sick. Of course, I followed all the rules and took the guidelines seriously, but I never thought that I would be the one to get it. COVID drained me. I lost my motivation in school and in my book. I could not bring myself to getting out of bed or doing anything. Thankfully, I am mostly recovered aside from the loss of smell, but it really opened my eyes to how awful this illness is. I am grateful that my parents, family, and friends have stayed safe and healthy, but I know some people that have not been so fortunate. My heart goes out to all of those who have lost loved ones due to this illness. I am hoping for better days and a healthy future, and it seems that COVID is finally slowing down. I can only continue to spread the word about vaccines and encourage as many people to go get vaccinated.