**COVID-19**

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ENGL 1100 Foundations of College Writing

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Spring 2021

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2020 was one of the hardest years for everyone including myself. There were many times that I did not think that this time in history was ever going to end. It has lasted so long but thankfully hopefully the end is near for everyone and we can go back to living our lives before the pandemic started. COVID-19 started in Wuhan, China in late 2019. It did not affect our lives in the states until about March 2020. We all believed that it would not reach the United States and that this was something that China and that part of the world was going to have to deal with themselves. Sadly, this was not the case and it quickly spread around the world and the US. With North Carolina being one of the many hotspots in the country we had more restrictions than many of the other states for a long time.

Being in college during the pandemic was a weird way to end my first ever year at ECU. It was going from seeing my fraternity brothers everyday and partying on the weekends to seeing them once over the summer in a different way than we were used to. I was very confused and did not like this big of a change happening in our society. We were kicked out of the dorms after spring break thinking that we were going to come back right after. Halfway through our spring break we received the news from ECU that we would not be returning to ECU and the last month and a half would be from home. This left me in a state of both confusion and somewhat anger. I thought that I had more time to see my friends that I made over the last eight months at school. Then I had to come home and not see any of my friends that I grew up with due to the pandemic happening. Not seeing professors to help me in the classes was also a major change from what I had spent my whole life doing.

We went from seeing our professors every other day to seeing them on the screen or just having that professor send out the lesson plan for the week with it being due on the Saturday or the Sunday of that week. This was not much of a struggle for me because I liked the fact that I could work on my own time and not worry about something happening. I had missed the in-person classes though. Even though taking exams and learning in the class was a big challenge for me I just missed seeing other people and how they were doing in the class, such as simple as sitting next to someone and asking them if they caught what the professor just said was monumental for me. This changed during online classes, however. If I missed something I would have talk to the professor after the class and many people had left because of my social anxiety. Being an only child, the pandemic was especially hard on me, not saying that it was not for everyone, but I did not have a sibling around my age to check up on and talk to everyday.

My family did not change too much due to the pandemic. We were extremely fortunate that neither one of my parents lost their jobs and was able to work from home all the way throughout the pandemic. I was unable to work until about July due to the YMCA unsure of what their plan was for the year. They believed that they had it under control and it was up to me and my fellow staff members to do our part in the pandemic and make sure the kids we were taking care of were safe under the COVID regulations placed in North Carolina. Working in the pandemic was one of the weirdest things that I had ever done. Games were laid out differently under regulations, wearing a mask every day, checking my temperature and the kid’s temperature as soon as they walked into the building. We had to ask the same questions to every kid which went along the lines of “Have you been in close contact with someone with COVID-19” and other questions too.

My COVID experience has not made me want to change schools or stop my education but hearing from some of my friends that they took a year off either for their health or so that they could work did make me reconsider what I did over the last year. I do not regret what happened, but I have taken the life lesson of live your life to the fullest you can every day. This can mean something different for everybody but for me it made me think about how I should start a new hobby or check up on my friends to see how they were coping during this strange time in the world. Another life lesson I learned over the past year was that your mental health comes first. After talking with my friends over video games I realized that everyone has some form of a struggle and it is important to check up on your friends on a certain time basis and make sure they are doing okay. You are not alone, and everyone will get through this tough time together is what I learned during this pandemic.