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The COVID-19 Issue

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MOSAIC

REPORTERS

BLAKE DIAZ
SOPHIE KOHAN
OLIVIA MILLER
CATE PLUNKETT
EMMAGRACE SPERLE
KALLIE TIMMONS
PAULINA TORRES
KARINA WENSJOE

DESIGNERS

STACY CARREON
JESSICA DOUGLAS
BENJAMIN MAKA
DANIELA MARTINEZ
MARIA ISABEL POWERS
MARISSA RAINONE
MEREDITH TAYLOR
KALLIE TIMMONS
PAULINA TORRES
LUCAS WILLIAMSON
LEEN YASSINE

FACULTY ADVISORS

JESSICA BROWN
REX HUPPKE

HEADQUARTERS

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO
51 E. PEARSON ST. | CHICAGO, IL 60611

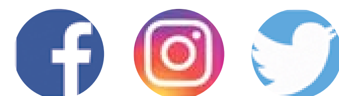
AD DESIGN WINNER

CLARE
BREES-OSWALD

COVER DESIGN

MEREDITH
TAYLOR

Visit us online at MosaicLoyola.com



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STUDENT STAFF

STACY CARREON

BLAKE DIAZ

JESSICA DOUGLAS

SOPHIE KOHAN

BENJAMIN MAKA

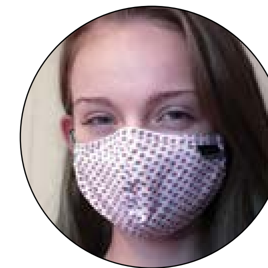
DANIELA MARTINEZ

OLIVIA MILLER

MARIA ISABEL POWERS

CATE PLUNKETT

MARISSA RAINONE


EMMAGRACE SPERLE

MEREDITH TAYLOR

KALLIE TIMMONS

PAULINA TORRES

KARINA WENSJOE

LUCAS WILLIAMSON

LEEN YASSINE

EDITORS' NOTE

Like many other segments of society, higher education was hit hard by COVID-19. Most institutions scrambled halfway through the spring semester of 2020 to adjust to the looming reality that they'd have to shut down their campuses. Faculty and staff took extraordinary measures to finish the academic year virtually, and in a way that allowed students to get the full benefit of course instructions while simultaneously addressing the uncertainty and trauma of a deadly virus experts had yet to fully understand.

That was March.

Fast forward five months and many colleges and universities decided the fall semester would stay online. Then virtual learning continued through the spring of 2021. This transition had varying levels of difficulty across curriculum, and journalism courses proved to be quite challenging. Reporting often requires physical interaction with the community and the pandemic made this a barrier to the process, but the Mosaic staff pushed forward. Coronavirus was a defining part of our lives, so it made sense that students charged with reporting for this edition of Mosaic focused on how COVID-19 affected different facets of society.

From restaurants to theaters, from single moms to therapists, and from online teaching to sports, these student journalists put forth their best efforts to design a magazine around profile, trend and opinion articles on topics that defined more than 12 months in quarantine.

We, the advisors of the Mosaic staff, are proud of the work they produced and hope you enjoy this issue that focuses on the unprecedented time that was Life During COVID-19.

— Jessica Brown
and Rex Huppke

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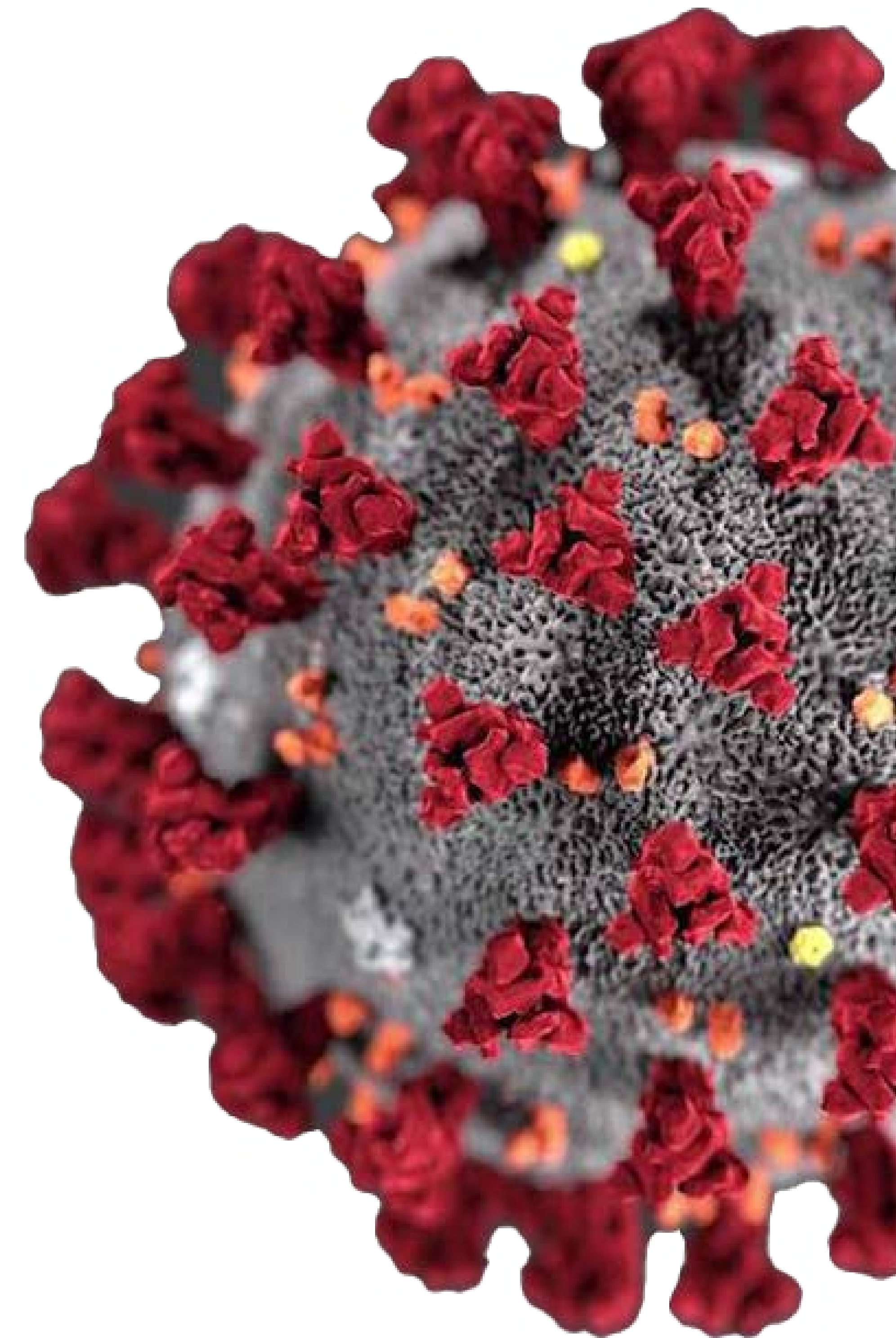


MORE online learning PLEASE

BY BLAKE DIAZ

Online learning was not a priority for many colleges before the pandemic. But now that the coronavirus has forced universities into virtual formats, educators should recognize the value of this format.

It may be arduous for some students to learn in a virtual environment, but for others it provides the opportunity to work while pursuing a degree.

A 2015 Georgetown University report found that 70% of students work while in college and about 40% of undergraduate students work at least 30 hours a week. If colleges offered more online classes, working students would be able to build a schedule more conducive to their success.

Ally Kvidt, a Loyola University Chicago student pursuing a master's degree in criminal justice, a bachelor's degree in film and a minor in the psychology of crime, enjoys taking online classes because she is able to create a schedule that allows her to work 25 hours a week while in school.

"Education is something that is really important to me and I don't want to sacrifice that for anything, but I also need to work in order to maintain any kind of lifestyle," Kvidt said. "I can't really afford not to work."

Kvidt said online classes give her the time to care for herself and take a break from her busy schedule when needed. She feels she gets as much out of online classes as in-person classes.

"I never really, in the past, had time to spend to myself and that made me suffer a lot internally," Kvidt said. "Just having the ability to build my own schedule leaves me so much more room to do things for myself like watching TV, eating dinner or taking a long shower."

Online learning also gives students who are easily distracted or experience social anxiety the chance to focus better.

The New York Times reported May 20 that some students feel less distracted and anxious in virtual environments. Students who normally did not participate in class now engage in online discussions and reach out to their instructors more often.

While online learning works for some students, others have found the transition difficult. Students miss the socialization that comes with in-person classes and others have found they learn better in a classroom.

To benefit students, colleges should offer a more expansive list of high-quality classes for those interested in taking online courses. Students who want the social aspect that comes with college or find they learn better in the classroom could still take classes in-person.

Although many universities offer online classes, a May 25 New York Times article noted that few "offer their most popular and prestigious degrees remotely."

By expanding online degree and class options, universities would be able to expand the number of students they can serve.

An often-cited issue with online learning is how to adapt classes that usually require in-person participation, such as labs or performing arts courses.

An online drama course at New York University has been adapted to include virtual reality technology allowing students to act with one another. The University of Illinois uses online forums to create micro-immersions where its graduate business students can connect with each other and work on live projects at companies, the Times reported.

If universities across the country worked together to develop ways to improve online classes, it could become a viable option for students without sacrificing quality of learning.

University faculty have the opportunity to use this time to learn what works and does not work for online learning. If they adapt these practices into reimagined learning options, students would have increased opportunities to work while in school and feel more comfortable in their learning environment, leading to less stress and increased quality of education.

LEARNING ONLINE

Online courses and degree programs were popular prior to COVID-19. While many students have had difficulty with the virtual environment, it is likely to remain a popular option for future college studetns.

60

The percentage of graduate students who indicated affordability was their top reason for choosing an online program.

46

The percentage of undergraduate students who indicated affordability was their top reason for choosing an online program.

SOURCE: Online Education Statistics

Fresh Meet

First-year students have to work harder to find community and scoal networks

BY PAULINA TORRES

Taking classes and meeting people entirely online? That is not the freshman year Sabrina Krieg had envisioned.

"This has been something I've been thinking about since I was really young, and nothing is going how I've always imagined it," Krieg said from her Edgewater apartment.

In an effort to hold on to what was once normal amid the coronavirus, some Loyola University Chicago students have moved back to the city, reuniting with college friends after months of separation.

But what about those who haven't made any friends yet? The pandemic has changed college life as we know it, with an immense impact on one particular group: Freshmen.

Loyola announced in July that the Fall 2020 semester would be online and on-campus housing would be closed, disappointing the eager class of 2024. An entirely online semester is a roadblock for freshmen excited to meet new people and experience the essential social aspect of college.

And it's not the first time this year's freshmen have felt robbed of a pivotal school year. These students also had their senior year of high school cut short in the spring.

"I was really looking forward to in person classes after losing part of my senior year to COVID," said Sarah Mahaney, 19, a Loyola freshman from Ohio.

It has been tough for the class of 2024, as they ended and started two significant school years online. However, Loyola was prepared to help these students through orientation.

The university organized more than 30 virtual events on their Welcome Week 2020 website for incoming freshmen and their families. Ranging from a Virtual 5K to Sorority & Fraternity Life Welcome Week Trivia, Loyola offered ways for students to engage and feel prepared for the upcoming school year in unusual times. But was this enough?

Krieg, 18, a current freshman originally from Ohio, participated in the online events.

"To be honest, it sucked," Krieg said. "The webinars over the summer weren't very helpful and I felt super disconnected from my OL (Orientation Leader) and peers."

The transition to college was initially rocky for Krieg.

"I've definitely felt like there has been a lack of communication between the school and students throughout this summer, though it's definitely improved now that school has started," she said.

Mahaney's orientation experience was similar.

"I think it was really hard for online orientation to be as effective as it usually is," Mahaney said. "Because of this, I was very confused starting with the fall semester."

Along with adjusting to online classes, freshmen had to figure out how to connect with new classmates.

Both Krieg and Mahaney moved to Chicago, opening the door to meeting other students in the area.

Krieg characterizes her move to Chicago as an advantage: "I moved to Edgewater right before the semester started and I live with three other Loyola students, so we know some people in the area."

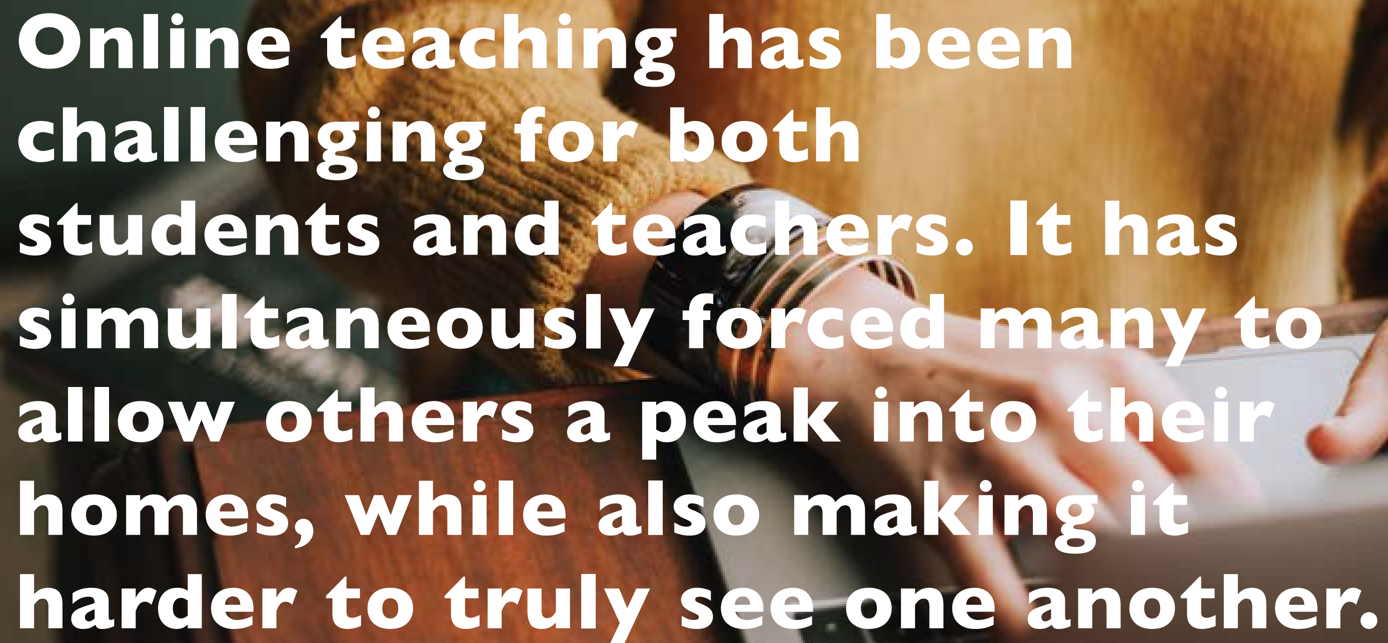
Krieg says there are several group chats for Loyola students to connect, but the main struggle is "finding people that you actually click with and can be close friends with."

Mahaney had a similar experience.

"I was able to find a community of students here in Edgewater that have helped me adjust to college and living independently," Mahaney said. "I found GroupMe and Facebook groups to be the most helpful when trying to find friends."

Adjusting to this new life can be hard, but freshmen should know they are far from alone.

As Mahaney said, "There are tons of amazing Loyola students who are in the same boat as I am."



Online teaching has been challenging for both students and teachers. It has simultaneously forced many to allow others a peak into their homes, while also making it harder to truly see one another.

Who's Zooming who?

BY SOPHIA KOHAN

Students' classrooms look different now that classes are virtual. Rather than chalkboards and rows of desks, there are beds and dressers. Students sit in the comfort of their homes having staring contests with computer cameras.

Karla Juarez, a senior at Loyola University Chicago, has been on both sides of that staring contest. She is a special education major who is taking classes virtually while also learning to teach virtually. She student-teaches at a Chicago Public Schools elementary school in a kindergarten-through-first-grade special education classroom.

Juarez says student cameras are off most of the time in her Loyola classes. She sympathizes with teachers everywhere because she knows exactly what that feels like from a teacher's perspective.

When Juarez's students are either muted or have their cameras off, it can feel like she's talking to herself. It becomes nerve-racking.

"It feels really awkward and you kind of feel exposed too because it literally feels like you're on a stage and there's an audience, but you're not receiving any type of feedback," Juarez said. "So, are you doing okay? Is this going good? You have no idea."

A number of students in Juarez's class are non-verbal, meaning they communicate through short utterances or gestures. Some of the non-verbal students use communication boards.

Since students might not have parents at home to help them communicate, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand what they want to say. Those who don't know how to answer or use a communication board prefer using gestures, but figuring out what students are gesturing to through a screen can become a guessing game.

"If they're pointing to something on the screen, I have no idea what they're pointing to," Juarez said. "They could be pointing to an incorrect answer."

Juarez believes Loyola professors are missing teaching in person as much as she does.

"Teaching a lesson in person allows you to receive physical feedback whether that's laughter, smiles, or nods or even shuffling around," Juarez said. "If your students are messing around with their backpacks or playing with their pens, you know they're possibly bored and you should change what you're doing in your lesson or with your lecture."

Juarez remembers a teacher who helped her when she was in fourth grade. Juarez would stroll into her classroom before or after school to chat about problems at home or other things stressing her out.

"Being in person allows educators like myself to provide that level of support that they might not necessarily be receiving at home and being virtual we can't really do that," Juarez said. "Students can't walk into a classroom, a place they might feel safer at than their own home in this type of online environment."

Juarez worries some of the students' safe havens have been taken away.

CPS recently announced plans to reopen schools and cluster classrooms for in-person learning in early November, but Juarez is not sure if that will include her.

> *Although I do not love the virtual setting I appreciate the skills it has given me that I can use for the rest of my life."*
>
> — Brianna Reinhard, student teacher

Other Loyola student-teachers are having experiences similar to Juarez's.

Brianna Reinhard has always wanted to be a teacher. She now student-teaches at Joyce Kilmer Elementary in a sixth-grade inclusion class.

"I have a passion for equity and I see education as the road to achieve that," Reinhard said.

Her semester has gone well, despite technical issues. Some of her students are connected to CPS's free WiFi service, and it's neither fast nor efficient. Students' audio and video connections often lag. Time is wasted waiting for computers to load documents.

Despite the challenges of virtual teaching, Reinhard hasn't questioned her future career.

"It has definitely reassured me about the importance of teaching and why education is so critical to solving the injustices of the world," Reinhard said. "Although I do not love the virtual setting I appreciate the skills it has given me that I can use for the rest of my life"

The pandemic won't last forever, but Reinhard believes the incorporation of various online learning platforms will continue and teachers will be more reliant on technology in the future.

Ava Koziol, another special education major at Loyola, is helping teach virtual chemistry and history classes to high schoolers. She has found a deeper appreciation for her Loyola professors this semester.

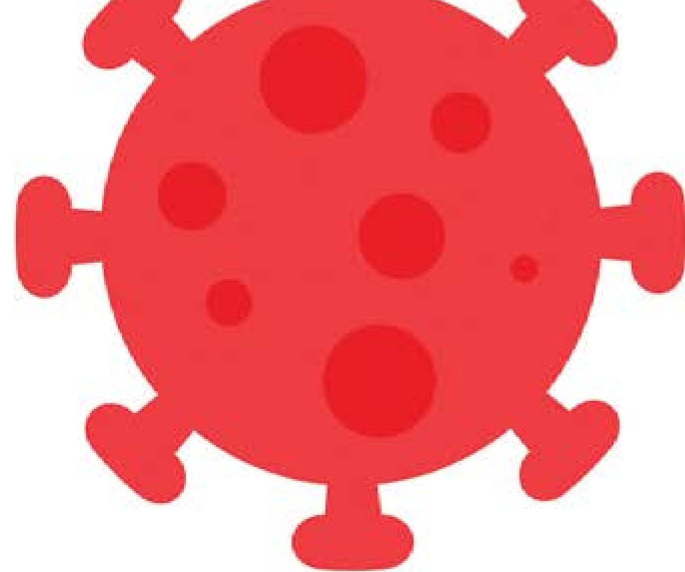
"I know how hard it is to keep people motivated to sit online for eight hours a day," Koziol said.

One big motivation for Koziol is knowing she will be teaching by herself in a year. She advises both students and teachers to be respectful of each other because this is a time of adjustment for everyone.

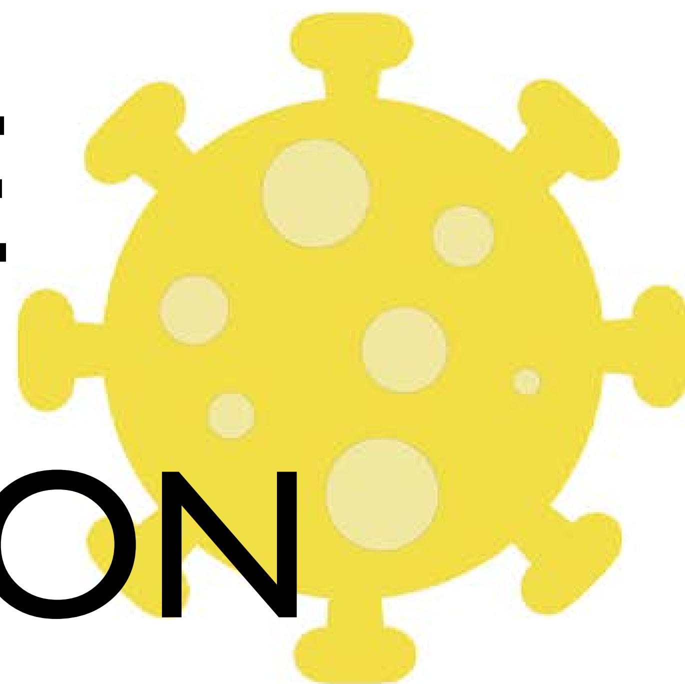
Kelly Case, a Loyola senior, wanted to become a special education teacher after working at a summer camp and witnessing people with disabilities accomplish things that they were told they never would.

Case teaches seventh- and eighth-grade math and science live online twice a week while living with four roommates who also rely on the same WiFi to attend classes all day.

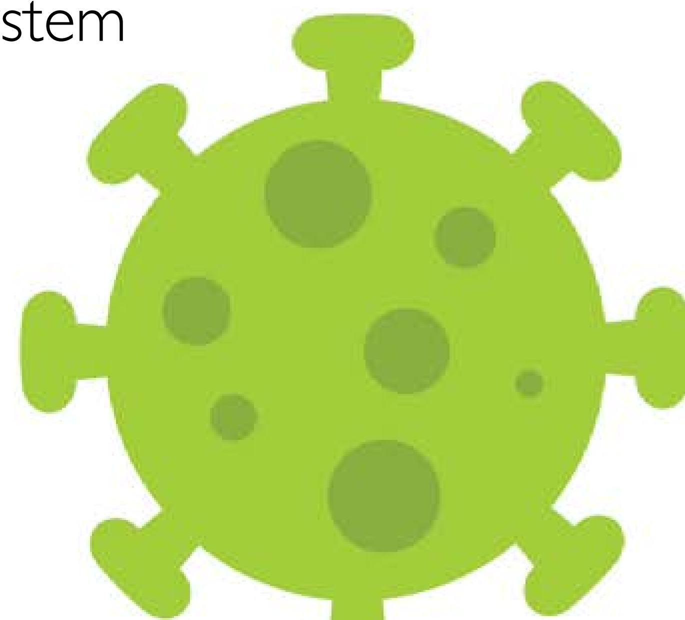
The learning curve of virtual teaching can be challenging, but Case values the experience: "If something like this were to happen again, I want to be prepared and give students the most equitable education."



ONLINE HYBRID IN-PERSON



In Mexico, how collegiate course are delivered is based on the traffic-light system



BY KARINA WENSJOE

While many complain about the sudden changes in education in America, where the coronavirus has forced most schools and universities to switch to online learning, people like Paulina Aragon have the gift of perspective.

The 21-year-old Loyola University Chicago senior lived in Mexico City for four years before coming to the United States, and her close ties to Latin America have given her a window into the educational struggles other countries are facing as the world confronts COVID-19.

"The Government itself [in Mexico] has set up pretty similar restrictions and regulations like the United States," Aragon said. "But people don't follow them or they aren't enforced."

She said many Latin American communities lack the technology and infrastructure to effectively educate students online. While she hasn't experienced the pandemic in Mexico, information from family and friends living in the country keeps her up to speed.

"I spoke with a couple of my college friends in Mexico who said that the government has set up a hybrid system at universities," Aragon said. "The three-tier system works like a traffic light for each state—green, yellow, and red zones. Green means you attend college in person, yellow is a hybrid of both and red is all online."

Aragon worries about the way Latin American countries are facing academic challenges. All zones in Mexico are currently red, except for two. The main issue involves technological requirements. Aragon isn't concerned about her university friends, but she does worry about low-income students struggling to afford digital material for school.

"This doesn't only apply to university students but also to younger students in low-income areas because they don't have methods of telecommunication to do school work," Aragon said. "Many schools have resorted to broadcasting classes on television but even that has proven to be difficult. These kids won't go in person and they don't have the ability to do so online."

Professor Hector García Chávez, director of the Latin American and Latinx Studies Program at Loyola University Chicago and a native of Mexico, said the three-tier system functions under federal coronavirus numbers, which determines each zone's academic approach. If we were to compare COVID-19 cases in New York City to Mexico's rural areas, both locations would've been marked deep red at the start of the pandemic. Now, Mexico is doing better than it was before.

The National Autonomous University of Mexico, or UNAM, is the largest public university in Latin America, with about 150,000 students. The institution has taken precautions for returning students. Essential workers enter first to sanitize the campus. Then, age by age, students are notified when they can step foot on campus. UNAM's method varies greatly from Loyola's approach.

"I can't even go visit my office," Chávez said. "My staff ID was locked, which stopped me from getting into the Water Tower building."

UNAM is proceeding slowly, being as innovative as possible. But even with the precautions being taken, enrollment in universities across the country is expected to drop by as much as 25% by the end of the year, according to a Sept. 4 report in the New York Times.

With youth unemployment spiking, students are grappling to pay tuition fees. The chances of securing a college degree is low. Even with curriculums adapting to virtual teaching, many students don't have access to the internet or a cellular provider to attend their course.

This current health crisis has also raised questions about teaching reliability in the next generation from the lack of college students pursuing a degree.

"There is definitely a larger conversation on how to educate and how education will change," Chávez said. "And who has access to the technology needed to finish a degree."

homework

With no separation of our professional & private lives, we must get offline and back in-person

BY CATE PLUNKETT

It used to take Daniel Reedy 30 minutes to get dressed, eat breakfast and walk to his morning class. Now, in under 10 minutes, he rolls out of bed, grabs his favorite cereal and walks three steps to his desk.

"I think the hardest part of online classes is that your home becomes your work," said Reedy, a Loyola University Chicago sophomore. "It is hard to separate work life and home life when you are doing both in the same place."

The Chronicle of Higher Education found nearly 43% of university classes are either primarily or solely online, which creates greater obstacles to learning. Students in online classes are more likely to skip lectures, engage in cheating, not participate and wind up with low grades.

According to research conducted by the study guide platform known as OneClass, out of the 1,287 U.S. students surveyed from 45 colleges, including Loyola, 75% said they were disappointed with their online learning experiences.

How can a chemistry student create a comprehensive lab report without physically mixing chemicals to see the result? How can an art major create outstanding pieces without the required equipment? With no hands-on experiences, it's more challenging to grasp the information.

Online classes are pointless if students miss assignments and disengage. It's easy for students to slack off because they can turn off their camera and microphone at any time and essentially become a black box.

The connections between teachers and students are more difficult to create, which makes it easier for students to slip away and find themselves failing a class. A 2017 study by the Brookings Institution found taking a course online reduces grades by 0.44 points, which adds even more stress to students' lives.

Schools used to be a place for social interaction where kids could connect with each other and their teachers. Online classes strip students of everyday conversations, often increasing social anxiety.

As a sophomore with all my classes online, I am struggling to comprehend concepts through a screen. I miss the structure and obligation to participate. Last year, I never would have taken my phone out during a class. Now, it's almost impossible for me not to.

Being inside all day, doing the same thing and interacting with the same few people is getting hard. I used to pride myself on my proactiveness with homework. Now, with online classes, I'm tempted to watch another episode of "The Office" instead of finishing what needs to get done.

Some believe online classes are easier because a majority of tests and quizzes are open book. But when students rely on notes, less time is spent studying and it can be harder to retain the information.

Others argue classes are easier online because you can cheat. Companies that sell homework answers, like Chegg, have benefited from the shift to online school. The Washington Post revealed Chegg "reported $153 million in revenue for their second quarter, when the pandemic shutdowns were at their peak – a 63 percent year-over-year increase."

Cheating and disengaging from online learning deters our success, and unless we start shifting to in-person classes, this feeling of school being useless could spread and carry over for the next few years.

College is the time when students are supposed to break boundaries and think outside the box. It's a place for self-discovery, confidence building and establishing important relationships. But with distance learning, how can we do those things if we are forced to spend time alone in our bedroom at a one-person desk, facing a blank wall?

I don't want to look back on these four years of college and think only of Zoom. I want to remember the relationships I created with classmates, the projects we completed together and the teachers that were with us every step of the way.

Each day that we are stuck in our rooms, we are missing out on opportunities, experiences and personal growth that in-person classes provide. We need to find a way to get back into the classroom as soon as possible so these key parts of college become reality again.

BY THE NUMBERS

75

The percentage of college student who said they were disappointed with their online learning experiences, according to a OneClass survey.

43

The percentage of university classes that are primarily or solely online, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Beard & Belly

PHOTOS BY CATE PLUNKETT

Top: The colorful, outdoor patio of Beard & Belly on a Saturday afternoon in early November. Bottom: : A hot and fresh cheeseburger with a side of salty fries complete the outing at Beard & Belly.

Edgewater restaurant works to survive pandemic

BY CATE PLUNKETT

Under the subtle yellow glow of outdoor string lights are a few tables and chairs surrounded by a colorful arrangement of flowers. Neon green duct tape marks off 6-feet between each table. Employees with smiles covered by masks bring out warm pretzel appetizers, hamburgers and fries, then homemade pie for dessert. The dine-in experience at Beard & Belly is becoming normal again.

"We've just been trying to make it as comforting and homey as possible and put a bunch of flowers out there to make it really welcoming," said Andrew Barbera, owner of Beard & Belly.

In March, just days before cutting the ribbon on the two-level, brick-walled bar and grill, Barbera was meeting with his employees and preparing for their grand opening. But the excitement that usually comes with opening a restaurant was missing.

The coronavirus had begun hitting major cities like Chicago and the looming pandemic seemed to be the only thing on everyone's minds.

A few days later, Beard & Belly became one of the thousands of restaurants forced to close and reconsider how to succeed in unprecedented times.

Chicago began its shelter in place and lockdown order on March 20 and required all dine-in restaurants to shift strictly to take-out. Barbera sent his employees home until they knew more, and his parents and wife became his first official employees.

"It was pretty crushing, to be honest," said Jim Torres, Barbera's partner. "To get to the finish line and be told by the government for the first time in history that no one can go to a restaurant for the foreseeable future."

Beard & Belly adapted to the Chicago-ordered restrictions and began serving take-out two weeks into the lockdown. Barbera was frustrated that his food was going to be eaten out of a cardboard box nearly 30 minutes after it was prepared: "It was tough knowing that a lot of people were going to be eating our food for the very first time in a less than ideal scenario."

However, Barbera was met with support he did not expect. The first three days following the opening, Beard & Belly sold out of food.

They began seeing an overflow of social media posts. Pictures were posted of their food plated at different people's homes, capturing their burgers on potato buns with butterkäse melted over the patty, thin-cut fries that were fried twice and their signature "awesome sauce." It was special for Barbera and his team to see these posts because "seeing those pictures it was like you had entered someone's home, you are a part of their night, and a part of their dinner routine of the evening."

Social media provided Beard & Belly with the personal connection between their staff and customers they had missed out on.

"Watching that it was making people's days better, watching it was making their quarantine routine better because they had something to look forward to each week, was an unexpectable and cool outcome," Barbera said.

By early fall, with their patio open for dine-in, Beard & Belly could finally serve their customers fresh, hot meals in a more personal setting.

On Saturday nights in September, locals rolled in for dinner and servers could be seen bustling around, making sure everyone was happy. Loyola University of Chicago students and their parents enjoyed celebratory meals and friends reconnected over cocktails.

But to oblige by the restrictions set by Chicago's Phase 4 pandemic plan, Beard & Belly could only fill their restaurant to 25% occupancy per room.

"We were expecting to do 75% more business than we are doing and we're not paying 25% of the bills," Barbera said. "So that math only works for so long where you are pulling in 25% of the money you expect to pull in, but you are still paying 80-100% of your bills."

Each day, more restaurants close due to lack of business from the coronavirus. According to ABC News, nearly 16,000 restaurants nationwide have closed permanently during the pandemic.

Barbera considers himself lucky to have a business at a time like this because he has the chance to make people happy. To him, it's an experience of sharing a meal with your loved ones. It's a feeling of being looked after following a busy day of work. It's a celebration of good food and a hunger satisfied.

He put it this way: "It's not just a burger."

SOUND OFF

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BAND OF WOLVES

COVID-19 put Loyola's pep band on pause

BY OLIVIA MILLER

Feet rumbling. Fans chanting. Music blasting. That's the sound of college basketball.

But with the COVID-19 pandemic, things will be different — quieter.

With the coronavirus seeping into every nook and cranny of life, college basketball won't be the same. At Loyola University Chicago, that means no band.

Loyola's pep band — the Band of Wolves — was defunded by the athletic department in early October due to the pandemic's budget cuts. The dance and cheerleading teams also took a hit.

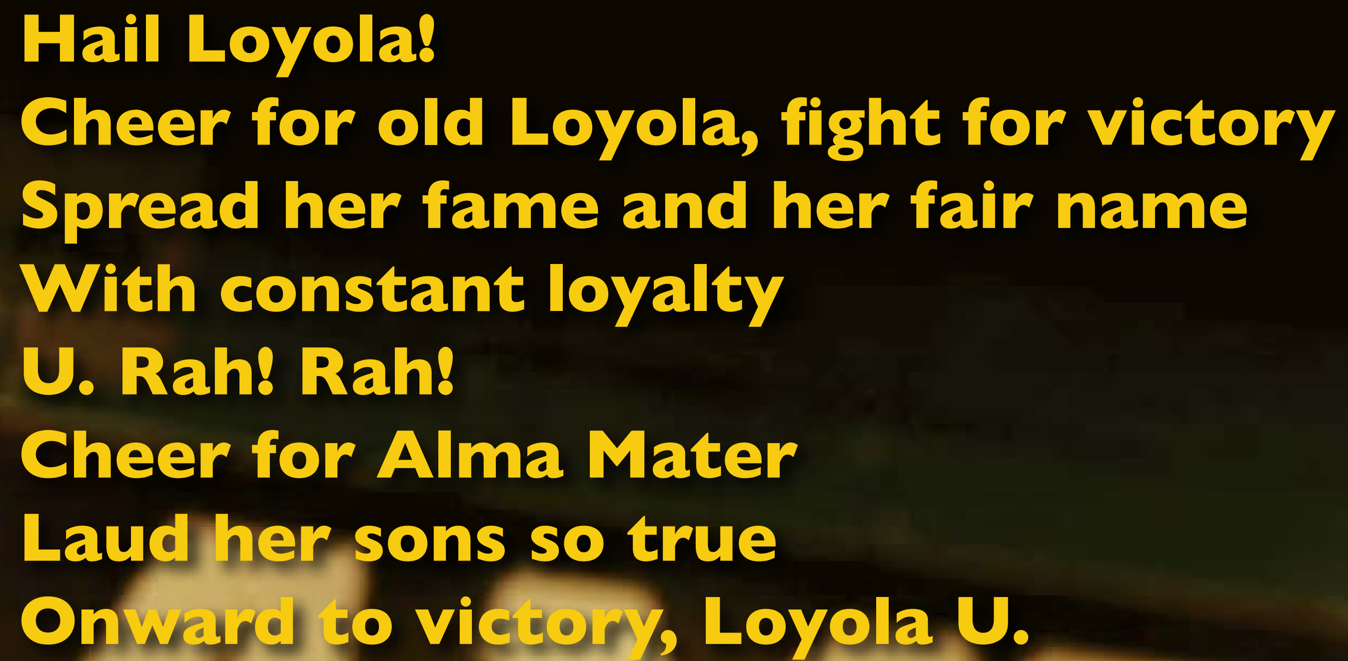
The decision is temporary, according to William Behrns, the assistant athletics director for communications.

"We understand how important they are to the game day atmosphere," Behrns said. "We'll get them back out on the floor as soon as possible."

University bands across the nation have dealt with similar obstacles due to the coronavirus.

The College Band Directors National Association announced on May 21 that they're studying how aerosols spread from musical instruments. This study will assist in adapting safety protocols, such as how far apart musicians should be while they perform, USA Today reported.

Story continues on pg. 21



Continued from pg. 19

In early March, Loyola's band was in St. Louis for a men's tournament and expected to attend a women's tournament the following week. But the trip was cancelled because the rest of the semester's classes moved online, according to Emily Blanchard, the band's vice president.

"We had to quit a lot of what we love about pep band," Blanchard said. "A lot of what we do is being together in person."

Patrick Rocks, the band's director, said its 60 members had a healthy attitude about Loyola's decision for online classes.

"We were obviously disappointed, but we think it was a good call," Rocks said.

This season, the band will create videos where individuals record themselves playing their part, and then edit them together for a group performance. The plan is to do four or five songs throughout the semester.

"My biggest goal is we communicate strongly with our members, so we can make music when it's safe," Rocks said. "I can tell you when we get the green light, we'll be back at it."

The band typically gains between 20 to 30 new members each year. This season they gained 10.

Blanchard said she hopes more social media interaction will keep current members participating while engaging new members.

"I'm excited about it, but it's not going to be the same," she said. "It just seems like we're on hold."

The band's season is September through March, and April is spent preparing for the next season. They rehearse once a week for about two hours from the middle of September until the end of October, meeting a couple times in February to prepare for March Madness.

During the game, the band can play anything from "The Hey Song" to "Bad Romance." It's traditional to play "The Fight Song" when the team enters and exits and Loyola's alma mater when the game concludes.

Samantha Jones, the band's president, said she has played the trumpet since her freshman year.

"I love the community feeling of being in the band," Jones said. "We strive to make the basketball games more fun for everyone."

\Behrns said the basketball team appreciates the band. For the last three seasons, the team has a 25-2 winning record in Loyola's Gentile Arena, which Behrns credits in part to the band.

"They're the leader of the student body," he said. "They provide a lot of energy."

The basketball season is scheduled to start Nov. 25, without feet rumbling, fans chanting and music blasting.

"What's cool about sports is you walk into the arena and feed off the crowd," Behrns said. "Now our coaches have to manufacture that energy themselves."

Curtain Call

Theaters across the country put shows on hold

PHOTO BY RICHIE DIESTERHEFT VIA CREATIVE COMMONS

The Goodman Theater in Chicago (above) and The Fulton Theater in Lancaster, Pennsylvania had to shut down duirng the pandemic, like many theaters across the country.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FULTON THEATER

BY OLIVIA MILLER

At Chicago's Goodman Theatre, when one door closes, another one opens. That has been the approach at the city's oldest still-operating theater since the COVID-19 pandemic upended the entertainment industry.

After closing in March, The Goodman decided to take its show on the road. In the fall, "Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It!" — a one woman, one musician show — was performed in nine Chicago parks.

Theaters across the country were forced to brainstorm ways to adapt during the pandemic. Many theaters went digital because of the lack of outdoor space and the dangers of being in that space.

Since the pandemic began, The Fulton Theatre in Lancaster, Pa., hosted three cabarets, a telethon performance and a number of online classes, according to Eric Pugh, the theater's marketing director.

Lancaster is one of the oldest towns in the U.S., about 60 miles west of Philadelphia, and The Fulton is the oldest still-operating theater in the country. This is the first time The Fulton has closed in its 167-year history.

At the start of the new year, The Fulton was unstoppable - show budgets were increasing, ticket sales were increasing and they were halfway through a $30 million renovation project, according to Pugh.

"The Fulton is the community's pride and joy," he said. "We, as employees, have a sense of pride, but we also have an obligation to the community."

But two weeks into its production of "Kinky Boots," people started asking for ticket refunds. There was an all-staff meeting, and the next day was the last performance.

"Everyone had tears in their eyes," Pugh said. "It was a scary moment that I'll never forget."

In early May, The Fulton decided to close for the rest of the season.

The Fulton employs around 120 actors throughout the year with most being from New York City, only a train ride away.

"The entertainment industry is the last to go back," Pugh said. "For me, I live, sleep and eat theater, so having it gone is detrimental."

As for the renovation project, the construction stopped when the building shut down for six weeks. Since then, Pugh said, they've made up time with an empty building, and the hope is it'll be finished in January.

Pugh said audiences should expect to see more intimate shows.

"That's the great thing about art," he said. "We celebrate individualism, and we're able to adapt."

When theaters reopen, audiences will likely decrease compared to previous years. While 30% plan to attend theaters more often, 37% think they'll attend less, according to Shugoll Research's "Coronavirus Theater Survey."

Regardless, the majority of audiences won't return immediately. When theaters reopen, about 63% said they'll wait less than six months, 29% said they'll wait six months or more and 18% said they'll attend right away, Shugoll Research reported.

The majority of ticket buyers are people ages 55 or older, which is the same demographic most impacted by the pandemic.

The Goodman's show wis the first to be approved by the city during the pandemic, according to Marissa Ford, the associate managing director at The Goodman Theatre.

"We've been evolving," Ford said. "The pandemic has given us the chance to really show that."

Ford said it was important for The Goodman to do the show because of its subject matter: voting.

"We were excited to see families come and see the message of the show," Ford said. "We didn't want to miss this opportunity."

When the pandemic spread to Chicago, The Goodman had completed its preview week of "School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play" when they decided to shut down the building.

"It was very hard for all of us to come to the realization that we needed to close our theater," Ford said. "But we had to put the safety of our staff, crew and actors first."

Even though theater is different now, Ford believes good things come with change.

"The show in the park is a new experience for everyone," she said. "It was a proud moment for all of us."

In the weeks before they closed, The Goodman put hand sanitizing stations around the building, and they're prepared to make changes again when theaters start to reopen.

"Now," Ford said, "The main question now is, 'what do we have to do to make it happen?'"

STAGE RELIEF

In December of 2020 Congress approved a $15 billion grant to the arts and entertainment industry to help recover from loss of revenue during COVID-19 shutdowns. The package covers theaters, music clubs and non-profit museums.

97,000

The number of people who work on Broadway alone, and were affected by closed theater productions.

Click here to read more about the aid package.

OPINION

Hope Through Masterpieces

A deep dive into art offered an escape from COVID-19

BY CATE PLUNKETT

Georges Seurat's painting "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte" depicts a scene that seems unattainable in today's world. People are seated close together at a park enjoying the weekend on the banks of the Seine River. Not one mask in sight and everyone appears unbothered by the close physical distance between themselves and strangers.

Despite the differences between Seurat's Sunday and Sundays now, art can transport people to a different time and place, a place where we can share the same air and won't have to think twice about how close we are to others.

Seurat's roughly 7-foot by 10-foot canvas makes his scene realistic and draws people of all backgrounds to the Art Institute of Chicago museum. Being one of the most respected art museums in the world, it's a destination for 1.5 million visitors each year.

Open for 141 years, the Institute has only had to close seven times. The coronavirus shutdown caused the museum to close its doors for nearly four months, marking the longest closure in its history. So you can imagine the excitement that surrounded its long-awaited reopening.

Following Chicago's coronavirus guidelines, visitors are required to purchase tickets in advance, wear masks at all times, virtually wait in line to see exhibits and follow arrows throughout each exhibit room.

Last Sunday, I spent my day at the Art Institute. When I went last year, crowds kept me from getting close to the exhibits. But with the new regulations, it felt as though I had the museum to myself.

Sure, there were people here and there, but never before had I been able to get so close to "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte." I saw things I had never noticed before, like a monkey in the bottom corner and a rowing team on the river. I could almost hear the sounds of children playing and water washing ashore. I was transported to a time of peacefulness and all thoughts of the coronavirus disappeared.

Henry Woodward at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art appreciates the "wonder, contemplation and hopefully joy in other people's reactions to art."

Woodward is happy museums have started reopening as he believes a day spent viewing art can better our mental health.

"Museums offer space to be curious, escape, and to see something beautiful, interesting, or new," he said. "This is especially important during these times, as so many stresses, pressures, and changes are affecting each and every one of us." When we look at Ancient Roman Sculptures or 20th century American Art, we see what life was like before the virus, and we are given hope that things will be resolved.

The Institute has managed to bring Paris to Chicago with the Monet Exhibition. When entering the exhibit, words that were written by the Chicago Daily Tribune in 1888 — "Why go to Paris since Paris has come to Chicago" — are on the wall. Walking through these rooms, you are transported to France as you move through the different eras of Monet's artwork.

My friend, Arden Luers, visited the Institute with me and left feeling grateful.

"During the isolation of this pandemic, I have been trying to connect more with the natural world around me, and Monet's work inspired this feeling even more," she said. "Just seeing the beauty of the world through his eyes was very moving."

Archibald Motley's "Nightlife" is one of my favorite pieces at the Institute. Viewing it made me yearn for a time when dancing and enjoying dinner with friends will be safe again.

"Art in general, and museums specifically because they are meant to be public resources, help us to see what we have in common with people across time and culture," Woodward said.

Through art, we can see life from another's perspective. The art throughout the museum was a sign of hope for me that better days are coming.

Some of the greatest art was created during horrible times. We can use this as a lesson and understand that even though we are living through undesirable difficulties, we will persevere. We will be able to enjoy a Sunday in a park again, with not a worry in the world.

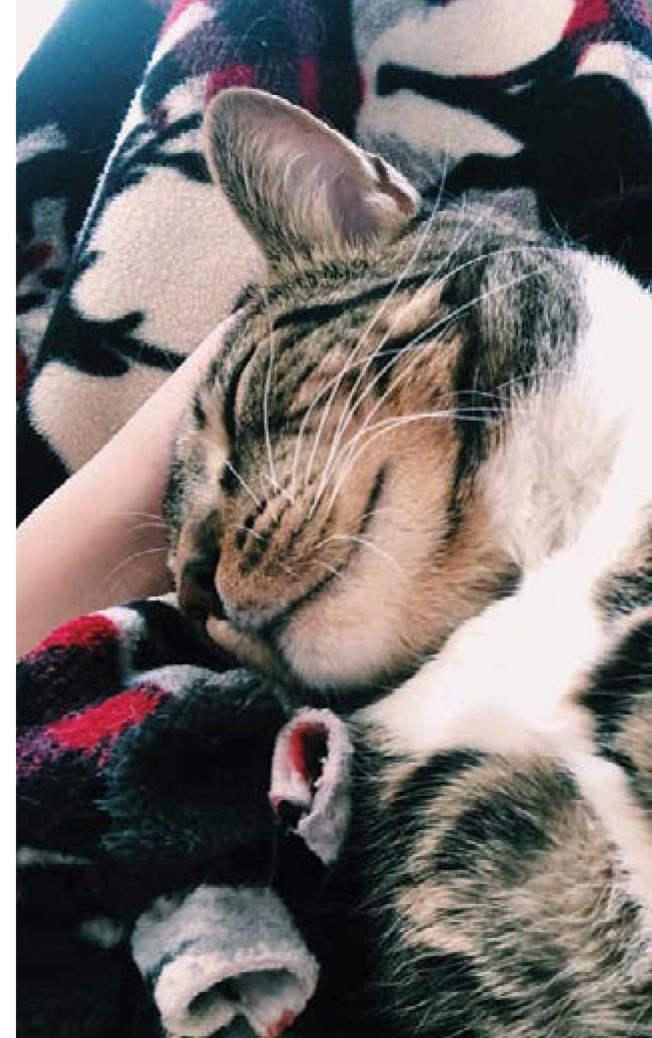
A Sunday on La Grange Jatte—1884
By: Georges Seurat

Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare —1877
By: Claude Monet

PHOTOS BY The Art Institute Chicago

Walking through these rooms, you are transported to France as you move through the different eras of Monet's artwork."

OUR LIVES DURING COVID



Members of the Mosaic design team share images of how they spent their time during lockdown. From the summit of Picacho Peak to the Sweet Sixteen NCAA Tournament in Indianapolis, the pandemic forced a lot of mask wearing, dish washing, online learning, and finding ways to spend time with friends - both furry and human - in ways that were fun, yet safe.

Enjoy a look at this special photo series: "Our Lives During Covid."

Photo Essay Pages 27-32

ABOVE: Benjamin Maka shares a view of the summit of Picacho Peak during early April of 2020.

RIGHT: Loyola seniors embrace after beating Drake 75-65 in the 2021 MVC Championship. (Left to right Keith Clemons, Tate Hall, Lucas Williamson, Cameron Krutwig, Jake Baughman, Aher Uguak).

OPPOSITE PAGE MIDDLE: Daniela Martinez spent time taking her puppy Pietra for walks in Old St. Juan Puerto Rico.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Stacy Carreon says people with dish washers had a much different experience than those like her who seem to always be washing dishes.

TOP: Marissa Rainone says taking classes online allowed her to go for walks along Lake Shore Drive in Chicago.

ABOVE: Kallie Timmons soaks up some sun with her friend Miranda along the Chicago Riverwalk.

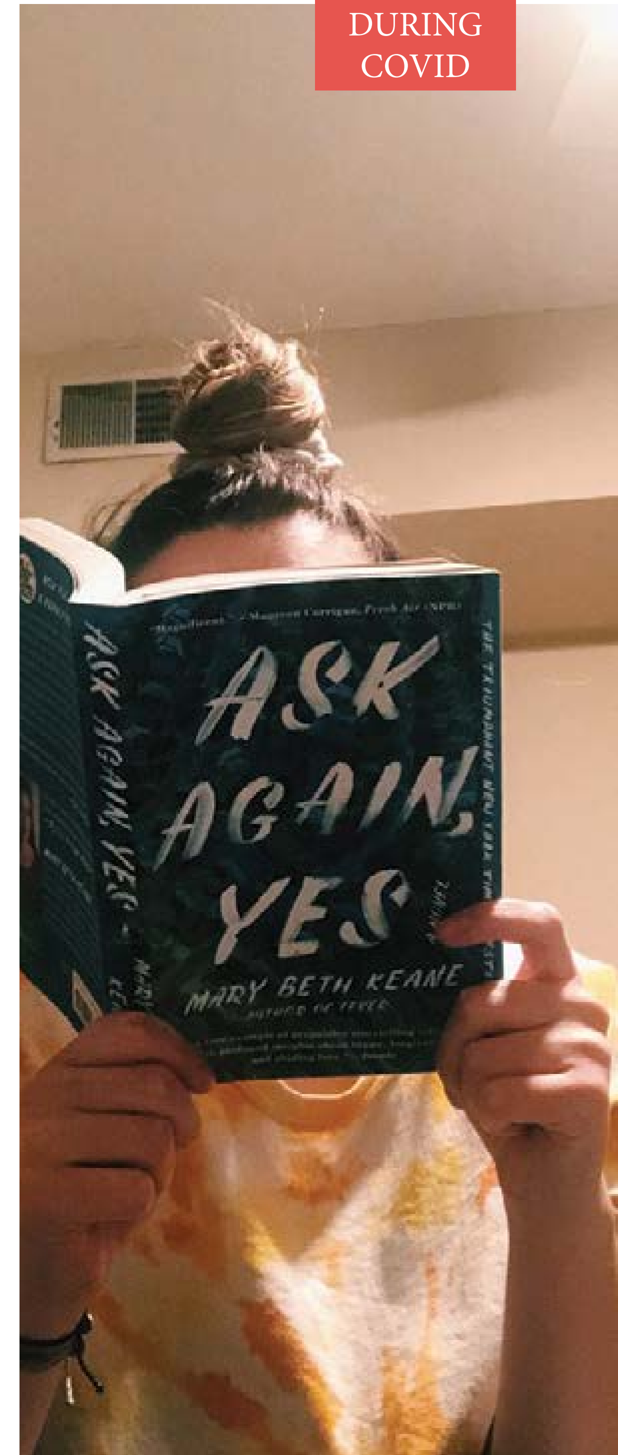
LEFT MIDDILE Meredith Taylor teaches Pre-K and welcomed students back in July.

LEFT: Carreon created so many dirty dishes by going home and cooking up delicious meals with her mom.

BOTTOM LEFT: Friends of Jessica Douglas let her begin her journey as a photographer by posing for this shot.

BOTTOM: Martinez's quarantine puppy is a stray they picked up and "made her COVID life berable with all her antics."

BELOW: Taylor works toward her graduate studies.



CREDITS: Men's basketball by Austin Hansen; all others submitted by permission from students.

MIDDLE: Timmons and her friend Georgia pose in front of the You Are Beautiful mural on the Morse Avenue Metra Underpass.

ABOVE: Rainone reads "Ask Again, Yes" by Mary Beth Keane a second time, just for fun.

LEFT: Williamson and his new dolphin friend pose for the camera at the Indianapolis Zoo during his NCAA run.

FIRST to Close, LAST to Open.

Chicago's Metro and Fulton Street Collective adapt to rapidly changing dynamics of music entertainment

BY BLAKE DIAZ

Joe Carsello, the lead talent buyer at the iconic Chicago rock club Metro, reflected on the grim reality independent music venues face during the coronavirus pandemic: "We were the first to close and we're going to be the last to open."

Metro, an 1,100-person capacity music hall, celebrated its 38th anniversary in July. But it has been shut down since March 13 with no end in sight.

Roughly 125 employees have dwindled to about five still working at Metro, Carsello said. The managers started a GoFundMe to benefit laid-off staff.

The Metro was opened in 1982 by current owner Joe Shanahan and featured rock band R.E.M. at its first show. Since then, bands such as Metallica and Nirvana have graced the venue's stage.

Nationwide, 90% of independent music venues risk shutting down due to the pandemic, according to a Sept. 24 article by NBC Chicago. Music venues will remain closed far into 2021 due to risks posed by large crowds.

The Chicago Independent Venue League is a coalition that advocates for Chicago independent music venues. The Chicago Tribune reported that 16 of the coalition's venues lost $7,176,253 due to the cancellation of 1,219 events between March 15 and April 30.

"It's all gone," Carsello said. "We have zero income basically coming in right now."

Metro has received some donations and is selling merchandise to ease the revenue loss. But it's not nearly enough to pay the bills.

Story continues on pg. 33

> *It's all gone, we have zero income basically coming in right now."*
>
> — Joe Carsello, Lead Talent Buyer at Metro

Joe Carsello, the club's lead talent buyer, said: "We need some funding, we need some protection from the government."

PHOTOS BY MANUEL VELASCO

Independent music venues like Metro in Chicago have struggled during the coronavirus pandemic and been forced to find new sources of revenue, from merchandise sales to streaming performances.

Continued from pg. 31

"We need some funding, we need some protection from the government," Carsello said.

The National Independent Venue Association represents independent music venues nationwide and has proposed the Save Our Stages Act, which would provide financial support for its venues. The act has passed the House of Representatives and is currently in the hands of the Senate.

If the act passes the Senate, it will provide aid for Metro through January 2021, allowing the owners to pay their staff and take care of maintenance bills, Carsello said.

The Fulton Street Collective, a small music and art venue, has also struggled to make ends meet.

"It's been rough," said Chris Anderson, the venue's operation manager. "You rely on people and a live audience to make your living."

Fulton Street Collective, which has been shut down since March, began live streaming performances from the venue in May when it was deemed safe.

"As far as live streaming goes, I think it might become the norm for our shows," Anderson said. "Even if everyone got inoculated tomorrow and we could put 100 people in there, I still think we would live stream certain shows, because we have been able to build an audience with that outside Chicago."

Fulton Street Collective opened in 2002 by singer-songwriters Anna Fermin and Joe Lanasa with the goal of creating "an incubator for arts." Anderson joined the team about seven years ago after managing the Green Mill Jazz Club.

"The goal of Fulton Street Collective is to provide an environment, a safe and supportive environment, for artists to build and create and hopefully earn a living in their craft," Anderson said.

Maura McManus, a Loyola University Chicago student, frequently attended jazz concerts at Fulton Street Collective before it shut down.

"I love it, because it shows artists who are just trying to make it in Chicago," McManus said. "I love the marriage of the arts that goes on there."

Many like McManus believe Fulton Street Collective, Metro and other Chicago music venues are essential to the city's history and residents.

"I've been going to the Metro since I was 13," Carsello said. "It's always been kind of a staple of my live music experience." Carsello is hopeful Metro will survive the pandemic and continue to serve the Chicago music community as it has for the past 38 years.

"Metro doesn't exist without the city of Chicago," Carsello said. "The support that we have gotten from the music community over the years is what keeps us independent and keeps us moving forward."

Anderson said the opportunity to perform live and share art at Fulton Street Collective and other independent venues is a crucial lifeline to Chicago artists and residents.

"There's nothing that can replace a live performance," Anderson said. "That human connection and engagement, that makes life worth living."

Popcorn Paradise

Thicksten's Popcorn navigates the pandemic after 120 years in business

BY KALLIE TIMMONS

It was a summer day in 1950 when Roger Thicksten proposed to his fiancé Millie Milby inside a 6-by-12 trailer, accompanied by an orchestra of popping kernels.

Main Street in Prophetstown, Ill., was packed with children and carnival games as the town of more than 2,000 hosted its annual Kid's Day. Roger left Millie to run the popcorn stand while he went down the street to Fenn's Drugstore, snagged a diamond ring and came right back to get down on one knee.

Seventy years later, the old trailer still reads "Thicksten's Popcorn" in peeling red paint and sits on the same street where Roger and Millie made it official.

The business's operation didn't change much over those years. It wasn't until the coronavirus pandemic hit America that Thicksten's had to find new ways to sell.

Thicksten's Popcorn opened in 1900 with only a kettle and umbrella to its name. Joanie Stewart, 63, has now taken over what her great-great-grandmother started. Stewart's nine grandchildren are the seventh generation of a family tied together by white popcorn, vegetable oil and popcorn salt.

The recipe has never changed.

"It's not broke, so we feel like we don't need to fix anything," Stewart said.

In fact, one of the only changes Thicksten's has seen in the last century is the move from paper to plastic bags.

"I call it comfort food," Stewart said. "It feels like you're coming home to something."

And people do come from miles away to get the popcorn their families have been eating for generations.

As the COVID-19 pandemic washed over the United States in March, settling into the cracks of small towns and family-owned businesses, Thicksten's was one of many that had to close down. Two months without business was too much for Stewart and her family to handle, so they decided to switch things up.

After watching other surrounding businesses adapt to mobile ordering and drive-through services, Stewart's daughter, Stacey, pitched the idea of curbside pickup to her parents.

Story continues on pg. 38

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STACY STEWART

The Thicksten's trailer, decorated for the holiday season, sits empty, ready for the large crowds that Prophetstown's Christmas parade will bring.

Joanie Stewart and husband Leo pictured with their four children, spouses and nine grandchildren who have grown up working in the trailer just like their parents did.

> *We're all getting older, but we're still worth something. There's a lot of worth left in it."*
>
> — Joanie Stewart, Owner of Thicksten's Popcorn

Story continues from pg. 36

"People would either call the house or they would message me directly on Facebook," Stacey Stewart said.

Four pickup windows took place throughout May and June, the first of which brought in the most customers, blowing the Stewart family away.

Joanie Stewart and her husband, Leo, ran the popcorn pickup from their residence, asking hungry customers to take the drive through Prophetstown, past the local high school and into their U-shaped driveway. With about 30 customers per half hour interval, the Stewarts had to begin popping corn two days in advance. Five vehicles sat full of popcorn ready to be dispersed while the family masked up, equipped with hand sanitizer and wipes.

Thicksten's also ships popcorn across the country, and despite paying double the cost of the popcorn for postage, customers don't seem to care.

"I love the popcorn too, but I wouldn't pay that much to have it shipped," Stewart said.

Local customer Karen Miles has been eating Thicksten's for 43 years.

"I think the popcorn stand handled the pandemic very well," Miles said. "They were closed, like many other businesses, but got many requests to open back up. The entire family helped on pickup day."

With the success of the curbside pickup and the release of Gov. J.B. Pritzker's Restore Illinois plan, Thicksten's Popcorn returned to its trailer in the parking lot of Shaw's Marketplace on the weekend of July 4.

Stacey Stewart worked the weekend with her mother, something she's been doing since she was old enough to count change.

"That was always where I worked," Stewart said, "and I'm still there now."

If anything, the demand for Thicksten's has increased.

"It's just crazy how it's grown from what it used to be," Stacey Stewart said. "People are driving farther and wanting it more."

Joanie Stewart remains grateful her employees are family, but she doesn't let them forget how lucky they are.

"It's like a legacy, and you help all that live on," she said. "We're all getting older, but we're still worth something. There's a lot of worth left in it."

BY THE NUMBERS: VACCINATIONS

Since our original reporting, a lot has changed, including the development and distribution of vaccines around the globe. We take a look at where we stand as of April 2021 as people around the world try to return to a sense of normalcy.

165
The number of countries that have started vaccinating against COVID-19.

39.5
The percentage of Americans who have received at least one vaccine dose.

25.1
The percentage of Americans who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The city of Chicago entered Phase 2 on April 19, 2021, meaning all residents over the age of 16 could get a vaccine.

PERCENT FULLY VACCINATED

24% All residents
31% Age 18+
56% Age 65+

3.19
The number of doses per day in millions administered in the U.S. by April 18.

ON THE ROAD TO VACCINATION

The map takes a look at the percentage of all Americans by state given at least one shot as of April 2021.

34
38
42%
Virgin Is.
Guam
N. Mariana Is.
Am. Samoa
Wash.
Ore.
Calif.
Idaho
Nev.
Mont.
Wyo.
Utah
Ariz.
Colo.
N.M.
N.D.
S.D.
Neb.
Kan.
Okla.
Texas
Minn.
Iowa
Mo.
Ark.
La.
Wis.
Ill.
Mich.
Ind.
Ohio
Ky.
Tenn.
Miss.
Ala.
Ga.
Fla.
S.C
N.C.
Va.
W. Va
Penn.
N.Y.
V.T.
N.H.
Me.
Mass.
R.I.
Conn.
N.J.
Del.
M.D.
D.C.
Alaska
Hawaii

SOURCES: Reuters; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; New York Times; City of Chicago

PRIME TIME

Lockdowns proved to be a great opportunity to binge shows

STREAMING HABITS

According to a 2020 study by Deloitte, about 80% of U.S. consumers subscribed to at least one paid streaming video service, up from 73% in the pre-COVID-19 survey.

SOURCE: Variety

22

The percentage of respondents who streamed a first-run film on a subscription service during the pandemic.

BY CATE PLUNKETT

The coronavirus lockdowns brought people home from work and planted them right in front of their televisions. Diana Keane, a sophomore at Loyola University Chicago, said her time in quarantine has brought a new appreciation of TV shows.

"I watched all the big Netflix ones – 'Tiger King,' 'Love is Blind,' 'The Circle,' 'Too Hot to Handle,' 'Never Have I Ever,' 'Outer Banks' – but the strange thing was that I wasn't alone," she said. "I could strike up a conversation with anybody, and chances were, they were watching a show I had seen."

According to The Nielsen Company: "During the height of countrywide shelter-in-place orders across the U.S. amid the COVID-19 pandemic, weekly time spent watching connected TVs grew significantly, rising by more than 1 billion hours as the weeks passed."

The increase in viewership has made the work of production companies more important because, without them, the stories wouldn't get further than words on a paper.

Since the pandemic hit America, Greg Grande, a Los Angeles-based production designer, has received more compliments about his designs than ever. It's easy to "get lost in the shuffle because there are so many TV shows out there that you could do amazing work on television and if it's not popular, nobody will ever see it and nobody will ever know how hard you worked at it," Grande said.

But during the lockdowns and the months that followed, Grande was one of many in the entertainment industry who benefited. He gathered more attention for his work on Netflix's "Dear White People" than he had in prior seasons. The viewership for this show "was up like 340% because of the relevance of Black Lives Matter and not a lot of things to watch, so people started to explore what other shows were out there," Grande said.

With nearly 30 years of experience in the production design industry, Grande has worked on TV shows including "Friends" and "Mixed-ish." In all his years of choosing wallpaper, sofas and lighting to create homes for characters, he has never experienced anything quite like this.

"Usually you walk down the hall and talk to a producer and writer about what the set's going to look like or what's coming up in the next episode," Grande said. Now when he has a question, he has to grab his computer and set up a meeting through Zoom.

In addition to these creative barriers, he's constrained by his employer's rules that consist of weekly testing, daily temperature checks, masks worn at all times and even the attachment of plexiglass to his desk.

His daughter, Alex Grande, is also in the production design industry working as a buyer for furniture and props. She misses talking to her coworkers over lunch about potential purchases. She now eats in her car since it's the only place she can be without her mask.

"It's crazy but it's starting to feel doable and normal now," she said.

Greg Grande

Creating a set can be one of the most important parts of pre-production. Rooms can act as characters and provide personality. Sets can become so unique that people identify shows based on what the set looks like.

Without people like Grande and his daughter, a junky warehouse in North Hollywood could never become a luxurious dining room in an English country house or a homey living room in a New York apartment.

Arden Luers, a sophomore studying molecular and cellular neuroscience at Loyola, found that over her quarantine and summer break, everyone was watching more television.

Television brought her something new throughout the past few months. She could slow down and take time for herself by watching seasons of shows she had missed out on.

"I think my favorite part of it was that I was always able to find someone to talk to about the shows, whether it be my family or friends," Luers said. "It was fun to discuss theories and favorite characters with them and I don't think that would have happened if this was a normal-looking summer."

TIFFANY TERTIPES | UNSPLASH

Poll position

PANDEMIC ENCOURAGED VOTERS TO CAST BALLOTS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

BY EMMAGRACE SPERLE

Maureen Hickey has voted in person all her life. After 30 years in Rogers Park, she knows all the details: early voting locations, the two nearest precincts to her home and when to go to miss the winding lines.

But the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the 63-year-old to consider other options. She has a heart condition that puts her at risk for the disease and worries about her husband's health.

Hickey is one of the record-breaking 500,000 Chicagoans who requested a mail-in ballot for the 2020 presidential election.

According to the Chicago Board of Elections, the half million applications have quadrupled the city's all-time record. If all requested ballots are submitted, they would make up half the city's votes from the 2016 presidential election.

As of Oct. 18, about, 120,000 people had submitted mail-in ballots, passing the previous record of 118,00 set during the 2020 March primaries.

Hickey has already filled in all the bubbles and packaged her ballot neatly in its envelope, but she won't be mailing it. She plans to carry her ballot to a polling place, where hopefully COVID-19 precautions have been followed and she'll be able to surrender it and vote in-person.

"The idea of sending in a ballot is stressful," she said. "Am I doing it correctly? Does my signature look the same as it did 30 years ago? Will it get there on time?"

Hickey's final question is one that has plagued many Americans since the U.S. Postal Service announced mid-August it can't guarantee all mail ballots will arrive in time to be counted.

Even on a local level, officials say it has been tough to keep up with the spike in ballot requests.

Board of Elections spokesperson Matt Dietrich told the Chicago Tribune that Cook County was backlogged with ballot applications, especially after the clerk's office briefly shut down mid-August when staff members contracted COVID-19.

Despite the obstacles, Dietrich told the Tribune the clerk's office would be able to get every voter a timely mail-in ballot.

"It's no small feat," Dietrich said. "Our employees have been working around the clock, on weekends. People are coming in on Sundays. People are coming in all the holidays. It has been a very arduous task, but we're up for getting these out on time."

Even though it doesn't have an official role to play, Ald. Maria Hadden's 49th Ward office has been working since July to help reduce the burden on the Chicago Board of Elections and Cook County Clerk's Office.

Leslie Perkins, Hadden's chief of staff, said the ward office first sent out information about requesting mail-in ballots over the summer. The goal was for residents to request early and "flatten the curve" of ballot applications.

Over the following months, the 49th Ward sent out weekly newsletters and social media posts with information on how to vote by mail or in-person for the 2020 election, Perkins said. Hadden even did a livestream to talk about voting and answer community questions.

"We're really trying to get people pointed in the right direction," Perkins said "There's lot of information and news about mail-in voting. There's misinformation that's been circulated about fraud."

And it seems to be working. As of Oct. 19, nearly 12,500 residents of the 49th Ward have requested mail-in ballots, which is an "incredibly" high number, Perkins said.

In the 2016 election, 26,903 voters were registered in the 49th ward and 9,996 voted.

Perkins said there haven't been problems with early voting either.

"Overall we've heard good things about the polling place," Perkins said. "Things are running smoothly, and the lines haven't been long. People seem to be having a positive experience."

This is what Hickey had hoped for — a safe and well-organized polling place where she won't have to worry about COVID-19.

"I feel confident that unless something goes haywire I can vote in person," Hickey said.

Over her 30 years in the neighborhood, Hickey said Rogers Park has always been politically engaged, but the way people are paying attention to this election feels different.

"I'm interested to see if civic engagement beyond voting has changed," she said. "Voting is the bare minimum, but I get the sense that more and more people are involved and being activists for what they believe in."

THE VOTES ARE IN

According to the Election Project, of the 1,699,302 registered voters in Cook County, 45.8% voted and 779.042 cast ballots early. in the 2020 election.

33.9

The percentage of voters who requested mail-in ballots for the 2020 election.

SOURCE: Election Project

Feast, no famine

Coronavirus didn't stop this church from feeding the hungry

PHOTO & STORY BY EMMAGRACE SPERLE

The United Church of Rogers Park has held a Community Feast every week for 35 years and never missed a Sunday.

Not for a "Snowpocalypse." Not when their glass doors were smashed in. Not even during a global pandemic.

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut the city down in March, what used to be a feast served on a long banquet-style table had to transition overnight to a single person take-out system for the more than 100 Rogers Park community members in need.

Sabrina Bermingham, the minister of administration and soon-to-be-deacon, said they run a well-oiled machine now, but the first week was hectic.

"I don't even remember what we served," she said, smiling behind her rainbow face mask. "I just remember it smelled good and there was a long line."

People come into the church to pick up their meals one-by-one and have to wear masks, Bermingham said. Each person gets a dinner — cooked by volunteers in the church's kitchen — a drink and a mask.

Bermingham said people have finally adjusted to the new system. They show up at staggered intervals, which has helped reduce the long line.

The food comes from the Greater Chicago Food Depository, which Bermingham said drops off pallets of food on the first Monday of each month. Bermingham said many of the people who come to the Community Feast each Sunday are homeless, so it's important to keep the feast going.

"We don't just talk the talk, we walk the walk," she said. "I felt this was the first church I've ever been to that actually does that."

The church goes beyond just providing meals on Sundays. In May, the church partnered with an Edgewater food pantry to make sure people have groceries every day of the week.

Care For Real, a non-profit in Edgewater focused on providing food, clothes, pet food and support services for those in need, runs a pop-up pantry through the church.

Nina Newhouser — a board member of Care for Real and co-chair of the Rogers Park pop-up — said many Rogers Park food pantries had to close when COVID-19 hit. After it received extra donations to help with COVID-19, Care For Real was able to help fill the void in the neighborhood by running a food pantry out of United Church of Rogers Park.

She said they worked alongside Ald. Maria Hadden to get word out to the community.

On the first Tuesday the pantry was open, Newhouser said they gave out about 500 meals to 120 people. The line still wraps around the block each Tuesday as they hand out meat and produce, now with more than 220 people receiving more than 800 meals each week.

The Greater Chicago Food Depository has been sending Care For Real more food as other pantries have closed.

"We were inundated, so anyone who did come to our pantry got overwhelmed," she said. "They come with a few bags and it's like, 'You'll need a cart or a car for the amount of food we can give you.'"

Newhouser said she has enjoyed getting to know some of the clients that come week after week. Among her favorites are a woman with three green parrots that perch on her shoulder and a man with three small chihuahuas.

She said she has been pleased with the volunteers from Rogers Park, especially because it's physical work: packing bags and moving cans or boxes of food. About 20 people help put together the grocery bags each Thursday in preparation.

Newhouser said there are benefits for everyone involved.

"People are impressed by seeing the need, and that you can do something so directly," she said. "Then for people who would rather be working but have been laid off [due to COVID-19], it feels good to be doing something."

Bermingham said she is looking forward to having people back in the church for the Community Feast and Sunday services once COVID-19 subsides, but they'll continue to make do for now: "As one of our pastors said, 'God doesn't require a perfect performance, just that it's from the heart."

The communion cup and plate — rainbow for LGBTQ pride — rest on the front altar of the United Church of Rogers Park. The church was unable to hold service for months due to COVID-19.

Disconnected

Seniors feeling isolated in nursing homes during the pandemic

BY SOPHIE KOHAN

Stillwater Senior Living's residents had to spend most of their time alone in their rooms when the coronavirus pandemic began.

That took a toll. Jake Kuntz, the lead wellness partner at the facility in Edwardsville, Ill., has seen how isolation challenged and changed his working environment and the residents' mental and physical health.

"It makes my job harder in the sense that I know they need that extra bit of positivity every day," Kuntz said.

He has seen a handful of residents become depressed and isolate themselves from the community, even after the strict quarantine rules were lifted.

A lack of connection with the outside world has proved to be more disastrous for people in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. A place meant to feel like a home now seems more like an unescapable confine.

Elderly individuals are at a higher risk for the more serious side effects of COVID-19, making nursing homes and assisted-living facilities hotspots for the virus. The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity found that 42% of COVID-19 deaths in the United States have occurred in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities. There are 2.1 million people living in nursing homes or residential care facilities in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Viruses love these facilities because they house high-risk people in a shared location.

To prevent the spread of infection, nursing homes and assisted-living facilities have taken various precautions recommended by the CDC, which ultimately means further seclusion for residents.

Stillwater Senior Living is home to 79 residents in total—61 residents in the assisted living section and 18 residents in their memory care section. Most residents are in their 80s.

Residents weren't allowed to leave their rooms during the full lockdown transition, which was lifted around May. Now the Stillwater residents can travel the hallways and their outdoor patios while following safety measures.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Stillwater did not allow any visitors and told family members to trust them to take care of their loved ones. Now residents are allowed three visits a week for half an hour outside on their patios while staying 6 feet apart and wearing face masks.

"They're all pretty sick of it," Kuntz said. "A lot of them ask me when it is going away because all they do is watch the news and hear about how negative it is out there."

Isolating inside all day led to an increase in falling accidents. During the quarantine period, the residents weren't getting enough exercise, leaving their muscles fatigued.

Fortunately, Stillwater's precautions have yielded results. The facility has not had any COVID-19 cases among the residents. There was one employee who tested positive in May and one false positive scare.

"I have heard that a few other nursing homes in the area still have their residents in lockdown so we got lucky," Kuntz said.

Although Kuntz has not heard residents mention if increased isolation has affected their mental health, he has noticed that a few residents staying in their rooms more than usual. He also noticed a shift in their moods and has seen residents lounge around in their pajamas all day instead of taking the opportunity to socialize.

"We try to encourage them to come out but they're kind of not the same anymore," Kuntz said. "I've seen plenty of residents become depressed and isolate themselves from the community and it usually becomes extremely detrimental to their health. It's really sad seeing a resident give up but even worse when it's because of a virus that none of us have any control over."

> *It's really sad seeing a resident give up but even worse when it's because of a virus that none of us have any control over."*
>
> — Jake Kuntz, lead wellness partner

Some nursing home residents might not fully grasp the reality of the pandemic, like Debbie Memenga's mother, Phyllis Larson, who suffers from Alzheimer's. Memenga has become familiar with the Watseka Rehabilitation and Health Care facility in Watseka, Ill., after visiting Larson for the last 10 years.

Memenga would visit once a month until Larson's illness worsened to the point where she lost her ability to speak and walk.

"She would just be in her own little world so when we would go see her there would be no communication," Memenga said. "Then the COVID came around we couldn't go at all and still cannot go."

Memenga praises the nursing home for taking care of its residents and ensuring everyone's safety. She sympathizes with other families who are facing the same difficulties created by the pandemic.

As things return to normal at Stillwater Senior Living, Kuntz uses encouragement and smiles to get the residents back on their feet.

"It's completely different than how it used to be," Kuntz said. "But it's a lot better than how it was when the pandemic first started."

Katy Selmi offers event planning and floral design during the pandemic with contact-free deliveries and mask protocols.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATY SELMI

Powerful Parenting

Single mom combats drop in business while protecting immunocompromised daughter

BY KALLIE TIMMONS

Like single parents across the country, Katy Selmi's life has been turned upside down by the coronavirus pandemic. She's working to keep her diabetic daughter safe, while navigating the trials of virtual classes and isolation with her three other children. Her personal dreams have also been put on hold, as her floral design business struggles to stay afloat.

Selmi, 39, lives in Rock Falls, Ill., with her four children, ages 15, 14, 13 and 9. In 2017, her 13-year-old daughter, MaryKay Downs, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes after weeks of abnormal fatigue and dehydration.

Her daughter's health condition added to Selmi's anxiety as the COVID-19 pandemic began.

"Diabetics whose blood sugar is either too high or too low, or not stable, those are the ones that are more susceptible to getting it," she said.

On March 13, as she picked her children up from school, Selmi realized their lives were about to change dramatically.

"I pretty much had the realization that they weren't going back," she said.

Downs remembers first hearing about coronavirus at school, but she had no idea what kind of impact it would have on her and her mother.

"I was in school, and they were talking about how it was in China," she said. "I didn't think it would come to the United States."

Aside from becoming a stay-at-home mom overnight, Selmi's work life didn't stop. Her business, Selmi's Weddings and Events, is a full-service floral shop, focusing on large event planning, floral decorations and rental services.

She graduated from the University of Illinois in 2003 with a degree in horticulture. After falling in love with floral design, she moved back home to Rock Falls to sell flowers out of the back of the barn at her family's greenhouse.

"Over the years, I got accredited as an Illinois State Floral Designer, I took many, many classes and I joined the American Institute of Floral Designers," Selmi said. "All of that just kind of helped me get a really good base of how to do bigger, better floral designs and be more confident in my work."

In previous years void of pandemics and social distancing, Selmi's Weddings and Events did anywhere between 50 and 60 weddings. This year, however, most of her weddings had to be cancelled or postponed.

Selmi can usually book events in January and February and then look out through October to estimate her revenue, but a year without weddings brought a year without income. She ultimately struggled to take home a paycheck for herself.

"That's where it bleeds into can I pay my mortgage at home, can I continue sending my kids to the private schools they're going to, can I continue to keep paying for dance for my daughter or can these boys still play on travel teams," she said. "Yes, I can probably pay the bills and keep my doors open, but all that extra money that I would take home we don't have this year."

Laura Duhon has known Selmi since their daughters started pre-school together more than 10 years ago. She has been by her friend's side throughout the pandemic, watching her small business take a major hit.

"I have watched my friend struggle during this time, as I know she puts her heart and soul into everything she does, and I know she misses doing what she loves," Duhon said.

It was the announcement of Gov. J.B. Pritzker's Restore Illinois plan, that finally brought Selmi to her knees. No events of 300 or more could take place until a vaccination was released, which meant that her events, even those that were already paid for, had to be cancelled.

"I had to find the money to keep my doors open, my utilities on, my car payments met and then give these people their refunds," she said. "I remember thinking, 'How am I going to do all that?'"

With the help of a handful of community grants through the hospitality industry, Selmi was able to make ends meet during her hardest times.

"I opened up that check and I started crying," she said. "I wrote them a thank you note and said you don't understand where I would be if I didn't have this,"

Luckily, Selmi never put all of her eggs in one basket. As a Country Financial insurance agent, she has a steady income for now.

"I haven't really seen too much of a change in my Country job because that's something people need," she said. "The wedding business and the flower shop is just a want."

Overall, Selmi has done her best to keep things normal for her kids, and the family is settling back into their pre-pandemic routine, with the addition of masks and lots of sanitizing.

Selmi's plan for the future is simple. She's just taking it one step at a time.

"I have to make sure that all these balls I'm juggling are going to stay in the air," she said. "You just keep trying to tell yourself just one day at a time, or one hour at a time or one minute at a time.

Selmi's children did in-person learning five days a week during the pandemic, but with some seating changes in the classroom.

in, out, up & down

therapist learns the value of self care in a chaotic world

BY BLAKE DIAZ

Hugh Cole became a therapist to help people be themselves and work through life's difficult moments. He loves his job, but like therapists across the country, Cole has been overwhelmed by the increasing demand for therapy brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Sitting on his front porch in Edgewater by an array of flowers he gardens himself, Cole, 59, explained that in September, his boss suggested he take a two-week break. His boss noticed he didn't have the same grounded energy as usual. Cole agreed and decided to spend the time caring for himself.

"I think myself and also my colleagues are experiencing exhaustion at a greater degree," Cole said. "For me, the impact of that has been to turn to the supports that I have. … Attending to my self-care like coming out here and doing the plants, noticing nature and that it persists is really important."

Cole focuses on his mental health by regularly meeting with a group of therapists to discuss vicarious trauma, indirect trauma experienced when a person is exposed to difficult images or stories. He cares for his physical health by eating well and getting enough sleep.

Therapists across the country are experiencing increased burnout while dealing with many of the same pandemic-related problems as their clients, according to a May 3 article in The New York Times.

Some therapists have found comfort spending time outside, practicing breathing exercises and driving to their office to conduct therapy sessions rather than staying home, the Times reported. In addition, interest in peer-advisory groups has soared.

Despite burnout, Cole, a Loyola University Chicago alumnus, continues to find great meaning in his job.

After pursuing an acting career and finding himself discontent, Cole was unsure where he wanted to go in life, but knew it involved helping people.

"I came back from acting. Sept. 11 had just happened," Cole said. "In the face of Sept. 11, I wanted to do something that was rich and had meaning and purpose. I wanted to do something that was giving back and using the privilege that I had in ways that were helpful to people that didn't enjoy that privilege."

Cole's friend suggested he take a college class. His friend brought him a course catalogue and urged him to "just pick something." Cole, 42 at the time, picked a random page and stabbed his finger down.

Social Work 101 with Dr. Sammie Dortch at Harold Washington College.

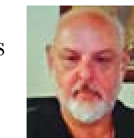
A project in the class involved a group presentation on the LGBT community, which struck a chord with Cole, a gay man.

Following the presentation, Dortch asked, "Mr. Cole, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"I didn't know how to respond," Cole said. "I started to cry in the class that I didn't know the answer to that question. I'm 42 years old and I didn't know what I wanted to do."

Later, Dortch called him into her office and said: "I want you know that the reason why I asked you that question was because I see in you, I feel in you an ability to be present in a way that social work is something that you can do."

Dortch, a former Hyde Park resident, became a mentor and friend to Cole ultimately inspiring him to pursue social work. Dortch passed away earlier this year.


Hugh Cole

"She lived with unconditional positive regard and a deep listening not for who she thought I should be, but for who I actually am," Cole said. "And that's rare. I aspire to be that for other people."

Cole is currently a social worker and psychotherapist at Howard Brown Health, an LGBT-focused health center with locations throughout Chicago. Cole's work shifted online March 12 due to the coronavirus.

Although not one of Cole's clients, Uma, a 20-year-old Loyola University Chicago student who asked to be identified only by her first name, said her therapist has been extremely important to her during this time.

"I think that my therapist has been really good about making sure I don't feel alone in this," Uma said. "She will relate to things I say, but she won't put her stress on me."

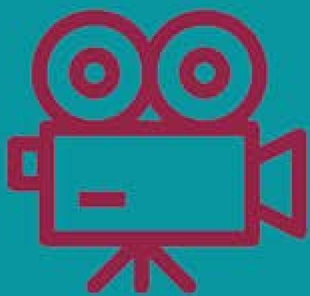
Uma said the focus remains on her even though her therapist is likely experiencing many similar coronavirus-related issues.

Cole, like other therapists, has been vital in helping clients work through anxiety and fear caused by the coronavirus, despite facing these issues himself.

"We are also human beings who are also in the same group with all those stressors," Cole said.

Although Cole may need time off for self-care, he persists in seeking to impact his clients' lives in ongoing and purposeful ways.

"What I love about my job is that I make a difference in people's lives in ways that resonate beyond our relationship in therapy," Cole said. "People already have the stuff of their own healing inside of them, but the world rolls these big boulders in the way of that path of wellness. If we move the boulders out of the way people lean towards wellness if they are given a space to explore the vulnerabilities that get in the way."



RAMBLER PRODUCTIONS

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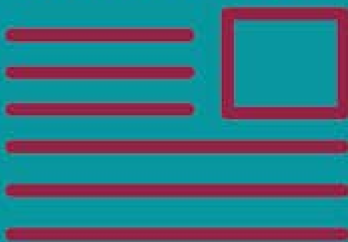
DISCOVER DOWNTOWN AT LOYOLA'S SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION

LOYOLA PHOENIX



INIGO COMMUNICATIONS

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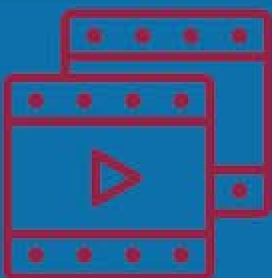

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