

Graduating into the New Normal

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When I left my dorm room for spring break, I expected to come back. But when I received the much anticipated email from Bowie State University about its plans for the rest of the semester, my fears were confirmed: The spring semester of my senior year would be continued virtually. I understood why the university took this action — the coronavirus outbreak had turned into a pandemic and the number of cases in Prince George’s County was increasing. If the school didn’t do anything, more people would become sick.

But my heart still sank as I thought about everything I would miss out on: graduation, organization events and final goodbyes to friends and professors. I also started to worry about how I would perform academically. I had only taken one online course in college, and it was difficult to re-create the classroom environment from the comfort of my room. So, I knew I would have to adapt to this new way of learning quickly. But it was more challenging than I thought. It was hard to gain the motivation to do my assignments. Constantly hearing about COVID-19 on the news and social media was overwhelming. It made focusing on school work more challenging. But as a senior, I still wanted to be involved at Bowie State as much as I could. So, I continued to actively participate in organizations. It was draining. I felt like there was so much to worry about.

One of those worries was graduate school. I wondered what my first semester of graduate school for journalism would be like. I knew there was a possibility my courses would be online. And if my classes were online, how could I learn to be an exceptional journalist through my laptop? Would I gain the necessary real-world experience that students before me were afforded? Would I be able to make effective connections with my professors and classmates? Would I be graduating and entering the job market during a failing economy?

These fears, along with the fear that my family and friends could become sick and my challenge to adapt to a virtual learning environment, often made me feel dejected. And it didn’t help whenever someone asked me for updates about graduation. Before the pandemic, I was so excited to walk across the stage and receive my degree. But now there will not be a traditional ceremony. Rather, our graduation ceremony will be held virtually on June 26. Even though this change was necessary, it still hurt to know graduation will not be how I had always imagined it.

It was comforting, however, to realize that I’m not alone. Graduating seniors across the country, and for that matter the world, share in my experiences. And I’m grateful for the conversations I’ve had with friends that have kept me encouraged. They reminded me that even though it doesn’t seem like it now, the world won’t be like this forever. This pandemic will only challenge us for the better and make us stronger.



*..... Class of 2020
Faces Triple Threats from
Pandemic, Recession and Racial Strife*



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