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COVID-19 Student Journal

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Kutztown University Fall 2020 COVID-19 Student Journal

By: Sierra C. Sprouse

Chapter 1: Moving Back to Dixon Hall

I suppose the best place to start is with the first thing you would do as a college student; moving into the dorm. Living situations can be different for students since there are a lot of options. You could live in an apartment off campus or you could live in the variety of dorms found on campus. As far as I know of, there are three main types of living arrangements for on-campus living. First there is the normal dormitories, where you share a bedroom with at least one other student and a public bathroom and shower room. Then you have the Golden Bear neighborhoods which, at least from what I was told, are built similar to that of regular apartments. Finally there's Dixon Hall, where the dorms are referred to as "suits" because of how they were built. Not only can two "roommates" have their own private bedrooms, but there is also a private bathroom and shower room for each individual suit. I've lived in a Dixon Hall suit for the entire time I was enrolled as a student because the thought of sharing a bedroom with someone gave me anxiety and the thought of sharing a public bathroom gave me more anxiety. So Dixon was the best fit for me when it came to living on-campus.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, when a student moves into their dorm, there was a series of steps you had to take to register yourself into the dorm building. Before a student could move their stuff into their rooms, we had to walk into the meeting room where the CAs of the building had set up stations for the registration process. The registration process usually involved the CAs double-checking the student's emergency contacts, having the student sign a document on a computer, and finally the CAs give the student pieces of paper with the information they will need to know while living in Dixon. The information included a guide to register electronic devices to connect to the building's Wi-Fi, the number of the student's mailbox and the combination to unlock it, and the number code to unlock your suit door and personal bedroom. Once a student was registered, they were free to unload their vitellicles and move their possessions into their new dorms. There was also the option to rent a cart to help carry more stuff inside, although they were admittedly hard to steer sometimes. When it came to moving stuff into a dorm on one of the upper floors, the elevators were heavily used by a lot of people. I remember seeing the area in front of the elevator doors getting crowded, between people trying to get on one and people walking in and out of the building.

In the middle of the Spring 2020 semester, right around when the pandemic was unfolding, the entire university ended up closing. That included the dorms as well. So after the extended Spring Break, my family and I had to go back to pick up all my belongings and take them home. At the time, there weren't a lot of safety precautions taking place in the dorm buildings. No masks, no plastic walls around the front desk, the most they had back then was the conveniently placed hand sanitizer. At least from what I remember. Then again, it almost felt that the whole building was empty when my mom and I got my belongings. This was because they had specific time signatures for students to come and clear out their dorms. So I suppose that might be why the dorm staff weren't too strict on masks or social distancing.

However, that was not the case when I came back for the Fall 2020 semester. About a week or two before the beginning of the semester I received an email that stated that I had a set move-in date and time; August 19th at 9AM. In all seven previous semesters I've lived in Dixon Hall, I never received a strict move-in schedule like this. Normally the dorm building would open on the Sunday before the first day of class and all students were free to move in any time after 1PM. This time, however, I had to wake up at 6:30 in the morning with my family just to have enough time to drive from my home to Kutztown University. Not to mention that, since I

moved in on a Wednesday instead of Sunday, I essentially had a five-day long weekend living in my dorm room. I didn't complain too much because living in my dorm is more peaceful than living with my family, but it still felt a bit off-putting being on campus before school actually started.

As soon as my family and I reached Kutztown University, we immediately saw how different moving in was going to be compared to the previous semesters. As soon as we drove up to the road leading down to the dorm buildings, we saw a large traffic line with policemen talking to each individual car to let the drivers know what's going on. It took a good fifteen minutes before our van reached a policeman who told us what we needed to do. Before we were allowed to get close to Dixon Hall, we had to get our temperatures taken and identify who in our van was the student or helper so we would receive cards that would let the people working for the dorm know we were healthy and allowed to move in. Getting our temperature taken took seconds, but the traffic it caused kept us from moving into the dorm for about twenty minutes. When we finally found a place to park near Dixon Hall, I was directed to wait in line in order to register myself and get the passcode for my dorm room. The line had social distancing stickers placed on the ground to let students know where to stand while they wait. And the people working for the dorm only allowed one person from the line in the room at a time, so it took about another ten or so minutes before I could get inside and register.

After all of this, my family and I were finally allowed to move my possessions into my new dorm. However, there were still a few issues that made moving in a bit more complicated. First of all, the dorm was not allowing anyone to borrow a cart from the dorm. So for the most part, we had to improvise and use my office chair to carry some of my stuff inside. There was also the issue of how available the elevators were, since Dixon Hall had a rule where only one group was allowed to use the elevators at a time. And there were times where the elevators had such long lines that my family and I had no choice but to take the stairs to move some of my stuff in. Thankfully my dorm room was only on the third floor, but I don't have a lot of stamina so it was still a slow move in for us.

Once everything was finally moved in, I went out to have lunch with my parents before we parted ways. Even though I had five days free to unpack and organize my room, I finished doing so by the end of the day. This way I would have the next couple of days to either relax or plan ahead for the semester. From that point onwards, I tried to stay in my dorm for the rest of the semester so I could lower my chances of catching COVID-19. All of my courses were moved to online, so it was easier for me to stay inside. The only times I would go outside are when I would go to South Dining Hall to eat, or to the Dixon Market Place if I needed to buy more things. But aside from that, this was my game plan for the semester; stay inside, do your class work and internship assignments, and graduate.

Chapter 2: Eating at South Dining Hall

After three hours spent moving into your dorm room, unpacking your belongings, and trying to set everything up in your room, it's reasonable to take a short break. And for me, that short break was going to the South Dining Hall to eat dinner. Throughout my eight semesters as a student at Kutztown University, the South Dining Hall had always been my main source of food throughout the day. Not only because it was located right next to Dixon Hall, but because it also worked with the meal plan I registered for. If you're a student at Kutztown University, you have the option to sign up for a meal plan so you can just walk into the Dining Hall and eat rather than pay with your own money (although that option wasn't out of the question either). The meal plan also allowed you to allow a limited number of "guest swipes" to let any outside friends and family eat with you as well. The Cub Café also used the student meal plans, but since it's located on the other side of campus I rarely eat there. The only exceptions were if I had an hour break in between classes and didn't have time to walk to and from South Dining Hall. Not to mention that The Cub Café was a lot smaller than South Dining Hall, so around lunch hour it becomes a scavenger hunt to try to find an open seat. So when it was five o'clock, I headed to the South Dining Hall to get myself some dinner. I was expecting that things would be relatively the same as before the virus, but there were a lot of changes made because of the pandemic.

First, let me explain what eating at the South Dining Hall was usually like before the COVID-19 virus spread. When someone walks through the front doors, the first thing they would need to do is walk up to one of the two cash registers. If you were a student at Kutztown University with a meal plan, all you would need to do is hand your student I.D. card to the employee in charge of the cash register and they would swipe it into the machine before letting you in. If you didn't have a meal plan, you would have to pay with either cash or your own credit card. Although every time someone paid with cash, it would end up causing a really long line that would stretch outside of the front doors. But normally people just have their cards swiped and the lines move on quickly. Once you're inside you can eat either on the first or the second floor. The first floor had the dining areas stationed by the large windows that covered the majority of the front area of the Dining Hall. If you sat next to the windows, you could enjoy the outside view while you eat. Before the virus, I used to have a weekly tradition where I would order a cup of hot chocolate and sit by the windows, watching the outside as I sipped my drink. Whether it was a sunny, raining, or snowing, the view was always relaxing to me.

The second floor was set up more like a cafeteria found in high schools, where there were rows of tables lined up across the main floor. I almost always ate on the second floor to save time because the food was already cooked and ready to server, whereas most of the food on the first floor had to be ordered and cooked. The first two times I ordered something from the first floor, I ended up waiting for over fifteen minutes for my food to be ready. I wanted to use the limited time I had in between classes wisely, so I couldn't really afford to wait that long every time I had lunch. So instead, I always ate on the second floor. My favorite meal back then was a fried chicken sandwich (occasionally topped with lettuce and provolone cheese slices), a banana, some broccoli, and a cup of apple juice. I would also get some mac & cheese, but the Dining Hall only served that on a few occasions. The second floor had other options, such as pasta station that I would occasionally visit for dinner, and a sushi grill stationed in the dead-center of the floor. There was also a salad bar where I got my broccoli from, but I would sometimes get some eggs if I came early enough. They also had a dessert bar stationed in the very back of the floor, but it was right next to the single seats that I really enjoyed sitting at when I ate. However, the second

floor of the South Dining Hall was only open from 11 a.m. until 8 p.m., so I'd always kept that in mind each time I made my schedule for classes for the next semester.

However, when I first entered South Dining Hall the night I moved into my dorm for the Fall 2020 semester, it was made immediately clear that things were going to be different. First of all, aside from the plastic barriers now placed in front of the cash registers, students with a meal plan now had to swipe their own I.D. cards into a card reader before entering. But before they could swipe their cards, the employee in charge of the cash register would ask if the student was planning to eat either upstairs or downstairs. I didn't get a concrete reason why they had to ask this or why they had to keep track of how many students went either up or down, but if I had to guess I'd say it was in case if a virus breakout happened on campus and the managers could check the numbers to see if more students are catching the virus after eating either upstairs or downstairs. But if that was the case, then I'd guess their attention was more focused on if the virus spread on the second floor. Because all of the food stations on the first floor of South Dining Hall were made to serve take-outs. South Dining Hall never had take-out options before this semester, everything was eat-in only. A few seats were still open to sit down and eat at on the first floor, but if you went up to order something it would come in a small package. Most of the food stations were still open, except for the one where students used to be able to eat cereal from. That station had been mostly blocked off, leaving only the soda and juice dispensers open.

The second floor seemed to have gone through the most change, though. First of all, they split the staircase leading to the second floor in half. One half was meant for students to walk up and into the food area, the other half was meant to be an exit. I believe this was done to help social distancing, rather than letting patrons standing right next to each other as they go up and down the stairs. This new entrance would lead people straight to the front three food stands, which only had one open the first night I visited. Thankfully the one that was open still served chicken patties for me to eat, but it was just a sample of how limited the rest of the food options were. Out on the main floor, the rows of tables were taken away and replaced with small, 4-seated tables set up to keep people more separated. You would think this would cause a seating problem similar to the one at the Cub Café, but surprisingly I never had any trouble finding a seat to eat at. It might be because fewer people ate on the second floor due to the virus, but I can't say for sure. But when I checked out the other food stations on the second floor, almost everything else was closed. The sandwich station was closed, the sushi grill was closed, and the open salad bar was closed. I understood why they closed the open salad bar, but it there was nowhere else on that floor where I could eat vegetables at the time. Food options on the second floor were always limited on the weekends, but since it was five days before the University was "officially" opened, the options were even more limited.

I was thrown off by the limited options on the second floor, and I wasn't sure if the first floor would be any better, so I came back to my dorm after eating a limited plate. I figured more options would open up once the semester officially kicked in, but for the next four days after that night I had to find other options for food. And thankfully, my family and I decided to buy some food that I could save in my micro-fridge and cook in my dorm room instead. My lunch and dinner for the next four days mainly consisted of roman noodles and frozen alfredo pastas, and I continued this tradition during the weekends to limit my interaction with the outside and lower any risks of catching the virus. As the first week of the semester rolled on, I eventually got more familiar with what stations in South Dining Hall were open and adapted to some of the changes. The take-out options on the first floor turned out to be really convenient for me because I normally eat dinner at 5 p.m. but I had a three-hour long class that started at 5:30 this semester.

So not only does getting take-out help me save time, but I can also enter the zoom call while I finish my meal. Eventually the sushi grill on the second floor was re-opened into a salad bar, but they still didn't serve any broccoli. So when it came to eating fruits or vegetables, I would usually get a banana while I stated to add lettuce to my chicken patties. The changed South Dining Hall went through were definitely a lot to get used to, but within a few days I was able to adapt and adopted a new eating schedule for this final semester.

Chapter 3: Online Classes

I can't say if this is the same for other people, but when I was in high school there were many times where I overheard students talking about how taking online classes was a lot more difficult than in-person classes. So after a few years of repeatedly hearing this from different people, it convinced me that I should probably try to avoid taking online classes if possible. That's why whenever I choose my courses, I made sure they were all in-person courses. However, you can probably expect that this plan wouldn't pan out well when there's a pandemic happening. When Kutztown University closed halfway through the 2020 Spring semester, all of the in-person courses had to be moved online. And even though the campus opened up again for the 2020 Fall semester, all of my courses were moved online regardless. While this changed a lot of things about how the course was operated, it also made some things a bit more simple in a way.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of Kutztown's courses were in-person, meaning that you would travel to a classroom in one of the University's academic buildings and sit among other students. It was a lot like taking a class in high school, only that these courses weren't always scheduled to fit within a seven-hour time frame. Instead, before the semester would even begin, students would sign up for whichever classes interested them (and also filled out the requirements set up by the student's major). And because these classes took place at different times throughout the day, students also had control over choosing when to take their classes. So they could choose whether their lunch break in between two classes would last either one hour or five hours. This might make it seem like students were free to choose to sign up for any class at any time, but there's a lot more planning and calculations that need to be considered when planning out your schedule for each semester. The most important thing you'll need to keep track of when choosing your classes is if the subject can fill out one of the requirements on your Major Program sheet. Even if you start your first one or two semesters as Undeclared, it would be wise to choose classes that filled out the General Education requirements that all students are given.

The next important factor you would need to keep in mind is the times these classes are set as and how long they last. Most of the time the courses would last either fifty minutes (on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays) or eighty minutes (on Tuesdays and Thursdays), but there are some classes that last for three hours. So if you were planning to have lunch or dinner at a certain time, you'll have to make sure you give yourself enough time to eat and consider where to eat if you have limited time in between classes. I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter that I used to eat at the Cub Café if I only had an hour break in between classes, and I'd recommend other students to do the same if they found their schedules put them in the same position. It only happened for one semester, but I also ate dinner at the Cub Café right before a three-hour long class started.

This next part is more for self-preparation, but you should also pay attention to which building the class would be held in. I usually held the mentality of "If this is where I need to go for a class, then I'll do what I need to do." But there were times where I had two classes back-to-back, but the building the second class took place in was on the other side of campus from the first class. So depending on how quickly you can exit the building, or navigate through the hallways, you might find yourself booking it within the ten minutes gap between the two classes. And there were times where I had a professor keep the class in session a few minutes overtime. It might not sound like a big issue, but those few minutes might make the difference between you

being on time for class or being late. Although I'm not sure if a lot of other college students see this as an issue, this could just be me being punctual for being on time. But if you were one to stress about being on time as well, then I'd say keep this in mind and prepare to do a few jogs if this were to become the case.

For being in the classes themselves, there were three different types of classrooms I've been in throughout my first seven semesters. The first type was a large lecture hall with multiple rows of seats, sometimes fitting up to one hundred people per class. I usually tried to sit at one of the front rows in a seat that was next to the open aisles. Not just because it would help me leave the classroom faster and get to my next class on time, but it can get a bit awkward walking in front of someone who was already sitting down to get to your own seat. Due to the size of these classrooms, it was a little harder for professors to focus on one particular student. So unless you made frequent visits to the professor during their office hours, you might not get a chance to personally know them. The second type was a smaller, more personal, classroom that looks like a normal high school classroom. These classrooms would usually only hold between twenty-five and thirty students at a time, so there was more room for professors to interact and help students. From what I saw, these were the most common type of classes on the campus. The last type was a laboratory, and those were set up specifically for some of the science classes. Sometimes there would be a science course that required students to take both a lecture and a lab class, with the labs usually lasting longer than the lectures. This was because the lab was more focused on students getting into groups and conducting small, hands-on projects. The kinds of projects vary depending on the specific science class the lab is associated with, and sometimes these projects required students to do some work outside of class hours. I only had two instances where I had to take a science course that was split into a lecture and a lab like this.

When I had to switch from in-person classes to online one's half-way through the Spring 2020 semester, it was definitely a tough pill to swallow. I wasn't sure how the change would affect my learning abilities, note taking, or how projects were going to be handled. Thankfully, the professors were understanding and tried to help out the students where they could. Out of the five classes I had, only two of them actually held online sessions. The other three didn't use Zoom for meetings, and instead gave out notices and project guidelines on D2L (Desire 2 Learn). In some ways this made it a bit easier to focus on projects, but it also made it a bit harder to learn the material we were covering. I think the biggest loss from this was that I wasn't able to interact with some of the professors like I could before. One of my favorite classes during that semester was an American Folklore course, not only because I really enjoyed the subject, but I also really enjoyed interacting with the professor in that class. It was definitely the most fun I had in a college course in a few semesters. But when we were moved to online sessions, we weren't able to hold zoom meetings in place of class meetings. I really missed those meetings, but I had to press on and finish the few assignments I had left. I was able to pass my courses pretty well, even with the sudden change.

For my final semester, the university decided to open its doors again and allowed students to live on campus and attend in-person classes. At first only one or two of my classes were online, but as the start of the semester drew closer all of my classes eventually moved to online. Even though all of my classes were online now, I still decided to live on campus because I felt that I would have more room to focus on my schoolwork than I would at home. This time around, all of my professors held Zoom sessions for classes. Some of the professors tried to encourage students to use their cameras on so they could see their faces, which I usually felt bad about because every time I tried to get the camera on my laptop to work it wouldn't. Although

this might be a blessing in disguise, because the way Zoom is set up is that it either shows your face among a cluster of everyone else's cameras or highlight your camera specifically when you're talking. Either option would have given me a lot of anxiety, as it would draw everyone's attention directly to me and my face whenever I talked. The use of a microphone also became an issue, because my laptop doesn't have a working microphone built into it. I own a pair of headphones that has mic attached to it, but sometimes the wires inside the cord would get messed up and cut off my mic, thinking that the headphones weren't plugged in. So each time that happened, I would have to either use the text chat box to communicate (which some professors have failed to notice most of the time), or silently pray that the professor doesn't call on me to answer a question if they don't have a text chat set up in their Zoom rooms. I always felt bad when I find myself in those kinds of situations because on the surface it would make it seem like I wasn't paying attention. But the only thing I could do was to keep taking as many notes as I could and go from there. No matter what the change, I still had to do my best to pass these courses.

Chapter 4: A Quiet Campus

One of the many things that I learned in the past four years is that Kutztown University holds great pride in its campus. When I was still deciding on which college to apply for, I saw one video from Kutztown talking about how beautiful its award-winning campus was. By no means am I saying they were wrong, though. Both the north and south halves of the campus were set up nicely, and it provided a welcoming atmosphere that helped me become comfortable living there. However, given that people have been used to quarantine life due to the pandemic, you would expect the campus to become less lively than it normally would be. And you would be right for the most part, but the campus didn't become a ghost town.

In one way or another, the campus had always been lively in the first seven semesters I attended Kutztown University. The campus consisted of two halves: the north side and the south side. The north side of campus mostly consisted of buildings which held classrooms and other educational/professional offices. The south side was where the residential dorms were built. Throughout every season you could see hundreds of students walking on the sidewalks, either walking to or from classes. Occasionally, someone would speed past you if they were using a skateboard or a bicycle to travel. I'm sure the students who used those methods knew what they were doing, but each time I saw them I would get nervous about them accidentally hitting me and I would try to step out of their way. For the most part, I never had any problems with people walking by or using skateboards. The only grievances I had were if I ended up walking by or behind someone who was either smoking or vaping. When I come across those people, I just hold my breath and try to get through it until I make it to class. However, there was one instance that really ticked me off. One afternoon I was walking on the north side of campus, on my way back to my dorm after finishing class for the day. Suddenly, a student on a skateboard sped past me. He must have been either smoking or vaping, because the second he was in front of me he puffed out a big cloud of smoke and it flew directly into my face. I've always been one to avoid smoking at all costs, which included second-hand smoking. I never smoked before and I have no intention on killing my lungs in the future. But there was no time for me to avoid that puff, the only thing I ended up doing was coughing it. And the student on the skateboard didn't even notice, he just rode on like nothing happened. If I could say there was one thing that I didn't miss about anything before the pandemic struck, it would be walking near individuals smoking among a large crowd of people.

Depending on the time of day, some areas became a bit crowded. One building that I had the most experience with being crowded was the Student Union building. From my own experiences, that building would become especially crowded in two areas: the Book Store and the Cub Café. I mentioned before that there was usually a seating shortage at the Cub Café during lunch hours. It was the one thing that gave me stress whenever I ate there. During my sixth semester, it got so bad to the point where I became fed up with dealing with it and started asking to get take-out boxes for my food. When I did that, I would walk down to the bottom floor of the Student Union building, find a seat in the back, and eat my food in peace and quiet. I wish I thought of that idea sooner, because those were the most relaxing lunches I can recall having outside of South Dining Hall. For the majority of the semester, the Book Store wouldn't have too many people visiting. However, if it was the start of the semester then it becomes packed like a zoo with students trying to buy all of their books. For the first week and a half of a semester, the Book Store's front cash registers would have lines that could wrap around and stretch back to where the books were being kept. However, something funny that I noticed

overtime was how a majority of students would stand and wait in a long line for the front registers, but there was another set of registers off to the side of the store that only a few students were using. I think this was because that second set of registers was set up in the clothing area of the store, and students thought those registers were for buying clothes only. But it saved me a lot of time waiting in those smaller lines than in the longer line at the front. Although this last part of the Student Union building never got as crowded as the Cub Café or the Book Store, they also had a room set up as a small movie theater where they would show different movies each weekend. It was a really neat part of the Student Union building that I wish I had more time to check out.

Depending on the season, I've noticed that the way students interacted with the campus changed. When it was closer to spring or summer time, I would see students either throwing frisbees across large grass patches or lay down in a hammock tied in between two trees by the library. The north side of campus had a small and pretty water fall area that connected to a small water fountain, and there were usually stones placed around the waterfall for decoration. Sometimes when I passed the waterfall, I would see messages or images that other students have made out using those stones. One time someone made a heart shape out of those stones, another time someone recreated the Pikachu meme face, and it wasn't rare to see "KU" spelled out from time to time. When I walked to and from Dixon Hall, I took a route that led me to walk past a tennis court, a basketball court, and the university's football stadium. Sometimes when I walked down that route, I could see people playing tennis or the university's football team doing practice runs and meetups. Strangely enough, I also saw people playing in the basketball court in both the warmer and colder seasons. When winter would come around, and after it snowed, I would sometimes find that someone built a snowman in the grass patch in front of South Dining Hall. Other times I would catch students sliding down the small hill by Dixon Hall with sleds as I walked back home from eating lunch or dinner. No matter the season, everyone seemed to find something to do and enjoy each other's company.

During my eighth semester, there were only four instances where I left my dorm room to go to the north side of campus. And each time I walked through the campus, even if it was midday, it was almost like walking through a ghost town. It was almost as silent as it could be, save for the wind and potentially a small handful of people walking by. The only other times I could recall the campus being that quiet was if I had a class that ended early and I was able to leave while all the other classes were taking place. Even though I saw a little more activity on the south side of campus, there wasn't anyone throwing frisbees outside Dixon Hall. Only a few people walking to and from somewhere. Out of the four times I went to the north side of campus, I went to the Student Union building three times and it was just as silent. The bookstore barely had any students buying books, and the line for the front registers was the smallest I've ever seen it. I didn't visit the Cub Café during my visits, but I couldn't hear the sound of people talking as much as I used to. And because of the pandemic, I thought it was safe to assume that the room that was used to show movies was no longer in service, especially since there weren't any more banners showing what movie would play next. However, even with the pandemic keeping a majority of people inside as much as possible, I still saw a few people engaging in activities like before. One time when I was walking back to my dorm, I walked past the basketball court and I saw a group of guys shooting hoops without their masks on. Another time I looked out the second-floor window of the South Dining Hall during dinner, and I saw a group of people playing soccer on the soccer field. I would assume that these groups were friends who trusted that one another didn't have the virus, but even then I can imagine some people would see these

activities as the students being unsafe. I'm not one to judge other people on what they decide to do, I just hoped that they would be okay. Although, it was nice to see them having fun like that.

Chapter 5: The Health Center and Getting Sick

When a university has students living on campus, I'm sure it's a requirement to have some form of nurse/health office located on campus in case a student experiences illness or injury. For Kutztown University, we had the Health and Wellness Center located within Beck Hall, one of the dormitory buildings on the south side of campus. From what I saw of the center, it was built as if it was an actual clinic. It had a waiting area with magazines to read and a television to watch. And if you went to one of the medical rooms, it was set up just like a doctor's office with the special bed and all. They also provided counseling services for students experiencing mental or emotional stress. And for the first seven semesters I attended Kutztown University it operated much like an actual clinic. However, sometimes that would cause me to not go to the Health Center when I did get sick during my first seven semesters.

The first time I remember getting really sick, to the point where it pushed me to go to the Health Center for the first time, was near the end of my very first semester. Fun fact; COVID-19 was not my first experience in dealing with a virus spreading on campus. Because apparently there was some sort of spread that happened near the end of the Spring 2017 semester, which I unfortunately caught. I remember it started as a small cough that I thought would pass by the next day. Instead, it got worse the next day and I found myself having big coughing fits for a few days straight. I think it was on the third day of this that I thought "Okay, enough is enough, I need to see a nurse or doctor about this and get some medicine." Since both Dixon Hall and Beck Hall were located on the south side of campus, you would think that walking to and from there would be easy. However, there were five other dorm buildings standing in-between Dixon Hall and Beck Hall, so the two were pretty far apart. Not only that, but as I walked to the Health Center my coughing fits would keep coming up, which made the walk feel a lot farther than it would be if I was healthy. I even had to stop and sit on the ledge of the sidewalk during a fit, it got that bad. When I finally got to the Health Center, the first thing the person at the front desk asked was if I had an appointment. When I said no, she gave me a form to fill out to register for an appointment. And it turned out that the earliest appointment I could get was an hour from when I first visited the Health Center. Of course, I didn't want to sit in the waiting area until then, so I walked back to my dorm to lie down before walking back to the Health Center an hour later. And even then, I had to wait another fifteen minutes in the waiting area before the doctor was ready to check on me. When I got into the doctor's office, they asked me a few questions so they could fill out a medical form they had on their computer screen, and then began to assess what was wrong with me. This was where I heard that the illness I caught was apparently a virus spreading among the other students on the campus. By the end of my visit, the doctor gave me some medicine and told me that it would take a few days before it would fully go away.

So for the day I visited the Health Center, I received a doctor's note excusing me from missing classes that day. But it turned out that it only excused me for that one day. And even though I still felt too sick to go to class for the next few days, I couldn't receive another doctor's note to excuse my absence unless I made another appointment and saw a doctor on that same day. And given how my classes were scheduled at the time, as well as the work I had to do for said classes, I didn't have the time to do that repeatedly for the next few days. So instead, I made a plan to stay in my dorm and rest during the classes where there were no penalties for missing a session, while I tried to suck it up as I attended the classes that would have a penalty for missing too many sessions in a semester. During that weekend, my parents came to visit me while I was sick and my mom gave me this really big, soft blanket as a way to comfort me. It was probably

the most comfort I felt that whole week concerning my health, if I were to be honest. The biggest take-away that I got from that experience was that, starting with my second semester, I became more strategic when it came to feeling sick and missing sessions. Because some courses at Kutztown University have penalties if students missed too many sessions, such as their attendance grade lowers if they miss more than three days without an excuse. I didn't want to go through the process with the Health Center each time I got sick, so if I felt like I couldn't go to class I'd either use up one of the three free days or suck it up if I've used all three.

However, catching that virus near the end of my first semester wasn't the worst illness I had to go through while I stayed on Kutztown's campus. That award goes to my very first day of classes for my sixth semester. I won't go into details about what happened to me for private health reasons, but I will say that I noticed something was up that morning when I was getting ready to go to class. At the time I didn't feel anything painful, and I thought that since I had three, one-hour long classes in a row that morning (and they were all located within the Old Main building) that I would be able to get through them for that first day and deal with the situation afterwards. I should also mention that I had the same professor teaching my first and third classes of that morning, and she stated in my first class that she would not accept any excuses for absences, even if students had a doctor's note. By the end of that first class, I could feel a little pain starting to build up, but I told myself to suck it up since I only had two more classes to go through. However, during my second class the pain kept building and building, and I ended up asking the professor to be excused from class half-way through the hour. Walking from Old Main back to Dixon Hall was a struggle, and I tried my best to not make it look like I was in pain so I wouldn't make anyone I passed by worry. It got so bad that I ended up collapsing to me knees in the elevator in Dixon Hall as it carried me up to my floor, but I pulled myself back up so I can finally lie down in my bed and deal with the rest of it. For the next hour or two, I was tossing and turning in my bed trying to deal with the pain until it would go away, and I ended up throwing up in the middle of it. Suffice it to say, I wasn't making any plans to see the Health Center that day. I just wanted to rest in my bed, regardless of any penalties that might come from missing my third class of the day. And I want to clarify here that the way I'm describing my experience might make it look like I was dealing with a serious medical issue, one which I should have let a doctor from the Health Center check out, because I'm not specifying what it was. But I want to make it clear that I fully knew what was going on, it has happened to me in the past, and I knew that the only thing I could do about it was to just wait it out.

So with the COVID-19 pandemic still spreading in the country, you would think that the Health Center would be handling things a lot differently than in previous semesters. And my answer to that thought is that I'm actually not sure. Throughout my final semester, I never got sick to the point where I felt as though I needed to visit the Health center. The worst I felt was a mild stomach cramp, but even then it didn't affect my ability to attend class. I didn't have a lot of space to take physical notes, but I placed my laptop next to my bed and I listened to the lecture to the best of my ability. As a matter of fact, I tried to avoid going to the Health Center at all during my eighth semester. I've heard that doctors at clinics or health centers would test patients for COVID by driving a six-inch swab up the patient's nose and through their systems, which was a process I didn't really want to go through. And while this could be my paranoia, I had a feeling that if I so much as took one step in the Health Center, the first thing that would happen would be the doctors testing me for the virus. Even if I were to walk in and say that I had a stomach issue, I had a feeling that they would still test me before they would do anything about the stomach pain. I could be wrong about this because I never went to the Health Center during the time of the pandemic, but that paranoia followed me even outside of the Health Center. Ever

since my third-grade elementary year, I've always had this condition with my mucus where it would slide down my throat and make me cough it out because it felt like I was choking on it. So there would be times where I had to stop what I was doing to go to the bathroom and hack out the mucus in my throat. For the majority of the semester, I didn't have any major problems with this condition. However, when fall began to start later in the semester, the mucus issue would come up more often. And the times it would act up the most was, inconveniently, whenever I went outside to eat lunch or dinner. So every time I felt like I need to cough a little to let the mucus out, I would get paranoid that the people around me would hear me and assume it was because I had the virus. It felt like if I was heard, someone would sound the alarms and a swat team would come and send me to quarantine. During this final semester, I made sure to take care of myself and thankfully I didn't become seriously ill with anything.

Chapter 6: Snow Days and Canceled Classes

I think one of the biggest hopes I had when I was a kid was if a school day would either be shortened or canceled due to snow. Whenever I woke up in the morning and heard my mom say, "Hey Sierra, school's canceled today due to snow" I would mentally respond with "Yes, I get a break!" I'm pretty sure a majority of children have a similar reaction whenever they hear that school was closed, and I'm also pretty sure that feeling stays the same when kids grow up to become students in college. Although, the amount of people who feel that way about canceled classes probably grew smaller since a semester only lasts half a year and each class session really counts when it comes to learning everything in the course. Because of that, having a class session canceled due to snow or another reason has a different effect on the students instead of just "Woo-hoo, free day!" And because class sessions were moved to online platforms due to the COVID-19 virus, you would think that there would be little to no canceled classes for the Spring 2020 semester. In some ways that's correct, but it's also incorrect.

Throughout my first seven semesters at Kutztown University, I've noticed that there were fewer canceled classes due to snow. This is likely because, again, each semester had limited time to complete each course and every fifty minutes counted. That's not to say that they dismissed student safety, though. I have a feeling that they got their employees to sprinkle salt and shovel snow off the roads early in the morning to try to provide safe travels in time for classes to start. Because the night before I would hear news outlets saying that there would be a large amount of snow that would likely cause schools to shut down, but the next morning I would look out my window and find that the roads were cleaner than the floor of my dorm room. However, if the snowfall was ridiculously large, then the University would either have an early morning delay (which meant that classes held before 11 a.m. would be canceled) or cancel classes for the entire day. I can't remember which specific semester it was, but I remember that during one of my earlier semesters the University was hit with a snowstorm so big that classes were canceled for two days straight and had an early morning delay for the third day. For me personally, I still retained a feeling of relief whenever I heard that classes were canceled due to snow, mainly because it allowed me to worry less about getting to class on time and focus more on any schoolwork I had to finish. The big downside to snow days was that any in-class work would become more limited, since they would usually be moved to the next day to compensate and thus providing less time for future in-class work to be done. When a snow day happened, sometimes the professor of my class would start the session by having the class review an updated version of the syllabus to compensate for the lost class time.

However, there were more reasons as to why a class session would be canceled for a day, and they usually involved the professors teaching the classes. If a professor wasn't able to attend class, then the students would basically have a free period. And out of the entirety of my first seven semesters, I only had one instance where a professor would provide a substitute teacher to continue the class for the day. Every other time a professor couldn't make it to class the sessions were canceled. I always found this odd because the Elementary, Middle, and High Schools I attended before always provided a substitute teacher, but then there are almost no substitute professors provided in college. After thinking it over, I could only guess that the reason for this was because the lower-leveled education schools had a more rigid schedule and they had to employ a substitute to watch over the students in a class. When it came to Kutztown University's schedule, it was more flexible and personal because the students would choose which class they would attend and which time they would attend the class. So I think it was because of this

flexibility that University professors weren't as pressured to get a substitute for their class as the elementary, middle, high schools were to find someone to fill the role. That and because the professors organize and structure the courses personally, there might not have been substitutes that could effectively fill the position unless the professor gave them a complete run-down on what was supposed to happen.

If a class was canceled due to the professor's absence, it was usually because they became sick that day. Whenever I heard that a class was canceled because of that, yes I would feel slightly relieved that I was given a little more free time, but I would also feel bad that this free time came at the expense of the professor's health. For the most part the professors never had any serious illnesses or injuries, usually something they would be able to fight off within a day, but I would rather have the professors be in good health than to have an extra hour of free time added to my day. The worst situation I experienced with this was at the beginning of the Spring 2018 semester. Before the semester began, I enrolled myself in a screenwriting course and looked forward to participating in it. Not only because I thought the topic would relate to the career I was aiming for, but it was going to be taught by a professor I worked with in the previous semester. And from the way the rest of my courses were scheduled, I was originally going to have all of my courses take place on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, leaving my Tuesdays and Thursdays completely free. The only downside to this screenwriting course was that it was a three-hour long session that was meant to last from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., but I thought it would be worth it in the long run. However, when the semester first began, I noticed that the class disappeared from my schedule on MyKU. I quickly set up a meeting with my advisor to ask about what happened, and he said that the course was canceled for the entire semester. My advisor wasn't sure if it was because something happened to the professor of the course or to someone related to the professor, but I think someone might have passed away during winter break. I had to find another course to enroll in because of this last-minute cancellation and I chose to take a Cultural Anthropology class that was held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, but I was able to adjust to the change and continued on with the semester. But I was really disappointed to hear that the screenwriting class was canceled and I felt really bad about the professor who was supposed to teach it, especially since he seemed like a really good guy when I had him in the previous semester. Every time that I had to meet with my advisor to discuss my schedule for the next semester, I would always ask if the screenwriting course was available, to which he said that the University didn't have any other professors to teach the course, so it wasn't likely. I haven't heard anything about that professor since then, but I hope things got better for him or his relatives.

At the time I'm writing this, it has yet to snow at all during the Fall 2020 semester, so I can't discuss how snow would affect class session during the pandemic, if it would at all. Since every course I was enrolled in held their sessions through Zoom, everyone could stay home and not worry if snow did cover the streets or not. I think the worst that could happen is if a snowstorm was interfering with the professor's Wi-Fi connection, but even then I never had a session where weather became an issue for Wi-Fi stability. In fact, I think there was really only one or two thunderstorms throughout the entire semester thus far. And because these sessions were held online, that would mean that classes would be held every day without any canceled classes, right? That was what I believed at first, but somehow I've had more canceled class sessions this semester than in any of my previous semesters. This semester, I enrolled in a Professional Seminar, an Internship, and four normal courses. Three out of the four courses ran normally, with maybe only one class canceled due to a professor becoming ill. However, the professor for the fourth course I was enrolled in had canceled class on five different days. Two of

those days were because he became ill, but the rest were because he was having trouble connecting to the Wi-Fi and wasn't able to host an online session. And the professor never handed out review sheets or documents on what we were supposed to cover, the most I usually received from him was an email with the notice that class was canceled for the day. Yes we covered the material the next day, but I ended up worrying if the canceled session limited our time learning about future material, and thus leave me and the other students learning about less information that what might be required for the next exam. Thankfully the professor would narrow down the questions to the material we covered, but I still wish we didn't have our time cut down this much because of Wi-Fi issues. It stinks that the pandemic is limiting class interactions like this, but I can at least be thankful that students like me still have the opportunity to enroll in classes and continue their education. I honestly wouldn't know what to do if this current semester was completely canceled, especially since this is meant to be my final semester before I graduate.

Chapter 7: Living on Campus

I will admit that, for the first seven semesters of attending Kutztown University, I didn't really participate in outside activities that much. For the majority of the time I lived on campus, I usually stayed in my dorm and focused on my schoolwork and projects. That might sound like I was missing fun opportunities by skipping on some events that were held on the campus, and I will admit that I wish that I tried to do a few of them (since everything had to be closed or limited due to the virus now). But the thing is, I'm usually not one to enjoy outdoor activities that often, I usually feel more relaxed with and enjoy indoor activities more. This isn't because I dislike anything about outdoor activities, its just the personal preference I grew to have overtime. If I'm not working on my schoolwork, then I'd usually watch a movie, talk with friends online, or research different kinds of mythologies and legends. So unfortunately, I'm not sure if I would be qualified to share the full experience of what it was like being a student living on campus outside of the classes, dinning times, and subjects that I didn't cover in the previous six chapters. So instead, I'll share how the pandemic changed the smaller parts of living on campus that affected me ways where I had to adapt.

The largest change that I experienced early on into the Fall 2020 semester was my suitemate moving out of her dorm. For context, in Dixon Hall a normal suit consists of two bedrooms (that would hold either one student or two students each), a toilet room, a shower room, and an entrance room that connects to every room. Every semester, I would have to share the toilet and shower room with another student who lived in the second bedroom of the suit. This meant that I normally had to keep more personal items (such as toothbrushes or shampoo) within my own bedroom so that way my stuff wouldn't get in the way of my suitemate's routine in the morning. However, if a suitemate were to move out of the suit, then student left behind would essentially have the entire suit to themselves until another student were to move in. Out of the first seven semesters of living on campus, I only had one instance where a suitemate moved out due to mental health reasons, but it wasn't until a week before the semester was about to end. However, two weeks after this semester began, the suitemate I had decided to move out and live with her family in order to avoid potentially catching the virus on campus. So this was the first and only semester where I had the suit to myself for the majority of the time. I will admit that I feel kinda bad because my suitemate seemed like such a sweet person and I wish I could have gotten to know her better. However, being able to leave some of my stuff in the bathrooms helped me relax a bit and made doing my morning routines take up less time since I didn't have to set everything up each time I needed to take a shower. Instead of moving bathroom mats in and out of the shower room, I was able to simply leave them there until the next time I took a shower. For a while it felt like I was living in my own apartment.

Ever since the pandemic began to cause quarantine regulations across America, I've always followed the rule to wear a mask and a pair of gloves. This was especially the case during the 2020 summer break. Every time I had to go outside, I always made sure to wear a pair of gloves. Thankfully, my brother's workplace gave him a large box of disposable gloves to wear to work and he allowed me to use a few pairs whenever I went outside. Although each time I did, I would sometimes get criticized by my stepfather about being overly paranoid, saying that all I needed to do was wash my hands and I would be fine. I washed my hands whenever I got back home, but I still continued to wear a pair of gloves because I wanted to lower the chances of catching the virus as much as possible, especially since my stepfather could become vulnerable if our family were to catch the virus. I continued the habit of wearing gloves when I moved back

into my dorm on campus. Even though the only place I would go outside for was the South Dining Hall most of the time, I still made sure to wear a pair of gloves. During the first half of the semester, I bought two bags of disposable gloves to wear and throw out. However, they eventually ran out and when I tried to go out to buy more, neither the Book Store nor Dixon Market Place sold disposable gloves. So for the rest of the semester, I ended up reusing a pair of cloth gloves that my mother bought for me for Christmas. At first, I was a little paranoid about if potential virus bacteria would stick on the gloves the next time I used them, or if it would spread across my dorm room if I carelessly placed my gloves around the room. So I set up a small area in my room where I would put my gloves after time I used them, hoping that any potential virus bacteria would stay in that area and die off by the time I would need to use my gloves again. I will admit that I might have been a little over paranoid about the last part, but I've stayed healthy throughout the semester thus far so I can only assume that it's working.

One of the biggest downsides that I've witnessed about living on campus is how, occasionally, we would be visited by a small group of people that I have mentally called "Invaders." I call them "Invaders" because they would either stand in the center of the northern campus or right in front of South Dining Hall and shout out a protest that was either racially or sexually discriminating, in addition to adding religious context behind why their hate speeches were validated. I don't have any specific examples of what some of these groups talked about, because whenever I see or hear one pop up on campus, I try my hardest to block them out and avoid giving them any attention. I recall two instances where a group of Invaders were stationed in front of South Dining Hall, and I ended up entering the building through the side exit instead just to avoid the confrontation they were making. I realize that I'm not supposed to do that, but I would always walk up to the cash registers at the front to swipe my student I.D. card once I got in. Thankfully during the Fall 2020 semester, I only saw two instances where Invaders came on campus, one of which was, thankfully, when I saw them leave as I was walking toward South Dining Hall. However, for the other instance where I saw the Invaders in front of South Dining Hall, I knew I wouldn't be able to get away with entering through the side exit again, so I had to mentally tune them out as I walked straight through the crowd of students yelling back at them, making sure I wasn't making eye contact with anyone until I got inside. Every time I find that I have to walk pass a group of Invaders to get to class, I'd tried my best to keep my face away from them, even hiding my face behind my scarf or coat collar in it was that cold. Because I didn't want to allow the Invaders to draw any attention to me, call me out for walking by, or try to use me to make whatever discriminating point they had in mind. Thankfully I never got caught up in any of those events throughout my time at Kutztown University. But I do wish that this issue could be stopped once and for all. I realize that the university can't legally stop the Invaders (saying that they still have "freedom of speech" protecting them), but they continuously disturb the students attending the college and disturb the peaceful life on campus.

One more thing that I should probably mention about what happened while living on campus during this semester was that, on November 12th, the body of a deceased student was found within Dixon Hall late that night. I didn't even realize that someone had died until the following morning. When I woke up that morning, the first thing I saw was that there was a text notification from my mom saying, "I call the University and they're going to send someone to check on you." Immediately, I was confused as to why on Earth did my mom call to send someone to check on me. Then I read back on the text messages and found that my mom had been spam-texting me asking for me to reply in 6 a.m. in the morning, when I was asleep and unable to respond at all. I read through the texts she sent me and found one where she said that a student had died within Dixon Hall the previous night. A few minutes later, the people that the

university sent to check on me knocked on my door and I had to call someone from home to let them know I was okay. Admittedly, I got frustrated at my mom for not only making the university check on me as if I was a child, but also that she expected me to respond to her texts so early in the morning that I was still asleep and unable to have done anything. However, after an hour or two to calm down, I acknowledge that the reason my mom panicked was because she was concerned about my wellbeing after hearing that a student had died in Dixon Hall. I still believe that she slightly overreacted when sending someone to check on me, because if something did happen to me I'm sure the University would have contacted my parents immediately. But at the same time I am grateful that my mom cares so much about me to become concerned in the first place. But the text she sent me was the only notice I received about the student's death at the time. I remember that the night before I did see a police car stationed outside my window, but I didn't think it was because of a death since there were multiple instances before where a police car was sitting in front of Dixon Hall without any incidents causing their arrival. The CAs of Dixon Hall didn't even use their Emergency PA System that night. In the previous semesters, Dixon Hall would occasionally run an automatic announcement over the PA that repeatedly stated "ATTENTION! THERE'S BEEN AN INCIDENT REPORTED IN THE BUILDING!" Every time they played that announcement, especially when it told students to remain on their floor until further instructions were made, I became worried that it meant that a student might have had an accident, was experiencing a health emergency, or even died in the building. But as far as I know, none of those situations were the causes of those PAs playing. But when the body was found on November 11th, no announcements were made on the PA system. In the days following the discovery of the body, I received notices in my email about how, while they left the cause of death unlisted, the student did not die due to foul play, meaning that she wasn't murdered. As of the time I'm writing this, I don't believe a clear cause of death has been published yet. However, I overheard the students and professor of one of my classes discussing it and saying that it was likely either an overdose or a suicide. And during the weekend following the death, I found that someone left a few sticky notes inside the elevators with encouraging messages written on them. They said things such as "You are Golden" and "You are loved, even if you don't feel that way." Those sticky notes essentially confirmed what might have happened. I've never met the student who died, but I still wish that things had turned out differently for her.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

At the time that I am writing and editing this, the Fall 2020 Semester of Kutztown University will be drawing to a close in a few weeks. That might sound like there's still a while to go, but when your time is spent focusing on class and working on assignments, then the time flies away quickly, almost too quickly. And once these next few weeks are done, I'll be graduating from the University and eventually beginning a new chapter in my life. But before I do, I should give a closing chapter to this project. I will admit that I wish that I would have been able to enjoy my last semester here as a normal semester. Or at least, what was normal before the pandemic. I think everyone on the planet wished that the world could go back to how it was before the virus, or that the virus didn't happen at all. But that's not the reality we live in. Instead, we live in a reality where COVID-19 did become a global pandemic and everyone and everything had to make some sort of change in order to stop the spread and keep people healthy and alive. But as of right now, no one can snap their fingers and make the virus disappeared. We can't change the things that are out of our control. So instead, we can focus on making changes that we can control and adapting to what we can't. I'm among the many who are hoping that the pandemic will be sorted out by the next year or two, but I don't know how long the virus will stay around. If the virus is gone twenty years after this project is completed, then hopefully this will serve as a useful introspective of how someone experienced the changes during the pandemic. If the virus is still spreading and has caused even more changes in the future, then hopefully this project might have given you some ideas as to what "normal" used to mean for us.

If I could give any advice from what I've experienced this semester, one of the biggest things I would say is to exercise patience. Remember that when there's a traffic jam, the other people in that same line might be just as confused or frustrated as you might be. I found that this was especially the case when my family and I tried to move into my dorm at the beginning of the semester. Adaptability is going to be key too, since there were a lot of changes made that I had to adjust to due to the pandemic. It took me a little bit of time before I fully adapted to the food choices at South Dining Hall, but with time it became like a normal routine. And I know that it can be tempting to zone out during an online class session, especially if you have your mic muted and your camera off. But your time spent in these classes are just as important as time spent during in-person classes, maybe more so since the limited environment requires students to pay attention or else, they might miss an important part of a lesson. I know I said in a previous chapter that I tried to avoid the Health Center because of my paranoid. But if you are feeling sick and think that you might have caught COVID-19, then do not hesitate to go find medical assistance to not only check for the virus but to also receive medical care as soon as possible. Hopefully COVID-19 won't last for another twenty years, but if it does then I hope this journal provided some good insight on how Kutztown University changed to adapt to try to stop the spread, as well as how it was like adapting to said changes as a student. But what I hope for more than anything is that people keep trying to stay safe and help others when and where they can.