

Jakob Wade

I, along with millions of other college freshmen, did not expect to begin my post-secondary education over Zoom. I have been fortunate enough to have begun this journey in the best possible way. My college allowed students to live on campus and take classes online from the dorms. Though this is still nowhere near the environment and opportunities of a normal year, I recognize it is still a much better situation than what is accessible to many of my peers.

Many students report feeling that they have learned nothing following the transition of education into an online space. I will admit that I felt similar in the late Spring when teachers initially struggled to adapt and work with unclear district policies. I myself struggled to find motivation. After the entire world had come to a halt, it was difficult to restart all that which had been abandoned in a single day. When I run, I frequently remind myself that even though it might feel good to stop running for a minute and rest, I cannot, because if I do, my muscles will be sorer than before and lifting my knees high again to resume running will be harder than it would be to continue without rest. The end of my Senior year of high school felt similar. I was eagerly awaiting college acceptances, applying to scholarships, and studying hard for my AP exams. I was finishing the race, pushing myself past the finish line, and then I stopped, not by my own volition, but because the entire world did.

When I finally did resume my education in full earnest to begin my first year of college, I had felt the muscles I needed had atrophied and were now being forced to run in a race unlike any before. I found it hard to focus on Zoom lectures filled with hundreds of other students and I found it hard to meet people and develop any kind of normal relationships with them. I had my roommates of course but finding human interaction beyond them proved difficult. More than simply the social loss of this situation, I felt it impact my education as well. In previous years I had benefitted from collaborating with my peers in studying and learning the material in my class, but without that, I struggled.

I am already disinclined to make intentional social connections. It has always been a weakness of mine, but it was not as if I was going to sit next to someone in class and get to know them accidentally. After last semester, I knew that I could not do without human interaction, even in its current limited form. This semester, I have made an effort to attend numerous online events, facilitated by various groups within the university. Even though they do not quite fill that which they replace, they have made me feel more like a member of my college community rather than someone living outside of it, peering in. In classes and discussion sections, I have spoken up more with questions and thoughts rather than simply letting the class run on my computer monitor as I take notes. I even just started an online study group with a few other students from my macroeconomics class.

It's not as if all of this effort has somehow made everything normal—it's not—but it has made it better. Last March, nearly all of us reverted to inaction; because of this, taking any action at all feels refreshing. I haven't yet seen the fruits of these changes in my life, but I already feel better, simply because I'm doing something instead of accepting pure and utter defeat in the face of this challenge.