

Before the Wake Forest's student body left for spring break there were whispers of the possibility of Wake extending spring break because of the coronavirus. These rumors would turn into reality one week later.

"I can't believe they actually did it," said a shocked Mary Troy as we all sat silently in an Uber on our way back from the beach in Miami— "Is it really getting this bad?"

The coronavirus pandemic caused thousands of colleges and universities across the country to transition completely to remote learning. According to Georgetown professor Bryan Alexander, the discontinuation of in-person education impacted an estimated 14 million students. As Wake Forest joined the mounting list of universities closed for the rest of the semester, our student population enters the ranks of students displaced and confused all over the country.

There is perhaps no better place to start discussing the impact of Wake Forest students at this time than with senior Olivia DeVos.

"At first it was really tough," said DeVos. "I was really sad to not be at Wake anymore and that took a toll on how I was acting. I would ask everyday if I could go back to school."

DeVos sits in her house in Grand Rapids, Michigan with her yellow labrador comforting her as she mourns the loss of the last dinners with friends, last classes, last weekends away, and-- truly-- her last months free from the stresses of the real world.

Though DeVos could have been bogged down by the losses and negativity of this time, she began viewing this opportunity as a positive.

"I still wake up and do work for school," said DeVos, "But this has given a lot of extra time and availability to look at jobs."

Sophomore Tony Calderon, who before this quarantine had no internship prospects in sight, also used this opportunity to finally lock down a job for the summer.

Calderon now lives with his girlfriend, sophomore Sarah Merchant, and her family in their home in Branchburg, N.J., putting them in a very unique situation.

“We wanted to be together,” said Merchant, “We were already gone a week from each other and because of some logistic things and Miami not doing that great, it made sense.”

Though they currently reside in the state with the second most coronavirus cases, they do not see the despair that the rest of New Jersey faces everyday, as Branchburg is relatively rural. No matter how difficult their situation could have appeared, they remain relatively content with their new normal.

With that being said, this transition has not been as easy for other students torn away from the people they love in Winston-Salem.

“At first I missed my friends the most, then normalcy, then my independence and space,” said sophomore Hannah Coates, who is currently residing in Ohio, “then I was just really depressed and uncomfortable with being alone so often.”

This mental battle is all too common for students no matter where they call home. But, Coates found comfort in an area where tension previously appeared.

“I have been able to communicate with my mom more positively and effectively than ever before, and we’ve really gotten to enjoy each other in ways that never panned out in high school,” said Coates. “I like my role in the family more now that I have been away. I can be my own person, but I can still be connected and we can appreciate each other for the good things we share.”

Personally, my family life has become one of my biggest struggles in this process. This is the second time this year I have been called home unplanned and little did I know how much that first trip would impact my quarantine experience.

Exactly two months before we received the email from President Hatch, I was putting on a borrowed black lace dress to bury my father. From that day on, home has become a different place for me.

Far too often, the constant reminders of my father's death are more haunting than the virus. That black dress brushing up against me as I reach to grab a sweatshirt from my closet shelf. The chair where my father took his last breath staring at me every time I go in my backyard. The dark black lizard mocking my pain as he sits on that very chair. His silver urn glaring at me as I sit and watch television. His funeral cards blatantly lying on top of papers my mother is organizing next to me at the kitchen table while I log onto a Zoom class. The remainders of condolence food baskets eyeball me every time I go to the pantry for a snack. No matter where I look, he is there.

Some days are better than others and I have done a good job at balancing my healing and self-growth with the suffering. After talking to Tony, it made me realize what it is that keeps me from descending into a pit of overwhelming sadness.

“This time really made me realize the people, my unconditional best friends, that I want to rush back to,” said Calderon.

The thought of our reunion surrounded by blossoming trees under the shadow of the glorious Wait Chapel, embracing with love instead of fear, is what keeps me— as well as every Wake Forest student— going in these uncertain times.