

Kento Ikeda

Professor Ruiz

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Life during the Coronavirus Pandemic

My name is Kento Ikeda, and I am a fourth-year geography major. As a transfer student, I started attending UCLA in Fall 2019, so I have not spent a lot of time here. I was looking forward to meeting new and previous professors in-person for Spring 2020, but that did not happen. It turns out that all classes will be online until the end of Summer Sessions this year, although I assume that Fall 2020 will be in jeopardy as well. The coronavirus pandemic has changed the everyday lifestyle. I still cannot believe that everything was normal roughly two months ago, and all students were attending classes in-person. I wish I could spend more time at UCLA to experience extraordinary college life. Still, unfortunately, I am taking as many courses as possible so that I can graduate quickly and spend less on tuition. I suppose my campus life at UCLA ended in March 2020 because I plan to graduate at the end of Summer 2020.

First of all, the coronavirus pandemic has ruined my college experience. Due to the lockdown and advice from public health officials, all schools are closed and will remain closed for the unforeseeable future. Before I transferred, I had the choice to attend CSU Fullerton, SDSU, and UCLA as a transfer student. CSU Fullerton was offering a bachelor's degree in social studies online, and its tuition was much lower than SDSU and UCLA's. However, I wanted to

attend in-person classes because I like meeting new people and interacting with others, so online education was not my ideal choice. SDSU would have been an excellent choice for me, but UCLA's prestigiousness caught my attention. So I chose to attend UCLA, and my first quarter was full of excitement.

Classrooms were giant compared to community colleges', and as an upper-division student, my primary focus was on classes that are related to my major, geography. Although many courses were, and still are, challenging, I found them very enjoyable, and I can manage stress. My second quarter, Winter 2020, was another joyful moment. This January was no different from the previous years, and no one talked about the coronavirus until mid to late February. And then, suddenly, UCLA suspended all in-person classes as of March 11, 2020. School is not the same anymore. Even though many professors try their best to have students interact remotely, the quality of education plummeted, at least in my opinion, and I no longer feel excited about learning. I miss waking up in the morning and walking to class. I miss listening to professors and taking notes in person. I miss making new friends. No one can predict when this pandemic will end, but I know that my college life is over.

Secondly, my family and I feel more isolated than ever. Although I am a US citizen, my parents are from Japan, and they live there. The Pacific Ocean separates Japan and the US, but one can move from either country to the other on a plane within a day. Now, however, international flights are minimal, and there are many travel restrictions. Thus, taking any form of public transportation is risky as the coronavirus is highly contagious, and it can spread from human to human at a rapid rate. I want to see my family, but I fear to catch the virus on the way

home. I heard on the news that some infected people are asymptomatic. What if I am asymptomatic, and then I go home? I could infect my parents, and because of their advanced age, they can experience severe symptoms. I may be overthinking, but it could occur. Should I fly back home anyway? Will I be able to see my family again this year? The answer is, I do not know, neither do my parents.

Moreover, I am thankful for Governor Newsom's handling of the coronavirus pandemic in California. Before this pandemic, I did not know that the governors had the power to impose lockdowns in their states. Every state took a different path. Some governors were reluctant to impose a lockdown because they were concerned about economic losses. Governor Newsom, in contrast, imposed a statewide lockdown in California, and he was one of the first governors to do so in the United States. Thanks to the governor's effort, California has prevented a severe coronavirus outbreak that New York, Italy, and Spain, to name a few, had encountered. The numbers of infected cases and deaths in California are significantly lower than those of New York, the US coronavirus epicenter. I strongly believe that California would have been in a terrible situation if the governor had not taken an earlier action.

Unfortunately, the world, especially the US, is currently experiencing another economic recession. I thought the 2008 financial crisis was the worst and last economic downturn that I had to experience in my life, but I was wrong. This coronavirus is the worst pandemic and economic hardship in modern history. Many restaurants went out of business, and those that remained opened only allow takeout orders. Retail stores and malls shut their doors, and beaches and trails, too, are off-limits. The airline industry appeared to be doing well, and more people

were traveling overseas. However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, airports are operating at a much lower capacity, and people are afraid to travel. As of today, more than 30 million Americans are unemployed, according to various media. There is hardly any economic activity, and no industry is immune to the consequences. Millions of people continue to lose jobs all over the world, and I fear the worst is yet to come.

Furthermore, it seems like the US is more politically divided than ever. Most Americans, including myself, support the lockdowns to slow the spread of the virus. It has worked in Europe and New York, so the entire country should follow public health officials. Nonetheless, there is a small minority group that opposes the lockdowns and wishes to reopen the economy quickly. Ironically, President Trump is downplaying the coronavirus, and he is somewhat supporting the protestors. The problem with reopening the economy too fast is that we are still learning more about the coronavirus, and there is no vaccine. Again, the virus is highly contagious, and large gatherings can spread the disease more rapidly. I understand the frustration from the lockdowns, but is it worth the risk to get back in business? I believe that saving lives is more important than earning money, but not all Americans think this way.

Sadly, I am incredibly concerned about my future. As tens of millions of Americans apply for unemployment, what are the chances of me getting a job? Will I be able to do internships to gain some experience? Various companies across the world come to UCLA's job fairs to hire UCLA students and graduates. But due to the lockdowns, there will be no in-person job fairs for the next several months, or possibly years. Networking with different employers has gotten much more complicated, and I know that I am not alone. After I graduate, I will be competing with a

plethora of desperate job seekers, and there will be more qualified people than I am. If I cannot land into a decent job, I am not sure if I can pay my student loans on time. It is a good thing that I completed my first two years of higher education in community college, but I had to borrow tens of thousands of dollars to pay for my education at UCLA. After I graduate, I must start paying back my federal student loans, and I am worried that this could ruin my credit. I should be happy to graduate, but there is too much uncertainty in the future.

I think wearing facial masks and social distancing will be the new norms throughout the world until the foreseeable future. I have noticed that wearing facial masks was very uncommon in the western world; on the other hand, in Asia, people frequently wear masks if they feel ill. Medical experts claim that the coronavirus can spread from human to human through respiratory droplets, such as coughs and sneezes, from an infected person. It functions like the flu, but it is much deadlier. To prevent the spread of this fatal disease, wearing masks and social distancing became common. Since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, recommended some form of facial covering and maintaining at least 6 feet apart from each other, everyone must wear a mask at all UCLA dining halls and other essential services and avoid crowded places. All employees wear masks, too. In the City of Los Angeles, residents must cover their faces in public, and no one can enter grocery stores, pharmacies, and post offices, to list a few, without a mask in which social distancing is difficult. I also heard that all airline companies are requiring all passengers and crew members to wear masks during the entire flight. I have never seen flight attendants with masks on a plane before. Even though masks and social distancing are uncomfortable and inconvenient, we have managed to keep UCLA housing safe, and the world is on its way to partial recovery.

On the bright side, I think the world will be prepared for the next pandemic. Recently, the media has been praising the South Korean government's effort to contain the coronavirus. South Korea did not impose a lockdown, but it acted quickly and created a driving thru coronavirus test centers. In contrast, I do not think that the US government was ready for the coronavirus outbreak. Our current administration was slow to act compared to South Korea's, and the US is short on personal protective equipment. I remember the world experienced the Ebola outbreak in 2015, which is another virus that caused global disruption. I also saw SARS and MERS' warning signs, which are other viruses that are closely related to today's COVID-19, at the US-Mexico border and airport customs, so the US should have expected another inevitable disease pandemic. Our current health care system is not great, but we have some of the most outstanding hospitals in the world, such as the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. We are the most advanced country in the world in terms of economics, military, and technology. And yet, how could we have a considerable PPE shortage? I think it is a national shame to be unprepared and experience medical supply shortages. Nonetheless, we all learn from our mistakes, and I assume the world has learned its lesson.

Most importantly, the coronavirus outbreak is similar to the smallpox outbreak that Americas experienced post-1492. I learned in History 129A that the European colonizers did murder and destroy various indigenous tribes in the Americas, but smallpox had a more severe impact on native populations. People in the Old World were already immune to smallpox, but people in the New World had not encountered the disease nor were immune to it. Without proper immunization and vaccination, people are going to suffer and die. Like the Native Americans, no one currently has proper immunization to the COVID-19. What makes the coronavirus outbreak

more deadly in the contemporary world is rapid transportation. Airplanes can carry infected people from one region to the other in a matter of a few hours. Bringing smallpox from Europe to the Americas would have taken several weeks or months on a ship, but airplanes in today's world is a different story. At the same time, we have acquired a lot of knowledge from the past, and we have highly sophisticated technology. We will overcome this outbreak like people have in the past.