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History 129A

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Fourth Option: Looming Uncertainties of the COVID-19 Pandemic

I transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) earlier this year as a political science major. This was supposed to be the most exciting and pivotal moment in my education that I had been waiting for since high school. This past fall I moved into my dorm room with all transfer students and it was an incredible experience until the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. I was never a religious person before this pandemic, but somehow I find myself every night wondering if there is a God or a grand power in the universe guarding us, and I pray to whoever is out there that they give us mercy and protects us all. I've lost an immense amount of my vibrant spirit during this pandemic, my life had many future promises awaiting me that now seem bleak.

I remember in February hearing about the COVID-19 outbreak being in other countries and that it was an alarming fatal virus that was highly contagious. I have a distinct memory of my floormates and I discussing if COVID-19 would make us have to leave campus and many of my friends said it wouldn't get that serious. A few weeks had past and it was the middle of March when the COVID-19 situation had escalated quickly.

While the COVID-19 situation continued to get worse, finals for Winter Quarter were simultaneously approaching and my professors were telling us to expect to take finals on campus. Other university campuses had been moving their classes and finals remotely and all my

friends and I broke out in a frenzy. We kept asking questions about why was our university not taking those precautions?

Later throughout that one week in mid-late March, I received the email that the rest of the quarter would be remote, including finals, and that Spring Quarter would not be on campus until April 10th. I had professors sending me emails about their frustration and that they would soon let us know their plan for the rest of the classes and the finals exam. I was completely shocked by how the situation shifted so quickly. I was in one of my classes earlier on that Monday of the week and my professor told us the likelihood of moving remote is slim, she told the class don't expect finals to be online. It was an incredibly confusing transition to process because we went from temporarily moving off campus to permanently moving back home.

This entire experience was immensely stressful, I had no real idea of how serious the pandemic would affect every aspect of my life. My parents told me to come home and leave my dorm, they told me to pack as many of my belongings as I could. My best friends and I from the dorms were all panicking and packing our items because we didn't know when we would come back. All of us were quickly arranging on how to get home as soon as possible. At that time we were still expecting to come back for Spring Quarter. Eventually, the Housing Office sent an email to essentially not come back and live in the dorms unless you have nowhere else to go. I didn't know at the time when I left that it was going to be the last time I would see my friends and I still don't know when I will see them next.

Additionally, my friends and I were in the process of getting an apartment together for the next academic year. We all were transfers and wanted another year of being able to live together and we were about to sign a lease on an apartment and pay our first security deposit, we had

already completed the applications for the apartment and had been approved. My friends and I were stuck in that apartment limbo for quite a while. We only recently decided moving forward with the apartment wouldn't be a wise choice because we still don't know if next Fall Quarter will be completely remote, or a hybrid situation.

This experience is frustrating because I'm expecting to have remote classes online next Fall Quarter, but what am I supposed to do about Winter and Spring Quarter if classes are no longer remote? Would I have to sublease an apartment or take out more loans? I genuinely have no concrete security in what is going to happen with my academics next year, I'm assuming I will commute for the next quarter if they are on campus. But I also don't have my own car and my family members commute to work as well. So, I could possibly do public transportation which would take an incredibly long amount of time to arrive on campus. Before the pandemic, I was excited and motivated to be a UCLA student and now I'm fearful of my future and the uncertainties that are coming along with it. There isn't much room for motivation in my mind or soul at the moment.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to escalate, it seemed like every week the situation was changing. There was no way to tell what to expect, I was receiving so many different opinions on the severity of COVID-19 from my university, my parents, friends, professors, the news, and President Trump. I finished finals for Winter Quarter and then learned that Spring Quarter would be held remotely, so my friends and I were disappointed to learn that we weren't going to see each other again until maybe summer if we arrange flights to gather once more. Now with Stay at Home Orders being extended into summer, it seems unlikely I'm

going to see them anytime soon. I have numerous virtual calls with them daily but it's not the same, I miss so many things about living on campus with them.

Furthermore, moving home was a difficult reality to face and come to terms with. I'm close with my family and fortunate to have a safe and warm living environment at home. But, I attended community college so I could save money and transfer to my dream university. I wanted to move out and enjoy that experience that I worked hard to achieve.

Now my mother, brother, and I are all working remotely at home sharing the internet connection that inconveniently is often unstable. Two of my classes that I'm taking this quarter have weekly quizzes that make my entire grade for the class, they only allow for one attempt and there is a time limit. My internet connection has failed twice while I was in the middle of taking the quiz. This happened for the same class giving me a less than satisfactory grade because I wasn't able to finish. I experienced an immense amount of anxiety because I had to make some of my classes pass or fail, so it wouldn't affect my GPA negatively. My GPA affects my future, especially for applying to graduate schools and applying to jobs, thus I feel an intense amount of pressure to maintain my grades. Throughout this crisis, I consistently feel conflicted because I should be able to complete more tasks since I'm only at home, yet I can't find the motivation to accomplish more. The COVID-19 pandemic has defeated my mind, body, and soul and I feel disappointed in myself. I've had emotional and mental downward spirals about my future, which seems to be out of my control now.

Furthermore, the pandemic has shown how important it is to have an effective government take action in order to stabilize and provide to the people that are living in the United States during a time of crisis. President Trump should have mobilized sooner and the

government should have taken stricter action. I applaud Governor Newsom for taking charge and providing rules and regulations to protect the people living in California. It's daunting to see other states opening with loose regulations because there is not a sufficient amount of information to see what lies beyond this pandemic. I'm fearful that there will be a second wave of deaths surging with the reopening of some states. The government is lacking in providing security and safety to the nation's survival and the United States seems to be in an eerie anarchic period domestically.

There is no unification within the United States government on how to best deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, each governor is taking different measures and precautions. Some have implemented curfews while others have opened up their states completely. The United States government is disorganized and as a citizen, I'm concerned. I don't know if there will be a vaccine mass-produced and distributed if one is successfully made. It's unclear what the new normal would be for society. To my understanding, I will be wearing a cloth mask out in public for the next following year. There is currently instability within the United States government and the ongoing pandemic has brought forward an immense amount of anxiety amongst the people, including me, about what actions America's leaders will take next.

Moreover, this class has highlighted the inequalities that are prevalent in a classist society throughout the history of Spain. Issues of inequalities and an uneven distribution of wealth were issues that consistently hindered Spain. The epidemics that occurred in the New World left many people hurt, but it's clear that the indigenous populations were the most affected. The indigenous populations were at the bottom of society and colonialism had devastating effects that are still felt today by many of those populations that survived.

Similarly, the United States also has immense inequalities and uneven distribution of wealth within American society. The population that will be the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will be those that are of lower-income. The elites continue to have money, savings, a stable household compared to those that have lost jobs and face uncertainty in every aspect of their daily lives. When or if the lockdown ends and it is the time for society to return to a new normal, the lower-income population will continue to feel the effects of the pandemic. They will have to figure out how to pay rent back if there was a rent freeze in place, look for new jobs if they are unemployed, and if there are kids involved in a lower-income family household the situation becomes more complex. There is uncertainty for everyone through this pandemic, but the elites in American society will have more flexible outcomes and previous institutions will favor them once the pandemic ends. Lower-income families and individuals will continue to struggle after the pandemic ends, the uncertainty they face does not end simultaneously with a vaccine or cure to COVID-19.

Ultimately, there are no certainties guaranteed domestically for the United States, thus it's difficult to predict an operating unified world for the future. I can't predict if I'm going to be able to graduate on-campus and in-person in the following year. I hope I won't have to participate in a virtual commencement for the graduating class of 2021. I hope I will be able to see my friends sometime soon without the looming fears of being in contact with COVID-19. I hope my family continues to be safe and healthy. I hope for a better future for those that have more uncertainties than I do. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated how quickly society could unravel. It is not impossible for us as a society to persevere through this adversity, but we as a country and the human population of the world must work together to survive through the pandemic.