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Lifestyle Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every person in the world at this point in time. With the government rushing to shut down their borders and issue stay at home orders, even if you have not been personally affected by the sickness of the pandemic, I would venture to say every person has been affected by the social and economic consequences of the pandemic. I will address three aspects of life that have been severely impacted by COVID-19. First, schools have been forced to operate remotely, with UCLA being no exception. As a student finishing up my degree requirements and entering graduate school in the next academic year, the circumstances brought on by the pandemic have been life-altering to say the least. Second, I am a student-athlete at UCLA on the baseball team, and with our season being cancelled weeks after its inception, I am still dealing with the repercussions that COVID-19 has had on my athletic career. Third, it would be unfair of me to focus only on the personal ramifications I've experienced during this time, so I will talk about some of the social and economic crises that have arisen as a result of the pandemic. Lastly, I will connect aspects of the History 129A course to the current predicament we find ourselves in as a country. Given the uncertainty of the times, public scrutiny has shifted away from the potential wrongdoings of the current government and instead been focused on safety and how best to combat the spread of COVID-19. This is reminiscent of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, when illness ravaged the native population, allowing the government to further their own agendas with little opposition. These are highly unique times, and I have no doubt that once we are through them and some time has passed, this

chapter in American history will be intensely scrutinized by historians for the immense impact COVID-19 has had on American society.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the majority of industry to transition to a stay at home, virtual setting. University of California education made the decision to transition to fully online instruction for the spring 2020 quarter and has extended that mandate to include both summer sessions, with a decision waiting on the fall 2020 quarter as well. This shift to online instruction certainly required a number of adjustments to be made, both from the students' perspective as well as the instructors. Personally, I am in the middle of finishing up degree requirements for the psychology major, and the adjustment to online coursework has been difficult in the case of lab classes and collaborative themed courses. This adjustment has not been easy due to the dramatic difference in learning styles required for in person learning compared to online learning. I have found that the pace of classes has been challenging solely for the reason that the responsibility, in most classes, lies exclusively with the student. I understand that this is a problem that maybe limited to myself or someone with a similar style of learning, however there are a number of problems that are present for a larger constituent of students at UCLA. When I was on campus, I relied on the technology center for student athletes in order to access a computer. Since I returned home, I have had to borrow my father's work computer in order to complete assignments and study material. For someone who is not fortunate enough to have access to a computer from a family member, the transition to online learning becomes immeasurably more difficult. While UCLA has done a good job in providing stipends for students to purchase laptops and other necessary technology equipment, the reality of the matter is still that it will be much more difficult for a student without access to a personal laptop to

flourish academically than it would be for a person who does have access to a personal laptop during this unique time. Another aspect to consider is the impact the pandemic has had on the actual graduation for students graduating during the online period. I know that my parents would love to see me walk at graduation and receive my degree, but the sad truth is that this opportunity for an in-person graduation seems to be out of the question with the state of affairs in California as they relate to community gatherings. The academic landscape at UCLA and across the country has been undoubtedly shaped by public policy aimed at controlling the spread of the virus.

Another way in which I have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic has been athletically. I was a member of the UCLA baseball team in the past year and had the unusual experience of playing only a quarter of the season before it was abruptly ended. I remember sitting in my apartment in Westwood with my roommates who are also on the team and finding out that the season had been cancelled by watching ESPN on our television. It was a truly surreal experience and for a team that had very high hopes for the 2020 season a rather unceremonious end. At the time it seemed foolish to be cancelling an entire season's worth of competition but in retrospect the decision was made to ensure the safety and well-being of the athletes, which I can absolutely respect. It has put me in a truly unique situation, since I will be graduating as a junior this summer, I will be eligible to enroll at a master's program at another institution and continue playing baseball for my final two years of eligibility. It has also affected baseball on the professional level as well, with the normally 40 round draft being reduced to 5 rounds as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Personally, I believed I would have an opportunity to be drafted in a normal length draft, however due to the reduction in the draft's length, that possibility is greatly diminished. With all that being said, I am thankful to be in a situation where although I will not

be drafted, I have the ability to complete my undergraduate work and also begin a master's program while continuing to play college baseball. From a purely logistical point of view, athletes across the world have been hamstrung by the inability to train due to the stay at home orders put into place to ensure public health. Personally, I have been limited to training in my garage and in the street in front of my house with my younger brother. While this is not an ideal situation for athletes, it is necessary in order to combat the spread of the virus. Another aspect to consider is the role of sports in society and how that has been affected due to the pandemic. All major professional sports leagues have been postponed or cancelled because the risk of spreading the virus is too great to warrant continuing competition. Professional sports leagues are a huge source of revenue and entertainment in society, and the impact of these being cancelled on the American psyche cannot be undervalued. The COVID-19 pandemic has truly altered every aspect of American life, from the transition to virtual learning to the closure of professional sporting events.

The third aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic I'd like to talk about is the general societal impact it has had on everyday Americans. I will do this by talking about my parents and how it has affected their daily lives. Both of my parents work in athletic departments, my dad as an athletic director at a junior college and my mom as an administrative assistant in a high school athletic department. Both of them have been working at home since the stay at home order went in effect in the bay area. Talking with them has helped me gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a working American during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. My dad is constantly speaking with the leadership for the conference his college is in and there is no clear indication as to whether sports will be back in the fall of next academic year. This puts him under

a huge amount of stress as when funds begin to get tight as a result of the pandemic, the athletics programs will in all likelihood be the first to be cut in order to staunch the bleeding, so to say, for the college's financial situation. He lives in uncertainty as to the future of the athletic department, and hopes, like all of us, for a swift end to the pandemic. My mother's concerns are more to do with the logistical aspect of the new reality of living under the cloud of the pandemic. When I accompany her to the grocery store, she is very nervous about getting too close to people or about using a cart that was in use earlier during the day. As is required in the bay area right now, a mask and gloves are required when going to grocery stores and other similar businesses, but the anxiety about going out in public is still present for her and many Americans during this time. At the end of the day, everyone wants to keep themselves and their family healthy, and we are no different as a family.

However novel the situation may seem, there have been instances in the past over the course of human history where epidemics have plagued groups of people and fundamentally altered their way of life. When the Spanish began conquest in the Americas, they brought with them disease that the indigenous people were extremely susceptible to contracting. When smallpox ravaged native American populations, Spanish settlers claimed indigenous land and set up methods for keeping the local populations under Spanish subjugation. Similarly, the current administration has had the opportunity to deflect intense public criticism and further their agenda while the nation is preoccupied with an illness to which we have no means of inoculating ourselves. Although the COVID-19 crisis is vastly different than the native exposure to European disease, there are some parallels that we can examine, notably the action of government during times where the public attention is diverted elsewhere.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to great uncertainty in almost all aspects of American life and for people around the world as well. The adjustments we have had to make to daily life have been tremendous. Personally, the shift to online education has been a notable societal impact directly coming as a result of the pandemic. I have also been affected athletically because of the cancellation of athletic events and community gatherings. The societal impact on everyday Americans for things as menial as going to the grocery store have been massive, with the pandemic creating huge amounts of anxiety around these tasks. We can also see the parallels between this troubled time and in previous cases of pandemics affecting societies and their ways of life. I am fully expectant that we will, however, bring an end to this crisis. Healthcare workers, government officials, and everyday Americans are doing their part to slow the spread of COVID-19 and eventually bring about the demise of the virus that has affected our country for the last several months. I have faith in this communal effort and the power that we can have when we pull together.