

# UT Community COVID-19 Archive Project Self-Guided Interview

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The self-guided interview questions are divided into six sections. Respondents have the opportunity to answer as many sections as they like:

- Current Students
- Faculty, Staff, and Students --Learning/Teaching/Working
- Relationships & Social Connections
- Emotions & Reactions
- Daily Life
- Historical Context

## **Current Students**

Tell us about your experiences as a current UT student during the pandemic.

N/A

## **Faculty, Staff, and Students --Learning/Teaching/Working**

Tell us about your experiences with learning, teaching, and/or working during the pandemic.

I worked a lot this summer, before the start of my freshman year in college. I work at an aquarium in my home county, which is a popular tourist attraction. We've been very busy this year since everyone is trying to make up the vacation time they lost during last year's quarantine. When I first started there, I had to wear a mask, but near the end of the summer I was able to go mask-less since the governor of my state lifted the mask mandate. Despite seeing thousands of people every day, I didn't wear one because I'm vaccinated. Considering I'd started working there when the mandate was still in place, I got a taste of what it was like to have to enforce the policy.

## **Relationships & Social Connections**

Tell us about your relationships and social connections during the pandemic.

The social isolation part of it all is slowly winding down now, but it was really bad in the summer of 2020. I spent the first three summers of high school being busy with the sports I was involved in as a manager, so I was devastated when all that got cancelled because of the quarantine. My mental health plummeted so bad during that time I actually voluntarily admitted myself into a behavioral health facility. I was so lonely and sick of being trapped in my house with some family members that I don't really get along with that I had developed psychosis and homicidal ideations. I spent a week there, learning really good coping skills- plus it was the first time I'd been around people by age in months. Senior year was kind of rough, not being able to just be normal for that last year of high school, but luckily we did get to have sports. The girl's basketball team did get wiped out for a few weeks because of some positive COVID cases though, plus my mom didn't let me go to the Christmas tournament we host every year because she was worried I would get sick being around all those people. We spent so much time together for practices and games that near the end of the season we kind of ignored the whole social distancing thing.

## **Emotions & Reactions**

Tell us about your emotions and reactions during the pandemic.

I would definitely say I've changed in terms of, like, appreciating other people more. I consider myself to be an introvert, but even introverts need to socialize. The first two weeks, give or take, I was like, "Holy sh\*t, this is amazing!" And then when I didn't get to see my best friend- who was a senior at the time- graduate, I was like, "Hmmm, this actually kinda sucks." At the end of the day I'll always need time alone to recharge, but COVID has taught me that even though socializing wears me out, it's something I need to not go insane.

## **Daily Life**

Tell us about your daily life during the pandemic.

In December of 2020, like half the girl's basketball team got COVID, so of course all of us had to quarantine regardless if we had it or not. I've always privately blamed it on the handful of girls who didn't follow the rules and kept going to parties. Because of that I had to be a virtual learner for two weeks and I hated it; I learn better in person. I got quarantined because of basketball right around the time I turned 18, so I wasn't able to do anything to celebrate. I wasn't missing out on celebrating with my friends because I don't do that under normal circumstances anyway, but I wasn't able to have a birthday dinner with my family like I usually do. Luckily things were starting to calm down by Christmas, so my family and I were able to celebrate that as usual.

## **Historical Context**

Consider the historical context of the pandemic.

I'll definitely always remember the week I spent in the behavioral health facility. I'd been in a very good mental place before COVID became such a big problem, but the social isolation ruined all the work I'd put in to get there. Plus, regardless of what got me in there, being in a place with such a stigma around it ("oh, only the crazies get put there" you know, that kind of mentality) is something you don't ever forget. All throughout school when I'd learn about major historical events I'd think, "What would I have done in that situation?" Except now I don't have to ask that, because I AM living through something that will be covered in future history books. Someday I'm gonna have a grandchild who will ask me about this pandemic for a homework assignment and I'll have to explain to them the absolute dread that we all felt as a nation when the first cases started showing up in America.

### **Additional Thoughts**

It really didn't help that COVID became more serious right when there was a major presidential election occurring. The pandemic really had an effect on American politics, and in my opinion, it was a negative effect.