

Alana Gartenberg

As we approach 10 months of living in a pandemic, some part of me still can't comprehend that all of this is real. I remember starting my first spring semester at Springfield College in January 2020, and people began to discuss the virus. However, at this point, everyone more or less believed it would stay in China, and no one really took it seriously or thought much of it. We all just went about our daily lives. When living on a college campus, it's difficult to keep up with the news unless you make an active effort to. Almost all of my news about the virus was coming from Instagram, and most of the posts were memes. The majority of us didn't take this seriously until March approached. There were cases in the United States, and rumors of a lockdown. With campuses shutting down across the country, it seemed that Springfield College was next. That became official during a large meeting in the Dodge Room on the second floor of the Union. It felt like the entire student body attended this meeting, with all of us anxious to find out the fate of our semester. It was ironic to hear President Cooper talk about how the virus spreads easily when we were all cramped in this room. Students were sharing seats and many were in the back of the room standing. I was ignorantly happy when I found out that we would be getting an extra week of spring break. I thought I'd get an extra week at home with my family, and then I would be able to come back to finish my semester. No one could have predicted what was to come.

Explaining this pandemic is challenging. I believe it means something different for everyone. For some, it meant finally having some extra time to workout, spend time with their family, start a new hobby such as baking, watch Tiger King, or practice self-care. However, for others, it meant loneliness and sadness being isolated from loved ones. Many lost members of their families, some not even having the opportunity to say goodbye. People lost their jobs and

businesses. For me, the pandemic meant many things. I was lucky enough to be one of the people who started working out and took up baking. Although my sadness wasn't as severe as those who had monumental losses, there were still challenging times. It was hard not seeing my friends and my boyfriend. Long distance relationships are hard enough without a global pandemic going on.

For everyone, the pandemic meant adjusting and adapting to a new normal. Students all across the country had to start using Zoom and other similar platforms to get their education. Everyone had to get used to seeing loved ones living outside of their household on a phone or computer screen. While the pandemic may not have tragically affected everyone, I guarantee that everyone was affected in some way and had to adapt to a new lifestyle. There is so much gravity to this pandemic: no matter how much you try to ignore it, as many do, it's real, and it takes a toll on everyone sometimes.

When I signed up for a Human Disease colloquium in spring 2020, I had no idea how relevant it would be to today's world. The first book we read for this class was *COVID-19: The Pandemic that Never Should Have Happened, and How to Stop the Next One*. There were times when living on campus was stressful and confusing, so it was nice to come to class every week and not only discuss the book, but also what was happening on campus and around the country. One of the most valuable things I learned is the importance of listening to scientists and epidemiologists. The world was extremely underprepared for a coronavirus pandemic despite epidemiologists saying since the SARS outbreak of 2002 that evidence pointed to a coronavirus surfacing. Scientists have been warning for decades that this was going to happen, and if government officials around the world would have listened, COVID-19 likely would have been much less severe. Reading this book helped me realize that more needs to be done in terms of

preparing for all different kinds of viruses. Experts warned about lack of preparation, and the few countries that did have pandemic plans focused solely on the flu when there are so many other viruses, such as coronaviruses, that can and will emerge and put individuals in danger. Even with these plans in place, many countries failed to stockpile or acquire even the most basic essentials required to make the plans work. If a worldwide pandemic does not inspire future preparedness, I don't know what will. Something needs to be done because the effects could be catastrophic if we do exactly what has been done in the past. I gained so much knowledge taking this class, and all I can do is take what I have learned and try to educate those around me and hope that countries will start taking pandemic precautions sooner rather than later.