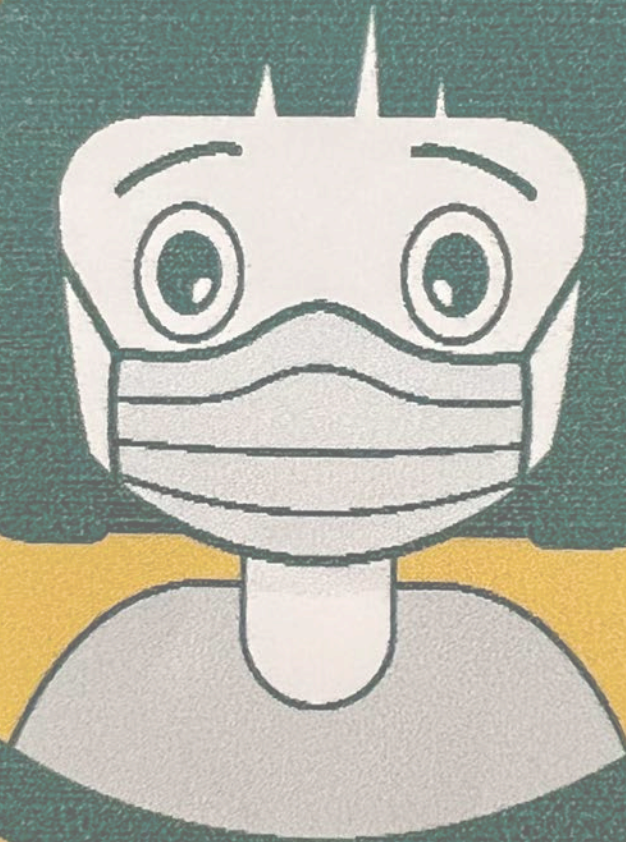


# THE PANDEMIC

**STORIES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
AT NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY,  
FARGO  
2020-2023**



**A DOCUMENTARY PROJECT**

**By advanced writing students of the Department of Communication**

**Fall Semester 2023**

# The Pandemic

## Stories of the Covid-19 pandemic at North Dakota State University, Fargo 2020-2023

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic emergency formally ended on May 5, 2023, with an announcement by the World Health Organization. We acknowledged that the virus was still around, but most of the world returned to a routine that did not require the variety of strict measures that had defined the daily lives of many for more than three years.

Schools and universities, in particular, saw dramatic change to their operations. Both students and teachers scrambled to meet pandemic requirements set up by administrators who also were unsure of the decisions they were forced to make. Closures, testing, quarantines, required spacing, mask mandates, Zoom classes and, after early 2021, aggressive vaccine promotions became a confusing daily whirlwind. Everyone had to rethink an educational approach under umbrella of fear they would get sick.

As schools emerged from the pandemic toward the beginning of the 2023 academic year, many people decided to move forward, making an effort to forget about what had become possibly the greatest time of anxiety and change in their lives. But what changed? How did universities cope? What did we learn? A history of the pandemic at universities has not been written. But if we want to know what happened, it's critical to collect the evidence now. North Dakota State University, as a middle-sized research-intensive school in a politically conservative state, may offer significant insight in its own response to Covid.

That is the goal of this documentary journalism. Advanced writing students in the communication department

have approached the topic from a variety of perspectives, both student-centered and staff-centered, based on interviews with those who were there and those who remember. Many of these people needed to be reached now. As time goes on those who personally experienced the pandemic as students will graduate. Many staff will have retired or left. And everyone will confuse details as the fog of years descends on a difficult period many would rather forget.

The goal of this publication is to begin an effort to collect and preserve this memory.

—Ross F. Collins, professor of communication, and the students of COMM 310, Advanced Writing for Mass Media: Laura Baldwin, Serena Fraser, Cora Huhn, Savannah Lussier, Hailey Maddock, Abigail Molstad, Kooper Shagena, Miranda Tetzloff, Morgan Twardowski, Alexis Vandeberghe, Andrew Werlinger



Halloween decoration 2020.

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## A timeline

# The Covid-19 pandemic at North Dakota State University

### 2020

March 11

As universities around the country close down, NDSU cancels all study abroad trips and requires all students to come back to the United States.

Toilet paper shortage nationwide; shelves empty locally.

March 12

NDSU cancels class for two weeks after spring break ends, tells students to stay home.

March 15

North Dakota governor announces closure of all schools for one week.

March 16

West Fargo police guard supply of toilet paper at Costco to stop binge buying.

NDSU announces all employees should work from home.

March 18

West Acres Shopping Center and city offices close.

March 22

NDSU cancels in-person classes for the rest of the semester, goes completely online.

March 24

North Dakota restaurants and bars are required to close, takeout only.

March 25

Virtual meetings begin at NDSU using Zoom software.

April 2

"Six-foot rule" stickers applied to floors and sidewalks around campus.

NDSU announces it has identified its first Covid-positive case in what it calls "the university community."

April 8

NDSU issues warning to the 300 students still living on campus that they must NOT get together for parties.

April 19

Professional-grade facemasks nearly unobtainable; former NDSU student reports on social media she has 100 homemade cloth masks for those in need.

April 30

Governor eases state lockdown to allow restaurants, bars, gyms, nail salons, hair salons, tanning stores, tattoo parlors and massage therapists to reopen at reduced capacity.

No graduation parties, award ceremonies, luncheons at NDSU. Commencement canceled.

North Dakota State Board of Higher Education announces face-to-face classes will resume in the fall. Offers older professors at higher risk a buy-out opportunity to retire.

May 1

North Dakota bars, restaurants, gyms, hair salons reopen; elementary and secondary schools will stay closed until the end of the school year.

May 20

NDSU announces 40 staff layoffs following cancellation of all summer camps, workshops, conferences and get-togethers.

June 18

Zoom meeting with administration announces classes will be back next fall, and students will be expected to wear masks. Faculty in classrooms will not be required to wear a mask if they stay at least six feet away from students.

June 25

NDSU president announces that the university will implement a teaching program called "HyFlex," invented a few years ago in California. Students may attend class or go online as convenient.

July 6

Provost announces that "face coverings" will be required of both faculty and students in the classroom.

August 4

NDSU cancels fall football season.

August 25

First day of class in "HyFlex" model under controversy, the detractors predicting the university will be closed within weeks as positive cases spike, and "people will die."

August 29

NDSU announces a few positive cases, orders a quarantine of two fraternity houses.

Sept. 14

NDSU allows one football game with 10,000 spectators in 18,000-seat Fargodome to maintain social distancing. Some faculty and people in the community express outrage that the university is allowing any game at all.

Sept. 21

NDSU president Dean Bresciani announces he will self-isolate after being notified that someone he came into contact with later tested positive.

Oct. 19

Mid-semester at NDSU, still open, defying predictions that a Covid spike would force it to close.

Oct. 28

University relations launches social media campaign, "Why I wear a mask," featuring photos of masked-up students.

Nov. 5

NDSU president issues plea that students not go home for Thanksgiving for fear they will spread Covid.

Nov. 30

NDSU still in session after Thanksgiving break, one of the few universities in the country that did not go totally online or tell

students not to come back after the holiday.

NDSU *Spectrum* reports students are miserable, Zoom fatigue, feeling trapped because told they should not go home.

Dec. 15

First local Covid vaccination given to a Sanford epidemiologist.

## 2021

Jan. 17

NDSU president announces that the university will be back in full classroom mode in fall.

Feb. 25

Flags at NDSU flying half-mast to recognize 500,000 Americans dead of Covid.

March 27

NDSU cancels a football game (season postponed to spring semester) because one player tests positive.

May 15

NDSU returns to in-person commencement but masks required.

June 7

NDSU drops campus-wide mask mandate.

May

Vaccine station set up in Memorial Union lounge.

July 28

CDC recommends everyone return to masking and social distancing to protect from Delta variant.

August 17

NDSU announces return to mask mandate in classrooms, even if vaccinated.

August 22

NDSU students launch petition demanding NDSU president rescind classroom mask mandate, signed by 2,000 students.

Sept. 9

University announces that 5,600 students have taken advantage of its \$100 reward for those who vaccinate, representing 47.5% of those who are attending face-to-face classes.

## 2022

March 4

University announces end of the in-class mask mandate.

May 15

NDSU commencement, no mask requirement; NDSU Covid response comes to an end.

Sept. 21

President Biden declares that the pandemic is over.

## Vocabulary of the pandemic

### Anti-masker/ Anti-vaxxer

Opposes mask mandates and/or refuses to get a Covid shot.

### Breakthrough Covid

Getting Covid despite vaccination, usually a mild case.

### Flattening the curve

Requirement to lock down a community or country in hopes that the statistical curve of Covid cases does not rise as quickly.

### Herd immunity

Point where most people are vaccinated or have already recovered from Covid and so unlikely to spread the disease.

### Hygiene theatre

Taking steps recommended by authorities to curb Covid spread, even if actions are minimally effective; mostly applies to repeatedly disinfecting surfaces or taking temperatures.

### Lockdown

Closing businesses and requiring residents to stay home in an attempt to stop Covid spread.

### Long-hauler

A Covid victim who does not quickly recover, with continued symptoms surpassing the two-month mark.

### Mask wars

Protests against, or in favor of, mask requirements in schools or other public places.

### N95

Mask style more efficient than typical paper or cloth masks.

### Pandemic wall

Point at which people become overwhelmed dealing with pandemic restrictions and closures.

### Self-isolating

Staying home after exposure or testing positive in an attempt to avoid spreading Covid.

### Social distancing

Staying away from other people in public places; recommendation is at least six feet of separation.

### Testing positive

Based on a nose swab at a testing facility or using a home test kit, indication that a person has contracted Covid, whether or not feeling symptoms.

### Toilet-paper panic

National shortage of toilet paper following hoarding at the beginning of the pandemic.

### Vaccine hunting/vaccine tourism

Early in the vaccine era (late 2020), driving from state to state or region in attempt to find scarce vaccination openings.

### Vaccination selfie

Posting photos on social media with sleeves pulled up or down for a shot.

### Virtue signaling

Accusation of anti-masker that person is wearing mask simply to show they are superior to others.

### Zoom fatigue

Inability to focus and mental exhaustion after spending hours in online classes and meetings.

# A teaching expert and infectious disease doctor consider Covid

By Laura Baldwin

The sound of an email coming through was nothing new for students and faculty in March 2020. However, this message was different, and it greatly changed the university. That email, sent March 12, from director of police and safety Mike Borr, read, “Effective March 14, students who are leaving campus for spring break should plan not to return to campus for an additional period of two weeks.”

It was just the beginning.

## Faculty responsibility

The pandemic shifted operations and classroom structures, making faculty rely heavily on each other’s expertise in the new challenges. Communication professor

Carrie Anne Platt served as associate dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences during the pandemic. As an expert on teaching and student engagement, she was left to guide other faculty. “There didn’t feel like a lot of time to get ready for it,” said Platt, now in her 15<sup>th</sup> year at NDSU. “Especially as an associate dean because I was having to adjust my own teaching and coach the other faculty on how to do the same and be a support for them.”

Faculty saw a unifying shift among departments, Platt said. “Now faculty from all different departments were working together to navigate the uncharted territory they were in.” Faculty needed to be collaborative, as they shared the strategies that worked and failed in their online teaching. The shift to online learning was not every person for themselves, but a collective effort among all departments.

“Our department was very unified. The rest of the world was horribly not,” said Dr. Paul Carson, infectious disease specialist and professor of practice in the public health department. Carson said he met with faculty from the communication, theater, nursing, and education departments to help them understand the situation at hand and how they were going to continue their teaching online. Through these intradepartmental meetings, Carson met more of his colleagues than he would have in a typical year. Both Platt and Carson saw the unity among faculty even as they interacted behind computer screens.

Carson, with 20 years of experience as a doctor of internal medicine and infectious disease, began at NDSU in 2013. The university utilized his expertise and that of the NDSU public health department staff throughout the pandemic. Not only was the department conveying information to the university, but it also served the state of

North Dakota at large according to Carson. The governor’s office and the North Dakota Department of Health turned to NDSU’s public health department to help navigate the crisis. The NDSU Center for Immunization Research and Education (CIRE), which Carson helped establish, became a hub for other NDSU departments, state legislators, city officials, health care workers, and more to uncover information about vaccines and prevent misinformation from spreading.

## Working from home

The amount information felt overwhelming, Platt said, from contact tracing to news updates to course changes. “It was difficult to deal with the quantity of information

to catch all of the details,” Platt said, “and one part that sometimes we forget is that just the emotional element

of what was going on, that it was really scary.” Faculty, students, and administration alike were dealing with the mental toll of a global pandemic. They had more to consider than vaccines and immunity. Classes and research turned chaotic as none could remain on campus. The campus had to be brought into the home.

“There was no real way to balance work and home appropriately,” said Platt. She explained that her house was full with two young kids doing online school and her husband, NDSU communication professor Zoltan Majdik, also teaching from home. Platt noted how she and her husband would have to sit on opposite sides of the house so their Zoom meetings would not interrupt each other. Working from home during the pandemic brought new challenges of taking care of kids who were navigating online school, managing workloads, and having family time, all in the same space. “The balancing,” Platt said, “I don’t know that anyone feels they succeeded. I think that we were just kind of in survival mode.” Classes could now be interrupted by bad internet connections or kids needing a snack.

On a possibly positive note, Zoom calls for online classes gave a glimpse into student and faculty home life that otherwise would not have been known. During a Zoom call, the class could see a faculty member’s artwork on the wall, holiday cards on the fridge, or their cat crawling behind them. “There’s just something about a Zoom call as you suddenly see the background of someone’s home,” Platt said, “You see a side of people that was not necessarily accessible when it was everyone in the workplace together.”

Carson served on the pandemic university task force in coordination with the emergency management depart-

**They had more to consider than vaccines and immunity. Classes and research turned chaotic as none could remain on campus. The campus had to be brought into the home.**

ment. The group met to navigate how the university should respond to pandemic developments. Carson also worked on the governor's task force led by his chief operating officer, Tammy Miller. Alongside the university and state task forces, he also met with the Cass County Public Health staff. The three task forces met separately several times a week, often daily. Between the task forces, research, and teaching, Carson's days often started at 6 a.m. and didn't wrap up until 8 p.m. While at home he said he found it easy to narrow focus on all these things to get done, but added he definitely saw work-life balance disappear. He had to be on call for many departments during the height of the pandemic, so he said family time was sometimes not really an option. As faculty members were now working remotely, their home became their offices, classrooms, and meeting rooms. A commute became a move only to the living room.

### **Shift to online courses**

Faculty began with differing levels of online teaching experience. Carson was already teaching some distant students online. He said the pandemic offered a way to simplify his course materials and even the playing field between in-person and online students. With course content already focused on public health, the research students had been doing had now become applicable to real life. He covered class content through the lens of the pandemic. "There was no need for case studies or hypothetical situations," said Carson. "The class was working through an actual public health crisis." Students were responding to questions that had seemed out of reach. How do you do appropriate surveillance? How do you mitigate the transmission of disease? How do you design interventions to prevent disease? How do masks work? Does hydroxychloroquine treat Covid?

"Students' projects turned into creating technical briefs to help provide information to North Dakota. Students were now doing contact tracing, and communicating their findings," Carson said. "You know, all the stuff we were teaching in our classes became very, very real to our students."

General advice given to faculty was to focus on the most essential elements of the course, to make sure that part was understood, said Platt. "The switch to online teaching forced all faculty to essentialize the content of the course," she said. "It was impossible to get everything in that we normally teach, so it was about really driving in the main points of the course." Platt, teaching graduate students, had the benefit of a smaller class size. Students in smaller classes were less likely to be in a void of Zoom screens with cameras turned off and audio muted, she noted. She was able to regularly check in with her students

and hear how they were doing academically and personally. Many communication courses heavily rely on in-class discussions, she added, so Platt had to replicate those in an online setting through shared Google documents and breakout rooms in Zoom. As a faculty member she felt the awkwardness of muted Zoom conversations as she entered a breakout room. But through trial and error her courses found a rhythm to bring back class discussions. Although it was not the same as sitting in a classroom together, many faculty still found ways to connect with students and encourage them to be engaged in their coursework.

Faculty had other difficult decisions to make in shifting content online and managing student expectations. Many students isolated from the classroom seemed to lose motivation. "There was just so much going on," Platt said. "Everyone just needed to do something to make life a little easier." Some faculty altered grading standards to help students overwhelmed with the new learning structure. "We saw a noticeable hit in the sort of academic output, the quality of the work," Carson said. "It was reflective of the weird nature of how things were taught and a mix of anxieties."

### **Back to normal?**

After the rest of spring 2020 semester online, some faculty and staff showed mixed feelings about re-starting classes in person. Some faculty expressed fear of the still unknown threats of Covid, while others were excited to finally see students in the classroom again. NDSU's decision to try the HyFlex class learning model took a step toward normal.

Going back to the classroom, faculty implemented new strategies they had found in the spring while teaching online. "You don't have to stuff a class full of content and full of assignments," Platt said. Many faculty found instead a way to focus on essential content and avoid overloading the course with assignments. Another lesson learned from online teaching was the importance of early outreach to students, Platt explained. Online students could mentally check out if they wanted, and sometimes faculty had difficulty engaging them. Faculty could help students early on, before they got lost in the flurry of a semester.

The university by fall 2021 was mostly back into the classroom. Whether course content changed or not, faculty and students rediscovered the missing piece of learning—physical proximity. "I didn't realize how much I missed it, but I did," Platt said. "The science was not well understood, but I was genuinely happy to be back around students."

# A pandemic hits residence life

By Cora Huhn

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the social lives of university students living in residence halls, and North Dakota State University was no exception. Students had to navigate new experiences from social distancing, wearing masks, mandatory cleanings, quarantining, canceled events and more. The residential halls faced many social challenges, and some of the effects are still lingering on campus today.

For incoming freshmen, a university can be an intimidating place to start building friendships and meeting new people. The main way NDSU positively impacts the social lives of students is by providing them with a variety of campus events. These offer a simple and available resource for students to socialize and create new relationships. However, when NDSU shut down during the pandemic, the university canceled in-person events.

Current NDSU senior Nora Lagergren was a freshman during 2020 when Covid first affected the school. "Covid definitely affected my social life big time," said Lagergren, who also works as a Wallman Wellness Center life guard. "Throughout my freshman year there weren't really events for us." The university tried to compensate for the withdrawal of social events by setting up virtual events over Zoom. From the students' perspective, they were not always a big success. Too many students often chose links at the same time, ending with the Zoom calls crashing.

Residential Assistant (RA) Ryan Calhoun oversees residents in the East Mathew Living Learning Center. Calhoun experienced NDSU's Covid challenges from many angles. When the university was first shut down he was a student living on campus. He then worked as an RA in Cater Hall as Covid restrictions loosened. He said not having events in the halls affected the residents a lot. "The students' social lives were definitely affected by Covid because they couldn't go out and do anything fun," said Calhoun, "If you can't go out and have social hours with people because everything is shut down, it kinda cuts the whole social aspect of anything."

Although hall events were canceled, residents were still able to meet and interact on their own terms. "Just because we didn't have events didn't mean that people weren't still getting together and meeting people and having a good time," said Lagergren. "Given that everyone lives in close proximity to each other, everybody still saw each other," added Calhoun. "However, it cut off opportunities for people to have outside engagement instead of only with their neighbors."

Apart from missing hall events, other campus amenities were difficult to use due to mandatory cleanings. Students at the wellness center and dining centers found it harder to socialize through demands of social distancing as well

as frequent closings for cleaning. "It was super annoying when they would shut down the dining center and wellness center to do cleaning in the middle of the day," said Lagergren. "You would have to be more mindful of when you were going." Lagergren said she saw this as especially difficult for incoming freshmen who rely solely on the dining centers for all of their meals.

Many freshmen living in the residential halls during NDSU's restrictions in fall 2020 had actually experienced similar challenges while still in high school. "It was super hard to leave home and be open to new friends because during Covid I got super attached to my parents and high school friends," said Lagergren. "I think without Covid I would've branched out more

and branched out further from just the people that I was living with, but because of that happening it was just so easy to stay in that circle." Some students experienced a sense of disconnection from others, especially as classes were all online. "It got me to my really close friends, but I kinda wonder if, without Covid, would I maybe have more friends with people in my major?" said Lagergren.

Residents were forced to follow numerous policies, including mask mandates, a reporting system and quarantining. The system didn't always work, however. "It was just like an interesting monitoring system. I felt like it wasn't super cracked down," said Lagergren. "There were a lot of instances where people didn't report." This made it less effective for the university as some students reported while others didn't. When students were forced to quarantine in their rooms, food was delivered so that they could keep them away from others. (Even though Covid is not as relevant at NDSU as it was during 2020-2022, in fall 2023 Covid quarantine policies were still in place.)

While heavy Covid restrictions began to ease in fall 2021, restrictions still affected students and RAs. "The residents were supposed to wear masks at all times in the residence halls," said Calhoun. "However, most RAs did not uphold that enforcement. We saw it as this is the residents' home and it isn't an expectation to wear a mask at home." When events began to return to the halls, the residents were still supposed to wear masks. But RAs noticed that because many people didn't want to wear masks they responded by not going to the events. The last mask mandate was lifted in March 2022. Hall events are somewhat back to pre-Covid levels, yet attendance is lower than pre-Covid.

Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic undeniably shaped the social lives of college students living in residence halls at North Dakota State University. The challenges of masking, cleanings, social distancing and quarantining disrupted the traditional college experience. The virus affected many people and has left lasting impacts on the NDSU campus.

**Residents were forced to follow numerous policies. The system didn't always work.**

# Navigating student organizations through a pandemic: resilience and evolution

By Savannah Lussier

The North Dakota State University campus before March 2020 was an active place of student life, where student organizations thrived. Until an uninvited guest arrived, the Covid-19 pandemic, and everything changed. Lisa Samuelson, director of student activities, painted a vivid picture of the challenging yet inspiring journey student groups navigated in the face of unusual challenges. Samuelson took on the director's role in July 2020. "I spent the next three months of what was supposed to be a fresh start of my career dealing with angry and confused parents," she said.

## Arrival amidst pandemic chaos

Samuelson began her tenure right as the pandemic continued to cast its long shadow across the nation. She recounted challenges she faced at her previous institution, where she oversaw various aspects of student affairs. "We immediately went remote, and for the next three months it was a daily struggle to navigate the complexities of relocating students who left their belongings in residence halls," Samuelson explained. The pandemic demanded rapid decision-making and constant adaptation, setting the stage for the hurdles that lay ahead.

## The two first years

Samuelson humorously referred to her first year at NDSU as having "two first years." The initial phase involved navigating a virtual landscape, with Zoom becoming the primary mode of interaction. She highlighted the difficulty in recognizing people in person after meeting them virtually and vice versa. The second phase for Samuelson commenced as restrictions eased, allowing for in-person interactions. "I remember when the face covering requirement got lifted," she said. "I was walking to the restroom in the union, and I just remember saying to myself, oh my gosh." After almost two years at the university, she said, it her first time seeing someone's smile, and it was a stranger. Samuelson said that incident gave her a renewed appreciation for human in-person connection.

However, challenges persisted as individuals had become accustomed to a virtual format.

## Challenges faced by student organizations

As activities director Samuelson oversees a multitude of student groups, many facing different challenges. "We're

at about 272 official organizations on campus right now," she said. These organizations, ranging from fraternities and sororities to club sports and academic interest groups, all felt the tremors of the pandemic's disruptions. Among the challenges, Samuelson emphasized the difficulties organizations faced during the initial lockdown, when students left for spring break in 2020 and never returned. This abrupt departure left many groups without a proper transition, resulting in a loss of information and leadership. "Most groups were led by seniors, and those folks didn't come back," said Samuelson. "That first fall of 2020, there were probably a good 20 to 30

student organizations that didn't restart." Financial hurdles also arose, as accessing bank records proved challenging for those who couldn't secure the required signatures from previous leaders who had graduated.

## Positive outcomes and new initiatives

To counter pandemic limitations student organizations turned to technology. Samuelson highlighted Zoom and Teams as the primary platforms for virtual engagement. Activities like Zoom workshops, Zoom trivia nights, and Zoom art sessions were offered in an effort to maintain student involvement. "Grab-and-go" kits, where students could pick up materials for activities, gained immense popularity.

Despite difficulties, the pandemic spurred technological advancement and flexibility. Samuelson noted that the increased use of platforms like Zoom and Teams improved accessibility, allowing for better engagement with a diverse student population. "The advancement of technology has allowed for a greater, I think, flexibility to accommodate people's various demands on their time" said Samuelson, "and it's also probably allowed us to be more inclusive to those who are further away."

## Advice for future student organizations

Looking ahead, Samuelson stressed the importance planning. "It is never too soon to start having succession planning conversations," she asserted. Documenting transition processes, creating timelines, and ensuring organizational continuity are vital elements for student group sustainability. Samuelson urged student leaders to leave behind a robust foundation for their successors, emphasizing that the success of an organization hinges on the shoulders it stands upon.

**Challenges persisted as individuals had become accustomed to a virtual format.**



# Mental health crises during the pandemic and after the return

By Hailey Maddock

Social distancing, isolation, and loneliness. Many would use these words to describe their experience of the pandemic, and although it has been pegged as one of the worst mental health crises to date, in March 2020 the world's time in quarantine was just the beginning.

"The biggest thing that we found was stressful for people during the pandemic was loneliness," said Bill Burns, director of the NDSU Counseling Center. "That was probably the one we don't normally see, and ever since the pandemic we've seen more loneliness because people are having a harder time connecting."

As pandemic restrictions forced students to leave their "normal routines," it became apparent that the lack of social interactions would have an impact on everyone's life. In-person communication skills became something of the past, no longer playing as much of a part in students' daily lives.

"I think because students weren't in their normal routine of being on campus, being with their friends, they were more isolated, so those things were more visible," said Burns. "We learned how important social connections are during the pandemic."

Not only students, but many people around the world began to struggle with anxiety at the thought of talking or even being surrounded by others. Not being around people for such a long period of time paired with the lack of normalcy came together to create entirely new issues of their own.

"I would pretty much not leave my apartment forever, which was hard," said NDSU graduate Brianna Boehm, a student at NDSU during and after Covid-19. During her time in college, Boehm was involved in many different student organizations including Blue Key and Bison Ambassadors. As university regulations in fall 2020 limited activities and classes moved online or on HyFlex, Boehm interacted primarily with only her roommate. This was much different from the university experience she was used to.

With all this newfound anxiety and loneliness came students' need to deal with everything new introduced into their lives. This led to a variety of coping mechanisms, one of the most common being a shift toward living on social media. This technology has always been a time-consumer, but during the pandemic, more than ever, people struggled to place time boundaries on how much they consumed. Sometimes the habit became unhealthy. "I think part of it is your generation lives in a 24-hour world that never shuts off," Burns said.

Having the world "at our fingertips" during the pandemic sometimes caused students to fall into a trap of hours-long scrolling from which some would reemerge and find that

the entire day had passed. Possibly unhealthy social media consumption could lead to other mental health issues. "Being online and social media are problematic in other ways, but they were coping mechanisms," Burns said. "Spending tons more time on social media can turn out to be unhealthy."

Overuse of social media during the pandemic to connect with others sometimes contributed to an even greater lack of desire for real interactions. People began to depend on it for an escape, so returning to "pre-Covid lives" became that much more difficult.

## **"It was hard for students to come back to campus and intermix with other students."**

Many students explained this as an escape into a trancelike state. Time would drift by as they

scrolled for hours. Anxiety rose with the awareness that they were not present in the real world.

Burns explained that almost every student who ended up in quarantine reported "anxiety of how to deal with the world and more of the unknown of what was going to happen."

However, "What was seen around the country is that most college students weren't overly stressed during the pandemic," Burns added. "When school started back up again, the stress levels started going back up again."

Stress of adjustment became a reoccurring problem throughout the pandemic era, whether it was going into quarantine and the isolation that came with that or having to adapt to a "normal" way of university life that wasn't normal at all, as students were expected to socially isolate.

"It was hard for students to come back to campus and intermix with other students even though that was what they wanted," said Burns. "It was hard not to feel anxious doing that. Lots of students continued their isolation even though they didn't have to."

Regarding the campus return, Boehm also felt "the anxiety of coming back. I naturally worried a lot about grades [because] I came to rely on certain resources when I was home that wouldn't be there when we went back in person."

That said, the pandemic experience of students at NDSU was by no means an exception to the unprecedented mental health struggles worldwide. Boehm said she was, "pretty resilient," but added that "it did make me more anxious about things." Boehm said she has always been an anxious person, so her feelings of anxiety weren't out of the ordinary for her, but she did find them to be slightly heightened by the worries of going back to school, returning to a pre-Covid approach to education, with worries about health and Covid at the university.

"At first I was just as scared as everyone else, because there were so many health regulations we had to follow, and it was kind of stressful," said Boehm. "But then after a month or so of being back, I realized that there was noth-

ing I could do, so my anxiety got a little better.”

As students switched from in-person classes to online in spring 2020, not only did restrictions affect social spaces and raise anxiety that came with distancing. It also changed the approach to education and how students were expected to interact. Whether it was attending classes over Zoom or doing all assignments online, discipline became crucial to student success; but this wasn't all dependent on the student either. The ability of professors to adjust their class curriculum became a huge factor in how well students not only learned but continued on their educational paths after the pandemic waned. Student adjustment and motivation, explained Burns, “depended on how well the courses worked for distance learning [and] how well the student was able to discipline themselves.”

Boehm said she was luckier than others, as her department, biological sciences, made a close-to-seamless conversion. “The professors I worked with...were good and willing to help transition things,” she said, adding that she felt comfortable asking her instructors any questions she had. This allowed her to form more personal professor-student relationships throughout that time.

Self-discipline became important, both while classes were online but also when in-person classes again became available through the HyFlex model. Despite classroom access, many students continued to take advantage of the online option for several reasons: fear of the virus, anxiety of being in large groups of people, or simply laziness and convenience.

“Engagement really went down in terms of class attendance,” said Boehm. “There were four of us that went to class; otherwise, there were, like, 35 people online.” With the HyFlex option beginning in fall 2020, adjusting to being in person seemed to have become as difficult as transitioning to online in spring 2020.

“Even while the pandemic was hard, it was unique and different,” observed Burns. This was true until “it got really long. Then it started to get more stressful.” Then, once students began to come back to campus and in-person classes, that stress level rose again.

The HyFlex model not only affected class participation of those who chose not to come to the classroom. It also affected those who did attend in person. Class discussion became more difficult with such a limited amount of people. Group projects and even networking and making connections with classmates and people going into the same field of study became only a small part of the curriculum, even though the skills learned by these exercises might be considered crucial to a future in the workforce. “I do think it affected how well we learned things at the time,” Boehm explained. “We missed out on opportunities and experiences in terms of having a good education because people just didn't show up.”

Contrary to the negativity surrounding mental health and the pandemic, Boehm also provided a different perspective, observing that some things during the quarantine could be considered mentally healthy. “I think college was

the best place that I could be during that time,” she said, explaining that being a college student in Boehm's case specifically meant she had only herself to be responsible for. This allowed her to take some much-needed time to rest from her previously packed schedule. “It was nice to just not be constantly going.”

Boehm also got to return home and live with her siblings and family during spring 2020 when classes were all online. “It was like we were all living under the same roof again, and I didn't think that was going to happen again.”

For some, the pandemic could be a time of rest or remaking family connections. For others it was a time of constant panic. It depended upon not only individual beliefs, but also individual experiences and how that played into mental health and approach to uncertainty. No matter how different every single one of us viewed this time, every single one of us was impacted in some way. “The pandemic might have been a time of nerves and chaos, but in the end, we all made it through and are stronger for it,” Boehm said, explaining how she would sum up the experience. “It's hard to say if it was completely positive or completely negative. There were ups and downs, but I'm just grateful for everything I learned and everything we made it through.”

However, the negative impact of pandemic restrictions prevented student involvement on campus. Some students became lonely and anxious. Burns emphasized stress from Covid-19 worries, its impact on people's health and views of safety, played a role in the anxiety. But for students the biggest stressor seemed to be not in the leaving but in the return, and the demand to readapt to the social environments and educational standards.

The pandemic seems to have encouraged more open discussion of student mental health. Resources have become more widespread, and seeking help more socially acceptable, Burns said. Students are more forthcoming about what they're dealing with. Professors and administrators have become more open-minded. “After the pandemic, my professors were a lot more likely to check in on me and my classmates,” said Boehm, “along with having more understanding when it came to deadlines and being mindful of everything else we were dealing with in our lives that might be affecting our performance in the class.”

Student mental health struggles didn't begin with the pandemic, according to Burns, but people's awareness and ability to understand this emotional turmoil seem to have been. Whether it was NDSU students, students in general, or the world's population, everyone experienced a chapter of life that impacted them in some way. And just because the pandemic is over doesn't mean that this discussion should close anytime soon. The shared experience of the pandemic and mental health is something that almost everyone has in common.

Boehm perhaps said it best: “The world needs to continue paying attention to what everyone else is going through, because once we can come together on this ground, the rest will follow.”

# Administrative and political challenges confront confused expectations and growing resistance

By Abigail Molstad

“You are torn between am I doing enough? Am I putting people at risk? Or am I doing too much?” said Dean Bresciani, former president of North Dakota State University, who led the university during the pandemic. Bresciani saw the political considerations of responding to a pandemic in his role as the top leader of a university.

Other NDSU students and staff saw different sides of the political spectrum. Steven Briggs, NDSU political science professor and criminologist explained the many pandemic challenges he saw NDSU face, along with issues nationwide. During the pandemic, “there was a massive, actually the largest percentage change in homicides, tied to a great deal of alcohol consumption,” Briggs explained. This is one conclusion based on the research. Briggs emphasized his observations relied heavily on science. He said even though his wife was a hospital-based physician working on the pandemic front line, it didn’t necessarily drive his opinions or decision-making. It was science. Briggs said science made him conscientious about following the guidelines put in place. When students were resistant to wearing masks, he wondered if it had anything to do with their political standpoint or just the possible lack of self-awareness.

As a student, on the other hand, Lily Olson, an NDSU freshman as Covid began, had a different opinion. The pandemic left her along with many students suffering from challenges, whether that be the feeling of isolation or worrying about the future of their academics. She said everyone seemed to be trying their best during this time, considering the world hadn’t seen a pandemic like this in more than a century.

Strong differences in pandemic response, whether based on science or political affiliation, moved Covid to create a divide between the left and right. Briggs said when vaccinations came out evidence suggested conservative areas, where residents were less likely to be vaccinated, saw higher mortality rates. North Dakota as a politically conservative state saw higher vaccination resistance. It served to politicize the debate over the vaccine. Bresciani in his role as a leader during these political debates, explained how North Dakota became an interesting example of that political divide.

Bresciani observed that some conservatives were more opposed to Covid precautions. “Bismarck [the state capital] became violently antagonistic that Covid wasn’t real. It was like a dividing line in North Dakota. People would get

visibly upset.” He found that the eastern side of the state was more compliant with Covid health recommendations than the western. Even though Fargo lay in the eastern part, Bresciani found it important that NDSU reopened in fall 2020, although many universities around the country had moved completely online during the 2020-2021 academic year. “As president we needed to stay open, keep our students here for their sake and for their families, and keep as many courses going.” But he worried about the students, and the education they would be receiving during this time. “Either tell students they can’t finish their

education or tell them to stay and risk becoming sick,” he said. “It was a situation where you’re damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” Looking back he wishes the university had been able to keep more

students on campus. They are were likely to be healthier and to have easier recoveries from Covid. The concern was that students leaving campus would bring the illness home to elderly relatives who were unable to recover as fast. “We were dealing with a primarily healthy population,” Bresciani said, “It was safer to have them here.”

However, the idea of students staying on campus saw disagreement depending both on political perspective and on age. Olson experienced pandemic restrictions differently. “Everyone was very pushy about it,” she said. “One time in the library a friend and I were in there studying and we weren’t wearing masks. A teacher went by us and yelled to put our masks back on, even though we were just sitting by ourselves.”

Students who actually got Covid found the isolation requirement to be a challenge to mental health. They were pretty much locked in their room for two weeks. If it was not actually Covid, but just a close contact, they were nevertheless stuck alone or with roommates. They couldn’t leave, had food delivered, and couldn’t even step outside to get fresh air.

Anger based on these restrictions took a political turn. During this time, Olson said that for some students the rules and their implications challenged mental health and well-being. Bresciani also observed student struggles. He said one day he came across a student who was sitting alone in the basketball arena among hundreds of empty seats. The student explained that it was the only place he could do his schoolwork and focus on the Zoom call. He considered the realities of enforced isolation, but said he just needed to get out and find a new place that wasn’t his dorm room.

**Strong differences in pandemic response, whether based on science or political affiliation, moved Covid to create a divide between the left and right.**

In addition, Bresciani said that he was concerned that due to Zoom classes replacing normal classroom settings, grades would be affected. And he did see a change in grades. It seemed almost as if Zoom caused lower grades.

Bresciani added that as history goes on, we will see more Covid impact on students who lived through the pandemic era. Many dropped out when universities halted face-to-face classes at the beginning. After closing in March 2020, NDSU wanted to return the option of face-to-face instruction, Bresciani said. While some faculty opposed it, administration wanted to keep as many things open while hoping to ensure safety for students and staff. It was hard to maintain a balance of rules and recommendations. "Every day it felt like something new came out," Bresciani said. We had a task force at NDSU that met

anywhere from once a week to every day. You never knew anything for sure. It became absolutely draining."

In hopes of giving NDSU students the best university experience possible under Covid conditions, the university decided to schedule its first football game since the pandemic. Bresciani explained that NDSU received some heat for holding a football game, but public health experts said the Fargodome had cleaner air quality than a commercial airliner. "We did things to monitor people coming in and out. And we had no positive cases from that." Saying he was trying to do the best he could with what he knew, Bresciani quoted Teddy Roosevelt: "Do what you can with what you got where you are."

# The Pandemic In Photographs

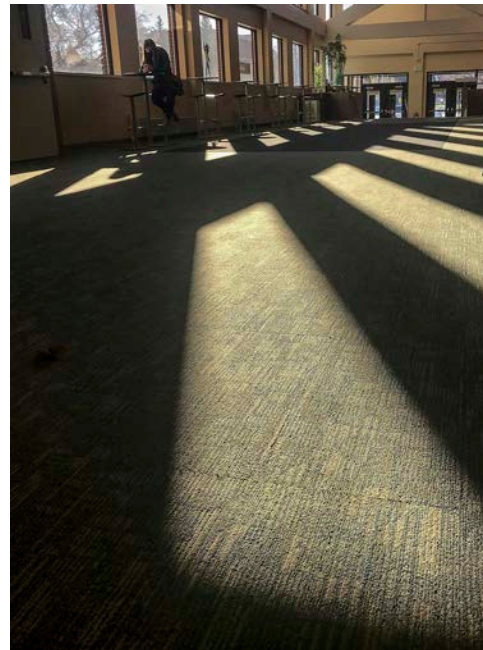


A new semester begins, September 2020.

Free Covid vaccinations at Memorial Union, May 2021.



Closed food court, April 2020.



Nearly empty Memorial Union, November 2020.



Minimum social distancing requirements enforced, Minard Hall, September 2020.

Table sign, food court, May 2020.





Deserted NDSU campus, April 2020.



NDSU choir practice, Reineke Fine Arts Center, February 2021.



Students were strongly encouraged to vaccinate beginning fall 2021 after a Covid vaccine became available early that year.

Mariah Mayer shows her heifer at the 95th Little International competition, February 2021.

Photo by Alexis Vandenberghe



Worn social distancing sticker, November 2022.

# Student confidence in a post-pandemic world

By Kooper Shagena

Has the institution of higher education in America been changed by the Covid pandemic? Maybe college is easier now, less rigorous. Maybe rules are made to be bent. Not enough time has passed yet to clearly see the full picture. There is no complete study or science inquiry that can show the world everything that has come from the pandemic.

What we do have is the lived experience of university students, faculty and staff from before and after this time in history. This article is a collection of data—stories that is—from North Dakota students past and present placed side by side. The picture of the evolution of higher education may become clearer with this collection of first-hand sources. So might an older alumna's perceptions of the next generation, and an indication of how recent graduates may be received in the workforce in the years to come.

The voices of those who lived, worked, and learned during the devastating Covid-19 pandemic are available here before the studies and statistics that will be found in future textbooks. Although the specific experiences of individuals narrow our scope of history, they are more real than any graph, chart, or percentage.

First, let's picture the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks freshman class of 1985. A small-town farm girl from northern North Dakota arrives on campus electric with both confidence and intimidation. College will be tough—she's heard it from everyone—much tougher than high school, and the stakes are higher, but she is up to the challenge.

Diane Hahn, now a 4-H program coordinator for the NDSU Extension office for going on 15 years, remembers this first year as a student in 1981.

"In the beginning, I took it very seriously because I did not know what to expect. I went to all my classes, all the time." Long hours and late nights studying for tests were part of the freshman experience for Hahn.

"Everybody did that," she said simply. "It was a camaraderie type of deal. In the dorms, sitting up late studying for a final."

This is the kind of accountability that 2020 pandemic freshmen did not have. The decision to enroll at all was a lonely one—why not take a gap year and wait for things to settle? Many 2020 high school seniors did just that. So

those who did show up on move-in day, masked and social-distanced, may have felt like they were embarking on a more perilous journey than any freshman who had come before. This context is vital to keep in mind when thinking about the academic work that was asked of college students, because it colors everything else.

Consider the contrast. For Hahn, the university workload was "definitely more manageable than I was led to believe. "I gained the confidence that even if something is hard, and I had no idea and felt floundering, that it would work itself out. That I could figure it out." Perhaps this is one of the most foundational real-life skills that students should carry with them out of college.

Are the students of today coming away with this same feeling of confidence in the post-COVID world? One student tells her story as a freshman in 2020.

Melodie Letvin is an art education major in her fourth year at NDSU, and her first year was drastically different from Hahn's.

"You didn't leave your dorm unless you were eating," Letvin recalled. Campus was silent in fall 2020, with students hidden away in their dorms, their only company being their roommates and their laptops. Zoom classes replaced lectures, and students never met their professors or their classmates in person. This made coursework and assignments extremely challenging for many students. Without a classroom to actually sit in, or a real, tangible person to hold students accountable to simple daily tasks, a lot of the meaning of "college" became lost. Letvin remembers losing sight of her academic identity in this strange time.

"It definitely set me back on my expectations for what it meant to sit down and dedicate yourself to one thing," Letvin said. "I couldn't seem to remember how to do that."

Now in 2023, Letvin has since changed majors and found her groove as a college student.

"It showed who has courage and perseverance and guts to stick things out in the hard times," she pointed out, "because the majority of people still in college right now that were 2020 freshmen...they went through hell."

This hard time will no doubt leave some lasting effects on the students and teachers who experienced it, but it may also permanently change how higher education is run. Because universities were forced to throw together an entirely new style of presenting education to students, they were shown that there is no one right way to be a student

**Without a classroom to actually sit in, or a real, tangible person to hold students accountable to simple daily tasks, a lot of the meaning of "college" became lost.**

or a teacher in college. The HyFlex program implemented by NDSU in the 2020-2021 year allowed for more flexibility than ever before—students could either attend Zoom class at the scheduled time or they could watch the recorded lecture later, on their own time. For the classes that held in-person lectures, teachers were required to also offer online attendance via Zoom every day, for every student.

Nearly four years later, HyFlex still colors the way students navigate their courses. Some people perceive a higher tolerance for flexibility at NDSU after Covid, which can be a helpful tool or a challenge to stay disciplined.

“I’ve definitely seen a laziness amongst peers,” Letvin admitted. “It’s... It can be quite baffling.” Of course, there have always been some lazy students in college, but the higher degree of flexibility may make laziness a bit more doable. Teachers have held on to some flexibility adjustments they made in 2020 that give more options to students. One faculty member who has done this is Elizabeth Carlson.

“I learned that it’s much more efficient to include more text on my slides, so that students can both read along in class and then review the material at home if they choose to,” said the NDSU assistant professor of political science. “I used to rely mainly on my lecturing to get the information

to the students, but now since Covid I always put more complete text on the slides and upload them to Blackboard.”

Carlson does this because she does not believe that a more flexible class model contributes to laziness. “The students who are going to do the work and stay focused will do that regardless,” she said.

There is one particular spillover from Covid that Carlson is thankful for: “I don’t see nearly as much sniffing and coughing in class as I used to. Which is a good thing. Students should feel comfortable staying home if they don’t feel well.”

Letvin said she has noticed a similar phenomenon since Covid.

“Students realized this is a thing I don’t need to be on campus for, this is something I can do from home—and still do a proficient job.” Perhaps Covid will prove to have a streamlining effect on universities, rather than a corner-cutting one. Despite the isolation, chaos and hardship of her first year, Letvin said she will graduate feeling as accomplished and prepared as Hahn did back in 1985.

“Once I leave here, I’m definitely going to be equipped.”



# A technological leap for the university's research

By Miranda Tetzloff

The Covid-19 pandemic hit the university in March 2020, and that impact extended to on-campus research facilities. As guidelines from both the government and North Dakota State University underwent daily changes, Jane Schuh, vice president of research and creative activity (RCA) at NDSU from 2018 to 2021, found herself at the forefront of navigating change. "As the office of research, we wanted to give as much support to our researchers and to our technical people who were running our research facilities," said Schuh.

One way that the office provided support to researchers early on was with the launch of the new Novelution software. "The pandemic highlighted the urgency of implementing our new electronic platform for grant submissions and tracking," Schuh said. This platform not only represented a technological leap but also served as a lifeline for NDSU's research community when physical access to campus was severely restricted. Before the software, researchers had to navigate the long process of obtaining hand signatures on all documents, a task made even more challenging during a campus-wide shut down.

The pandemic created an atmosphere of uncertainty, particularly when it came to funding from federal agencies. This uncertainty had significant ramifications, as research institutions like NDSU had to navigate uncharted waters. "We receive research funding from various federal agencies, such as NIH, NSF, USDA, and DOD," Schuh said. "However, these major grant and contract agencies were uncertain about their guidance. For instance, they could have given a broad directive like "do what you want," or they might have decided to halt all funded research, leaving researchers to navigate on their own for an indefinite period. Alternatively, they could have opted for a case-by-case approach. The evolving situation created a daily challenge on campus as the guidelines seemed to change regularly."

If federal funds were unavailable, NDSU would lack the financial resources to cover researchers and their staff salaries. "What are we allowed to spend money on, for example?" said Schuh. "Are we allowed to keep spending money on the salary for graduate students that are working on a grant, even though maybe they're not in the lab like they were before?"

Ensuring the safety of researchers and maintaining research continuity were top priorities for NDSU. Schuh highlighted the challenges faced across different types

of research. "We have research with chemicals in labs, research that works out in the field with considerations like limiting people in a car. Then there's research with animals—mice, insects, bacterial cultures, large animals for agriculture—all needing constant care." To address this, the university took steps like providing protective gear and guiding researchers on scheduling lab time to maintain a safe distance.

Handling such diverse research types made things tricky. NDSU researchers had to find a balance between staying productive and keeping everyone safe. Schuh explained, "Some researchers wanted to keep going no matter what, while others were more concerned about the risks of the pandemic."

**A new software platform not only represented a technological leap but also served as a lifeline for NDSU's research community when physical access to campus was severely restricted.**

The availability of regular Covid-19 testing on campus emerged as a pivotal strategy that fortified NDSU's ability to navigate through the pandemic. According to Schuh, "Regular testing was a game-changer, providing researchers with a sense of security when working on-site, assuring them that they could pursue their work without putting others at risk." The option to be tested twice a week on campus not only enhanced the resilience of NDSU's research community, Schuh said, but also played a role in the broader objective of minimizing the spread of the virus.

Schuh also emphasized the role of trust and relationships as the linchpin of NDSU's response to the pandemic's challenges. "Trust and relationships were the backbone that ensured the success of the research enterprise during a difficult time," she said. These bonds of trust extended from the leadership to the entire research community, providing a solid foundation for collaboration and problem-solving.

An extraordinary testament to the efficacy of these safety measures and the dedication of the NDSU research community was the fact that no infections were traced back to research laboratories on campus, noted Schuh. This remarkable outcome underscored the careful planning, unwavering commitment, and the effective implementation of safety measures, she pointed out

The pandemic also left an indelible mark on NDSU's RCA office, not only challenging the office but also reshaping its long-term strategic goals. Schuh emphasized, "The ability to work effectively remotely opened new possibilities for researchers." In-person tests and interviews now could be conducted online. The pandemic served as a catalyst for reimagining how research could be conducted, with remote work emerging as a pivotal solution. Researchers

at NDSU harnessed the power of virtual meetings through platforms like Zoom and Teams, providing an efficient means of collaboration and knowledge sharing.

However, it is important to acknowledge that this shift towards remote work and virtual meetings was not without its challenges. As Fred Hudson, RCA's communication manager, reflected on this period, he noted, "Even though it has been three years, platforms like Zoom and other online tools were not as advanced as they are today. They were still in their early stages." The transition to remote work required adjustments, not only in terms of technology but also in the way people communicated.

Hudson shared an anecdote from the early days of the pandemic. "I remember one of the first stories I worked on in mid-summer. I met someone outside, and we had our conversation outdoors while maintaining a safe distance."

Schuh highlighted the collective flexibility, saying, "The pandemic emphasized the value of innovative solutions and the research community's readiness to adapt." She noted NDSU's researchers embraced new ways of collaboration, recognizing the potential of technology to facilitate communication and knowledge sharing.

However, as Hudson noted, the pandemic forced a reevaluation of the standard communication tasks. "The day-to-day communication tasks, such as informing people about funding opportunities or facilitating basic office functions, were disrupted," he explained. RCA, which used to organize in-person sessions for research opportunities, team meetings, and basic collaborations, faced challenges that affected the traditional functions of the research office and its associated communication support.

While the pandemic presented challenges for RCA, it also brought about several positive outcomes. The office dedicated itself to offering robust support to NDSU researchers. RCA made considerable efforts to distribute safety guidelines and information and was always ready to assist.

Schuh also pointed out that the increased use of virtual meetings, especially through platforms like Zoom and

Teams, opened up new avenues for international collaboration. NDSU's microbiome research initiative, for instance, hosted international experts, allowing researchers to attend seminars and gain insights from renowned scientists without the usual logistical hurdles of in-person gatherings.

Hudson also offered valuable insights into the challenges and successes of the pandemic period. He mentioned a facility-wide initiative to address the shortage of Personal Protective Equipment in the health care sector. "We did a drive to provide PPE to outside entities, including hospitals," said Hudson. "It involved some intense communication to rally support."

The drive was a testament to the willingness of the NDSU research community to step up during a crisis. Hudson described the process of collecting PPE items, emphasizing that there were some challenges, particularly when items were grant-funded and had specific usage restrictions. Nevertheless, the effort resulted in the collection of pallets of PPE, which were then distributed to medical providers and organizations in need. This collective effort not only contributed to the fight against the pandemic but also exemplified the importance of communication and collaboration in challenging times.

Hudson also highlighted the creation of FAQs for researchers. These FAQs aimed to provide clarity and guidance during a time of uncertainty. They addressed a range of questions and concerns, helping researchers navigate the evolving restrictions and safety measures in lab environments. While specific stories may be hard to pinpoint, the impact of effective communication and support was undoubtedly significant in keeping researchers safe and ensuring compliance with guidelines.

The pandemic may have posed numerous challenges, but it also showcased the resilience, adaptability, and sense of community at NDSU, according to these research professionals. This period has not only transformed the institution's approach to research but has also left a lasting imprint on its long-term strategic goals, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and innovation in the face of adversity.

# The university's overlooked essential workers

By Morgan Twardoski

In March 2020, the Covid pandemic hit North Dakota State University like a tidal wave. The adjustment to the “new norm” was difficult for everyone. Those whose struggles were most overlooked were NDSU staff members—the large number of employees other than teachers. “It felt like we were sometimes the forgotten,” Joshua Schroetter said.

Joshua “Shwa” Schroetter, now NDSU technical services manager, was Niskanen Residence Hall director. He worked closely with custodians and other hall directors. The first shock wave of the pandemic left everyone stunned. “Nobody really knew what this meant, just that we had sent the students home, and everything was chaos,” Schroetter said. University staff quickly had to figure out how they were going to keep everyone safe, including live-in staff, custodial staff, and residents, because while many would be able to work remotely, certain people would not have the same ability. “We went through the summer just trying to figure everything out,” he said.

Margaret “Maggie” Latterell, assistant director of new student programs, served as staff senate president during the pandemic. She said her focus was to maintain communication with staff members who needed to transition to remote work. She noted that conducting online meetings allowed staff members to contribute to meetings who may not have otherwise been able to. However, she admitted that initially learning how to manage large-scale meetings over Zoom was challenging.

Schroetter recognized NDSU's ability to maintain its staff in a time of uncertainty. Many universities throughout the country were forced to furlough staff, but NDSU never reached that point. “For some people, the job security was really nice,” he said. “We never tried to do a bunch of things remotely and cut positions for a temporary amount of time. I think that definitely helped.”

In fall 2020, when students returned to the university's “HyFlex” teaching approach, Schroetter said enforcing the mask mandates became a major frustration among many staff members. “It was really hard for staff to get push-back from students,” he said. A common theme among students was the feeling of irritation and anger which stemmed from the loss of a normal college experience, especially incoming freshmen who had already missed out on significant components of their senior year of high school. Schroetter claimed that this took a toll on morale.

This was also a large issue Latterell faced in staff senate

meetings. “We had a lot of protections in place for classrooms because we knew that students were going to come into classrooms.” She explained that while faculty members created their own mask requirements in their syllabi, staff members did not have the same options. Many were hesitant to enforce mask mandates for fear of backlash from students.

Staff faced struggles with wearing masks as well. “Being a custodial staff, cleaning for eight hours straight in a warm building while having to wearing a mask... that's not easy stuff,” Schroetter said.

## A common theme among students was the feeling of irritation and anger which stemmed from the loss of a normal college experience.

The most overwhelming task, however, was making sure that community areas around campus were as clean and germ-free as possible. Custodians had to make sure that hand sanitizer was fully stocked and all surfaces were adequately disinfected after each use. It was a never-ending task.

Maintaining sanitary spaces was especially difficult for custodial staff of the many residence halls. “I'd have to say their workload was much harder,” Schroetter said. He explained that each week custodians were still expected to go into each room and bathroom to clean, unless there was a reported positive Covid case. “And I don't know how many unreported cases there were on campus,” he emphasized. “I know they were stressed, and I know it was a lot of extra work on them just to make sure everything was clean,” he noted. “Covid spread through the residence halls, there's no denying that.”

As for dining halls, many changes had to be made as well. The university transitioned from a mostly self-serve dining experience to everything having to be dished out, Schroetter explained. “I would be shocked, also, if the kitchen workers didn't have to wear masks while working over the hot ovens,” he added. “That would not be easy to do.”

There's no doubt that the new procedures the pandemic brought were difficult to navigate. It was new territory for everyone, so it was difficult to know what the right thing was. Policies for dining halls were especially complicated. “Students hung out in the dining centers like crazy because you didn't have to wear your mask while you were eating... it was more or less a mask-free zone,” Schroetter said. “I'm sure that put more stress on dining staff.” Not only did staff members have to worry about enforcing procedures correctly, observed Schroetter, but they were also concerned about their own health and safety.

Despite the time and effort they put into making the campus a safe place, not to mention putting their own

health at risk, staff members often felt ignored or overlooked. “Being a hall director on campus, we had a lot of hard conversations about how difficult this is that we’re one of the few frontline staff,” Schroetter said. “Dining, custodians and hall directors kind of all got lost in the bigger conversations around campus, from our perspective.”

One of the main struggles of the staff senate has always been receiving feedback from custodial and dining staff members, said Schroetter. “In the staff senate, we struggle to get representation from those groups on campus.” He explained that staff senate meetings take place during the

day while many staff members are in the middle of their shifts and cannot attend. Because of this, these staff members are unable to supply perspective and input.

Overall, there is no doubt that the pandemic placed an immense amount of stress on staff shoulders. “These are already intense jobs with weird hours, lots of manual labor, and to throw another thing in that is stressful in its own right,” Schroetter said. “In some ways, I’m kind of thankful I don’t remember all of the minute details anymore because it was just a lot for everybody involved.”

## Making connections under restrictions of Covid

By Alexis Vandenberghe

In fall 2020, freshmen from all over came to NDSU having to adjust to the new regulations of Covid-19. Students were required to wear masks whenever they were in a campus building and even encouraged to wear them outside when walking from building to building. Also set in stone was the requirement that everyone space out in classrooms, at least six feet away from each other. Classes with larger enrollments were moved to larger spaces to allow social distancing, extending even to desks set up in the Memorial Union Ballroom.

Mariah Mayer was a freshman in fall 2020.

She had to learn how to adjust to regulations including distancing herself from others. She lived in Burgum Hall, an all-women dorm, majoring in animal science. She recalled her difficulty with mask mandates. "I remember not being able to breathe because I have asthma, so it made it harder to breathe at times." She also said having to wear the masks she could not talk to other people because there was no facial expressions to see. Many students were not fans of wearing masks, arguing they had the right to do whatever with their body. "I didn't really fear Covid, so to me the masks were pointless if you weren't sick." Mayer also thought that having to keep track of a mask was inconvenient.

Like other new students during this time, Mayer also struggled to make friends. Most events were canceled, and she said it was frowned on to really be around anyone but your roommates. "I struggled to make friends because no one was out and about doing activities, and in classes you had to sit away from people, so group projects weren't used anymore," said Mayer. She did find a way to make friends by participating in Saddle & Sirloin, an on-campus animal welfare-based club. Saddle & Sirloin members refused to let Covid-19 win, and so continued its regular activities while participants wore masks and followed university requirements. Members even held the 95th Little International that year, making sure both the students had masks on while showing animals and the audience had masks while in the stands. (See photo on page 13.)

Covid restrictions made it difficult for Mayer to make connections with the professors and advisor. Mayer said it was hard to approach them when a mask was covering their face, and she didn't know if the professor was comfortable or not with her approaching them. "I felt it

was harder to connect with everyone wearing a mask just because it didn't seem like any of them were friendly, as when not wearing a mask, I could see the emotion." Because she was afraid to approach, she pulled away from going up to them, and it made the situation even more awkward, she said.

Emma Torgerson, an agricultural education major, was also a freshman in fall 2020. She lived in Dinan Hall, also an all-female dorm. Getting used to the on-campus regulations, she struggled with not being able to meet people. "There were no hall socials in the dorms, so you really didn't know anyone but your roommate unless you ran into someone else in the hallway."

**It was hard to approach them when a mask was covering their face, and she didn't know if the professor was comfortable or not with her approaching.**

Being from Montana made it even harder for

Torgerson, because she didn't know anyone, unlike many North Dakota students who knew each other from high school. She said the masks restricted her because it didn't make it fun to want to be around people and talk to them when she could not see their expressions.

Considering those new rules for masking and social distancing, Torgerson said she was a "yes and no" for following them. "When eating and you had one too many people sitting at a table you would get in trouble, when all you were doing was eating a meal with the people you have been regularly doing so with, and not wanting to exclude anyone just because you had one too many people," Torgerson said. She added that it made it harder for her to learn because she could not read the lips of the instructors. She likes to read lips for better comprehension. One thing Torgerson did like about masks: she enjoyed having masks on in the winter since it was cold out. It helped her stay warmer. Torgerson did understand that some people were considered at high risk for Covid, so for those people she knew she had to adhere to protocols.

Also a struggle for Torgerson was making a connection with instructors. She thought the masks affected her ability to approach them. "They felt more intimidating and less personable. Since then I have connected more with them." Also like Mayer, she struggled in the classroom to ask questions. But email was not an answer. Torgerson thought that when she asked questions over email it was harder to understand what the professors meant. She said she does better when told in person or shown how to do an assignment.

After Torgerson's freshman year the university began to return to normal. Once again she was able to socialize with other students, a big problem for her in her freshman

year. "I would say my social life was affected in the sense that I found only a few friends during that first year with all the restrictions," she said. Torgerson was happy with the friends she did make, because they introduced her to new friends, and now those are the ones she is closest to today. After regulations eased she also joined Saddle & Sirloin and Collegiate Cattlewomen.

# The struggle to learn online: Adjusting to a new life

By Andrew Werlinger

There comes a handful of times in one's life where you're able to stop, take a breath and realize that you're witnessing an earth-shattering event unfold before your very eyes. For Americans, the second weekend of March 2020 definitely qualifies, as most of the 300+ million had their worlds flipped upside down thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The disease reached the United States on Jan. 20, the first case confirmed in Washington state.

Here's a short rundown of events that occurred between Thursday, March 11, and Sunday, March 15:

- The World Health Organization declares Covid-19 a pandemic.
- President Donald Trump bans travel from Europe.
- President Trump declares a national emergency.
- The NCAA cancels all remaining winter and spring sports.
- The NBA and MLB postpone seasons.
- North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem join 24 other states and territories in closing schools.

Braxten Bastian, a sophomore agricultural economics major at NDSU, was a high school student in Oregon in 2020. He recalls a particularly strange set of events just prior to the confirmation of the first Covid case.

"My dad had a conference in Seattle... before Covid even hit the news," said Bastian. "And he and his work partner came back, and they both got really sick, gave it to everyone at their office. But it was only like two weeks after everyone had gotten better, then Covid hit the news. It was like 'Oh there's a Covid outbreak by the way.' So it was kind of interesting to be like, 'Oh that might have been what that was.'"

What started as a mysterious, cold/flu-like disease spreading through China in December 2019 made its way to the United States. In the blink of an eye, it shut the country down. Over a span of just 27 days, almost every single public school in America had closed its doors.

Maggie Krueger, a nursing student, vividly recalls the twists and turns leading up to the shutdown. "Everybody

had me really worked up," she said. But then at the same time every single teacher said they'd had a thousand of these, and that it wasn't going to happen to us. Everybody was like 'We're going to be fine... we've had so many different viruses that have gone around and nothing ever ends up coming from it.'"

Unfortunately for everybody, those predictions were way off.

**You would think that being able to go to school in the comfort of your own home for months on end would be a dream come true. But online schooling wasn't as popular as you might think.**

Initially, most schools across the country, including schools in North Dakota and Minnesota, closed two-weeks, joining in the attempt to "flatten the curve" of rising cases around the nation. However, it quickly became clear that this was going to be more than just a two-week break.

Bastian remembers being told he'd be back to his high school soon. "The school district was telling us, 'it'll be like a long spring break, and you guys will be back by mid-April,'" he said. "Obviously, that didn't happen. That would've been my sophomore year of high school, and we stayed remote until halfway through my junior year."

Colten Alme, a mechanical engineering major, was a high school junior in March 2020. He observed that "two weeks turned into two months, turned in to two years."

The WHO-declared public health emergency wound up lasting 1,191 days.

Adjusting almost overnight to a different way of living wasn't easy for most students. Krueger vividly remembers. "My mom, when Covid first happened, she was really strict, so she wouldn't let me see anybody. My friends would hang out all the time, but my mom wouldn't let me see them because they were always out." To ensure social distancing, she said, "we would park our cars and sit in the trunks and talk."

After a hiatus of no school whatsoever, schools in North Dakota and in much of the nation tried to revive class-work by holding classes the only way possible: Zoom. You would think that being able to go to school in the comfort of your own home for months on end would be a dream come true. But online schooling wasn't as popular as you might think.

"I hated Zoom school, because I cannot learn well online, at all," Krueger said.

"It was handy because you just had to wake up and hop on Zoom, but it sucked because you had no interac-

tion with anybody.... It was hard having to communicate through screens.... You didn't really learn anything. Nobody was trying anymore."

Alme shares the sentiment. "I really enjoyed the little hiatus before we got into the online (school). It was very, very nice but then they forced us to do online, and I just hated it."

A distaste for online schooling due to the pandemic seems to be a shared sentiment across the country. According to a survey by technology company Morning Consult, two-thirds of American students said they learn better in-person than virtually. More than half said they disliked online classes. Other studies showed a large share of students were displeased with how their school handled keeping them informed and engaged during the pandemic.

Challenges of online education led some students to excitement when they could get back in the classroom.

"It was kind of nice to get back to the routine when you did get back to school," Bastian said. "It's like summer. I feel like everyone at some point during the end of summer is ready to get back to school or get back to a schedule or something like that."

The pandemic didn't just impact students however. Faculty members also had to adjust.

Margaret Fitzgerald, professor of human development and family science, served as NDSU provost during the pandemic. "It was intense," she said. "It was a time of always questioning, like, what should we be doing? Are we doing the right thing? How is this working? Are people safe?"

After sending students home for an initial two weeks, university administrators considered options that could continue education without putting students or staff at risk. "I remember thinking for a university to close completely is kind of unrealistic," Fitzgerald said. "People need to work and earn money... students want to keep progressing in their degrees, but to just stop your life completely was probably not an option." The only reasonable decision seemed to be going online.

Unlike the majority of faculty and staff working remotely, Fitzgerald said she still came to work daily throughout the pandemic. "I was on campus every day, and there was a handful of people in the buildings who were working normal kinds of jobs. But we were all very careful about not exposing other people."

Although Fitzgerald was in her office her daily agenda had shifted. "My attention became much more focused on the pandemic and what we could and could not do and how we should and should not do things," she said. Our office had a faculty advisory committee making recommendations on how they thought we should respond as a campus, so getting that input was really valuable."

In the end, however, Fitzgerald gives praise to the whole university community for executing a plan. "I was extremely impressed at how adaptable our faculty, staff and students became to get through the pandemic, because we did some pretty dramatic changes with going from face-to-face to entirely online," said Fitzgerald. We had a lot of people who never (had) taught online. They had to learn to do that very, very quickly. It was a very heavy lift for students in that what they thought their college experience would be like was not at all what their college experience was like."



# Recruiting new students during a pandemic: success and failure

By Serena Fraser

The Covid-19 pandemic changed most aspects of traditional American lifestyle. Particularly affected was higher education. On March 12, 2020, NDSU announced that all classes would go online. This followed a similar decision made by most universities and colleges in the country. The National Center for Education Statistics in July 2021 reported that 84% of the country's undergraduates saw all or some of their classes move online in spring 2020. At NDSU, face-to-face classes were expected to reconvene on April 6. That did not happen. A typically lively NDSU atmosphere ended.

NDSU's student organizations generally remained dormant while the campus waited for the world to resume. Now, more than three years later, many of those organizations continue to struggle with the effects of Covid. Seventeen did not survive. Financial challenges, attracting and retaining members, and an apparent loss in the spirit of involvement have left many NDSU organizations struggling—or fizzling away.

The challenge to student organizations began at the state level. Based on North Dakota Department of Health advice, Gov. Doug Burgum outlined three thresholds of recommendations for public events and gatherings: low risk, moderate risk, and high risk. The designations applied to student organization events, as these were gatherings in the Covid definition. High risk threshold warned of the possibility of widespread community transmission, stating, "Authorities should cancel or postpone all events that involve the potential for disease transmission." The health department offered no other options. As classes resumed in fall 2020 under the HyFlex model, these thresholds became a way to assess not only the risk of holding classes but also the risk in any NDSU gathering, including those of extracurricular activities.

That posed a huge struggle for campus organizations. Student officers and members faced extreme challenges and resistance in efforts to follow guidelines. For freshman Michael Thomas, a biology major in fall 2020, university life was anything but normal. Despite challenges of pandemic rules, Thomas said he tried to stay involved throughout campus. He joined Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity, even progressing to director of recruitment. He also participated in intramural sports and Saddle & Sirloin club. Under the circumstances, and still today, Thomas proved to be an unusually active student in both his university and community.

**Most organizations promoted themselves by talking about events held in the past. That was because Covid restrictions prevented most new events from happening.**

In his experience as a fraternity recruitment director, Thomas said he saw most campus organizations promoting themselves by talking about events held in the past. That was because Covid restrictions prevented most new events from happening. Fraternity members, like all students, were required to self-isolate when running a fever, and a mask mandate was mostly enforced throughout fall semester 2020. Members of student organizations were required to social distance at the events and meetings that did take place. This put a strain on new recruitment for most on-campus organizations, said Thomas, who observed that "small-town students didn't notice the extremities of Covid until coming to NDSU and getting involved." More than

half of NDSU's students come from small North Dakota and Minnesota towns, and many did not see the stringent Covid restrictions common in universities and urban areas. Not only did these new students face a change in their living space, but they also had to change their behavior to accommodate the health and wellness considerations of a large university community.

Sarah Simonett, a major in apparel, retail merchandising and design, also joined NDSU as a freshman in fall 2020. She also pointed out changes in recruitment for "Greek life," that is, the on-campus fraternities and sororities. Simonett's recruitment process for the Delta Delta Delta (Tri Delta) sorority was done via Zoom. Also on Zoom were pledging and initiation ceremonies. Simonett shared her most memorable pandemic-era experiences as a freshman and new Tri Delta member. The first took place the final day of recruitment, known as Bid Day. What was supposed to be the most exciting day of the year for both the chapter and new members like Simonett was darkened by anxiety and pressures of following Covid rules. Simonett felt frustrated. "It's one thing to join an organization, but it's another thing to meet frequently," she said of the rare in-person events. "It felt weird."

Authorities and the public frowned upon or prohibited student gatherings, but the line was gray between safe and inappropriate. No one had an answer. Freshmen, like other students, became not only frustrated by the restraints but, as Simonett said, also the loss of opportunities to make new friends and have a fresh, new experience at a university.

Simonett discovered that during the university's Welcome Week. The week is supposed to be an opportunity for new students to venture out, become familiar with campus and, most importantly, meet new people. In Fall

2020, however, Welcome Week was not a requirement. Many freshmen brushed off the week and instead spent the time before their first days in the dorms trying to learn what the pandemic world had in store for them. Simonett said the university's Welcome Week could have been handled better, despite pandemic restrictions. After having emphasized the importance of the week, she said, university officials could have better emphasized an approach to meet students, but in a safe way. She said that might have "changed her freshman experience for the better," observing "there was no guide on how to meet people."

Simonett, Thomas and other NDSU first-year students in fall 2020 said they became used to the restrictions although it was anything but easy.

After almost four years, the university has joined the rest of the world in pulling away from the pandemic. But NDSU's organizations continue to face challenges, and many have not returned or have not yet regained the

strength they had before. Organizations that closed or did not re-register in fall 2020, according to Robert Jones, assistant director of student involvement and leadership, include Co-Ed Volleyball Club; Developmental Science Graduate Student Association; Dog Obedience and Training Club; Ducks Unlimited; English Graduate Student Organization; Environmental & Conservation Sciences Graduate Association; Farmers Union Collegiate Chapter; the Herd; Just Jesus, Adventist Campus Ministries; Material Research Society; Phi Beta Lambda; Photography Club; Racquetball Club; Smash Club (returned under new name); Unicycle Club; Young Americans for Liberty; Yo-Yo Club.

On the bright side, many students who faced these challenges say the experiences were great practice for career challenges. It may even give a little extra advantage to students who chose during this time to stay involved and work through the struggles.

# A personal response

**T**he student writers who produced this documentary of the pandemic at NDSU serve the campus not only as journalists. They also suffered as pandemic

survivors themselves. Their memories also matter. Here they write briefly of their own difficult challenges, both as students in high school and university.

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## Laura Baldwin

Halfway through warm-ups, the team is ushered off the court. The Minnesota State High School Basketball Tournament is canceled due to a new virus on the rise, Covid. This news becomes the hot topic of study hall and lunch table conversations. Classmates discuss the impossibility of our country school shutting down for this random virus and the dramatic approaches of other states dealing with it. Surely this virus would not impact this small-town Madison, Minn., school.

Less than a week later, the administration announces the school will be closed for two weeks due to rising concerns over the pandemic. Classmates cry as they begin to realize they may lose their senior year.

At first, I was confident that school would be back in time for the final events of senior year including prom, senior prank, banquets, and graduation. However, as time went on it was clear Covid was here for the long haul. My high school graduation took place in the parking lot, 50 cars lined up with the radio tuned to hear the principal give a speech and farewell. After, I stood in my driveway as friends and family dropped off cards and gifts of congratulations. The lack of a signifying end created high expectations for the start of college. These were ultimately unmet.

Creating a community at NDSU was difficult if not seemingly impossible with masked faces and mostly online classes. The lack of human connection and frustration with the pandemic led to many personal mental and physical health issues.

Through the struggles, I found comfort during the pandemic in a local church which helped build a supportive community that I had been missing. The pandemic was part of the hardest times in my life, but through it I have seen incredible growth in my life. I was lost in the depths of the pandemic looking for answers and control, but found peace through giving my life to Jesus knowing He is in control.

## Serena Fraser

The first time I ever heard about Covid was from a fellow student who read somewhere in the news that two cases of the Coronavirus had been detected and quarantined in Chicago. We all giggled at the silly name, and simply

ignored its glooming shadow.

I was attending an all-state choir conference in Chicago approximately three weeks before the whole world shut down. Rumors of this silly thing named the Coronavirus had been brought up in conversations, but my 17-year-old self had much on her mind and, quite honestly, I didn't think twice. It was my junior year of high school. Football games, volleyball practice, teenage boys, and prom took up most of my head space. Kobe Bryant had just died, and gun violence raided our country's schools. My world was so small, and I failed to acknowledge the crazy world I lived in.

March 12 I received the email and a message from my mom. School continued till the end of that day, but we were asked to remain home, safe, and healthy until after spring break. At first, I was very confused that a little virus couldn't have that big of an effect on my tiny little world. The thought of not having school and enjoying all my extracurriculars left butterflies in my stomach. What about prom? State basketball? All these exciting events gone in an instant.

Those two weeks multiplied into three years. Three years until the pandemic was officially proclaimed over. So much time and love lost. When I returned to school after the summer, the state of South Dakota's school system required masks, two weeks of quarantine, and limitations for extracurriculars and events. It was easy to be upset about the situation. No one had the right answers, and at this point everything felt hopeless, numb, and scary. I got used to hearing the words "I don't know."

A few days after Halloween I, like many others, was sent home from school because of a close contact report. I quarantined for two weeks without any symptoms. At this point Covid test results took around a week or more. Two days before I was able to return to school, I received a positive Covid test. I was out for another two weeks. Throughout my quarantine I lost all my motivation for school, and when I was finally ready to return, the pile of assignments I had waiting for me was crucially overwhelming. My school spirit, academic motivation, and involvement were locked down in a tiny space in my brain that I couldn't seem to reopen. Although I once again was immersed with friends and classmates, Covid had already done so much damage. Many students and I can relate to this and to that numbness still carries on in American academics and so much more.

## Cora Huhn

In March 2020 my friends and I were hanging out when we received a seemingly exciting email. We were going to get two weeks off of school. It seemed super fun. No one was expecting Covid-19 to shut down our high school, so we saw it as a second spring break. Little did we know that the times spent at home would span much longer than two weeks.

I was a sophomore at Litchfield, Minn., High School when the virus began affecting our everyday lives. At first it was an enjoyable vacation, but as online school over Zoom started, my mindset changed. Trying to learn over Zoom was difficult for me. I had a hard time paying attention and being honest in my schoolwork. As an involved student, it was challenging to go from being active in extracurriculars to suddenly becoming a lump behind a screen all day.

In high school I participated in swimming, golf, basketball managing, student council, FFA, 4-H, choir and band. Each of these activities helped me to socialize with friends and fill up my free time. Being unexpectedly stuck at home and not being busy was a lonely feeling. At times, I felt like I didn't know what to do with myself. I've always loved singing and playing my flute, but it became an actual chore to do over Zoom, so I ended up not practicing with the class. We had to submit recordings of ourselves singing and playing our instruments, and it was a humbling feeling, because hearing yourself over a recording always doesn't sound right. It was in my sophomore year that I had hoped to make varsity on the golf team, but I never even had the chance to try because spring sports were canceled. It made me feel sad knowing I missed out on so many potential memories from the spring of that year.

Overall, Covid-19 took a toll on me in high school. It made me feel isolated and like I missed out on opportunities. I don't think I obtained a lot of knowledge from my high school Zoom classes. The pandemic was a difficult time for everyone, and I am grateful we are finally leaving that era.

## Savannah V. Lussier

What was supposed to be one of the most exciting years of one's life turned quickly due to a pandemic that nobody saw coming. As I was packing up for college, and getting my dorm necessities ready, there was another thing on my check list: masks. At the peak of my senior year of high school in Warroad, Minn., we were hit by Covid-19. The moment the news of the lockdown echoed through the high school lunchroom speakers, a realization set in—things were about to drastically change, possibly not for the better. We were forced to leave school and stay in our

houses, and were unable to spend time with the people we were about to leave for good.

Arriving on the NDSU campus in fall 2020 I was uncertain. I had never experienced college life, let alone during a global crisis. During the welcome week, I vividly recall meeting numerous individuals, yet their faces behind masks made it all feel somewhat surreal. Actions like having my food served in the dining center seemed normal then. Only did I realize later that it was far from normal.

I feel as if we had fewer opportunities to get involved around campus during my freshman year. Many clubs remained inactive, and social gatherings were limited due to room occupancy restrictions. It wasn't until my sophomore year

that I began to immerse myself and learn about various events. Despite feeling deprived of a conventional freshman experience, I wouldn't entirely change it, as it still led me to where I am today. Though my journey differed from the norm, it's a unique narrative that taught me to anticipate the unexpected, and I can share this experience as a testament to overcoming adversity. Covid-19 taught me a valuable lesson, always be prepared for the unexpected.

## Hailey Maddock

I was a sophomore at Maddock (N.D.) Public School when the Covid-19 pandemic took us out of classes and forced us to learn online for the foreseeable future. My high school was not well equipped for this which resulted in almost a month of no learning while it adapted. Until late March, we didn't use any online video chatting resources and were mailed weekly assignments or given them over email. I am a somewhat disciplined student, so this didn't pose any challenge for me as it did for others.

In fact, my experience of the pandemic was positive despite conditions. Since around fourth grade I was always involved in everything and could never catch a break, so when the pandemic came around and shut everything down, I could relax and see what life could be like when I wasn't constantly running around. I finally had the time on my hands to have hobbies, be with my family, and relearn how to be a kid.

My mental health during this time was probably the best it's ever been because, since I had no activities going on and school was pretty easy at the moment, there was no pressure on me to complete anything or to be performing well in, for example, sports or academic competitions. I started to understand how little some of the things I had prioritized in my life mattered, and began enjoying parts of my life that I hadn't been able to in the past.

Coming back from the pandemic was definitely hard. By

**Little did we know that the time spent at home would span much longer than two weeks.**

that point, I had gotten into a routine and had also not talked to anyone outside of my family for the majority of the time. I had already been considered an introvert, so when I hadn't had to practice any social skills for such a long time, I had become comfortable with only talking to my family. This made the transition back to "normal" life hard because I now was being forced to have a social life once again. That was something I had enjoyed not doing.

Overall, my experience of the pandemic was not as negative as most, but instead, a time of rest that my 16-year-old mind had been craving. It allowed me to enjoy life, set new priorities, and see the difference between my "normal" life and that of the pandemic.

### Abigail Molstad

Little did I know that when we were sent home from school for two weeks it would be the last time things were "normal." You think about growing up, graduation, going to college, and you never consider the effects the outside world may have on those things happening the way you had always planned in your head.

Practice almost every day at 6 a.m. school from 8 to 3, practice again after, then homework or a game, to then repeat that schedule right away the next morning. Who knew a month later my schedule would be to roll out of bed at 7:50 a.m., lie on the couch from 8-3 on Zoom, work on a little bit of homework, and that was what I called a day. Sitting on my hind end was my new "normal."

Once senior year came around things gradually started to be "normal" again, and soon enough it was freshman year of college: getting to meet my new best friends, having a completely different schedule to manage, and taking care of what seemed to be my constantly sick body. Freshman year I had mono, influenza, pink eye, sinus infections, and pneumonia. I don't think people talk enough about how the isolation everyone did to prevent themselves from getting sick may have done more harm than good. My body was clearly not used to being around so many other people. It didn't have the built-up immune system to fight off anything after being trapped, locked away from so many people for over a year, breathing in nothing but my own air from within the mask.

I still have a vivid memory of going to class the first day masks weren't required anymore, and nobody looked like what I had pictured their faces to look like behind the mask. It almost felt freeing, as though I had forgotten what my original thoughts of going off to college would be like.

### Kooper Shagena

I was a high school senior in March 2020. I was a high school senior who was planning her outfit for the student section theme of "America" for the state championship semi-final basketball game.

It was the night before the game, and I was riding with my mom and aunts to Walmart for a grocery run when the email buzzed my phone. The game was cancelled until further notice due to Covid-19 concerns. I remember the tears coming shortly after the shock and anger. It wasn't just about a basketball game; it was about my last chance to jump and cheer alongside the kids I grew up with, for the kids I grew up with. I was already sentimental about the game, and now that last chance was taken from me by some mystery virus that no one could even explain.

Of course, the hits kept coming. Two weeks off from school became no senior prom and no real graduation, never seeing my classmates in the hallways again. We didn't get to appreciate the "lasts" together like we all planned to do. The last day of school. The last lunch together. The last time in a student section. Our graduation, what the last 12 years had led to, was a sad and lonely affair held spread out on a football field with a limit of two supporters per student attending.

When fall 2020 came around and it was time for me to start my freshman experience, making friends was out of the question. Classes were not held in person. My day consisted of waking up in my single suite alone, watching a Zoom class or two, most likely falling asleep during them, and then heading to the dining hall to eat alone and make sure to sit at a table that was marked "clean." Then, back to the dorm to sit alone and probably not do any online assignments.

My experience improved over the next couple years. I recovered my GPA from the trenches of freshman year, started making friends in the classes I was able to attend in person, and started to have a more positive outlook on college itself and my place in it. I do still feel robbed of my senior year of high school and my college freshman experience, but my family and I are still alive to talk about it, and that is what matters the most.

### Miranda Tetzloff

When the pandemic started it was March 2020, and I was a freshman in college studying at Concordia College, Moorhead. I had just returned from spring break and had no idea what Covid-19 was or the potential doom it carried.

I got back onto campus and returned to classes like normal. Wednesday of that week Concordia canceled classes until the following Monday. During that time Concordia faculty and staff met to discuss what Concordia's action was going to be. Concordia decided to cancel the rest of the spring 2020 semester and move into distance learning. I was given two days to collect my belongings and to get off campus. We did not have to empty our dorms because Concordia did believe we were going to come back later in the semester.

Once I was sent home, I was experiencing some severe mental health issues. I had no human contact beside my close family members, I was unemployed, and I was learning to do online classes. My virtual learning experience was extremely difficult for me. I was taking 21 credits and had the same work load as my in-person classes. Concordia teaching staff were not prepared for virtual learning. I received one PowerPoint to complete my course work and study for exams, while on-campus classes had three lectures a week, online readings, and tutoring services.

May 2020, we were finally allowed to return to campus to empty our dorms. We had to sign up for times to enter the dorm. We were only allowed to have one other person in the dorm with us and only had one hour to pack everything, clean, and return the room to the condition it was when we moved in.

Concordia was not sure if it would be returning to in-person classes in fall 2020, so I ended up leaving and transferring to MState Community and Technical College. MState was online as well, but I thought it was set up better than Concordia was.

After fall 2020 I wanted to go back to campus learning and so decided to transfer to North Dakota State University. Everyone in campus classrooms were required to wear a mask, and the class sizes were smaller to accommodate social distancing. I did not mind wearing a mask. I felt it was a small price to pay to be back in person and experiencing on-campus resources again.

The pandemic deeply impacted my education, resulting in the failure of two semesters. It took a toll on my mental health, worsened by a lack of resources. It was a challenging and scary period for everyone.

### **Morgan Twardoski**

When I first heard about Covid-19 I was a sophomore at Century High School in Bismarck, N.D. I was surrounded by a bunch of other girls, celebrating my friend's birthday. We all gathered around the TV to hear the governor's big

announcement about whether we would have school the next day. We sat there, fingers crossed that we would get a couple of days off school.

When Doug Burgum announced that we would have a few days off, we were ecstatic. We didn't realize at the time the gravity of the situation. Later that night, my parents called me and told me to come home as soon as possible. I was furious. I didn't understand what was so serious about a little virus, one that probably wouldn't really affect North Dakota much anyway.

Boy, was I wrong. We didn't go back to school for the rest of the year. My classes changed to completely online. I couldn't leave the house to see any friends, my boyfriend, or any extended family. I felt completely isolated.

Eventually, in the summer, I was finally able to start spending time with people outside the house again. We had to wear masks, use lots of hand sanitizer, keep at least six feet away from each other, and remain outdoors as much as possible.

When fall came, the school decided to incorporate HyFlex learning. They split my class by last names and decided to alternate in-person and online days so they could limit the number of students in the school each day. Most of my friends' last names are towards the beginning of the alphabet, and mine's near the end, so we were never at school on the same days. We also weren't allowed to hang out much at all outside of school, so I never saw them. While we were in school, we were expected to wear masks at all times, unless we were in the act of taking a bite of food. I even had friends get yelled at for leaving their masks down between bites. Gym class was nearly impossible. Running around with a thick mask over my mouth and nose nearly had me on the ground. We were also expected to always stand or sit at least six feet apart. I barely saw anyone in the hallways.

Anytime a person had a scratchy throat in class, everyone felt on edge. Just about any feeling you had was a possible Covid symptom, so people were constantly paranoid. Everything felt dystopian.

Finally, my senior year, things felt almost back to normal. I got to go back to school with all my friends, and the rules concerning masks and distancing had practically vanished. There are, however, many ways that the pandemic has created lasting effects in me. The feelings of loneliness, confusion, and paranoia that the virus brought on are ones that I won't forget.

**Our graduation, what the last 12 years had led to, was a sad and lonely affair held spread out on a football field with a limit of two supporters per student attending.**

### Alexis Vandenberghe

Coming to NDSU as a freshman in 2020 was definitely hard for me to adjust to. In my small town in North Dakota we didn't have much for regulations with Covid-19, so all the regulations that the university had in place were hard for me to get used to.

I was never a big mask-wearing person from the start just because I thought they were always hard to keep track of. In the dorms, I always had a hard time with the fact that we had to wear a mask just to go down the hall to the bathroom when no one was ever in the hall. I know many times I didn't listen to that rule and was told by RAs many times to put my mask on.

There was always a big problem with me trying to make friends because no one talked in class, or they just were scared to approach someone because they didn't want to get sick. Honestly, my freshman year I only hung out with my roommate, a few girls in my dorm, and my boyfriend at that time. It was hard for me that year mentally because I am a big people person, so I always wanted to go to events or hang out with friends, but that was not a thing of that time, really.

My happiest time of the week was always just going home to the ranch because I could be outside and do a lot of things and be around family since I was struggling with making friends. The one organization on campus that continued to do as much as possible was Saddle & Sirloin. We still had meetings every Wednesday, and I was able to meet students of all ages who had similar interests to mine. So honestly, the club saved me my freshman year from losing it!

### Andrew Werlinger

It was near the turn of the new year. I was pretty excited. New year, new me, whatever. I remember catching a glimpse of the national newscast, when David Muir gave a quick side report on a new "mystery virus" that had infected a handful of people in China.

I felt like I'd seen this movie a few times before. A new sickness begins spreading, causes worldwide panic, only

to fade away in relatively quick fashion. However, soon after, that mystery virus turned into the A-topic of news outlets worldwide.

As 2020 rolled on, dystopian videos from all corners of Europe and China depicting empty streets and overflowing hospitals began emerging, and the disease eventually entered the U.S. Still, I wasn't overly concerned. I lived in North Dakota, one of the most isolated places in America. There was no way this thing would ever get to us.

The second week of March changed that perspective.

**There was always a big problem with me trying to make friends because no one talked in class, or they just were scared to approach someone because they didn't want to get sick.**

Watching the news and seeing nationwide events being cancelled like schools on a snow day was surreal. It seemed like every few minutes a new state had reported their first case, North Dakota being one of them.

Then it happened. Friday, March 13.

I was in my French class scribbling down answers on a test in the day's final class period, trying to get out ASAP so I could go watch the state basketball tournament. Out of the blue, the ringtone for the school-wide intercom system announced its presence. My heart sank. Our assistant principal came over the intercom and announced that the state basketball tournament had been postponed.

Just two days later, Gov. Doug Burgum announced that all public schools in North Dakota would be closed two weeks. I was elated. No school for two weeks? Sign me up.

Pretty quickly though, I realized this was different. We were stuck at home. Doing nothing. And before I knew it, I was longing to go back to school. What started as a two-week break turned into years of mask-wearing and changes to everyday life.

What stands out to me when I look back was how fast everything happened. On Friday, I was at school with over a thousand other people, and others nationwide were going about their lives as normal. But just 72 hours later, Americans everywhere were living completely different lives than they had been just three days earlier.

Insanity is the only way I can describe it.



### **The team**

Front row, l to r Hailey Maddock, Savannah Lussier, Morgan Twardoski, Cora Huhn, Abigail Molstad.  
Back row l to r, Laura Baldwin, Kooper Shagena, Miranda Tetzloff, Andrew Werlinger, Serena Fraser.  
Kneeling, Ross Collins. Not pictured: Alexis Vandenberghe.





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