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Seniors Reflect on Fall 2020 Semester



As the final few weeks of this fall semester tick away, we at GWU-Today feel like a bit of reflection is needed on this rather unusual and groundbreaking semester. As we all know, COVID-19 has taken the world by storm and changed how we live our lives for the foreseeable future. We've had to change how we do everything from normal tasks, like going out to eat and putting gas in our cars, to hosting Thanksgiving dinner and going Christmas shopping. Nothing is the same as usual, and attending college is no different. Even before students stepped foot on Gardner-Webb's campus for the Fall 2020 Semester, they had already been subject to several months' worth of government mandated regulations and recommendations. Once arriving on campus, these regulations became even more amplified for on-campus living. These increased safety measures included limiting class sizes, maintaining a distance of six feet, wearing a mask when in a public place or residence and limiting mass social gatherings.

Overall, Gardner-Webb was successful with their implementation of safety measures as they helped us continue to stay on campus until Thanksgiving break. While most would call this semester a success considering this new "normal" that we're in, it is hard to talk about a semester ending without thinking about the graduating class. This is the second semester in a row that saw Gardner-Webb forgo an in-person commencement and instead opt for a socially distanced, virtual ceremony hosted live on the Gardner-Webb Facebook page. While it still is encouraging that Gardner-Webb attempts to maintain some sense of normalcy during these trying times, you'd have to think that it is still rather upsetting to think that you worked long and hard for a degree that you won't even get to accept in front of your loved ones. In order to get a few thoughts on this semester, we reached out to a few seniors who are about to say their last farewells to Runnin' Bulldog Country.

Senior Claire Coile reached the end of her Gardner-Webb tenure and is set to graduate this December. Even though this last semester wasn't exactly what she expected, she still looks back on her time at Gardner-Webb fondly and appreciates the memories she made. "Before this semester, I was an average college girl. I went to class, work-study, hung out with friends, did homework, and went to a lot of social events on campus. I like to do a little of everything and Gardner-Webb was my home," Coile said.

Even though Coile had to change her routine after coming back to campus, it wasn't anything that she wasn't used to. "Honestly, so much of our lives had changed to a 'pandemic normal' by the time we returned to school this semester, it didn't seem odd to me. The only noticeable difference was the lack of sporting events and large gatherings," Coile said. "To combat this, my friends and I just played a lot more board games. Overall, it just goes to show you can get used to anything."



Profile photo of Claire Coile
Senior Claire Coile posing for a headshot.

Coile offered praise to the university's handling of the virus but still has her "what-ifs" regarding the semester. "I think GWU did the best they could. The people at student activities were very creative in coming up with ways to bring people together. As a senior, I already had established friendships unlike the freshman, so it wasn't too hard to adjust," Coile said. "There are always things that could be done better, but being in a leadership position during a pandemic is in no way easy. Hard decisions must be made, and there will always be critics because of that. If I had to say one thing, GWU needed one staff member dedicated to dealing with students who had COVID or were in quarantine."

While Coile was able to adjust pretty well and avoid quarantine during the semester, there are plenty of people that didn't. December graduate Garrett Blanton is one of these. Instead of enjoying his final few days as a college student, he was in quarantine. Blanton's roommate tested positive for COVID-19 less than two weeks away from Thanksgiving break, resulting in him having to quarantine on-campus until he could leave for break. While his last couple of weeks on campus certainly put a damper to his semester, he is glad he was able to make it through his last semester at GWU and graduate. "Early on, it was really difficult to adjust to all the COVID-19 restrictions because mostly I didn't go anywhere over the summer and coming back to campus and wearing a mask everywhere got old, very quick. While it was a struggle to begin the semester, I got a handle on things and changed my lifestyle to adjust to this new normal," Blanton said.

Even though he adjusted, Blanton is disappointed with how the semester ended. "We always look at our senior years and think of it as the big farewell as we move onto the next chapter of our lives," Blanton said. "Well, this semester was not that for me. It was a bunch of Zoom classes with limitations on what we could and couldn't do. Sadly, I didn't get to enjoy my last semester to its fullest, and that leaves me unsatisfied with the outcome of being quarantined my last few days on campus."

Even though he was disappointed, Blanton wasn't sure how Gardner-Webb could've operated any differently during the pandemic. "Gardner-Webb did the best they could. I'm just disappointed in 2020 and how the year has gone. It's been one struggle after another, and I'm just ready to move on and see what the future holds," Blanton said.

Regarding graduation, Coile and Blanton both agreed that they were glad to just be back on campus, and from the very beginning they kind of assumed it was probably not going to happen. While the Fall 2020 graduates

have already been given a verdict on their graduation, the Spring 2021 graduates still have hope that things may just get back to normal. With increasing numbers every day and a vaccine on the horizon, it will be very interesting to see what happens over these next few months as we go into 2021.

Reporters Note:

Finally, no reflection would be complete without a few words from the author of the article you're reading who is a senior himself. Hello, I'm Michael Harvey. As with those interviewed and the rest of the world, I too am looking for greener pastures come 2021. This year has been mentally and physically taxing on everyone, myself included, but we must continue to power through and hopefully it will help us get to where we'll see some glimpses of "normal" again soon.

I would like to say thank you to GWU-Today for allowing me to share the stories of so many talented people at Gardner-Webb throughout this semester. Sadly, most of them dealt with how we're handling COVID-19, but it wouldn't be responsible for us to write about something else given the current times we're in. Thank you to everyone that has read a GWU Today article this semester, and I hope y'all will have a merry Christmas and a happy holidays!



Senior Garrett Blanton posing for a professional shot.