



# Coronavirus: Flagler College students grapple with campus closures

By Christen Kelley

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The last few weeks of college are usually spent celebrating and saying goodbye to all the friends and professors who made the experience worthwhile.

Now Flagler College students are forced to finish out the rest of the year online due to the coronavirus, causing seniors to miss out on important end-of-year traditions.

“I definitely feel a bit disconnected. It’s disheartening to have your college experience taken away from you and there’s nothing you can do about it,” senior Karina Quinones said. “You feel like you have a few months to go to those last few events and say thank you for the experience, so it’s hard but you have to be grateful for all of it.”

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Flagler College strongly encouraged students to return to their permanent homes to self-isolate, but the residence halls, dining room and library remain open to students. Still, the school has turned into a “ghost town,” with only a few students left on campus.

“I’m with freshmen girls and they get a little rowdy sometimes, so it’s weird not hearing the girly chatter down the hallway,” said Kim LaPorte, a community advisor in one of the on-campus residence halls. “I think we had 60-something residents just in my hallway, and I think there might be four left. It’s very strange being on campus with no one here.”

But just because the residents are holed up inside their dorms doesn't mean they are socializing. Resident Assistant Zachary Corbitt and his coworkers are hosting virtual hang-outs to keep students connected, especially when mental health is at risk during isolation.

"We acknowledge that this is a very stressful time and there are people who may not necessarily be able to deal with the emotions that it causes, so without overstepping our boundaries into counseling services, we're just trying to mitigate those negative feelings by offering opportunities for social interaction," Corbitt said.

So far they've held a Zoom meeting where students did crafts and drank coffee, and they're thinking about hosting a webinar about how to make videos go viral, the subject of one Flagler College professor's doctorate thesis.

"This is a time where people are resorting to social media, especially TikTok and YouTube, so by offering them the ability or knowledge on how to go viral, we thought students would be interested in that," Corbitt said.

Meanwhile, most students have returned to their childhood homes to ride out the pandemic. While some added family time is nice, some students might be missing their independence a little.

"It's a mix of both," said senior Lauren Piskothy, who is back home in Brooksville. "It is nice to have them around, but I'm still trying to figure out how to navigate being independent while also being home without feeling like a child again. I've been trying to go on walks and riding my bike as my way of being alone."



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First year students are also feeling disappointed that they will be missing out on making important connections and experiences. Freshman Presleigh Johnson went home to Texas for spring break, not knowing that she would be stuck there for months.

“I used to be home schooled, so I told my friends, it kind of felt like Flagler was a dream and I woke up and I’m still being home schooled,” Johnson said. “I really miss campus, I miss the connection and being with my friends, going to class. Zoom calls are nice, but I really want to talk to my professor and see how energetic they are, because we really feed off their passion and energy.”

Flagler College is offering students the option to convert one or more of their classes into a pass or fail grade. A grade of 60 or higher would be a pass, which would not impact a student’s GPA, while a fail would negatively impact their GPA. That gives students some leeway if they are dealing with coronavirus-related hardships.

Still, seniors are struggling to end their college career on a high note when their routine has been thrown off. Post-graduation plans are being put on hold until after the shutdown is over, and the Class of 2020 will enter the job market while unemployment is at its highest peak in years, adding even more pressure and uncertainty.

“The economy is falling apart in a sense, stocks are falling, and it’s scary to think that I’m going to have to attempt to find a career in a time where jobs are going to be scarce,” Corbitt said. “On that end, it’s terrifying but I’m happy that I have a family that has offered support and I have a place to go if I need to.”

Quinones is planning to move to Miami in August to study clinical psychology, a field that she feels will always be deemed essential, but now it seems to be up in the air whether she will be able to move there during this crisis.

“It definitely puts a strain on things, and I’m honestly not sure if me going in August is still a 100% guarantee,” Quinones said. “It’s hard to wrap up your life here and then also start a new one in the middle of a pandemic. This is the time where I’d be going to Miami to check out my college and look for apartments, and that’s all just been put on hold for now.”

While spring commencement isn’t happening this year, Flagler students will still get to experience walking across the stage and flipping their tassel from one side to the other. The college is inviting seniors back in December to graduate then. It might not be the same graduation they would’ve had in May, but it’s going to be every bit as celebratory.

“I would like the closure and just being able to see my classmates and say goodbye to undergrad and that part of my life,” Piskothy said. “I am grateful to Flagler for that.”