

# College of Corona: How are students in higher ed dealing with shutdowns?



COVID-19 is causing global shutdowns, but these closures affect more than businesses or already planned weddings. Colleges have felt the brutal impact of coronavirus, but more importantly, the students have. Physically showing up to class is a thing of the past, and classes now are being held online. It seems like a simple fix, but from students' perspective, just because it's seemingly the only option during this tough time doesn't mean it's an ideal alternative. I spoke with several college students who make it clear that COVID-19 is negatively affecting their costly higher education.

Mikayla Swenson is finishing up her senior year at the University of Rhode Island. Having studied and put in effort for her degree, she is dealing with feelings of being deprived of a decent senior year. "I couldn't stop crying over it. I hate feeling like I'm being selfish, but it just felt so anticlimactic and like the class of 2020 deserved more." Swenson studied religiously to earn her two degrees. However, she feels like students in the class of 2020 aren't going to have the same opportunities as those graduating in the past and the future seeing that essentially a whole semester of quality education was taken from

them. COVID-19 has already hurt the economy; now students are expected to go into the job market world with less experience than their competition. The loss of a decent graduation is also part of the pain for Swenson. While understanding that she could have it worse, working tirelessly to be the first person in her family to successfully finish college has Swenson upset over the cancellation of graduation. Swenson says, "I'm the first to complete high school and college, it was supposed to be a unifying moment for my family, so it was an emotional ride and it took some mourning after finding out it wasn't going to happen." Swenson also brought up that decent communication and consistency were lacking in her online classes as well, due to the fact that many of her professors were not tech savvy enough to go about the online teaching the correct way. "A lot of anxiety was turned up while trying to attend and learn from those classes," says Swenson.

Rhode Island College senior Justin Cormac, though acknowledging that online classes weren't ideal, says it was the best that could have been done considering the circumstances. Cormac doesn't blame RIC for the online classes situation, though he does think some students didn't try as hard as they could have. Cormac says, "Online classes exposed a lack of discipline in students. When classes began, students backed off. Many students just didn't meet college half way. The opportunity was there to manage and students didn't rise to the occasion."

Cormac also brought up the point that although he managed to get his degree despite this wild ordeal, he's struggling with feelings of not having actually earned it. Cormac adds, "There's a definite part of me that says my degree doesn't hold as much weight as someone who graduated last year. My spring semester was a cake walk. However, just because it was easy doesn't mean that it was rewarding, doesn't mean I earned it." The feelings of not having actually deserved a degree or deserved a decent grade because everything was through online class are ones many college students and recent graduates are feeling, despite how hard they worked or didn't work.

Coronavirus isn't just making it difficult for students who know what college life is like already. Lily Rhodes is going into her freshman year at Berklee College of Music in Boston, and says that not knowing how classes will be done in the fall has her thinking a lot about the decisions she has to make when the time comes. "It's honestly been on my mind so much lately. basically I'm trying to take a rational approach when deciding what to do if in the fall there are online classes only." Berklee is one of the most respected music schools in the country and to Rhodes, who deals with ADHD, it's unknown if the rigorous art classes could be taught through a screen. "Berklee is such an intense school. I don't know if I'll be able to handle that through a computer, especially when it's an art school. It comes down to the fact that our school really just needs to be in person." Thoughts of uncertainty swirling around Rhodes' head have caused her to consider taking the fall semester off, opting to possibly instead take classes with Community College of Rhode Island to save money.

In short, we're all aware that coronavirus has taken its toll on everyone and everything. Dealing with it is tough. However, we can't fail students; especially not college students who put their money and hopes into getting a decent education. It's not an easy fix, but online classes and the way they are being

gone about seems like using a chewed piece of gum as adhesive to connect an elevator roping system. It's not going to work in the long run. Here's hoping for a vaccine so this Band-Aid of a solution can be a thing of the past.