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The Freshman Experience: Establishing Normalcy in Quarantine

Claire Needs, Staff Reporter

Early Monday morning, Cooper slides out of bed onto the carpet of his dorm room floor, makes some coffee and begins zoom class in his pajamas, removed from his classmates and professors. This is routine for Seattle University's first-year class, who are coping with the rocky adjustment to life as college students in isolation.

Life on campus allows for little social interaction with rules in place that allow "absolutely no visitation or guests will be permitted in residence halls/apartments until King County attains Phase 4 status" as the 2020-2021 Resident Handbook states.

For first-year Creative Writing major Bella Crayton, normalcy begins with a change of clothes and a trip to the dining hall for breakfast.

"That's how I'm going to be productive today", Crayton said. "I'm going to get dressed, put on makeup and go get breakfast."

These small joys encompass the class of 2024's current college experience, as COVID-19 procedures have ushered in an abnormal experience for new students on campus.

Despite isolating conditions, Seattle U students have managed to sustain a social life.

"I made one of my first friends in line to get my ID picture taken," first-year Environmental Studies major Cooper Cieslicki said. "My little group of 4 friends have gone out a lot. We went to Alki and we've been exploring Capitol Hill."

Current social hotspots on campus include the library, food hall and dorms, however these resources are easily exhaustible. Therefore, students are seeking places to hangout off campus.

"[I] enjoy the little spots around campus, places to escape and socialize away from the city" Crayton said.

Social media has been imperative to the social success of first years, who have met friends online before moving on campus.

"A lot of people talked over social media so they would have opportunities to have connections," Cieslicki said.

Because the class of 2024 applied to Seattle U in fall and winter of 2019, they never predicted a pandemic would alter their college experience. When applying to Seattle U, Crayton was looking forward to discussion-based honors classes, which have been difficult to facilitate in an online learning environment. Because Crayton is vegan, she was excited about the variety of food offered at the student center. However, due to COVID-19, food options have been limited this quarter.



While Seattle U has made efforts to make the incoming class feel welcome on campus, students have sought their own endeavours for socialization and campus exploration. Orientation this year was held via zoom, a different experience than previous classes went through in their first days on campus.

“We had a couple required meetings, which were COVID-19 rules, Fr. Sundborgs’s speech and drug and alcohol policy,” Cieslicki said. “They weren’t super engaging.”

Although on-campus resources may not be in person this year, as it is easy to scroll past an email reminder for a school event, they are equally as valuable despite being online.

The Corq app is a great resource for students looking to get involved on campus. The app provides a list of upcoming events, club meetings and fitness activities.

Svetlana Sohoni, a second-year political science and art major who resided in Champion Hall last year, gave her advice for making friends amidst tense social conditions.

“Don’t be afraid to put yourself out there,” Sohoni said, “the more timid you are the harder it’s going to be to meet new people.”

Sohoni met most of her friends in the dorms last year, as she socialized mostly with people on her floor. For students looking to get off campus, Sohoni recommends Cal Anderson park, Caffe Vita, or the KEXP radio station coffee shop, La Marzocco, in Queen Anne.

A safety concern Cieslicki brought up was the concealment of COVID-19 numbers. “Apparently we’ve already had 3 confirmed cases,” Cieslicki says. “The only way I found out was through the New York Times which has a COVID-19 tracker for all US colleges. Then I emailed my advisor who confirmed the cases.” A Seattle U covid case tracker is available though, and can be accessed via the university’s website.

While COVID-19 has changed the atmosphere of on-campus living, first and second-year students will continue to find ways of exploring Seattle and broaden their horizons on and off campus.