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A Holiday Season Like No Other

Ben Wiley, Author

Ordinarily, the winter academic break and holiday season is a time for students to celebrate with their friends and family. However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 holiday season will both look and feel different.

As COVID-19 cases continue to increase across the country, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health officials are advising Americans to strongly consider taking precautions when it comes to gathering with family over the next few weeks.

Dr. Elizabeth Poorman explained the health risks of Thanksgiving in an opinion piece on NPR.org.

“Traveling from one hotspot to another and eating with multigenerational family and friends in close proximity indoors for hours could become a national super-spreader event with catastrophic consequences,” Poorman said in the article.

Health officials are recommending that if families do gather to celebrate the holidays, they do so outside and while socially distanced.

College students remain one of the most affected groups when it comes to recent precautions, as they are weighing the health risks that come with traveling home to spend time with their loved ones to staying on campus and remaining apart from their families for prolonged periods of time.

At Seattle University, this is especially consequential. Given this year’s longer six-week winter break due to the fall quarter starting and ending earlier than previous years, many students plan to return and stay home until winter quarter begins in early January.

One factor influencing college students’ decisions about whether or not to return home is the number of COVID-19 cases in their respective hometowns. Kaityln Steckel, a third-year psychology major, explained the reasoning behind her decision.

“I’m originally from Southern California, and because of the recent surge of cases in Los Angeles county, I will be staying in Seattle for Thanksgiving and through mid-December,” Steckel said. “I am sad that I won’t see my family in person on Thanksgiving this year, but it makes more sense for me to stay here and take extra precautions.”

Similarly, Jasper Rose, a third-year communications and spanish major, expressed sadness because this will be the first year that he will not spend the holidays with his family. He is planning to stay in Seattle over winter break because he does not feel comfortable flying home to his family.

Seattle U is providing students with activities and tips for self-care over the break. For example, De’Andre Jones, Assistant Director of Events and Traditions at the Center for Student Involvement (CSI), said that the Student Involvement Center will host the annual Christmas Tree Lighting event virtually Dec. 3.



Colby Lane

Mele kalikimaka is the thing to say.

Seattle U's Wellness and Health Promotions and the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) will also be holding events Dec. 3. Jones highlighted ConnectSU as the best place for students to look for COVID-safe activities planned over the break by Seattle U student clubs and organizations.

Additionally, knowing how important it is for people to maintain physical activity, Amanda Deml, Director of UREC, offered the following tips.

"Plan it out. Decide ahead when and how you would like to move your body. This will help to hold you accountable," Deml said. "Our bodies are good at telling us what they need. If you are feeling like some light stretching seems best, don't stress about pushing yourself into a maximum effort workout. If you choose what you like to do, you are more likely to feel motivated."

Deml made sure to note that a little goes a long way when it comes to moving the body, and that students can schedule a virtual workout with a friend if they want to catch up while exercising. She also suggested that students should find other ways—not just physical—to care for themselves over the extended break.

Regarding his plan for the six-week break, Rose explained that he is going to try his best to keep doing yoga, meditation, working out, skateboarding and cooking, as each helped him take care of his mental health throughout the fall quarter. He also wants to spend some time watching movies and playing video games.

"I will be working with the athletics department to help film Men's and Women's Basketball games. I'm also trying to see if the SU Bookstore is hiring to make a little extra cash," Rose said. "One thing I plan on doing is taking a hike with a friend. I also recently picked up skateboarding, so I'm going to keep working on new tricks and improving my form."

Health officials recommend that anyone traveling home for the holiday season quarantines for 14 days upon arrival and limits indoor social interactions and activities due to fear of spreading the virus. Health officials view outdoor activities like cornhole and socially-distanced outdoor gatherings as safer, because "airflow helps dilute the virus" and "reduce its risk of infection." Another COVID-permissible activity, ice skating, remains open in many cities with strict protocols in place that mandate all skaters wear masks.

Regarding indoor activities, some safe options include hanging out with family members in the household, watching a movie, TV show or playing video games. The winter holiday season is usually one of the best times of the year for new movie releases. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic delaying the release of many new movies in theaters, some have been released via streaming platforms, like "Mulan," which landed on Disney+.

Hallmark Christmas movies are also an annual staple this time of the year. The coming weeks will feature movie releases, such as the new Pixar animation film "Soul," which will be available on Disney+ beginning Christmas day.

Additionally, and after months of delay, "Wonder Woman 1984" will be released in theatres and on HBO Max on Christmas day. For student gamers, the brand new Playstation Five will likely provide hours of entertainment over the break. And for sports fans, football and soccer will continue so long as players stay healthy. College and professional basketball will also be returning soon.

Federico Gutierrez, a third-year International Studies major on the Seattle U Men's Golf Team, recommended the television show "Game of Thrones" and Disney movies, which he said are his go-to during cold weather.

"[I want to] spend time with family and friends in Mexico and enjoy the sun, weather and food—especially tacos," Gutierrez said.

For many college students like Ian Paulo Santiago, a fourth-year electrical engineering major, the winter break serves as a much needed time to relax and recharge by getting more sleep and exercise before the beginning of the next academic quarter.

"I'm gonna be taking it easy this winter break. It's been a long quarter, and I'm just in need of some time to recharge, so I guess these next six weeks are my opportunity to do so," Santiago said. "I'm not exactly sure if I'll get the chance to connect with friends back home in Hawaii due to restrictions, but we'll see."

The time off for the holiday season also enables students to look ahead to their future.

“I know I’ll probably end up using some of that time planning out what life is after undergrad; with only two quarters left here in Seattle U, it’s really time I dug deep and plan out what’s ahead—so that’s potentially on my list as well,” Santiago added.

It is important that students find ways to relax and have fun during the prolonged winter break and holiday season, while also being cognizant of their actions as the COVID-19 pandemic surges on into 2021.