

How the coronavirus is impacting Asian students at AU

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Body

The coronavirus is causing fear for many across the world. In Auburn, it's no different.

The novel coronavirus has infected tens of thousands of people and has killed more than 3,000.

There are no known cases in the state of Alabama as of publication, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention expects the number of cases in the U.S. to rise.

In Auburn, some Asian students told The Plainsman that they are experiencing racist interactions.

While many Asian students told The Plainsman that they haven't experienced any such incidents, the ones who did experience it said the incidents made them feel unwelcome.

On Feb. 19, Luan Yen, a freshman from Vietnam majoring in supply chain management, was in her foreign language class when she said she saw a troubling interaction.

"My class only has me and one girl who is Chinese American," Yen said. "At the beginning of our class, her partner always sits beside her. But yesterday, that girl was sick. Suddenly, her partner changed ... seats."

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Yen said the Chinese American student had a common cough. Her throat was sore, so she didn't speak, Yen said.

Everyone who once sat near to the Chinese American student suddenly moved away from her. Only Yen continued to sit next to her.

Yen said the attitude of people around her changed immediately.

"No one talks about this, but when you are in the situation, you can feel this is racist," Yen said. "I feel like this situation is terrible because when we divide people, the virus wins. I feel so sad about the racism. People shouldn't divide Chinese people. They think all the Chinese have the virus."

Yen said the Chinese American student is shy and that she didn't say anything about the incident during class.

In January, Li Yang, junior in environmental design, said he experienced an uncomfortable situation when he went to a kickboxing gym in Auburn.

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Yang said that he arrived at the gym late and went to go change in the bathroom.

The training session had 20 minutes remaining, but when Yang walked out everyone had left the gym.

There was only Yang, his coach and one of his friends who is Chinese in the gym. All of the other people in the gym, which Yang said was around 8, left.

"I think it might relate to coronavirus," Yang said.

Yang said he feels like some Americans are OK with leaving when an Asian walks into a space.

Some Asian students told The Plainsman that they haven't experienced any racist incidents and have seen no difference in the way they're being treated since the coronavirus outbreak.

Hannah Hong is a freshman in pre-business from Vietnam. She said she hasn't experienced any racist incidents and has been treated fairly.

"My American friends are cautious while we're talking about this," Hong said. "I think it is because I have nice American friends, and they know that it might hurt my feelings."

Juliane Vo, freshman in pre-graphic design, is Vietnamese American.

She said she's noticing how the coronavirus is creating a boundary among some Asian students and American students in her art history class.

"I feel like people ... started [it] as a joke: 'all Chinese students have coronavirus,'" Vo said. "It escalates from there [to] actual fear."

Vo said that when the coronavirus began spreading, some international students felt uncomfortable in Auburn.

"I just feel like we are better as an Auburn family when we support each other," Vo said.

Lily Wang, freshman in economics, is from Wuhan, China - the origin of the outbreak.

She recalls overhearing a conversation among several Chinese students about the coronavirus. They were making fun of people from Wuhan, China, which is where the virus first began to spread.

"I was feeling aggrieved, sad, in despair, depressed. Now, I am feeling more panic. I'm afraid to say to people that I am from Wuhan."

Editor's note: Some of the interviews have been translated from Mandarin to English by the reporter.

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