

Student Voices



Reflections from the Pandemic





Table of contents




Copyright © 2020 by Jazzlyn Miller

Cover design, interior design and composition: Jazzlyn Miller

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copywriter owner. For information on getting permission for reprints and excerpts, contact jmil33@uab.edu.

All image acknowledgement and copyrights appear on the same page as the images they cover. It is a violation of the law to reproduce these selection by any means whatsoever without the written permission of the copywriter holder.



Student *Engage*-ment @ UAB

By Jocelyn Wright

For many UAB sophomores, their freshmen year fell short of the hype. Wide-eyed high schoolers touring campus imagined that their college days would be filled with plenty of time for new friends and experiences. But in the midst of the global pandemic, keeping the student body safe from Covid-19 came with sacrifices.

Freshmen on campus spent their days in dorms, staring at black rectangles instead of actual faces. The campus that freshmen had been sold quickly became an atmosphere of isolation. For many sophomores, this year is their first real year on campus. Still, many are still stuck in the same habits and don't know how to get engaged on campus.



There's always something to get involved in, and Engage can help students break out of their shell. Engage is an online service that keeps UAB students in-the-know about events and opportunities to join organizations on-campus. Getting started is simple. First, visit [https://](https://www.uab.edu/students/involvement/engage)

www.uab.edu/students/involvement/engage to reach the website's homepage. Then, click the tab "Engage Log-in" and use your BlazerID username and password.

Engage is extremely simple and user friendly. There are tabs located near the top of the screen that allow you to view upcoming events and organizations. To find the best fits for you, Engage even lets you narrow down search results based on certain dates and categories. If you're just browsing, Engage organizes events by date so you don't have to worry!

At each event, you'll be asked to show your Event Pass; simply click on your profile icon, click on "Event Pass", and show them the QR code. Coming out of quarantine can make students feel like they have no idea what to do on campus anymore. Let Engage help you find ways to get back out there!



Need More Extracurriculars?

Team Inferno is Looking for New Members!

Multiple
tournaments.
A relaxed
environment.
Scrimmages twice
a week.
Only a **small** fee to
join!

For more
information: (251) 421-7756
imthomas@uab.edu

Same School, Different Rules

By Eric Davis

“I get how capitalism works, but damn!” When discussing how they’ve felt about the adjustments they’ve made to the “new normal” on UAB’s campus, and how they would describe what the “new normal” is, these were some of the words shared with me by one Johnnathan Lemar Gadson. Though a student, Johnnathan’s circumstances are somewhat unique as he departed before the pandemic settled in the US, and re-enrolled during its height. In understanding what the “new normal” is exactly, and its impact on students, what better students to ask than those who’ve had no true adjustment period?

In addition to Johnnathan, for my inquiry I also sought out his friend, Andryl Spikes Jr., who is more popularly known as AJ. I posed a series of questions; the first of which being how would they, in a single word, describe the transition from being students who graduated pre-pandemic to now being enrolled under pandemic regulations and pressures.

“Difficult” said Johnnathan, citing the sudden change in his study habits as the main reason for this description. For other students, such as AJ, the change was even more detrimental, as access to resources available only at campus became heavily restricted by the regulations that came as a result of the pandemic. For AJ, it was “adjustments”, as many of these resources were things he desperately needed. Something like wi-fi was essential to his ability to complete his work, and because his home had none, being unable to access campus consistently made it difficult for him to complete his unchanging workload. Adjusting to

new ways of things at campus, and in life as a whole, certainly became an everyday practice for both students.

Still, this hasn't meant that there haven't been things that were unexpected. When asked what surprised them most upon their return, they gave related answers. "The student body got smaller," said Johnnathan, "In past years the student count wasn't as low." This was a shock indeed for many, as UAB had just come off the 50 year anniversary

of its founding and had just enrolled one of its largest classes ever. In AJ's view, it was the physical distance between people and the way they populated campus that was the most shocking. "UAB is in the middle of a city", he said, "Everything was spread out... little groups of people being here and there."

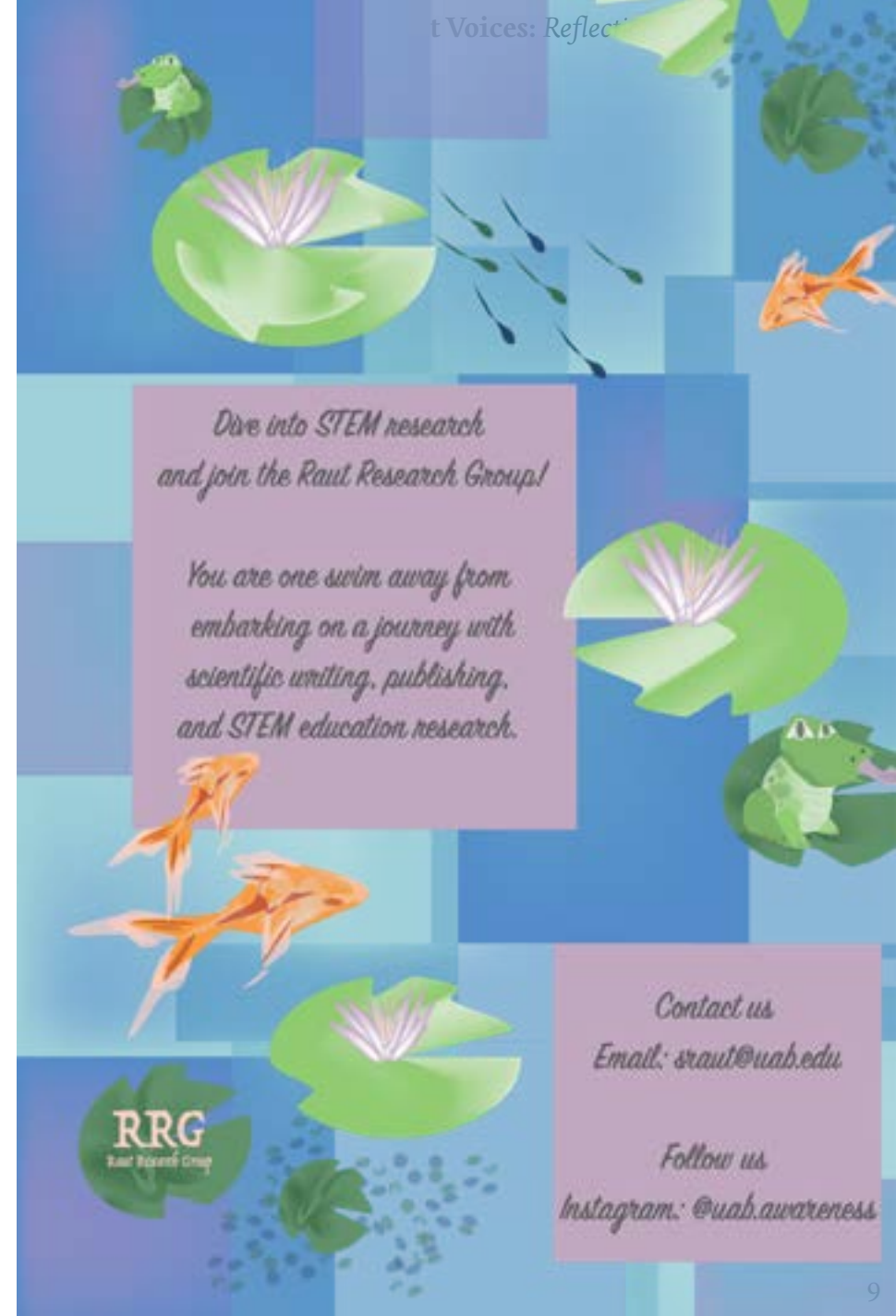
These developments changed their views on the personal utility of online courses. AJ, who stated "it's fifty-fifty for me" in answer to whether or not he was more online or in-person this semester, hasn't really cared for online courses. Although they afforded him more time to work than in-person classes do, he still admitted that "[he preferred] to be in class" because it was "easier to make connections [with other students] that way". Johnnathan, on the other hand, was a student who



enjoyed online classes prior to graduating. He felt that "before covid, I [preferred being] online for sure," but, "after covid, I kinda do miss being around other students." In many ways, for students like AJ and Johnnathan, part of acclimating to the "new normal" on campus has been learning the new modes of social interaction in school permitted by the virus, without the year of adjustment that many others had.

Ultimately, the interview landed on a final question: What should the university have done differently to make acclimation easier? "Work with the students", was AJ's simple answer, "no one worked with me". He went on saying, "Half the population in America lost their jobs", and that due to the fact that being at least partly back on campus now has occupied more of his time than usual, he himself has lost many work opportunities. Opportunities he couldn't afford to lose because he had bills, and if he didn't pay them "there was nowhere for [him] to go". Johnnathan also expressed frustration, saying he wished the university either "[paid] us more" (as interns), or at least halved tuition's cost. Similarly to AJ, he "lost [his] job trying to come on campus" and even though "[UAB's] one of the most rigorous schools in the state," nobody "lightened the load".

For both Johnathan and AJ, and many other UAB students, the process of acclimating to the “new normal” hasn’t been aided by university policy, and that policy has in many ways itself become another thing to overcome. The pair are currently working to complete their Masters degrees in Sociology. As undergrads, they departed a campus on the eve of COVID-19’s appearance in the US. Though they both are committed to finishing their time out at UAB, it is clear that, if nothing else, the “new normal” is a set of unique challenges, and learning to overcome them has occupied just as much time as learning the lessons in their study.



RRG
Raut Research Group

Contact us
Email: sraut@uab.edu

Follow us
Instagram: [@uab.awareness](https://www.instagram.com/uab.awareness)

Mental Health for UAB Campus Students

by Faylan Stokes

What's it like to experience such hardship, whether on campus or off? Is it easy to overcome, or is it just unbearable? Mental health is the root of all our challenges, and it's up to us to do something about it. During the pandemic, it was hard to cope for a while for many students. After getting the hang of things, everything seemed to fall in place for some. Others, not so much, but it's okay. No one is alone.

Two students, Michelle Barnes and Nakia Coleman, from our campus, know what it is like to be in these situations. Questions were asked about their mental health before, during, after the pandemic.

How was your mental health before Covid?

MICHELLE: Average, maybe? I wasn't depressed, as far as I remember, but homework kept me constantly stressed. I was dealing with my senior year of high school, so I was also worried about what I'd do in college.

NAKIA: Before Covid, it was good because I was in school and going to work. I had a daily routine every day. My mental health was good, good balance.

How was your mental health during the pandemic with stricter regulations?

MICHELLE: I'm a pretty introverted person, to begin with, so I spent most of my time indoors anyway. The break from school meant that I didn't have to worry about many stressful projects, which was a weight

off my shoulders. The extra free time was devoted to my hobbies, and nobody around me that I knew got sick. So, I guess my mental health probably got a bit better. Most of what I missed during the stricter part of COVID was my friends, who I missed meeting in person.

NAKIA: When we first got out of school, my mental health was fine. I needed the break. I was doing my schoolwork at home, so it was fine. After a few months in, I started to struggle. I couldn't go out and see my friends. It felt like I was in a stage of depression. I was angry. I felt trapped.

"I think something that COVID has changed... is that it has gotten me a lot more stressed about little symptoms that I could usually overlook."

How did you cope with stress? Did it change at all?

MICHELLE: Coping with stress is not something that I really know how to do? Most of the time, I hope it goes away. One way to cope with the stress of getting sick is to stay as far away from people as I can. It's a little nerve-wracking whenever I have any little problem, like coughing, because it makes me anxious that I've caught something. I think something that COVID has changed about me as a whole is that it has gotten me a lot more stressed about little symptoms that I could usually overlook. It's probably the same for most.

How did you cope with depression?

NAKIA: I did a lot of reading. I have a lot of books, so I re-read the books I had. It helped me. It calmed me down. It felt like I was in another world, which was good for me.

How is your mental health now since we are back taking in-person classes and wearing masks all of the time?

Photo by {name}, downloaded from Unsplash

It's hard getting back into everything. It is kind of stressful when going places—having to worry so much.

MICHELLE: It's a little more tiring, I think, running around. Online classes meant that I didn't have to go anywhere and that I could just wake up and attend without having to worry about most things. If any-

thing has improved, though, I'm getting more fresh air and I'm actually enjoying college life more. Being forced to actually go places has also driven me to take better care of my appearance, which is a nice bonus.

NAKIA: I think my mental health was better than it was during the pandemic since I couldn't see anyone or socialize. I like the balance, but sometimes it can be challenging. It's hard getting back into everything. It is kind of stressful when going places—having to worry so much. I need to wash my hands and be super safe. Now, I can socialize and get my feelings out.



If you could tell someone what they should do in dealing with the pandemic, what would you tell them?

MICHELLE: Contact your friends through social media, texts, and keep talking, to make times less lonely. Don't go to huge parties, but small ones with people you trust. Try to find something to do at home. If your usual activities don't involve spending time at home, find something new to do. Get invested in a new TV show or learn how to cook something new. Keep your environment tidy since having too much trash around might get you sick or stress you out.

NAKIA: It's going to be a change, but you need to be open to change. Be adaptive. You are going to go through a change in your mental health, but it's okay. Everyone went through it, and you have to roll with the punches.



Home of the Art World

Registration Required (Free)

Connecting Online During the Covid-19 Pandemic

By Shannon Bradt

While the University of Alabama at Birmingham moves back toward a state of semi-normalcy, in-person events with mask mandates and other precautions have resumed.

This is true for UAB Queer Peers, a “small programming board looking to create space for LGBTQ students to feel supported and build community,” according to a self-description on their website.

So far this year, the organization has hosted a beginning-of-the-year Queer Mixer, Coming Out On the Green (a series of events during the week of National Coming Out Day), and a Halloween Murder Mystery party. More events are coming up, not only this semester but on an ongoing basis.

Although the university (including Queer Peers) has resumed in-person events, some students may be wary of attending due to pandemic conditions. Others may be unable to attend because they live off-campus.

Whatever one's reason for abstaining from in-person events, the Queer Peers Discord Server is here to pick up the slack.

Any currently enrolled UAB undergrad is free to join. There are channels to meet almost every need of an online community. Students can share resources, discuss pop culture and video games, ask general questions of their peers, and plan to hang out “in real life.” In addition to a general undergrad chat channel, there are school specific channels for every UAB school, from Art to the School of Public Health. There

are even channels just to share memes, be goofy, and by far the most important cornerstone of any online community: a place to share pictures of pets.

Gaining access to the server is simple: simply visit linktr.ee/queerpeer-suab and click the link labeled “Discord



Have Classes Gotten Harder Post Pandemic?

The Rigor of classes post pandemic in comparison to pre pandemic

By: Karishma Parbhoo

Within the last two years, the world has faced great loss emotionally, physically, and mentally. To be specific, the world changed for everyone all at once. Continents established travel bans, countries underwent lockdown, companies sent their employees home not to return, and schools closed their doors to all students for the last time. Everything was different and everything that used to be normal disappeared.

An example of this would be the drastic changes made in the education system between the years of 2020 to 2021. In the year 2020, schools across the globe closed their doors to students and moved their curricula from classrooms to electronic platforms. Most people around the world connected by using the electronic platform Zoom, used for work, school, and leisure. Zoom was a trailblazer in establishing “the new normal.” Almost all professors would send out classroom links to students to join their Zoom calls for classes. Although this response was an efficient way to combat against the consequences of social distancing in classrooms, remote learning encouraged education reform that would have negative effects on students and impact their future performance in the classroom. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Education, only 15% of districts expected their students to be receiving instruction for more than four hours a day and 17% of districts had instructions to not teach new material but to review old material in-

stead, as if stuck on the same learning material as a “pandemic holding pattern.” This can be viewed as both a positive and a negative thing. It can be seen as a positive occurrence because it can be viewed as an act of consideration. Specifically, given that the world was experiencing great loss in certain instances, the changes in curricula could be seen as consideration to the state of the world at the time (giving students room to breathe in a time of great stress). However, this could also be seen as a negative because it can be viewed as a temporary fix that may lead to future consequences after coming back to school post pandemic.

Although it may be true that the education reform during the pandemic in 2020 expressed consideration to the student’s well-being, many students would attest that the change in curricula post pandemic in 2021 not only lacked consideration but also dangerously augmented the rigor of the curriculum. According to an interview conducted between two students at The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), the changes in the CH460 (Biochemistry) class curriculum has been quite drastic, imposing negative effects on students. Jinhee Son is a current senior at UAB majoring in Biology who took CH460 in 2020, when lockdown and social distancing sanctions were in place. According to Ms. Son, the exams given in the class were all given on the electronic platform of Canvas and “all questions included were multiple choice.” In addition to this, students were given the opportunity to receive bonus points when attending the lecture online by participating in the in-class I-clicker questions. Furthermore, Ms. Son expressed that although she never attained 90% or above on any of her exams in CH460, during the pandemic she finished the class with an “A average.” Ms. Son described the class CH460 as a class that displayed, “consideration,”

“understanding,” and “acknowledgement of the student’s well-being.”

In contrast to Ms. Son’s experience Elena Alarcon (another student being interviewed) expressed her experience with the class CH460 as being “difficult,” “unnecessarily hard,” and “unfair.” Ms. Alarcon, a current junior at UAB majoring in Chemistry is now taking CH460 post pandemic. According to Ms. Alarcon, attending CH460 in-person is “frightful” because the class is made up of “200 students” and it is “weird attending a class without social distancing or protocol” in place. In addition to this, Ms. Alarcon expressed that the exam format has changed for the first time ever to both “multiple choice and written questions.” Ms. Alarcon expressed discomfort with the exam format conveying that she felt that it is “unfair that the exam is now split into two portions”: the written and the multiple choice especially when given “limited time.” Furthermore, Ms. Alarcon conveyed that the written portion of the exam counted for 40% and that the multiple choice counted for 60% of the test grade. She states that this distribution of points “augmented the rigor” of her test taking experience, because even if she got a perfect score on one portion of the exam, losing a few points on the other portion would put her at a “high risk of failing.” Although CH460 “still offers the bonus” for in class questions, the rigor of the tests has increased and has been perceived as “unfair” when compared to past classes.



