



The Daily Free Press

The Independent Student Newspaper at Boston University

 MENU



CAMPUS, CORONAVIRUS, NEWS

Students adapt to life on an empty campus

March 26, 2020 10:39 pm

by Angela Yang

The sound of birds chirping on Commonwealth Avenue has grown clearer these past few mornings with the typically bustling street nearly devoid of pedestrians and cars.

Though life seems to stand still at Boston University, several students continue to go about their day-to-day out of sight in residences on campus.

Nearly 1,000 students have petitioned successfully to stay for part or the whole of Spring semester, BU spokesperson Colin Riley wrote in an email. This makes up about 10 percent of the university's on-campus student body.

College of Engineering senior Ahsan Fuzail appealed to remain at BU within half an hour of receiving President Robert Brown's March 17 email with a link to do so.

A citizen of India, Fuzail's family resides in Dubai, but the United Arab Emirates had halted the issuance of all non-diplomatic visas effective March 19, two days after BU announced all students must move out for the semester. For Fuzail, going home had suddenly become near impossible.



A Boston University residence on Bay State Road. Nearly 1,000 BU students remain on campus, many of whom cannot return home because of travel restrictions or fears they could transmit the coronavirus to vulnerable family members. SOPHIE PARK/ DFP FILE

“So, that was never an option,” Fuzail said. “And then India [had] really long lines at the airports, a lot of exposure to people who are showing symptoms of COVID-19. So, that also was quickly discounted as an option.”

Fuzail said he now stays indoors about 95 percent of the time. The only moments he leaves his apartment at 708 Commonwealth Ave. are to take out trash and get takeout from the dining hall.

“I think the biggest difference is that I’m just not used to seeing campus this empty,” Fuzail said. “No matter the time of the day or night, there’d be people out, there’d be a lot more activity going on on-campus and it’s just very eerie seeing campus this quiet and this unpopulated.”

Currently, he is most concerned about the lack of clarity on whether he will have to move into another residence. In the email sent to students who successfully appealed, John Battaglino, assistant dean of students, had written it may be necessary to relocate them into consolidated housing.

“The gaps in communication since then have been a little worrying, like being stuck in limbo about this has just been a lot of anxiety because I have set up the space to be in self-isolation for the next month, month and a half,” Fuzail said. “And every day I dread seeing an email from Housing that says, ‘Oh, we reassigned you to another space.’”

Any students who receive notice now to relocate would struggle to fit such a change into their schedules since online classes have already been in session for a while, Fuzail said. Because the mandate would apply to a small minority, affected students cannot expect professors to cancel classes or give adequate time to catch up on missed material.

“Classes are still going on, and to have to move out in the middle of that would be a complete nightmare,” Fuzail said. “[And] if I were to move out I’d be exposed to a lot of people over the course of the entire move-out, and that’s not only a risk for me but it’s also a risk for other people as well.”

Also still on campus is Chikezie Asuzu, a freshman in the College of Communication staying in Claflin Hall.

Asuzu was already sure he wanted to stay in Boston this semester and through the summer, as he held a stable job and had been applying to local internships. But personal desires aside, he said he also worried about the risk he would pose to his family if he returned home to Georgia.

“I have traveled a lot this semester. I’ve not only been all around the Boston area but also to New York, and both my parents are rather old,” Asuzu said. “My dad is in his 70s and, in the past, battled cancer, and has immune system deficiencies.”

Asuzu said it was “chilling” seeing his peers quickly trickle out of campus.

“I had made the decision early on, but it doesn’t make it any easier to kind of feel like just that quickly, my entire freshman year experience was over,” Asuzu said. “Especially seeing so many friends for the last time, realizing there’s so many friends I saw for the last time before they left for spring break and I didn’t even realize it yet.”

He now only ever heads out for two reasons: going to work and obtaining basic necessities. Asuzu said he believes social distancing should be taken seriously, and tries to limit his in-person social interactions whenever possible.

“Especially on-campus, people are not interacting at all,” Asuzu said. “Or, in the streets, we’re used to Comm Ave. being so full of people all the time. Hardly if anyone is on there, and if they are, they don’t even look like college students to me.”

Asuzu said he is still able to go physically into work at the Student Activities Office. The office, however, is locked down and all non-employees can no longer enter.

“We wipe down everything when we get in, we wipe down everything when we leave,” Asuzu said. “We have no one in the office besides the front desk. Everyone else works remotely and we can just contact them through email.”

Neha Iyer, a senior in the Questrom School of Business, is another student who knew immediately she needed to remain at the university once the eviction notice came out.

As an international student from India, she had submitted her Optical Practical Training visa — which would permit her to work in the U.S. after graduation — application a few weeks ago and selected to mail the visa to a friend’s home nearby.

“I knew that I had to be here when that visa arrived, or I wouldn’t be able to get back into the country,” Iyer said.

A second reason that pushed Iyer to stay was the health of her family back home. Her grandmother had just moved in and, being elderly and “very” ill, she did not want to risk taking the virus to her.

Iyer said she is disappointed with the seemingly haphazard way BU opted to communicate with its students, and believes the university should have made a definitive decision with the first email it sent out over Spring Recess.

“Stalling that decision until later definitely was a detriment to a lot of students,” Iyer said, “because people came back on spring break, settled in, or they just felt like, ‘Okay, I can just stay on campus and take my online classes,’ and suddenly they were asked to leave.”

She said it was difficult for her to see many students moving out so swiftly, as she knew that as an international student, she does not have the luxury of having her parents drive up to help pack everything up and head home.

“Even if I decide to go back home, I’ll take two suitcases and I’ll leave,” Iyer said, “but all of my other stuff will probably come trailing behind in a shipment or something that BU will have to send to me because there’s no way I can take that back.”

So far, Iyer said, she has not left her whitestone apartment for two weeks. She had made plans well in advance to obtain all necessary supplies, and still works remotely at the off-campus internship she holds this semester.

“I think the most challenging part has to be finding a way to be self-motivated and organized,” Iyer said. “There’s no real beginning or end to your day when you’re basically working out of a six-by-six room.”

Though she will miss major events, such as the final two Model UN conferences of her college career, the surplus time has presented Iyer with new opportunities.

“It’s given me more time to continue reading again, and that’s something I really do value. And I FaceTime my friends, my family back home because they’re also on lockdown back in India,” Iyer said. “So it has given me a chance to connect with some of the things that I didn’t do because I felt like I always had to be somewhere or do something or hang out with someone.”

Annabelle Winter, a senior in the Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies, is the only one in her family not immunocompromised — and home, for her, is New York City. After seeing Brown’s email, she realized she might be forced to put her family at greater risk.

“I was pretty scared and I immediately had to start thinking of various contingency plans before I appealed to stay,” Winter said. “But I did call my parents and say, ‘Hey, this is possibly going to happen and I might actually have to leave and come home, so be ready.’ And I had to mentally prepare myself for that.”

She ultimately remained in her brownstone apartment on Bay State Road while watching yellow moving carts line the streets as her neighbors emptied out.

“I’m used to hearing cars go down the road every day and obviously hearing people walk down the street,” Winter said, “but looking out my window and just not seeing anyone for hours at a time and maybe someone jogging is just an odd feeling that I’ve never experienced before.”

Winter said she has made herself relatively comfortable in her residence, as she went out for extra groceries and bought more food from City Convenience as soon as BU first announced classes were going online. She has also relied on food delivery services.

“So things definitely still feel up in the air,” Winter said, “but knowing that I’m relatively set with having my life in my room in my apartment and then being able to get deliveries and being able to have the freedom to go outside and take a walk, take a run is comforting.”

Winter said she is still feeling out the changes to what her employment at the Admissions office will now entail as it, like many other BU offices, goes remote.

“I thought that I wasn’t going to have a job for the rest of the semester,” Winter said. “But I think I’m in the fortunate student job case, where the department is still going to be running virtual events so that I can participate, do my job and then obviously get paid.”

Winter said she has experienced more difficulty focusing since Spring Recess ended. She said she is used to the physical routine of attending class and living her life mostly outside of her apartment, and the adjustment has been tougher than she

expected.

“I’m definitely just a lot more worried,” Winter said. “I’m still trying to find a balance between how much news is personally healthy for me to consume every day about the virus and how much I need to take my mind off of it and be doing other things.”



Author: Angela Yang

One Comment



Jennifer Hicks

April 4, 2020 at 3:10 am

I faced the exact same issue of taking my online classes.

What would you like to see The Daily Free Press cover? Let us know on our [tip line](#).

LATEST OPINION



OP-ED: American democracy isn't on the brink of collapse — it doesn't exist

2021 Breakdown: Actions must have consequences, especially for those at the top