



The Daily Free Press

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 MENU



CORONAVIRUS, PHOTO

GALLERY: Life on an empty campus

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by [Angela Yang](#)

Angela Yang is a freshman studying journalism at the Boston University College of Communication and the City News Editor at The Daily Free Press. Unable to return home to her parents, who have been put out of work because of the coronavirus, she's remained on BU's campus and begun working as a cashier on the frontlines of the outbreak. In this photo essay, she details a typical day in her new life that has been transformed by the pandemic.

I was still on campus in the days after Spring Recess when the email rolled in. It was one I had dreaded for days but expected would come: all students must now vacate their dorms, save for extenuating circumstances.

I called my mom immediately. I had warned her not even a week beforehand that it could happen, but the possibility was now a reality.

My parents rent a small bedroom in Los Angeles County with a bathroom attached and a kitchen in a shack outside. That little hut served as my bedroom for the summer, and it's where I would now return to indefinitely — this time with no opportunity to see my friends or head to a coffee shop for a bit of escape.

It was disheartening, but I began to accept that I'd once again be sleeping on a foldable spring mattress too short for my body.

Then, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a stay-at-home order on March 19. My parents, who relied on travelers for their income, were now both out of work and could not support themselves, let alone another household member returning home without a job.

My dad, always resilient, assured me on the phone that everything would be fine. Seconds afterward, my mom called back

and confessed she was indeed at a loss for what to do.

My friend Kami sat with me through the tears that night before suggesting a solution: applying to remain on campus.

I was now an extenuating circumstance, I realized. My appeal was accepted early the next morning by a university official and I began to breathe.

I spent that day applying for jobs, as I suddenly gained the flexibility to take on paid employment now that all my physical time commitments had loosened. Soon, I started work as a grocery clerk at Star Market.

My mornings these days typically consist of a quick breakfast before heading out to work. If the dining hall wouldn't be open in time, I'd prepare by grabbing an extra dinner the evening before to save for the morning.



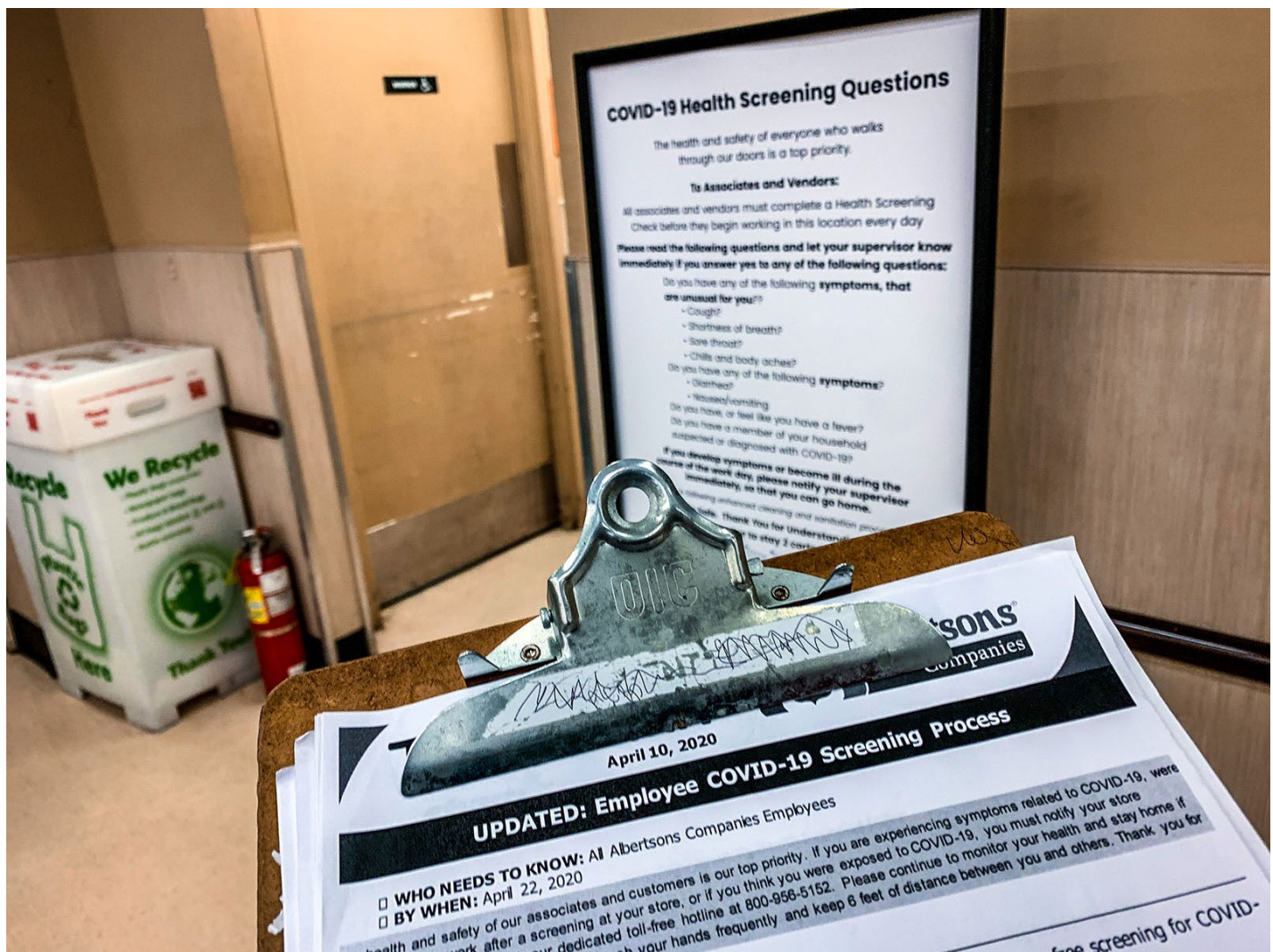
The West Campus dining commons closed Friday. For the remainder of the semester, each meal will take me an extra 40-minute round trip walk to Warren Towers. But walking has always been a solace, each trek a small window of time to clear my mind and just enjoy the breeze.

At first, one out of the two entrances here at West closed as staff had visibly and continuously shrunk since the first week or so after Spring Recess. Operating hours cut gradually.



All seating areas were blocked off and self-serve was a luxury of the past. Paper trays replaced the plates and disposable plastic substituted the usual stock of cups and utensils.

The security guards in the lobby are still here, and they seem friendlier than usual as I pass in and out. Maybe they, too, feel lonely keeping watch over a near-empty building.



Every day after punching in to start my shift at Star Market, I answer a set of health screening questions before heading to the storage closet to pick up a surgical mask and gloves. We've been running low on supplies, though, so my manager has offered me a few cloth face masks to keep for reuse.



My mom had insisted on sending a shipment of masks she bought out of concern for me just before my workplace began providing them. I planned on donating these to a hospital now that I didn't have use for them, but changed my mind when shoppers began reprimanding my mask-less colleagues for not covering up. Our store needed them, too.

A few customers throughout the day would thank me for coming to work despite the circumstances. They mean well, but I don't understand it.

I'm not volunteering my time to scan and bag their groceries; I'm working for necessary pay. While that's not to say I don't enjoy my job (it's actually quite fun), it's really nothing more remarkable than a means to an end.

One of my coworkers is also new to the position after losing his campus job to the pandemic, and another had recently dropped out of high school his senior year to care for a father grappling with cancer.

We are not heroic for working. We simply have family or ourselves to support.

Still, I'm lucky. If I fall sick, I don't have to worry about taking the virus home to others because I live alone in my dorm.



The common bathroom on my floor has been assigned solely to me, but the formality didn't change anything in my case — all of the girls in my 50-person floor had already emptied out by then. Now, however, entering another bathroom in the building could cause Boston University to revoke my housing.

As amusing as it is to have three toilets, six sinks and four showers for my personal use, I do miss having hot water. Diminished activity in the dorms means it'll take a few minutes longer to pump up the pipes, according to Facilities, but my showers never warm up no matter the length of their duration.

I guess if nothing else, this pandemic has taught me to tolerate cold showers.

Just kidding.

It's also made more apparent a reality I often ruminate over. As a student from a family with an income low enough to bag me full financial aid, I'm fortunate I don't have to work during the school year for my survival and education.

This privilege grants me the time to fully pursue my passions and advance my vocational path without hindrance. Despite working remotely now in my role as City Editor for The Daily Free Press, my new job has already taken a toll on my ability to perform my best.

I've been writing much less while exerting just as much effort, and I must assign stories knowing I won't always be available at a moment's notice to ensure everything works out. It's a game of sacrifice, even with no newsroom hours and a lighter academic course load.



It's in these times that I'm reminded many students hailing from backgrounds similar to mine don't have the choice of dedicating themselves to an unpaid extracurricular, especially under regular circumstances when all other obligations are in full swing.

So while I myself struggle to cope at times, I always try to circle back to the understanding that I have so much to appreciate:

I'm employed, I'm eating, I have a bed. I have friends who support me through highs and lows and I'm still working on what I love in spite of this global crisis. On days when stress or general gloom threatens to dominate, I hope to never take all of that for granted.



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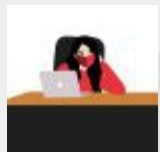
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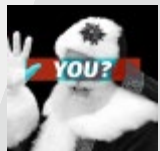
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