

Interview with an anonymous CUNY student in her senior year at Baruch

Zach Muhlbauer: *How are you these days? Keeping well?*

Jane Doe: I'm healthy and functioning, but not without experiencing frequent anxiety. It's difficult to transition from my previous schedule and life in New York — that included full-time work and school and a social life — to living back home with my parents.

ZM: *How have your classes been since the outbreak? Have you felt prepared for online learning?*

JD: Some of my professors have effectively adjusted to transition to distance learning while others have not. One of my professors immediately sent out an updated and flexible syllabus as well as creating a Blogs@Baruch page for assignments and all information. He does not force regular timed meets on Zoom, but rather he created a forum where students can engage with one another at their own general pace. This professor still sets deadlines but will often be soft on them when students reach out and explain difficulties they are experiencing. Another professor took an entire month to release a new digital learning syllabus and is not flexible regarding assignments. She mandates Zoom meetings at specific times and will often hold class an hour overtime (she even mandated students attend a Zoom class over spring break when the school had said class will not be held). Overall, this wide range of reactions from my professors causes extreme inconsistencies between my courses and within my schedule, creating a lot of anxiety.

ZM: *How has the transition online altered the ways in which you engage with each of your classes?*

JD: The engagement has definitely dropped. Even in classes where we regularly meet on Zoom, many students don't show up or participate. I also do not feel as engaged with my professors and peers, and I often find myself feeling less motivated to actually do the assignments, especially when professors just assign filler work that they do not seem to check. My professors are still assigning large amounts of individual papers and work, some without very much explanation. In addition, several of my professors are extremely disorganized with their deadlines. Some of my professors have been changing deadline dates and sending out too many communications, one of these professors even assigned work on a Saturday that was due the same day (although she later extended this due date in a second email). Other professors have not been clear about due dates whatsoever, except for vague mentions of a "last day of class for presentations" or an "extended last class for recitations" — projects which are left completely unclarified or solidified.

ZM: *To what extent have you been in contact with your classmates and professors?*

JD: I am in very frequent contact with most of my classmates and professors. However, one of my professors often does not send out communications and will only vaguely answer questions in her inconsistent Zoom classes. She has not provided any place to hand in our homework questions, nor has she clarified most future assignments; she always says that there will “eventually” be a group project and that she will “at some point” be creating a Dropbox folder for us. However, many professors are very responsive over email, and thus are attuned to the concerns of students like myself. I had a paper that was assigned and due on a certain date, which I failed to complete. I emailed my professor that night, saying that I had not been able to time manage very well, due to the loss of my job and living back at home. He was very sympathetic and concerned, giving me a several-day extension as well as saying that he understood that the world was turned upside down, so not being able to time manage was conceivable.

ZM: *Has your workload increased, decreased, or remained fairly steady since the outbreak? How so?*

JD: Different professors have reacted in a variety of ways with respect to the workloads that they assign. In my class that has a more flexible syllabus — with a more reasonable and understanding professor — my workload has decreased, where my professor got rid of the extended final paper as well as the final exam. However, regarding my professors that have not adjusted as well to the transition, many of them have added even more work to the syllabus, or kept on long difficult assignments, in formats that are not conducive to distance learning. One professor assigned a new group project to be completed from home, which will be very difficult to manage considering the altered schedules of all students during this unstable time. It will be hard to communicate with students whose schedules have been greatly affected by the pandemic. In another class, my professor kept a 16-page research paper due, along with three 6-page papers. Assuming that students have more time now than ever is not fair and is inconsiderate of those who may be struggling to keep afloat in basic areas of their lives.

ZM: *In light of recent events, what are your thoughts and feelings on graduating in May? How would you react to a remote graduation?*

JD: I’m sad I won’t get to walk in my cap and gown, and at a glance I don’t think I would attend a remote graduation if it was offered. Needless to say, this whole ordeal is not how I imagined my last semester of college would shake out, but really, I think I’m just trying to take it day by day and focus on what’s in front of me, rather than worrying about my graduation ceremony.