

Lucy Smithwick

Peer COVID interview, MEJO 153.009

9/24/2020

Moving back home after a five-month long study abroad trip, living at home while a deadly disease breaks out and transferring to a completely different school.

Junior Grace Thompson did this, all while figuring out how to transfer her credits from George Washington University to UNC-Chapel Hill. Her journey to become a Tar Heel was long and has continued to require hard work.

With COVID-19 on her mind, Thompson had to navigate classes at Wake Technical Community College as well as figure out her new social situation.

“I went from an experience that was really eye opening – culturally and just socially for me too,” Thompson said. “Going from that and being around people all the time definitely was hard, and I think it made COVID feel even more isolating since I had all this freedom abroad and now I was back in this bubble in Raleigh.”

Thompson has found her experience fairly rewarding, given the quickly changing social situations.

“I had planned to live on campus,” Thompson said, “but I have some friends that I already knew here and we’re in an apartment off campus. I’m glad my life didn’t have to change too much, and I think that would have been really hard for me, especially considering I just lived at home. It has definitely proven to be the right decision for me.”

Back in March, Thompson had expected a vastly different outcome of the pandemic on her various communities.

“I thought that we’d definitely be back on campus by now and just living our normal lives,” Thompson said. “I was a little more worried about (COVID-19) from the beginning, but

definitely when all my friends were like ‘oh we have an extra week of spring break,’ I was more excited than anything. My spring break didn't match up with my friends’, so I thought, ‘perfect, another week to hang out with them.’ But that definitely turned out to not be the case.”

Since being in quarantine and adding a new semester of school into the mix, Thompson’s routines have adapted to the new environment around her.

“I’ve tried to incorporate time outside exercising and cooking into my routine because it’s something I can look forward to,” Thompson said. “I wouldn’t say that in the beginning I thought I would come up with all these new hobbies, but quarantine turned out to be a lot longer than all of us thought. It feels like you need to be doing something during these times, but it’s hard enough as is to get your daily things done.

The turbulence of her college experience when added to the disappointment of not being able to fully live the Tar Heel experience adds some pessimism to her outlook, but she will not let it get her down. Reflecting on her time in quarantine has taught her to slow down, be more present, and to not take the little things for granted.

“I think it’s hard, sometimes, to not feel trapped in the situation we’re in,” Thompson said. “Things are still changing as time goes on, and not knowing what’s coming next is scary.”