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Longwood: Life during COVID-19

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### Reflective Essay

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ENGL 400

May 1, 2020

Final Exam (Option 2).

The coronavirus pandemic was a very sudden and unexpected event that has had a profound impact on many people worldwide. Unfortunately, this unexpected pandemic that quickly spread throughout the entire world didn't avoid the state of Virginia and Farmville as well. The novel coronavirus first originated in China, which is a country that is quite famous for its deadly outbreaks of dangerous viruses and other pathogens throughout history. In fact, the 2002 outbreak of SARS or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome also happened in China in the province of Guangdong. However, the outbreak of that disease was only localized, and the virus didn't spread throughout the rest of the world. There were only over 8000 confirmed cases around the globe and the last confirmed case was in June 2003. Therefore, the SARS outbreak of 2002 didn't lead to a pandemic. This time, however, the situation with the novel coronavirus was entirely different. The exact place of the origin and first outbreak of the novel coronavirus is a city called Wuhan with a population of around 11 million people that is located in the Hubei province in China. The outbreak happened in the end of December 2019 when the first cases have been confirmed in Wuhan right before the start of the new year. As a matter of fact, the first person that became infected with the novel virus in China was a vendor who was selling fish at a seafood market in Wuhan. Although the exact cause of the origin of the novel coronavirus or COVID-19 as it was later officially named remain largely unknown, there are several possible theories that have been considered and contemplated. Some people believe that the virus was created artificially in a laboratory because there was no initial evidence of its transmission from animals to humans. Although there is a laboratory that is located just on the outskirts of Wuhan and has been conducting various experiments with dangerous viruses and pathogens for quite a long time, there is still no evidence of an accidental leak that resulted in the escape of a dangerous and highly contagious virus. However, other scientists believe that the novel coronavirus is of zoonotic origin and could have originated from animals, such as bats and pangolins. Yet other people even believe that the unexpected outbreak of the virus could be a conspiracy theory that still needs to be proved.

It is quite difficult to say whether the unexpected coronavirus pandemic has had a positive or a negative impact on my daily life. When I first found out about the outbreak of a new virus in China sometime in January, I paid relatively little attention to this matter at first and didn't consider this to be serious or important. I was mostly thinking about finishing my bachelor's degree at Longwood and starting to look for potential employment opportunities after graduation, which was already being delayed for another semester. I also didn't know until now that the first U.S coronavirus cases were already confirmed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, although it could have even been earlier. I thought at first that the novel coronavirus was only affecting China and that it wouldn't cross its borders. However, later in February I realized that this was becoming a real problem in the whole world. It was in February when I found out that South Korea has already become a new epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak and that other countries, such as Italy, Iran, Japan and Australia, were already recording new confirmed cases. In the very

end of February, my attention towards the coronavirus began to steadily increase as I became more and more aware of this situation that was happening in the world. On February 26<sup>th</sup>, Dr. William Collier, who is my professor in ENSC 402 or Environmental Decision Making, devoted much of our class time about the coronavirus and its spread throughout the globe. He showed the class the official website of John Hopkins University where anyone could see and monitor the number of confirmed coronavirus cases worldwide and in every country on Earth. It was then when I looked at the number of confirmed cases and there were only 57 in the U.S and no deaths at all. Dr. Collier also showed us the comparative statistics of confirmed cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from the flu in the U.S during the 2019-2020 flu season that usually lasts from October to February. The number of deaths from the flu ranged from 16,000 to about 41,000 people. I thought that if the coronavirus had infected only 57 people in the U.S and with no fatalities, then this new virus should be no big deal at all and there is nothing to fear. However, everything changed entirely in March when the events that unfolded in the U.S and in the whole world were truly unprecedented. When classes resumed after Spring break, many students in some of my other classes were already actively mentioning the coronavirus and that new cases were already emerging in Virginia. Up until that point, I thought that the only confirmed cases in the U.S were mostly in the western states, including Washington and California. But then the first confirmed case was reported in New York in early March and later in central Virginia as well. Many students and professors at Longwood were already talking about the possibility that the university would cancel all in-person classes and other events as many other colleges and universities in Virginia had already done so. Then, on March 12<sup>th</sup> there came the news that one Longwood student was tested presumably positive for coronavirus. Longwood cancelled all in-person classes for a week the day before this news spread throughout the community. After a week had passed and the national situation worsened, Longwood cancelled all in-person classes for the remainder of the Spring semester. Since that day when all my classes transitioned into online format and I was spending most of my time in my apartment, I read almost any news that I could find on the Internet that were related to coronavirus. The World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic on March 11<sup>th</sup> and all of my attention was entirely devoted to this matter. I set aside all of my concerns related to school and other issues, and I didn't even play video games or watch free movies on Youtube or Netflix although I had a ton of free time. As the days passed, I read about all the horrors that were happening in the most heavily impacted countries, mostly in Europe. I saw the images of Italy's overburdened hospitals and soaring coronavirus cases and deaths as well as the disastrous situation in New York city which was already experiencing a significant shortage of masks and ventilators. My family, especially my mom, was already getting very worried about me and my own safety. She urged me to come home and told me to avoid going to the grocery store for as long as possible. I decided to stay in my apartment in Farmville until the end of the Spring semester because the number of confirmed cases was very low and it wasn't rising.

There were other noticeable things and events that began to unfold as people literally started to panic when they acknowledged the dangers of this novel disease. Some people were starting to fear that there would be a prolonged lockdown in the U.S as in Italy and started to stock toilet paper and hand sanitizers. It became clear that the coronavirus has caused an unprecedented level of panic among many people in the U.S, who were beginning to think that

this was going to be the worst pandemic of the century. I was also affected by this myself when I went to Food Lion to buy toilet paper and all of it was entirely gone. Luckily, I managed to snatch one of the very few toilet paper rolls happened to be on the shelves about five days later. I was also aware that the U.S fell dangerously behind testing for the novel virus compared to some other countries, especially Germany and South Korea. As a result, new confirmed cases started skyrocketing in the nation as testing ramped up. The following video shows the spread of the coronavirus in the entire U.S and in North America from January 20<sup>th</sup> to April 22<sup>nd</sup>: <https://youtu.be/nuRUkklr6bQ>. Another video shows a terrifying timeline as the United States reached 1 million confirmed coronavirus cases in just about three months. It also shows the breakdown of the nation's cases across the 50 states: <https://youtu.be/D83uYkcvq6E>.

The U.S has reached a major milestone of over one million confirmed coronavirus cases and over 60,000 deaths in just about three months since the beginning of the pandemic. The number of deaths due to coronavirus has already exceeded the average number of deaths from the flu and the death toll in the Vietnam war that lasted from 1964 until 1973. No one knows what the estimated death toll from COVI-19 will look like by the end of the first wave, but the current projected death toll is around 74,000 deaths by August 4<sup>th</sup>. The U.S is on the first place in the world with the highest number of coronavirus cases and deaths with Spain and Italy, which are on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places respectively, greatly falling behind. The richest country in the world with outstanding medicine and highly qualified epidemiologists, such as Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birks, was utterly defenseless against the coronavirus pandemic. All of this could have been avoided and many lives could have been saved if the nation's approach to the coronavirus pandemic was different. The U.S president Donald Trump and his administration completely ignored the potential dangers of coronavirus although the WHO warned many countries in January about the dangers of the coronavirus outbreak in China. When the virus reached the U.S and was already spreading in the states of Washington and California, testing was very low and largely unavailable to the public. The government started acting too late as states frantically began issuing lockdown and stay at home orders, while also closing schools, restaurants, bars, fitness centers, movie theaters and shutting down businesses in order to contain the spread of the virus. The following video describes this quite accurately: <https://youtu.be/HMLop-jR8cw>.