Reflections on the Pandemic
By Caroline Kucko, A’22

When I initially wrote this story, I thought we had surpassed COVID-19 for good. I interviewed various students asking for their closing reflections on the pandemic and how it changed them. I was writing about COVID-19 in the past tense because for a moment, it truly seemed as though the worst was behind us.

And I sit here now in mid-September rewriting this story; it has become clear that the pandemic is far from over and is changing by the day.

When the pandemic first began, it was a wide-eyed freshman halfway through my second semester here at Duquesne. Duquesne was the school of my dreams for as long as I can remember. My dad and I made an annual trip to Pittsburgh each spring to visit campus and each time, my dream of being a Duquesne student only grew stronger.

By the fall of 2019, all of the years I had spent dreaming of becoming a Duquesne student were finally coming to fruition. I was living the college experience I had envisioned for so long, exploring the city, making new friends, going to sports games and learning independence.

However, it wasn’t long before COVID-19 became a reality. In March of 2020, the world was shutting down and so too were universities across the country. Just as college had really begun, I found myself packing up my belongings, leaving my friends and moving back home across the country. Just as college had really begun, I found myself packing up my belongings, leaving my friends and moving back home.

When I finished my freshman year from home, I breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Although it was far more difficult to connect with professors and classmates online, we did the best with what we had in order to adapt to the circumstances. I surely felt some disappointment about missing part of my first year, but I was able to slow down and enjoy extra time with my family, cherishing the small moments we once took for granted.

When I got the news that we were returning to campus in the fall of 2020, I was overjoyed. Although there would be new rules in place, I was so happy to return to a semi-normal college experience on campus.

Within the first month, this new dynamic became habit for all of us. We got tested every few weeks, practiced social distancing in public spaces, wore masks and adjusted to hybrid learning. As a community, everyone rose to the occasion and worked together to keep each other safe so that we could stay on campus. And miraculously, it worked.

Together we completed an entire school year on campus in the midst of a global pandemic and we did it safely and responsibly. While this was not at all what I pictured my college experience to look like, the pandemic became a reality. In March of 2020, the world was shutting down and so too were universities across the country. Just as college had really begun, I found myself packing up my belongings, leaving my friends and moving back home.

As college students, we are now undoubtedly faced with a new normal. While mask-wearing is here to stay, it is the small price we have to pay in order to learn in a full classroom. After having no choice but to go back home and learn remotely at the beginning of the pandemic, it is a privilege to be able to return to campus and learn in person. We have come so far and I will never take that for granted again.

It is true that we are still very much facing COVID-19 today. New information is being released by the minute and there is still so much uncertainty about what is to come. However, after overcoming what we have thus far, it is safe to say that the Duquesne community is truly prepared for anything.

New Awards Program Recognizes Dukes from the Last Decade

The Duquesne University Alumni Association and its Young Alumni Council have inaugurated the Dukes from the Last Decade Awards, recognizing graduates from the last 10 years who have demonstrated professional excellence, service to their communities and commitment to the mission of Duquesne University in their daily lives. Originally scheduled to begin in 2020, the live awards ceremony was canceled last year and again in 2021, but the initial recipients were honored with a video tribute event posted online in June.

Read who has inspired them most in life, what aspects of their current roles are most rewarding, what they liked best about attending Duquesne, what they hope to achieve next and what they do in their spare time.
WHAT DID YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT ATTENDING DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY?

The people. The people. The people. Seriously, I cannot express the caliber of faculty, staff and students at Duquesne University. Every day whether in or out of the classroom was a beautiful challenge to strive to be the best version of myself and become a life long learner.

John Foster, Class of 2016
Liberal Arts, U.S. Department of the State

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE NEXT, PROFESSIONALLY OR PERSONALLY?

Professionally, I wish to continue to serve the military and veteran communities in the health care industry … to continue being a health care advocate and advance my role in health care policy in order to help our nation’s heroes and their families within our complex health care systems.

Joseph Vitti, Class of 2011
Liberal Arts, Visiting Nurse Service of New York

WHAT DOES BEING SELECTED AS A MEMBER OF THE INAUGURAL CLASS OF DUKES FROM THE LAST DECADE MEAN TO YOU?

It’s an incredible honor to have been chosen, and I will continue to strive to represent the University and its mission and values well in my own life.

Alex Brennstelner, Class of 2012
Health Sciences, HM Home and Community Services

WHAT DOES BEING SELECTED AS A MEMBER OF THE DUKES FROM THE LAST DECADE MEAN TO YOU?

“Leader” is the first word that comes to mind when I think about this award. Leadership is not about yourself or recognition, but it is about how we can make the lives of others even just a little bit better.

Eric Sinagra, Class of 2011
Natural & Environmental Sciences, PathVu

WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST IN LIFE?

There is no way I can pick just one person. Perhaps earliest, though, I was inspired by my mother, who also has pursued a career helping others and is one of the few people I know that loves her job decades later.

Alyssa Pietropaolo, Class of 2013 and 2016
Liberal Arts and Law Community College of Allegheny County

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE A GRADUATE OF DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY?

You represent something bigger than yourself. You represent the faculty and all the students, current and former. It is on all the graduates to uphold that reputation of excellence that Duquesne is known for so the investments we made in ourselves to get our education at Duquesne continue to pay off in the future.

Carter Henderson, Class of 2018
Business, Fort Pitt Capital Group

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE A GRADUATE OF DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY?

Duquesne University represents the finest traditions and values of a postsecondary, Catholic education. My time, both as a student and as faculty, at Duquesne has molded me into the up-and-coming successful man that I am today.

Jason Bertocchi, Class of 2011
Liberal Arts, Arthur J. Gallagher & Co.

Being a Duquesne University graduate comes with a lot of responsibility. Our University was founded on the idea of helping others, and these beginnings were instilled in us throughout our time on the Bluff. Duquesne University alumni are caring, driven individuals who strive to make a positive impact in their communities and in their professional lives.

Kayla Frattini, Class of 2010
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On a daily basis I look back at my years at Duquesne and I am grateful for not only the knowledge I obtained, but the supportive group of mentors who lifted me to pursue excellence as a person and a nurse. I am thankful to be a part of this community.

Marybeth Wargo, Class of 2010
Nursing, MSF Academy for Healthcare, Brussels, Belgium

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