

The New Normal: How The Pandemic Allowed Me to Find My Passion

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My first day back on campus amidst a once-in-a-lifetime (hopefully) pandemic was intimidating. The old stone buildings stood as they had for over a hundred years. The familiar sound of birds chirping lingered in the air. The trees were green with leaves just past their prime. Children rushed by with their sun-kissed skin and their favorite summer clothes. Yes, it was all so familiar, yet I was a totally different person.

My excitement to return was minimal, and stress started to overwhelm me. Nearly my entire high school experience had been spent in front of a screen in my bedroom. I was used to things changing on a dime, and I had adjusted to uncertainty. I never had to wear nice clothes or look my best at home. I could always hide behind a screen. I had never experienced a full year of high school in person, and the idea was truly frightening. With a full year of in-person learning ahead, I wondered if it would all come back to me: how to interact with friends and teachers and study and take in-person exams. I was so nervous, but the one thing that reassured me was that everyone else was experiencing the same thing. We all belong to a generation of kids living through a pandemic and a complete disruption to our lives. Before 2020, it was unthinkable that all schools would close, that all students would be forced to learn from home, or that the whole world would shut down. Many in our generation will look back at this crazy time as an unfortunate experience but one that forced us to learn unexpected lessons.

At first, it seemed like a dream come true! We had several weeks off while the school determined the plan. Then we could sleep more, start school later, and grab a snack any time we wanted. For many students, online school was a challenge. They said it felt hard to connect, focus and study. For me, however, it was a time of growth –mentally, socially, and academically. While online, simple problems like where to eat lunch or to find a bathroom at school were eliminated. With the luxury of being at home, there was no need to worry about any of the problems I would face daily at school. Not having to constantly worry about these small things made it so much easier to focus on school.

After adjusting to the new school "normal," I found I had more time to explore my interests. I just wasn't sure what they were! Then, I started to learn more about business and investing. I explored the idea of developing my clothing brand. I created a directed independent study class, which allowed me to use some of my academic time to learn more about marketing, brand development, and business management.

I began reading books about finance and investing, and for the first time in my life, I began to figure out what subjects really excited me. Developing the clothing brand forced me to become more outgoing, organized, and even more confident. So, when I finally came back to school, it was with the knowledge that I could take on new challenges. I arrived on campus—the one that still looked the same—with new confidence and a better outlook. So far, it has served me well. I have developed more meaningful friendships and felt more confident speaking with teachers and voicing my opinions.

These things that have made me who I am today may not have happened as fast (or at all!) had it not been for the pandemic and online school. Looking back now, I am so grateful for the experience and the learning opportunities I had.