

37th Annual AMBYESE Educational Conference
COVID-19 and the impact on College Access and Student Learning
Student Essays

I've been preparing to apply to college since the moment I burst through my elementary school's doors as a chubby, prospective kindergartener. I would say I wanted to go to "Hail," my toponym for Yale University, so that I could grow up to be a "doctor." While my aspirations have shifted from medicine to law, I still hold the appeal of higher education close to my heart. This is where my future lies. This is where I will change the world.

Thus, I was obviously devastated when I found out I would spend the last quarter of my junior year and my senior year - the college application season - at home due to a global pandemic. Distance learning has made completing critical parts of my college application incredibly difficult. I'm struggling to find time to meet with my counselor regarding college and my transcript and overall don't feel supported by my school. I'm incredibly grateful to have started the application process early as a result of my excitement. My SATs, teacher recommendations, and college lists were already finished by the time January of my junior year started. Without it, I may not have been able to get an SAT score or meet up with teachers to arrange for recommendations due to pandemic cancellations.

I cannot even fathom how much more difficult applying to college is as a result of distance learning for those who haven't prepared prior to March of 2020. Not having access to an SAT or ACT score may impede your application even though schools are test-optional this year if your GPA or extracurriculars don't excel as much as that test score. One may also lack the ability to apply to an international school because of this factor. The absence of extracurriculars and volunteering opportunities for those who haven't begun joining them before junior year will certainly leave a gap in many students' applications.

Then there's the problem of distance learning's challenges. Without in-person learning, many students who have visual styles of learning are at a disadvantage and are at risk of not understanding course material the way they would if they were in a classroom. The absence of teaching and the sudden surplus of independent work without instruction means many students are in jeopardy of grade drops or even failure. While it's not the school's fault considering the necessity for precautions to be taken, distance learning and the difficulties that come with it - internet problems, domestic dangers, and more - can impede a student's chance at achieving a transcript that would allow for them to enter their dream colleges.

Ultimately, adolescents must be prepared to persevere during the pandemic. Employing technological mediums like email, Khan Academy, and other sources can provide access to communication and education that can provide help during the college application process. Volunteering by sending letters to local elderly homes or setting up PPE drives to local hospitals can improve extracurricular lists and also serve as an aid to one's community. This certainly isn't an easy application season for the Class of 2021, but students can ultimately prevail and achieve their aspirations.

- Viktoria Wulff-Andersen

COVID-19 has dramatically affected the ability of students to succeed in school. Since the onset of this year's pandemic, learning opportunities have become virtual, significantly affecting students who need learning accommodations, stronger internet access, or a place to focus on their learning. Distanced learning has far fewer opportunities for AP and honors classes than hybrid scheduling at our high schools, pushing high-achieving students at risk of developing more serious illnesses from the virus to go to school physically.

Although elaborate planning has been implemented across the country since school began in the fall, we all lost several months of school last year when it was unclear whether we would return or not. According to my peers, daily online classes, although helpful in discussion-based classes like History or English, were challenging to follow in Science and Math classes, where some concepts have to be shown physically for better understanding. Not every student is an auditory or visual learner, and districts cannot afford to supplement each student with the materials used for in-class activities if they learn best hands-on.

Students are also likely to have been affected by mental health issues during the extended school closure, especially students from lower-income families that do not have access to treatment, which is incredibly expensive. The pandemic has also drained us financially—affecting some far more than others. Many families had to use their savings when unemployment was on the rise, and job opportunities were looking dire. Even though college tuition has not increased as much this year, prices are still high at some institutions considering students face significantly fewer opportunities in college and are instead attending more virtual classes from inside a room. Lower-income students still have to pay near full price tuition for primarily virtual courses.

COVID-19 was a drastic shock to our education system. It is still continuing, and we are still adjusting to it. Although we have adapted to some of the changes, the pandemic has disproportionately affected low-income students, immunocompromised students, and students that need learning and mental health accommodations. We need to find ways to accommodate these students, so they have an equal chance of success in school and college.

- Rachana Somaskandan

The impact that Covid-19 had on College Access was that students weren't able to be in person to take the SATS, which meant that colleges had to excuse the SAT scores since the students weren't in person to acquire and fully understand everything that were being taught to them. It also relates to the impact that Covid-19 had on Student Learning. As we all know, we are in a pandemic, which means that we shouldn't reduce the amount of times that we go outside until it is necessary. Schools have closed because of it and we started remote learning. We stare at our laptop screens throughout the day, which could cause eyestrain, blurry vision, neck pain, back pain, shoulder pain, etc. Not only can remote learning cause damage to us physically but it could also damage us mentally and emotionally. Due to the amount of work, our teacher's expectations of us, strict rules during zoom, and misunderstanding of the work, we tend to get stressed and gain lots of headaches from it. Covid-19 and stress from school can give some student depression, from being inside all day without getting some fresh air and sunlight, to being stressed and having anxiety attacks about failing school. Even though remote learning can make things hard for us, and although it might not be our faults, it is on our transcripts which would be later shown to colleges and could affect our chances of getting accepted to that certain school. Covid-19 had caused a great impact on our lives in general, but as times goes, hopefully we will return to our normal way of life.

- Precious Owusu
