

Covid_vanderree_tessa

Cara: Today is Monday, August 24, 2020, and we are talking with K-State student Tessa Vanderree. She is 23 years old and is currently in the College of Veterinary Medicine.

Cara: Tessa, when did you first hear about the coronavirus?

Tessa: About a week before spring break was the first time that I really saw it on the media. I think I'd seen it before that a little bit, but that was the first time I kind of realized it was becoming an American thing.

Cara: What was your reaction at the time?

Tessa: Honestly, I didn't really care about it because, like, I'm very stressed and busy in my program and it's like, "Oh, whatever."

Cara: When did the virus first become real to you or when did it really start to affect your life?

Tessa: About a week before we went home on spring break, that was the semester I was taking my epidemiology class. My professor, Dr. Larson, took about 15 minutes out of our class time. I don't remember what day of the week, but it was during that week. And he talked to us a little bit about the spread and about the numbers. And then he told us that it probably wasn't going to impact us and that we shouldn't get too worked up about it.

Cara: OK. How did it affect your life?

Tessa: So, I packed up the Friday that we got done with our pre-spring break classes and everything, and I left out Saturday morning and I drove home. Then I think it was Wednesday or Thursday of the following week; they had called off the semester for the rest of the year and they said that they were going to do it online. That's pretty intimidating. This was the semester that we were doing all of our dissections, so we'd spent the first part of the semester dissecting a horse, and we were just finishing up with that and we didn't even get to do ruminant dissections or our pigs or the chickens. They just ended up having to take pictures of it and put it online. And, you know, they tried really hard and everybody tried to make it work as best they could, but it's still really kind of sucked.

Cara: OK. Were you allowed to go ahead and finish the whole semester online then?

Tessa: Yes. Unlike main campus, we don't really get a lot of choices in the classes that we take. At the beginning of the semester, they give us all but like one or two hours of the classes that we're going to take and we get no decisions about it. And if you stop those classes or have to repeat anything, it would throw the entire program off a whole calendar year.

Tessa: So they were really motivated to try to get us through that semester with as much knowledge as possible. And I mean, this semester, they're trying to make up for some of the stuff they missed last semester. But it's really hard because they've kind of got about as much information as you can learn in the semester already, and there's not really room to add any more on top.

Cara: Where do you live when you're at school?

Covid_vanderree_tessa

Tessa: So, I live on Claflin, which is basically the street that goes through the middle of campus and I have a little apartment and I can actually see the dorms from where I live. So I'm within walking distance of the school, but I am not having to deal with the dorm life, which people have talked about how that's kind of a struggle. I'm very glad to have my own apartment.

Cara: Do you live in the apartment by yourself?

Tessa: I have one roommate, and she is not doing classes this semester because she didn't want to spend the money or pay the tuition to take classes on the computer. She wants to just wait until she can take them in person.

Cara: OK. How did you feel when the schools closed? What things changed right away at that time.

Tessa: When they first called it off, I was halfway through the semester. You're a little bit burnt out when you're working that hard, so I was like, "Oh yeah, another week of spring break, hurray!" And then I got about a week into my online classes and I realized that I was sitting at my desk for nine or 10 hours a day, watching videos and typing on my screen with like no human interaction really. I mean, I love my parents, but I wasn't getting the 'college experience' where I got to go study with my friends and spend time with people. And that was really hard. I think that that was harder than trying to learn the information online, the sudden lack of human interaction.

Cara: Were there any things that changed so slowly, so incrementally that you didn't notice it happening?

Tessa: See, for me, it was very sudden for most of it, because I was in Manhattan, I went home for spring break, I had my spring break and then all of a sudden, I was stuck in the house for 10 hours a day. I think the only thing that might be incremental would be, where I lived, maybe the pressure to wear a mask.

But even then, when I came back up to Manhattan... it was pretty loose rules about wearing the mask where I lived in Coldwater versus coming to Manhattan, where you have to have a mask to go anywhere.

Cara: What is your school situation right now?

Tessa: So they brought us back on campus and they're trying to get as much of the hands-on stuff as they can do. There's 120 people in my class, something like that, and they're basically broken up into cohorts of 39 people. And those 39 people will take turns on what days they go up.

I go to class, in person, Tuesday and Friday, basically 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. And then on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, I sit in my apartment and I do Zoom meetings and something called Echo 360 and study on my own, so there's a lot less social interaction there. They're also front-loading the semester to where they're trying to get all of the labs out of the way if they can. So this semester I am using a microscope a lot, because I'm taking parasitology and pathology, which is stuff you use microscopes for. So they're trying to get that done as quickly as possible.

Covid_vanderree_tessa

Cara: And why do you think they're trying to do the hands-on stuff right now? Are they concerned that they may have to close down again?

Tessa: Yeah, they are very concerned they're going to have to close down again. I do not know these things for a fact, but I've heard rumors circulating that there's already been problems in the Greek houses. And so I don't know how long they're going to get to do it. If everything goes according to their plan and they get to go as long as they want, they'll just send us home at Thanksgiving break. But if they have huge spikes, they're going to hit the decision. And this is one that the dean, Dr. Ross, actually talked to us about a little bit. They're hoping that even if they have to close down main campus, they can push through the professional school and keep us open, even if they send the rest of campus home. But, it's just very uncertain.

Cara: When do you think life will get back to normal?

Tessa: Honestly, I have no idea. I don't know very much about epidemiology. I've only had one piddly little class in it, but if this is all as real and scary as everyone's saying and stuff, I don't see how it would just magically be over any time soon. And yeah, I would love it if the semester came back to normal next semester, but I don't know how that could happen.

Cara: OK. Have we made changes due to Covid that you think are just temporary? And what changes do you think might be long term?

Tessa: Well, I actually have a friend who is a foreign exchange student for vet school from Taiwan and when she first moved here, it was it was her freshman semester of vet school. I got to know her and everything, and she tried to wear a mask to school because it was a dusty day, because that's what they do where she lives. And she was like, "Oh, I just got all these funny looks."

So I honestly start to wonder if the mask thing will ever really go away or people who are kind of germophobic or something will just always be like, "Oh, it's flu season. I'm going to wear a mask now." So that's something that I could definitely see being a longer lasting thing, especially in the larger areas. And I don't know, I hope that in like the students' study areas, that one of these days they will move the chairs back in so we can actually have group study, because right now they don't want us within six feet of each other, which means you can have like two people at a table, which isn't very easy to group study. And then even looking at the Greek life, they're not going to be able to have any of their parties. They're not... like their rushing. When is that going to come back? I don't know.

Cara: What's your reaction to the whole thing now?

Tessa: Honestly, I completely understand where people are on both sides of the political issue or whatever. And if it makes people happy for me to wear a mask and make them comfortable enough that I get to have school, then fine, wear the mask, whatever. And honestly, I start to care a lot less about the political climate. I just want to get my degree. I want to get to go to school. I want to study.

Cara: Is there anything that you would like for people in 20 or 30 years to know about what it was like to try to go to school during a pandemic?

Covid_vanderree_tessa

Tessa: It's not mentally healthy. It's not good for people. I woke up at 7:30 this morning and I had class at 8:00, which is nice, I could sleep in a little bit. Then I sat at my desk, in my house, for the entire day. And that's just what I do because I have a heavy class load. That's not good for you. It's not something that we should be pushing off on people. And I get that we're trying to get people socially distanced or physically distanced, which is, I think, the more politically-correct term. But I think there's going to be a lot of long-lasting impact on people's mental health because it's just not healthy. It's pretty depressing.

Cara: OK. Thank you very much.