

Kaylah A. Fermaint
The George Washington University
Human Services and Social Justice
Class of 2021

The Impact of Covid-19 on GW's Campus

How has COVID-19 impacted the community in which you attend school? How is this influencing how your class approaches grantmaking?

The Covid-19 crisis has caused extreme disorder at The George Washington University (GWU) and in the education system at large. The George Washington University has worked tirelessly to roll out an effective action plan in response to our current pandemic. To ensure the safety and security of all students our university has transitioned to virtual learning pending the greenlight from public health officials to resume in person learning. While various measures have been taken to guarantee the health and safety of all students I fear that the university did not anticipate catering to the struggles students face at home. I believe many institutions of higher learning have attempted to implement a one size fits all approach in rolling out their actions. Unfortunately, this approach fails to consider the inequities and disparities within the education system. As a result many students including myself have experienced great struggles in completing each semester due to extenuating circumstances.

Many policymakers and senior administrators are blind to what the institutions of education actually offer many students. For some students, schools represent opportunity, consistency, and safety. It allows students to have access to the tools and resources that prepare them to be active in their not only in the classroom but also in their communities as well. When you take that away from individuals who depend on the resources schools have to provide you put vulnerable students at a greater disadvantage than they already have. As time has passed GW has attempted to address the discrepancies in their action plan by providing housing for students with extenuating circumstances, distributing hot spots to students who have poor internet connectivity, and even providing financial assistance for those who qualify for it. These measures are a strong start to addressing some of the inequities that vulnerable students face. However, there is still a lot of work to be done in the classroom to ensure that all students are given a fair chance to succeed in class.

Professors in different departments have each developed their own way of managing their course in the midst of a pandemic. Many students have expressed concern of being overwhelmed and fearful of failure due to their professors unreasonable approach to running their class. Luckily, the professors in my major have found a nice balance between being extremely accommodating and understanding of our circumstance while also making sure our course work is completed. The success of our classes can be attributed to the fact that our professors view this pandemic through a human service perspective. Their understanding to treat each student as an individual has allowed for their course to translate the true nature of what it means to provide equitable opportunities for all. This has helped our senior capstone class in completing the goals for our course this semester.

In our Senior Capstone course my classmates and I are collaborating with The Learning By Giving Program to create a foundation that will allocate funding to an organization that combats the social justice issue of our choice. This year we have chosen to provide grant money to organizations that are combating homelessness in the DMV area. “Mayor Muriel Bowser announced that this month (August 2020), the District will end its use of the Days Inn, the last local hotel being used as overflow emergency shelter, and completely phase out the use of local hotels to house District families in need of [emergency shelter](#).” This order displaced many individuals that are a part of this vulnerable community in the midst of a global pandemic, and at what cost? My peers and I recognized the needs of this vulnerable population and made it our mission to provide financial assistance to organizations who supply this community with the basic necessities that Mayor Bowser’s order stripped from them.

Given our experience with covid-19, as students we understand that the organizations that will be submitting grants to us are also being affected by this pandemic. As we lead by the example our professors have set for us, we designed a grant application that is gracious and accommodating to our potential grant recipients while also making sure we receive enough information to be critical of those we will allocate funding to. This pandemic is a learning experience for all of us. As we all go through this together we must lead with grace and understanding so that we may find sustainable solutions to the struggles we face.