

My Experience as a Graduating Senior at SJSU During COVID-19

Pramod Sapkota

San Jose University

May 5, 2020

My academic journey at San Jose State University is going to leave a lasting memory in my mind because of this COVID-19. I am a graduating senior student at SJSU, majoring in Public Health. After successfully completing three semesters by taking 15 – 18 units each time, I was quite ready to complete this semester and walk through the ramp with my head held high wearing a graduation hat. My 17 years old son, a junior at Homestead High, and my 12 years old daughter, a 7th grader at Sutter Middle in Sacramento were equally excited to participate in their dad's graduation ceremony. As the news of virus outbreak in parts of China in early January 2020 and later spreading throughout the globe became the daily headlines in news media, my mind was already saying it's not going to be easy this year.

I used to work as a part-time rideshare driver on the weekends to pay for my rent and food which had to be stopped due to the fear of virus transmission as I had to pick people up from SFO and San Jose Airports. Following that, I had to move out of the bay area, back to Sacramento as I couldn't afford to pay expensive rent without income. SJSU announced the cancellation of in-person lectures and daily class participation activities beginning mid-March. It was not easy to follow through an online portal to attend classes and do other learning activities. To deal with the health crisis we had to do anything while making sure we continue our studies. Thanks to the modern technology and invention of various group chats, meeting rooms, and media platforms available to use by everyone which made it possible to connect with the class, teachers, and peers to some degree. Now coming to the beginning of May 2020, we are about to complete this semester and getting ready to graduate, even though not in uniform but at least we will get our certificate. I will be getting my BS in Health Science- Public Health.

Universities and educational institutions can also learn from this crisis and turn this into an opportunity to strengthen alternative modes of interactive lecture delivery system in the future, not just at the time of disease, despair, and crisis but to reach out to wider networks of people. Sometimes universities have to break out of their money-minded mentality by arousing the sentiment of inclusiveness and responsibility to the human communities. Support and unite talents in a platform to create new ideas, innovate new technology that can benefit the world.

This moment reminds me of the need that studies never end. I would love to go for a Master's in Public Health program, but my financial situation, as well as the extra requirement of the GRE stands as a barrier to my higher education at this moment. We need to figure out a million different ways to help the human population to live in good health. There is so much to be done in terms of dealing with health crises, improving the financial situations of millions of people, and taking care of the nature we share together with other animal species. Sometimes a crisis comes with an alertness that we need to change the way we conduct our daily life activities. The best application of the academic knowledge we received during our college years is now to be tested in practical application. We need to turn this crisis into an opportunity to do something good that is more sustainable for our health, our economy, our environment, to change our existing understanding of economic benefits at the expense of environmental degradation and pollution.

My fear at this moment is that I want to utilize my knowledge, not just sell myself for a few dollars but be able to contribute for the benefit of humankind. I am afraid that I might not be able to get connected to that platform because of the fear of viruses and travel restrictions. Looking at the history of a similar influenza outbreak of 1918, I still see the fear is looming in the air.

As a student of Public Health, I can clearly say that the method we used during this season's virus outbreak by maintaining social distancing, limiting movement, and big gatherings were effective. The decision of SJSU administration to stop in-person lectures and implement an online platform to deliver lectures was the best decision and we can't be too hurry to re-open. Health is wealth and keeping the human population safe and healthy is our responsibility.