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Anne Lim's Personal Reflection

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Anne Lim
A Class of 2022, currently staying in Seoul, South Korea
Personal Reflection

1. How has the pandemic impacted you?
 - a. relationships?
 - b. future plans?
 - c. lifestyle, habits, routines, etc? What have you had to adapt to and what has changed? d. Belonging?
2. What is something positive that has come out of this whole experience? What is the most important lesson or meaningful experience you have gained from this project? Positive and Negative?
3. How has your college experience impacted your view of the pandemic?
4. What is something you think should be preserved in public memory about this time?

The most challenging time for me was the last half of winter term when the virus had spread at breakneck speed in South Korea. Although I felt physically safe on campus, I was emotionally unstable as I was worried about my family and friends back at home. I had a sleep disorder as I stayed awake to check in with my family and get the latest information about a virus which directly affected my loved ones.

While I was frustrated by the reality I heard from my family, many Carleton faculty and students underestimated the severity of the virus by comparing it with other types of disease. For example, when the topic was brought up in one of my classes, the professor did not lead to a discussion but simply concluded with “It is just a flu, and we are safe.” I still remember the meme one of students shared on her Instagram that said, “If you are worried about corona, use a condom. The number of people dying from AIDS are greater than that from corona.”

They also seemed surprisingly uninterested in what international students had to go through during the winter term. Due to the great sense of anxiety I had to cope with at the end of term, my final grades suffered. I expected Carleton to approve retrospective scrunch that was

suggested along with mandatory scrunch for spring term, but less than a half of the student body supported the policy. On the forum the school created for students to discuss grading policy for spring term, I saw many students, in support of mandatory scrunch, talking about potential struggles international students would have with time zone differences. It was weird to see many students concerned about international students when they opposed retrospective scrunch which would be more helpful to many of us.

The lack of support from Carleton makes me think about the reason for my presence on campus. Carleton seems to take notice of international students only when they need to show their principle of diversity on campus, especially on the celebratory events such as international festivals and new student week. I wondered whether the school positioned me as merely a provider of diversity, since I was not taken care of when I needed their help the most. The messages I received from the U.S. government and Carleton that were far from the reality I heard from my family in Korea made me rethink about my relationship with the United States in general.

As soon as Carleton announced that spring term would be held online for at least the half of the term, I decided to go back to South Korea. While most international students decided to stay on campus out of a fear of a possible lockdown and their visa status, I thought about the worst-case scenario—getting infected. Because South Korea is known for its good medical system and low death rate, I thought I could be better treated in my home country in case I test positive for Covid-19.

My family and friends welcomed me, but I saw many comments on news and social media platforms that showed South Koreans' frustration at international students coming back. Some of the comments were: "You abandoned the country when the situation was bad here, and

you are now coming back for medical care,” “Please don’t come back and spread the virus,” etc. I was shocked by the fact that my arrival could be threatening to my nation which I believed was the place that would always welcome me. These comments made me think about my position within the nation. Perhaps, I am so privileged that I can selectively and strategically choose the system that is “better,” moving across the countries. Indeed, I left home for a “better” educational system in the United States, and came back for a “better” medical system in South Korea. I felt guilty, ashamed, and lost. I still question—where do I belong?

We are living in the moment where states are shutting down their borders and failing to protect their citizens living outside of their territory while simultaneously emphasizing international cooperation as a key to overcome the crisis. Due to this complicated nature of the crisis, I decided to document the experiences of international students who live outside of their home nation and often view nationality as a key element in their identity construction. If we simply believe international students are privileged and exclude them from our discussions about marginalization, we will fail to see how the pandemic shifts social dynamics and positions of all students. In this archive, I tried to document students’ changing sense of belonging and solidarity both with their home nation and the nation they live for education. In my future archive, I would like to preserve the stories of de jure and de facto stateless persons in public memory. I would like to examine how the absence of nationality and legal citizenship affect the experiences of people in this time.