

Columbia College Chicago

Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago

---

Public History Journals

Response 2020

---

Summer 2021

***Capturing Quarantine: Student Pandemic Experience Journal***

Nicole Leung

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colum.edu/journals>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### **March 2020**

**March 11:** The World Health Organization declared coronavirus a pandemic, which has significantly impacted and altered life as we know it.

**March 12:** My partner and I start messaging each other on Instagram. He responded to one of my stories asking about a pair of platform boots I had that I'd stuck screws into the bottom of. We've been dating for over a year now, and I've grown so much since we've been together. I'm so grateful he is a part of my life!

**March 16:** Trump publishes a tweet referring to COVID with the term "Chinese virus." He has also referred to the virus as "kung flu". This rhetoric most certainly fueled the spike in Asian hate crimes in the US, which have been occurring in alarmingly increased numbers. Attaching an ethnicity to a highly contagious and deadly pandemic gives very ignorant and bigoted people a scapegoat to project their anger, anxiety, and frustration towards the pandemic based on false pretenses.

**March 18:** All campus housing is announced to be closing until further notice. When the pandemic was announced to be getting drastically worse only days prior, I was under the assumption that students would still be permitted to live on campus, and had bought food, canned goods, toiletries, and other necessities in preparation for my stay (in accordance with the impending stay-at-home order).

**March 19:** I visit my friend to give him some of the supplies I'd acquired before I left campus. He lived about 40 minutes from my dorm by train, and this was before any mandatory mask mandates. I believe I was exposed to the virus on this day, but didn't start showing symptoms until exactly two weeks later, and by that time, I was staying with my aunt and uncle in the suburbs. I thought I had been cautious, wearing masks and gloves when going out, but I realized there was a point where the pandemic still didn't feel real or as serious to me as it needed to.

**March 21:** I leave my dorm and move in with my aunt and uncle in the suburbs of Illinois. Being evacuated from the dorms was such a sudden announcement that I was unable to go home to New York. I was very lucky my aunt and uncle were willing to take me in - they live

in a fairly secluded area, as well, meaning encounters with people outside of our family would be rare and social-distancing much easier.

**March 28: I develop COVID symptoms.** I am feverish and experience difficulty breathing, fatigue, a headache, a sore throat, and congested sinuses. My aunt and uncle are in their 60s, so my contraction of the virus put them at risk. I remember feeling guilty for having the illness because of this. We social-distanced, had minimal contact, and I wore a mask in the house as I got better (and for a week after I felt fully recovered, just to be safe).

### **April 2020**

**April (An ongoing circumstance): I live with my aunt and uncle for over a month.** Although I respect my aunt and uncle very much, they really intimidate me, and I found myself feeling really anxious upon my stay. However, we were able to become much closer as a result of the experience, and I think we were able to see more genuine and intimate versions of each other that we wouldn't have been able to at a typical family gathering. During this time, I also remain in contact with my friends, my partner, and my family back home through Zoom, phone calls, and texting.

### **May 2020**

**May 14: Semester ends.** This was my first semester of taking online classes. I enjoyed how in control of my schedule I was, but felt extremely anxious about Zoom classes - so much so that I avoided them all. I was honest with my professors about this anxiety, and they were very understanding - *the pandemic really taught me to communicate my needs more clearly to my professors*. At the end of the semester, I truly believed I would never have to take a Zoom class ever again - *the joke was all on me*.

**May 20-28(? - Don't remember the exact date): My parents drive to my aunt and uncle's to pick me up, and they take me home.** By this point, I hadn't seen my parents for the longest period of time ever - over 8 months! I missed them so much, and although I enjoyed my time at my aunt and uncle's, I was ready to go home.

**May 31: Black Lives Matter protesting the unjust killing of George Floyd and police violence against Black Americans.** I was following news of George Floyd's murder and the escalation into protests from afar, especially through social media. I think the pandemic's drastic increase of our online activity (just to stay in contact with the people we care about) really played a huge role in how information about protests, racial injustice, and police brutality were spread. I learned quite a bit just from the various articles and resources being shared on Instagram, especially about the importance of being aware of myself and how I perpetuate systems of oppression and how I can support others.

### **June 2020**

**June (An ongoing circumstance): I practice digital drawing.** I dabbled in using Adobe Illustrator my freshman year, and Adobe Photoshop my sophomore, all without a drawing tablet. A friend recommended one to be during quarantine, saying it would be a "game changer" for my digital practice (I'd been using my trackpad to draw the entire time) and I purchased it! I'm really glad I did, too, it is a far more organic process to draw on a tablet, and it's been very fun to experiment with the different brush presets in Photoshop. I'm glad I'm able to have some digital illustration under my belt, just to diversify the mediums I've used before.

### **July 2020**

**July (An ongoing circumstance): I revisit making collages.** Much like me learning to use a drawing tablet, I wanted to explore making collages to try out new mediums. I hadn't collaged anything since I was a kid, so it was a really interesting experience approaching over a decade later. I would collage and paint around journal entries in my sketchbook, and I found this process to be extremely therapeutic.

### **August 2020**

**August (An ongoing circumstance): I experiment with my paintings, introducing new techniques and subject matter.** I tend to lose motivation to paint very frequently because I end up becoming fixated with making things look really realistic/grounded in reality. During this time, I began to use mixed media in my pieces, incorporating charcoal and pastels into my usual acrylic routine. I also pushed myself to paint more loosely, and began to incorporate amorphous,

intestinal shapes in my pieces that continue to be a motif in my more recent work. Because I hadn't had the opportunity to purchase new canvas/painting surfaces (I limited the time I went out during the pandemic to virtually none to keep my family safe), I began elaborating on and painting over my old work, which is a practice I found I really found solace in. All of these things have been very significant to my current practice!

### **September 2020**

**September 3: I move back onto campus for my junior year.** I decided to dorm, and got a room in the Dwight with two of my closest friends (at the time). My partner also chose to stay in that same dorm. I was really excited to regain my sense of independence and be able to spend time with people I cared about and felt comfortable being myself around. It was also very convenient for me to live in such close proximity to my support system of peers - it was definitely a welcome change after how estranged from them I had been during quarantine.

### **October 2020**

**October (An ongoing circumstance): I pick up cross-hatched pen-drawing again, and I start learning 3D modelling in one of my classes.** I hadn't done a pen drawing (building up forms using cross hatching) since freshman year, and had really lost all my confidence in it. It was a little uncomfortable getting back into it (I was highly critical of myself), but I ended up with a few pieces I am really proud of! This whole process reassured me that I can always pick up a medium again after taking a break from it.

### **November 2020**

**November (An ongoing circumstance): My roommates and I start having issues.** We decided to live together because we'd enjoyed one another's company over the past few years; however, living with one of my roommates in particular proved to be a very different experience than anticipated. Over the following months, many boundaries of mine were crossed, and, among many other things, our "roommate agreement" to verify who we spent time with (to ensure COVID was not brought into the dorm) was thrown out the window with this particular roommate - she would go out to large gatherings, putting myself and my other roommate at risk. The overall experience helped me recognize my need to be more assertive and clear with my

boundaries. It was truly unfortunate that things unfolded how they did during a time where it was very difficult (virtually impossible) to find space from a toxic roommate (Ex. If this had happened during any other time but the pandemic, I'm sure I would have found a way to stay with my boyfriend more often in his room, or stay with a friend off-campus). This month was the hallmark of a very difficult living situation.

**November 26: I spent Thanksgiving with my partner and their immediate family.**

We took into account the CDC's plea for people to avoid travel and gatherings during the Thanksgiving holidays (Announced on November 19), but decided it would be okay to have Thanksgiving at my partner's home at our own discretion. They lived very close by to the dorm (about a forty minute drive), we would just be eating with his parents and younger brother, and we had all tested negative for the virus - us driving to his home and back to the dorm wouldn't expose us to anyone new who could potentially have the virus. I believe this was my second time meeting his family, and I think we were only brought closer together from this time. I had a really lovely time!

**December 2020**

**December 8: I made my first plaster sculpture.** I'd never worked with plaster before, and had very limited experience in making any 3D object before. I created a bust with an additional prop using crumpled up newspaper and plaster bandages - it was a super fun and new experience, and it definitely got me interested in making more [larger] sculptural work in the future!

**December 25: I spent Christmas at my partner's.** It had been a long semester, and my partner and I decided (after similar deliberation to coming on Thanksgiving) it would be safe for us (and those around us) to visit his family for Christmas. It was (again!) a very lovely time - I really loved spending time with his family, especially because I had decided with my own that it would be best for me to stay in Chicago for the holidays (Adhering to yet another CDC holiday travel limit request). We spent a few days there, and I learned more about his family. His dad is an illustrator, and has this incredible collection of art books he uses as references for his work. It was really inspiring to see the variety of resources he had - I took a special interest in this book about composing comics, which I thought was really informative about how motion can be conveyed in a series of frames through a few key visual choices (Ex. A person is running away

in one frame, and there is only a puff of smoke in the next one to show how fast they're running). Although I don't currently make a ton of comics or artist's books, I thought this concept would be applicable to the paintings and other 2D work I create.

### **January 2021**

**Mid-December to January 4: Winter break ends, and spring semester of my junior year begins!** I stayed in Chicago for the entirety of winter break, which was very new for me - I'd always gone home for Christmas, but we decided it would be better for me to stay in Chicago because of COVID. I spent pretty much the entirety of the break with my partner in our dorm, which was very nice (I didn't have to be alone that whole time!), but rarely went into my own bedroom and apartment. I spent a majority of my time in my partner's dorm due to escalating tensions with one of my roommates. In retrospect, the growing discomfort I felt in what was supposed to be my own home made me realize my fears of standing up for myself and confronting my roommate were grounded in me clinging onto it, even as the bad outweighed the good. The entire situation has really illuminated some unhealthy tendencies I have related to me repeatedly pushing my own limits aside to fulfill the needs of others due to my fear of not being enough for people to accept me for who I am.

### **February 2021**

**February 14: This was the first Valentine's Day I'd ever spent with someone!** I've never been in a long-term, committed, healthy relationship before, and it was really reassuring and lovely to be able to celebrate love with someone who truly sees me, understands me, and makes me feel safe!

**February 22: My work was shown in the exhibition, *HYPERLINK*, in the C33 gallery!** One of my peers organized the show, and asked me to participate, along with a group of several other very talented artists. I was really honored to even be considered for it! The other artists participating had been in my classes before, and I really admired and respected their work; it felt unreal to have my work placed next to theirs. This exhibition was the first one I'd participated in in my time at Columbia, and was also my first delve into experimenting with soft sculpture made from nylon tights, which has been something I've been really interested in building into my body of work.

## **March 2021**

**March 1: Governor J.B. Pritzker announced a federal vaccination site will open at United Center starting March 10. The site is able to administer 6,000 vaccines per day.**

Although I was not eligible to be vaccinated at this time, my partner and I made a mental note of this, and actually ended up getting our Pfizer vaccines here! When I became eligible, I found it extremely difficult to get an appointment at many other popular vaccination spots (Ex. Walgreens), so it was a great relief when the United Center was readily available to provide vaccines in a fast, streamlined manner!

**March 8: I won the Pougialis Scholarship!** I applied for the scholarship by recommendation of one of my professors - I honestly wouldn't have even considered it if she hadn't. I'm very uncertain about my work because of how closely tied it is to me; sometimes it's hard to distinguish it from the insecurities I have about my self-worth, not to mention how fearful I am of my work being rejected! However, the fact that I won was really confidence-boosting - my work stood against some really talented artists. The first-place winner of scholarship comes with a significant amount of scholarship money towards my first semester, an internship with a Chicago-based artist of my choice, and a show with the second-prize winner in the C33 gallery.

**March 19: Gov. Pritzker announced all residents age 16 and older will be eligible for vaccinations starting April 12.** This was super exciting news - I was so close to finally being eligible for a vaccination! Now, it was just a waiting game until April 12, hoping no complications with the vaccines emerged.

## **April 2021**

**April 12: All residents age 16 and older will be eligible for vaccinations starting April 12.** Yes! No vaccine complications in the past few weeks meant I was finally able to be vaccinated! I began looking at places close to my dorm on campus (Walgreens, CVS, ...), but their online sign up systems were very glitchy and I became very stressed at my inability to set an appointment.

**April 16: Anyone 16 and older became eligible for the vaccine in New York.** This was really comforting news to hear, because it meant my whole family back in New York could



get vaccinated. My dad and brother got COVID around the time I did during quarantine back in 2020, and it was really scary. I had been far away from home for so long, and was worried COVID would take my family members before I could see them in person again.

**April 22: I get my first dose of the Pfizer vaccine at United Center!** It was a relief to finally have an appointment for a vaccine, and to actually get it. I was a little feverish the night I got this dose, and for much of the day after, but I recovered quickly.

**April 26: I am able to acquire an on-campus studio space in the 1104 building (and it's the space/cubicle I wanted)!** I started working much larger than I ever had this semester, through larger-scale sculpture and paintings, and I realized I would've been unable to bring my work back home to New York with me. The space is also much roomier than where I was used to working the past three years of school: in my small, often shared, dorm rooms.

### **May 2021**

**May 13: I get my second dose of the Pfizer vaccine!** I was able to time when I got the first vaccine just right, so I was able to get my second dose right before I went back to New York! (Literally the day before!) I was really lucky I didn't have as severe symptoms as others have experienced with their second dose to interfere with my dorm move out - I just had a headache the night after I got the shot.

**May 14: Spring semester ends, and I go back home.** I felt really satisfied with myself and how the school year went, which was a very new experience for me. I find I always find ways to exclusively focus on the negatives of something once it's over. However, I really believe I grew a lot over the length of the year! I grew more comfortable with myself and reaching out to those around me, whether it was to my professors and academic-related, or to my closest companions about my emotions, I found myself reaching out more (for the first time)! I also allowed myself to experiment even more with new sizes, mediums, and subject matter in my work, and "put my work out there" even more than ever! I also was very glad to be out of my toxic living situation, and have made a mental note to be more assertive of my boundaries with others.

### **June 2021**

**(Late May to Early June): My partner stayed with my family and I in New York!** I was both really nervous and excited for this - it was the first time I ever had someone I was

dating meet my parents. I think it went really well! He might even come back before fall semester starts again, I hope he can. We went to a bunch of museums and galleries in the city together, and it was really nice to have a companion who enjoys and shares my passions. My peers in Chicago and New York don't really love going to galleries, so I had a lovely time. I'm so grateful to be with my partner!

**June (Ongoing throughout the month): I worked on a painting commission for a poster for a peer's upcoming movie.** The commission taught me a lot about how to price a painting - I've only really made digital illustrations for others, and didn't realize how different pricing a painting would be from that. I now know the importance of factoring in the price of supplies, how much time I would spend on it, and the cost of the image of the painting being something entirely separate from the cost of the painted canvas itself. The commission was also for a drama movie, and the content my peer had planned for the poster was very much not my style of painting. It felt like they'd selected me for the task because they knew I could paint, rather than for my unique style. For future commissions, I have learned not to say "yes" before I know what exactly they want me to do, and that I can say "no" if I don't think the style they're asking for is one I think I could do justice!

**June 19: I meet an online friend for the first time!** We'd been talking intermittently for a few months during the pandemic about artists we liked, but we finally had a chance to meet this summer (Especially as things in New York have been opening up, and because we are both vaccinated). I'm really grateful to have met this new friend! I tend to like keeping my circle of friends very close and small, so it was really refreshing and reassuring to meet someone who I resonate so deeply with. She also introduced me to the book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, by Alice Miller, which has enlightened a lot for me about my childhood and has allowed me to use my time at home this summer to look into myself and try to heal my past.

### **July 2021**

**July 6: I start this class!** I've been really enjoying it so far, and it's actually been very good for my mental health. I don't have a job this summer, and have been having a lot of trouble leaving the house; in fact, I barely have this entire summer. I've just been laying in bed, extremely depressed, for the majority of it. Having this class has helped me put together a schedule within my full control to get me out of bed, which I greatly appreciate.

**July 22: My friend and I bought a hamster together!** We lived together my junior year (She is not the roommate I had issues with), and plan on doing so next school year, as well. We've always talked about caring for a pet together, and finally decided this would be the time we do it. I've never had a pet before, but she is very experienced with animals - she's had a dog, cat, bearded dragon, and a spider over the years, and she currently works at a Petco - so I felt much more confident in my own capabilities to care for another living creature when she reassured me that hamsters are a pretty easy to take care of, and are a good first pet! She's taking care of it until I move in in the fall, then it'll be our joint responsibility. I'm so excited!

### **Bibliography**

“Documenting Illinois' Path to Recovery from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) PANDEMIC, 2020-2021.” *Ballotpedia*,  
ballotpedia.org/Documenting\_Illinois%27\_path\_to\_recovery\_from\_the\_coronavirus\_(CO  
VID-19)\_pandemic,\_2020-2021.

Reis Thebault, Tim Meko. “A Year of The PANDEMIC: Sorrow, Stamina, Defiance, Despair.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 11 Mar. 2021,  
www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2021/coronavirus-timeline/.

Robinson, Jon Campbell and David. “NY Expands COVID Vaccine Eligibility to Those 30+ on Tuesday; 16+ next Week.” *Democrat and Chronicle*, New York State Team, 30 Mar. 2021,  
www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2021/03/29/ny-covid-vaccine-eligibility-expands-to-16/7048588002/.

“A Timeline of Covid-19 VACCINE Developments in 2021.” *AJMC*,  
www.ajmc.com/view/a-timeline-of-covid-19-vaccine-developments-in-2021.

“Trump's 'Chinese VIRUS' Tweet Linked to Rise of ANTI-ASIAN Hashtags on Twitter.” *Trump's 'Chinese Virus' Tweet Linked to Rise of Anti-Asian Hashtags on Twitter | UC San Francisco*, 29 July 2021,

[www.ucsf.edu/news/2021/03/420081/trumps-chinese-virus-tweet-linked-rise-anti-asian-hashtags-twitter](http://www.ucsf.edu/news/2021/03/420081/trumps-chinese-virus-tweet-linked-rise-anti-asian-hashtags-twitter).