





1 Elaine Greiner: All right, so I'll start out with the title. Capturing quarantine: student life during  
2 Covid-19, 2020. Can you say your name for me?  
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4 Nikolas LaMaack: My name is Nicholas LaMaack.  
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6 Elaine Greiner: And I'm Elaine Greiner. Today is April 30, 2020. And where are you residing  
7 currently?  
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9 Nikolas LaMaack: I'm in Chicago, Illinois.  
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11 Elaine Greiner: I'm in Des Moines, Iowa. Yeah. (Nik cheers) What is your year of birth?  
12  
13 Nikolas LaMaack: My birth year is 1999.  
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15 Elaine Greiner: And can you tell me what year in school you are?  
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17 Nikolas LaMaack: I am a junior. I think a junior. At Columbia.  
18  
19 Elaine Greiner: And your major.  
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21 Nikolas LaMaack: I'm a BFA dance major.  
22  
23 Elaine Greiner: Wonderful, and what school?  
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25 Nikolas LaMaack: At Columbia College Chicago.  
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27 Elaine Greiner: Awesome. Now, can you tell me your place of birth?  
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29 Nikolas LaMaack: I was born in either Davenport, Iowa or Rock Island, Illinois, but the cities  
30 border each other. It could be either or, I really don't know.  
31  
32 Elaine Greiner: And where were you raised?  
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34     Nikolas LaMaack: I was raised in Davenport, Iowa.

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36     Elaine Greiner: Can you state your mother's year of birth, year of birth and place of birth.

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38     Nikolas LaMaack: My mom was born in 1974 I think and Rock Island.

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40     Elaine Greiner: And your father's year of birth and place of birth?

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42     Nikolas LaMaack: My dad was born in 1974. He was born in Davenport, Iowa.

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44     Elaine Greiner: Um, so we'll start with the opener. What's your earliest memory?

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46     Nikolas LaMaack: My earliest memory, is probably, I think [pause], so I have a fake memory  
47     that would technically be my earliest memory. And that fake memory is me seeing my brother  
48     through my mom's belly button when she was pregnant with me. It's real in my brain that it  
49     happened, but clearly that couldn't happen, because memories are black. But I think my first real  
50     memory would probably be like me skinning my elbow. The first time I learned how to ride a  
51     bike. I think I was probably four or five, I'm assuming.

52  
53     Elaine Greiner: Okay, would, would you say that memory sticks out for a certain reason or--

54  
55     Nikolas LaMaack: Like pain makes big memories. You know, pain makes something really  
56     important. If you were to tell me remember the happiest moments of my life versus how I got  
57     scars on my body. I'd probably be more inclined to be like, this is the exact time, age, how it  
58     happened. But if you're like, how are you happy? What are your happiest moments? I would be  
59     like, oh, I guess I loved ice cream, you know.

60  
61     Elaine Greiner: Right. Going into high school. Can you describe your high school experience?

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63     Nikolas LaMaack: Yeah, so in high school, I was like, well, my brother's four years older than  
64     me. And he was a horrible student. And I went into high school and I was like, dang, all these  
65     people are going to hate me because my brother was the worst. And then I kind of felt like I had  
66     to make a name for myself. I literally just did everything I could. Like, as soon as I could. And so  
67     by my senior year, I was president of environmental club, president of drama club, president of  
68     my class and I was a state officer for a theater organization, so I traveled around the country, a  
69     little bit to represent Iowa theatre, which was awesome. I was just heavily influenced by theater  
70     and show choir. That's where I found my first outlet of dance. Yeah, I was just crazy involved

71 and was trying to get the best grades possible because I didn't want to be anything like my  
72 brother (laughs).

73

74 Elaine Greiner: Yeah. So it sounds like your brother was a big impact on your life.

75

76 Nikolas LaMaack: Oh, yeah. He was a-- He was a teenager. I was like, let me not do that.

77

78 Elaine Greiner: Right, yeah. What most-- Why did you decide to-- Sorry-- What were your  
79 expectations when you graduated from high school?

80

81 Nikolas LaMaack: Right. Well, I feel like I held different expectations than other people did for  
82 me. I feel like my expectations for myself is that I had to be successful, in any sense of the word.  
83 And I feel like that kind of throws expectations too high. But basic ones are like, I must go to  
84 college because my brother did not. But also it was like, I have to be stable because, obviously  
85 my family has three more little ones running around now that they can't support. So I have to be  
86 able to be an artist and support myself at the same time. Which, I mean, I pulled that expectation  
87 for myself too. I don't want to have to rely on these factors. I want to be able to rely on myself,  
88 from my own stability, like, get a job, pay for your own college, like all of these things are just  
89 expectations of what my form of success is and sometimes that success is too high, you know.

90

91 Elaine Greiner: Yes. Why did you decide to attend Columbia College Chicago?

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93 Nikolas LaMaack: When I applied for colleges, I applied to three colleges. I applied to  
94 Columbia, I applied to Portland State University, I applied to the University of Toronto. I got  
95 into all three of them. The only reason why I wanted to go to Toronto was because Canada is  
96 awesome but also Trump had just become president, and I wanted to (snaps) scadat out of the  
97 country as quickly as I could. But I turned down Portland because it's so much further away than  
98 Chicago is and if I would have gone to Portland, I would have been a teacher, and not a dancer.  
99 And I kind of got the best of both worlds coming to Columbia, because now, like I teach dance.  
100 So I get to both do my craft and teach my craft. And also--

101

102 Elaine Greiner: Do you think--

103

104 Nikolas LaMaack: Our dance department at Columbia is like one of the best in the country.  
105 We're the only ones-- one of the only ones that has West African and hip hop built into our  
106 program. And so when I went to Paris to-- for an intensive, people from different countries were

107 like, I love Chicago, like you guys are amazing and people from Sweden knew about Columbia's  
108 program. Which was really amazing and impactful to be there in that experience.

109

110 Elaine Greiner: Do you think that you would want to stay in Chicago, or would you like to go  
111 elsewhere?

112

113 Nikolas LaMaack: I think I'm going to stay here for the foreseeable future. I could be  
114 comfortable going to other places because as horrible as it is to say, being a male mentor gives  
115 you a lot of opportunities because it's less saturated. So everybody's always looking for a male  
116 teacher for another male member of their ensemble, and so I have that stability, but also because  
117 of Corona, art is dying and Hubbard Street Lou Conte just shut down. And that's like the biggest  
118 dance studio in Chicago, you know, and they like closed down forever like, Lou Conte is no  
119 longer a studio, which is like insane and so my job stability has kind of gone down like even I  
120 teach full time and I was teaching on zoom for the last like, month and a half, two months. And  
121 now, our studio shut down for the next month because they don't have the money to pay me,  
122 we're a new studio. I feel like before Covid happened I was really stable and being like, I could  
123 stay here. I could go there. I can do whatever I want. And now I'm like, well, I'm going to stay in  
124 Chicago, where I know I have a job and I can be stable.

125

126 Elaine Greiner: Great. All right. So when did you first become aware of the Coronavirus?

127

128 Nikolas LaMaack: I think I became aware but didn't take it seriously like probably— and what is  
129 it, January, February, March, early March. Because I had heard about it in February, but you  
130 know when you hear something and just kind of like blow it off and you don't look into it or  
131 understand it really what it is. I feel like it started growing through February and once March hit,  
132 I was like, oh, maybe I should learn about this so at least I'm not in the dark. I feel like once, I  
133 mean obviously mid March hit, it was all everybody who is in the US knew about it. I honestly  
134 feel like I learned about it kind of late, which is funny.

135

136 Elaine Greiner: But so did you initially take it seriously or realize like the threat it possessed?

137

138 Nikolas LaMaack: I feel like I didn't just because, which is my own ignorance, like living a super  
139 busy lifestyle. I don't have time to keep up with the news and to keep up with all the happenings  
140 like— I go to school. I teach dance. I have a dog to take care of, I have like all these other  
141 responsibilities. So I just kind of like let the outside world happen and then let people tell me the  
142 information if it's important until it started happening. And then once mid-March hit, I was like I  
143 should know about this. And then once we were in lockdown, I kind of reverted back to the  
144 ignorance is bliss. Just because everybody that I live with is mega panic about it all the time. So  
145 feeling their anxiety, I was like, I don't want that. I'll get my information that I need from them,

146 but as long as I know we're closed down and I can take care of myself. I'm going to sit here and  
147 be like, well, I'm inside for the next six months, and that's okay. Just because I don't want to  
148 stress myself out too much over something I can't control.

149

150 Elaine Greiner: Right. So where were you when you learned that Columbia College was going to  
151 close?

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153 Nikolas LaMaack: I was actually— it's really funny. I just came from that class to here, and we  
154 were, I was in a class called arts and healthcare, which is already funny because it's an art class  
155 about health and we're currently making a project that we have to do eight interviews about  
156 peoples' images of health and then we have to create a work on it. So we were in that class and  
157 we were talking about how it is getting bigger. My boyfriend, he goes to DePaul and their  
158 college had just shut down the night before. So I came to class and I was like, listen, y'all like,  
159 it's going to happen soon, blah-blah-blah. And we're all talking about it. One of my roommates is  
160 a senior and earlier that day we were on the stage at the dance center and she looked at me and  
161 she was like, "this is my last time dancing on the stage." And we were like, oh my god it's not,  
162 it's not, like it's fine. We're going to stay open. And then I got to that class and we were, when we  
163 were in that class, we got the email that said we were going to close down. And so I immediately  
164 texted them. And I was like, I'm so sorry that your senior year is ruined. And I was just panicked  
165 because I was supposed to perform at a show like— We're supposed to do all these things. The  
166 project that we were working on was a performance-based project. And now we had to move to  
167 film. It was just like being a performing major trying to figure out how all these classes are going  
168 to work now, and we were in a class that was majorly affected by it. So she literally looked at us  
169 and she was like I have to decide by tomorrow night is what our department head chose. Our  
170 teacher was like, I have to choose by tomorrow night that this class can run online or if it can't.  
171 And if it wouldn't be able to, like, we wouldn't get the credit, which means the seniors in that  
172 class wouldn't be able to graduate. It's just hard being performing arts and being in classes that  
173 you need to graduate.

174

175 Elaine Greiner: And she decided to keep it online?

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177 Nikolas LaMaack: Thank God We're online. [unintelligible] technology where like, the  
178 performance is going to be a dance film now, just so everybody can do it. We're doing different  
179 things, like I just did the class that it was is a-- class that's practicum, so we're supposed to go to  
180 Rush Hospitals and do classes with old people. With Rush Generations is what it's called. And so  
181 instead of going there and teaching old people dance, now I just literally gave an hour-long  
182 presentation that I had to figure out how to make it fit on zoom, basically. Which was really  
183 interesting, and I think it's changing my mind as an artist to what limitations are, but it also just  
184 has its implications.

185

186 Elaine Greiner: Can you describe your current living situation?

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188 Nikolas LaMaack: Yeah, so I, in my apartment in Uptown, I have— so, normally I would have  
189 me and two other roommates. Right now, I have me, my boyfriend is living with us, my other  
190 roommate that's normally here, her boyfriend has to live with us because he got kicked out of  
191 Emory because of Corona, so he had to move from Emory college, he had nowhere to go. So he  
192 moved into our place and then one of my roommates went home because she was like, she's also  
193 from Iowa. Go Iowa! She was like, it's going to be safer in Iowa than it is in Chicago, so she  
194 went home, which thank God, because one of my other friends, she had to move in with us  
195 because the only place she had to go was home to her 84 year old grandma. She couldn't go  
196 home because she didn't want to literally kill her grandma from the virus. So she moved in with  
197 us. And I also have my dog. Our apartment is packed right now, but it's been fun.

198  
199 Elaine Greiner: Did your parents have any involvement in your decision about staying or—

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201 Nikolas LaMaack: I think my parents wanted me to come home. Just because Iowa is safer and  
202 my aunt is actually the one, the doctor heading the corona containment in the QC [Quad Cities].  
203 Our family's, very tied to it and it has a lot of knowledge to it and where we are from in Iowa. I  
204 chose to say here a because: A, I need to have the space to dance, that I don't have at home. B,  
205 because I'm still taking classes and I'm still teaching dance. C, because like I have, I have a dog,  
206 and I also have like a lizard that I have to take care of. So it's just hard to like transport, all those  
207 things. I didn't want to come into a space that wasn't mine anymore and be like, here's my entire  
208 life and place it on them. I just kind of want to be respectful and also I didn't want to pay for an  
209 apartment I'm not staying in— so I'm excited to stay here and they wanted me to come home. I'd  
210 gone home once to just be like, I'm alive, but other than that, I've been here.

211  
212 Elaine Greiner: How has your current living situation with the, more people there. How has that  
213 impacted your learning and education?

214  
215 Nikolas LaMaack: It's actually really interesting right now because me and my boyfriend share a  
216 room, obviously, and so, he was like, oh, you have an interview. I'll have to do my class in the  
217 dining room. And so there's, I know there's one point every day, I think it's on Tuesdays, that my  
218 boyfriend is in my room doing a class. My roommate is in her room doing a class. Her boyfriend  
219 is in the dining room doing a class. Another roommate is in their room, and then I'm teaching  
220 dance in the living room. It's just a lot of we're all using the Wi-Fi. We upgraded our Wi-Fi and  
221 everything else to make things work. So there are times in our schedules that we're all busy and  
222 there are other times that like we're all free, which is really interesting as well because we still—  
223 because we've been stuck with each other for so long now. We all kind of keep to ourselves for  
224 most of the day and then hang out at night if we want to, which is interesting but has its own  
225 thing itself because you feel a sense of loneliness. You want to be able to, you know, feed the

226 need to socialize but socializing with the same four people for that long, you're like, well, what  
227 do we talk about. [Laughing] It's funny.

228

229 Elaine Greiner: What's a normal day in the life of quarantine for you?

230

231 Nikolas LaMaack: Well, I normally wake up around ten. I lay in bed and pet my dog for a long  
232 time, but I get up and make breakfast and do any class that I have. And then I teach any class that  
233 I have. And then normally at night we try to hang out or we just watch a movie. We try to go on  
234 walks. I mean, obviously I have a dog. Which, the lakefront in Chicago closing down played a  
235 huge like, challenge in how experiencing Chicago with a dog is because my puppy is nine  
236 months old, so he has crazy energy all the time. And I'm trying to find ways to outlet that, where  
237 before, we would go on a walk on the lake for two hours, and now it's like, well, we can walk  
238 around our block (laughing) and pray like that you actually are getting some type of stimulation.  
239 Just stuff like that. And also we've been cooking a lot for each other, which is nice, in just like,  
240 doing things that will help boost morale, because it's weird to think about morale in that sense.  
241 But you really have to when you're stuck in a room for so long with about four people, you  
242 know?

243

244

245 Elaine Greiner: Yeah, definitely. When you do have your classes, how are you and your  
246 professors communicating?

247

248 Nikolas LaMaack: I feel like a lot of the time our professors are either: A, communicate via  
249 email and then— which also, I have my own thoughts about online work itself. Email is a lot of  
250 LAS [Liberal Arts and Sciences] classes. They're like, hey, this is all these things, but like my  
251 dance professors genuinely miss us, so we always stay on zoom a little bit longer than when our  
252 class is, just to have that social interaction with them. It's hard communication wise, especially  
253 because so many people aren't doing well in classes right now. So being able to be like, I'm  
254 struggling and here's why, it's because we're in a global pandemic and I don't have time to do  
255 your 85 assignments you just sent out. Yes, I have the time. But can I mentally, physically,  
256 emotionally handle the stress you're putting on me. I feel like with a lot of professors, they think  
257 that because we have the time, we're available to do the time. And I've had to email many  
258 professors and be like, listen, homie. I'm struggling, like, I'm not going to turn this, this and this  
259 in. I pass/failed your class, how can I succeed because I don't do well online. I don't do well with  
260 this, this and that. Which is just challenging because we're no longer like— I can't come to them  
261 in person and be like, here are my struggles and my issues. I have to send an email with eighty  
262 thousand apologies and try to have them understand my experience, when they're experiencing  
263 the same thing, just in a different form.



264  
265 Elaine Greiner: It sounds like, and I know there's a lot of challenges that have arisen from remote  
266 learning, what class has been successful in this transition and why?

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268 Nikolas LaMaack: I feel like the only class that's been successful in this transition is my dance  
269 class, which is surprising because we were all like, how are we going to learn to dance on my  
270 own but I'm in an advanced contemporary with Page Cunningham, who is like a chef's kissed  
271 genius artist. She danced in Cunningham for 15 years in New York. She's amazing and her  
272 pedagogy is so sound that she really took the transition with headway, and was like, here's how  
273 each week we're studying this choreographer, you're going to do a video diary that's going to be  
274 for your own exploration and artistic endeavors. We're going to be taking class for a shortened  
275 amount of time because I know it's hard to move in your space. I feel like the successful classes  
276 come from the professors that are like this shit is hard and to be successful you need these things.  
277 And here are these things. I feel like the professors that are failing with it are the professors that  
278 aren't giving the accommodations that are like, I don't care you need all these things turned in by  
279 this time, here is this crap ton of work, you know, but, shout-out to page because, Paige, really,  
280 she's a genius. I'm so lucky to be involved with her education and partnership and all those  
281 things.

282  
283 Elaine Greiner: How's the transition, kind of, how has that affected your motivation and  
284 productivity.

285  
286 Nikolas LaMaack: Oh god, it's horrible. It's horrible. And I feel like my motivation is out of the  
287 window. I have no motivation to do anything. Which is hard in and of itself. And my  
288 productivity comes from me paying thousands of dollars for an education that: A, we aren't  
289 really getting right now because we're online and B, I straight up just need to graduate with the  
290 college degree. I have to have this degree and I'm paying the money, so I have to do the work.  
291 But at the same time, I'm like, I have no motivation to do anything because we're stuck in one  
292 place. The world is in chaos. Why does dance matter right now? Why does reading matter right  
293 now? Why does an interview matter right now? Like, why do all these things matter in a place  
294 that literally thousands upon thousands of people are dying, you know? It's hard for me to find  
295 value of scaling it, being like, I need to get this work done because of this, this, and that, versus  
296 there are thousands of people dying. It's hard for my brain to care when there's so many other  
297 things to care about

298  
299 Elaine Greiner: Yeah, it's definitely affected a lot of people's motivation for sure. Would you say  
300 that you agree with the pass/fail decision that Columbia made, and why?

301  
302 Nikolas LaMaack: I one hundred percent agree with it. I actually, which is like a hot topic, I'm  
303 part of the team that is either: A, we should get all A's or B, we should get refunded. I think that



304 even with pass/fail, we should get refunded on our money just because I'm paying for studio  
305 space, I'm paying for stage space, I'm paying for directors and teachers and all these things that  
306 I'm no longer getting. I feel like pass/fail has that accommodation of being like, if you turn in the  
307 work, then you're fine, but I feel like there at Columbia should have placed the option that if, pre-  
308 Corona, if you could just be graded on that stuff. If there was like a halt in the rest of the  
309 education, if that part was wiped and just the pre-stuff could be graded. Because I know now,  
310 like when I was in class I was doing my work, I was on top of all this stuff. I was active. I was  
311 present. And now, I'm like, so detached from school because I'm on the laptop learning dance.  
312 You know, like, I'm paying thousands upon thousands of dollars for a video. Which is just  
313 problematic in and of itself. And I also, I mean if we have to do it this way, I think that the every  
314 body gets an A route would have been so much better than pass/fail because we all have extreme  
315 different living situations. I know I'm taking it easier than my roommate who was displaced.  
316 Everybody has such extreme conditions that, how can you hold somebody to a normal  
317 expectation of what the classroom work would be when the world has never experienced, in our  
318 lifetimes, hasn't experienced this, so it's just trying to find that balance of pass/fail is okay, but  
319 where's my money? And where's my A?

320

321 Elaine Greiner: Right. How do you think Colombia should have handled the dorm move-out  
322 situation?

323

324 Nikolas LaMaack: I think it affected me less because I already had my apartment. But just like  
325 seeing everybody that it, I mean, they gave no warning. They gave— it was a Wednesday and  
326 they were like, you have to be out by Sunday, and so people who had to fly, I know I don't  
327 remember who it was. I think it might have been somebody in the oral history class, but they  
328 were like, I had to fly home. We got the thing that we had to be out of our dorms. They have to  
329 drive back, grab all their stuff and come back. Nobody has notice for that, people have work.  
330 People have all these things; people are paying for those dorms. Right now, people who are  
331 paying for the dorms aren't getting refunded so they're still paying for a space they can't be in,  
332 which just has its own issues and it makes me view the college, as you know, a business, because  
333 I mean we are privately owned and all of, like, we're keeping your money feels like they don't  
334 care, you know, and at least if they don't care. They can give us the A, like if they don't care,  
335 then let me pass, which is my issue. And the roommate who couldn't go home to their grandma,  
336 she was an RA. She got the notification that she had to move out everybody on her floor within  
337 four days and then she had to move out herself by Sunday. It's chaos with the college's decision.  
338 I think I understand moving out of the dorm, but I think they should have at least given a two-  
339 week period of like, you need to be out by two weeks from now, not in four days from now,  
340 because it just feels selfish.

341

342 Elaine Greiner: Right, it definitely does. So financially, can you talk about what your job was  
343 before the pandemic happened and what you did?



344  
345 Nikolas LaMaack: Yeah, I teach dance, which is amazing. I teach from ages four to seventeen  
346 and I teach Euro techniques which are like contemporary, modern, ballet, jazz, and I teach hip  
347 hop. I would drive. I teach in Channahon, Illinois at Dance Beat. Shout out Dance Beat, I love  
348 them. And it's an amazing studio, great atmosphere. I love my kids. And it's like an hour-ish out  
349 of the city. I would drive to work four times a week. Since that's changed to being online, a lot of  
350 it has needed to have adaptations and it's hard to teach four year old's tap via a webcam, you  
351 know, and have their interest, just because, so much of dance is being present and the  
352 atmosphere and spatial awareness and all of these energetic changes—Where teaching it online,  
353 like, I'm so detached from you right now. Like, all I see is your face. I don't see your legs  
354 moving. I don't see all these things. Finding pedagogical ways to infiltrate, like, zone them into  
355 this is our studio space is really hard. I feel like also as a dance educator, which I've  
356 communicated this to a lot of my other teacher friends, is that us taking class online is fine  
357 because we have an educated body. But teaching a five year old to do a pli  , which is literally  
358 just bending their knees, can quite literally break them in the future, because if their knees aren't  
359 going over their toes and they're turned out too much, and it's going like off of their rails, then  
360 that can cause like severe knee issues and stuff like that. When you're trying to train an eight year  
361 old how to do ballet, you need to be in person, so I can make sure they're being safe, because if  
362 they're not being safe, it can damage their hips, their knees, their ankles. Where like, if you're  
363 telling me to do a pli  , I know all of those things. I've had a hard time with my own ethics of  
364 teaching dance online and what I will teach them, what I won't teach. Because I don't want to  
365 injure a young dancer or young artist and place them in bad positions the rest of their life. Like, I  
366 refuse to do it. Which thank god my dance teacher or the studio owner was like, I understand,  
367 like, it makes sense why this is unsafe. But a lot of people aren't. And so it just makes my heart  
368 ache for those that aren't. Teaching dance at Dance Beat has been great until Corona hit and now  
369 it's just chaotic because I want to make sure my dancers are safe and also getting what they're  
370 paying for.

371  
372 Elaine Greiner: Right. Has the shutdown of everything affected you financially greatly?

373  
374 Nikolas LaMaack: I feel like it did just because we're a first year studio. Um, so we're already  
375 just making ends meet. And then right when Corona happened, I had to take, we took, we  
376 extended our spring break, is what happened, and we took three weeks off. There's three weeks  
377 without me making any money to pay for my apartment and then we got back on, but now there  
378 are classes that I can't teach. So I'm not getting paid for those. There are other classes that are  
379 more advanced but parents aren't paying because they're like, I'm not going to pay for an online  
380 dance education, so I've just taken a lot of hits with that— just like either not being able to teach a  
381 class or parents not paying because they don't want their kid to be taking an online dance class,  
382 you know. Which has affected me to the point that now I drive for Postmates, where before I was  
383 completely stable and now I'm like, well, I applied for [unintelligible] jobs and nowhere hired me  
384 and now I have to drive around for Postmates. And this upcoming month— I finished teaching



385 this week actually. The next month, all of May, I'll be on unemployment. Because our studio  
386 financially, we're new, like Corona could ruin us. So we're closed down. And I'm going to be  
387 getting unemployment, which I should be able to live off of. But it's stressful trying to do art and  
388 make it work in a time that art is the most dead that it's ever been.

389  
390 Elaine Greiner: How confident do you feel in continuing to complete your degree at Columbia in  
391 any aspect financially or like learning wise?

392  
393 Nikolas LaMaack: I feel like— being a BFA means that I solitarily take dance classes, like, I do  
394 my LAS [liberal arts and science] classes, but I take dance classes. I don't have a minor, I don't  
395 take electives. So that means that my entire dance education is via a screen now. I know— I can  
396 never say his name, Pritzker, Illinois's governor, he just said students should be prepping for  
397 online for fall in an interview, like a day or two ago. That's like really crushing information  
398 because I'm going to a performing arts college. We have business programs, but I'm going to a  
399 performing arts college, you know. Why am I going to pay the tuition that I'm paying for dancing  
400 on a screen. Honestly, like, my roommates are all acting or musical theater or dance majors as  
401 well and they're in the same place— we don't know if we're going to continue for the fall, the  
402 upcoming fall semester, if we're online. There's no point in us wasting that money, wasting our  
403 time, wasting our education, for a screen. We've already talked about how do you defer, because  
404 if we're online, we're deferring, which I feel like is a lot of the performing arts part of Columbia.  
405 Unless Columbia does make extreme accommodations about tuition, about these things that, I'm  
406 not going to pay twenty thousand dollars for tuition for a year when half of it's online, you  
407 know? I feel like that's been kind of in that realm of, like, will I continue my education and am I  
408 secure in my education? And that's like no, straight up, like, I'm not going to come back to  
409 Colombia if we're online and we have to pay as much money as we're paying, especially with  
410 how they've handled this semester alone.

411  
412 Elaine Greiner: Agreed. What kind of activities or experiences are you missing most being in  
413 quarantine?

414  
415 Nikolas LaMaack: A, I miss walking my dog by the lake, number one. Number two is there's a  
416 sensation that you get in your body because being a dancer, like, you're just trained for sensation,  
417 it's literally all dance is, is training your body for sensation. Not being able to be in the space  
418 with my fellow dancers is so hard. That presentation I just did before I joined this zoom call, we  
419 were doing an improvisation literally just on our screen. Where normally an improvisation, when  
420 you're in a room with somebody, it's so much better because you get to physically connect  
421 energetically with somebody else's movement and like, how the sensation feels in your body and  
422 where that can lead into the next. Now I'm watching a screen and I don't know how somebody's  
423 doing the body roll feels [does body roll], because I'm watching them do it on screen, so it's just



424 been a hard with the fact that, like, dance is community and dance is embodied and dance is no  
425 longer embodied, it's captured via webcam, you know?

426  
427 Elaine Greiner: Yes, that's got to be really hard. How do you deal with feelings of depression.  
428 What are some coping skills you use to deal with the anxiety from the virus?

429  
430 Nikolas LaMaack: Okay, so this is—

431  
432 Elaine Greiner: Really very forward. Sorry.

433  
434 Nikolas LaMaack: It's really funny, because I mean, I have bipolar disorder which I'm open  
435 about and I recently found a new therapist who is working, doing extremely well right before  
436 Corona happened because I was hitting a low. And then Corona happened and the office shut  
437 down, because of me being trained the way I am, I'm completely detached from this kind of  
438 interaction. My therapist was like, we can do online videos and I said that's not going to work for  
439 me, like, straight up, that's not going to work. Which has been hard mentally because it's hard for  
440 me to find motivation. It's hard for me to do all these things. And I feel like that comes from  
441 depression and also being confined to a space allows your mania and your manic depression to  
442 fluctuate so quickly, because there's no longer outside atmosphere. Where before, if I was like  
443 super manic, I would go on a walk or do something to satisfy my need to do whatever but two  
444 nights ago I was up at 3:30am making cookies, because I couldn't, like, I didn't have anything to  
445 satisfy what I needed. And with the depression, like, before I would go and I would go to a  
446 studio and dance. I would go hang out with friends, I would do these things. Where now I'm like,  
447 well, let me lay in my bed until 3pm because there's nowhere else for me to go, which is like,  
448 horrible to think about it because you're aware of those things, but also you're like, I don't have  
449 control over this.

450  
451 Elaine Greiner: Have you tried doing anything like any new activities or hobbies, maybe, during  
452 quarantine?

453  
454 Nikolas LaMaack: My roommates, one of the things that we do is we try to do something  
455 creative daily, but does it happen daily, no. We've done collaging. We've read— wrote poetry  
456 together, we've painted, we try to do stuff to satisfy our creative needs. But sometimes it just  
457 feels artificial being stuck in a situation and being like, I'm going to now paint this picture  
458 because that will help me. And it's like, no, it's not going to change anything about the situation  
459 you're in. It's hard to get out of that more negative mindset into something positive. But it's good  
460 when you have people around who are all like, we're in the boat, we're in the same boat with  
461 you. So, like, let's ride the waves together and not push against the current.



462

463 Elaine Greiner: Would you say that you normally talk to the people you're living with when there  
464 are problems or just to express yourself?

465

466 Nikolas LaMaack: Yeah, I mean, I feel like my boyfriend probably gets the brunt of it. Just like,  
467 I mean, even this morning, I skipped my first class because I couldn't get out of bed and the only  
468 reason why I got out of bed was because I had to do a presentation that was worth a lot of my  
469 grade, and then I had this interview. If I wouldn't have had those things today, I would have  
470 stayed in my bed, the entire day. But I feel like even just having, which I'm lucky to have him  
471 with me, being like, I feel bad right now. And he's like, how, what can I do to help. Like, what  
472 can I, how can I help this? And sometimes there's no need to actually do anything, sometimes  
473 you just need somebody to be there with you. Which I think is the hardest thing of being in  
474 quarantine is sometimes because you are so stuck together that you don't need to express  
475 verbally, you just want to express physically. And that physically can be sitting in the same room  
476 with a group of people just because you need that energetic entertainment of being on your  
477 phone with five other people, you don't have to be talking. Sometimes you just need bodies.

478

479 Elaine Greiner: So how do the infection prevention restrictions and recommendations in  
480 Chicago, or I guess— How has the stay at home order and the CDC guidelines affected you in  
481 Chicago? Has it changed at all?

482

483 Nikolas LaMaack: I feel like, I mean, part two of this is that like low key, I don't do that much  
484 outside of school work and my stuff that I already have. It hasn't really changed my life that  
485 much. The lake shutting down was the biggest thing in Chicago, just because that was like, I live  
486 a block away from it in Uptown, so it's like heartbreaking, not to have that fresh piece of nature,  
487 which also being from Iowa is around you so often. So it was such a strong part of my life  
488 before, and then coming to Chicago, it was taken away a little bit. And then I found like another  
489 piece of that paradise here and now that's taken away too, in a time that I needed it the most. Just  
490 like, stay at home in general, it's hard to think about general activities like going grocery  
491 shopping. When you go grocery shopping, you have anxiety about it now, you know? You're  
492 like, well, when I get home I need to wash these canisters and whatever it is, like, nothing is safe.  
493 Which— once you, we, here accept it, like, if it happens, it's going to happen. You know, like, do  
494 we have some control over it? Yes. Do we have all the control? No. Like, if one person in this  
495 house gets sick, we're all going to get sick. And that's the fact, so I feel like coming to terms with  
496 the stay at home and coming to terms with why it was put in place. But also it's hard to recognize  
497 that all when you're like, well, if it happens, it's going to happen anyway, you know?

498

499 Elaine Greiner: What would you have changed, or what would you not have changed about how  
500 Chicago reacted to the Coronavirus?



501  
502 Nikolas LaMaack: Well, I think I would have changed how they've been handling the homeless  
503 population of coronavirus. Just because Uptown, we're right next to Lakeshore, and under all of  
504 the overpasses there's like little villages. So the one that me and my dog walk by the most, the  
505 only thing they made accessible for them, is now there's a little hand sanitization stand next to  
506 them. That's it. And I'm like, how are you not– there should be people supplying more food,  
507 supplying face masks, gloves. We– you and I can go get a face mask or make a face mask or buy  
508 gloves or by hand sanitizer, do all these things. I feel like the way Chicago has kind of not helped  
509 the impoverished communities more than what they could, has hurt a lot, because truthfully,  
510 they're the most at risk. They're stuck in public, because that's where they have to exist. But I  
511 think that overall, yes, they'll be closing probably was a smart idea, keeping stay-at-home order  
512 longer is a good idea, like Lori has been talking about, even if Illinois opens up, Chicago might  
513 not. And I feel like those ideas are great because we have a huge population. It'd just be smarter  
514 for us to stay in, stay at home for longer until we have that fourteen day period in Chicago,  
515 specifically.

516  
517 Elaine Greiner: When you go to the store or leave the house, what are you doing-- what do you,  
518 what is it like, what is your experience.

519  
520 Nikolas LaMaack: I go to Aldi, because we love Aldi in this house, and honestly like, I don't  
521 have any immunosuppression, so I feel very comfortable, like, if I were to get it, I would most  
522 likely survive. I keep hand sanitizer in my car. So once we go in, we come out and we use hand  
523 sanitizer. But I don't think anybody in my apartment wears gloves or masks when we go to the  
524 store, just because we want to leave those resources for people who actually need them. And  
525 like, when we come home though from the grocery store, we like to wipe down all of our stuff  
526 with Clorox wipes before we put it away. And every time we go outside, no matter if we went in  
527 public, or not, if we just went on a walk with Elio, my dog's name is Elio, when we come back,  
528 we like to wash our hands. So it's just stuff that– we're not crazy concerned about it because  
529 we're all young and none of us have immunosuppression or issues that could really be attacked  
530 by the virus and we want to leave the resources open for those people that actually do need it,  
531 you know.

532  
533 Elaine Greiner: What are the media and new sources that you've been using?

534  
535 Nikolas LaMaack: I, which is horrible, but I get my information from Twitter. Just because, I  
536 mean, me playing the ignorant card in general, either I get it from Twitter when I see a tweet  
537 about it or my roommates tell me, they're like, oh, this is the newest update. But most of the  
538 time, just because the world is so social media heavy and especially right now, like, social media  
539 is booming, because we have nothing else to do. Finding reliable sources on the internet is like,  
540 my thing. So I like to go to Twitter and if I want to know about it, literally the top page, like the



541 top button, of Twitter, every time you log on right now is news about Corona, and it'll pull up  
542 like the latest things. So when I want to know more, or like, I know that Pritzker, whatever,  
543 however you say his name. I know that he spoke recently, like those are the times, I'll be like,  
544 okay, let me see how much longer we have to stay inside. Let me see how this will affect me  
545 getting back to work, or my school staying closed, so it's less about me needing information  
546 about the world. It's like me, like, how is this impacting the community that I'm in, and that's all I  
547 want to know about.

548  
549 Elaine Greiner: You have—All right, I'm going to move on to the reflection now. If that's all  
550 right. Do you have anything else you want to add about the narrative portion?

551  
552 Nikolas LaMaack: I'm good.

553  
554 Elaine Greiner: Okay. What should Columbia have done differently?

555  
556 Nikolas LaMaack: I mean, I think, I think, Columbia hasn't handle it the best. I think that Dr.  
557 Kim played a lot of cards that he shouldn't have played. Which is horrible because I know this is  
558 going into the archives, you know, so I know this is going to be forever. And I know that I'm  
559 talking down on the school that I'm paying money to go to. So that alone says something that  
560 obviously I'm at Columbia for a reason. And I love my department, like the dance department is  
561 absolutely amazing, but I'm completely like—I can't find one positive thing to say about our  
562 administration, which is hard to say. But right now, as a student, it feels like they don't care  
563 about us. I think I would change the way they're approaching the students of supplying more,  
564 giving more, feeling like we're paying for the school for a reason. Not are paying for the school  
565 and the students are a nuisance to what is happening. The words that we're saying shouldn't be  
566 going in one ear and out the other, they should be taken into consideration because the school's  
567 only open because we're here. I'm and I know there have been, like, there's an article that was the  
568 little conference that Dr. Kim had with a group of students and I'm close friends with Kiera, who  
569 is the student body president. I know that she's informing on some stuff, but it just feels like the  
570 capitalism jumped out in Columbia as soon as this happened, you know. Which is sad to say,  
571 because I love my department and if it was up to my department, things would be completely  
572 different than what they are. I think that goes to say for most departments, they have their own  
573 beliefs and the administration simply isn't acknowledging and isn't informing. There's no reason  
574 that my professors should have been informed when I wasn't informed, because that puts  
575 implications on them to know everything when they're like, I didn't know either, I didn't know  
576 we're going to close until you just got the email you told me we were closing. I just think those  
577 are all things that they could have done better, is actually caring, like actually giving the  
578 resources, giving the availability, giving the options even. If I were to be like, I mean pass/fail is  
579 optional. But if I were to be like, I don't think this is worth it, grade me off of what I presented  
580 already in my classes and give me a grade then, that should have been an option. Giving the



581 option of pass/fail is okay, like fine, getting the option of getting a refund is important and it just  
582 feels like we're simply numbers and money bags to the college. And as much as Dr. Kim, or  
583 whoever else wants to be like, we care about you, it feels so false and like we're not cared for as  
584 students. This experience specifically has made me regret coming to Columbia, a little bit. Not  
585 because of my department and it's simply because of the college. My department has handled  
586 this the best they could. And I love my teachers and professors because of that, but I've been  
587 extremely disappointed by the other figures at the college.

588

589 Elaine Greiner: If you had to say something to President Kim, what would you say?

590

591 Nikolas LaMaack: I would tell him to look at me and then I'd probably stick my hand out [sticks  
592 our hand] and say, like, where are my rights, like, I'm paying you money, where's my money,  
593 where's my grades, where's the compassion and the caring. You claim to be this passionate  
594 support person but when we see you on the street, you don't even smile, so how am I supposed to  
595 expect that you're going to carry our college in the right direction. And I would just ask him to  
596 care more, you know, like when you come here for orientation, for open house, all these things,  
597 he seems like such a for the students type of guy. And everything I've seen since then shows the  
598 complete opposite. So I would just be like, where— I would probably be like, where's the  
599 character, like who are you, because you have to choose one. Stop jumping. If you're going to be  
600 the bad guy, be the bad guy all the time because that's more true than you putting on the face  
601 that's not correct.

602

603 Elaine Greiner: How do you feel about the future?

604

605 Nikolas LaMaack: I think the world is going to change after this, truthfully. Like, I don't think  
606 anything will be done the same. And I don't think it should be done the same. Even just all of the  
607 facts coming out about how the environment is getting healthier, is saving itself, like humans  
608 have done so many horrible things that now that we're stuck and we can't do all those horrible  
609 things, nature's like replanting itself. So I hope that like in the future we recognize all the  
610 environmental things that we were doing wrong. Specifically for me, I hope in the future I can  
611 teach dance again. I hope that my art doesn't die. And for the college, I hope that they actually  
612 understand the students' viewpoint. And understand where we're coming from because even  
613 though I'm saying all this stuff about what they could do better, they're not going to do anything  
614 better. And I hope for the future, they actually listen to us and help us in the ways they can  
615 because they have so many options that they're just not exploring right now.

616

617 Elaine Greiner: What aspects of life did you take for granted before the virus?

618

619 Nikolas LaMaack: I think I took for granted freedom. You know before, the only thing that was



620 stopping me from doing something was me and now it's legal restrictions, you know? I think I  
621 took for granted just my freedom to be able to do what I wanted. Which is hard, you know, and  
622 also, like right now, like, I could go to, I could go back to Iowa, I could go on, whatever,  
623 whatever, whatever, but it's just not safe for me, or for other people. Like if I'm asymptomatic I  
624 don't want to infect somebody else, you know, so I feel like I just took for granted health and  
625 general well-being.

626

627 Elaine Greiner: What was the most significant change in your life due to the virus?

628

629 Nikolas LaMaack: My ability to dance. Changing how I have to teach is hard enough, in and of  
630 itself. Being a dance teacher, even though you're teaching for five hours a night, like, planning  
631 for those classes takes an equal amount of time. Um, and so, changing how my education is  
632 changed for dance, how I'm teaching dance, my own artistic endeavors. Like I was supposed to  
633 perform. I can't perform anymore. I'm currently working on a dance film. But like, I just don't  
634 have that drive to do it right now. I feel like dance has changed everything. And also, I feel like  
635 once this is over dance is going to change it again. You know, I'm going to be like, whoa, I love  
636 life again because I can wiggle around for an hour and a half, with some really awesome people.

637

638 Elaine Greiner: What will you most remember about this pandemic in 50 years?

639

640 Nikolas LaMaack: I feel like I'll remember probably, not any details, but being stuck in a space  
641 with my best friends. You know, like in 50 years I'll be able to look back and say, oh my gosh, I  
642 remember when I was stuck in quarantine with the people I cared most about and my family  
643 away from my family. Because, I mean, there are people who are— have roommates they don't  
644 like that they're stuck with now. So I just got really blessed that I'm living with my best friends. I  
645 think that this, it's making us grow even closer. I mean, not that we weren't close before because  
646 we know everything about each other. But now that we're stuck together, so much deeper things  
647 are coming out in our experiences which will probably make me be their friends for the next 50  
648 years, you know? I feel like that's a good thing and probably the thing to remember the most is  
649 having time dedicated to my friends now.

650

651 Elaine Greiner: It sounds like it's been like overall a pretty positive experience living with them.

652

653 Nikolas LaMaack: Yeah, I love it. Honestly, like besides for them eating my food randomly or  
654 stuff like that. I honestly— which is bad to say like, I can't say too many negative things about  
655 what my experience has been at my living situation or even living in Chicago right now. People  
656 text me and they're like— my mom said the funniest thing the other day, she texted me. And she  
657 was like, “do you know anybody who got Corona, dad was asking because you guys are in the



658 heart of it.” And I was like are we the heart of it, like, we're Chicago bro. I honestly– I might  
659 have people in my family back home that have gotten Corona, but I don't know anybody that's  
660 gotten Corona here. I'm like, are you guys okay because I'm doing fine, you know. I feel like  
661 that's just funny to think about that.

662  
663 Elaine Greiner: Would you like to add anything else.

664  
665 Nikolas LaMaack: I just, I think acknowledging that my experiences and other people's  
666 experiences and other people are having pleasant experiences with the college and with all these  
667 other things is important. Because I feel so often there's a biased view. And I just acknowledge it  
668 all the time. I'm like, just because I'm having this experience, doesn't mean everybody's having  
669 this experience and for some people it's way worse. I think taking each of the interviews that will  
670 happen with this process that's going on with the project is really important. Simply for the facts  
671 that through this we're getting honest feedback, you know. I– Oh yeah, that's it, though.

672  
673 Elaine Greiner: Perfect. Amazing. I think that's all I say, yeah.