

Reflections from a University of Portland Senior

By Heidi Parrett '20

I am writing this reflection from my new classroom for the remainder of my undergraduate career – my living room.

When I sighed to my mom on the phone just weeks before schools closed and said, “I just need a break,” this is most certainly *not* what I had in mind.

It felt like everything happened in the blink of an eye. Suddenly, the campus was no longer filled with the bustling lives of students, it was filled with an eerie silence. Friends and classmates that I had spent the last three and a half years seeing, laughing, and learning with had disappeared without time for goodbyes. My classmates and I missed out on experiencing so many “last times.” The last time sitting in class, the last time enjoying the Pilot House patio, the last time walking into the library.



So many celebrations we had been waiting for, not only all year, but since we began our college careers, have been whisked away: Prost with Profs, the Last Lecture, Founders Day, club events, Commencement... The list goes on and on. These special moments are curated to allow us to say goodbye to not only each other, honoring the importance we have had in each other’s lives, but also to The Bluff we have come to know as home over the last four years.

From the moment I stepped onto campus prior to my freshman year, The Bluff instantly felt like home and the community quickly became my family. Before UP, I had never experienced such a supportive, connected and loving community and now I am unable to honor the community that formed me with the proper goodbye I had always imagined. My sense of loss is only remedied by the sense of peace found in knowing that I will always be able to call The Bluff home, and knowing that I will soon become part of the UP alumni network who continues to be dedicated to a ceaseless sense of connection to one another and to The Bluff.

“I will always be able to call The Bluff home.”

Although we may not have been able to savor our last moments on the Franz steps or our last late night run to the Pilot House, we have also been presented with an opportunity to grow and learn in many new ways. Unprecedented ways. We are learning how to be patient with ourselves and with each other as we figure out our new normal. We are learning how to be truly present with those we are in close quarters with. And, while we aren’t running into our classmates, professors, or mentors on campus anymore, we are learning to be more intentional by reaching out to those we appreciate and miss.

Although this time of uncertainty has brought about an array of emotions (sadness, worry and shock), I have also been overwhelmed with the feelings of appreciation and gratitude. Grateful for my wonderful housemates who I have shared the same house with on Willamette for the past two years. Grateful that we now have time to laugh, cry, dance, cook, and paint together every day before we go our separate ways come May. Grateful for the many memories I have made, from cheering at basketball games to pep talks during office hours and everything in between. I have also become very appreciative of the technology that we are so privileged to have that allows us to remain connected and informed, and which has allowed me to continue to support my class of 1st graders whom I have been teaching all of my senior year.

Although this unprecedented time looks different for everyone, it is comforting to know that we are in this together—not only all of the UP community, but communities across the world. Our safety and healing rely upon our stewardship and collaboration as global citizens.

Many post-graduation plans have been thrown out the window as many organizations freeze hiring and global jobs and service becomes uncertain. This encourages us to give ourselves a break, roll with the punches and create a plan B, C, or maybe even D as our expectations become as fluid as the situation we are living through.

With so much uncertainty, I am confident in our resilience and our ability to lean on each other to get through this. Check in on a senior student. Make sure they know how proud of them you are, because we could all use words of encouragement.

*Written by Heidi Parrett '20
Published by the UP Office of Alumni & Parent Relations
April 2020*