

A Day in the Life at Corona College, Fall 2020
by Nancy Nessel, *Generation Z Specialist*
gettinggenz.com

8:55 am

Morning Routine: My alarm jolts me out of my lumpy twin bed in my **sterilized dorm single** in Hayden Hall on the north side of Corona College. I retrieve my iPhone from under the covers to see what day it is. *It's Wednesday.* Now I'm rushing because I can't miss my **scheduled bathroom time at 9am.** I stare at the perfectly made empty bed across my room and smile, thinking about my old roommate Lindsey who'd often stay out all night, **sleeping at her boyfriend's dorm... when that was allowed.** This semester we can't have roommates, as the 50% of us allowed to return are in singles and part of a "household." I'm trying to move off campus, but apartments are impossible to find because **everyone desperately wants to live off campus.**

I put on my "Wednesday" mask (I have one for each day of the week), sanitize my hands, put on my Ugg slippers, and line up for the 9 am bathroom shift. **Standing six feet apart,** I try to make eye contact with anyone who looks somewhat familiar through their masks. I **savor even the tiny human connections** we make on this line. It's one of the few times I can even bump elbows with my household mates.

9:20 am

Virtual Lectures: My first online lecture is at 9:20 am. I return to my room alone, back to bed with my laptop and log in for my first virtual lecture, "*Intro to Psychology*" with 200 other students **participating remotely from home or their dorms.** My professor lectures remotely because **she's recovering from COVID-19** and has two kids under the age of ten, with no childcare. [My friends who live overseas](#) are staying off campus in case Corona College goes fully online. They get the "asynchronous experience," which means they watch a recording on their own time. Most classes I join passively, keeping my video off so I can multitask -- like texting my **remote therapist about my skyrocketing anxiety level.** For breakfast I eat a banana, because going to the dining hall for takeout requires too many rules. As my second class begins at 10:40, I get dressed for the day in the Lululemon leisure outfit I got for my 19th birthday. (It's the "Patagonia" of pandemic collegiate fashion.)

12:30 pm

Lunch: I open the Grubhub app for the "contact-free experience" of eating a lunch that makes my stomach churn. It's takeout, because our **dining halls are temporarily closed for in-person dining to avoid contact.** My friends at smaller schools like Skidmore and William & Mary eat in their dining halls under strict rules, one perk of attending college in a smaller town. I order my usual: an individually wrapped and tightly sealed turkey sandwich with one packet of mayo, because it's **least likely to arrive soggy or contaminated.**

Study "Hall": The library is open but with limited capacity so I'd have to wait outside on a socially distanced line, as if I were at Trader Joe's. Instead I run back to my dorm room to eat lunch and study for a few hours. **Every time we enter the dorm, a bored nursing student at a fever checkpoint zaps me on the forehead.** Phew, I pass with a "98" so I wait for an **empty elevator to take me to my room on the 16th floor.** I scrub my hands, unmask and get back into bed with my laptop, iPhone, Air Pods and try to read some notes. My friend Jack, who's recovering from COVID-19, FaceTimes me from his bed in the campus' "quarantine unit." He came back over the summer for the football season that never happened and caught the virus.

I'm really not learning much because it's so hard to focus, listen or learn.

3:00 pm

Afternoon Workout: I try to take a walk around campus each day to enjoy the storybook campus landscape that attracted me here in the first place. I walk to the athletic fields to find two dozen defiant lax bros scrimmaging for fun, since **most team sports have been postponed**. The gym is open at minimum capacity, but my **scheduled gym time is at 6 am** and that's way too early for me. Instead I do yoga with three friends living in temporary dorm **singles at a nearby Marriott** used to spread students around town. We lay our mats six feet apart on the crunchy artificial turf in the middle of the empty stadium. Wearing masks and Corona College sweatshirts, we're led remotely by an instructor from LA via Zoom. Ugh, my phone buzzes. It's **Amy, the Contact Tracer calling again trying to track me down**. She wants to know if I was at the Kappa Alpha frat party last week and says at least fifty cases came from there. Luckily, I missed it, "too busy" texting from my bed. Now I wonder who I know among that unlucky fifty and beyond – did I bump elbows with an asymptomatic one in the bathroom line this morning?

Once again, coronavirus panic looms over my day.

6:30 pm

Dinner: I'm longing for the gooey hot meatball pizza from the dining hall. Instead I grab a slice at the takeout window and picnic alone on the bustling quad, one of the few places we can congregate. About thirty seniors, freshman and sophomores (the only classes attending this semester) are playing rugby, tackle football and singing to the rhythm of live guitars. It feels like "real college" but **none are wearing masks or socially distancing**. Should I report this like I'm supposed to? Nah, my classmates' response to following the pandemic guidelines is always the same: "It's not gonna happen to me".

"It's not gonna happen to me."

8:20 pm

Evening In-Person Class: Tonight I have a Sociology discussion group, one of the few classes that meets in-person. **I attend live once every three weeks**, because the class of thirty is divided up into three rotations of ten students. Smaller classes for a large student body means classes meet well into the evening. As I enter Williams Hall, I get my temperature checked ("97") and hear the echo of my slippers through the empty corridors. **Ten of us sit well beyond six feet apart with masks on, in a lecture hall built for 200**. We almost have to scream through our masks to communicate. The professor stands twenty feet from us, a look of fear in his eyes; he's only 45 but has diabetes. He told us bitterly in the first week that he was being forced to teach in-person. Most of us nod off – the anxiety of life at Corona College does a number on your sleep.

I don't know why I'm even here.

10:00 pm

Friends and Family on Screens: I head back to my dorm room, fever check "97". My Mom texted me during class that my favorite cousin's having her first baby next week, and my parents are going to celebrate their 25th anniversary next month with "just family." *But I can't leave the state under Corona College rules except for "serious family emergencies" – so do I sneak out and get my friend Clark to drive me home for those things?* I finish the night with a **Zoom social with my sorority sisters**. **It's nice to see my friends' faces but honestly, it gets really boring**. We talk about masks, who's violating the rules, blah, blah.... An hour goes by and I leave my room for **scheduled bathroom time at 11pm**. I get into bed and think about the day. *Who did I get near? Does anyone else I know have coronavirus? Are my friends and family OK? When can I get tested?*

And really – can I do this another day?

And one last thought before my eyes close: my every-other-day room sterilization is tomorrow, and I have the lucky 7:00 am appointment. Sweet dreams.....???

After reading Izzy's day at Corona College, I'm not sure bringing students back to campus is the right decision. Let's think about this: students will live on campus only to attend classes from their dorm rooms, alone? Collectively, parents and students are relying on their higher education institutions to make the best decision for their fall experience. In truth, we're each scared but hope that the college will take care of our students. **Is a sliver of "the best four years of their life" better than another semester at home?**

Students and parents, think hard about what a **day in the life at your college will really look like** under their guidelines, as I did above. Read through your college's fall pandemic plan with your student carefully. Make sure that they're willing to return to something like this and that they'll follow strict health guidelines. If they don't, they may be back home sooner than they'd like. Best of luck.