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Honors Thesis Personal Reflection

Before COVID-19 changed life as we knew it, I felt my thesis was an important and exciting one. It was difficult at times, especially after we finished our colloquium, to motivate myself to write and research when it seemed like many of my friends were coasting with an easy course load as seniors, but I still knew I would finish my thesis in the way that I wanted to. My topic felt urgent and I, once I was able to put aside other distractions, genuinely found the research to be fascinating and moving. One of the reasons I decided to write a thesis originally was because I wanted the opportunity as an undergraduate student to devote significant time to a research question of my choosing, instead of writing eight or ten pages three times a month for professors — papers that I was happy with, but rarely turned in feeling like I had done *all* of the work that I needed to to make them perfect.

Since classes went online and we all came home, my perspective on my thesis changed greatly. In some ways, I guess, I had more free time. Really all I *had* to do was attend my online classes and complete the homework for each of them. Social distractions (and sometimes pressures) condensed essentially to the expectation that I sat down with my family for dinner everyday; when my siblings and I were wrapping up online classes, my parents were understanding that we all had to balance the same rigorous coursework with new schedules and spaces. But I was also grieving an abrupt ending to my time at Notre Dame.

When I hugged my friends goodbye at O'Hare after we got back from our spring break trip, I was at least somewhat hopeful that after a weird few weeks at home, we would rejoin each other on campus after Easter to hang out and then to celebrate our graduation. However, for a while there, it seemed like everyday brought new news of loss. Classes were moved online for the remainder of the semester — but graduation wasn't yet cancelled — but how would they ever be able to let it go on? My state held an election in-person during this time, and I was angry and torn about whether or not I should go to the polls — because my absentee ballot was sitting in my mailbox at my apartment in South Bend. Several friends had family members suffer from COVID, and a few even lost relatives to the epidemic. I attended "office hours" with a few professors, but the distance and frankly my lack of care about my classes made them awkward. Many of my peers spoke in Zoom classes about how their parents and siblings were on the frontlines in hospitals fighting the pandemic. Obviously, they finally cancelled graduation.

I think it was when commencement weekend was called off that I realized the remainder of my time at Notre Dame was truly in my control, because there was nothing else to have cancelled. So I turned once again to my thesis, and figured out how to write it — not in late nights and early mornings at the library or while stopping into my advisors' offices, but sitting at a temporary desk in my childhood bedroom. I wrote much more of it during the daylight hours and it grew longer than I ever expected because it was something to do, and I do genuinely care about my topic.

The thesis that I ended up with is imperfect, and I know there are many, many more questions about the topic that we will have to address eventually. But my thesis is done, and I am proud of what our cohort of writers did and incredibly grateful that our advisors continued to support us as they navigated new challenges of their own. From what I've read, our topics remain urgent, although the world into which they have been written is so, so different than the one in which we conceptualized them. The problems our projects address have not gone away during COVID-19, although they are manifesting in new ways. I doubt any one of us would say our completed

thesis is perfect or what we expected to write when we set out, but it has been a comfort and a relief to have something to do — and to feel like I'm doing *something*.