

2021 GRADUATION ISSUE



THE LIONS' PRIDE MEDIA GROUP

concretions concretions seniors:

Senior Send-Off

What I Wish I Knew....

SOME ADVICE FROM OUR SENIOR EDITORS



You don't have to be the best, or the biggest, or the most well-known, to do great things. This might seem obvious; likely you've heard this before but let me

reiterate. Perfectionism is not the only way to "be good" or do well. As someone who cares a lot about making a difference and about helping other people, about social justice, knowing this was paramount. I've spent a lot of my time here at Saint Leo thinking abstractly about these ideas and that simply doesn't achieve what one would hope.

So, my advice to you is to simply be aware of your surroundings. What things can be done at Saint Leo to improve life for the most people? I encourage you to find people with similar interests and work toward your goals; **take advantage of the small, yet tight-knit community Saint Leo provides**.

For me, I wish I had worked harder to advocate for recycling on campus, especially given the newer coffee shop which primarily uses plastic cups and straws. This won't by any means, "save the turtles" or solve the climate crisis, but it's something. I think **disregarding** any change on the grounds that it is "too small" pushes us further from any positive change at all.

What you want doesn't have to be recycling on campus, but the point still stands for any positive change you want to see in the world: that change can be applied on a smaller scale. **Activism doesn't have to be grand**. And I hope you take this advice with you in any place you live.

- Emily Miller, Senior Copyeditor

Take an active role in your education and time here, and I don't mean this in the contrived way that's it's usually said. I don't mean that you should make friends in class, go to campus functions, or study at the CAVE (not that you shouldn't do those things, you absolutely should).

What I mean is that, often times, we as students allow ourselves to idle, to let serendipity take the reins while we take the backseat. This could be blindly accepting your class schedule, staying in a major you've realized you don't like, or keeping to the usual four-year plan when all you want to do is be done.

It's very easy to just let go and do whatever the university puts in front of you each year, but this is quite possibly one of the worst things you could do for your academic journey. It is only when you take an active role in steering the course of your college

experience, when you don't shy away from doing taking the hard road you know to be right, that you make your time and effort here worth it.

Trust your instincts and do your own research; if something about your schedule or your program evaluation seems off, look into and take active steps towards fixing it. Keep your own best interests in mind and don't

rely on student success coaches or advisors to do all the heavylifting for you. Nobody's perfect and mistakes happen, but it's up to you to catch those mistakes before they do serious damage.

If you're unhappy with your major, change it. Change it more than once. Pick up a double major, a minor, join the Honors program a year late if you want to. Yes, there's a point where it's too late for some of those things, but you only get to that point by ignoring the signs that you wanted a change for too long. Take time to reflect on what you want, from life and from your



degree, and take actionable steps to reach that goal.

Finally, the most charted course is not necessarily the one you're meant to follow. Four years, five classes per semester, is the default path most students are set upon when they begin university. Don't let this trap you if it doesn't work you for. If you want to graduate in three years, go for it. Even if you don't have AP or community college transfer credits, there are ways to speed up your education without breaking the bank.

Most students don't realize this, but our default tuition covers six classes, not five; plus, all credits taken after the 18 that are covered by the usual tuition are half the normal price. If you can handle it, overloading your schedule allows you to cut a semester or even a year from your time here without needing any additional credits to start off with.

As a student, you have a responsibility to take care of yourself – mentally, physically, emotionally, academically, financially – while you're here. **Do what's best for you**, speak up and give yourself a voice, make waves and take action, but most of all, **don't ever settle**.

- Gracie Swind, Managing Editor

Senior Send-Off

What I Wish I Knew....

SOME ADVICE FROM OUR SENIOR EDITORS



I always thought I would be writing something like this under different circumstances, but I guess we have to roll with what we have. That being said, there is a lot that college has taught me over the years about rolling with the punches, not just with COVID. It's been a tough time reconciling that I was robbed of a senior year, but what makes me the saddest is all the people who died this year due to COVID. So my first

piece of advice is to GET VACCINATED.

With that out of the way, I can now tell you that college is unpredictable, harsh, and is abundant with candor. It forces you to dig deep for better or worse – mainly for the better. Don't let that scare you. In my experience, some of the best choices I've made were after serious soul searching and confronting who I am head-on. Everyone says you "find yourself" in college, and I would definitely have to agree, even if it took me until my senior year to finally do it.

The question of "Who Am I" kept me up a lot, especially when determining what kind of cog I wanted to be in the capitalist workforce. When I concluded that a career path doesn't define me, nor does a degree that's when I started to find myself. I can't stress the fact that **you don't have to know exactly who you are the second you step foot on campus**. Take it from the girl who redid her entire Senior Portfolio the night before it was due becuase I had a shift in identity. All I do know, is that **what makes**

a person a person is simply existing unapologetically.

I used to get upset when people said that I'm always "doing too much," but now I own that shiz. I am the queen of "doing too much," "being too loud," and "being unapologetically me." So, the second piece of advice I impart to you is – **stop caring what other people think and more about what you feel about yourself.** Not everyone will like you, understand you, believe in you, but you better be sure as hell you do. Your friends and allies will come with time, so don't rush it. I wish I had slowed down and was more selective of the energies surrounding me during these times of change and reflection.

Third bit. Never, ever, EVER think it's too late to change your major or switch paths because you discovered a part of you that burns with passion. I started as a Criminal Justice student and picked up an English major along the way. **Education is limitless and your resources infinite.** Never let anyone put you in a box. It's not what we were born for. Humans are meant to question, and **we are allowed to change our minds, discover new things, and explore new heights.**

The last piece of advice I'll impart to you is to be aware of your identity. This comes before you discover who you are, intrinsically. College is a place of learning and debating but also listening and internalizing. **Understand that the person next to you knows something you don't.** Be sure to research before you speak. Throw out that stupid idea of politics, religion, and sex shouldn't be talked about. It's a ploy to keep your head in the sand. Listen and learn but also challenge and push back. **You and I are the future, so always question and never, ever stop.**

Be bold, be brave, be badass,

Haley Robinson EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

- Haley Robinson, Editor-in-Chief

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Campus News THE FUTURE OF SAINT LEO UNIVERSITY:

Alora PetersArts & Culture Editor

The 2020-2021 academic year was a difficult year for students and faculty alike at Saint Leo University. Despite the challenges, however, the university remains optimistic for the future.

The Lions' Pride Media Group recently conducted an interview with Saint Leo University's President Jeffrey Senese. The conversation provided a number of interesting and important takeaways, including projected plans for University Campus, reflections on what went well and what went poorly during the past "COVID" year, and how the University wants to communicate with and hear from students.

No one can contest that the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying measures designed to prevent the spread of the disease weighed heavily on Saint Leo and its students this year. Senese

wholeheartedly agreed.

"I think it's a tough year for both faculty and students," he said.

One of the starkest differences between the Saint Leo experience of the 2020-2021 school year and previous years lay in the methodology of education. Classes were held largely on the video conferencing platform Zoom, with students attending fully online via the Connected Classroom format, or via a combination of in-person and online streaming by using the Hybrid format.

In an anonymous survey conducted by The Lions' Pride, 78% of student respondents expressed that they felt the quality of education had diminished under the transition to remote instruction under COVID-19.

Senese suggested that the best way for students to combat learning deficiencies would be to directly contact and approach their professors. He stressed that the ability to develop one-on-one

relationships with faculty members is one of the most crucial and unique elements of a Saint Leo education.

"I would say to students, they should approach their faculty to provide additional assistance and support," Senese said. "Go to the faculty. The faculty are here for the students. I think they would welcome those comments."

Students also raised concerns about the hours available for eating in the dining hall and other locations on campus. Benedict's Coffeehouse, for example, had previously remained open for service until 12:00A.M.; over the past year, the coffeeshop typically closed at 7:00P.M. instead.

The hours were limited, Senese explained, due to the COVID-19 restrictions that forced the university to hire less staff to work during those hours.

"The dining hall team didn't like the environment they were operating in," said Senese. "But it is the environment that we had to operate in."

The Hungry Lion Food
Truck, which opened on campus
back in February, also brought
disappointment to some students,
due to the truck's limited hours.
The Hungry Lion was only open
on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and
Thursdays, for a few hours around
lunchtime.

"The Food Truck isn't fully opened yet," said Senese, explaining during the interview that the current, limited hours of the truck largely have resulted from having a limited staff to manage the entity.

"The hours we did were because of the staffing we had," he said. "It's difficult to hire people right now."

As a trial run, the university had opened the Food Truck during the midday hours primarily to appeal to faculty and staff working on campus.

Previously, faculty had been allowed to buy special meal plans in the dining hall; due to limited



Campus News AN INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT SENESE

capacity restrictions, faculty had been prohibited from purchasing and using these dining plans and had been forced to find other options. The Food Truck had provided another mealtime possibility.

This year, students also found issues with the quality of food being offered. 80% of survey respondents to The Lions' Pride thought the quality of the food in the cafeteria had decreased, compared to the 20% who argued it had increased.

Senese urged students to let the university know what they liked and did not like about the meal options, to help the university better appeal to the tastes of the student body.

"Students should come forward and say, 'This is the kind of food we want,'" said Senese.

Another controversial issue discussed during the interview was the quality of care that students were receiving during their quarantine periods after they had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Common complaints from students included improper meals or a lack of basic necessities, such as toilet paper.

"As we heard students' complaints, we made adjustments," said Senese. "We'd never done this, students had never done this—so we learned."

This year, Saint Leo had hired a doctor and five other staff members to help manage the quarantine situation on campus. However, during both the Fall and Spring semesters, COVID-19 cases peaked on campus, meaning that there were points when hundreds of meals were being delivered to quarantining students each day and staff were stretched thin.

"It's not an ideal situation to be quarantined," Senese said. "Nobody likes it. I can get why people would complain about it—I would complain if I had to do that! But the vast majority of people who quarantined understood that... the university did the best it could in this situation."



While COVID-19 restrictions caused a number of unfortunate and unavoidable problems, there were some positive results from the university's procedures.

"Look at the infection rate at Saint Leo compared to other universities," said Senese, pointing out the proportion of students at Saint Leo who caught the virus was significantly lower compared to other local universities, such as the University of Tampa.

Senese also stressed that Saint Leo was able to offer the majority of its classes via the Hybrid modality, which still allowed students to attend class in-person. Many other universities did not offer a comparable option, operating entirely online.

Saint Leo also experimented with a number of iterations of virtual campus events and continued to offer Mass in the Abbey Church on campus throughout the school year.

As to what University Campus

will look like in the upcoming Fall 2021 semester, Senese hopes that campus life will be "as normal as we can make it."

"Our intention is to open fully," said Senese. Provided that the number of coronavirus cases continues to decrease, and no additional restrictions are placed upon gatherings, Senese confirmed that the University plans to return to normal functions, including faceto-face classes.

The University has already announced that intends to "discontinue Hybrid and Connected Classroom learning options" for both University Campus and its education centers by the fall, via an email that was released on April 19.

Dining hours for the cafeteria, Fusion Eatery, and Benedict's Coffeehouse are also expected to be restored to their normal operating times.

"As normal hours as we can get is what we are shooting for," said Senese. Aside from the return to a sense of normalcy, the university has other exciting, upcoming plans. One important new addition to the University Campus is the opening of the new Wellness Center.

"It's going to create a totally different environment and community on campus," said Senese. "Our goal every year is to add something that can enhance the environment."

The university also plans to expand its dining options, including access to The Hungry Lion.

"The purpose of the Food Truck wasn't intended to be a replacement for meals," said Senese. "It was for after hours. A lot of students will go into the city, and we wanted to provide an option for them here [on campus]."

Additionally, expansions to the dining hall are in the works, and are likely to begin construction sometime over the summer. The university plans to extend the hall using the empty land that runs in

Campus News PRESIDENTIAL INTERVIEW, CON.

between the Student Community Center and St. Francis Hall.

"We know now that we need a bit more space in the dining hall," said Senese. "The expansion will probably take twelve months. It could go faster or slower, but it's a little bit simpler of a building [project] in that it is an extension."

While the ground floor of the expansion will, naturally, be dedicated to the cafeteria, the university is still discussing what the upper level will be used for.

"We're talking about a couple of different ideas. One of the ideas is a pub," said Senese. "So, for students, for faculty and staff who are 21 and older, there would be something that looks like a little English pub. A sports bar is another idea that we had."

Part of the university's aim is to create a dining option for visitors who come to campus.

"There really is no place for parents who come here, or people who come to see sporting events, with the Abbey Tavern closed," said Senese. Another important addition to the university campus that is currently being considered is a grotto.

"We'd like to add another worship space on campus—a grotto—on our side of the campus," said Senese. "The Abbey has two grottos [across the street], but I don't want students and faculty walking across 52!"

The idea would be to construct the grotto around the fallen tree, located on the hill between the Abbey Church and the Marmion and Snyder dormitories. The grotto would hopefully be completed by the end of spring next year.

While many students are excited about the installation of new buildings and the upgrades of existing ones, issues do remain with some of the older buildings on campus. Lewis Hall, for example, and Apartment Buildings 1-4 are largely regarded by students and faculty to have mold problems.

There is no easy answer to this pressing concern, however, due to the costs associated with a complete

renovation.

"Take Lewis Hall, for example," said Senese. "To replace that building, it would be between 37 and 47 million dollars... it's not money that we have right now. The updates with Fuz, with the Food Truck, they're really miniscule compared to what we're spending on capital improvements every year."

Senese and other university staff will be conducting an annual tour and inspection of all of the university campus building over the summer, to see which areas are most in need of improvement. On the previous campus tour, Marmion, Snyder, and Henderson were pinpointed as the buildings with the most pressing concerns.

Senese, again, encouraged students to come forward with their complaints.

"If there is an area that needs attention, tell us," he said. "If there are things that need to be addressed, we want to know now. We'll do our best to address it."

Finally, Senese discussed with

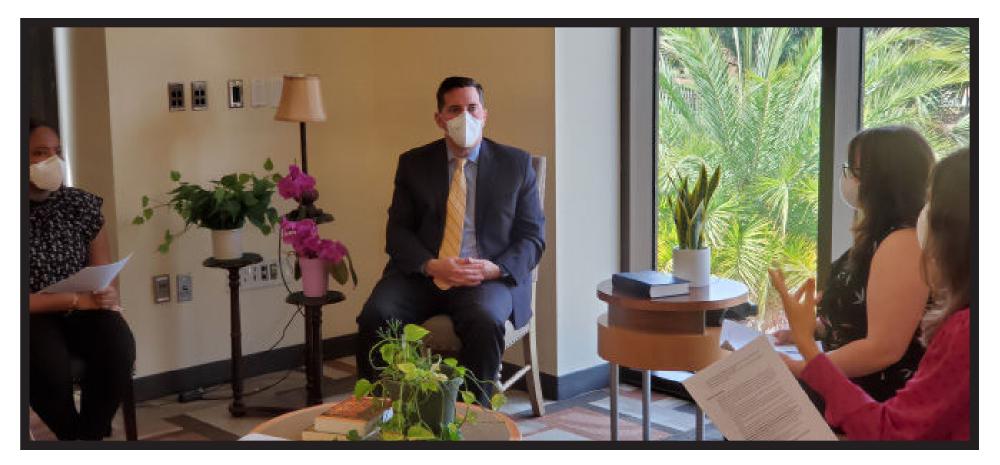
The Lions' Pride the possibility of creating a new forum that would allow students to submit questions and complaints like these to the university and give students the opportunity to voice their opinions, concerns, and hopes.

"I'm totally open to that—let's figure out how to do it," said Senese. "We could do—every semester—an open forum, over in Selby Auditorium."

A town hall style question-andanswer forum would also provide a chance for faculty and staff to communicate their plans and ideas to students, as well as a chance to listen to the thoughts of the student body.

"We're here because of the students. We're not here to serve ourselves," said Senese. "We need the dialogue, we need to establish that."

The Lions' Pride will be working over the summer to establish set dates where students, faculty, and staff can come together and looks forward to facilitating further dialogue.



Campus News MOVING OUT AFTER GRADUATION

Reid Griffin *Contributing Writer*

2020 marked the first year a majority of young adults are living with their parents since the Great Depression, according to the Pew Research Center.

Previous data collections conducted by Pew suggest that this number has been on the rise, but last spring's sharp increase is one of the many indicators that young adults are the hardest hit by the ongoing global pandemic.

Specifically, the percentage of young adults ages 18-29 living with a parent grew from 47% in February of 2020 to 52% in July of 2020. While this statistic does include students living on college campuses, those students are unlikely to jump from dormitories to apartments.

With this is mind, it is more important than ever for college graduates who are planning to move out to do their research far ahead of their anticipated move-out dates.

The problem is that, for many college students, their only experiences in moving and budgeting are from campus living.

There are some skills that can be learned in dormitories. For example, many students are familiar with packing and moving on a tight schedule.

However, the last-minute finals week packing panic will not work when moving to a more permanent living situation—there are too many unfamiliar tasks associated with a true moving experience to procrastinate. If planning a move, be sure to sell, donate, or throw away unwanted items in advance, and plan both when and how to pack the remaining items.

Then, the true work begins. Research the housing market, tour homes, build credit, and learn to budget.

Bernard Ramos graduated Saint Leo University with the class of 2020. His program of study was English and he was the Vice President of Sigma Tau Delta, the English honors society. When Ramps graduated, he moved to the Tampa area where he found employment as a special education middle school English teacher.

After COVID-19 hit, Ramos had to find a higher-paying job to keep up. Now he works as a behavior specialist at a private school in Tarpon Springs.

freshman year or even sooner. There is no time like the present to start—every little bit counts.

"I wish I'd known how difficult and time consuming it can be to go through the application [process]," said Ramos. "A lot of apartments want 60 days of proof of employment at your job."

This means that, in some cases, a prospective tenant needs to work for two months before applying for housing.

graduates.

Realtors have mixed opinions on where the housing market is going in Florida. The economic recession triggered a boom in Florida's housing market, says The Tampa Bay Times, and the amount of buyers in line for homes yet to be constructed may be a sign that the 2006 recession is due for a repeat.

Saint Leo students familiar with the Zephyrhills area can see proof of this in the new neighborhoods



"Rent is really high in Tampa," Ramos warned.

To get an estimate of how high rent might be, use websites such as Zillow in the desired area to get a feel for the rental costs. If the prices are too high, try neighboring locations. This is a good benchmark but, bear in mind, there are many more expenses associated with moving out.

The most easily forgotten cost is transportation. Long-distance transportation can be expensive and researching the cheapest options can make a significant price difference.

Ramos saved throughout college in order to move out. Ideally, graduates looking for their own place should start saving in their "Once I found an apartment to live at, I wrote down the cost for Wi-Fi, water, electric, food, gas, and even pet stuff," Ramos continued. This is the simplest way to start a budget. Calculate living expenses for a month, starting with what services, utilities, and subscriptions will need to be paid for and what groceries will cost in the area.

The total cannot exceed or match the amount of money saved, because an emergency fund will also be necessary. Something will go wrong, guaranteed, and an emergency fund is a buffer against homelessness. Multiply monthly living three to six times to calculate a total for an emergency fund—money saved for half a year is ideal, but may not be possible for most

being constructed. "For Sale" signs vanish before houses and duplexes have windows installed and driveways completed. With over half of young adults at home and potentially looking to change their living situations, that demand could skyrocket even higher.

There are tax advantages to living in Florida that attracts out-of-state homebuyers, but those cuts are more meaningful to the upper-class, according to Forbes. The market is lucrative for realtors and billionaires, but detrimental for college students.

In the end, it may be better for college grads in stable homes to live there a little longer until the economy is more favorable.

Editorials A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER: TACKLING THE FRESHMAN YEAR OF COLLEGE DURING A PANDEMIC

Tayhana Taylor *World News Editor*

Starting college is an experience many freshmen look forward to. Unfortunately for the freshmen students who started their college journey in 2020, this new experience looked a bit different. Many students' first year was filled with meeting new friends and professors through a square computer screen on Zoom, attending first-year orientation virtually, and participating in many socially-distant on-campus activities.

While some students had the luxury of leaving their homes to attend classes on campus, some incoming freshmen, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, found it safer and easier to use the Connected Classroom learning modality Saint Leo University offered during the academic year.

"I used the Connected Classroom option during the fall because I choose to stay in Colombia. For the spring semester, I was able to come on campus and utilize the hybrid modality," said Angelica Molina, a freshman majoring in global studies with a minor in world politics. "Being on Zoom for the first semester definitely affected my learning because of the temptations and distractions that are around when I am at home."

During this past academic year, many clubs and organizations have had to alter the way they met as a group, to ensure that students who were not on campus would still be able to participate in on-campus activities.

"I joined the Gold Rush Dance team while I was in Colombia. In the fall semester, our coach created a hybrid modality," said Molina. "Half of the team was practicing on campus and the other half was online. I am also a member of Lead Scholars, and this year all our meetings were held over Zoom, except for special award ceremonies, which were hybrid."

Molina hopes that she will eventualy get to have a normal college semester in the fall of 2021.

"In the fall I am looking forward to more on-campus activities because I think that helps to unite us a community," said Molina. "As many more students, staff, and faculty take the vaccine, I also hope to see a successful transition with activities being held completely in-person."

Like Molina, Geossica Madden—a freshman from Jamaica, majoring in marketing with a minor in hospitality management—also completed her first semester of college using the Connected Classroom modality. But once Madden stepped foot on campus in the spring, she made sure to make up for all the activities she missed during the fall.

"As soon as I got on campus, I tried to be as involved as I possibly could," said Madden. "I joined the Saint Leo Radio Station "The Dream Room," and meetings for this club were held both in-person and online. I am also a member of Saint Leo's Esports team. As a team, we practiced in-person in the Esports Arena, but there were options available for those team members who were fully connected."

While Madden was able to attend on-campus classes during the spring, her learning and level of focus were affected during the fall when she took classes via the Connected Classroom option.

"It is hard for me to learn through a screen because I am more of a tactile learner and I need human interaction," she said. "The inability to be in a physical classroom severely affected my level of motivation. Connected learning was hard for me, as there would be times when I did not want to go to classes because I lacked motivation."

It seems as though many freshman students enjoyed the hybrid learning option Saint Leo offered as a way of providing students with a sense of "normalness" throughout this abnormal semester.

"Hybrid learning has been much better for me, since I have been able to actually attend in-person classes with my professors," said Madden.

Aside from missing out on inperson activities, it was challenging for some students to socialize during the pandemic. Madden mentioned that she made sure to find ways to interact and socialize with family members and friends.

"I set up a lot of Zoom meetings and Facetime calls with my friends and family, so I could have an adequate level of human interaction," said Madden.

Ashley Tucker, a freshman majoring in criminalistics with a minor in psychology, shared that being on campus for both the fall and spring semester gave her a sense of "normalness."

"I lived on campus for both semesters. During the fall semester, I joined the Campus Activities Board (CAB), all of our meetings were held over zoom because of the need to avoid in-person interaction as much as possible," said Tucker. "Although my first year of college was during a pandemic, I am still thankful that I got to join the CAB and meet new people. It gave me a chance to establish a little on-campus family."

The Campus Activities Board plays an integral role in planning and hosting campus events. As the Special Events Chair, Tucker mentioned that planning the things that helped me cope during this pandemic year, while being away from my family, was ensuring that I talked to my family on the phone as much as I could. I did not meet with my professors in-person as much as I would in a normal setting, but I stayed in touch with them via email and Zoom office hours."

Freshmen like Berkel Anderson, an international student from the Bahamas majoring in Biology, shared that not being on campus for her first year of college made her feel as though she was missing out.

"I used the Connected Classroom option for both the fall and spring semester," said Anderson. "I wanted to



Despite the pandemic, freshman students were able to attend and participate in Saint Leo University traditions.

some of the socially distant activities was a bit challenging at times.

"It was frustrating and difficult at times to get everything organized because of the protocols we had to follow to get our plans approved," she said. "For example, we would have to ensure we are stating how we will maintain social distancing and how we will ensure the students wear their masks at all times during these activities."

Those who were able to attend on-campus events had to remain six feet apart because of COVID-19 safety protocols, but this did not prevent students from still getting engaged.

"While social distancing was not the ideal situation, we tried our best to make the activities as inclusive as possible," said Tucker. "Sometimes, before or after an event, we would do a sing-along with students or make jokes to make the students feel engaged."

Tucker further mentioned, "one of

engage more in on-campus activities and join more organizations, but I hope that I get to do all of this in the upcoming fall semester."

Quite a number of these freshmen students are looking forward to experiencing a normal college semester during their sophomore year.

"I am definitely looking forward to more in-person events this upcoming fall," said Nicholae Robinson, a freshman majoring in cybersecurity with a minor in criminal justice. "The activities we did on campus this year were enjoyable, so I can only imagine how much better it will be when the majority of the school's population is back on campus."

Whether the class of 2024 started at Saint Leo University on campus or in their homes on Zoom, many of them remain hopeful that they will regain the normal freshman experience they missed out on during the pandemic.

Editorials

I'M GRADUATING THIS YEAR, BUT IT FEELS LIKE A HOLLOW VICTORY

Gracie Swind *Managing Editor*

I feel cheated. 2020, the year from Hell, pretty much ruined my college experience.

I spent much of my high school years preparing for university, wracking up as many credits as I could so I could save money in the long run. A degree isn't cheap and I wasn't keen on the idea of flippantly taking out multiple loans, each for thousands and thousands of dollars.

I took numerous AP courses, studying hard to score threes and fours so I could get the maximum amount of transfer credits for the classes. I also enrolled in the Early Admissions program for my senior year of high school, attending Saint Petersburg Community College full time to earn thirty additional transfer credits and cover a number of prerequisite courses.

By the time I arrived at Saint Leo University in the fall of 2019, I had enough transfer credits to graduate with my bachelor's degree in two years if I worked hard and overloaded my schedule each semester. I'm a quick learner and I bore with the same routine for too long, so two years to get "the college experience" seemed like enough for me.

Two years of living on campus, attending class, and enjoying the college life would have been enough for me, but 2020 had other plans. Thanks to lockdowns and a literal global pandemic, my "college experience" was knocked down from two years to seven measly months (eight if you count December during winter break).

In the rubble of my first year of university, I opted to attend Saint Leo in the fall via the "connected" modality, as the state of affairs on

campus looked bleak. Additionally, choosing to live at home while "connected" allowed me to keep my Presidential scholarship while also cutting the cost of my housing and meal plan completely; in the end, my family and I saved somewhere in the realm of \$12,000 by my staying home and Zooming in to class.

This was a major benefit of the not-so-beneficial pandemic, since money and loans were a huge point of anxiety for both me and my family, but it was one of the only advantages. Since I was able to work from home and attend school from home, I had no reason to leave the house; ergo, I essentially spent the last year in the same ten-foot by ten-foot room, staring at the same laptop, sleeping and resting and studying and working and relaxing in the same place all day, every day.

Most times, it was agony, and I can safely say that I hate this house and this room now, which is sad. It feels like the last year was stolen from me, because I can't remember most of it.

The days, weeks, months spent following the same routine – never really leaving the house, sitting at the same desk for six to eight hours a day, working on the same courses, pacing the same small house – blur together. There are very few days – or even weeks – I can specifically remember or pick out of the memory slush pot.

Everything has been nondescript for the longest time. Now that I'm at the end of the road, two years of hard work and overloaded semesters later, I'm not sure what to do.

I got my bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Theatre in two years, most of it completed online. In total, I took out \$5,500 in loans.

It feels like I cheated the system a little bit, getting a degree this cheap and quick, but then, the system cheated me, too. I got one good year; one good year of being plugged in on campus, loving my job, meeting new people, engaging with the theatre, living "the college experience."

In a lot of ways, I managed to get the gist of the "college experience" in just seven months; I got the SparkNotes version. Sitting here, writing this, I'm melancholic for the few brief moments I had on campus that were good, well and truly good, but the memories that are coming back to me are not what I expected.

I remember food: quiet dusks walking from my dorm room to the dining hall, sitting at an empty table watching YouTube, listening to music, or just decompressing over a plate of turkey, wheat pasta, sweet rolls, and Cajun cream sauce – my favorite dining hall meal that I still haven't managed to recreate. Grabbing a fortune cookie for the road and a vanilla cappuccino for tomorrow morning, I'd head back to my room every night in a good mood.

I remember the theatre:
Wednesday evenings in the fall
staying up at the hill until after dark,
working on patterns or props with
music while theatre kids bobbed in
and out of the workroom, making
happy, familial racket between
rehearsals and classwork. I created
the gold dress for Guys and Dolls
in an evening, six hours of sewing
and chatting followed by a very
satisfying night of sleep.

I remember so much about the newspaper: Monday meetings, covering off-campus events, interviewing professors and students, peaceful office hours on Friday mornings in the newsroom, our amazing trip to the newspaper conference last spring, luncheons with campus guests, and so many other opportunities and moments that would not have been available to me had I not been involved with the paper.

But for all the good moments that I can look back on and the few, but no less fond, memories I managed to eke out while staying home and Zooming in, there are so many things I didn't get to do that I hoped to experience while in college. At the end of the day, I got the short-hand version of the college experience; most of the fault for that lies with a global pandemic, but I'd be remiss to say that some of it wasn't my fault, too.

Whether it was an opportunity to socialize that I squandered or one of the disadvantages that came with my choice of university (Saint Leo was great, but it's a small, private college in rural Florida; to say there weren't some drawbacks to the school's size and location would be dishonest), I missed out on some experiences that it might be too late to try and get back.

It's over. My time as a college student – at least as far as undergraduate studies are concerned – is over.

So what now? I'll apply for jobs in my target field and hope for the best? Step boldly into a job market that has never looked so bleak and hesitant? Or maybe try to give myself – and the economy – more time to heal? Maybe look into a master's program to get a second shot at those wasted "college experiences"?

I think the takeaway here, if there is one, is not that the last year was hard and I wanted to complain about it, so I wrote an article. No, I think the takeaway is to make every moment count. You never know how much time you'll really have before life pushes you forward, whether you're ready or not.



SAINT LEO ALUMNI OF 2020: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

By: Mariana Navarrete, Contributing Writer

A year ago, the class of 2020 was graduating from Saint Leo University—in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This led students to change their academic, personal, and professional goals towards something that fit into the pandemic world.

The Saint Leo Alumni from 2020 clearly had to adapt to a new normal. Here are some of their life paths after graduation and their advice to share with the graduating class of 2021.

Alumni Bernard Michael Ramos graduated in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in English with a specialization in professional writing. Now, he works as a behavior specialist at a private school in Tarpon Springs.

"It was difficult finding a job last year during COVID," said Ramos. "I started looking in March and was planning on moving after graduation. I had to change all my plans."

Ramos was originally hired as a middle school teacher, but ended up in his current position due to pandemic-related layoffs. He is also pursuing a master's degree in school counseling at New York University online.

Ramos point out that, if it was not for his professional writing professors at Saint Leo—Dr. Valerie Kasper and Professor Marissa McLargin—he would be hopeless.

"They gave me the love, support, and knowledge to become prepared for higher education and jobs," he said. "My advice to the class of 2021 is to connect with your classmates and professors. They are the ones who are going to help you and prepare you for life after college."

Ramos points out we need to give ourselves space to make mistakes and accept denials from jobs and universities. Sometimes our career path will go a different route, which will open more doors and opportunities.

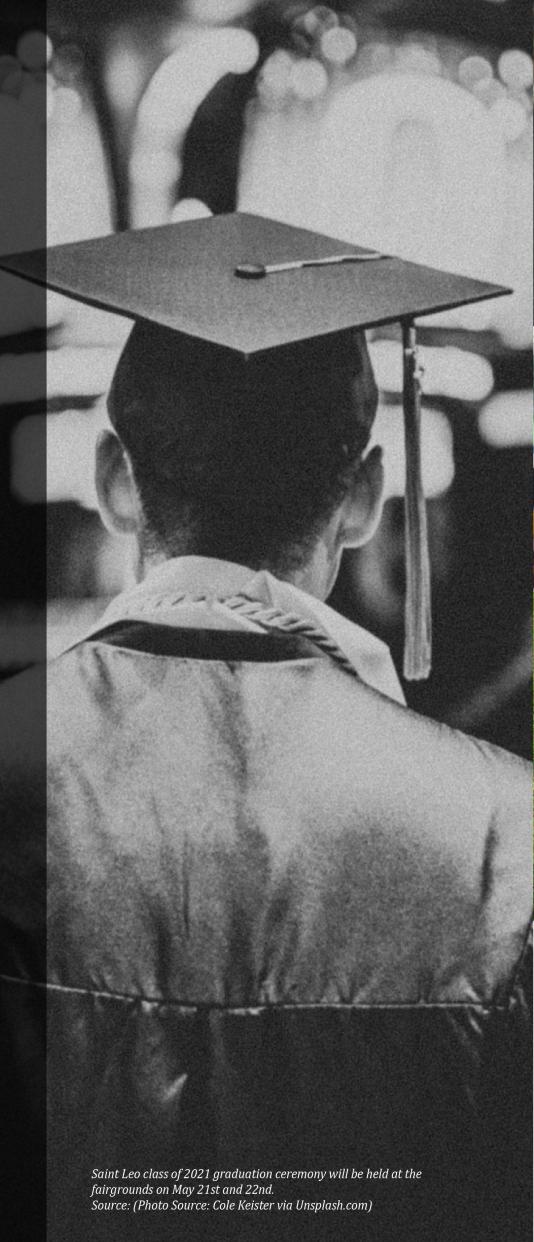
"Accept the changes and work with it!" said Ramos. Alumni Matalin Shaver lives in Naples, Florida, working as the executive director assistant for Sunlight Home, a Christian shelter for pregnant teens and women.

Shaver points out the best thing she learned about finding jobs—especially during COVID—is that it takes time and lots of motivation.

"You have to want it, and if you do, you will bear fruit from the work you put in," said Shaver.

"I spent hours every day searching for jobs, looking at mission opportunities, and even looking at graduate programs," she continued. "Through lots of prayer and trust in the Lord, He opened the door for me to come down to Naples and help the women and children at Sunlight Home."

Shaver recommends the graduating class of 2021 stay motivated, put in the hours, and have an open mind.







Siobhan Murphy was a <mark>student athlete at Saint L</mark>eo who represented the Lions on the swimming team.
Source: Siobhan Murphy

"The Lord might be calling you to something you would never have thought of!" she said.

Having graduated with his bachelor's degree in cybersecurity, alumni David Bello Brewer, is currently enrolled in the master's program for cybersecurity at Saint Leo, and will be graduating this summer.

"When Covid hit, I knew jobs were going to be impacted," said Bello. "Not knowing when this was going to end, I decided this was the best time to study and pursue something better than a Bachelors." Bello comments he learned that everything—good or bad—happens for a reason.

"Post-graduation might bring you a little bit of anxiety, but I'm letting you know that you've made it this far and you should be proud," he said. "You still have your whole life in front of you, so go do whatever makes you happy. I wish you all the best in your professional careers." An alumni who majored in psychology, Siobhan Murphy, works at present as a preschool teacher.

"Although I do love my job, it has made me realize I don't want to be a teacher," said Murphy. "It was very hard to find a job with my degree, psychology, straight out of undergrad, especially during the pandemic."

Murphy explains she took this job because it gives her experience in child development, which is eventually what she would love to pursue professionally.

"I am currently applying for higher education to work as a child life specialist in a hospital," she said. Murphy says she learned that life after college is very stressful and adulthood comes at you quickly.

"The advice I would like to give to this year's graduates is to seize every opportunity and connection," she said.

John Fritzgerald Hall, Jr. majored in biology and minored in chemistry at Saint Leo, and presently works as a laboratory medical assistant for BayCare Health at St. Joseph 's Hospital.

"I found it increasingly intimidating as an international student to search for jobs during the pandemic," said Hall. "However, the market for persons in my major was completely wide open."

Hall tried using most job forums—such as Indeed, LinkedIn, and Saint Leo's Handshake—to apply for various positions.

"At some point, I filled out 30 applications in one day," he said. Hall's first job was with LabCorp, before he got a job offer from Baycare. Later, Baycare offered him a position in their Medical Lab Sciences certificate program at Hillsborough Community College.

"The lectures and information I learned at Saint Leo gave me the base I needed to understand everything I'm learning, but also gave me a significant push in applying what I learned," said Hall.

Hall suggests that this year's graduating class needs to be persistent, tenacious, and unrelenting in pursuing jobs and when furthering their education.

"It may be easy to get complacent and give up the first days when you made 10-20 applications," said Hall. "But understand that application #11 or #21 may be the one that launches you into your dream career or the next adventure of learning."

"Your future is brighter because of the sacrifices you will make today," he added. "Go Lions!"

The pandemic is still not over, and the 'new normal' forces people to adapt to changes. The class of 2021 graduates have some references here that portray how one can still pursue academic, professional, or personal goals even in the middle of a pandemic.

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- William Jason Carr
- William L. Fumero
- Willie Self
- Xauskya Hilda Eugenie Emmanuel
- Xavier A. Self
- Xavier Michael Davis
- Xavier Ryan McHugh Carroll
- Yasmin Jalamdeh
- Tasimin jalame
- Yenite GartnerZachary Wyatt Pottle
- Zackary T. Allison
- Zane Michael Long
- Zoe Katrina Dmuchowsky

MASTERS

Zion Jujuan Lawrence

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- Aisha Monique Yarn
- Aleksandra Irene Jagiella-Litts
- Alexander David Bond
- Alexis E. Nunez
- Alfred Joseph Ivie
- Ali Jordan

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- Almeka Parks
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- Amber Jeneé Sanders
- Amberlie Nichole Russell
- Analin Andreina Ramputi
- Andrada Teodora Alston
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- Andrew John Carroll-Mazeli
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- Christine Marie Potthast
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- Christopher Ronald Steger
- Christopher Vendrell
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- Ciarra Thompson

- Clanzerria Annetria Brown
- Claudio Ernesto Faenza
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- Coreyoun Jackson
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- Cosset Cerra
- Courtney Cooper
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- Cvnthia Hunter Reed
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- Jessica Lynn Milford
- Iessica Marie Eineder
- Jessica P. D'Alessandro
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- Iulissa Catalan
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- Kathryn Gray
- Kathryn Snow Bohto
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- Kayla Chantelle Rivera
- Kayla Marie Dickerson
- Kayla Rayven Philogene
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- Kennethia Blue
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- Leroy Whatley
- Leslie Head Coker
- LeTisha Dorsey
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- Lisa Freeman Pace
- Lloyd Jermaine James
- Loren Ashley Kistner
- Lorraine Korb
- Lucv Short
- Luisa Elena Ojeda Vera
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- Magdalene Markey
- Maheera Rahman
- Maisha Morman
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- Maria Isabel Torres
- Maria Melendez
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- Mariamma Itty Pothen
- Marie A. Bethea
- Marie Lourdes Amisial

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- Mary Anne Wiltse
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- Masciel Irizarry
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- Matthew Wayne Mulock
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- Mondelle Michelle Wint
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- Naomi Elise Killian
- Naomi Violet Florez
- Natalie Figuereo Harden
- Natasha Anrisma Natoy Anteri'a Baker
- Nechiya Warrensaunders
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- Nicole Haberland
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- Nikki Robinson
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- Ossie Elaine Lock
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- Paige Rotarius
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- Rarlynn Calixte Mardy
- Rebeka Bell
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- Samantha Ting
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- Savannah Leigh Wagner
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- Shawn Monroe
- Shawn Young
- Shawna Marie O'Neil
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- Shellie A. Lewis
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- Takia Brown
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- Tamia Roberts
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- Tanya Kozak
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- Tara Uvett Jackson
- Tasmin Avay Munro
- Terra Marie Dorsch
- Terricka Monique Washington
- Tesh Danielle Yu

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- Thomas Michael McCarthy
- Thomas Oliveri
- Thomasina Santacroce
- Tiffany Anderson
- Tiffany McClanathan
- Tiffany Renee Gregory
- Tiffany Rose Adekola
- Timothy Patrick Fletcher
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 Pugh
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- Vernita Lynn Foster
- Veronica Sylvia Lewis
- Vicki Cassandra Taylor
- Victor Alfonso Zabala
- Victoria Marie Bennett
- Victoria Marie Wellborn

Vincent Alexander Tesla

- Virginia A. Jones
- Voneshia Quilana McMillian
- Wendy Ann Marie Villa
- Whitney Ann Hall
- Whitney Antoinette Savage
- Xavier L. Shipman
- Yanely Ramirez
- Yanet Calvi
- Yann CorbelYenite Gartner
- Yvonne M. Kelly Montell
- Zhanyl Tokoeva
- Zhiwen Yang

DOCTORATE

- Albertus Seegars Barnes
- Alexis M. Dempsey
- Anne Catherine Legatti-Maddox
- Anthony Simon
- Anthony Wade Thompson
- Christine Marie Bellido
- Demetrius Johnson
- Elizabeth A. Bland
- Ingrid Maria Rader
- Jennifer Marie Mills
- John Thurman Duncan
- Judith M. Bowser Kevin L. Mallory
- Marilyn Burnett Ponder
- Marvin Harrison Fontaine
- Mary Elizabeth Branch
- Naomi M. Clayton
- Ramon Alvarado
- Randy Churchill Forbes
- Robin Marie DavissonRuqayyah Cheryl Eugenie Nicholas
- Sonya Louise Bosanko
- Tara L. Brewer
- Valerie MurphyWilliam Jude Smith

ED SPECIALIST

- Claudia Ann Steinacker
- Jyllene Elizabeth Vogel
- Kenya Juanita JonesKira Jardinella
- Mark A. Holmes
- Melanie Snow Waxler
- Natalie Irvine
- Nikole Alma OakTammie McCaskill
- Valentine Tisha Doohen

