

CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION NETWORK

ARTICLES ON COVID-19 AFTERMATH,
EVERYDAY STRUGGLES,
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, CURRENT AFFAIRS,
AND SO MUCH MORE.



 DEN

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

MAGAZINE EDITION 2021/2022



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Acknowledgements

Democratic Education Network (DEN) is an extracurricular establishment at the University of Westminster that was formally launched in 2016 with the full support of the Quintin Hogg Trust (QHT). It operated with the help of academic staff and a diverse mix of students, including alumni in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Every year, it strives to work on an array of different projects. Publishing the annual magazine is among the more intensive projects, requiring consistent and systematic collaboration from a range of different participants at the University, local communities in London and international partners.

This year, this task became all the more challenging as the team was pushed to join forces virtually due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet it also became the core theme of this year's magazine, as we realised that this was an opportunity for us to discuss emerging issues in a novel but highly relevant contemporary context. And after months on end of virtual teamwork, we are delighted to be presenting this end-product which reflects the efforts and input of many. All articles in this magazine have gone through a process of edits and revisions by the DEN student editorial team, supervised by Dr. Farhang Morady. Special thanks to Alexandra Bukhareva for reading and organising all the articles and Eleonora Venturini for designing the front and back of the magazine.

Our special thanks to Dr. Peter Bonfield, Vice-Chancellor of the university; Dr. Sal Jarvis, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Education; Dr. Andrew Linn, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Dr. Dibyesh Anand, Head of the School of Social Sciences; Dr. Gerda Wielander and Dr. Thomas Moore, Associate Heads of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; and Irene Queralt Santamatilde, Westminster PhD student and long-time DEN contributor. Their insights and words of encouragement have always been an important motivating factor for DEN members to continue to put forward their best efforts week in and week out.

And as always, we are deeply grateful for the constant guidance provided to us by Dr. Farhang Morady, who not only has become a mentor for all members of the team but without whom this project might not have materialised this year. And, last but not least, a hearty thank you to all the authors for their true dedication to the project and the contribution of some fantastic ideas towards this book, as well as the editorial team who worked hard to ensure that those ideas could be compiled together.

Foreword - 2021

Following on from the success of the 2021 publication, *The Unprecedented Impacts of COVID-19 and Global Responses*, I'm delighted to see that the work of DEN goes from strength to strength as we seek to understand and respond to the impact of COVID-19 on our own lives and on local and global communities. This is a wide-ranging collection which embraces everything from students' personal experiences to perspectives from across the world. The rich and thought-provoking material in this special edition shows that DEN members are not just learners but that they are already contributing to research and knowledge exchange at Westminster. There is lots to inspire here as DEN addresses the major global challenges and contributes to solutions to them.

Prof. Andrew Linn,

Head of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research

Introduction

Engaging Students During Covid-19

Since its launch in 2016, Westminster's Democratic Education Network (DEN) has been a hub for academic staff and students to collaborate in its project design, development, and implementation. DEN is proud to engage diverse students with varying abilities, ages, social, ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds. DEN develops projects that connect the University with local communities in London and with international partner universities. It places the University of Westminster in a unique position. It provides much more than a comprehensive academic curriculum; it also offers education beyond borders in a genuinely global fashion while being mindful of individual and local specificities.

The University of Westminster's biggest challenge has been finding ways to engage students outside the curriculum, especially those who do not meet the usual criteria for enrolment at the established or top universities. Various studies have presented considerable evidence to demonstrate engagement's vital role in students' learning. Hence, the University has always explored new ways of teaching and engaging our students, with particular attention being paid to the experiences of under-represented and disadvantaged students at all levels. In addition, the internationalisation of higher education has added to the diversity of the student population, placing additional focus from the University's management and academic staff as to the importance of culturally and socially integrating our students.

The 4th annual magazine of Democratic Education Network (DEN) is being published under new conditions. On March 11, 2020, various governments around the world enforced lockdowns and other measures such as banning or restricting both internal and international travel. Higher education institutions, including the University of Westminster, were forced to close their doors and operate entirely online. According to UNESCO, approximately 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries and nearly 94 per cent of the world's student population within schools, colleges and universities were affected. Remote learning effectively became the only way teaching and learning could continue.

With the sudden outbreak of Covid-19, Higher Education institutions, in general, have faced huge challenges of continuing to engage students online. Since its launch in 2016, DEN has been central for student engagement, combining staff, student and community collaboration to find innovative ways of teaching, learning and supporting students via practical experience. DEN has always led by example, demonstrating students' potential by building bridges between different communities in London and international universities.

At DEN, we explored different ways to manage and sustain our activities. With the academics and students, we experimented with various online methods to maximise students' potential, encouraging them to work collaboratively to co-create a new environment. As a result, students enthusiastically embraced the new online learning mode, performed with no criteria or grading system, instead voluntarily delivering projects online. They have expressed their passion and desire for learning, working together regardless of their geographical location. Hence, they developed new democratic skills by working online in a friendly environment ultimately encouraging each other, ensuring respect and equality.

The development of this unique online engagement has facilitated knowledge exchange activities with local communities and international partners. One of DEN's objectives is to encourage the development of educational strategies and practices. We have done this with care, mutual understanding, and respect for academics, students, and support staff. The collaboration between academic staff and students with common aims and goals has become a fundamental principle in DEN's objectives. Through this collaborative work on different projects, DEN has looked for the best practices to engage students and develop learning materials in the classroom.

The academic program has prepared students for professional life, but DEN also ensures that they are equipped with a good understanding of their society locally and globally. The academics' willingness to go beyond their subject expertise in teaching has been a crucial part of DEN. In addition, through practices with some years of experience, DEN has become a platform for interning and mentoring students. Thus, in working as a community, we have involved our alumni and post-graduate students in supporting the process of mentoring our undergraduate students within DEN's projects. Hence, DEN has shown awareness and taken on board responsibility for improving Westminster students' future employment prospects and post-graduate studies.

In DEN, we have looked for different strategies to support their educational journey outside of students' courses and fields of study. As a result, we have built a bridge between students' courses and DEN's projects. In particular, three Politics and International Relations modules: "Learning in an International Environment", "Energy and Development in the Middle East and Central Asia," and "Political Research and Practice," are closely linked to DEN's projects.

DEN has undertaken various extra-curricular projects to develop and support students' learning:

- The online and hard copy magazine
- The international virtual field trip to Vietnam and Turkey
- The international students' conference
- The annual book

This magazine is a collective work by students collaborating in designing, writing, reviewing each other's articles and implementing projects. Despite all the limitations imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have worked with students from all over the world and from within different communities in London. For over a year, undergraduate, post-graduate, alumni, and academics in the University met online once a week. We organised schedules, peer-reviewed papers and presented students' articles, among other activities. As a group, we also took the initiative to develop guidelines regarding the publication process of this monograph. Our combined efforts have culminated in this collection of articles. Some of these articles are published in DEN's online magazine, "Insidewestminster" (<http://insidewestminster.co.uk/>).

The magazine is divided into different sections focusing on DEN's projects. Apart from encouraging them to write and perform, we also hope to develop their democratic skills. Furthermore, we hope this magazine will inspire the students at the University to write, build and establish a bridge between each other and their respective communities in London and beyond.

The selection of articles in this magazine reflects the experience of students and their communities during Covid-19, addressing the impact and implications of the pandemic. The articles tell their stories of building resilience and managing the pandemic collectively. This special issue of DEN's magazine covers a wide range of political, economic and social issues from across the world. We further share our views of the pandemic addressing the ramifications induced by the global emergency, which has dominated political agendas for the last two years.

***Dr Farhang Morady** is Principal Lecturer in Development and Director of Democratic Education Network*

DEN and The Quintin Hogg Trust

The University of Westminster is where every student has a right to express their opinion, participate in various projects and share their ideas with others. However, turning ideas into reality is not easy and having just a desire to change or do something might not be enough. Therefore, it is crucial to support students with their endeavours, as this will help them implement their ideas and contribute to their educational experience.

One such initiative is the Democratic Education Network (DEN), fully supported by The Quintin Hogg Trust. The Trust's purpose is to sustain the educational advancement of students at the University of Westminster. Quintin Hogg (1845 - 1903) was an English philanthropist, remembered primarily as a benefactor of the Royal Polytechnic institution at Regent Street, London, now known as the University of Westminster. There are currently 12 Trustees who come from a range of professional areas reflecting the requirements of a modern, forward-thinking Board and in alignment with the needs of an Educational Institution. Marius Brodeala, Development Projects Officer, commented,

DEN's projects have proved to be very successful and have positively impacted many students at the University of Westminster. Thanks to the Trust's support, DEN has also attracted external attention with multiple international collaborations. A great programme indeed!

Quintin Hogg Trust (QHT) has supported various projects at the University of Westminster including kick-starting a mentoring scheme, The Regent Street Cinema, match-funding the alumni fund, bringing international students to Fabrication Festival (FAB FEST) and many other projects. QHT inspires students for future studies and new achievements, making their university experience brighter and memorable. Paula Doyle, a trustee of QHT, visiting one of the DEN's projects, the virtual field trip to Vietnam, commented,

It was fantastic to see how the students from Hanoi University and the University of Westminster were working collaboratively to learn more about each other and how the Westminster students were learning about Vietnam's long and turbulent history. I was struck by the level of engagement of all students and the open reflection and discussion points among them. Covid has taught us that much can be done and learned across continents without physical travel, and this virtual trip is an inspiring example. Well done to the DEN for making this happen!

DEN is one such project that has received support from Quintin Hogg Trust since 2016. An initiative like DEN has been essential in supporting and driving students to reach their goals in life, addressing them to the right pathway.

DEN empowers students to engage and contribute to various projects to enhance their employability independently from their course of study. The projects aim to integrate communication and interaction between students, locally and internationally, collaborating with academics.

Thanks to the QHT, DEN has been fortunate in supporting hundreds of students in their growth, offering opportunities to share their talents in International Student Conferences, events, publications and video production. These opportunities motivate and encourage students to drive their professional development, which will help them in transferrable skills, always crucial to employers. In addition, students are urged through critical thinking to share their creativity and passions with the community.

DEN has been an important initiative that sustains the engagement of students' diversity to promote meaningful learning experiences and social-emotional well-being. Learning and integrating with different cultures increases the confidence in interacting with a broader range of social groups and in themselves. In addition, DEN offers terrific opportunities to move internationally, allowing students to expand their perspectives and develop a cross-cultural awareness by discussing and learning from different societies worldwide.

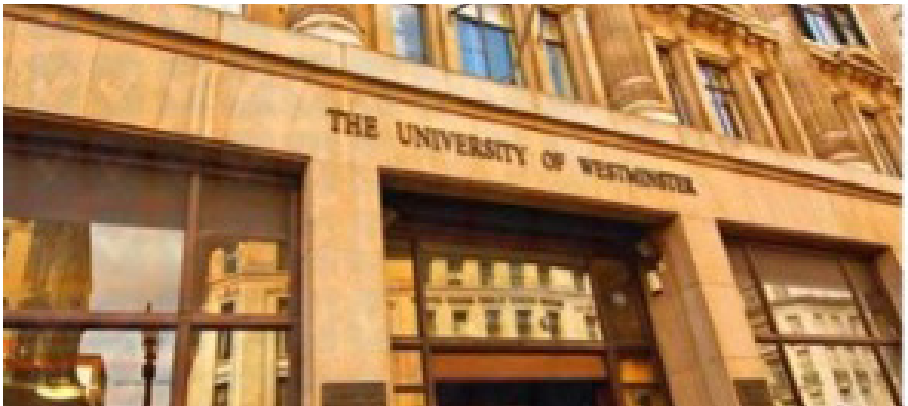
In a world that changes every day, we need more organisations like the QHT to generously support projects like DEN that encourage and inspire students to help drive the change positively.

Eleonora Venturini, BA (Hons) Creative Writing and English Literature

Alexandra Bukhareva, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

Students' Journeys

My Journey From Babson College in Wellesley to Westminster in London



New Country, new city, new campus, new faces. As I walked into my first class as a Study Abroad Student at the University of Westminster, I was asked to write about my journey. No other instructions were given, simply, just to write about how 'you' got here. Within five minutes of class, I realized that I felt out of place. I was a Babson student studying global business in a room full of well-rounded politics students, all sharing the same passions. I then thought, "How did I end up here?"

Babson College is a small school in Wellesley, Massachusetts that prides itself on being named the #1 school for entrepreneurship in the last 26 years alongside empowering its students to create lasting value not only for themselves but for the wider world. Being a Babson student, having a global perspective and mindset is huge. The student population itself is comprised of various ethnicities, nationalities, religions – making it about 75% international. We need to know that we are not alone in this world, and Babson believes that if one surrounds oneself with people from all corners of the world, it is a lot easier to be reminded of that. In addition to this, the opportunity to travel abroad is sometimes even a deciding factor

for future students. Business is usually synonymous with finance, numbers, accounting and all of the quantitative sides of the way the world works; however, that side is not the one that speaks to me. Sure, you need numbers and ratios when it comes to business, but business is also about people, cultures, relationships - without understanding this, it would be impossible to truly create a successful business. This is where abroad comes into play when talking about my own journey. In order to graduate with a Global Business Management concentration, it is required to go abroad; this is where people usually go somewhere simple and 'cool' to take random classes that check the box. However, I decided to take advantage of having the opportunity to take classes at a university that offers different degrees and majors and, hence, a wider variety of classes that I would not have had access to if I stayed home. With all these new classes to choose from I wanted to force myself out of my comfort zone and opt for classes that would challenge me academically and mentally. I knew that I wanted to return home feeling more well-rounded, in a worldly sense.

Since joining the University of Westminster, I have already been exposed to various ways of thinking and opinions - opening my mind and forcing me to challenge my previously constructed opinions. All the modules I have had the honour of taking, are led by passionate lecturers who wish their students to be eager to learn and excited to walk into class. I think that was something immensely important and impactful as teachers are not only tasked with 'educating' their students but also serve as mentors, helping guide students through unfamiliar waters: without passion it makes it hard for students to actively engage. Other than my scholarly experience, I have met so many people that come with their own different experiences.

So, I guess I answered my own question. I ended up here because I decided to push myself, to do my part as a world citizen by further educating myself in topics such as worldly development: to help the future, one must understand the past. I know for a fact that the lessons I learn from this course, alongside the other ones I am taking, will be implemented into my daily life and I am so excited for what's to come.

Natalia Zapata, Study Abroad International Student from the USA

A Traveller's Guide to Studying in London



It was a warm day in October when I first flew to London to begin my studies at university. I had been to the UK a couple of times before, though never for anything longer than a few weeks and without a specific touristy goal in mind so I was very keen on this new experience. I have been a big fan of travelling around for a few years, mostly finding cheap tickets and generally just seeking adventure in countries in Europe, seeing new places and getting valuable life lessons. Since most of these trips were only with a few of my friends, I quickly learned to be independent and take care of myself. So for me, starting university here was the next big adventure where I could learn new things in my studies as well as stay for a more extended period in a different country. Alas, even though I was excited about it all, I still would feel nervous in my first few weeks here, but I believe that every student has these feelings when they first go to university.

As I reflect on the first few months of my university experience in London, I was facing a whole new environment in which to learn new things. But also, with lockdowns stricter than I had ever encountered before, there is one thing I got from all this that I wouldn't trade for anything in the world: experience. So I decided to write this as a guide for readers who might feel lost in this new academic environment. Hopefully, some of you will find my advice helpful for your beginnings in university life, or at least interesting enough to read through to the end.

The first thing I would always say to first-year students is, don't be shy! University has a lot of new people for you to meet. I can readily attest that studying is way easier and enjoyable when you have people to discuss

topics with or at least vent to if some tutor gave you too much coursework to manage in a single week. I know it might be hard for some people to start talking to random people and making connections, but, especially in your course, most students there came to that module because they are, at least to some extent, interested in the same topic as you. There are also so many different university societies to join through the student union website, where you can easily find people to interact with. These friendships are not only beneficial for your mental health but also for practical reasons as well: if you want to rent a house or work on some group research projects, having close friends you trust gives you opportunities to make your stay in London more exciting and meaningful.

The second thing which I find extremely important to address is just study! There might be times when you feel overwhelmed or don't see the meaning of what you are doing for coursework. I sometimes had that feeling when I was doing reading during the lockdown period where you had a disconnect between the coursework and the meetings where you could not connect the dots in your head to see the purpose of what you just read. But it all comes together further on as you read, and it's alright if you do not understand everything from the reading the first time you do it; that is what studying is for. It is also relatively easy to get the feeling that you are falling behind or that you procrastinate too much, but the thing is, everybody does their studying differently. Some people like to do all their work as soon as it is assigned, and others want to do things at the last minute. So all ways of studying and doing your work are pleasing if you learn from it and do what you came here to do: learn.

The third and most important thing that everybody should keep in mind is to be productive with your time in university! We all worked hard and paid good money to get into these academic institutions, so you need to grasp each possible thread that could lead you to do other exciting things during your time here. Of course, I know that it is easier said than done, but it is worth attempting, even if you fail sometimes. I would certainly consider myself an average blog writer at best, but from my personal experience, just forcing myself to get up and participate in something has given me some of the best memories and knowledge of my time here. By participating in many different activities, even if they were outside the university, I have gained valuable experience in volunteering work, researched various organisations, and even landed an internship at LATO, a sub-organisation for NATO, an organisation I would love to work for. And of course, it also led me to DEN, which is the organisation in which you can read this blog. You have so many opportunities to do many exciting things: you need to participate and show everyone what you can do!

Karlis Starks, Year 2, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

My Everyday War

The IV line dug deep into the pit of my elbow, delivering doses of what tied me to this earth. 'Parvolex' they called it. A bastard is what I knew it as. A bastard is what they saw when they looked at me. I lay there on that gurney, expelling the putrid remains of depression wine I was too young to buy and co-codamol I was too old to overdose on, before a younger nurse took pity on me and administered an anti-nausea drip. As I lay in my despair, I heard the conversation of the patient on the left side of the curtain and the doctor attempting to decipher what the matter is with this life-loving soul.

As time passes by, hateful stare after uncaring glance passes by the open door of my makeshift cubicle as if they wish to throttle me for trying to throw my life away when they must deal with the consequences. A name I no longer used was printed on the tag attached to my wrist and I was carted off to sleep in a room of sinister geriatric patients of a gender I didn't belong to. Although that day these medical professionals snatched me from death, the treatment I was given - not the medicines, but the lack of understanding and the careless discrimination - was the root cause of my ailment.

Years later; I find myself an adult, able to purchase depression wine legally (although I still can't stomach white), and still the draftee of a social war declared upon my people by the elite, self-victimised 'intellectuals', and troglodyte commoners, all of whom would wish I had succeeded all those years ago.



I awake in the embrace of my boyfriend – a fellow draftee – and as I do whenever I have the energy, attempt to wash away the trauma of years past and ongoing in a shower which alternates between far too hot and far too cold. I brush my teeth, take the lifesaving medicine which I fought like hell to be prescribed against the wishes of countless GPs, equip an outfit of either limitless self-expression or reluctant compromise, apply war paint as if to laugh in the face of the everyday stares, and take a moment to appreciate my Student ID. Although just a piece of plastic, it is adorned by my name – not a name given to me, but MY name – and when you and I are long dead and gone, it will still exist to affirm who I really was.

I browse through Reddit and then the BBC on my phone yet the posts feel the same: feel-good article, a bombing a world away, a story of success, an ignorant and objectively flawed opinion piece authored by someone who accuses my peers of mass rape and false intentions, (mere days later, said author is exposed for committing several sexual assaults to which she confesses, blames the victims, and creates a manifesto calling for our lynching).

I travel by train, avoiding the hateful stares of the man on the London Underground and the concerned glances of an Orthodox parent. I alight at Oxford Circus Station, weaving around tourists and commuters, my ears perking up at the word ‘faggot’ stated by a passing coward while an officer of the law looks on.

I arrive at my university around 20 minutes late as usual and read law in halls paid for in generations past by men in a time where my existence was illegal. Later, I catch up with my friends and hear stories of good times, troubles at home, plans for the future, and with tutors who while teaching, expressed disdain for those like me. I catch a glance from someone who I believe to be one of my sisters in this war. I smile, they don’t smile back, and I don’t blame them. I go to the women’s room and use my privilege to pee in the correct room. I wash my hands, catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror and contemplate doing all this again tomorrow. Another woman washes her hands next to mine, looks at me, and gives a reassuring smile. Maybe all this is worth it.

My name is Elizabeth. I am a woman. I am transgender. When I die, whether it’s long in the future in the wrinkled arms of my love, or tomorrow at the end of a TERF’s knife, my toe-tag will have the right name on it.

Elizabeth Sole, (She/Her), Year 1, Law LLB (Hons)

DEN and community: beyond the politics



Hopetowns during the pandemic

For the first couple of months of 2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic changed the world as we knew it, Hopetowns was running our popular weekly support sessions in west London. During these sessions, the community members (including young people aged 16-25) accessed English classes, learnt 'skills for life', shared meals together, and met new friends every week. This included an exciting creative writing project and reading group. Our organisation supported people with many practical issues, whilst also providing a warm and welcoming atmosphere, fun activities, and educational sessions every week.

Once Covid-19 struck, we quickly changed our activities and started a community WhatsApp group where we shared some learning resources and stayed in touch with people so that they didn't feel alone. We also shared multi-lingual Covid-19 information from the NHS explaining the lock-down rules and other important information. In addition, we started running an ambulant food bank where we handed out food parcels safely to those in asylum accommodation and refugees across London. We then also created educational packs handed out in a Hopetowns tote bag containing an English grammar workbook, graded fiction books, healthy snacks, note pads, pens and vocabulary worksheets. These were handed out through the community food banks to those who expressed an interest in receiving a pack. We also continued providing remote support with form filling for integration loans and other matters relating to the asylum process. At one point in the summer of 2020, when the UK Government allowed certain Covid-safe outdoors gatherings, we held two barbecue sessions in a park. It was the first time since the beginning of March that people were able to meet and, unsurprisingly, friends turned up in large numbers. It was wonderful to see so many faces, old and new. Everyone shared food and stories, played group games and made new friends. We also used these opportunities to hand out more of the aforementioned education packs.



Later in the year, our founder Samer and colleagues from the organisation Peaceful Borders travelled down to Folkestone to the army barracks where newly arrived asylum seekers are housed in terrible conditions, to offer them clothing, food and hygiene items. Our community members often tell us that Hopetowns helps to break the sense of isolation which they are experiencing in London. It takes away some of the stress they feel throughout the long process, during which they wait for the outcome of their asylum application. Even those who have been granted refugee status face daily challenges as they try to navigate the housing market to rent a place to stay, seek employment, and go through day-to-day life in a completely new society and culture. We support them with all of this and help enable language learning to support integration and self-empowerment.

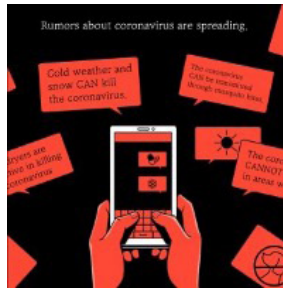
Our group members also really seemed to enjoy the summer barbecue events. Here is what some of them said:

“I’m super happy because I have been in lockdown for three months and haven’t seen anybody ...Really grateful for this opportunity.”

“Now, finally, we have positive things to enjoy when we come out of lock-down. I’m very thankful to all the Hopetowns team, who are organising things for us.”

While the situation of the global pandemic, of course, brought its difficulties, and we had no other choice than pivoting within our strategy and pressing pause on the weekly in-person activities and lessons, we are pleased that we have been able to keep the Hopetowns community vibrant and supported through a WhatsApp group, food bank, education packs, summer barbecues, and administrative support. We are grateful to everyone who helped make this work possible and look forward to another year of Hopetowns throughout 2021!

Dr Marta Wellander, Alumni, Hopetowns and Founder of Refugee Rights Europe



Media Literacy in the Covid-19 Crisis

Our world is going through a pandemic crisis; Coronavirus (Covid-19) is spreading all over the world with an incredible speed. The number of people who have been infected is rising day by day. The whole world is experiencing a period out of the ordinary. We are all in a process of adaptation; all countries developing strategies to get this pandemic crisis under control. At a time where communication technology develops seemingly every second, getting the crisis under control appears to be one of its most challenging points. In our technology era producing information is one of the easiest things, especially considering the availability of social media platforms: anyone can invent information without citing sources. Henceforth, everyone is exposed to several types of information each second through media, which ends up leading to information overload. This highlights the importance of media literacy.

This article will indicate the various types of information being produced during the Covid-19 crisis, according to the typology Hasan Ashrafi-Rizi and Zahra Kazempour mentioned in their article: "A Commentary on Information Typology in Coronavirus Crisis", in line with the emphasis on the terms 'media literacy' and 'information authenticity' through further up-to-date examples and definitions.

There are many types of information we are being exposed to during the Covid-19 crisis; one of the leading information types being "shocking information", which is the type of information that causes people high concern. Examples of this include the mutation of the virus (taking variable forms depending on the host cell it attaches itself to), the easy spread of the infection, and the age group that is most under threat. In other words, the sensational information that become a media cause-celebre.

“Comforting information” on the other hand is the information that comforts and calms people. It is mostly implemented through the memes and gags on social media platforms such as the ‘safe hand challenge’ conducted on Instagram where celebrities share funny versions of themselves hand washing. This type of information accordingly decreases the intense perspective on the virus and helps reduce tension and anxiety. As Hasan Ashrafi-Rizi and Zahra Kazempour also indicated in their article, comforting information serves as a safety valve, relieving pressure and preventing the further pressure building. Thus, it is a tool to make the crisis safer and under control.

One of the main types of information shared on the topic of coronavirus is “valid information” which is the information that has a scientific evidential basis. This information demands feasible reasoning and authentic information; an example is the handwashing techniques recommended by WHO (World Health Organization), including the necessary duration (20 seconds with soap) and demonstrating techniques that will reduce the threat for us and our relatives by decontamination of the virus.

By contrast with valid information, “misinformation” is the unreliable information based on wrong assumptions. Considering the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, this information rapidly spreads into online platforms where it has the highest potential of reaching people. Mis-implementations where the source of information is not valid, or the information has no basis in scientific fact ends up creating anxiety and panic among the public. This brings up another related topic: media literacy. A media literate person is one who consumes media products wisely; in other words, one with the ability to distinguish true information from false claims. When we think of today’s circumstances where information overload is higher than ever, media literacy - being mindful of the reliability of information and interrogating the information we expose - takes on increasing importance.

“Disinformation” is information that has been created in order to meet the specific intentions of the distributor and may be disseminated for specific purposes (e.g. political, economic and cultural) by the producer seeking manipulative benefits. Governments’ attitudes towards disinformation during the pandemic has led to the implication that they’re providing efficient crisis management. This means taking beneficial and helpful steps to meet the expectations of the public and instituting solid precautions for the good of the public. Furthermore, “confidential information” is the type of information that is intentionally kept from the public since it may give rise to conflicts. With Coronavirus, the public can never be sure they know the exact numbers of people that are infected and the actual numbers of deaths due to Covid-19. The information about the confirmed numbers that has been represented in the media may not reflect the truth.

Rather like confidential information, “postponed information” is information that has been released to the public with some delay since presenting



information brings certain consequences and issues with it. In order to manage the pandemic, information can be announced after a process of retention. This is exemplified through the beginning period of the pandemic, during which the Turkish authorities delayed the publication date of information on infection as much as possible, to avert a chaotic environment. However, the information has to be announced eventually, as the number of people who catch Covid-19 is increasing, and by delaying releasing the numbers, the trust of the public can be lost, and the authenticity of the information revealed will ultimately be questioned and doubted.

In addition, “doubtful information” occurs when the information presented cannot be claimed as authentic due to insufficient scientific information and validations. For example, some types of vegetables and fruits have been claimed to be alternative solutions to prevent infection. Garlic, for instance, is well-known for its antibacterial properties, hence thought to help fight against Coronavirus, but this is not scientifically proven. Accurate data can only be provided through certain evaluations and assertions of qualified scientists.

“Contradictory information” is information that has been debated among contradicting opinions where different perspectives on one particular topic cannot be agreed upon. An issue such as the value of mask use during the pandemic is a case where each side claims different positions on the value of wearing a mask to decrease or control the spread of infection. As a matter of fact, most of the information we are exposed to is contradictory, considering there are many sources of information from multiple perspectives, and much is still unknown about Covid-19. “Progressive information”, on the other hand, is information that is open-ended, where several studies need to be conducted in order to clarify unknowns such as the future development of Coronavirus. Such information cannot be forecast without observations over time and this may change as a result. Another type of information is “perplexing information” where the information constructed has the purpose of creating awareness by informing. However, the audience is not necessarily a suitable target for the information that reaches them; an example would be scientists using an

advanced level of language while making a scientific implication to inform the public that does not possess sufficient background knowledge to be able to understand the information presented to them.

To conclude, as mentioned above, the excessive amount of information represented in the media cannot indicate the true information; moreover, it may not be disseminated through appropriate ethical ways. Considering all the information types we get exposed to, first and foremost, we should deliberate over the information we obtain. We should have the power to control the information we are continually exposed to every day. Being able to distinguish right information from wrong, being critical as to the sources of information, seeking reliable sources and authentic information, in short being active media users will provide effective usage of media during information overload and promote media literacy.

Melodi Diner, BA (Hons) Communication and Design, Bilkent University, Turkey

The paradoxical effect of continued injustices and rising awareness: capitalism and lockdown



My experience during lockdown has been challenging but more importantly enlightening.

I feel I can speak for many when I say the various challenges posed by the pandemic have driven us to question our realities and the way we choose to live our lives, as well as taught us more about ourselves and others. Although being in a position to reflect on your life is a privilege symptomatic of the very issue this article will discuss – capitalism, there is a

paradox: capitalism for all its benefits is unquestionably the catalyst for the majority of injustices prevalent in the world today.

Many of the existing injustices across the globe (e.g. poverty) have inevitably been amplified by the effects of Covid-19 and have ironically become more apparent through reflections on capitalist privilege. For instance, through reflecting on the increase in fast fashion consumption during the national lockdown we can understand the implications of capitalist privilege (i.e. the ability to continuously purchase non-essential products) on exploited workers and the environment. According to Oxfam, “the carbon footprint of new clothes in the UK each month is greater than flying a plane around the world 900 times”. Whilst this is a clear global concern for the environment, it is also a major ethical concern in that developed countries such as the UK continue to contribute vast amounts of CO₂ emissions that disproportionately impact less developed and developing countries in the Global South.

The pandemic can be said to have caused a void for many, with fewer distractions and more restrictions, a period during which a modern ‘reality check’ emerged. Advances in capitalism/platform capitalism, and therefore consumerism, arose to supplement the void. Platform capitalism is when business takes place through the recruitment of vast numbers of people who utilise a company’s platform to make profit (e.g. Deliveroo and Zoom), and would profit from the products or services sold by individuals or companies utilising the platform. The significance of platform capitalism is these platforms instigate new inclinations within capitalism that impede the emergence of a non-capitalist future. This has been paired with various companies shifting to accommodate for more online shopping.

Ironically, the tremendous increase in alternative means of consumerism (online) over lockdown has led to a rise in awareness of the injustices caused by capitalist consumerism. The rise in awareness is evidenced by the presence of numerous posts on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and TikTok educating people on this matter. Recent events relating to the BLM movement have put capitalism, and fast fashion, under the spotlight, highlighting fundamental plagues of the world such as systemic racism. Consequently, people are becoming more conscious of their everyday life choices and of the ways in which they consume. Relating back to the beginning of this article, through these unprecedented times many ongoing issues of the world have resurfaced, but we have also seen people come together and stand up against the very systems and institutions that are responsible for these issues. There is much to learn from these difficult times, as well as many positive outcomes that we can achieve. It is our responsibility to increase our awareness and ensure we strive to become conscious individuals.

Yasmine Hisham, Alumni, BA (Hons) International Relations and Development



The World Must Change

Covid-19 is a clear example of the fact that with enough pressure, the world can and will change. In the span of a few short months, our lives have become unrecognisable. When people rightly lament the many injustices prevalent on our planet (global inequality, global warming, systemic racism) it is often retaliated against with an air of defeatism, as if humanity's way of organising itself is a stubborn old man set in his ways: "Things are never going to change". Well, things have changed many times before and they have changed in 2020. Although we live in a vastly different world to the one our grandparents grew up in, unfortunately, we should be ashamed to admit systemic racism is still prevalent. Against the backdrop of Coronavirus and the complete reorganisation of our lives, a revolution is occurring

For four weeks now, many citizens of the United Kingdom have been protesting systemic racism in the UK under the movement Black Lives Matter. This movement started in 2016 with roots in the Civil Rights Movement and has reignited on a large scale after the murder of George Floyd in the United States of America on the 25th of May. The movement has spread in part in solidarity against police brutality in the US but also because the rest of the world is not innocent. The UK is not innocent.

Coronavirus can be lethal but systemic racism often is too, and it is always violent. And yet it continues.

The duty to protect others has been espoused heavily during the global pandemic. We wear a mask and socially distance to protect ourselves as well as others, the importance of which has been drummed into us. Yet it has taken global unrest to bring to the forefront the need to dismantle systemic racism - even though it is violent and lethal, and present worldwide. This is a repulsive reality.

The view has been expressed that a global pandemic is not the time for protests, highlighting how little many people care about the lives of black people, as they are being lost every day due to racism. This is not something that can wait. At the Black Lives Matter protests the majority of people have been wearing masks and abiding by social distancing measures as much as possible. Could the same be said for Victoria Park on a sunny Sunday afternoon? Absolutely not. The hypocrisy of such statements is simultaneously astounding yet not surprising. We must support Black Lives Matter as much as we support the duty to protect each other from the virus. We must not be silent in the face of systemic racism. Understandably, some people may not be able to attend due to health insecurity, but we have an undeniable duty to call out and fight systemic racism in our personal lives, as even the smallest opinion expressed can have great influence. The world can change with enough pressure. Anything else is an excuse.

Lina Hammouda, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

The Future Will Become a Reflection of the Period



For all of us, the sudden shutdown of society due to Covid-19 has created an emptiness within our work, studies, and social lifestyles. All of us have created stories from the experience of lockdown - that of travelling back thousands of miles to be reunited with family, shielding from society, or working from home; this lockdown has given us a chance to reflect on how we have persevered but also struggled with being apart for so long. I reflect on my experience of lockdown from working in a supermarket in central London and the pandemonium of panic for basic groceries.

Before the talk of a national lockdown, my work life had already been thrown into chaos. My part-time job at Waitrose, initially a lifeline for me, had suddenly become vital to the distribution of essential food and goods. This sudden increase of footfall given the panic buying had seen desperation for Partners to work more hours to keep the store surviving. Given that university learning had moved towards online teaching and the increase of overtime meant I moved into working almost full-time hours for much of the lockdown. Encountering longer hours, stressful shifts, and coming to grips with being the only person on Central Line trains during peak hours put everything we do into perspective and for a reason.

Once the lockdown was introduced, my life revolved around Waitrose, early mornings to finishing hours later than scheduled had shone a light on the seriousness of where we are at within our lives. Never would I have thought that my part-time job would become so important, but for a couple of months, it did. I have never felt prouder to have been working in the Partnership these past few months and to know I delivered when it was most necessary. It has been the small moments which mattered to me, such as joking to managers about accidentally agreeing to work a Sunday evening on my birthday which led to them giving me a birthday cake and a gift as a thank you for the work myself and other partners were doing or experiencing the first of many 'Clap for Carers' as I stood by checkouts in my meat and fish apron clapping awkwardly. These high moments come at a cost, as although around 90% of customers were understanding of the difficulties we were facing, it became much more common for anger to crack through. The fear of Covid-19 and the possibility of a stricter lockdown to match the stringent rules set out by governments in Spain or Italy meant that although the proposals set out by Number 10 were much more relaxed, we all felt this could change at any time. The past few months have equated to some of the most stressful periods while working at Waitrose & Partners as my skill set was stretched across the store, as one shift was different from the next. Job roles included putting as much fruit and veg out as possible, cleaning fish on the counters, and watching the genuine madness over panic-buying toilet rolls! The truth is I enjoyed stepping up to learn more skills at Waitrose which I can apply in the future and I am proud to be seen as making a small difference to people in London.

Partners joked around with me that I was practically living in the conference room in my branch but the reality was I used my workplace as an escape; an escape from the loneliness of lockdown, escape from the separation from family and an escape from the deconstruction of society. As families across the world reunite and spend time together, this was not an option for me, whilst the chance for me to ask if I could work in a Waitrose closer to home disappeared instantly. Stuck in my London apartment because of the need for me to work and my need for income I had put myself in a situation which became common in my branch. For sure this became the hardest part of the lockdown, not the fear, but the inability to see my parents and

brother at home which is only 20 minutes from central London. My parent's inability to use video calling meant my ear ached after almost two-hour phone calls from various family members.

While I increased my working hours at Waitrose & Partners, I did not lose sight of the other things I wanted to learn during my off time. Something I have always felt I missed my chance with was to learn another language, notably Thai. Even though I am still in the beginner stages with a lot to pick up and learn, the momentum is there and I hope will continue for months to come. This period has increased my passion to learn more and to experience more.



Three months within our lifetimes seems minimal, yet given these circumstances, three months has become either life or death for many. To seize every opportunity has become a vital goal during my remaining years at university but also after I graduate. What I make of the future will become a reflection of the period in which the pandemic stopped the natural order of the world. As I mentioned at the start, this lockdown has provided us all with stories of how we coped, what we did, and what we must learn about ourselves. There is still so much to understand as we continue living in what is dubbed the 'New Normal' and I urge everyone to think and reflect on these, our lockdown stories.

Jamie Greenfield, BA (Hons) Politics



The aftermath of Covid-19 and its impact on earth

In these past couple of years, we have suffered a substantial global crisis, and we have had to come together to find the best possible solutions to survive. We faced an unprecedented challenge that threatened to break the world as we know it, so we fought together, slowly coming out on the winning side. Or did we?

We felt the struggle of Covid-19 impacting the population, but what impact did it have on the environment? At the beginning of the pandemic, there was much speculation on the positive effects that Covid-19 had on global pollution, especially in big cities. We saw the change that happened when everything came to a stop: there was no traffic in central London, less transportation available, and we had a beautiful blue sky compared to the grey smoke that we were so accustomed to seeing. There were wildlife sightings in cities like Venice and other unexpected places, due to the absence of traffic.

We could walk, run, or ride bikes around the city centres feeling almost as if we were in the countryside, suddenly restored. We breathed in fresh air without smog from cars or buses, staining our nostrils black.

In the middle of the pandemic, we seemed to find a way to repair some of the damage done. It appeared that being confined to home had impacted people to behave better and be more cautious about their actions. However, did Covid-19 positively impact the planet? Moreover, if it did, how can we follow this up now that we are back in motion?

We are now 7.9 billion people in the world as of January 2022. How many masks did we use, change, and throw away? If we reflect on the medical waste alone during these years, the number of single-use face coverings we had to wear is astonishing. Recent studies from the University of Denmark have estimated that we used 129 billion face masks every month, which is 3 million per minute!

Suppose we consider the Personal Protective Equipment used in medical settings, like gloves and shoes, which unfortunately are made from material which does not easily decompose. If not disposed of in the right way, all this material although used for health reasons will cause real hardship to the planet, resulting in increased waste in our oceans and land fill sites.

The chemical production that was negatively affected by the pandemic in 2020, (in Europe €499,1 billion, 6,4% down on the previous year), saw a sudden increase in 2021, to €582,9 billion, 16.8%. This was due to the meeting the rising demand for businesses and health carers. These chemicals usually come in rigid plastic containers that must be recycled as the plastic is most likely hard to decompose if they are simply discarded.

Recent studies have also suggested that global warming, causing the melting of the glaciers, will increase the spread of ancient viruses trapped in the ice for millions of years. This ice melting contributes to the migration of species in territories now warm enough, affecting the transmission of new diseases.

The initial relief for the environment seems in reality like an illusion because there was much more at stake that influenced the environmental degradation of the planet.

England aims to achieve Net Zero greenhouse gases by 2050, whereby CO2 emissions are meant to be removed from the atmosphere. Thanks to a rapid change of policies and commitment in many sectors, scientists will focus on the linked reactions of global warming and how to change their impact.

We can all contribute to recycling and be more mindful, even - especially, during a pandemic, and so supporting this necessary change.

Eleonora Venturini, BA (Hons) Creative Writing and English Literature



Solving seemingly unsolvable problems

As students, we solve problems every day - whether it be an issue related to our studies, jobs, personal life, health, society or the environment. Although we work towards our aspirations and set new goals all the time, some things just do not seem to get any better, no matter the effort. However, it is crucial not to ignore these seemingly unsolvable problems, as they will most likely come back to us in one form or another when left unchecked. Let me give an example of such a problem that is very simple and seemingly insignificant, but familiar to many people living in today's world.

Let us say that Mary is trying to lose 15 kg of her body weight. She currently weighs 80 kg but desires to reach 65 kg. Mary is in good health overall, fairly active and not excessively overweight. Despite the absence of an objective need to lose weight, she has been trying to achieve the weight loss goal for a decade now. She has tried strict and not so strict diets, fasting, daily exercise programs and whatnot, but without any long-term success. There have been short periods when she has been very close to achieving her aim, but the results have never lasted long. Now, Mary does not talk about her desire to lose 15 kg anymore, but deep inside, the idea of wanting to weigh 65 kg does not fade away. Therefore, she is still on the lookout for new diets and tries to avoid eating with others to save herself the trouble of having to justify refusing food.

To help Mary, most of us would probably encourage her to accept her body weight as it is, not let weight define her worth and suggest that she eat

with others to maintain relationships. It seems like a good way to solve the problem, right? Unfortunately, it is unlikely that she will be able to follow this advice and make the weight problem disappear. Even if she can fully accept her weight of 80 kg by following a well-refined professional strategy, she might not feel fulfilled. Mary might start feeling scarcity in another area of life, such as her finances or relationships, and start blaming her unhappiness on perceived problems in this new area. Therefore, Mary's dissatisfaction seems impossible to solve.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to solve such a problem when some not so obvious but essential steps have been skipped - just as impossible as building a house but forgetting about the foundation. The house walls can be constructed exquisitely, but without a solid foundation, the house will not stand still, no matter the effort. Therefore, in the example above, Mary's weight was not the problem to be solved at this stage - the weight was just like "a part of the wall that had fallen a bit out of place due to missing pieces in the foundation". As hard as it is to take, putting a great deal of effort into solving the symptoms - such as her weight - will probably never succeed at solving her problems. Therefore, as the first step towards successfully solving her situation, Mary needs to identify the missing parts in her "foundation", which can also be called the root cause(s) of her issues.

With this story, I encourage you to think about whether you have something in your life right now that seems impossible to solve. If so, can you identify whether this thing is a root problem or a symptom of something bigger; in other words, "a missing part of the foundation" or just "a damaged part of the walls"? To increase the chance of long-term success in both personal and professional life, step away from symptoms and start tackling root problems as early as possible!

Grete Kurik, BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition

Black History Month



What Is It, And Why Should We All Celebrate?

As a first-year student at the University of Westminster since starting my course, I was intrigued by a huge flag outside the main building in Regent Street Campus. The flag represents Black History Month, and I am sure many students and members of the public have also noticed it.

I became aware of the seriousness of the month during the first meeting of DEN this academic year. I was asked to write a blog on Black History Month: When did it start? Why should we celebrate it? Is it just for Black people? Could anyone get involved to recognise and celebrate Black accomplishments and their impact on our world and humanity? This short blog is an attempt to answer these questions.

The origin of Black History Month goes back to 1926 and Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), known as the father of Black history in the United States, when he set up “Negro History Week.” Woodson was a poor working-class man with no or very little access to education or a job at an early age.

He found a job in a coal mine, saving his money to educate himself. He went to a school that was for Black students. He continued his study, earning a master’s degree from the University of Chicago and later a PhD from Harvard University. In 1926, Woodson became a historian, writing books and articles extensively.

His struggle for representation, standing up to racism, and exclusion of African Americans in schools, colleges, universities and in the educational books encouraged him to join forces to establish the association for the



study of negro life and history in 1916. He and his followers later launched the journal of “Negro History” which published African American history in honour of the achievements of people with African descent.

In 1926 in the second week of February, Woodson and his organisation launched Negro History Week to promote the study of Black history in universities, schools and the Black community.

Black History Month was first launched in the United States in 1976. All the United States presidents chose a day in February to celebrate Black History Month. The day is the birthday of two influential men: Frederick Douglass, who escaped slavery to become a prominent activist, author, and public speaker, and Abraham Lincoln, who played a crucial role in freeing slaves.

Later, Black History Month was recognised as an important event, and different governments including Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland, celebrated it. For example, in the UK, it was first celebrated in October 1987, which marked the 150th anniversary of Caribbean emancipation when the Caribbean was finally freed from the bondage of chattel slavery.

Finally, Black History is everyone’s history; it concerns the struggle of Black people against discrimination. This history has been systemically left out of our educational books and mainstream media. Black History Month provides us with an opportunity to learn, celebrate and work together on breaking down barriers and the privileges that continue today. A final message I would like to say is I would encourage everyone in the world to fight racism, discrimination, and hate towards Black people and other races. We should remember the reasons Black History Month is known around the world.

Okafor Bruno Chukwuemeka, BA (Hons) International Relations

Reflections on Black History Month

“It is a month that we celebrate, promote, support and respect the black people’s achievements.”

Alua Regine Monoke, BA (Hons) International Relations and Development

“Black History Month is a period where we can showcase who we are, our talents and our culture.”

Lovester Aperpeng-Kyeremaa, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

“It is about paving the way for raising more voices for black people within our community.”

Keletso Kesupile, Alumni

“It is time to reflect and recognize the success of black individuals who’ve contributed to our history.”

Olawale David Awoyinka, BA (Hons) International Relations and Development

“It is an essential month for people to learn of black people’s struggles to achieve freedom and equal opportunity.”

Wanya Whyne, BA (Hons) Politics

“In light of the ongoing pandemic, we must take a moment to highlight and celebrate the excellent, ground-breaking contributions and innovations made by our black nurses, doctors, scientists and innovators.”

Odayne Haughton, Graduate and Alumni

International responses from around the globe



How we beat Covid-19: Assessing the Cuban Experience

Imagine a sui generis country, disconnected from the world, with a deformed economy, no access to international credit, where a taxi driver can earn more money than a medical specialist. An island, whose main source of income is tourism, faced with its borders being closed for more than three months. A socialist nation with a minor private sector that faces multiple regulations, legal loopholes and obstacles. How then has that country successfully managed to contain the deadliest pandemic of the 21st century?

On March 11, 2020, the Cuban Ministry of Public Health reported the first Covid-19 confirmed cases: three Italian tourists on holidays. Twelve days later, with 40 infected and one death, the country implemented the closure of its borders, social isolation, as well as the closure of educational establishments and public transport.

The novel Coronavirus arrived in Cuba to aggravate the discomforts of a pre-digital society. The zeal with which government officials have guarded Cubans' access to information for years has had enormous repercussions for the development of the country. The first e-commerce attempts made at the start of the outbreak collapsed on demand. So, Cubans had no choice but to stand in long queues to buy food, sometimes overnight, sometimes under the punishing sun, crowded with despair. People in Cuba fear shortages of basic goods more than Coronavirus. Despite being a poor country, the island has a strong health system, one of the great achievements of the Cuban Revolution, which did not skimp on sending doctors overseas to fight the pandemic. However, since the beginning of the outbreak, the government was convinced that it would be impossible to cope with a wave of patients requiring intensive care, as in Europe or Asia. A weak infrastructure, the deficit of medicines and the embargo imposed by the United States preventing the entry of medical equipment were sufficient reasons. The way out of this epidemiological crisis was through prevention.

Cuba's experience has shown that simple measures help contain an epidemic. Yes, this also applies to novel Coronavirus. While developed countries carry out massive rapid tests to detect asymptomatic cases, in Cuba medical students visit household by household repeating the same words: "Does anyone have a cold, cough, fever, sore throat?" The ordinary Cubans never knew the FFP1 or the N95 and, in absence of hand sanitiser lotion, they use pure chlorine shot directly in the hands. However, no one is missing a face mask, regardless of their social background. Retired workers, private businesses and state entities have taken charge of sewing and distributing them, many for free or available at minimum prices, just to cover the cost of production.

On the other hand, the Cuban government, with a great tendency towards centralization and experience in handling civil liberties with "mano dura" (heavy hand), had no qualms about transferring the positive cases and their contacts to improvised centres of isolation which, before the pandemic, functioned as schools, work institutions and student residences. Guaranteeing the health of the majority prevailed before the will of the individual.

The Cuban President, Miguel Díaz-Canel, has taken the measures he believed necessary, without finding internal detractors on the way. The only judge of government strategies has been the independent press, as yet unrecognized in the country, persecuted and censored. Moreover, the ability of citizens to subject state policies to public debate arises. That is something new. Social media has become for Cubans, in recent months, a tool of social pressure, a platform marking a break with a one-way information channel, allowing alarm signals to be visible. Clearly, the state management of the few resources available in the fight against Covid-19 and the conceptualisation of an effective epidemiological system were decisive for the early control of the disease. But the actions of civil society,

which has been strong, hard-working and fundamentally innovative in confronting this pandemic, must also be recognized. Despite belonging to an exposed sector that still lacks legal personality and faces economic challenges such as the absence of a wholesale market and access to financing sources, local private business owners did not hesitate to donate goods to those most in need. They have also gone beyond business creativity to keep their entrepreneurship alive.

At the time I am writing this article, my country seems just as usual. “We



have almost defeated the Coronavirus”, the state press repeats. According to official data, Cuba ranks 16th among the Latin American countries with the most cases of Coronavirus and is one of the 20 nations with the most recoveries (percentage) in the world. At the close of June 27th, the National Director of Epidemiology of the Ministry of Public Health, Dr Francisco Durán, stated that only 43 people are confirmed active with the disease, the lowest number in the last month. It will be interesting to see if the benevolent statistics are maintained when the country reopens to international tourism.

People are back in the streets, back “en la lucha”, as we say. The city scene is only missing the schools open to all without distinction and the public transport full of half bodies hanging out of the bus doors. Overcrowding at its finest. While the rest of the country is experiencing the first phase of the de-escalation plan, Havana continues in an atypical quarantine. The Cuban reality makes it impossible to stop the mobility of passers-by, forged for 60 years under the principles of a culture of resistance. The last calls for sacrifice are no longer taken with equanimity by a civil society that, beyond questioning whether the political system should be changed, lives in the certainty that the current economic model is not viable. The promise of a prosperous future for Cubans is a ship full of empty words that has already set sail.

Alejandra Angulo, MA (Hons) Journalism



Returning to Kazakhstan in the Middle of the Global Pandemic: Reflecting on My Experience

It is undeniably difficult to argue against the statement that the concept of change became one of the key concepts depicting the events of the past two years. People are changing, cities are changing, the world is changing. Nevertheless, due to many factors, this change is experienced differently by different people. Our experience varies according to the place we lived during the course of the global pandemic. I wouldn't make such statements if I had lived elsewhere: returning home to Kazakhstan after my first year of studies in London I have realized the visible difference of how various countries and governments are managing the pandemic.

The very first thing I noticed was right after I landed in Kazakhstan. Apparently, you cannot enter any building, café, restaurant or public place, without having to download a local app, "Ashyq", that allows you to scan the QR-code at the entrance and your location will be saved. In order to download this app to your mobile device, you have to register at the governmental website, where your mobile number, ID, and address are saved to the system to further notify you whether you have to self-isolate in case there was someone with the virus close to you.

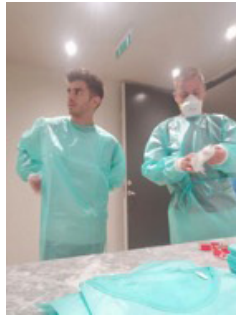
Despite the control via this app, many public places are equipped with thermometers, so you will not be able to enter a building having a fever, which could possibly be a symptom of Covid-19. However, now when it is known that there are many other symptoms other than increased body temperature, the majority of these thermometers are not in use.

Another thing that grabbed my attention was the progress with vaccination programmes. In London, I had already got used to the structure of vaccination that was introduced there, with different chronological phases that depend on the degree of people's vulnerability to the virus, and centres of vaccination placed in various locations throughout the city.

In Nur-Sultan (the capital city of Kazakhstan, where I am from) the situation is a bit different, since now anyone who wishes to get a vaccine, can go to the nearest vaccination centre and get vaccinated. This is not age-dependant. What surprised me is the variety of vaccination centres and huge propaganda promoting vaccines - vaccination points are literally everywhere, from local hospitals to big shopping malls, and many stores and cafes are even offering huge discounts if you show your vaccination passport.

There are always differences in the way countries behave, but why do these differences occur? Of course, there will be many contributing factors, including local economics, politics and the cultural nature of a country, its healthcare capacity or the severity of the pandemic in that region. It also depends on citizens' attitudes toward the concept of a social responsibility and duties: that is why some governments might introduce tighter control over people, while others choose to prioritize the promotion of self-isolation hoping for citizens' solidarity. Nevertheless, in every country there are people who follow all the safety measures, but also those who neglect the rules and I believe it is mostly a matter of their personal attitude towards the situation, rather than the conditions they objectively find themselves in. The situation with the safety measures and the way governments manage the pandemic definitely differs by country; however, it is not a factor that will allow you to make a conclusion whether one is managing it more successfully than another.

Alexandra Bukhareva, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations



What has been the Red Cross' response to the pandemic of Covid-19 in Iceland?

The spread of Covid-19 instantaneously changed how many of us live our lives. For better or worse, from the way we interact with each other to how we travel or conduct business, societies across the world have adapted and transformed to carry on with normality. As an international volunteer, I was involved in implementing Covid-related changes in projects at the Icelandic Red Cross (RKI), to ensure the safety of both staff members and clients.

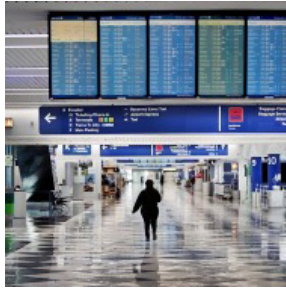
I work mainly on integration projects for people with international protection in Reykjavík, to reduce social isolation and contribute to the integration process of those clients into Icelandic society. This is largely achieved through social activities, workshops, information sessions, seminars, focus groups, one-to-one interviews... so how do we do this when meeting clients face-to-face is no longer an option? When the Icelandic government announced the ban on gatherings for more than twenty people, and the two-metre rule in all spaces, the way we operated our projects had to be re-organised. We could no longer host large groups of people at the facilities in Reykjavík, so communications with clients were mostly carried out via phone and email. Additionally, psychosocial support became an even more integral part of the job. When meeting clients in real life you can see how they interact, you might be able to tell if they look tired or stressed by the way they express themselves, you get a better grasp of what their physical and emotional state is. However, when communication is done through a mobile phone or typing in a computer you lose proximity with the client, and you need to find other ways to fill that void. Calls to clients were made more regularly, online meetings via platforms such as Zoom or Skype

became the norm to reduce social isolation. It all came with its challenges since not all clients own a computer or even know how to use one. We had to get creative to be able to deliver information to clients with language and technological barriers. It was a learning process for both our clients and the organisation.

The Icelandic government was very quick in reacting to the recommendations of professional advisors and in developing an appropriate response. RKI has also played a crucial role in the response of the spread of Covid-19 cases in Reykjavík. To avoid overcrowding in hospitals and deliver the best health service to patients infected with the virus, the government rented private hotels and converted them into quarantine centres. Two of these centres Fosshotel Lind and Rauðara have been managed by RKI staff members and volunteers. Both centres host people in quarantine who are waiting to be tested and who cannot quarantine at their homes due to living with others in risk groups (older adults or people with a chronic illness), and patients who have been diagnosed with the virus but whose health condition does not require them to be in hospital. Patients who have been diagnosed with the virus and sent to the hotel facilities spend a minimum of fourteen days in isolation and are unable to leave their rooms or have physical contact with anyone besides the trained staff and volunteers. In order to mitigate confinement and solitude, RKI have been providing psychosocial support through specialised psychologists and nurses. Staff members and volunteers are responsible for taking in new admissions and discharging guests, providing catering and any other necessary supplies, as well as mediating between the guests at the hotel and any requests from the outside.

As a member of the quarantine facility team, the main challenge I encountered was maintaining human connection with the guests. Many of them are travellers, asylum seekers and refugees, often entire families with young children, arriving in Iceland and sometimes not fully understanding the scale of the problem. Following protocol requires us to wear full protective clothing when visiting guests in their rooms; this includes a long gown, face mask, goggles, gloves, and a type of medical cap. Protective equipment is of course crucial to performing our jobs, but nevertheless I have felt the invisible gap that is created between us trained response personnel in full PPE, and the isolated guests in a quarantine facility in a new country. It can be quite a process to build the necessary trust in order to better service people's needs. Overall, the response from the Icelandic government has been very proactive, keeping the number of infections low. Iceland's unique geolocation with very few points of entry, and Iceland having the lowest population density in Europe (Directorate of Health 2020), have also contributed to it being one of the safest countries to be in during the pandemic

Jordi Cortes Espasa, Alumni



Patience and Hope: My Journey from Mumbai to Delhi During Global Pandemic

Often, I introspect the situation we all are in and how the world we once knew will never be the same. Though the news of a virus rapidly spreading in Wuhan, China had made headlines all through December 2019, it felt quite far away to ever affect me. It felt too distant for me to imagine that it would impact me in any manner. However, my world pretty much turned upside down in March this year.

After the completion of my postgraduate degree, I had come back to India to visit my family. The months passed by quickly and even if the political climate has been extremely disappointing, there was still some hope. The one factor that made me hopeful was that I was going to return to London. The thought of meeting up with my friends and re-uniting with my fantastic teachers was quite exciting. This mere belief was all that kept me going for a few weeks.

Everything was in place: my tickets were booked, accommodation sorted, and the visa stamped on my passport. However, a week before I was meant to travel to London, I had scheduled to go meet my mother in another city. My mom lives in Mumbai and my grandma was also visiting her during that time. It felt like the perfect reunion before I left the country and I was really looking forward to spending time with them.

The flight journey Mumbai was quite far from usual. Everyone was wearing masks and using a sanitizer pretty much every few minutes. I arrived in Mumbai safely and I was very excited to go back to Delhi and board my

flight onwards to London. However, barely seventy-two hours after my arrival, I received a message from my airline stating that my flight had been cancelled. I was still hopeful that I would manage to book another flight. But then the official announcement was made that all domestic flights had been suspended across India. This news was shattering to say the least. Regardless of this news, I still tried to find other ways of somehow going back to board my flight to London. But soon, a nationwide lockdown had officially been announced for a period of twenty-one days and all international flights had been cancelled until further notice. All forms of transport had officially come to a halt. I was blank for a while and I didn't know what to expect further. I spent days cribbing and simply waiting. Even though the situation was severe, I still thought that this was temporary, and I would be able to travel soon. However, as days went by, it became clear that this wasn't temporary. This virus was here to stay.

The only thing we all looked forward to were the formal announcements by the authorities. Since all three of us were meant to travel, we kept waiting for some positive news. However, we were only met with disappointment as the lockdown kept getting extended and all travel bans remained intact. At one point, my grandma and I even considered hiring a taxi and driving back to Delhi. But that was not a wise option as the journey was over 1400 kilometres and crossing each state required special permission from the respective authorities. Each state has a distinctive set of quarantine rules and restrictions. So yes, definitely not an option.

As days went by, we all seemed to adapt and to be okay with the fact that we needed to be patient. Although I don't watch the news, it is safe to say that I am addicted to Twitter. On April 14th, videos started emerging of a large number of migrant workers gathered outside a railway station as the lockdown was meant to end that day. However, as the lockdown was extended, the train services also remained suspended. The workers demanded that they should be allowed to travel back to their hometowns. But within barely a few minutes, the workers stayed put and the police resorted to lathi-charge in order to disperse the crowd. Police officers were beating up workers for asking for their right to go back home. Every day after that, news stories emerged from across the country whereby migrant workers decided to walk hundreds of kilometres in order to get home. With each passing day, more news of deaths emerged. In May, sixteen migrant workers were killed by a train while resting on the tracks in Aurangabad. According to the Huffington Post, migrant workers have died almost every day since the tragedy in Aurangabad.

Knowing that this was happening across the country and that people were dying just because they wanted to go home or due to their lack of access to food and other basic amenities, my personal hardships suddenly felt so irrelevant. I had a stronger sense of acknowledgement of my own privilege and how lucky I was to have access to everything I needed to survive. My family and I found solace in the fact that we were together, safe, and that

we were still in a massively privileged position to be able to feed ourselves. Never in our lives have the three of us spent so much uninterrupted time together. In spite of the lockdown period being extremely challenging with regard to applying for jobs, the unpredictability of the whole situation, and the fact that India now has the third-highest number of cases in the entire world, I have learned so much through the past months.

I have a renewed sense of respect for all healthcare workers, municipality workers, security guards, and all those who have kept on working for the sake of others even during a pandemic. Most of us have stayed at home while these people have been on the frontline and selflessly done their job. I have never been diagnosed with anxiety, but I felt anxious most of the time during the lockdown. I have been away from home since I was fourteen years old and away from India since I was barely eighteen, but I never felt the urge to go home so strongly. Though technology can help us connect with our friends from around the world and access information, for me it was just fuelling my anxiety further. I kept scrolling through my Twitter feed but everything just seemed negative. The deaths, despair, and helplessness just made me feel sad all the time and I kept feeling guilty somehow for being in a relatively well position. But I just couldn't stop. I wanted to know whatever was happening. When I finally acknowledged that my phone was making me constantly anxious, I decided to keep away from my phone and it actually helped me. It helped me focus on the positivity around me and to be grateful for what I have.

I had initially planned my trip for four days. I ended up going back home to Delhi after four months. My friends and I often laugh over this as I have never stayed in Mumbai for such a long period that I can remember. The newly imposed formalities were extremely daunting and made me suddenly doubt if I could travel at all. I have travelled by myself every single time since moving to London, but I didn't know how I would manage this time. Even merely a few hours before my flight, I was questioning my decision altogether. This was primarily because of the fear of not just getting infected personally, but also becoming a carrier and spreading it to other people, especially my father.

The international airport in Mumbai was completely deserted and protocol had to be strictly followed right from entering the airport to boarding my flight. The main bit was the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment kits and thermal scanning. The whole duration of the flight was just silence. Nobody spoke for a duration of two hours. Although this whole procedure was very scary, the one positive factor to highlight is that I have never witnessed such kindness or solidarity among people. Each person was checking on one another or simply helping out with navigating through the airport. Or the beautiful gesture of smiling from behind their face masks at one another. This was so positive and heartening.

After finally arriving back home after months of being stranded away, the first thing I did was sanitize my luggage. It broke my heart that I couldn't

hug my father or play with my dog. Abiding by the state government's rules, I chose to self-isolate upon my arrival, and I home-quarantined for two weeks. Luckily, I didn't have to go through institutional quarantine because that would have been a different experience altogether.

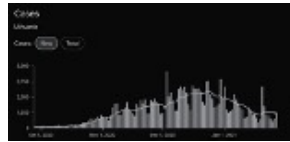
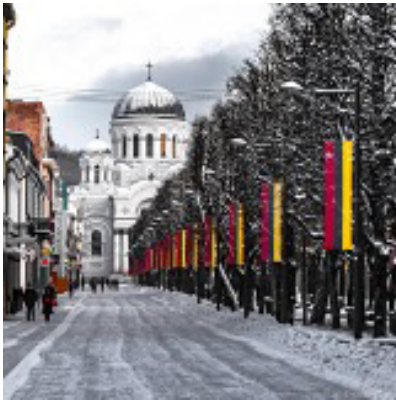
Despite the fact that the past few months have probably been the harshest and most challenging months of my entire life, I can't be grateful enough. Out of all the things I have learned during this catastrophe, the most important is patience. I can't be thankful enough for all that I have and for the fact that I still had a place to call home; my family members were safe and I managed to spend so much time with them. My heart goes out to all those who lost a great deal during this pandemic and yet have resisted and not given up. Their resilience is inspiring and I can only hope that the situation improves for everyone in India and all around the world.

Gehna Kapoor, Alumni

From One of the First to One of the Worst: the Case of Lithuania

Like all countries around the world, Lithuania, a country in the Northeast of Europe, faced the wrath of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. When the first few cases were reported in Italy, the Lithuanian government began to speculate whether or not a national lockdown would be necessary to prevent the spread of the virus in the country. Then, before the cases were in the hundreds a national lockdown was declared, a stringent approach that was adopted in many countries around the world. The Lithuanian lockdown was one of the strictest, with everything completely closing including all supermarkets (apart from essential food shops), schools and the hospitality sector, as well as the borders, which were closed to all including nationals. Though it was difficult to accept the new reality, the citizens realised that they had to act responsibly (for the most part) to get through the current circumstances as quickly as possible, especially as they've managed to get through hardships in the past.

As in many countries, a coping mechanism that quickly arose was humour, and the internet filled with different memes about how life was pre- and post-pandemic, how daily activities have suddenly changed and what they expect to experience in the upcoming months. The Lithuanian government



faced challenges such as controlling the flow of people during celebratory periods, which they tackled by imposing city-lockdowns, ensuring people were not allowed to leave their cities unless they had a place of residence outside of it. Furthermore, the so-called 'anti-maskers' and the 'anti-lockdown' protesters 'inspired' by the events in the UK and the US arose following the implementation of masks in all spaces, but this movement was weak; the majority of people abided by the law. Lithuanian authorities took the rules seriously, with fines being handed out to rule-breakers, and the army was enlisted to help with monitoring the people to ensure they were following the social distancing guidelines.

By the end of April, less than two months on from a nationwide quarantine, a few businesses were allowed to reopen, and an amicable move from the Mayor of Vilnius, the capital, saw the 'gifting' of all public spaces to the citizens, as a kind of reward for coping with the tough measures and abiding by the rules.

These public spaces turned into a big open bar which the Lithuanian people were desperate to return to, and this saw the hospitality sector gain an economic boost since it had been struggling beforehand. As the number of cases decreased throughout May, the three Baltic nations, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, created an agreement to allow quarantine-free travel between the nations, in the hope of reviving the tourism sector, and this was later extended to include Poland.

The leisure sector also needed reviving, and to do so the government allowed outside drive-in concerts to be organised, which were also broadcast on radio, so people could experience the joys of live music once again. Lithuania was one of the few countries to apply this initiative and it proved to be popular amongst the people.

On June 17th, the country finally came out of lockdown, and people were able to breathe once again. People maintained the 1-2m distancing idea,

as this had become common practice during the lockdown, but regardless of this, they enjoyed the summer to the full extent and tourism was bolstered during this time. The hope was to continue this way and be in a position to assist other countries that had not tackled the pandemic so well.

However, though the summer passed quite smoothly and cases remained low, the autumn months saw a drastic difference. There were two main reasons for this: people were tired of living under the lockdown measures and there were upcoming governmental elections in October 2020. People became more care-free when it came to shielding one another or taking precautions as they thought it was all over and that they could return to their old normality, but they were wrong. Cases started to slowly resurge, and records new highs were being set for the daily number of cases. The green-conservative government at the time did not act in time for fear that they may not get re-elected. There was little desire for another national lockdown, despite it working well in March. Once the elections passed, a new government was elected following the poor performance of the previous government prior to the pandemic, and the new centre-right government came in with an action plan to immediately shut the country down once again.

As I write now, the country is still in a national lockdown, the end date of which has been extended three times already, and there is a fear of an extension for the fourth time following the discovery of several new Coronavirus strands in other parts of the world. The holiday season was met with the same precautions as before: city lockdowns and no mixing of families, which is still continuing to this day (January 2021).

As it currently stands, Lithuania's infection rates are one of the worst in Europe, at one point being the country with the highest infection rate - but things are slowly looking up. It is disturbing to think that Lithuania went from being one of the first countries to come out of a lockdown with cases essentially non-existent, to being one of the worst countries in Europe based on the track record in the past three months.

The daily figures are gradually decreasing and edging on being at a plateau. Although the country is not yet out of the dark, the arrival of the vaccine is giving people optimism that life will return back to 'normal' (again), and hopefully, that will be the case by the summer.

Karolis Barutis, Alumni



The Kafala, Migrant Workers and Covid-19 in the Middle East

The kafala system, a sponsorship system formed in the 1950s, manages migrants and employers among the Persian Gulf Countries (PGCs) including Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is used as a way to legally bind a worker to their employer to obtain a legal immigration status, but, in some cases, it has proven difficult for workers who suffer inhumane treatment and abuse if they try to leave their employers or even leave the country due to the restrictions imposed by the contract they signed with their employer. Migrant workers are tied to the employers as they are sponsors allowing them to enter the country and remain there legally. This includes the confiscation of their passport during the time that they stay in the country despite this being illegal, so the workers become completely dependent on their employers if they wish to leave the country. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has reported that many household employers are preventing domestic workers from leaving employment, or refusing a day-off, or even confiscating travel documents as a way of protecting their household against “financial loss” (i.e. recruitment fees that have already been paid). Bigger corporations have also been accused of similar practices such as “charging of recruitment fees, or where employers fail to renew workers’ visas and keep passports, restrict workers’ freedom of movement” according to Basic Human Rights and Resource Centre.

With the impact of the global pandemic, many migrant workers have been left stranded due to the decline in economic and business activity. With over 23 million migrant labourers across the PGCs, according to the International Labour Organization, there is enormous concern for the welfare and safety of the workers, particularly those who have been made redundant by their companies: migrant workers are now being forcibly evicted out of their homes as they are unable to pay their rent. This is detrimental for many workers that have little or no protection as they are not part of the labour laws imposed across the PGCs. Many of the workers come from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Philippines to name a few, where nationals from these countries are enticed by the work opportunities in other countries, in order to support their families, especially with how easy it is to obtain a work visa in the Middle East. According to ILO, many workers do not want to pass up the opportunity to find work and “migrant workers contribute substantially to the development of their destination countries and send vital remittances to their families and communities”. Most migrant workers are often “low-skilled” such as hospitality domestic and construction workers.



Many contracted workers live in inadequate conditions; some live in dormitory-style labour camps, and also have to endure backbreaking labour, as seen by the construction of the Qatar Olympic Stadium in which around 12,000 workers have died since 2010, according to International Trades Union Confederation (ITUC). A recent report by Business and Human Rights Resource Centre concluded that a Covid-19 outbreak in the labour camp in Qatar resulted in a lockdown claimed to be a “virtual prison” due to the government neglect and the lack of provision of essential sanitation, support and information regarding the outbreak. There is also concern for the lack of welfare given to the workers as they live in a confined space, no doubt spreading the virus. Another example comes from a migrant worker named Hassan interviewed by Qantara. Hassan, who is from Bangladesh, is currently working and living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and he describes the dire conditions he and other workers are facing. He is sharing a one-bedroom flat with 11 other people, where the kitchen, bathroom and other amenities are shared, increasing the chance of passing the virus. In the interview, Hassan said he doesn’t “have any symptoms as such – sometimes [he felt] like [he had] a sore throat at night” but thought it was a trick of the mind. One week later he tested positive as saying “what [he is] more

worried about is money”. Cases like Hassan’s are not uncommon, and the reality of the lives of these workers is that their needs are not prioritised by the government or the companies that employ them, whilst many domestic workers that work in households are also in a difficult position due to the lack of protection by the law.

Migrant workers also worry about what lies ahead after the pandemic. Many feel scared of an uncertain future, with many workers unsure if they can resume work or if they will be furloughed or offered payments while in quarantine. With the current system, little priority is given to migrants, and many that want to return home are stranded and worried about the future as their livelihood is at stake. According to my research, migrant workers support development in their own countries through remittance (transfer of money back home). India, Philippines and Turkey receive large flows of money: US\$ 9.2 billion, US\$ 6.2 billion and US\$ 4.6 billion (not only from the Middle East), demonstrating the vast number of remittances from emigration. The impacts of remittances in the Developing Countries Study have shown that remittances have a potentially positive impact on the national economies of the worker’s own country.

According to the IZA World of Labour, remittances can both have a good and bad effect on developing countries. Amongst the positive aspects, they argue that “remittances can facilitate the accumulation of human capital by making possible improved sanitary conditions, healthier lifestyles, proper healthcare, and greater educational attainment. Remittances can ease the credit constraints of unbanked households in poor rural areas, facilitate asset accumulation and business investments, promote financial literacy, and reduce poverty”. Nevertheless, it can be argued that it decreases the labour supply and creates a culture of dependency that prevents economic growth from within a developing country. “Remittances can be curtailed, along with international migration, by escalating anti-immigrant sentiment and tougher enforcement practices in host countries, including the US and many in Europe and the Gulf region.”

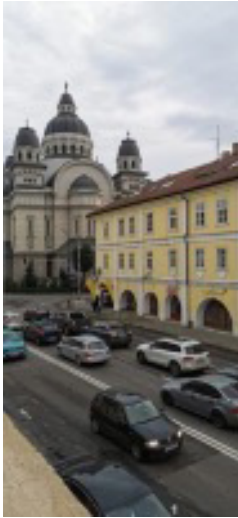
Margaret Fernandes, Alumni



Romania, Covid-19 and the post-Westminster “Good Life”

It is safe to say that the “Class of 2020 Experience” is quite unlike what other fresh graduates lived through when they finished their studies. After an exhausting dissertation and a nerve-wracking waiting period for one’s final results, the only thing soon-to-be graduates can look forward to is the celebration at the end of it all, gathering at the Royal Festival Hall to get their name read, receive their diploma, handshakes from the staff, all while in a gown with parents in attendance. Afterwards, an after-party with the people one got to know across three years whether through seminars, group projects, DEN or drinks at the suitably named “Thirsty Scholar” pub over on Great Portland Street. That was the closure I imagined and unfortunately, it shall stay in that realm due to a novel threat to public health: Covid-19. In this article I explore in a semi-formal fashion the impact of Covid-19 on society from my point of view and my personal struggle as an International Graduate who had to return to their home country. Lastly, as a fun thought experiment I will go back to the teachings of Aristotle and see if, despite my situation, I can still achieve “The Good Life”.

To begin with, something that was uttered very often in these past months was that pandemics represent the most challenging test for a government because of the strain they put on its healthcare system, overall economy, labour market and the society that animates these sectors. In Scambler (2020), the new coronavirus represents a “breaching experiment” that exposes a “fractured society”. A “breaching experiment” is something the author learned from the work of Harold Garfinkel. Garfinkel would ask his students to violate sets of social norms so that they would acknowledge their importance in day-to-day interactions. Keeping this framing in mind, Covid-19 has possibly exposed the flaws of neoliberal governance and the social order of financial capitalism. The “fractured society” has eight principal attributes yet for the sake of brevity I will mention the two which have caught my attention as the pandemic unravelled around the world.



Firstly, Scambler argues that high levels of wealth and income inequality have been omnipresent through history however these have only intensified since the mid-1970s. I have seen this deeper inequality gap take place via the sheer amount of people, friends included, who've lost their job. Without income, one's own housing is put into question if they answer to a landlord. Those lucky enough to keep their jobs have been forced to work remotely through platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams, however, one must ask: what happens to those whose countries are less digitally developed? Lastly, the following reality has to be acknowledged: the current global inequality will determine a country's access to the vaccine and even after the vaccine's release, death tolls around the world will still bloom.

The second factor is "post-national othering". "Othering" in itself is nothing new, but the novel Coronavirus has given birth to new arguments against migrants, the sick, the disabled and those

in need of benefits. Friends would tell me stories of Asian people being harassed physically in shops or verbally on public transports with the phrase "We do not want your virus here!". I wish people who engaged in this kind of behaviour knew that it is possible to point out the causes of problems without assigning blame.

The Romanian government's response to the pandemic can be summed up as "too little, too late". At the time of writing, real-time statistics from Date la Zi (2020) show there are 157,352 confirmed cases, 118,912 cured cases and 5,467 deaths while the average age of the infected is 46 years old. Working within a political party since July to help prepare for the local elections that took place on the 27th of September reminded me of the Romanian people's distrust in the government and its systems. Some basic measures were taken such as the redirection of public funds into the healthcare systems, the introduction of furlough payments and a lockdown which has been eventually relaxed although it looks like it will be enforced again on a countywide basis. The European Union directed funds to Romania as well to help it cope with the situation. The healthcare system is about to collapse and online teaching fares no better, as teachers do not have the knowledge nor the equipment to deliver remote learning properly.



The government's plan for in-person teaching has been lacklustre as well, placing the pupils in plexiglass "barricades" in unventilated crowded classrooms.

Reaching the last destination of this article, to what extent is "the Good Life" still within reach during a time of isolation? My findings will be based on Michael Pakaluk's (2008) interpretation of Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics". For Aristotle, the "Good Life" refers to the ultimate goal of human life which is achieving "the ultimate good". Someone who has been successful in this is "blessed" by a consistent disposition of "eudaimonia". The word when translated in English means either "happiness", "flourishing" or "fulfilment". Pakaluk in his interpretation chose "happiness" yet I would argue in favour of "fulfilment". To me, "happiness" is more relevant to one's personal life than their professional life. "Fulfilment", on the other hand, is applicable to both. I imagine it as the inner peace within someone who considers that they've reached their own expectations, their work from that point ongoing towards maintaining that state of mind. My interpretation of eudaimonia as "fulfilment" rather than "happiness" as per Pakaluk serves as a smoother transition to Aristotle's criteria of what must be considered "the ultimate good" because his first criteria of "Ultimacy" refers to the scale of the positive effects generated by one's activity towards their goal. Here, the goal regulates one's behaviour into a cycle of "doing good". Furthermore, "Ultimacy" dictates that the "good" generated by one's activity is measured by its "wholeness". A "whole good" includes "smaller-scale goodness". The second criteria, "Self-sustenance" says that the goal meant to reach "the ultimate good" is renewed constantly through one's activity.

In my interpretation of "eudaimonia" as inner peace, the subject reaches that state by achieving their goal, further activity only going towards maintaining it. The third criteria is "Preferability" which refers to one's ability to compare different "goods" according to what the world needs at the time. Judging from Aristotle's criteria, the profession with the most "eudaimonic" potential is the Doctor: their work is endless and it goes towards the goal of health. The goal of health is also the most preferable, since other people cannot work towards their goals with severe health issues. Doctors may not be happy all the time due to the pressure of their job but underneath whatever they may feel in a moment, underneath it all there might be "fulfilment".

What about me then? Can I reach a "Good Life"? My return home coupled with the current situation placed me in a "purgatory" of sorts, in which progress towards my goals (i.e. finding work, returning to London) has been severely hindered. Despite that, I do still apply to jobs both in my country and in the UK, yet listings are scarce. Increasing the scale Aristotle would say my "ultimate good" is me developing into someone people can rely on. The moment when I will be able to support myself and uplift others through my actions then I will know that I have achieved "eudaimonia".



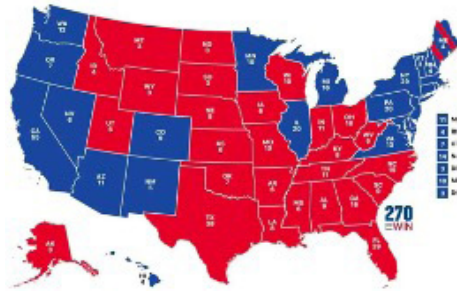
Covid-19: A game changer in the US election

Despite a controversial Presidency which resembled a juicy reality TV show full of misogyny, racism and drama, President Donald Trump was very likely to become the most powerful man in the world for a second time. Not even his impeachment ruined his chances at a second term in the White House, and he still managed to rake up 71 million of the popular votes.

Although the available data is still limited, according to The Guardian, this year, voter demographics seem to look fairly similar to 2016. 57% of the white votes were cast in favour of Trump, even more, white women came out to vote for him this time around, despite projections of the opposite, and he gained a wave of support from Cuban and Venezuelan Americans.

However, a substantially higher number of people came out to vote in favour of Democratic nominees Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, making history for multiple reasons. The President-elect collected more popular votes than any Presidential candidate in American history just one day into the election process with 74.5 million (and counting) votes, and with an Afro-Indo-American woman on the ticket as Vice President.

Biden and Harris also turned many ruby red States blue this year, including Philadelphia, Arizona and Georgia. This not only represents a huge win for the Democratic party, but also for the minorities and young people in those States.



After days of suspense, Joe Biden was named as the victor at 11:30 am on the 7th November 2020 by major news outlets including CNN and Fox news. This election has been described as a very tight one with most states being “too close to call” when the ballot count was still under 98%.

But what propelled Joe Biden to victory?

President Donald Trump is said to have lost this election due to his irresponsible approach to the Covid-19 pandemic. He constantly sought to minimise the gravity of the situation, calling it a “Hoax” and “fake news” invented by the media and Democrats as a ploy to get him out of office. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention had a significantly difficult time developing and organising testing strategies which caused severe delays. This was partly due to the administration’s ignorance in regards to how the virus would develop over the first few weeks: they were expecting it to disappear after 15 days like a “miracle”. The President and the key advisor on Covid-19 were also firmly against testing and called for testing to be slowed down.

Furthermore, the White House failed to provide enough protective gear to hospitals, schools, and the population in general. It is also hard to forget the dangerous lies and advice spread by Trump and members of his administration. For instance, he suggested on television that doctors injected bleach or disinfectant into patients to ‘clean’ the virus out of the body, while members of his team constantly repeated that masks were useless and made people even more likely to contract the disease – which was, and is, an outright lie. Trump’s administration made so many dangerous policy mistakes which have gained the US its title of the country in the world most affected by Covid-19.

Unfortunately for him, Covid-19 is very much real and his supporters were not spared by the deadly disease. Many Trumpies who were affected or work in the medical sector were disappointed with the way their President handled things, which encouraged them to vote blue.

As of today, there are over 10 million recorded coronavirus cases across the US and nearly 250,000 deaths at around 1000 per day. Many low and medium-income citizens suffered greatly from the pandemic's economic fallout. The internet has seen hundreds of testimonials from suffering Americans who could no longer pay their mortgages, student loans, debts, rent or feed their children. Regardless of the countless deaths and grieving families, the President carried out his re-election campaign in a 'business as usual' fashion. He hosted numerous rallies where social distancing measures and precautions were overlooked. A University of Stanford study has linked 700 Covid-19 deaths to Trump rallies. It was also found that rallies were often followed by a spike in Covid cases in the host area.

Unlike President Trump, Joe Biden's campaign prioritised electors and his team's safety. He and Kamala Harris conducted online and drive-in rallies to respect social distancing. Throughout his campaign and even during his winning speech on Saturday night, everyone made sure to show the public that they were acting responsibly by limiting physical contact and wearing masks when around each other. He has laid out a clear hands-on and comprehensive strategy against Coronavirus and the economic fallout it has caused. He has promised another huge stimulus package, a mask mandate in all states, the creation of a "U.S Public Health Jobs Corps" to employ at least 100,000 unemployed Americans to fight the pandemic and \$25 billion to fund more research and ensure the equal distribution of testing and vaccines, amongst many more policies. Despite not being in office yet, he has already set up a team dedicated to the health crisis in order to have a policy ready to install on the first day of his mandate.

The Biden-Harris response to the pandemic has been vital for them and without it, they would surely have been 5 million votes short of their seat in the White House.

Carmen Lesplulier, Alumni

A small superhero successfully fights against Covid-19 - something magical or just sensible?

While Coronavirus has hit the world intensively for months, Vietnam has remarkably beaten the pandemic and seen no cases of infection for 99 days and zero deaths. The early success comes as the result of timely proactive measures Vietnam planned and enforced since the moment when there were only two cases of Coronavirus in Wuhan. Thanks to the strong Vietnamese government and public authorities' efforts with drastic action for fighting against Coronavirus, Vietnam from the first steps contained the pandemic effectively. The measures and the spirit Vietnam implemented towards Covid-19 seems to be magical but could be applicable to other countries.

To begin with, taking Coronavirus seriously from the very beginning the Prime Minister of Vietnam released a statement declaring a pandemic when there were only 6 confirmed cases in Vietnam. Other measures include, the Vietnamese Communist Party introducing guidelines enforcing travel and transport restriction, organising strict health checks at borders and vulnerable areas, controlling international flights entering the territory and closing borders to neighbouring countries. Disease traceability has been conducted to help public functional forces and facilitate the process of seeking infected people, so as to put them in quarantine as an efficient way of controlling Coronavirus strictly.

Moreover, the government did really well in communicating with its citizens to keep them informed and get them involved in the fight against the pandemic with the Party, government and authorities. Of course, Vietnamese people trusted Vietnam's Communist Party and its government because they saw the government worked very effectively. The government also raised people's spirits during the epidemic through text messages sent to all phones with a motto "fighting the epidemic is like fighting against the enemy", adding the prevention statement "stay at home" on the screens of all mobile phones used across the country. People wear masks in public areas such as classrooms, small shops, on public vehicles, in markets, even as soon as they step out of the door. They also follow other protection methods like handwashing and staying two metres apart from one another. Like other East Asian countries, Vietnam implemented

social distancing quite early and carried out the world's largest isolation campaigns for anyone who entered Vietnam from abroad, isolating infected people at once and putting them in quarantine for at least 14 days with full basic needs provision, run and funded by the government. Any hot spots of community infection were put in lockdown immediately. In addition, all costs of proactive measures including quarantine, lockdown and medical costs have been fully funded by the government.

Although Vietnam is considered a small so-called developing country with limited resources, its Communist Party and government sacrificed for the whole society's benefits regardless of its difficulties. Vietnam has a culture of sacrificing itself for the common good, and we as Vietnamese have courage and kindness, humanity and solidarity, and we are ready to sacrifice short-term benefits for long-term ones. That is the key element of our success in fighting dangerous diseases in general, not only Covid-19. We are ready together as the entire country to confront hardships and dangers ahead and that makes magic happen. Covid-19 has not disappeared in the world yet and no matter how complicated and unpredictable Covid-19 is, the whole world in general, and Vietnam in particular, must always take it seriously from the start and act quickly with proactive measures, such as those that Vietnam implemented, to fight against the pandemic.



Due to Coronavirus, Vietnam timely carried on distance learning in education. Indeed, online education was already planned and available in education, but face-to-face learning was still more fundamental and popular in Vietnam. With Covid-19, all educational systems, from

compulsory schools to universities, moved to online courses for students to adapt to the pandemic and catch up with the annual syllabus. Television channels broadcast teachers giving live lectures which were convenient for students to watch. Universities provided training for teachers and students for distance learning.

As students of Hanoi University specialised in foreign language-related fields, we experienced the new reality of staying at home and seeing teachers through computer screens. In fact, distanced learning brought students a mass of advantages. Self-studying taught us how to be independent and responsible for the knowledge we gain without teacher supervision. Also, students learnt to manage time better as the commute to university was unnecessary, giving more time to focus on studies. Online learning saves time but it unintentionally impels students to read books more, which means we spend more time and patience on thinking and brainstorming instead of relying on teachers' thoughts. Online learning also satisfies the thirst for endless sources of knowledge on websites for students to keep ourselves up-to-date. Covid-19 obviously forced the Vietnamese education system to change, to catch up with modern technology and develop distance-learning which would be convenient for everyone at every time and everywhere. Despite some negative aspects of online learning such as inaccessible or weak internet and/or unaffordable devices, university students learnt a lot including self-brainstorming, technical skills by approaching high-tech devices for digital learning, reading and computing skills.

Vu Khanh Phuong, International Studies, Hanoi University

Students' experience through the pandemic: an inside perspective



After 14 Days of Quarantine, I Couldn't Hug My Father

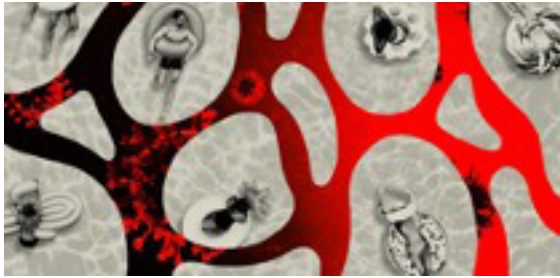
We opened our eyes one day with the most shocking news that Coronavirus, or Covid-19, has hit London after it emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019. While the pandemic started to cause a fast outbreak around the world, I was still in London studying. News about the deadly virus had been circling on social media, TV, radio and newspapers, including news about the increasing rate of infection. More alarmingly, news about the rising numbers of deaths in many parts of the world, which reached thousands per day, was causing me great panic and anxiety. News on social media was very alarming, even annoying since some information shared around was fake. So, I decided to focus only on news from trusted sources, including the World Health Organization and Ministries of Health in various countries. I found useful information about the precautionary procedures that should be adopted in order to avoid contracting Covid-19, including frequently washing hands, wearing gloves, sanitation of hands with sanitisers, and wearing face masks.

However, despite committing to the precautionary instructions of personal hygiene, I was still worried because the number of infections started to double, and many alarming videos of people falling while walking because

of Covid-19. Therefore, I decided to return to my home country, but classes continued as usual, and I couldn't travel without the approval of my university. What made me feel even worse, to the point of panicking, was when I heard that my home country, Saudi Arabia, was going to close its borders, meaning I wouldn't be able to go back. This was when I started contacting my lecturers about going back; they were really helpful and understanding and happy to help through video calls. However, immigration did not approve, so I had to stay until classes went online. Luckily, within a week the University decided to start online classes, and as soon as this happened, I booked my ticket, and my friends and I travelled the day after. Initially, our itinerary included flights from London to Bahrain and from Bahrain to Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Guess what? Unfortunately, while we were at the airport they told us that the flight from Bahrain to Dammam was cancelled, and the causeway was closed. So, as we couldn't go back to Dammam, you can say I had a small heart attack, it was a really hard decision we had to make: whether to stay in London or fly to Bahrain, not knowing when we would be going back home. After some time waiting there without knowing what to do, we decided to go to Bahrain. Once we all reached our seats in the plane the sanitizing process started: we started sanitizing the seats and everywhere near us, we got our own blankets and of course, the masks were never taken off. Upon our arrival to Bahrain, we were informed that we were given an exception and we would be able to go through the causeway. I guess you can imagine how happy I was at that time!

At the same time, we were told that we would be quarantined in a hotel in Khobar, Saudi Arabia for fourteen days as one of the precautionary measures to protect from the outbreak of Covid-19. At that time I did not really care about this part, as I was happy with anything as long as I was in the same place as my family. We were taken to the hotel in which we asked to be together so they agreed to split us into two rooms of two but, unfortunately, we could not see our other friends the entire period of quarantine. Moreover, we tested negative for Covid-19, but we still had to stay there for the full quarantine period to make sure that our health was good. We were tested again on the thirteenth day which yet again turned out negative. The period passed well, but the feeling of being in my own country in a hotel for fourteen days without seeing my family for such a long period of time was really weird. After I was done with the quarantine, my dad came to pick me up from the hotel. Do you know what was the saddest part of all of this? I had to stay apart and not hug him after this long period of time! I guess this was my hardest experience that I have ever had, with this rollercoaster of emotions - something that none of us will ever forget.

Sara Aldossary, Alumni



My Covid-19 Experience

The coronavirus pandemic rapidly spread around the world, during a time in which I was just a recently graduated student searching for a job in my speciality. With the economy taking a big hit and all the major businesses suffering, finding a job at times felt backbreaking. Despite all this, I believe this pandemic that we are still going through has actually taught us more than we may have ever known if it did not happen. I would argue one of the most basic but fundamental aspects that the pandemic has highlighted is that we are all human. As simple as this may sound, I mean it in the sense that none of us is immune to this virus. With figures such as Boris Johnson and Jair Bolsonaro having contracted it despite their powerful positions, the playing field is levelled when it comes to this.

Another key lesson this experience has taught me personally has been what is truly valuable in life: my family, friends, and the connections I have made over the course of my life. I say this because I went from someone who had been living my life on autopilot to waking up one day with no plan of what I was going to do and where to even start. This period has taught me much about myself and what I was capable of. During the first week, I formulated a timetable which included me learning Python (a type of coding language), applying for career jobs and learning French. Within a few weeks, this was the comfortable routine that I still follow even now as we progress towards the end of the lockdown. Personally, I believe that this would not have been possible without an event like the pandemic to show me what I am actually capable of.

In addition to how valuable life is, time is another area which I discovered the importance of. Before the pandemic, there were certain things I had always pushed back and had been reluctant in doing simply because I believed I never had the time for it. The truth is that it was never about having enough time to complete something but instead me not being able to prioritise things well. A few weeks in I saw the range of tasks I was getting done just by simply managing my time more efficiently.

The lessons this pandemic had taught me about mother nature itself have also been very eye-opening. For example, when it comes to the constant reminders from non-government organisations, as well as heads of states pledging a change will happen in the future, the pandemic has sped up his process and set the bar in what is achievable. With fewer cars on the road and power plants being temporarily closed, the thick smog which covered China at times had cleared up. Satellite imaging and recording a drop of carbon monoxide levels by 48%, amongst other greenhouse gases, demonstrate the result that can be achieved during a situation where we are posed with danger and have been forced to cooperate. Nevertheless, it is clear this is achievable now and we must all take the lessons we have learnt from the pandemic and implement them in our lives in the future.

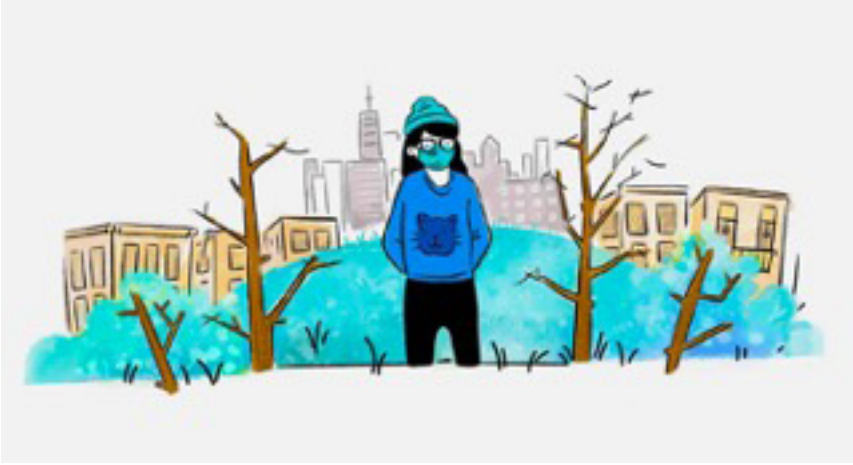
Abdirazak Yassin, Alumni

Towards New Beginnings Due to Covid-19



As an international student in London, my life has not been as easy as it had been in Turkey. After the national lockdown and fear of Covid-19, everything has changed in my life. On the 13th of March, our university announced that everything would be going online, which meant I was able to come back to my country and feel safer at home with my family. I purchased my ticket on the 14th of March, straight after the announcement, to fly back to my hometown. I would say this was the quickest decision I have ever made in my life without planning anything. I thought I would come back to London after two months for the DEN Conference and everything would be better by then - I didn't even pack up my items from my flat.

However, nothing has happened as I thought it would. I moved back to my country, Turkey, without knowing a new journey had begun for me. I effectively put my entire life in London into four large suitcases and started a new beginning.



I came back to Turkey safely, but some of my friends were stuck in the UK and struggled mentally because of flight cancellations in between countries. I was very happy to return and spent my time with my little sisters. During the three years of living in London I had had no opportunity to spend such a long time with my family so I am grateful for it.

During the lockdown, we faced restrictions which were not “normal” for anybody. I thought my mental health was going to be impacted because of doing nothing that I am really passionate about such as travelling to different countries, going to the gym, going outside with my friends to chill, etc. To my surprise, I learned how to do creative things in order to spend time at home with my family. We played games, gossiped with my little sisters, cooked - I was not a good cook before the lockdown - and took online courses to improve myself.

Day by day, I felt that I was healing and adapting to the “new normal” and life in Turkey again. Now, at the time of writing, some of the restrictions have been eased and we are returning to our life. However, this lockdown has taught me that family is the most valuable thing, and that we should not isolate ourselves from them. Apologies to my mum, she tidied up our home while we were having fun taking pictures!

Berfin Melissa Şafak, Alumni



My Experience of Lockdown

Rekindling old flames

Admittedly I have not exercised a lot or eaten the healthiest, but I have enjoyed many hobbies during these past four months. Dusting off my art supplies, I decided to pick up a paintbrush after four years. Whether the birds are chirping or the wind is howling outside, I draw and paint away for hours on end. Boardgame night has also made a return to my household in lockdown. While I have not won a game of Monopoly or Scrabble, a screen-free night is a therapeutic break.

Let's get Quizzical

Like many in lockdown, my friends and I hopped on the quiz bandwagon and have been creating our rounds. From general knowledge to a (very revealing) sex round, we get away from the outside world. Yet the pandemic will always creep into the conversation; our phones and television screens constantly buzz with more updates on the outside world. It has impacted us all in one way or another and snaked its way into our lives. With every quiz, though, we check-in and ask how each other and their families are doing.

Knowledge is Power

Once my first year at Westminster finished, I immediately scanned the reading lists for next year and ordered as many books as I could find. As I write, there is a pile of books on the fireplace waiting to be read. Varying from civil rights to middle eastern politics, all are intriguing. Reading the history of the US civil rights movements has been very revealing, in that only a mere snapshot of the campaign was presented in my history lessons. Lockdown has been a time of opening my mind and widening my knowledge. Not only is reading giving me a head start for next year but making me better equipped to tackle any challenge in life.

The Future

How can we ever go back to normal? The outside world now feels alien to me. Coronavirus has created an undeniable fear in people's minds for months, if not years. It will be ingrained in our descendants' history books as pre- and post-pandemic. As a shielding person, I feel hand sanitiser may become a necessity rather than a choice for when I can go outside again. Even then, I will have to wear masks and gloves to protect me. It will be scary to be back at work or travelling into university when I have spent countless days inside playing with my cat or bingeing tv shows, but I know it will be good for me. There is a glimmering ray of light, however. People not only understand the vitality of a public health service like the NHS, but the importance of a support system around them. We must not let the fear take hold of our lives but instead, venture outside when safe to do so and confront this different world together.

Sophie MacDonald, BA (Hons) History and Politics



Covid-19: An Opportunity that Inspired Me to Learn

It was the beginning of March 2020 and life as an undergraduate student was going perfectly. I was meeting up with friends, attending university and just having fun. Then, boom, in comes Corona and everything turns sideways. I was suddenly at home, attending classes via zoom, and living through a real-life history book.

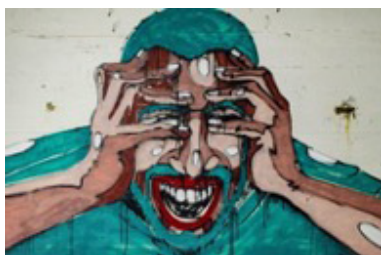
In the days, weeks even, that led to the UK's official lockdown, I watched as the whole world turned to an eerie quiet: no one was on the streets, no one was allowed outside, it was just a big worldwide silence. The whole experience was surreal, it felt like a whole dream; in my head I was like 'Is this really happening?' That led to inertia setting in.

A big sacrifice we all had to make while being in lockdown was our social lives; gone were the days where we hung out at parks, gone were the days strolling through London, gone were the days meeting our friends and family. It felt so different as I was so used to seeing my friends every day that it felt weird not seeing them all the time. But even though I could not see them physically, I saw them from time to time virtually.

During lockdown I think I have become a changed person; it made me learn not to take university and my free time for granted. Lockdown has motivated me in ways that I couldn't really imagine. For example, I started taking different online courses that were about different sections within international relations like US public policy, which is not something we learnt during university. I also started brushing up on my Turkish, as this is a language I want to become fluent in. Lockdown has opened up many different ideas and horizons for myself that I believe can help me in

the future. Moreover, I started to read again as before I did not have much time to read as I was busy doing other stuff, so it was nice to pick up some old books and read through them. I think now since lockdown has eased a bit we will start going back to normal life. However, it still feels so odd, it feels like I have been detached from reality, it honestly doesn't feel real. It feels like this is just a really long dream that I will wake up from. On top of this, I think lockdown has made me appreciate the outside world a whole lot more as I can't wait to go back, see new places, try new things, and explore the world.

Tasneem Fadel, Alumni



Quarantine: with my Social Anxiety

At the start of lockdown, I was happy as for someone who has social anxiety having fewer social interactions felt like a positive thing. I am a key worker and was getting to work for free with far less people around than usual, and there was no pressure for me to go out and meet friends. This meant every day off gave me time to focus on university work, however not every day was productive. I live in London, whilst my family are up North, so using video calls to speak to family was also fairly normal for me, so I felt like nothing much had changed and that my wife and I were quite lucky.

Three words to describe my feelings during lockdown would be relief, apprehensiveness and gratefulness. Relief due to it feeling like a break from the expectation to socialise, apprehensiveness of what was to come, not just for myself and my family but for the residents I cared for at the care home I work at, and gratefulness due to both my wife and I being keyworkers and not being in the position many have been in, such as not being able to afford to pay their rent. During the start of lockdown,

I was finishing my first year of my Masters, so I felt I had more time to focus on that, as other commitments other than work were cancelled. At times it was quite hard to concentrate but I thankfully was still able to get good grades. Moreover, since I had quite a bit of free time I have made a good attempt at reading the never-ending stack of books on my shelf.

However, something I took for granted before lockdown was being able to go back home when I had a few days off. Although I was quite happy not to have that pressure to socialise, I actually started to miss socialising, being able to go and meet friends for a drink and give them a hug, which is definitely something I took for granted before. The post-pandemic situation seems quite uncertain; I have tried to not focus on what happens after lockdown as I don't believe society will be back to 'normal' for a very long time, if ever. It seems to me that social distancing and wearing masks will be something that will stay for the foreseeable future. Moreover, university going online and not being able to use the library is something I have found very hard, as I am a book person and I don't like reading them online. If I could redo lockdown again, I would try to be less harsh on myself if I felt I had had an unproductive day: I would take more time to feel like I deserved to relax too. I feel quite lucky that I am one of the very few fortunate ones as lockdown has not affected my life dramatically. Despite all this, I have enjoyed spending extra time with my wife, which will soon be over when she goes back to work to teach the next generation. Although, one thing for sure is that none of us will forget 2020.

Ruth Spencer-Lewis, MSc Psychology

Covid 19, a Virus that Caused Peerless Times

The world became aware of the virus probably at the beginning of the year, but no one ever thought the impact would be like it has been. The time that we spent since March is unique, but for the ones who are abroad it is more challenging. As a foreign student studying in Germany, it was such a different experience for me, with both positive and negative sides to not being able to return home.

For me in the beginning, like for many others, it was total chaos. The cities which were full of people, joy, and noise turned into ghost towns. It caused the cessation of all activities, which reminded us actually how many activities we do in our daily routine. Mutual concerns for yourself



and your relatives is only one of the emotional challenges we faced. However, quarantine and other restrictive measures were the perfect times to get to know yourself, and if possible, to improve yourself.

We started our education online, which had a variety of effects for different people. But that made me realise that even the most boring class in the classroom had given something to me since I find the efficiency of online education to be questionable. It is helpful in one way to at least allow people to access education remotely, however the possibility of gaining knowledge from it is still debatable.

When it comes to dealing with the virus, I can objectively say that Germany did a successful job in handling it. Considering the population and demographic features of the country, the number of infected people and deaths are considerably low. While tackling it, they also allowed people to live in a very human way. None of the measures was as tough as other European nations, even in the days when the highest number of cases were reported. Even if the local governments had the capacity to enforce numerous restrictions, nobody triggered strict measures. Today, I can easily say that Germany is on the edge of defeating this virus, and people are outside and enjoying their lives again.

***Bulut Arın Taştan**, MA, European Studies, Europa-Kolleg, University of Hamburg*

Covid-19, Expectation and Reality: A Personal Reflection



There can be many ways to describe my lockdown experience but one that suits it most is 'ever-changing'. Before the whole Covid-19 pandemic, I took life for granted especially in regards to university, where sometimes I wouldn't turn up. No one was expecting what was to come and how that would change society so drastically. It did not seem like it was real because, all of

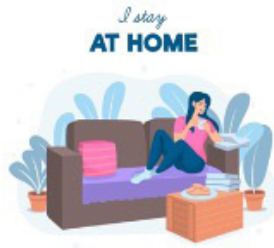
a sudden, people were being told to stay in their homes and to not go outside, and the world was rapidly changing.

There were many challenges due to the pandemic, but one of them was definitely the impact on our social lives, keeping social distancing measures, not being able to see friends or even relatives. When I saw my cousins after three months, they all got really emotional because normally we see each other every other day and all suddenly months had gone past.

Life during lockdown has not been so bad, for the most part, I've been trying to pick up another language, French, and have been focusing more on my health. Hiking in the mornings around 6-7 am every day, cycling in the evenings and watching shows. One thing that also has been different is that I have reconnected with people I hadn't spoken to in a long while and it has been nice to catch up with everyone. Something that has improved a lot during this lockdown is my cooking skills, since I have had a lot more free time and have been able to learn different recipes and try new things.

I regret that I did not make the most of the opportunities that I was given, and that is something I will change when life begins to get back to normal. Hopefully, when things do go back to normal, I will not waste a second of any opportunities I get, such as travelling, going places, doing more things than I ever did. One thing I really do miss, other than university, friends and family, is travelling; once the whole situation improves, I will be travelling more frequently and am looking forward to that. Something that I wish I did during lockdown is read more, gain more knowledge of things that may help me in my course and even in life in general.

Mahnoor Shahid, Alumni



7 things I have learnt during my time in lockdown

2020, the start of a new beginning, a fresh start for many and a year expected to bring us hope and joy much like every other year. However, this year took a slight turn and since February things turned pretty sour. Once the World Health Organisation had declared Coronavirus to be a pandemic, the world was brought to a standstill.

As world leaders and governments fought over medical supplies and people fought over toilet paper and soap, things were starting to get out of control and a nationwide lockdown was enforced in late March. Since then our lives have considerably changed.

Amidst the uncertainty, this was the first time I and many others had the chance to take a step back and detach ourselves from reality. What was seen to be an inconvenience was in my eyes a blessing in disguise. Here are 7 things I've learned during my time in lockdown.

- 1. Health is wealth.** In the midst of a public health crisis, it is normal for one to be concerned about their health, however this should be an eye-opener for one to take their health seriously. We only really get one set of organs, abusing them with alcohol or intoxicants is not worth it at all. One should treat their body like a temple, by ensuring what I put into my body is safe, clean and is most importantly healthy. I can't stress enough how important it is to eat clean and to workout; by watching your diet and your lifestyle you can prevent many diseases and illnesses and will hopefully go on to live longer, look younger once you reach old age and you are guaranteed to be happier. Now I'm not advocating you go full vegan but swap that chocolate bar for an apple, ensure you're drinking 2 litres of water (that's only 4 regular water bottles) and eat more vegetables. We all love a sweet treat here and there and that's perfectly fine, just do so in moderation. Don't jeopardise your health.

- 2. It's okay to be frustrated.** You have just as much right to feel annoyed, angry or upset as anyone, and nobody can tell you any different. Many of us have unfortunately had to deal with the loss of a loved one to the virus and many are still having to come to terms with these somewhat extreme social distancing measures where certain family members are restricted from seeing one another. This pandemic has affected all of us in different ways and no two sufferings are the same. Your feelings matter and they are not to be overlooked. However, I know that things will get better and at the end of this dark tunnel, there will be some light. I try not to dwell too much on those negative thoughts and start manifesting and working towards a brighter future for myself, one that my loved ones would ultimately be proud of. Mental health is important and not to be overlooked, if you are feeling down, know that there are people you can talk to.
- 3. It's the little things that matter.** It's very easy to overlook the little things: your mother's cooking, eating together as a family, spending quality time with your siblings, going out for a meal with your friends and being with your partner, are all just some of the things we pretty much take for granted daily. This lockdown has taught me to appreciate these things, appreciate the special people in your life, be that your friends, your family, or your partner - those that make you laugh and smile. Make memories to look back on. The petty arguments with my sister and my mother's lovely food and even getting a Starbucks with my best friend before class every day, are just some of the little things I will cherish. Appreciate what you have.
- 4. Embrace your faith.** Throughout lockdown, many religious holidays had passed and with all places of worship closed, millions of worshippers were confined to worship at their homes. Christians were not able to attend churches for Easter, the Jewish community were unable to come together to celebrate Passover, Muslims were unable to gather for iftars and prayers during the holy month of Ramadan and Eid as mosques were closed and the Sikh community were unable to gather and celebrate the most important day in the Sikh calendar, Vaisakhi. As unfortunate as this was, this lockdown brought many closer to their faith including myself, as spending Ramadan with my family at home allowed me to take in the blessings of the month and allowed me to make the most of the time I had to reconnect and embrace my relationship with God. Faith is a personal journey and lockdown has allowed many to reevaluate their lives and find their true purpose.
- 5. Cooking is fun.** I've always enjoyed cooking but have never really had the chance to cook as much as I have during my time in lockdown. I have managed to make a range of foods, some of which I learned from TikTok and online recipes. Waking up to make a Dalgona coffee has been the highlight of my mornings in lockdown. From making different kinds of pasta, rice and beans, bean burgers, sweet potato wedges

to baking cakes, cheesecakes and tiramisu, my love for food has only gotten bigger. Not only has it been enjoyable making food it's also a very wholesome feeling making food for my loved ones and being able to share moments over food.

6. **Nature is fun.** During my time in lockdown I made an effort to go on walks and visit the park, it was a refreshing feeling and I felt uplifted being able to take in the beauty of nature and put my mind at ease. Sometimes you don't need to travel on an aeroplane thousands of miles away to another country to witness scenic views, when you can explore the country you are living in and stumble across magnificent views, sunsets and mountains. If there's one thing lockdown has motivated me to do it would be to explore the UK more. Durdle Door, The Cotswolds and the Jurassic Coast are just some places definitely worth seeing for their natural beauty.
7. **Self-love is the best love.** It's easy to feel pressured to look perfect in a society obsessed with unrealistic beauty standards. Sometimes it can be very unhealthy and rather toxic. My time in lockdown has allowed me to detach away from all that: this is the first time many women including myself have gone without the need to wear any makeup and look perfect. I've been able to let my skin breathe and work on accepting myself wholeheartedly. When you feed your mind positive affirmations you learn to come to terms with yourself but most importantly you learn to love yourself for who you are. I hope everyone can learn to love themselves because it truly is the best form of love.

Nasra Shafie, Alumni

Covid-19 or how I learned to stop worrying and love my lockdown

I was drafting my dissertation as the initial government measures were announced. The rumour of a lockdown made its round at the time. Quickly I scrambled to the library and took out as many books as I possibly could for fear that I may not have the necessary resources to complete my assessments. However, the initial panic and hoarding quickly subsided and was replaced by a monotony of boredom. We were all stuck indoors with nothing much to do; fortunately, I had coursework to finish.

From the inside of my room, the pandemic and the lockdown went by with increasing measures, one thing led to another and suddenly there are worldwide demonstrations, the year seems to be turning into the most interesting in my lifetime. The pandemic and the associating Lockdown for me was a slight blessing in disguise, as it allowed me to focus on things I otherwise could not have, and to finish my dissertation within the timeframe I did, as well as read books that I have been meaning to read. This 'Interesting year' seemed to stay interesting for everyone but myself. However, it gave me time to focus on my studies. It also revealed to us who the people are that we can rely on and trust, from anti-maskers to activists it gave us an opportunity of reflection: who we wanted to keep in our lives and what needed to be changed, from governments to policies, changes are going to have to be made, and this pandemic served as a wake-up call.

As I was in London I was able to attend a few of the Black Lives Matter marches, not just as a way to break the monotony of the lockdown, but also because I believed in the cause and felt that for once I could go out and try and make a difference. As an avid photographer, I would also be able to document something other than my houseplants. The demonstrations were nothing like I had expected. Even though people numbered in the hundreds, the majority I saw still adhered to wearing a mask, which showed that the ones who were socially aware enough to protest for this issue were also aware of the health issues and tried to meet the restrictions as much as possible. Furthermore, the anger one could see in the people about this issue was mind-opening as years of repression came out during these marches. I believe that if it weren't for the pandemic and people being forced to remain indoors these large-scale demonstrations could not have happened: without the free time to think and be made aware of the injustices these protests would not have garnered the traction they did.

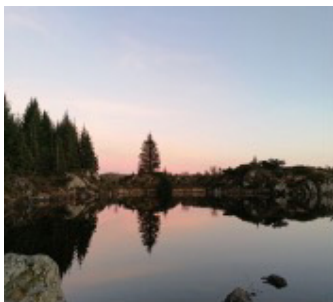
Halfway through the year, I had to move back to Switzerland, a place which approached the pandemic slightly differently; they managed to get the spread under control much faster, in part due to the complete mobilisation of the Swiss Army. However, this positive news did not last long as many



believed the pandemic to be over and started to gather in large groups again and to enter public places without a mask. This disappointed me greatly as I had always been under the impression that Switzerland and its people behaved more reasonably and would follow rules and regulations, although this misconception was quickly corrected. Having spent the pandemic in two different nations, it became obvious that

people and their behaviours were the same all over: a great part of the population seems to be completely out of sympathy to the other part of the population and unless it was happening to them personally, they did not seem to care that they may be harming others. This behaviour was already evident with the anti-vaccine movement (or pro-pandemic as I like to call them), but the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how many of these people surround us and how many people need to be educated in basic medical knowledge. All in all, maybe the world needed a wake-up call, maybe this was all for the best, so long as we learn from it and enact change; if we simply go back to business as usual then all those people would have died in vain.

Steve Fröhlich, Alumni, BA (Hons) Politics and History



Restoring Silence and Solitude in the Midst of a Pandemic

Since autumn 2019 I have been living in a small city called Haugesund on the west coast of Norway, working as a Project Manager for a local youth programme. In this short article, I will be talking about my experience of Covid-19 as a resident of Norway and as a youth worker in a small city where over one thousand children and young people live in families struggling to pay the rent. Yes, that happens in Norway too.

Starting with the broader picture – the Norwegian government was quick to realise the dangers of Covid-19 and had made significant restrictions already on the 12th of March 2020. House parties were banned, schools, offices and cafés closed their doors, and everything was moved online.

Just like everyone else, I found myself in a situation completely out of my control and I understood that a lot of what I had been working on over the past months wouldn't come to happen. My shoulders dropped and there was nothing to strive for. I spent the next three weeks working in the garden, helping my nieces with their schoolwork and maybe most importantly – praying.

Today I am thankful for our government's ability to see the dangers of Covid-19 and for their quick response. The spread of Covid-19 was quickly halted, and zero new cases have been confirmed in my local area during the past two months. As a result of the restrictions enforced by the Norwegian government, it is not so much the actual virus that has impacted us the most, but the physical separation and lack of normal routines. We have been forced to withdraw, to stop producing in the way we are used to and to be present where we are. I believe that the forced silence has been good for us. Maybe not comfortable but good – forcing us to reflect on our lives: what and who are we relying on? What is important to us? I am sure that many wouldn't agree with me on this point or even think I am insensitive to say so, but I remain confident that it was about time someone pushed the button that says STOP (and I believe nature agrees). People have been drawn out into the forest and to the lakes rather than into the city centre; that surely is a positive thing for us – breathing fresh air and working with our hands in the soil.

However, not everyone has a safe home in which to do their schoolwork or parents who bring them to the lake or to the forest. I was able to start working already at the beginning of April but instead of gathering up to 70 teenagers on a weekly basis, we started to meet the youth in smaller groups – creating more space to listen and talk to each person. Besides the positive things we witnessed and experienced (for example, one teenager expressed that his anxiety had eased) we could also see that young teenagers from less safe/poorer homes were made even more vulnerable due to the constraints. The financial worries of their parents were impacting the youth and many of them started spending more time in the city centre where it seems like drugs were made even more accessible than before. As a result, we have seen several young teenagers embarking on a negative trajectory. It will require a lot of resources and hard work to bring society back to where it was before this crisis began. Locally, I believe it is important to put resources into the youth and those who have been harshly ramified by the governmental restrictions. I also hope we will bring something important with us into the next season – for example, that silence and solitude weren't that bad after all, even though it felt uncomfortable to start with. Maybe it is something we should try to incorporate into our routine even when it is not forced upon us.

Victoria Vall, Alumni



My Education Journey from Tbilisi to London During Coronavirus

I clearly remember the time when I was preparing my application. From the very first day, I knew what I wanted. I wanted to study in the UK. After receiving acceptances from different universities, I had my eye on Westminster. I had heard about the diverse environment in this university, and the different social groups and activities that students can participate in. After living in 3 different countries, this seemed the ideal place for me to pursue my higher education. I was really looking forward to becoming part of this environment for the next 3 years! I was nervous. I was afraid that I would not be able to do everything I planned to. I wanted to participate in every possible thing related to my interests and do my best in studies as well. So, I set goals.

The most crucial time for me was from February to July. These were the months when I had to really plan what is ahead of me. July was when my offer was unconditionally accepted. I remember when I received the email, I was more excited than ever! My first thought was, 'hard work really does pay off'. So, what were the different expectations I had in mind? Honestly, I was hoping to start in September or October at the latest. Just like most students, I wanted to fully enjoy the first year of university. This meant meeting the teachers and students, attending interesting lectures and seminars on different topics, spending time in the university libraries to study, socialize with classmates and try to make the environment even better with my presence.

I never expected to be studying in London but not physically being there. No one was really prepared for anything that this year has brought.

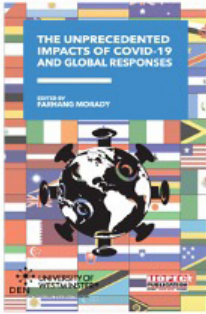
Who knew that a 'bat' virus initially reported in Wuhan would soon be a pandemic, completely changing the lives of everyone around the world? March was when the first wave really began. Back then, the situation was not as severe in Georgia because the state immediately took the necessary measures including restrictions and lockdown. I assumed that since the UK is a developed country, it will definitely manage and soon I would be there. My hopes were up for this. Day by day, the cases were increasing and so were the deaths. The news showed how the UK hospitals were full of patients of Covid-19. I still did not lose hope. I knew that soon things will start to get better. In September, university began online. I was still just as excited to study what I really enjoy. So what if I will not be in campus right now? At least this way, everyone is safe.

Obviously, online was not the same. But when you know you will have online classes, your expectations automatically change. Mentally, I had already moved from Tbilisi to London. In the first couple of days, I would hesitate to participate much in seminars. Even if I had millions of ideas in my mind to share in discussions. Yet with time, I started to really enjoy the seminars, watching the pre-recorded lectures, and doing different assignments for the modules that I am studying this semester. The module tutors were indeed supportive and although it was not the same as on-campus learning, the discussions were engaging and interesting! Social media helped in socializing with classmates. Students started creating WhatsApp groups and adding one another on Instagram, Twitter and so on. Everyone was being very welcoming and supportive. I personally decided that I will not miss any chance, so I volunteered to become a Student Rep and joined Democratic Education Network! Even if it is online right now, this is only temporary.

Why should we stop ourselves from participation? Yes, being in Tbilisi whilst studying in London is not the easiest thing. The time difference is not always so convenient. But giving up and losing effort is even easier. Clearly, I want to physically be there. But these past couple months have been very fruitful. I am now even more excited to join the campus! It has been a great journey so far, and I am sure that finally physically moving from Tbilisi to London will be an even more interesting journey.

Zohra Shamim, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

DEN's book



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World Without Boundaries: Working on Ideas and Publishing during Covid-19

As stated by the American industrialist Henry Ford, “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is a progress. Working together is success”. We hear quotes like these almost daily. But they only relate to us through experience as this is the only way to really understand the deeper meaning of quotes or sayings. Being in the DEN Book Team has taught us a lot. For Ford, success was for one person or a group of shareholders whilst many who were ordinary workers were left without any real benefit. So, for him the profit was paramount. For us it is about collaboration, sharing, believing that we can work together regardless of geographical locations, colour, ethnicity, race, beliefs or age group. Our goal is to have a different world, one that we are demonstrating through our action.

What really is a team? The first thought that comes to mind, to me at least, is: a group of people of the same age sharing mutual interests. Projects like this showed that this is not so important. We are all from different levels, first, second or third years and some are even studying for

their Masters. And we also come from different cultural backgrounds. This is what makes us a team. We learn from each other by collaborating. It has been such a fruitful experience. At every meeting one of us talks about what happened in the previous meeting. So, a first year would be chairing the members who are much older and far more experienced.

This has really helped us gain confidence. Not just about us, but about our work, our writing and thoughts. Writing coursework and assignments for university is not a big deal: teachers are the only ones who end up reading them and marking them. Getting your work read by several people, from different years, is a completely different story. For instance, an essay about development of the Third World turning into an article on the Covid-19 experience of these countries, or an essay initially being about democracy and development becoming one on how democracy contributed to maintaining the pandemic. After editing we gave each other comments on the articles to that team member presenting it. It feels really nice to share our thoughts with each other. It is heartening hearing someone else talk about your article and share what they think the purpose of it is, and of course give comments on how to improve. We understand how to relate articles to the main agenda of the project, in this case Covid-19. We have developed so many skills such as writing skills, editorial skills, and presentation of others' ideas to people. I believe that a key to writing professionally is to be able to transform your own work. Editing is not just making a few changes, is it? It's changing the structure, context and perhaps the content of the article. Most of us, in the team, chose an essay we did for university as coursework during the first semester. Then we shaped it into an article related to the agenda. This has taught me a lot. It gave me confidence. I now strongly believe that I can easily change my work into something it initially was not about.

So, what was the DEN Book Team project all about? Learning how to edit? Teamwork? Collaboration? Gain confidence? I think it was much more than just this. It was an opportunity to really discover yourself. I have learnt so much about my own capabilities during this project. When you share your ideas with each other, you motivate each other. It is not just about communication. It's about support. This is what I learnt by being involved in the DEN Book Team. And this is what all of us will take with us once this project is finished.

Zohra Shamim, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

Experiences from the team!

“The work on the DEN publishing project is something I wish everyone could experience. It is not only about collectively working on a book, editing articles and writing works. It is more than that – this project is a unique way to learn and develop your personality, along with developing writing, editing and communication skills. Being involved in this project allows you to look at things from different perspectives, meet new people and gain the experience that would be especially useful in the future.”

Alexandra Bukhareva, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

“I became a part of the DEN team in my third year and it has been the most profitable opportunity the University of Westminster has given me. Not only have I made lifelong friendships within the team that are outside of my field of history, but the experience has offered me the chance to advance my communication and coordinating skills, which are vital after graduating. By being involved in the publishing project and mentoring alone, my confidence in my academic ability has soared and inspired me to proceed into a MA.”

Ana Gill, Graduate and Alumni, BA (Hons) History

“As a third-year student working on the DEN publishing project helped me stay in touch with my peers despite the pandemic and helped me gain a wider perspective of how Covid is affecting countries across the globe. The attempt of this project is not just to produce a final product but to learn from each other and work together. To read each other’s work, edit it and make suggestions. This helped me in working together with other students to bring about ideas and to encourage others to get involved. I am looking forward to the final product and can’t wait to see how everything turns out!”

Andreea Petrovici, Alumni

“The DEN project has been an incredible endeavour to be a part of. The knowledge, collaboration and collective commitment shared by the group throughout this process has greatly impacted my academic experience this year. Farhang’s guidance and remarkable leadership style has tremendously inspired and provided me with confidence and invaluable leadership skills. It is so rewarding to see this book as the result of countless hours of work and collaboration.”

Cassidy Mattingly, Alumni

“The DEN publishing project has been an amazing opportunity to create a community of friends during Covid-19 and produce a piece of work collectively that reflects the realities of the world we are living in. We have learnt invaluable skills such as peer-reviewing, organisation and editing

research papers, all whilst building a structure for future year groups to continue long after we have graduated.”

Esme Bartholomew, BA (Hons) International Relations and Development

“Joining the DEN project was one of the best decisions I made during my studies at the University of Westminster. This opportunity has allowed me to improve my professional and interpersonal skills which have been beneficial to me since graduating. One of the most rewarding aspects of DEN has been meeting new people and making new friends which has allowed me to network with other departments within the university.”

Chloe Coburn, Graduate and Alumni, BA (Hons) History

“Initially what I thought was a voluntarily-forceful activity and a part of my second-year module - turned out being a commitment. A commitment that I chose to have. After almost three years of being a part of the DEN team, after becoming a university alumnus and participating in numerous projects, I am yet to be satisfied by my own efforts. Evidently enough, participating in DEN provided me with a number of niche skills, academic experience and a number of connections, but what truly opened up to me - is my ability to fully devote myself towards a bigger aim of shaping the society we live in. I honestly believe that DEN has the capability of changing the world, beginning with minor academic projects of book publishing and finishing with fundraising dinners aimed to help the refugees. Influencing individuals, influencing people and the world - this is what DEN is for me.”

Dmitrijs Zujevs, Graduate and Alumni

“The DEN publishing project has been a great experience. I enjoyed the collaborative aspects to the project and being able to make decisions cooperatively throughout the whole process. The team was incredibly kind and encouraging to everyone and it gave me the opportunity to improve my writing and editing skills. I can’t wait to see the finalized book!”

Giorgia Monsignori, Alumni

“Being a part of the DEN Project for the past two years has greatly improved my skills and importantly taught me vital lessons. Working on a meaningful and insightful project has made me more confident in my own academic work. Being able to gather together different ideas, backgrounds, and thought processes provides perspectives which DEN continuously does so well.”

Jamie Greenfield, BA (Hons) Politics

“Ever since joining DEN, I have been part of an incredible team from a vast range of backgrounds as well as of different ages which has made it that much more interesting. Our ability to organise and proceed with the publishing project in such a diverse group has been a fascinating sight

to witness and has also been a great opportunity for myself, as a recent graduate to be able to mentor some of the younger students to develop both their skills and my own too. Most importantly, being a part of DEN has allowed me to make unforgettable memories and provided with the opportunity to meet people who have become some of my closest friends in the process of being part of this team.”

Kate Vasiljeva, Graduate and Alumni

“Going into my final year of university was very intimidating and the added strains of a pandemic made it even more so. Working on this project with an incredible team definitely made things easier. It helped me find a sense of community even when we couldn’t see each other. We have had regular meetings and have agreed upon both short-term and long-term goals. This has helped me better organize and plan my own projects. We have all learnt a lot about publishing and the quality of work academia demands which has translated to our own research and works. The DEN publishing project has provided us opportunities not usually available to undergraduate students with room to grow and make mistakes. I am excited to be a part of this team and help put together our book!”

Kinkini Bhattacharya, Alumni

“DEN book project feels absolutely amazing working with students from different academic years. In just two weeks, my experience has been lovely, everything seems so clear, there is no hesitation to ask questions and the team just feels like a family. Never did I think Covid-19 could have a positive effect on my life but it did; it is helping me improve my skills, communication and so much more. DEN is an absolutely amazing opportunity to be part of especially with a tutor like Farhang!

Komal Nadeem, BA (Hons) International Relations

“I am very happy to be a part of the DEN Publishing Project. This project is a great opportunity to sharpen both your writing and editing skills. This extracurricular project provides a platform in which you can learn from Dr. Morady and collaborate with fellow students while gaining significant experience. The learning opportunity is very useful for future studies or employment. I am looking forward to the end product.”

Mehmet Emir Turgutalp, Alumni

“Though I’ve only recently joined the DEN project, I already feel so comfortable and at ease with the group. I think it will be an amazing opportunity as I go into year 2 and I am excited to learn and experience more things and be a part of such an innovative group. It has also been a great experience so far with the help of Farhang and my fellow group members!”

Momina Nehmat, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

“The DEN publishing project has been a great opportunity for students to write beyond our academic studies. It allows students to gain more confidence when talking about our work and ideas. Along with academic development, it provides a chance for professional development through chairing meetings, taking minutes and editing and presenting papers. For many of us DEN is our first publishing experience, and I am very grateful that DEN has been able to provide a platform like this to students”

Naema Jannath, Alumni

“Being a part of the DEN publishing project has been an incredible opportunity, I have been a part of the publishing project since my first year of university; here I was able to break out of my shy manner that came with being in a new environment, the project has greatly improved my confidence and skills in my academic work, and communication wise. Not only does being involved with this DEN project look great on your CV but the atmosphere is very engaging, friendly and encouraging. Being a part of this insightful project has truly been one of my highlights of this entire university experience.”

Najaha Choudhury, BA (Hons) International Relations

“The DEN Project has helped me develop a few skills. These range from being able to edit articles to verbally presenting the arguments of my peers. It’s been an invaluable experience: the sessions last an hour but the benefits can last a lifetime”

Pardis Jallali, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

“The opportunity to continue being part of DEN after my formal education at the University, has allowed me to develop a true sense of community. It also taught me that success and good results depend on commitment and being responsible for each other. Moreover, DEN has equipped me with a rich soft skill set that has assisted both my personal and professional development. Such first-hand experience is absolutely necessary to enhance the academic journey of students and show us the reality behind the values of inclusiveness and open-mindedness.”

Polina Encheva, Graduate and Alumni

“My experience in university so far has proven to me that there are a lot of opportunities that it provides, the DEN publishing project being one of them. It has helped me in improving my academic and communication skills, additionally my ability to work alongside others. Thanks to the help of Farhang, this will be one of my best experiences from university.”

Rayan Haji, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

“I am extremely happy that I have become a part of the DEN Project, which has played a crucial role in my academic and personal development. Despite the fact that I have only recently joined, thanks to the project I have not only cultivated my writing, presentation and communication skills but also made some new friends during this Covid-19 pandemic period.”

Rauf Novruzov, *MA International Relations*

“After being a part of the DEN team for the last three years I have gained an invaluable amount of experiences, networks and development in academic/ personal skills. Through all this, I have felt a part of a wider community who support and encourage one another. Working alongside my peers and academics has been a rewarding experience and one I will forever cherish. The DEN publishing project has been an incredible journey. It has provided students with a platform to express their ideas and creativity freely. It has especially allowed students to develop their writing, editing and communication skills further. I am proud to see this book as the result of hard work and commitment from the team.”

Samira Azir, *Alumni*

“As an alumnus of the University of Westminster, I received an email from a professor to write and publish a paper for DEN’s annual book. Little did I know that DEN was more than that. DEN is a group of young professionals who work voluntarily but passionately. I was surprised at their commitment and they taught me a lot about team working. Farhang has done a great job with this project. Personally, DEN has not only provided me with editorial skills and academic experience but has given me a platform to give back to the University of Westminster and serves as a bridge to my life-long connection to the UK.”

Sara Zekaj, *Postgraduate Alumni, MA International Relations and Security*

“The DEN book project has been lovely. It’s a great way to hone your writing, editing, and collaborative skills while socialising and learning from each other!”

Saudamini Sigdel, *Alumni*

International Field Trip

Covid-19: Going on a Virtual Field Trip to Vietnam



The global pandemic brought around so many changes in our day-to-day lives, upending how we go about work or education, and limiting the tools and resources at our disposal which we so often took for granted. It also showed us that the fruition of long-term plans might not only be a result of our personal intentions but also impacted by circumstances beyond our control. One of the industries that has suffered the most from the consequences of the Covid-19 is the travel industry, as travelling has been largely restricted due to closed borders and quarantine regimes. These restrictions have cancelled a lot of vacations, annual family gatherings, business trips, or trips made for educational purposes.

Concurrently, these changing circumstances have given rise to the need for rapid adoption of virtual technologies, as most activities were required to move to the online realm. Studying and working from home might be beneficial for some, and irksome for others. However, during such trying times, the benefits of the virtual format cannot be understated. Despite all the barriers posed by the pandemic, communities have successfully organised themselves online to carry out numerous endeavours. The Virtual Field Trip to Vietnam, organized by the University of Westminster and the University of Hanoi, is a great example of how online exploration can be as fascinating and informative as traditional forms of learning while bypassing many spatiotemporal barriers.

This field trip - normally an annual event undertaken as part of a second year undergraduate module - has had to evolve in its scope and format substantially this year. In previous years, the aim of the field trip was to gain first-hand experience of Vietnam, enriching our knowledge about its rich



culture, traditions, and its role in the global arena. This year, although it was online, we are working together to ensure that we still amassed a wealth of knowledge about different aspects of Vietnam.

Every week we have a meeting on the Microsoft Teams platform, where we discuss various topics, partake in debate and discussions, and even get to listen to fascinating talks by guest speakers and students from Vietnam. What is really special about the field trip is that it is a very collaborative effort. For example, every week different students take up the responsibility of chairing meetings and taking notes. Students also engage in different tasks such as creating blog posts about their impressions, writing reflective essays, watching videos prepared by Vietnamese students and academics, and providing constructive feedback on such materials. The theme of the videos changes each week, encompassing a wide range of topics from the role of the UN and different NGOs in Vietnam to the virtual expedition to different museums - like the Women's Museum, or the Hoa Lo Prison in the city of Hanoi. After watching the educational material, we write our reflections on them, identifying its importance to the socio-political and economic development of Vietnam and posing questions that can be answered by professionals and our partner students from the University of Hanoi. This creates a visible link between students and academics from both universities, giving everybody the opportunity to participate, use their voice, and learn from each other.

What makes this attainable from week to week is the cooperation of students and academics from Vietnam and the University of Westminster, and our collective desire to make this trip as interesting and enjoyable as possible to the best of our abilities. By uniting people from across various regions and time zones on a virtual platform, we were able to involve a larger number of participants than ever before and discuss a wider breadth of topics surrounding Vietnam. And by using the technological tools available to us, it has been possible to learn about Vietnam and its diverse culture from a distance: although physically far away, it made us feel as though we were immersing ourselves right into Vietnam's culture and politics.

This Virtual Field Trip has allowed students to gain a world of new knowledge about Vietnam without even having stepped foot in the country, and the fact that it all has happened online is a testament to the marvels of technology and the human capacity to work together to solve problems despite all challenges. Vietnam has an incredibly rich heritage and culture that not only means a lot to its citizens but also has considerable global significance. This virtual field trip is the experience we wish everyone could have, because this is a project where you can not only be introduced to these different ideas and exchange of views across cultures, but also foster new friendships, get insights from different people, and make memories for a lifetime.

Alexandra Bukhareva, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations
Saudamini Sigdel

Reflections

Learning about different countries and cultures has always been my passion and this virtual field trip allowed me to replenish my collection of memories with knowledge about Vietnam - the country with its rich culture and history. I am very glad that I had this amazing opportunity to be involved in this virtual trip, as this is a unique experience I wish everyone could have. All these weeks passed so quickly, I have met a lot of new interesting people and now I truly wish to visit Vietnam one day.

Alexandra Bukhareva, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations,
University of Westminster

Joining the Vietnam Field Trip was something I was unsure of at first since I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but it immediately caught my eye and was something that I had to give a go. Unfortunately, I did not get the chance to see Vietnam while I travelled Asia in 2019. So, the opportunity to hear from the Vietnamese students and be a part of the Field Trip was almost the personal redemption to get a second chance for me. On reflection, I am glad that I did not know what to expect from the Field Trip because my experience has been a pleasant surprise - I have met like-minded people who enjoy listening and discussing with the Vietnamese students and academics and getting their perspectives on their own country and comparing it to our own. While being on my summer break it has also kept me engaged wherein, I probably would have become quite detached from the topics that I needed to keep track of over the summer. So, in hindsight, the Vietnam Field Trip has been a delightful experience and I am grateful for the opportunity it has given me to hear from the students and academics at Hanoi University.

Samuel Elsey, BA Politics and International Relations, *University of Westminster*

Before taking part in this virtual field trip, I had very limited knowledge about Vietnam but from this field trip I have learnt so much in such little time. It was a wonderful opportunity to be a part of especially with the current circumstances. With the participation of the wonderful students from Hanoi University it was as if Vietnam had come to us: we were able to ask so many questions and watch videos that the students had recorded. I'm glad that I am able to say that I was a part of this virtual field trip and a special thank you to Farhang and Hanoi University for making it happen, I hope to visit Vietnam soon and hopefully meet students from the University!

Tania Sharif, *BA Politics and International Relations, University of Westminster*

Being part of the Vietnam virtual field trip from the module 'Learning in an International Environment' was a wonderful experience! I am so grateful for this experience, as I developed various skills ranging from collaboration to communication and public speaking. Every week there was a different chair, and every member came from a different background! Some of us were from the University in London whereas others were from Hanoi University and alumni. It was so interesting to hear different people speak about their experiences, beliefs and thoughts. Prior to this virtual field trip, I was not as aware about the culture of Vietnam. This is an aspect that cannot simply be googled. Discussing the culture, traditions, and international relations of Vietnam with both Vietnamese and international students really taught me a lot.

Zohra Shamim, *BA Politics and International Relations, University of Westminster*

I was drawn to the University because of its great interconnectivity with other countries. I knew before even coming to Westminster that I wanted to do the 'Learning in an International Environment' module and so I was slightly disappointed that I didn't get to go to Vietnam last Christmas. However, the virtual field trip has made up for it in some ways. I have still accessed knowledge and experience from this trip, and I have met some really amazing people. I hope I still get to go to Vietnam, but the virtual trip allowed me to have an insight into Vietnam, that otherwise I would have been lacking.

Lauren Norcliffe, *BA (Hons) International Relations, University of Westminster*

Before signing up for the virtual field trip I was quite unsure whether I would enjoy it. However, taking part in the different activities such as video-making, blog-writing, and attending meetings has allowed me to learn more about Vietnam. Also having the chance to directly ask questions to students and lecturers in Vietnam has been interesting and a great way of learning from one another remotely. I am very happy to be a part of this field trip which has given me the opportunity to learn about a new country as well as meet and work with others from different levels of education.

Laila Barakat, *BA International Relations and Development, University of Westminster*

I had the opportunity of going to Vietnam a few years ago, and now doing the virtual field trip has freshened my mind especially towards the current issues, such as the Covid-19 situation. It has allowed me to engage with the students there virtually and has been very informative.

Mahnoor Shahid, *University of Westminster Alumni*

I was lucky to be able to go to Vietnam two years ago as part of the 'Learning in an International Environment' module and being part of this virtual field trip gave me an opportunity to share my experience and has also taught me more about Vietnam! It's amazing how students from different parts of the world have been able to adapt to the effects of Covid-19, demonstrating the resilience of both students and lecturers in educating people despite the challenges of navigating online learning.

Margaret Fernandez, *University of Westminster Alumni*

This field trip opened my eyes beyond measure. I realised how important it was both spiritually and academically. I obtained wisdom that allows me to prosper and received so many gifts from Vietnamese students, the most important being their friendship. I have realised how easily we can stay in contact and learn from the Vietnamese experience of managing Covid-19. This was something especially relevant to me as I was there two years ago. This amazing experience has been one of the most important in my life.

Natali Usma Bustamante, *University of Westminster Alumni*

Being able to visit an amazing country such as Vietnam, was probably one of the best experiences in my life. Two years have passed since then and we were given the chance to join a virtual field trip to Vietnam. The challenges of Covid-19 didn't stop those students that weren't able to travel to Vietnam from being able to learn more about the country. The thing that amazes me the most is that this learning process involves us students and our ideas, our interaction with each other and with our Vietnamese peers from Hanoi University. I believe that this virtual field trip was definitely beneficial in adding to our knowledge of Vietnam. Finally, I love how our experience of travelling to Vietnam before Covid can be of inspiration to the people that didn't have this chance yet, building up their curiosity towards Vietnam that will help them have an amazing experience once they have the opportunity to be there themselves.

Raja Touri, *University of Westminster Alumni*

Having had the opportunity to go to Vietnam two years ago to now being a part of the virtual field trip has opened my mind immensely. As, firstly it is different, it's completely different from being physically there, yet at the same time it feels as if you are there, as you are still interacting with the students and lecturers at Hanoi University. The second thing being that it builds you up as a person. It actually allowed me to be more part of the

Vietnamese culture and the current issues that they face. I'm learning more about Vietnam from the different perspectives that students from different years share with us. Finally, I am able to engage more and learn from the different kinds of work we do, such as writing blogs and filming videos. This leads to us being able to boost our employability skills.

Tasneem Fadel, University of Westminster Alumni

As someone who has had a keen interest in history and has studied it at university level, I have always been fascinated by the Vietnam War and the undertones of it on the global stage during the Cold War. However, I previously had no other knowledge of Vietnam so being able to join this project has been insightful and greatly appreciated. I have loved hearing about the culture, society and politics in Vietnam from the students at Hanoi University and I truly believe I have walked away with a new-found interest for Vietnam.

Chloe Coburn, Graduate and University of Westminster Alumni

Having had the chance to be a part of the Vietnam field trip a few years back and compare it to this year's virtual field trip, the experience has been incredible in that I was able to connect even more with the country, its culture, and people through the virtual sessions. It has been fascinating to hear from familiar faces on their experiences in Vietnam during the pandemic as well as engage in discussion with current Westminster students as part of the virtual field trip experience.

Kate Vasiljeva, Graduate and University of Westminster Alumni

The virtual field trip was fun and very useful for Vietnamese students. I have participated before in joint activities between Hanoi and Westminster Universities, and this is the third time. Every time joining the Westminster students I feel very happy to connect with them and exchange views. This trip is more special than all the previous ones because it was organized online due to Covid-19. It did not take away the spirit and enthusiasm although working online also has many disadvantages. For example, we were able to discuss many issues including Covid-19. I feel proud to be a part of the trip. I hope the Westminster students also found the contributions and opinion of Hanoi University students helpful. Next year, hopefully Covid-19 will pass so that Westminster students can continue to come to Vietnam to do fieldwork. Vietnamese students will always give you the warmest welcome. Thanks to DEN, Dr. Farhang and Saman for letting me know about these great online meetings. Thanks to the Westminster students for interacting with us during the meetings and to the Vietnamese students for attending the meetings.

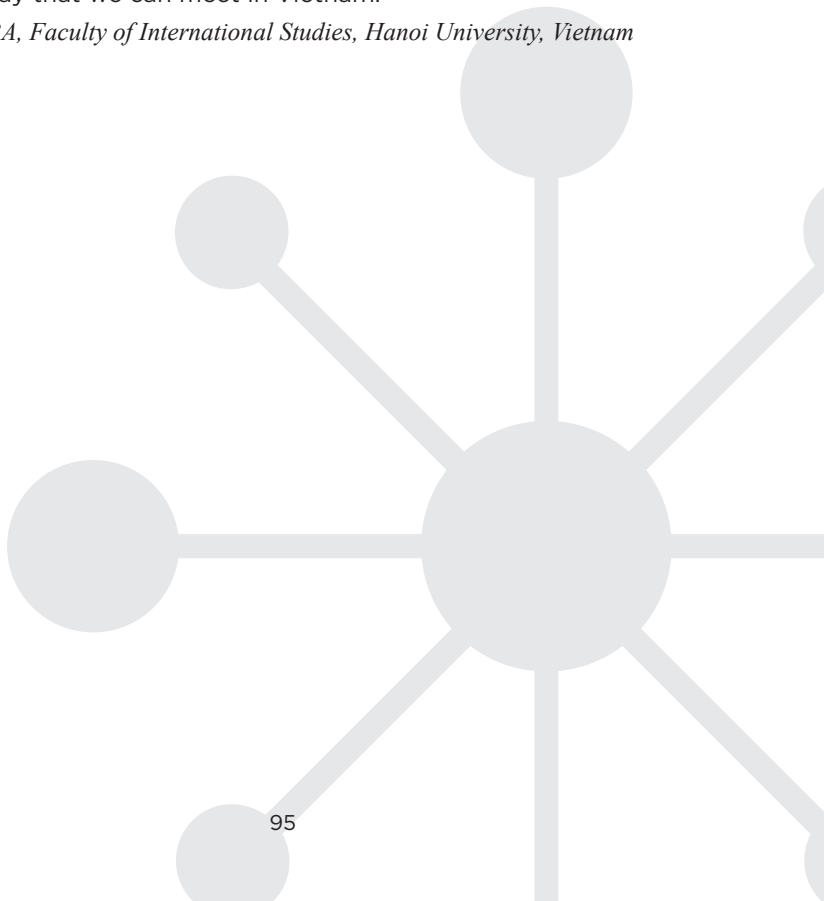
Pham Thi Ha, Faculty of International Studies, Hanoi University, Vietnam

This virtual field trip not only allowed me to connect with Westminster students but also gave me cultural and educational knowledge during the time of limited travel and exposure due to Covid-19. Though not being able to meet you face-to-face, the virtual field trip brought me different and interesting experiences. I was delighted to share my knowledge about the diverse culture of Vietnam, our country. This was a very meaningful project and would be a memorable one for me. Thank you for sharing useful knowledge and informative presentations as well. Hopefully, I can meet all of you one day.

Kim Dung, BA, Faculty of International Studies, Hanoi University, Vietnam

It was an honour and a valuable experience to be able to attend Westminster University's conference. I was impressed by meeting Westminster's students and listening to the appealing sharing about the reality during the Covid-19 period. Although we were not able to interact face-to-face, it was still an exceptional meeting for the acknowledged and academic information. Also, I truly appreciate your welcoming approach during the conference: it helped generate a pleasant atmosphere and narrow the distance between each other. I am looking forward to the most anticipated day that we can meet in Vietnam.

Trang Pham, BA, Faculty of International Studies, Hanoi University, Vietnam





The Long Road to Home: Students4Refugees

Refugee. To many people, that word brings forth mental images of wind-battered and world-weary groups of minorities arriving on shores by rafts of little seaworthiness. Of adults and children, taken far before their time by the unforgiving wrath of nature and man's harshest elements. And to others: thoughts of loved ones, spouses, cousins, daughters and fathers, family, co-workers and friends.

The prejudicial anger and resentment of those bellowing voices during the European 'migrant' crisis of seemingly so many years past still work to bury the stories of those who seek peace and safety in the arms of the countrymen they have yet to meet, and it's seemingly as critical as ever to amplify the voices and stories of those who have had no choice but to abandon all that they have known in days, months and decades past. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as 'people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country', yet this does little to approach a true understanding of those very human and emotionally complex stories that many of us are unaware of. Stories such as those of Sir Alfred Mehran who was forcibly expelled from Iran for simply protesting against the Shah and forced to live in terminal one of Charles de Gaulle Airport for 18 years.

As we look to the future of society, we see old, closed wounds being opened, yet it remains as important as ever to not forget the lives affected. Having said that, there are numerous ways to help refugees and it is important to understand their significance. Firstly, we must take into

account what is fundamental for refugees. Considering their experiences, it is pretty evident that a refugee is seeking to become a productive member of society. This suggests that they will require the right to work, the right to healthcare facilities, education and access to any other public good. The quicker a refugee becomes able to integrate into the labour force and access these public goods, the easier it will become for them. However, the reality is that many refugees get involved in the black market.

Aware that selling and buying in the black market is illegal, there are reasons causing them to choose this pathway of life: governments are not fulfilling the needs of the refugees that are attempting their best to enhance their role in the society, simply because they are either unaware or unbothered.

One may think, how can we as individuals help refugees? Over the years, political participation and action has become a more common way of increasing awareness. Raising awareness is crucial and an important step to help refugees. This is possible through spreading the word, by discussions, making posters, distributing pamphlets and so on. Moreover, donations and fundraising are another way to support refugees as this can cover their financial needs- something the government or state has failed to meet.

Overall, this is why Students4Refugees is passionate in building a society that both understands and respects refugees. We will work to achieve our agenda by organizing fundraiser events, raising awareness and collaborating with organizations that may contribute to helping refugees.

Elizabeth Sole, Law LLB (Hons)

Zohra Shamim, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations

International Student Conference



Global Governance During Unprecedented Global Challenges

Democratic Education Network (DEN) hosted their annual international student conference on 11th and 12th May 2021. This conference, like DEN's other ongoing projects, was organised collaboratively, managed and delivered by students and academic staff. It attracted 50 individuals made up of fellow students, families, and friends from different universities all over the world including the UK, Vietnam and India.

The conference programme included around fifty speakers engaged in discussion and debates covering different disciplines such as economics, politics, sociology, law and history. The panel topics ranged from globalization, migration, gender, media, democracy, populism, to the regional geopolitics in the Middle East, China and Africa.

DEN's conference took place in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Unlike in previous years, it was fairly challenging and difficult for the groups to gather. The conference had to be shifted online. As we have been working together on several projects such as DEN's annual book, this was not a completely complex operation. We simply had to work out a different method, to design, plan, organise and deliver the project.

Organising a conference requires different phases which need to be taken care of. Whilst the discussion groups of the conference are crucial, we must also manage workshops to suit different groups of students. The challenge for us was how to use computer hardware and software. Most of the students have used both Blackboard, MS Teams and Zoom.

Given that the conference was now online we hoped that it would attract students from all over the world if we could get the timing right. By looking at the online format from this other perspective, it became clear that we would be able to cover more geographic regions and therefore involve more students. As well this idea became clearer when we were able to promote the conference abroad to our international partners from different universities. Therefore, we came to involve students from over 30 countries, with speakers from India and Vietnam who have used the opportunity to present their own views and ideas to such contrasting regions of Western Europe, to the students in London. The outcome was also presented more widely to colleagues in Russia, United States and across the world after being published in the following annual book publication.

A collaboration of cultures, ideas, and perspectives has always been one of the aims for DEN, with the academic conference as a prime opportunity to explore these outlets. Being able to include people internally from the University of Westminster as well as external students and alumni allowed us to showcase the perspective and opinions which matter to us. From the first session right to the last, panels participants were actively engaged. After all, the conference of 2021 has taught us that, despite limitations, the participants had an opportunity to broadcast and share their ideas regardless of their region, background or social status.

This celebration of the very values DEN prides itself on shone within the online conference and is a testament to the dedication of the members of DEN that we produced such a successful event. While we cannot wait for the next conference in 2022 to be held once again in person, to be able to have experienced stories and academic pieces from individual bedrooms across the globe is something special and gave a graciousness that those involved will never lose.

Dmitrijs Zujevs, Graduate and Alumni
Jamie Greenfield, BA (Hons) Politics

Interning with DEN and receiving academic support



Reflecting on my Experience

Prior to starting my internship with the Democratic Education Network (DEN), I only had a few ideas about it. I was involved in various projects, including the editorial of DEN's annual book alongside a number of students. This academic year has been different, as teaching and learning has been virtual. During the first semester, I attended DEN's meetings every Thursday, then in semester two, I decided to join the editorial team of the book. Over twenty students meet every week to organise, manage, and edit different articles written by students for the students. Last year and this year it mainly covered Covid-19.

Whilst the agenda was organised by Dr. Farhang Morady, who is a senior lecturer in international relations and development, students were involved in chairing, taking notes, and reviewing articles. This was something different to what I have done both in the classroom and outside as an extracurricular activity.

I feel as if I have progressed well, whilst also maturing intellectually and personally. The way in which DEN works is really refreshing and lovely to be a part of, and the atmosphere made it easy for me to get involved. I engaged with the placement, as well as being comfortable enough to contribute towards the group. At the beginning, I felt a little bit anxious and overwhelmed, as I was worried that I might make a mistake. However, with time, I felt more comfortable since everyone was very helpful, especially Farhang.

The ways in which I was comforted, was through having consistent communication with Farhang, in circumstances where I struggled with tasks at hand. During these periods, he would call or set meetings during his office hours via Microsoft Teams. Through organizing meetings, I gradually learnt how to manage expected requirements for different projects. I was also in communication with other students to help and mentor, especially first year students such as Zohra and Sasha. It was very gratifying as they felt a little out of place considering the circumstances of being totally online. Therefore, communicating and befriending them was a pleasure, as it helped them feel more comfortable taking part in this virtual DEN environment.

I realised the other students that I communicated with, were also in the same boat as me, since we were going through this new virtual experience together. The ongoing learning and experimenting made me feel better, and more confident in myself, which allowed me to help and support the other students. Chairing meetings and taking on more responsibilities, helped me to become comfortable in my role. I started getting more involved and showed my willingness to participate in other projects.

Additionally, I have developed my critical and creative thinking. The project that I was involved in includes researching, writing, communicating, and learning from the other students. As a team, we have the role to edit different papers and engage critically. This helped me to understand when and where a writer needs to be concise or more detailed. For example, we must be critical with both our own and our colleague's work. I have been able to improve on my literate and effective communication, through contacting members of the project and engaging with individual writers' work that I have edited. For example, I edited Illona's paper, who is a third-year student. Communicating with her not only helped me with being a part of this project, but further helped me gain insight in what is to come with third year, and how to tackle its difficulties. Accordingly, I have more social and environmental awareness as well. Considering this book is a project on Covid-19, involving how the environment and different societies have been affected, this has been an eye opener for me to learn and research about some of these cases.

This placement experience of DEN has helped me immensely. For example, it will be put on my CV and LinkedIn profile. I, therefore, hope to enhance my employability. This has been an opportunity that I cherished being a part of, and I would recommend students to consider it seriously. This will not only develop and increase their individual growth as they learn from their lecturers and fellow students; it will also build a link between the courses that we study, improve mentoring, and above all aid future employment.

Najaha Choudhary, BA (Hons) International Relations



Academic E-Support and My Journey to Complete My Degree

Coronavirus, a global pandemic affecting millions of men, women and children around the world has created a universe filled with fearful and worried human beings who live each day in panic. Although the country's lockdown increased fear and anxiety, it gave me the opportunity to work on myself. Despite not being able to come into university for the last three weeks, staying at home gave me the chance to spend more time with my family, in particular my elderly grandparents who had spent the last four months in Mumbai, a yearly ritual for them. Also, I was able to spend more time on my studies, giving 100 per cent effort towards my degree, aiming to work to the best of my ability. Hence, self-improvement developed and became a large achievement for myself during the last four months. This was predominately in my university studies as I gratefully became a graduate: despite tough times I was able to overcome any difficulties faced.

Supporting me in my journey to complete my degree was the university's academic e-support. Although I did not have the opportunity to speak in person with my lecturers, I was still given opportunities to communicate with them virtually through online seminars, drop-in sessions as well as via email. At the beginning, I was apprehensive about this new approach to studying as this was something I was not used to; thus, thoughts came into my mind that I would be losing out on support which would normally be given at university. However, the university's academic e-support reassured me that I would still be gaining all the help, information and knowledge needed to successfully complete my journey at Westminster. Although this change felt strange to begin with, the academics' approach to teaching and supporting students was indistinguishable to the methods of teaching given whilst I attended the university in person; hence it became easier to adapt to this new system of learning.

Throughout, my experience of continuous academic support towards the students was inspiring. For example, academics made weekly drop-in sessions available for students in the lead-in to upcoming assignments, which gave us the opportunity to ask any questions regarding our studies. After attending these sessions, I felt confident in completing my work as I was offered immense help and guidance from my lecturers. Having the opportunity to communicate with my lecturers kept me focused and motivated, hence I firmly believe it is significantly important for academics to offer support to students particularly with the ongoing pandemic. As covid-19 persists students may face daily challenges that is often not voiced, which can interfere with their studies. To support students at Westminster academics could speak to students by checking up on them and seeing how they are managing with their studies as this will reassure them that they are not alone. As support was offered to myself and others during our time, as a former student I can recognise the usefulness of this support, particularly in keeping motivation levels high.

Aisha Isa, Alumni

Forthcoming Projects



Write An Essay: A Video Series

It was not that long ago, I was sitting at my desk, struggling to remember how to write my own name, my mind was foggy...

As someone who usually has no problem with writing, and certainly not talking, at that moment, I was not capable of composing a simple, ordinary sentence. Is that possible? I needed to understand what the cause might be.

Everything fell into the right place only a few hours after submitting my very first piece of course work – essay writing. The obstacle was my own mind and waves of anxieties. Regardless of being familiar with the topic I was going to write about, and regardless of being provided with all the tutorials and handbooks, I overthought everything to the limits when the brain suddenly decided to stop processing any more information and put itself into, let's call it, a 'standby mode.' A clear example that our minds are the most powerful tools we possess.

I somehow feel, there might be quite a bunch of others recognising themselves in this story. I spoke, and I reached out for help. And who would be the best to offer some tips and tricks? Students, of course! And this is what we have come up with:

A team of Westminster students have joined forces to create a short, informative video filled with information on how to write a great essay! We are interviewing fellow students to get their take on the essay writing process. While recognizing that we all probably share similar anxieties when it comes to essay writing, we also realize that each of us will have a few tips they can share, which might help the rest of us.

We have compiled a video full of their tips and tricks, which cover a range of useful information. From methods to intro/body/conclusion it helps to be sharing the various challenges we all face. When it comes to writing, our video covers it all! We are hopeful that anxieties will be relieved, and knowledge will be shared in this way: student-to-student.

We recognize that our tutors provide us with an array of useful resources to tackle essay writing and coursework, and these do provide us with important information on the technical aspects of these tasks. However, our video series offers a way for students to have their questions answered by other students, who can, in addition, share their general perspectives on the best ways to tackle essay writing. In this way, we are providing more than just the information you can find in a module handbook or essay writing PowerPoint - we are building a platform where you can connect with other students and talk about a shared experience, and along the way learn tips and tricks that your tutors might not have given you!

Anushka Parakova, BA (Hons) International Relations and Development

Cassidy Mattingly, Graduate and Alumni

Gerda Kisanna Kovacs, BA (Hons) Sociology and Criminology

World in Westminster Festival – 15th to 17th March 2022

YOU are invited to Celebrate Diversity with DEN!
Westminster students & colleagues are welcome!
Join us in celebrating **multiculturalism**
& mark the closing of World in Westminster Festival!
Register on Eventbrite:
<https://denwestminstercelebratingdiversity.eventbrite.com>
17th March 7:30 PM-9PM, Hideaway, Regent Street Building
Live music, quiz, games, henna artist, food from every part of the world & fun! Experience it all!
Would you want to showcase an aspect of your culture?
Please get in touch directly with
F.Morady@Westminster.ac.uk

The Democratic Education Network will play a part in our World in Westminster Festival.

The World in Westminster Festival will be a global celebration of cultures, which offers students and colleagues a variety of exciting and imaginative events. DEN will join colleagues and students from our University worldwide on Tuesday 15th to Thursday 17th March in different campuses, including Regent.

As DEN has been at the heart of student engagement with diversity, inclusion, and internationalisation, we are proud to highlight our participation in the festival as this will further our work within the global community. We will discuss our activities

such as exhibitions on equality and diversity, Women's Day activities, working with local communities and our international conference every year.

We hope students will join us to celebrate the 15th and the 17th of March. If you have any questions about the World in Westminster Festival, please contact:

Grace Egbewole-Adereti (G.Egbewoleadereti1@westminster.ac.uk)

Zahrah Surooprajally (Z.Surooprajally1@westminster.ac.uk)

International Women's Day: The Radical Challenge Echoing In A Greener Tomorrow



On the 8th of March, we celebrate International Women's Day (IWD). Nowadays, we talk about it as a traditional celebration, not thoroughly thinking about the fights and lives sacrificed to achieve this small yet monumental token of celebration. We ought to remember when it started and why it is essential for women's rights.

The revolution began during the 20th century's movements for the "universal suffrag" spreading in all Europe and North America, nurturing a wave of change in the minds of the Western population, as never seen before. In 1909 on the 28th of February, we had the first attempt of "Women's Day" founded by the Social Party of America in New York City. Thousands of women marched the streets protesting against their poor working conditions a year prior.

In 1910, the International Socialist's Women Conference was organised by a group of women delegates in Copenhagen and led by Clara Zetkin (a German socialist). So they decided to spread the movement of IWD, in order to instate the celebration in all Europe. While Europe and America were already spreading the vibes of a new beginning, we faced a country

broken by wars and famine in Russia. It was not before the February Revolution in 1917 that women gained suffrage and was on an official national holiday made on the 8th of March. Their protests started a chain of events contributed to workers' strikes from all sectors. A week later, they followed the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, leading to the downfall of the Russian Empire. The United Nations' observance came somewhat later in 1975. We celebrate women's cultural, social, economic, and political achievements in history on this day around the world, and the best way to do so is to hear people's voices. However, we also want to remember the voices that were not heard before and celebrate them.

One of these voices is Lise Meitner, who experienced more than her fair share of discrimination in her life. Born in Vienna in 1878, she was the second woman in the world to receive a Doctorate in Physics. She dedicated herself to scientific discovery and the understanding of nuclear elements. She is often credited with the discovery of nuclear fission, which is considered a viable solution to climate change. As someone of Jewish heritage and a woman, her male colleagues often did not take her abilities and work seriously and consistently took credit for her discoveries. She was lucky to receive any credit at all, and oftentimes her name was removed from scientific papers and publications she authored. After the political success of the German National Democratic Party (NDP), her work was not even considered for publication by most institutions, with those who accepted her work often being dismissed from their positions. She later claimed asylum in Sweden, where she became a staunch critic of Swedish neutrality and continued her work and aided the construction of Sweden's first nuclear reactor. However, she was consistently overlooked for professorships and was even unjustly removed from consideration for a Nobel Prize, awarded to her male collaborator Otto Hahn instead.

Lise's voice is just one of the thousands that suffered injustices and sexism over the years, and even now, gender equality is not assured in all institutions or countries. That is why the theme of this year for IWD is "Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow", enhancing the voices of the girls and women that drove the climate change movement in these years and are making an impact for our planet. Girls and women have to be empowered to be equal players in the sustainable movement to have equal opportunities in working together to a greener future.

Elizabeth Sole, (She/Her), Law LLB (Hons)

Eleonora Venturini, BA (Hons) Creative Writing and English Literature

Mental Health Blog

The First Principle of the Hermetic Philosophy – the Principle of Mentalism:



There has been an increased awareness regarding mental health among people in the past decade, especially the younger generations. This has become especially prevalent since the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, corporate companies have rolled out a new set of policies regarding mental well-being in the workplace. However, many of them are only for show and don't encapsulate the wide variety of issues many of us face.

We can see posters and advertisements promoting healthy mental well-being everywhere we go. Some use posters expressing their support to their staff, "It's okay not to be okay" or "It's okay to ask for help".

If it is okay, why do we still suffer in silence? Is it fear of judgment, of accepting the truth or simply not understanding what we are suffering from?

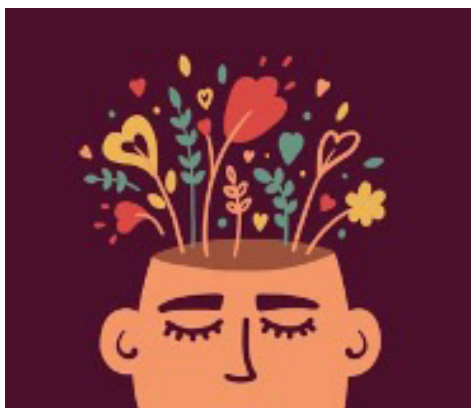
Unfortunately, the word 'mental' has a rather bad reputation. However, if your first thought was not to assume it correlated with 'crazy' or 'not normal' and you imagined something positive, you do think out of the box, and we like it! But sadly, most of us would automatically associate the word 'mental' with something negative, something to be ashamed of. Yet, throughout my time in the first semester on campus, I have discovered some students have been struggling with mental health.

Well, if we think about it there are so many pressures around us: the influence of social media, societal stigmas, environmental issues, or a more common problem many people have come to face over the past two years – social anxiety. Being unable to leave our homes, becoming isolated from one another, through school and work-life has led to many people feeling the pressures of social anxiety as we try to return to a 'new normal'. The list could go on but dealing with just one of the issues is enough to strain anyone's mental health, let alone dealing with all of them which would be a straw to break the camel's back.

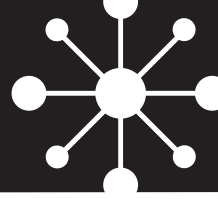
Here at DEN, we recognize the struggles that many people, young and old, have come to face, and throughout interactive projects and blogs, we aim to break down stigmas and create group activities that will help us all. Nothing gives you more confidence and lifts a bigger weight off your chest than the ability to say that feared phrase: "I need to talk..."

We plan to produce a short video to give exposure to the problem and encourage students to talk about the issues and develop a network of support between them, academics, and support staff.

Anuska Parakova, BA (Hons) International Relations and Development
Erin Crane, BA (Hons) Politics and International Relations



Alumni and DEN



What is DEN, and why did you join?

I discovered DEN after I graduated and returned to my country, Albania. And I joined because I want to continue my engagement with the University of Westminster and the UK academia in general. DEN looked like the perfect possibility.

Which projects were you involved in? What do you do?

I was involved with the team working on the DEN book, the conference and everything in between. During my short involvement, I had the possibility to edit the articles of the other participants and participate in the meetings of the working team.

What did you learn from these projects?

I loved language and writing when I was younger, but I never thought that I'd edit others' words. The whole engagement was a source of knowledge for me. I found it very useful especially being able to act as editor for the articles, because I was able to practice not only my writing skills but my leadership skills as well. I was able to self-train myself because I had to manage other's work too. Moreover, I had the possibility to read for free some very good articles.

How did these projects help you academically and professionally?

For all the above-mentioned reasons, I believe I now have a clearer understanding of what others want to read and how to address questions in my own essay/article.

Why should other students join DEN?

From an academic perspective, they will learn a lot. From a social one, they will make some new friends, widen their connection and feel included, part of a working team.

Sara Zekaj, Postgraduate Alumni, MA International Relations and Security. She is working as a Migration Expert at IOM Albania.

What is DEN, and why did you join?

DEN is a student-focused initiative where students work on DEN's annual book and magazine and other different range of projects in collaboration with each other under the supervision of Dr Farhang. I heard about the initiative a year ago. With my passion for developing my research, communication and teamwork skills, I decided to join a group of young and dynamic students.

Which projects were you involved in?

I was involved in DEN's annual book, titled "Global Governance and Unprecedented Challenges" and the virtual field trip to Vietnam.

What did you do?

I reviewed and proofread my peers' pieces and authored an article titled "Sputnik V- COVID-19: a New Foreign Policy Tool for Russia?" for DEN's annual book. Additionally, within the "Vietnam's Virtual Field Trip" project framework, I wrote three blog posts about my perceptions of Vietnam and video recorded myself asking questions from Vietnamese academics and students.

What did you learn from these projects?

These projects enhanced my research, academic writing, and critical thinking skills. In addition, I learnt how to work well in a team with a diverse range of people, considering everyone's views and valuing every suggestion.

How did these projects help you academically and professionally?

The projects, particularly the project of DEN's annual book, upgraded my understanding of the academic research process. It taught me how to apply International Relations theories in analyzing current political developments, which was very useful for my master's dissertation writing. In a professional sense, the projects helped me realize my weaknesses and strengths and improved my confidence, motivating me to engage more closely with these kinds of projects.

Why should other students join DEN?

Joining DEN is useful in many senses. First, it enables you to grow academically and develop necessary skills in your fields. You realize your academic potential and are presented with many opportunities to learn about yourself, your goals, and your strengths. Moreover, it teaches you how to work well as a part of a team in a multicultural environment by putting you in situations where you are required to collaborate with other members.

Rauf Novruzov, Alumni

What is DEN, and why did you join?

DEN, the Democratic Education Network (DEN), is a network of students who want to learn and share their knowledge with their colleagues at the University of Westminster. It is home to a variety of student-led projects to learn in a more global environment and create connections with those who will be our peers during the next few years at Westminster.

I joined DEN after hearing about it during my first week of classes. The projects all seemed to be very appealing, and it was the best place to find people with similar interests to mine.

Which projects were you involved with and what did you do?

I was involved in multiple projects during my three years in DEN. I worked with Students4Refugees, which was created to raise awareness of the refugee crisis and help those affected. I also assisted on DEN's Magazine and helped organise some of the society events, including two Christmas galas.

What did you learn from these projects?

Working in DEN for two years helped me gain skills that I have taken further as a post-graduate, skills that I would not have achieved without the hands-on work that we were encouraged to do with DEN. It has also helped me gain new relationships with peers, some of which I have taken with me after graduation, and hopefully into my future personal and professional life.

How did these projects help you academically and professionally?

DEN helped me to gain insight into what it takes to work professionally and how to put what I learn into practice. It has prepared me for whatever area I decide to follow as a recently graduated young adult. The professors and mentors of the projects showed us how to use our skills in the best way possible.

Why should students join DEN?

Students should join DEN if they are looking for a network of students where they wish to start their projects. The professors provide the best encouragement and support you will have; they make sure you can share your ideas and bring them to life. Also, you can join the existing projects as they are always looking for volunteers. They are just as passionate to help and continue their work. It is a great place to meet new people while doing something you enjoy.

My final words for the current DEN members is to enjoy it while it lasts: the lessons and skills you learn here will continue with you for life, but those three years go by really fast.

Barbara Ribeiro, Graduate and Alumni, BA (Hons) International Relations. She is now studying for her Masters in Lisbon, Portugal.

What is DEN, and why did you join?

DEN is a collaborative group, run mostly by students, that oversees the operation of several independent projects. By fostering teamwork, creative visions and proactivity, DEN provides a platform for people with various interests to grow together and turn ideas into action. I joined because I found it a suitable forum to network amongst my peers and to develop my skillset.

Which projects were you involved in? What do you do?

I participated in the organisation of the annual conference and the publication of the annual DEN book. Across multiple years, I was part of a team that helped edit and peer-review articles written both by DEN members and non-members. In 2020-2021, I was also one of the deputy editors for this project and was thus involved in many of the final editorial processes that culminated in the publication of a special edition, the Covid-19 book.

What did you learn from these projects?

I cannot stress enough just how much I enjoyed gaining knowledge from other people's research -especially in niche topics or geographic areas I hadn't interacted with much before. I also built upon my critical thinking, editing and logistical/planning skills. Most importantly, these projects were an exercise in successful collaborations and massively honed my interpersonal abilities.

How did these projects help you academically and professionally?

Academically, it taught me how to research more effectively, and to review my own work with a more critical eye. In my field of study, that is especially important, and I'm sure I will carry that experience with me when I embark on the next step of my academic journey. Professionally, I made sure that my participation in DEN was highlighted adequately on my CV and on LinkedIn. It was also one of the anecdotal evidences of my skills and learning that I always referenced during interviews.

Why should students join DEN?

University life is all about experimenting, pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone, and driving ahead your passions. DEN is an opportunity to do all of this while also making new friends and learning from them just as they learn from you. Your memories from DEN and the skills that you gain from taking part in its projects will stay with you for long after you graduate - give it a go!

What is one advice you would give to current DEN members?

Don't be shy - be active, put your ideas forward, and don't hesitate to take on responsibility. Above everything else you will come out with excellent time management skills, but this is also the prime time for you to take your development into your own hands.

Saudamini Sigdel, graduate in 2021 and is now working fulltime in a Non-Governmental Organisation in London.

What is DEN, and why did you join?

DEN is a hub in the heart of the University of Westminster, encouraging students to thrive and learn competencies, applying what they learn in their daily lives. I joined DEN firstly because it's fun, and it allowed me to network with students of all different backgrounds. DEN believes in inclusion and diversity, which helps all students contribute to any of the projects.

I helped organise events such as the 2019 charity Gala and the 2019 Academic conference and made an edited video of the projects.

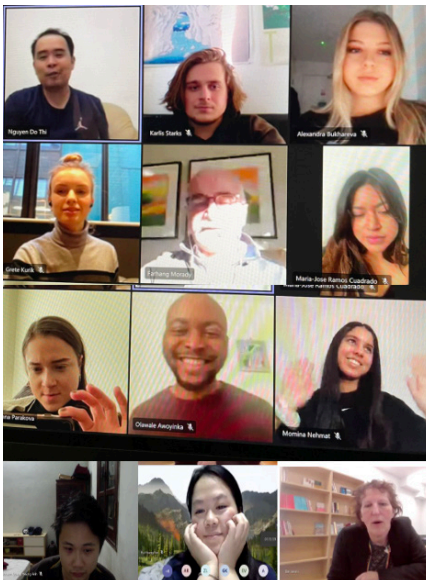
What did you learn from these projects?

These projects helped me professionally as they taught me how to liaise with many different people and allowed me to put down several competencies on my CV including communication skills and teamwork.

Why should students join DEN?

Students should Join DEN because they can meet other students, make new friends, and enjoy their time at university; there are numerous projects for everyone to get involved in. They can learn various skills that are vital for employment after university. Join as many projects as you can so long as you enjoy them; if you want to create your own projects, do not be afraid to step forward and shine your ideas

Mohammed Khaled, graduated in 2021 and is now a boxing trainer in London.



What is DEN, and why did you join?

Den is a student-led organisation that prides itself on being a community of students and educators working to raise awareness on issues DEN members perceive as important. We work with networks in the university as well as local charities to ensure we are being as useful as we can. I joined DEN because of Farhang mainly, but also the opportunities offered to make a change with the support of academics.

Which projects were you involved in? What do you do?

I was involved in a number of projects but my main focus was Students4Refugees, which aimed to bring awareness and raise funds to ensure that refugees in both London and Europe could gain access to basic amenities. This included donations to Hopetowns, a local charity based in Elephant and Castle which works to educate refugees that have come to London, to shape a journey for them to go on to higher education. Our donations allowed for the purchase of whiteboards and other educational resources.

What do you now?

Currently, I am on the Zurich Insurance graduate scheme. My scheme focuses on change and technology management. This scheme lasts for 3 years and has opportunities to explore project management, business analysis, innovation, and service delivery. Alongside this I am working within my company's many networks, which include women in innovation, accessibility and inclusion, cultural awareness network, diversity and inclusion and the graduate community.

What did you learn from these projects?

I specifically did a number of things for this: budgeting, planning, marketing, communications including articles and videos as well as events management, hosting and fundraising. This helped me with a lot of work I am currently doing within my company such as outreach for the cultural awareness network. As well as having hard conversations within the company on diversity and inclusion.

How did these projects help you academically and professionally?

Academically DEN provided me with a network of people that I could ask questions of and seek advice from as they had already experienced a lot of the work. I also built an understanding of the world in a more holistic way. I think that it is one thing to learn about it but to participate through DEN allowed me a fresh understanding of what development within a community can be.

Being a part of these projects has allowed me to utilise skill in the networks I work with. For example, my experience working with local communities in DEN (e.g. Hopetowns and City and Islington College) will accelerate my progress with schools that we are looking to work with, due to networks built and an understanding of the way schools work. I also discussed these heavily within my interview and on my CV which helped me land my job at Zurich as I could show that:

1. I care about issues within the world and am willing to help to make a change.
2. I am a team player.
3. I can act on a vision of others.
4. I am willing to split my time and can have a work-life balance as I was studying, working with DEN and holding down two part-time jobs as well as having a social life.
5. I can work with everyone, no matter their background.

Why should other students join DEN?

I think the reason students should join is evident in what I have discussed above. Not only does it allow you to develop transferable skills that you will use in your career, you build a network of like-minded people who go into different industries.

What is one piece of advice you would give to current DEN members?

Don't be scared to raise an idea, just make sure you are willing to put in the work to achieve your goal. Don't forget that the rest of DEN want to help you.

Yasmin Ahmed completed her degree in International Relations and Development Studies in 2020. She is now working full time at Kings College London.



What is DEN, and why did you join?

DEN is a student-led organisation within the University of Westminster whereby students across the university are able to engage through the non-conventional academic style and use creativity and passion as a means to express issues that matter to us. I joined DEN because I thought it would pave the way for me to get involved in projects that mean a lot to me such as Student4Refugees.

Which projects were you involved in?

Throughout my two years at DEN I joined numerous projects such as Students4Refugees, a sub-branch project within DEN in which we raise money for refugees in the UK specifically working alongside Hopetowns, a charity as well as refugee camps in Europe. We began hosting events such as an annual gala, not just to raise money, but to bring attention to the ongoing refugee crisis and the issues facing refugees today. Further to this, I've participated in a conference known as the Global Crossroads: Rethinking Dominant Order(s) in our Contested World. Hosted by DEN, I presented a paper, 'Does International Economic Organisations represent the interests of rich and poor nations equally?' This gave me the opportunity to speak about a topic that matters to me in the field of development.

What did you learn from these projects?

These projects within DEN really gave me the opportunity to delve into extra-curricular activities that mean a lot to me within a group meeting.

How did these projects help you academically and professionally?

Working on these projects really pushed me further in my studies because I explored all means in topics within International Relations and Development. DEN pushed my creative skills which I translated into my studies. However, DEN really helped with my professional experience as I was able to showcase to my employer that aside from my studies, DEN has given me project-management skills and initiative skills that I use in my role today.

Why should other students join DEN?

I think students should really think about joining DEN not only for the plethora of experience it gives, but also because DEN is an environment filled with students that had fun with bringing projects to life.

What is one advice you would give current DEN members?

Engage as much as possible in projects, but most importantly have FUN!

Zeenat Khan graduated in 2021 and she is now working full time at Zurich insurance, London.



The Democratic Education Network (DEN) is a collaborative group involving academic staff and students aim to organize and support students' educational experience at the University of Westminster.

DEN inspires students to engage locally and globally. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, DEN has played a significant role in engaging students online and aiming to facilitate their learning process.

This magazine is a compilation of written blogs by students at the University of Westminster and its partner international universities.

The magazine brings together different issues related to the student's experience during the COVID-19 and after.

This edition of the magazine is a manifestation of DEN's collective teamwork between staff and students.

If you need further information, please, don't hesitate to contact us at

F.Morady@westminster.ac.uk



<https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/den/>

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