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MOVING ON BUT MISSING THE 'LASTS'

Senior reflects on campus life cut short by pandemic

BY BROOKE REILLY

SENIOR YEAR. IT'S supposed to be filled with time spent with friends, countless "lasts" and memories to last a lifetime. Many students take on internships, clinicals, observation hours and more as they begin to transition into the "real world."

It's a time for students to really connect with their organizations, faculty, staff and each other and to reflect on every opportunity and experience they've had in the course of their college careers. Luckily, reflecting can be done in quarantine, but the time with friends on campus cannot.

I always knew my time to say goodbye to Quinnipiac would come, but I didn't know it would be so soon. I knew it would be tough, but having to leave so early without warning made it even more difficult.

When I look back on my time at Quinnipiac, I think about the organizations that made school feel more like home. My first semester wasn't easy, but getting involved did a 180 on my college experience. The organization I joined first was Q30, the student-run television station. Q30 not only provided me with the skills I need to succeed in the field of journalism, but it also gave me a place to grow and meet like-minded individuals who became some of my best friends.

Q30 allowed me to try new things and step outside my comfort zone. I didn't know much about TV or journalism when I chose my major, but Q30 showed me why I decided to pursue journalism. I was able to learn from great people who paved the way for me to hold multiple leadership positions at the station. This eventually led me to the role of news director in my senior year. I spent many late nights in the media suite, and whether I was working on stories or laughing with my friends, those simple moments are some of my favorite memories.

I was also lucky enough to be an orientation leader for first-year students during the summer of 2019. This experience changed my life. It pushed me to be the best leader I could be and allowed me to learn more than I ever imagined, not only about myself, but also about people of many backgrounds. I

In this article, broadcast journalism major Brooke Reilly '20 reflects on the surprise ending to her senior year and how quickly her college years flew by. That ending gave way to a beginning: her first job as a professional reporter. She will be working there with fellow alumni Kayla Hevey '19 and Andrew Badillo '17.

will forever cherish the summer I spent living in Hill and all of the memories made and lessons learned.

Along with those organizations, I was a founding sister of my sorority, Tri Delta, a student ambassador for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and vice president of the Quinnipiac chapter of the National Communication Association's honor society, Lambda Pi Eta.

Another thing that comes to mind when I look back on my time at Quinnipiac is the semester I spent living and interning in Los Angeles through the QU in LA program. I spent 12 weeks on the other side of the country and learned more than I ever thought I would. I was fortunate to have two internships while there with the FOX News Channel's LA bureau and KTLA 5 News. One of my favorite assignments was interviewing Vanessa Hudgens, the other judges, and the finalists at the finale of "So You Think You Can Dance." My friends and I explored the entire Los Angeles area and also visited Las Vegas, Disneyland, Laguna Beach and San Diego. Going to LA was so rewarding, and I'm grateful Quinnipiac provided me with that opportunity.

I was sitting on my couch at home when I learned we would definitely not be returning to campus for the rest of the semester because of the spread of COVID-19. I truly did not know how to react. I felt a mix of emotions, and I shed some tears. I knew I had to write a story for Q30; however, something felt different about this one. It was the hardest story I ever had to write.

All I could think about is how spring semester is always my favorite. The flowers bloom, the sun shines, the weather gets warm, and the quad fills with students playing games, relaxing, studying and enjoying time with friends. My last seven weeks were supposed to be filled with completing my classes and my internship with NBC News at the TODAY Show in New York City, a million meetings, more Q30 shows and special events, QTHON, Greek Week, formal, senior send-offs, Wake the Giant, May Weekend, hanging out at the new pub, Friday nights at Aunchies, Saturday nights in New Haven and a week spent with friends leading up to graduation.



I think what hurts the most about having my college experience cut short is that I never felt the emotional goodbyes and closure that come with the end of college. I left for spring break thinking I'd be back a week later and barely said goodbye to my friends, professors and staff members whom I've grown close to.

I'll never know that feeling of walking out of my final class because I didn't know I was sitting through it before spring break. I won't get to take a final lap around the cafeteria to talk to whoever I might run into. I won't spend one final night in the Media Suite. There are too many things I left unfinished.



Although it's hard not to feel sad, I am doing my best to stay positive. Being home has allowed me to spend more time with my family. I know I am so fortunate to have a safe home to be in as we navigate through these unprecedented times. I decided it was important for me to stay as connected with Quinnipiac as I possibly could despite not being there in person. I kept up with my classes and attended many virtual events.

I continued to work from home for Q30, and I treated this as a learning experience when it came to news coverage. Members of the Q30 news team and I produced remote newscasts every other week and wrote many stories about how COVID-19 was impacting the Quinnipiac community. I also conducted interviews with SGA executive board candidates and moderated a town hall over Zoom prior to elections to model how we would normally cover in-person elections.

I coordinated a Zoom interview with President Olian that was supposed to take place on campus in April as well. Doing all of this from home taught me that even as a student, I can continue to cover these historic times, and now more than ever, news is so important.

The opportunities I have had at Quinnipiac changed my life for the better, and I could not be more grateful. I'm sure I speak for most of the Class of 2020 when I say that none of us wanted our senior year to end this way. However, the situation was beyond our control. I know that Quinnipiac made the right choice to close campus as the virus became more serious. My thanks go out to all health care workers and first responders protecting us as we work to find normalcy again.

A piece of advice that I would give to current students is to cherish every moment and take advantage of each opportunity that comes your way. College flies by. If I could, I would turn back the clock and repeat these last four years again and again.

But, if there is one thing I've learned, it's that life goes on. In April, I was hired as a reporter by Fox 22 WFVX, an ABC affiliate in Bangor, Maine. Quinnipiac will always be with me wherever I go.

We will use the tools we learned during our time at QU in future jobs. We have photos that will always remind us of our home. Someday, we may come back and go on a tour with our own children. Most important, our friendships will last forever because once a Bobcat, always a Bobcat. Even when it might not feel like it, it's always a great day to be a Bobcat.

Top: Reilly will miss going to the annual Yale game with Boomer and her friends. She is shown in this November 2017 photo with friends Brendan Brooks '20 and Kayla Hevey '19.

Below left: Reilly (front row) and senior orientation leaders gather for a group photo in 2019. Reilly also served as a campus ambassador for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions.