

Post-Graduation Planning Amid the Coronavirus Pandemic

The outbreak of the coronavirus has caused an enormous amount of uncertainty in people's lives across the world. Individuals from all age groups have been affected by this pandemic, whether they have been diagnosed with the virus or had their daily routines altered (["How the Pandemic Will End"](#)), but as the spring semester comes to a close, college seniors are met with questions that students their age have not had to ask before. Along with the stress that comes with leaving a university after four years, college seniors all over the United States now have to worry about the wavering job market due to the virus. With college campuses being closed, graduation ceremonies being postponed, and all courses being moved to online, life after graduation is a growing concern for graduating college seniors.

According to the *National Public Radio*, since state "shelter-in-place" orders have been enacted in the United States, over 30 million American citizens have filed for unemployment. Before the pandemic bombarded the U.S. job market, the country's unemployment rate was 3.7%, one of the lowest unemployment rates it has been since the mid 1900s ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)). For example, The Walt Disney company, a worldwide known brand, furloughed over 43,000 workers in April due to the virus; other large companies such as Boeing, Sephora, and Under Armour have done the same ([Business Insider](#)). Along with large, nationwide companies, small businesses have taken a drastic hit due to the shutdown of non-essential businesses ([Business Insider](#)). President Trump has signed bills loaning billions of dollars to small businesses around the U.S. in order to help keep their doors open during these times. The closing of restaurants, hair salons, and other non-essential businesses has been a large portion of the rise in unemployed Americans. With many college seniors' last semester coming to a close, joining the work force before the virus struck would have been an exciting time. *Marketwatch.com* says, "before the coronavirus pandemic forced businesses and schools to close... graduates from the Class of 2020 could have expected to graduate into the strongest job market in 50 years." Now that states are beginning to lift their "shelter-in-place" orders, businesses are opening, but it will take time for the market to return to the way it was ([Marketwatch.com](#)).

Ami Goetz, a 22-year-old senior at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is experiencing the stress of the wavering job market, as well as an abrupt ending to her last year of undergraduate college studies. During her time at the University of Illinois, she majored in psychology, minored in social work, and worked jobs that would prepare her for life after graduation. Before the coronavirus pandemic forced the closure of college campuses, Ami was accepted to the "School of Social Service Administration" at the University of Chicago. She will continue to pursue her Master's in Social Work, despite an "anti-climactic" ending to undergraduate studies, but unfortunately still had a few cancelled plans for this summer. "I was originally going to go on "Birthright," which is where if you are Jewish, you get to go to Israel for free," Ami claims was one of her most exciting plans for the summer. Long-term, after finishing her two-year program, she hopes to be an academic advisor or "something along the administrative route." Currently, Ami remains unsure of her path to a career after graduate school because of her lack of experience and the uncertainties with the country's current

situation; she says, “I am going to get a license in social work, as a clinical social worker, and see where that takes me.”

Alike Ami, another University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign graduating senior is feeling pressure as her final year of undergraduate college comes to a close. Ellie Gatz will also be attending graduate school after the spring semester ends. During Ellie’s time at UIUC, she majored in speech and hearing sciences. To gain experience in this field during the past four years she “was a registered behavior technician, so it’s like a behavior therapist for kids with autism...” and she was also involved in Operation Smile, a club on campus that fundraised for children with speech deformities ([Ellie Gatz and Operation Smile, UIUC Chapter](#)). In the fall, Ellie hopes to begin an in-person Master’s program in speech language pathology at Midwestern University, but she worries it could be online due to the pandemic. “Now that it could be online, it could be more difficult transitioning into grad school...” Ellie claims as just one of her fears for after her undergraduate studies end. Attending graduate school to receive a master’s degree in speech pathology has always been the plan for Ellie, but what comes after is currently also an uncertainty for her. Fortunately, Ellie has had a job working in this field near the University of Illinois’s campus before the pandemic hit, so job security is not an issue for her right now. Ellie’s hopes remain high, as she may take part in UIUC’s online commencement ceremony mid-May and continues her transition into life after undergraduate studies.

Differing from both Ami and Ellie, Emily Potts will be going straight into the workforce after graduation; this was a decision she made based on the pandemic and the current U.S. job market. Emily Potts majored in political science and double minored in Italian and public relations, with future plans to attend law school. As soon as the University of Illinois transitioned to fully online learning, Emily was proactive and contacted a real-estate law firm whom she interned for last summer. She was able to secure a “part time position” since UIUC’s spring break, she says then, “I will be working there full-time as soon as my finals end.” Having a for sure job in her general potential field was incredibly important for Emily, as this wasn’t her “first plan” for after graduation, but she “knew” the job market would be scarce for college seniors. “A job is better than no job... but I do really enjoy it,” says Emily, as she explains that many of her peers have lost internships and jobs for after their graduation; she is “so thankful” she is not there. “Personally, this [the coronavirus pandemic] has just switched which plan [for after graduation] I will go to,” which was not too hard for her. One positive aspect that Emily really emphasized that she learned after losing the remainder of her senior year and struggling with the future was that she, “won’t take anything for granted anymore... you can’t be like thinking that something is going to be guaranteed for tomorrow. Often, we take having school tomorrow like it’s guaranteed, but now we see that not even that is a guarantee. So, this has definitely, overall, changed my outlook on life.”

Planning for life after college can be stressful for some students, but during this unprecedented time, more uncertainties have risen. For students like Ami Goetz and Ellie Gatz, attending graduate school is important for their future career goals, but the decline of the job-market due to the coronavirus brings questions for even after they receive a master’s degree. Emily Potts planning ahead and communicating with past employers was her proactive method to ensuring work after her virtual commencement ceremony. Other graduating students in the U.S. are not as lucky, as they are “scrambling” to find work after graduation ([Business Insider](#)). Although according to *Business Insider*, open internships in the U.S. have dropped by over 30 percent, students like Ami, Ellie, and Emily have done their best to adapt to this unique situation

and continue to have a positive outlook for their future; this will only help them be as successful in life after college, as they were during their four years at the University of Illinois.

Sources:

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