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The Montclarion

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Kaitlin Zazzaro Rejoins Women’s Lacrosse Team After Nearly Two Years

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Struggles of COVID-19 Era College Alumni

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#FocusDisruption is a collaboration of all the media outlets within the School of Communication and Media. Our goal is to report stories that highlight the disruption of the last two years and the solutions that have come out of it.

‘The Big Meal’ Revives Human Connection After COVID-19

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Told in only 90 minutes, “The Big Meal” walks audiences through the story of five generations of an American family trying to conquer the obstacles of life. Beginning with the love story of Sam and Nicole, audiences sit in on the development of their relationship and the building of their family. Tackling infidelity, addiction and grief, “The Big Meal” prompts one to question their own mortality as they realize time is truly fleeting.

Montclair State University’s production of “The Big Meal” is

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Elena Plumser graduated from Montclair State University at the peak of COVID-19.

Photo courtesy of Elena Plumser

Ashley Petrosine | The Montclarion

Kaitlin Zazzaro rejoined the women’s lacrosse team after a near two-year hiatus.

Corey Annan
Sports Editor

A few days after their contest against Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) on March 9, 2020, senior defender Kaitlin Zazzaro and the Montclair State women’s lacrosse team were enjoying a beach day at Clearwater, Florida. They were eager to take their minds off a heartbreaking loss in the final seconds of the contest.

However, the team was starting to hear news of Division I games being postponed due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. However, the Red Hawks couldn’t fathom that their season would be over in a matter of days.

Eventually, Division III sports would meet the same fate. The

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College Alumni

Photo courtesy of Elena Plumser

Ariel Rogg
Chief Copy Editor

It’s not controversial to say the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has taken a hard toll on everyone, in more ways than one. Even with the return of some in-person opportunities, college students are burnt out, completely exhausted and pushing themselves to stay motivated through a computer screen. It’s just not the same.

But what happens when that remote learning turns into remote adulthood? Or when online school becomes online career-searching? There’s no emergency manual to teach

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The family has an intimate moment in “The Big Meal” play.

Lynise Olivacce | The Montclarion
The Montclarion is a weekly publication of Montclarion Publishing, Inc. published during the 2020 fall and 2021 spring semesters, examinations, summer and winter sessions. The Montclarion is funded by student fees distributed by Montclair State University and incoming advertising revenue. The views expressed in the Opinion section, with the exception of the Main Editorial, do not necessarily reflect the views of The Montclarion.

The Montclarion has a commitment to accuracy and clarity and will print corrections or clarifications if information is found to be incorrect. To report an error of fact or a Letter to the Editor, email the Editor-in-Chief at montclarionchief@gmail.com.

All submissions to the newspaper become property of The Montclarion. We do not print articles from anonymous contributors. The first issue of The Montclarion, then named The Pelican, was published on Nov. 28, 1928. Information reported in the Red Hawk Rap Sheet comes directly from sheet unless information directly from the police report is incorrect. We can print an update to the events only if the newspaper is given access to relevant documents to corroborate the information.

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## Red Hawk Rap Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 18</td>
<td>Machuga Heights: A student reported an incident of laundry theft from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gordon Hall laundry room. This case is under investigation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, April 18</td>
<td>Burglary: A student reported that someone attempted to break them into</td>
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<td></td>
<td>after hosting a conversation on a social media account. This case is under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>investigation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, April 19</td>
<td>Machuga Heights: A student reported an incident of laundry theft from</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barton Hall laundry room. This case is under investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, April 19</td>
<td>Hawk's Crossings: A student reported an incident of cyber harassment from</td>
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<td></td>
<td>their social media account while in Hawk's Crossings. This case is under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, April 20</td>
<td>Lot 1: A faculty member reported that their vehicle was vandalized while</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parked in Lot 1. This case is under investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, April 21</td>
<td>Lot 46: A student reported that their vehicle was vandalized while parked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in Lot 46. This case is under investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, April 23</td>
<td>Fraud: A student reported that they received an Email regarding student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>employment which was fraudulent. This case is under investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, April 25</td>
<td>The Village: Resident students Natalia Oleen, 20 of Lambertville, NJ and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erica Molina-Tifa, 21 of Newark, NJ were arrested and charged with</td>
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<td>simple assault, an act of domestic violence, for their involvement in an</td>
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<td></td>
<td>incident that occurred within Fenwick Hall. Both parties are scheduled</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to appear in Little Falls Municipal court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone who has information regarding these incidents is urged to call the police station at TIP-S (8477).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Montclair State University's School of Communication and Media (SCM) is releasing #FocusDisruption, a collaborative student project which over the last two semesters has pinpointed the struggles and changes society has endured two years after the height of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Part of the project is a newscast on Thursday, May 5, which will highlight the solutions that have come out of the pandemic’s “disruption” to everyday life and how people have adapted.

Bernice Ndegwa, a junior journalism and digital media major, and Louis Biondolillo, a senior television and digital media major, are set to be anchors for the project. Ndegwa discussed how it feels to share this project with the Montclair State community.

“I’m very excited about this,” Ndegwa said. “[Biondolillo] and I anchored the kickoff live Focus project in the fall, and now it’s good to spend time with the team before a majority of our seniors leave.”

Biondolillo emphasized how being a part of his last Focus is somewhat saddening, but he is still more than happy to be a part of it.

“’It’s a little bittersweet for me, being my last Focus,’ Biondolillo said. ’I’ve hosted three of them and produced two of them. I’ve been with Focus since [#FocusImmigration] and I would say it’s fitting because #FocusDisruption is moving forward, and that’s what I’m doing myself.”

Ndegwa also gave a glimpse of what goes on in the creation of #FocusDisruption and what it will bring to the Montclair State community.

“It’s going to be a whole day event [on April 27] and there will be a colloquium in the morning, and round tables will be shot there as well,” Ndegwa said. “We are the last big thing that’s happening, recording all the ins-and-outs for the anchors. It’s going to be a very exciting day!”

Beyond the positions of anchoring, Gabby Taylor, a senior television and digital media major and one of the senior producers of #FocusDisruption, shared what it has been like to be a part of it.

“It’s the best to be a part of all of the Focus projects at the [SCM],” Taylor said. “Being a part of the first real big project after the pandemic is everything I could have asked for [since] coming to Montclair [State].”

Taylor also shared what students, faculty and families can expect from the release of the #FocusDisruption newscast.

“It’s going to be a lot different from our last show,” Taylor said. “We have similar elements in looking at the ways in which the pandemic disrupted our lives, but in this project, we’re really focusing on moving forward and the solutions people have come up with to live with the disruption we have experienced.”
Many students on Montclair State University’s campus are experiencing coronavirus (COVID-19) fatigue and have relaxed on restrictions they were once strict with.

COVID-19 has been disrupting lives for over two years now, but once it started to calm down and cases dropped, students, many of whom are experiencing COVID fatigue, felt they could start to relax with rules.

Abby Fletcher, a senior television and digital media major, said she is no longer strictly following COVID-19 guidelines. “The second I walked in [the Student Center] I ripped off my mask,” Fletcher said. “And I have [obsessive compulsive disorder], so during the peak of [COVID-19] I was very particular about that stuff, like to the point where my boyfriend needed to wash his hands before even entering my apartment.”

Jordan Buckland, a senior education major, said after he got his third dose of the vaccine, he started to be more lenient with COVID-19 rules. “I wear my mask under my nose now,” Buckland said. “I don’t social distance really anymore and I don’t wear it in stores at all.”

Buckland believes everyone is in this together and needs to get vaccinated so the pandemic can be over for good. Pat Farley, a senior television and digital media major, has been affected by COVID-19 fatigue. “With cases going down and the last two years have been non-stop regulations, I think everyone is starting to [feel fatigue], especially me just because I’m a student,” Farley said. “I’m young, I’m 22. I want the world to open back up again so I can experience it.”

Farley is also a part of a comedy group on campus called The Undergrads. They started their freshman year in 2019, the year before COVID-19 hit.

Farley said when they came back to campus they were able to do shows in person and get back to doing things they enjoyed. He explained this as a breath of fresh air that helped with their COVID-19 fatigue.

Kaya Mbojdi, a sophomore exercise science major, said she has not been affected by COVID-19 fatigue. “It hasn’t really affected me,” Mbojdi said. “I usually have a mask on me at all times even if I don’t wear it, but in school it is even required a lot more, so even if you’re going downstairs or throwing your trash out, you still need to have it on.”

Lauryn Miqueli, a sophomore sociology major, feels the same way, although she is a little more relaxed. “I do notice I have it in my pockets or sometimes it’ll just be on my chin and I forget to put it on,” Miqueli said. “But in school I have professors who are very on top of that rule so in my classes you will see me wearing my mask, but [in a more] comfortable setting I won’t have it.”
A Year of #FOCUSDisruption

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By Paul Thomas
Published October 19, 2021

Montclair State Returns to Remote Instruction For a Day Due to Storm
By Jennifer Portorreal
Published November 3, 2021

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By Corey Annan
Published January 26, 2022

Check out these articles & more at TheMontclarion.org!
How Greek Life at Montclair State Made It Through The Pandemic

Sal DiMaggio
Assistant Feature Editor

For many students, Greek life is a central tenet of their college experience. They could not imagine not doing philanthropic work or hosting events on campus, or going through the recruitment or initiation process to officially meet their brothers or sisters for life.

But the entire world of Greek life was turned on its head when the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic struck in March 2020. When students were on Zoom and had to social distance, Greek life organizations had to find innovative ways to engage and interact with their members. Even two years later, they still are.

When COVID-19 first struck and students were sent into quarantine, fraternities and sororities scrambled to change their current ways of operating. Claudio Alejo, the coordinator of Greek life at Montclair State, said there was a lot of confusion among organizations.

“I think after the two-week mark thinking back to spring 2020, people are like, ‘Oh, snap, what’s really going on right now?’” Alejo said. “We were told just two weeks and then two weeks turned into a month [and a month turned into] two months and here we are in spring 2022, still trying to figure it out.”

Brett Berrodon, a senior business analytics major and treasurer of the Montclair State chapter of Alpha Chi Rho, said the pandemic was definitely unexpected.

“We were hoping [that] maybe by the end of the summer [we would be] able to get out,” Berrodon said. “Things will come back to normal and then it just kept getting worse and worse. And then we just realized, ‘Alright, this is a lot bigger deal than we originally thought.’”

Ryan Breyta, a junior journalism and digital media major and president of Phi Delta Theta, described how his fraternity struggled with getting enough members to become fully chartered, as Phi Delta Theta was a more recent organization.

“During that time period, we had to make sure that we had enough new members and it was hard during [COVID-19] because we had to adapt to Zoom,” Breyta said. “[The recruitment] process had to wait another year.”

The bonds that members of fraternities and sororities have with their fellow members are crucial to the Greek life experience. As one could imagine, having to social distance and meet via video call greatly impacted those bonds. Alejo explained the effect that being forced apart had on the future of Greek life.

“From spring 2020 to now, [we’ve seen] the virtual generation of Greeks,” Alejo said. “So when it comes to the socialization amongst the fraternities and the sororities, it might look very different. Now some folks might feel comfortable and excited to go back to that normalcy and tradition prior to the pandemic, but some of them, because they came around [during] that COVID generation might not feel as comfortable.”

Nora Mackle, a junior nursing major, joined her sorority, Phi Sigma Sigma, during the pandemic. She said it was completely different from what she expected.

“I also only knew what sorority life and Greek life was through movies, TV shows and what I’ve seen online,” Mackle said. “So I just expected to be a lot more involved. Obviously, now that the pandemic is changing a little bit, it’s less out there.”

Another change in thought came largely from focusing on how this new generation of students” have had different priorities since the pandemic began, as Alejo has noticed.

“A lot of this generation of students now [are thinking] ‘How’s this going to benefit me?’” Alejo said. “So now I think it’s challenging our Greeks to really look at themselves as the incorporator organizations that they are, and they’re selling this business to their students and they’re really trying to help them develop as leaders, as professionals.”

This is something Breyta has said his fraternity has already capitalized on through their attitude towards students.

“We want to stand out in our leadership, we want to stand out in our events and people most importantly,” Breyta said. “Just because you’re in an organization that does not define you, What defines you is how you approach your life and what you do with it.”

Even just by being in her sorority, Mackle says she has developed skills that will help her in the professional world, such as time management.

“Being in Greek life also just makes me more organized, because I have to plan around whatever we were doing,” Mackle said. “For example, [one] week we had Greek week and I also had my nursing classes to do. But I wanted to do as much as I could, so every time I could, I would do an event so that I could stay active in my sorority.”

When it comes to what’s ahead for Greek life at Montclair State, Alejo hopes things can continue to return to how they once were.

“I think plans moving forward, as far as going back to some of those traditional programs and experiences, [we will] slowly start bringing them back in as much as we’re able to, with in the means of whatever [COVID-19] policies, procedures and precautions we have to take into account,” Alejo said.
COVID Alumni

Continued from Page 1

today's young people how to thrive in a pandemic-stricken job market, or how to snap out of the mental turmoil that isolation brings.

There's plenty left unsaid about how college alumni are not only swimming in debt but also drowning in the employ-
ment pool with COVID-19 pushing them down further.

According to the Pew Research Cen-
ter, college graduates in the year 2020 were less likely to be in the labor force or employed by their 2019 predecessors by 9%. The world has changed dramati-
cally, and recent college alumni are faced with trying to apply their new knowledge to an economy not strong enough to in-
clude them all.

Some peak-pandemic Montclair State
University graduates, like Elena Plums-
er, were given and celebrate all your accom-
plishments no matter how small, but less fulfilling than she'd dreamed.

“We couldn't have the big ceremony
with all my peers in one venue because of the severity of COVID-19 cases at the time,” Vitali said. “Considering college graduation is one of the most important milestones in one's life, I would have wished to change that.”

Vitali is different from many in her graduating class, as she earned her de-
gree in three years rather than the tra-
ditional four-year plan. The pride she wanted to have for finishing early felt di-
minished because of the overwhelming celebrations.

“I worked tirelessly to ensure the best
for my career while making my dreams and goals as possible to graduate in three years with a bachelor's in business ad-
mistration,” Vitali said. “It really sad-
dened me to not have all my family there.
I still feel as though I haven't fully grad-
uated because it was not ideal and what my friends are going to experience this upcoming graduation season.”

Many college graduates in the era
of COVID-19 have had to solely rely on
line job-searching platforms to find work.

Not only that, but the pandemic itself has now become a very apparent factor in the hiring process.

“When applying to jobs, specifically on LinkedIn, the application process in-
cluded a series of COVID-related ques-
tions as to disclose my vaccine status and if the company is in person, remote or hybrid,” Vitali said. “It makes you real-
ly take a step back and assess more than just the role of a job because COVID-19 is drilled into my brain to make informed decisions for my health as well.”

While the same can't be said for every college grad, it's not all bad for Plumer or Vitali. Both young women have man-
ged to find jobs to support themselves and have found ways to regain a sense of independence.

Plumser has taken on a variety of roles, from being technical support at a remote company to coordinating Mont-
clair State’s Summer Journalism Work-
shop and coming full circle with a posi-
tion at Broadcast and Media Operations (BMO), right at the School of Communi-
cation and Media (SCM) where she stud-
ied television and digital media.

“Since September 2021, I've been in the SCM every day working for BMO,” Plumser said. “I'm constantly on pro-
ductions, helping oversee the equipment cage, assisting professors and students when needed, posting on social media and so much more. It's not a full-time position and was only for this academic year, but I'm hoping to continuously re-
turn.”

At the end of the day, having the right people in your corner can make the tran-
sition from college to real adulthood more bearable, even when you feel sub-
merged in a chaotic pandemic.

“I've been very lucky to have such a great work environment [at Montclair State] with very supportive and helpful colleagues,” Plumser said. “Some days are better than others and it can be easy to fall back into student habits, but ev-
every day I'm working hard to improve and learn.”

Vitali has found success in working from the comfort of her own home. While not ideal, she's grateful for an op-
portunity to gain new experience.

“Since graduating, I am fortunate enough to have a remote position with one of the big four accounting firms working in anti-money laundering,” Vi-
tali said. “There is definitely a human component missing from working re-
 mote, but nonetheless I enjoy working in

Elena Plumser graduated from Montclair State University in May 2020 with a bachelor's degree in television and digital media, at the peak of COVID-19.

Elena Plumser graduated from Montclair State University in May 2020 with a bachelor's degree in television and digital media, at the peak of COVID-19.

Montclair State 2020 graduate Loren Vitali (left) was able to sit next to one of her friends and sorority sisters, despite having a smaller graduation ceremony.

Plumer helped coordinate the 2021 Summer Journalism Workshop.

Plumser helped coordinate the 2021 Summer Journalism Workshop.
How Can College Students Prepare for a Volatile Real Estate Market?

“We’ve seen a lot of activity in the market,” Petruzziello said. “All-time highs in terms of transactions, for purchases, as well as refinance. Interest rates dropped significantly during COVID-19. So even if you weren’t moving and you were living in your home, it was a benefit for you to take a look at your existing mortgage, refinance and save some money.”

The demand for houses was high, causing a surge in inventory, prices and purchases. This level of activity was the perfect combination for buyers, who now had the freedom and financial flexibility to buy a home. “Credit is obviously important,” Petruzziello said. “You want to keep that [credit card] balance at 50% or less than the available [credit limit]. That’s the other thing is you want to make sure you don’t have a lot, a lot of things on your credit — not a lot of debt. And in this market [having] flexibility in terms of where you want to live.”

For college students looking to move off campus as an upper-classman or recent graduates planning ahead, setting yourself up financially and mentally for entering this crazy market is important. “Credit is obviously important,” Petruzziello said. “You want to keep that [credit card] balance at 50% or less than the available [credit limit]. That’s the other thing is you want to make sure you don’t have a lot, a lot of things on your credit — not a lot of debt. And in this market [having] flexibility in terms of where you want to live.”

A strategy that may help young people looking to buy in this ever-changing market is to prepare themselves to enter an extremely disrupted world of real estate.

In 2020, the real estate market was shifted in an unprecedented way. Some would say the market even resembled that of 2008, before the economic crash. As the threat of the coronavirus (COVID-19) spread worldwide, people found themselves deserting their homes in crowded cities and moving back to the suburbs with their families. College kids all across the United States were forced to leave half-empty dorms and finish their semester back at home. As more and more people left the cities, the demand for real estate was high. And at the same time, due to high unemployment and incentives from the government, real estate loan rates were low, therefore giving even more of an incentive for people who hadn’t invested in property to get started.

Anthony Petruzziello, a sales manager for Cross Country Mortgage Company, has been in the business for over 20 years. He’s seen his business and the market in general shift significantly over the last two years. “We’ve seen a lot of activity in the market,” Petruzziello said. “All-time highs in terms of transactions, for purchases, as well as refinance. Interest rates dropped significantly during COVID-19. So even if you weren’t moving and you were living in your home, it was a benefit for you to take a look at your existing mortgage, refinance and save some money.”

The demand for houses was high, causing a surge in inventory, prices and purchases. This level of activity was the perfect storm for sellers, but not so much for buyers, who now had to constantly compete with others to even get a response on their house offers. Even the rental market has completely shifted. That is where many young students and grads find themselves landing and it’s oftentimes their first independent purchase.

Due to homeowner loan rates doubling for some to as much as 5.8% now in 2022, according to Petruzziello, many people aren’t looking to move out of their recently purchased or refinanced homes. Therefore, renters looking to buy are staying in their rentals and looking into refinancing and saving some money. “If you can wait it out, save a little more, or maybe move in with family, you’ll be better off when it comes to purchasing [or renting],” Apicella said.

Moving forward, the best way to prepare yourself is by planning ahead. The real estate market is always changing and knowing what you want and how to get there is only half the battle. “The whole idea is that you have a game plan,” Petruzziello said. “Have an idea in terms of timing [and] where you want to be. It’s never too early to sit down with either a loan officer or a realtor. Just give them an idea as to what you’re looking to do.”

A strategy that may help young people looking to buy in one of the principles Anthony Laurita, broker and owner of United Real Estate North Jersey, believes in. “If it would be practical,” Laurita said. “I believe that first-time homeowners should buy a multifamily house, if possible. So if you collect the rent while still living in a home that you own, that [will] suit your needs. A lot of people want top of the market right away. Know your place in the market and build toward that dream house. Let your real estate work for you, instead of you working for your real estate.”

If you learn how to do that, you’ll never have to save money for real estate; the house will do it for you.”

Samantha Bailey | The Montclarion

In 2020, the real estate market was shifted in an unprecedented way.
How Increased Screen Time Affects Students’ Mental Health

Sal DiMaggio
Assistant Feature Editor

Can you imagine not using social media? Many would shudder at the very thought. Our phones are always by our sides or in our hands. Constantly scrolling and refreshing, social media has become a part of our identities and who we are.

That hasn’t changed due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We have spent more time on platforms like Instagram and TikTok since we went into lockdown. But the increased usage has had different effects on college students’ mental health, from the way we perceive ourselves to the way we communicate with each other.

Kyle Pepitone, a senior animation major, said his social media usage increased once the world went into lockdown.

“I’ve been using it more since the COVID-19 pandemic than I think I have in the past,” Pepitone said. “I’ve definitely used it more than I did beforehand, but the problem is it’s not growing my own career. It’s just scrolling through social media.”

Lana Kalapodakis, a freshman film and television major, said this was true for her as well, so much so that she had to take breaks from social media.

“I’ve had multiple times even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic where I had to stop and put [my phone] down and delete Instagram off my phone because it was just getting to the point where I was just feeling constantly bad about myself for no reason,” Kalapodakis said.

Candace Wilson, a licensed therapist based in Newark, New Jersey for ThriveWorks, a mental health and therapy company, has noticed some trends in the past couple of years that came with the increased usage of social media. Body image and self-esteem are one of the biggest trends she sees.

“It’s been using it more since the COVID-19 pandemic and I think I have in the past,” Pepitone said. “I’ve definitely used it more than I did beforehand, but the problem is it’s not growing my own [career]. It’s just scrolling through social media.”

Kalapodakis agreed with this sentiment.

“I’ve had a bunch of these other girls who went to my school and they would be so pretty, so well made up,” Kalapodakis said. “And I’m just over here dealing with all the zits on my face, trying to get them off.”

Kalapodakis has his own issues with self-esteem when it comes to seeing content that other artists put out compared to his own.

“Seeing everybody do stuff, which I considered loads better, really made my self-esteem take a dive and to a point where I think it’s almost irreplaceable by myself at least,” Pepitone said.

However, this was not the case for all college students. Some of them found that being on social media benefitted their mental health in some ways.

Mari Zuniga, a senior communication and media arts major, said she became more confident in the way she looked and actually began to post more of herself on social media when the pandemic began.

“On social media, I felt more free,” Zuniga said. “I didn’t do it for the likes or anything like that. I don’t really care for the likes, but if someone did like [something], okay, cool … I just have more time on my hands to [post pictures of myself].”

Another trend Wilson brought up was how we communicated during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how that has an impact on how we do so now.

“I believe social media has caused a decline in social interaction in general,” Wilson said. “People will text as opposed to calling. I’ve seen people sit side by side and text one another as opposed to actually speaking to one another.”

Kalapodakis described how the ways she communicated changed due to the increased use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I don’t like talking to people. I don’t know through a screen, but someone I do know, that can work,” Kalapodakis said. “Being out in person, sometimes it feels like it’s a lot and it somewhat made my anxiety worse. I felt like I, for a little while, forgot how to have a physical conversation.”

Zuniga, however, said she was grateful for social media for letting her communicate with her friends at all.

“It just brought us closer together as friends, because not only would we do FaceTime calls with a smaller group, but then in our Instagram group chat, we would send memes,” Zuniga said. “We would be talking almost every single day and it just brought us together. Just because we can’t see each other doesn’t mean we have to stop texting.”

Based on her experiences with her college students, Wilson has some advice for college students when it comes to social media and mental health.

“Don’t be so reliant on [social media] for your self-esteem,” Wilson said. “Likes don’t matter that much. Bottom line, it sounds kind of corny, but you got to love yourself, flaws and all. Just because society says, ‘Oh, you’re supposed to do this at this age,’ it doesn’t mean you’re a failure if you don’t.”
What positive things came out of the pandemic?

By Lynise Olivacce
Assistant Photo Editor

“The compassion we saw for a moment in this very rapid and fast world that kind of forgets what it means to be with each other and form closer bonds with one another. That made me see hope in humanity.”

Dr. Michael Lees
Religions of the World Professor

“My family and I were already close but we got a lot closer. Also, I started working out more since I had a bunch of free time.”

Amira Cardenas
Freshman
Philosophy Major

“I would say I got to spend more time working on myself. I think before [COVID-19] I was kind of running around doing things and with [COVID-19] I kind of was able to slow down and really focus on myself with my goals.”

Carolina Perez
Freshman
Business Administration Major
“During that whole time we were locked in, I was still in high school and I didn’t know what I wanted to do in my life. But then I found out I wanted to do IT in my career. I started learning coding and things like that. It was a good time to sit down and see what I wanted to do in my life.”

Carlos Sesto
Freshman
IT Major

“I feel like I did better in my classes than before. Since I was home, it was much easier for me to focus more and do better in school.”

Elsa Naag
Senior
Biochemistry Major

“I feel like I got my family a lot closer. Because you were like out, my parents went out [to] places that we went to work and stuff. But for like, three months whenever everything was in lockdown, we had family dinners, every night. And we were just closer, closer than we ever were.”

Siya Batra
Freshman
Business Administration Major
All Montclair State University undergraduate students get (1) one prepaid ticket per production for PEAK Performances, MSU Theatre & Dance, and John J. Cali School of Music. Students need to arrange for their ticket in-person at the Alexander Kasser Theater Box Office window (Tuesday through Friday, 12 noon to 6pm) by showing their MSU Student ID, providing an MSU email address, and phone number. MSU prepaid student tickets cannot be secured over the phone or online currently.
Have a thought about on campus or off campus matters?
Write for Opinion!
Email:
montclarionopinion@gmail.com

Room 2035, School of Communication and Media in Upper Montclair, NJ, 07043

Parking and Fees

Campus Activities
Help Wanted

PART-TIME BABYSITTER

Seeking a part-time babysitter/mother’s helper for one or two kids (12 mos and 3 years) in Kinnelon, NJ. Seeking a sitter for spring, summer, and fall with availability within Monday-Friday 11am-6pm (negotiable). The perfect candidate is punctual, communicative and a strong leader. We are looking for someone who is fully vaccinated and has excellent references, infant experience, and CPR certification.

Please reply to 347-870-7757 if interested.

AFTER-SCHOOL SITTER

Looking for after-school sitter for a sweet 4-year-old boy. Hours are M-F 3:30-5:30pm for $20/hr. Must be vaccinated and punctual. Opportunities for more hours and pay are available if desired. Ideal candidate is studying speech therapy or ABA approach as he is in a preschool ABA classroom with delayed communication.

Please reply to 973-495-3670 if interested.
Across
5. This action sci-fi film involving time travel and a deadly alien species, originally set for theatrical release by Paramount Pictures, instead premiered exclusively on Amazon Prime Video.
6. Due to the ongoing pandemic, Netflix acquired the distribution rights to this Victorian England-set film about a famous detective’s sister and pushed it to streaming, despite Warner Bros’ initial plan for a theatrical release.
7. This addition to one of the biggest movie franchises had a hybrid release—in theaters and on Disney Plus—after repeatedly being postponed, a decision which notoriously caused a legal battle between Disney and the film’s leading actress.
8. This fantasy-adventure about a warrior princess attempting to unite her realm became Disney Plus’ first major animated feature film to release on the platform’s Premier Access service on the same day as its limited theatrical release.

Down
1. This fantasy-comedy film, inspired by a classic Roald Dahl children’s book, ultimately decided to skip theaters entirely in favor of a digital premiere on HBO Max, just in time for Halloween.
2. This film, about a musician who gets stuck in the afterlife, premiered exclusively on Disney Plus Christmas day, making it the first Pixar film not to have a wide theatrical release due to the pandemic.
3. This blockbuster about the clash between two iconic titans became available to stream on HBO Max the very same day as its theatrical release, like the rest of Warner Bros’ 2021 films.
4. The Lovebirds / This romantic comedy from Paramount, following a couple on the verge of breaking up who become involved in a murder mystery, became the first movie pulled from theaters due to the coronavirus and instead debuted on Netflix.

Sudoku

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Word Search

Solutions  Telecommuting Remote Instruction
Mental Health Misinformation Stress
Focus Social Media Support
Mindfulness Communication Education
Pandemic Climate Change Workplace
Companies now expect between the home and the office, which was a relatively uncommon modality before then. Now, according to data scientists at Ladders, 25% of all professional jobs in North America will be remote by the end of 2022, and there is no end in sight.

Don’t fret, this shift has proven quite beneficial to many in the workforce. Given the total upheaval of society as we know it and the rising price of every necessity imaginable, it’s been a relief to those who once had to commute five days a week.

However, just as with every major change, especially those wrought by COVID-19, there is a massive downside, one with borderline dystopian tones. The “9-to-5” aspect of an office job was based solely on the hours physically spent in the workplace, a distinction that has now become nebulous or fluid at best.

Well, since people are home all the time, that means they have more time to work, right? Wrong. Such a false assumption is just one sinister result of the blurred boundaries between the home and the workplace.

Companies now expect workers to be available all hours of the day, able to drop whatever it is they’re doing and run to their computer to fulfill an allegedly urgent task. To make matters worse, some employers see nothing wrong with texting or calling their employees off the clock, even on holidays. This is probably because it’s now expected of many workers to be on-call, even if their job doesn’t require it, and we as a society cannot afford to normalize this.

If it wasn’t already clear that there is no room for humanity under capitalism, it has become intensely apparent to those transitioning to remote work. People with children, spouses, pets and responsibilities are expected to sit on Zoom for hours with no interruptions. Workers have even been fired for having to step away from their computers to attend to their children.

Having no in-person contact with coworkers and bosses might mean the end of being forced to nod and smile at endless pictures of someone else’s moderately ugly baby. But as we all know from venturing into any comment section, virtual connections often enable intense cruelty and depersonalization.

Could this degree of separation exacerbate toxic workplace environments, too? Another consequence of remote work relates to the culture of immediacy that modern technology has contributed to. Think about how we’re all conditioned to immediately feel the irritation of having to wait for anything these days, whether it’s a package, a meal or a response to a text. Well, most companies expect a near-immediate reply to emails, and anything over a day is often considered rude.

The workplace often demands the utmost productivity coupled with the expectation of constant availability. This is a recipe for burnout. It is clearly not only an unrealistic system we’ve created but an unsustainable one.

Last year, Portugal passed a law prohibiting bosses from contacting their employees outside of office hours. Since Portugal is already remarkably progressive and a much smaller country than the United States, it might be wishful thinking to want that level of protection for remote workers here in the good old USA.

But there are some ways to enforce those much-needed boundaries without abandoning your old life and leaving for the Azores, as nice as that sounds. Having an area in your home solely reserved for work not only boosts productivity but also trains your mind to detach from work whenever you are not in that space. This is why bringing your laptop to bed to work on an essay often leads to distractions or lack of motivation; you associate your bed and bedroom with relaxation and rest, so focusing on research or drafting a paper doesn’t come as easily.

Conversely, your bedroom is now a place where work is expected, so you may find it harder to wind down at night. If possible, restrict your remote work to a place in your home you don’t associate with rest or relaxation.

I personally use my dining room table when I’m not eating there because it’s far away from my bedroom and is usually free of distractions. Investing in noise-canceling headphones can be a real lifesaver if your home is noisy.

When working a remote job or looking for one, make sure there are clearly outlined hours and days expected of employees, and be wary of any job that expects “open availability.” In some cases, that means you make your own hours, but more often than not, it’s just another way of saying you’ll work whenever they want you to.

There are plenty of remote jobs out there for all fields and levels of work experience, so don’t be afraid to leave one that is draining you. No job is worth your sanity.

Besides, these companies need to learn that this generation of workers knows their worth, especially in the virtual realm.

Maddye Belov-Boxer, a senior English major, is in his first year as opinion editor for The Montclarion.
I sat quietly in a lecture of over 90 other students in University Hall at Montclair State University. Some chatted softly and others read. The clatter of keys and notifications filled the somber room before our professor began the 12:45 p.m. session. At the same time, almost 5,000 miles away, Russia was launching the first large-scale land invasion in any European country since the Second World War.

The room, both uninformed and over-informed, felt the weight of the moment. More students than I could count had the New York Times open in a different tab noting the updates on the situation, traveling back and forth, while in tandem trying to comprehend the deep and thought-provoking questions of Plato in our Intro to Philosophy class. Our professor, rather understandably, noted the obvious elephant that was squeezed into one of the desks and encouraged us to try and focus our attention on the lesson at hand.

But how could one even remotely fixate on a lesson while questions of global conflict lingered at large? Many fears and concerns fill our collective conscience on any given day. It doesn’t matter if it is climate change, income inequality or racial injustice. We are deeply connected to these atrocities, both man-made and horrifically natural. How can anyone even pay attention to a lesson on Plato, when there is nothing but complete and utter existential disruption closing in on us?

As young students who are somehow supposed to function in this seemingly collapsing society, there should be an understanding and acceptance that we are collectively mentally displaced. Our focus often is not on the lessons presented on a whiteboard but on outwardly manifesting fears. The fate of Ukraine is just one overwhelmingly bone-chilling concern clouding us amongst dozens.

As an individual with Ukrainian heritage, it’s especially unnerving. I fear for the possible collapse of a sovereign and beautiful nation whose desire to pursue and embrace democracy led to such devastation. So, when instructed to tune out the world and focus for 75 minutes, that’s often not possible.

The news at large may not come to a standstill as it did with Ukraine. But every single day, someone in every classroom across this country is distracted due to the state of our society, be it on a local, national or global scale. Uyghur Muslims are still actively subject to genocidal practices by China. The United Nations reported that we can’t adapt fast enough to combat climate change. Florida keeps advancing the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. On top of everything, pandemic fatigue still looms at large, and yet we are supposed to carry on as if nothing is wrong.

Despite age being on our side, we are tired. There is so much dissonance in the air that even stopping for a breath is unnerving. Most of the students here at Montclair State are representatives of Generation Z; we haven’t known a world without conflict and unrest.

We were born in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001. We became hyper-aware of financial constraints, often leading to more than familial conflicts, in 2008. We feared for our lives while watching kids our own age be gunned down at schools in 2018. Then, like the rest of the world, we shouldered the responsibilities of a global pandemic by 2020.

At the end of the day, we are deeply distracted and continuously disturbed. For the most part, we push through the mud and find reasons to be present. But sometimes, the reality of this dark and depressing world is a little more than we can handle.

Please be mindful of the usually vibrant and diligent class that one day falls silent. There is a lot on our shoulders, and on occasion, it just becomes too much to bear.

Alex Pavljuk, a communication and media studies major, is in his first year as a staff writer for The Montclarion.
The Benefits of Remote Work

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been the source of many setbacks. It can be difficult for people to see the light at the end of a seemingly infinite tunnel. One of the most drastic changes has been the shift from in-person to remote work. But it isn’t all as bad as it seems. Remote work can be beneficial for several reasons.

The grind of American capitalism forces people to work late into the night and wake at the crack of dawn. The CDC reported that more than a third of Americans aren’t getting enough sleep, meaning one in three Americans are increasing their risk of developing chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and frequent mental distress.

One reason for this is that the commute time for the average American is 26 minutes one way, 52 minutes total. Switching people to remote work eliminates commuting, giving people back almost an hour of their time. Getting into those extra minutes of sleep is essential for performing the workday tasks that lie ahead.

Commuting isn’t just physically and emotionally taxing, it’s also expensive. Commuting isn’t just physically and emotionally taxing, it’s also expensive. Commuting isn’t just physically and emotionally taxing, it’s also expensive.

The attitude toward teachers needs to change as well. They are just people, and they get stressed, tired and burnt out, yet our education system acts as though they are robots, saddling them with seemingly endless responsibilities.

The Crisis Facing American Education

The Montclarion opinion section, titled “Smartening Up on the Teacher Shortage,” sounded the alarm bells on the crisis facing our education system. It highlighted its impact on New Jersey and what Montclair State University can do to help.

This issue has only gotten worse in the time since. A survey from the National Education Association (NEA) in January stated that 74% of members have had to take on extra duties due to shortages, and 90% of members say feeling burnt out is a serious problem.

A problem of this magnitude prompts two important questions: firstly, what are the causes of the shortages in our education system, and, identifying these, what can we do to resolve them?

Along with burnout, the NEA poll has teachers identifying general coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic stress (91%), student absences (85%), increased workloads (80%), low pay (78%), student behavior (76%) and a lack of respect from parents and the general public (76%) as the most serious issues facing teachers.

It is important to note that the two most important issues are rooted in the COVID-19 pandemic. If we are to finally round the corner, student absences due to COVID-19 would be nonexistent, and teacher stress from exposure to the disease would be relieved as well.

Other problems are more nuanced, though most people have roots in the aforementioned lack of respect educators receive. After all, local citizens elect the members of local government that determine pay and funding, and often, little care is given to these elections.

What care is given can often do more harm to teachers than good, as seen with recent proposals to put cameras in classrooms, as well as bans on novels such as “Maus” in Mcminn County, Tennessee, or any number of LGBTQ or African American works in conservative areas.

These moves to monitor content harm both teachers and students, adding stress to an already stressful job. Educators are forced to self-censor themselves to fit these flawed notions of what should be taught in school, and students are stripped of any and all privacy.

Related to these same woes from locally-elected offices are issues of funding. Many schools can hardly afford to feed their students or obtain basic supplies, let alone things such as a dedicated mental health counselor. When a school fails to provide these things, it falls upon the shoulders of a teacher. Educators are forced to provide supplies for students to help them through tough times in their life, burdening them even further.

Despite all this, teachers do not receive the time they desperately need for themselves. Alone time during a school day is essentially non-existent, as is paid maternity leaves.

Anger towards our school system should be funnelled into the election of those that determine the officials who have the power to change this flawed system.

School board elections, especially in New Jersey, face little to no competition, given how every board represents one municipality. This means the officials in small towns such as my own can be elected for years and years, facing no opposition to their lack of accomplishment.

Some states, such as Maryland, give students a voice in their education by allowing them to elect an official to serve on the board, providing a platform desperately needed for those of some of those most impacted by the decisions of the board.

The attitude toward teachers needs to change as well. They are just people, and they get stressed, tired and burnt out, yet our education system acts as though they are robots, saddling them with seemingly endless responsibilities.

As President Lyndon Johnson, himself a former teacher, stated, “We believe, that is, you and I, that education is not an expense. We believe it is an investment.”

Chloe Lawrence, a junior English major, is in her first year as a staff writer for The Montclarion.

Stephanie Cadet | The Montclarion

Ian Horn, a freshman journalism and digital media major, is in his first year as a staff writer for The Montclarion.

Stephanie Cadet | The Montclarion

Chloe Lawrence, a junior English major, is in her first year as a staff writer for The Montclarion.
“Wheel of Fortune” — Luke Cadman

In the year 2701, all elements of chance and decision were legally illegal by the Bureau of a Brighter Tomorrow under the assumption that the seemingly random and irregular flow of fortune, misfortune, and anything in between were unhealthy and unnecessarily stressful to citizens. Henceforth all elements of chance would be determined through an unbiased, infallible system, assumed to be infallible because of its incredibly complex structure. The layman would be entirely unable to understand. If the average Joe could understand their decisions then they therefore would be able to make their own with 100% accuracy, and this simply wasn’t the case. And so, with some reluctance at what was obviously for their own good, the populace accepted the system, officially named “PathFinder,” into their lives.

The first immediate issue was the egregious habit of the weathermen to announce their calculations of an unimaginable magnitude. Now doctors simply read from a monitor and told patients what treatment had been decided for them. If an individual had cancer but was decided to be healthy then the illness would be treated swiftly and efficiently, as cure-alls had been discovered decades prior. If a healthy individual was decided to have an illness then it would be implanted into their body artificially, regardless of circumstance. A rather famous example was of a boy by the name of Adam Aguanno, who at the age of 4 was decided to have a degenerative muscular disease. This was achieved through the use of groundbreaking genetic manipulation, and while no one was particularly happy about it the individuals involved were spared the turmoil of being unable to decide why their son had been cursed as such, whether it be God, fate or anything in between. Instead they could be reassured a third party had deemed it as the best possible decision, and could therefore relieve themselves of the burden of unfound and undirected anger.

There were, of course, dissenters who found issue in PathFinders decisions. One individual, by the name of Collin Aggar, had a habit of having bacon and eggs for breakfast. Before PathFinder’s arrival, he woke to discover that the decision had been made for him to enjoy a nice bowl of cereal for breakfast. He, for reasons unknown to any sane and logical system, ignored this directive and instead made his signature bacon and eggs. Elsewhere a world famous painter, Piero Lopez Rodriguez Gaona, was told that it had been decided that he would quit all artistic endeavors and henceforth would be working as a sanitations expert in a nearby high school. This decision was, for unknowable reasons, disregarded without so much as a second thought. These individuals, and innumerable others, who chose to ignore what was for their own good, were promptly taken out and shot for the public wellbeing, and the world continued to turn on its predetermined course.

"The Bathroom Backtrack" — Alex Pavljuk

I didn’t realize how drunk I was until I was looking in the bathroom mirror at Cicciotello Ristorante in Little Italy, New York. The room was spinning profusely. Those five glasses of expensive red really snuck up on me. My hands were firmly grasping the edge of the ceramic sink and my hair was dancing with the reflection in front of me. Despite the scratches and graffitied ink on the glass, in this rather illusive state, I thought I was keeping myself together quite well.

Then, of course, there was a knock at the door. I looked over and sighed sharply.

"Give me a minute!" I called out. The hum of the ventilation unit filled the static air which was only being cut by the drone of fluorescent light.

"Vinny, come on! We're backed up here, we've got 15 courses left to make and the antipasto going out between tables six, eight, and twelve. Not to mention the antipasto going out to table seventeen outside. Zip up your pants and move it!" I stared at the closed door and shouted in my direction, even going as far as tossing unbrewed calamari at me.

Unsure of what to do and how to proceed I just followed orders and cut the onions. I had worked in kitchens before so it wasn’t like I didn’t know what to do, in fact, for the moments that I chopped away I rather enjoyed myself. Maybe I was Vinny?

Yet to avail, my time was cut short, as from around the corner near the walk-in freezer a voice radiated.

"Oh! What is this down holding my knife, huh?" Only the bubbling of overly salted pasta water and the shallow frying of veal francesca filled the room.

The man who dragged me in here looked at us in confusion. His head shooting back and forth between him and I. Our faces? Nearly identical, the only difference was that his hair was held back in a net and mine was not.

"Is this some kinda practical joke? Who is this guy?" He then asked again. The room was still stunned and although I knew there was only one of him, my warping vision showed me two, "I go to the bathroom for five minutes and you already replaced me? Is that right?" The man who pulled me in here stuttered in disbelief at his mistake.

Before I knew it Vinny was hugging me. His fist, identical to mine, connected down and calmly explained that it was decided to have an illness then the world rejoiced.

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directed by theatre and dance professor Susan Kerner in her final production at Montclair State. Kerner is particularly attracted to stories regarding family and human connection. Being that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic hindered everyone’s ability to physically connect with one another, ending the 2022 spring semester and her time at Montclair State with “The Big Meal” holds more emotional weight than ever before.

“I directed this play for Montclair [State] in 2014 and decided to do it again because it is one of my favorite plays,” Kerner said. “I felt like we all needed a joyful, healing play this year.”

Kerner also took this show as an opportunity to highlight diversity among families, especially after the rise of the Black Lives Matter protests during the pandemic that sparked conversations about representation within all art forms.

“I cast [‘The Big Meal’] in a way that is very diverse,” Kerner said. “Family members are very mixed, ethnically and racially. I can’t imagine now doing it another way. This has been a year with a lot of trauma and a lot of anxiety about issues of race for the department and as well for everywhere. I think having this inclusive casting where you just didn’t even talk about that, they are just family. The audience totally accepts that.”

Almost two years of isolation brought upon by the pandemic changed not only how creatives think about their work, but how they practice it as well.

Sophomore Isaiah Robinson, who plays Man 3, was a freshman in the acting program during the 2020-2021 academic year when online instruction was implemented into the lives of students. With the difficulties that came with performing scenes through a computer screen and being unable to interact with classmates in person, he reflected on the complications distance and virtual learning had on the academic experience.

“We couldn’t intermingle with each other; we really couldn’t. We didn’t really have shared experiences because [one cohort] would have experiences this week, and I’d have a different experience the next week. It was really difficult to operate in that way.”

Now that the Department of Theatre and Dance has done away with cohorts for the 2021-2022 school year, Robinson is glad to take on his sophomore year in the acting program through live performances.

“It’s been so much better having the opportunity to see so much of our classmates’ work,” Robinson said. “This semester, we really got to dive deep into who we are as creators, what we can do and what we can bring.”

Joe Baez, who plays Man 2, is finishing his senior year in the acting program with “The Big Meal.” As he and many juniors during the 2020-2021 academic year approached their senior year, the pandemic brought anxieties about the future and what steps should be taken next in the new normal.

“I had considered taking a gap year during the time of the pandemic,” Baez said. “I just kept pushing through and putting in the work. I wanted to come back knowing that I feel like my best self. I wanted to see what I wanted to start creating now and not feel like I had to keep delaying things until tomorrow.”

Now that Baez is ending his senior acting career with a play centered deeply around connection, he is ecstatic to know he can end his time at Montclair State by returning to doing acting again in person, it just provides a great outlook. It makes me want to get into the space more. I’m excited to work on my next project. I’m excited to see where my friends here go because they’re all spectacular actors.”

“The Big Meal” is a reminder of how interconnected people once were and that it is possible to breathe life into it once more. The cast and crew behind the show, though experiencing numerous roadblocks throughout the pandemic, use those experiences to allow audiences to feel close to one another again.

As theater returns to live performances, reminders of what once was soon will become reality, closing the distance between one another and leaving society with the lesson of not taking things for granted.
Professor Anthony Pemberton is the director of Montclair State’s filmmaking program.

COVID-19 Alters the Way We Consume Entertainment

Aidan Ivers
Staff Writer

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had lasting impacts on the functionalities of the world’s business, especially in the film and entertainment industry. With the vanishment of daily commerce toward in-person theaters, the trend of releasing brand new movies on paid streaming services has gained traction over the past two years. Some people believe in-person theaters are an activity unlike any other, and movies should remain on the functional path that it has been for the past century. However, some prefer to watch grand-scale movies from the comfort of their own homes. According to an October 2021 poll conducted by CivicScience, 71% of American adults would rather watch a movie at home rather than going out to a theater.

Yak Ferstenberg, a freshman filmmaking major, spoke about the change in the streaming trend over the past two years. "I think they are going to be even more streaming services differ widely from what people are used to seeing in theaters. On streaming services, you could watch a series like ‘Squid Game,’ which is very graphic and violent, and people watch that," Ferstenberg said. "You wouldn’t see something like ‘Squid Game’ in the theater; you’re most likely watching by yourself, and you’re not going to see anything like that: today, these Marvel movies are蓬勃发展, DVDs and ‘Dune’ and ‘Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings.’"

Ferstenberg shared how series on streaming services differ widely from what people are used to seeing in theaters. “On streaming services, you could watch a series like ‘Squid Game,’ which is very graphic and violent, and people watch that,” Ferstenberg said. “You wouldn’t see something like ‘Squid Game’ in the theater; you would want to be comfortable.”

Some say the current state of how movie theaters are functioning due to the pandemic is unfortunate for the industry. Drew Raskin, a freshman film and television major, shared his experience with movie theaters over the past two years. “Definitely ever since [COVID-19] hit, the movie industry has suffered,” Raskin said. “The first couple of movies I saw since the start of the pandemic were [‘Space Jam: A New Legacy’] and [‘Spider-Man: No Way Home’]. Only the big ones. Other than those, I wouldn’t really see any.”

Raskin also shared what he felt he would have experienced watching movies in the theater. “Being in the theater, especially watching a movie like [‘Spider-Man: No Way Home’], you have the audience reacting on opening day,” Raskin said. “The cheers and laughs are things you can’t get on streaming services when you’re most likely watching by yourself, so there’s something special about that. I think the streaming services are still good, but hopefully, the movie industry doesn’t end as we know it.”

Professor Anthony Pemberton, director of the filmmaking program at Montclair State University, also gave his input on the current state of the film and entertainment industry and how it is affecting his students. “We try to have our ear to the industry in what is happening and the changes that occur all the time,” Pemberton said. “Some of these are changing the focus from movie theaters to streaming, but often it’s a lot of the same kind of skills our students have always been learning.”

Pemberton highlighted how the filmmaking program has adapted to this ongoing change dating back to more than a decade prior. “Whether they get a streaming service or go to a theater, the goals of the film directors, the producers and the people making the project are often similar to long-form feature filmmakers as well,” Pemberton said. Professor Roberta Friedman, the co-coordinator of the filmmaking program, pointed out the streaming trend in the industry. “It has definitely increased the work that gets presented in a streaming format,” Friedman said, “and that, I think, has superseded theater going, DVDs and all other forms of distribution over the last two years.”

Friedman also provided what she felt the future would entail for the movie theater and television industries. “I think they are going to be everything,” Friedman said. “Theater, because there is nothing like going to one, especially seeing a large-format or 3D film — it’s got to be in a theater. I also think there will be more streaming services, more cable ... there will be tremendous competition between both, hopefully to improve the quality of the work that is made because they are so hungry for new material.”
Margin Alexander's musical talent brought him to places in the United States and Europe. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic brought him to people's screens. And the present brings him a mix of both.

A New York City-based composer and pianist, Alexander began studying music in Europe at the age of 14. Pursuing higher education, he graduated from Montclair State University in 2011 with a bachelor's in music theory and composition before receiving a master's in arts and teaching in 2015.

Throughout his college career, he participated in collaboration opportunities under the guidance of Grammy award-winning composer Robert Aldridge. This included working with the dance department, orchestra reading, Harry Partch Ensemble and concert choir. Alexander refers to this as a turning point in his life, building passion within him to reach where he is now in his musical journey.

"[Montclair State] offered an array of ensembles and various performance opportunities for composers and performers," Alexander said. "Throughout each semester and year, I had the opportunity to perform multiple times on stage and in various settings. This was a golden ticket toward gaining experience as a composer and performer."

The time that followed is filled with steady performances of original neo-classical/neo-romantic compositions in locations like New Jersey, New York, Illinois and California. That is, up until the first wave of COVID-19 brought about a slew of canceled and postponed events, an obstacle to all arts, according to Alexander.

"Without an audience, a performance is not the same at all," Alexander said. "Therefore, there was a great amount of discouragement, suffering, disappointment, etc. I had many concerts scheduled and was at the peak of my emerging career. Then, [COVID-19] happened. My tours in Indonesia and Russia were canceled. A concert tour in the United States was also canceled. I had to reconfigure myself."

Alexander did just that and created a new strategy for himself. He acquired a movable digital baby grand piano to use on the go and ran many of his concerts virtually. The musician also continued to connect with other artists, leading to new collaborations and pieces as a result.

One of these collaborators includes Celeste Chau, who knows Alexander through the Association of Classical Musicians and Artists, of which both are members. While Chau and the organizations she is part of went through a difficult time brought about by COVID-19, she featured his music in a Play-In for the Association of Chamber Music Players in 2018, confirming her prior discovery of his "melodic cinematic style" as a composer and a musician that is "professional, without ego and extremely personable."

"[Alexander] really came through for us," Chau said. "He recorded a beautiful concert with short talks about his inspirations, and he recorded and edited it himself. All we had to do was to broadcast it. This was a huge relief for us as [we] were still struggling and figuring out what to do. We were still all on lockdown, so he really helped save our concert series to keep our community entertained and inspired by his music from the safety of their homes."

Another artist inspired by Alexander is film director Nikolas Grasso. Since meeting one another, Grasso has asked Alexander to act as an Italian American main character in his short film "Tavola" — a fitting role considering the musician's ability to fluently speak five languages, one of which is Italian.

Grasso met Alexander in 2018 at the IBLA Grand Prize in Sicily, a music competition where Grasso's wife was also participating. Feeling an instant connection, Grasso visited him several times in the United States and met with him on international tours in Europe where his wife performed alongside Alexander.

Grasso noted Alexander's commitment to art and strong work ethic.

"He was very perseverant during [COVID-19] and didn't have second thoughts about traveling all over Europe to keep giving concerts to his public," Grasso said. "I met many people who are inspired by his music, and I can say he inspires me as well."

Moving forward from the pandemic at its worst wave, Alexander's first in-person performance was in Switzerland. He went on to perform concerts in the Netherlands, Germany, North Macedonia to name a few. In October 2021, he performed for the second time at Carnegie Hall for the debut of his "Blue Nocturne."

"Overall, music is power," Alexander said. "Many people find comfort and consolation in music no matter where, no matter what. There are times when we feel so moved by a piece of music that no amount of traveling, financial wealth or any other form of happiness can compete with it. I strongly believe that music has been a lifesaver and will continue to be such in hard times like [COVID-19]."
All Montclair State University undergraduate students get (1) one prepaid ticket per production for PEAK Performances, MSU Theatre & Dance, and John J. Cali School of Music. Students need to arrange for their ticket in-person at the Alexander Kasser Theater Box Office window (Tuesday through Friday, 12 noon to 6pm) by showing their MSU Student ID, providing an MSU email address, and phone number. MSU prepaid student tickets cannot be secured over the phone or online currently.

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A Pandemic With (And Without) Sports: The NJAC Prevails

Matt Orth
Assistant Sports Editor

Today, as the United States has reached its 27th month since the first coronavirus (COVID-19) case was found in the country, not all normal activities before the pandemic are returning to their former glory.

But sports have, for the most part, turned back to their normal time slots, their normal amount of games and fans can cheer on their teams with much less worry about the virus.

This is especially true within the New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC) and Montclair State University. The basketball team is surely on pace for a conference championship, and the lacrosse teams are picking up steam when it matters most heading into the playoffs. But back in early 2020, sports moved to the back of everyone’s mind, even for the players, coaches and staff.

Terry Small, the commissioner of the NJAC, remembers leaving an NCAA convention and receiving word as the plane landed that star Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert contracted the virus. The NCAA immediately suspended its season. Small and the conference had different ideas compared to NBA commissioner Adam Silver at first. “We had hopes at the time that we would come back and finish our spring seasons,” Small said. “That obviously didn’t happen but there was so much we didn’t know about the virus, we didn’t know if we were on a two-week pause or a semester-long pause.”

March 18, 2020 was the day that would change collegiate sports in New Jersey forever. The NJAC decided to cancel all sports and championships for the 2019-2020 academic year. Even with such a monumental decision, Small said the choice wasn’t too difficult as no students were returning to campus for the rest of the semester.

After the decision was made, Small said all of the energy was then put toward preparing for the next academic year. With the conference consisting of schools like Rowan University, The College of New Jersey and Kean University, the conference commissioner said Montclair State played a big role in getting student-athletes back to playing. “[Former] president Susan Cole was a chair in our presidents’ council, and Rob Chesney, the intercollegiate athletic director, was the president of the conference,” Small said. “Working with [Chesney] and [Cole], we put our heads together and tried to come up with a way to return to play in a safe and consistent manner.”

From that March up until July, when the decision was inevitably made to suspend all sports and competition for the fall 2020 semester, and in a time when no sports were going on, the NJAC was as busy as ever.

Members were having meetings weekly and sometimes even multiple times a week, figuring out potential next steps and what other schools were doing at the time. To add even more difficulty to bringing sports back for NJAC schools, some schools in Division III individually already chose to hold out of the fall 2020 semester—including one close to home.

“We actually had competition planned that fall but the dominance started to fall,” Small said. “We found out The College of New Jersey was the third institution in Division III to make the announcement, I believe as early as late June, that they were not going to have competition in the fall semester.”

With the odds stacked against them once again, July 28, 2020 was the day that sports were suspended once again within the NJAC. The football fields were empty. The basketball courts were silent without the squeak of sneakers. For the second time for Small and the conference, it was back to the drawing board as to how to officially bring sports back.

The focus within Division III sports has always been higher education so the conference did not want to take the student out of the student-athlete. But ideas were floated around such as a one-week tournament for soccer, which would constitute a similar environment, but it never came to fruition.

Towards the end of 2020, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy made a major decision to bring back indoor sports with strict restrictions.

Once that choice was made, the NJAC slowly rolled out plans for basketball, football, soccer, volleyball and field hockey to return for a shortened season. Small could not have done something so spectacular without a lot of outside help.

“This is one area that I give a lot of credit to our athletic trainers, our presidents and our administrators,” Small said. “It was not easy. Take football for example from an athletic training standpoint, you have a finite number of resources. So in a lot of ways, you are trying to figure out how to cover football and baseball and basketball and soccer and tennis at one time.”

There were successes with this in conference model for all sports when it came specifically to Montclair State, like when the football team secured the NJAC North title against William Paterson University. But there was also the negative side, with the men’s basketball team having their season cut short with the NJAC semifinals right in front of them due to a positive COVID-19 case.
Christine Griffith stands on the podium with her first place award in the javelin at the 2021 NJAC Outdoor Championships. Photo courtesy of Montclair State Athletics

Overall, a crazy idea worked out for the conference. During 2021, the virus spiked up and down like a rollercoaster but luckily spectators were slowly being allowed to watch games. It started with friends and family of the athletes, and eventually, outside fans thanks to the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“It was awesome [to see fans back in the stands],” Small said. “You take our parents; they have a limited amount of time to see their son or daughter play and you have to treasure those opportunities. It was a way to get those people back at the field compared to watching on a computer screen.”

One student-athlete parent is Montclair State’s athletic director Rob Chesney. With no sports going on for the Red Hawks back in 2020, Chesney and his staff had to work hard to give the student-athletes a worthwhile experience.

“That was really important for us,” Chesney said. “We worked closely with the [NJAC] and [Small], our staff here, and our upper administration here at the university did a great job. We put our minds together and came up with the best we could and we allowed the student-athletes to participate.”

Just like every semester, even with an unusual pause from the norm, the message was always clear to the student-athletes: keep on top of your education. This held true at Montclair State, with plenty of athletes receiving high academic marks.

“I think that [having no] sports was a great break for them because all they were doing was staying at home and doing Zoom classes,” Chesney said. “So I would like to think this really helped them and that we had great success academically during that period.”

From the time with no sports, then to the craziness of all Red Hawk athletics going on at once in spring 2021 and now to the present day, Chesney has learned a lot about his staff, the athletes and his mission as athletic director.

“Our student-athletes are a pretty hardy group, so there are times where things are not going to go as they’re planned,” Chesney said. “But people can manage and deal with it, and the most important thing is we did the best we could to provide a quality student-athlete experience.”

The question remains; will sports ever return to a pre-coronavirus normal? Chesney believes we are already heading in that direction. Small is not as sure but is confident people will remain cognizant of issues raised during the pandemic.

Regardless, sports within the NJAC are trending in the right direction when it comes to dealing with the pandemic, and while nothing can be set in stone, the conference along with Montclair State athletics has a bright future ahead.

Student-athletes kept themselves busy, with teams like softball donating to a toy drive. Photo courtesy of Montclair State Athletics

Montclair State women’s volleyball players had to wear masks during games at one point. Photo courtesy of Montclair State Athletics
Senior defender Kaitlin Zazzaro was disappointed to see the game she loved get shut down so quickly.

New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC) and NCAA announced the cancellation of all collegiate competitions just days after returning from Florida.

“It was more frustrating for me because you go through a whole month of preseason [just to only] play four games,” Zazzaro said. “You come off a one-point loss to RIT, your wheels are turning and you’re ready to go [for the next game] and then for that to happen, it’s frustrating.”

However, little did the team know that it would be one of the few moments they would share with Zazzaro in a long time — nearly two years, to be exact.

In one of the hardest decisions of her lacrosse career, Zazzaro decided to walk away from the game in September 2020, just days before fall practices started in preparation for the 2021 season.

She was struggling to cope with the fact that her life had drastically changed so quickly. No lacrosse. Virtual classes. Little to no interaction with her teammates in person. Even worse, her uncle passed away from COVID-19 in April, someone who had been in and out of the hospital for several years.

The pandemic had taken away so much for her that mental health had to become a priority.

“I was stressed about situations I really had no control over,” Zazzaro said. “And when you compare that to mental health, in order for my situation to get better, I had to take a step away from lacrosse. If I go into [next season] not [feeling] 100%, it’s not going to benefit anyone. Not myself or my teammates.”

Before her decision, Zazzaro’s game had evolved throughout the 2019 offseason and early part of the 2020 season. In a year, her confidence was at an all-time high, transforming from a timid and hesitant player as a freshman to an aggressive playmaker for the Red Hawks who disrupted opposing offenses with her gritty play.

Her improvement during fall ball and the preseason earned her a spot on the starting lineup as a defender.

“It’s almost like having more confidence in myself from freshman to sophomore year made me more secure in making big plays,” Zazzaro said. “When you play defense, you can’t just be scared because someone is going to walk all over you. You have to make sure you’re making the move before the [opposing player] is.”

In regard to last season, on paper, it doesn’t appear that Zazzaro’s departure greatly impacted the Red Hawks. The Red Hawks were the No. 1 defense in the NJAC by most metrics, from goals allowed per game (7.96) to save percentage (.604%).

Overall, the Red Hawks had one of the greatest seasons in program history as they had an undefeated regular season with their only setback being a blowout loss against The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) in the NJAC Championship game.

However, senior midfielder Amber Gonzalez, a longtime teammate of Zazzaro since their days at Mount Olive High School (NJ), believes she is crucial to the team both on and off the field.

“Last season, we didn’t have [Zazzaro] and a few others, but her presence was a very big loss for us since she not only was a great defender but also was there to pick you up when you were feeling down. The defense helps to build the team up, and [Zazzaro] was one of those players.”

Missing out on a historic season is something Zazzaro wishes she could’ve experienced with her teammates.

“I had gone to a couple of games last season, and it was major FOMO [fear of missing out] for me,” Zazzaro said. “Their successful season wasn’t what killed me, but it was more like I couldn’t be there with them. Not even on the sidelines. You miss out on the small moments — the bus rides, locker room talks [and] just being around your teammates every day.”

However, the year-long hiatus gave Zazzaro time to improve her mental health and other personal challenges she experienced that season. During her time off, Zazzaro took on a full-time job at Walgreens, where she worked on the front lines of the pandemic administering COVID-19 tests and vaccines.

While the job came with an enormous amount of stress and responsibility, it actually helped her cope with everything that was going on in her life.
“Taking on a leadership position and gaining responsibilities helped me better myself and balance everything out in my life,” Zazzaro said. “Instead of being stuck in my own [thoughts] all the time, I put that focus on helping others who needed it the most.”

While she missed her teammates and playing the sport she loved for 13 years, coming back wasn’t always in the cards. She was conflicted — focus on her personal struggles for another year, officially close the door on lacrosse, or return for one last “dance”?

While she didn’t fully regret taking the year off, she knew lacrosse was something she wasn’t quite ready to let go of yet.

Shortly after the conclusion of the 2021 season, Zazzaro was back on the team.

Since then, Zazzaro has become a valuable piece for the Red Hawks. In 13 games this season, she’s collected 25 ground balls and caused 24 turnovers, which are all career-highs. With those stats, you’d think the transition back for Zazzaro was fairly smooth, but she will be the first person to tell you how challenging it’s been to return to playing at the level she’s accustomed to.

During the fall, Zazzaro described her first practice back in two years as a “slap in the face,” particularly when it came to regaining her endurance. On top of that, she contracted COVID-19 just weeks before their season opener, causing her to miss crucial practice time.

In the Red Hawks’ 2022 season-opener against Haverford College, Zazzaro’s first game back in nearly two years, it felt like an uphill battle from the opening whistle.

“There were definitely some nerves in that first game considering I didn’t play for [nearly two years],” Zazzaro said. “I think because I was so worried about making a mistake, I wasn’t playing to my full potential. I was [thinking] to myself, ‘When are you going to snap out of it or you’re going to let this happen the whole game?’ And then in the middle of the game, I was getting my nerves out. I felt less out of place.”

Since then, Zazzaro has been anything but out of place. She had one of the best games of her career against Moravian College on March 18, collecting seven ground balls and causing five turnovers.

“My mindset going into a game is so much different than before,” Zazzaro said. “Instead of focusing on the [big picture], I’m taking a step back and thinking about completing the small things in order to achieve the bigger goals.”

While her success on the field is crucial to her, Zazzaro has ensured her mental health remains her top priority. Thankfully, her relationships with her current and former teammates have allowed her to stay on track.

“I was having a rough day at practice one day and [senior attacker] Kaitlyn Arcede pulled me aside and checked up on me,” Zazzaro said. “To have someone be like, ‘Hey come talk about it,’ really helps. I realized something I struggle with is talking about my personal issues, and I’m very lucky and thankful to have a team that is able to take me aside and check up on me.”
For over a year, Kylinn Kraemer has been recovering from ACL tear and has battled mental health struggles due to the pandemic.

Kylinn Kraemer's Mental Health Journey In The Midst of An Injury

Matthew Gomez
Staff Writer

The Montclair State University women's soccer team had its stellar season cut short in 2020 due to the coronavirus [COVID-19] pandemic. Hope was lost and a sense of confusion overcame senior defender Kylinn Kraemer who went through unimaginable troubles.

Before the pandemic, Kraemer was an important asset to the team. She played extensive minutes for the Red Hawks in her first two seasons, starting in a career-high 16 games in 2019. Unfortunately, she suffered an ACL tear in her right knee in January 2021 during a pickup soccer game.

The injury would cause her to miss two seasons of soccer -- the COVID-19 shortened spring 2021 season and because it was only seven months after her surgery, a "normal" fall 2021 season. For Kraemer, there was a feeling of despair of not being able to play the sport she loved along with being isolated from her friends and family due to the restrictions.

Despite both the injury and the pandemic weighing her down, Kraemer believes there were some upsides.

"Most importantly, we were forced to actually consider our own health," Kraemer said. "I personally went through all of the normal challenges that the pandemic brought, but also tore my ACL during this time. I think the pandemic prepared me to better handle this injury." However, it was not an easy journey to reach that mindset. Being isolated from her teammates and having to be self-sufficient physically also comes with a mental toll.

Kraemer's time recuperating did not go unnoticed by her teammates. Freshman defender Emi Denovellis was one of those teammates who was inspired by Kraemer's mental fortitude during her time away from the field.

"She's a tough kid," she said. "She went through her ACL injury her junior year during senior year," Denovellis said. "She's very helpful in the way she guides all of us on the field and motivates us to keep going and not give up."

"Going through an injury can be hard for an athlete in normal circumstances but going through it when the world seems to be broken too, makes the process even more difficult."

"It was hard with [COVID-19] not being in control with what was going on, and when you're not able to control what's in the world around you, all you can control is yourself," Kraemer said. "And when I got hurt, that took that other part of control away as well. Now with my injury, I wasn't in control of myself either."

During physical therapy, she confided heavily in her therapist to guide her through the mental blockages as well.

The sense of being alone during the injury and being stuck in lockdown was finally disappearing.

"I started to talk to my therapist to get me through the mental challenges of not being in control of the situation," Kraemer said. "It was great to have someone to talk about all of the obstacles that COVID-19 and my injury brought me."

On campus, numerous resources help students manage their mental health. Kraemer shared that the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), a service provided to students at Montclair State, was one of the biggest supports to her through this time.

"In the past couple of months, we have had some amazing speakers come to talk to us about different mental health challenges we face especially as athletes," Kraemer said. "I personally have been extremely grateful to CAPS for helping me through tough times and I highly recommend seeking their assistance if you are a student at Montclair State.

Seeking out assistance from CAPS resulted in a new mindset for Kraemer. With the injury, there was a sense of hopelessness, but guidance through the department resulted in her finding a new role for her team while still being injured.

"[My therapist] helped me accept my new role on the team ... by supporting them on the sideline and [making sure] not to rush myself with my injury, and also realize I was struggling with my injury a lot because of the aspect of control because I always want to be in control," Kraemer said. "And my mental health, in general, being able to talk to someone and them giving feedback was super helpful."

Kraemer also acknowledged that women's soccer head coach Patrick Naught is a big advocate for mental health and has created an environment in which discussing the topic is normal.

"Our head coach has always been supportive in regards to mental health, even prior to the pandemic. But, I think COVID-19 brought obstacles concerning mental health to us all, rather than just a few," Kraemer said. "As these obstacles still continue to affect us, mental health is something that is normalized within our team for sure."

Kraemer was able to grow a sense of self-awareness throughout her time off from the field and seeking out help. She began to understand that the only reason she would come back to play was if she was fully comfortable with herself.

"It hasn't been hard coming back just because I feel confident after all the rehab I've done in the past years," Kraemer said. "I just have to do it. If you put in half effort or play scared, that's how you get hurt."

With Kraemer concluding her senior year here at Montclair State, there's the question of whether she will come back for her fifth year and continue to hold the defensive line for the women's soccer team.

The answer is yes. "I felt that my last two years were stripped from me," Kraemer said. "I want to end my time here as an athlete on my terms and prove to myself that I could be resilient and come back from it all. And to have fun. So far it has all been completely worth it."