

GRADUATING IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

By Brahmjot Kaur

Congratulations to City College's graduating class of 2020! You have persevered and completed your final year at CCNY! For that, you should all be proud. There is no doubt that we are living in an unprecedented time. The coronavirus pandemic has created unimaginable stress for people around the world. CUNY students were required to transition to online learning and complete their courses from home, with many expressing difficulty focusing and increased stress during finals. As news outlets headline articles about economic concerns, the "real world" is starting to look a lot scarier. Post-graduation plans are now accompanied by apprehension for many students and some plans have been canceled or postponed.

Susan Aracena, a political science student who graduated this past fall, said her LSAT test date was postponed due to the pandemic. The Law School Admission Council canceled the LSAT testing for this March and introduced the LSAT FLEX, a shorter version of the LSAT. "My test was horrible!" she stated. Technical issues resulted in her losing 20 minutes of her overall test. "I was already delayed on my law school applications but now, I might have to wait a year" Aracena told The Campus. She also said, "I am worried about the job market. It was already a hard job market pre-COVID and now due to the pandemic, many recent grads like me are in a state of unknown".

Amna Zaheer, a biomedical engineering student who is graduating this semester, told The Campus she plans to "undergo a crazy amount of job searching". Zaheer also voiced concerns about the job market, saying, "The pandemic is affecting many companies and as a result affecting many of the graduates. My

friends and I have noticed that not as many companies are hiring, and even if we do get an interview it is still difficult since we missed out on work experience that could have benefitted us this semester". While a number of students are nervous about their post-graduation plans, some are not as concerned. Sadia Rahman, a biology student graduating this spring, said the pandemic hasn't affected her plans too much. "Currently I plan to continue my education with a master's degree also at City College". She will eventually pursue her Ph.D., but says, "[the pandemic] definitely set me back in terms of qualifications and experiences...that was a little disheartening" and voiced concerns about "being able to conduct research through my Masters. I want to be able to complete it fully, but it seems like with the pandemic it might be difficult to really do any thesis work".

Similar to the class of 2020, the graduating classes circa 2008 also faced great uncertainty after graduation. The 2008 Recession was extraordinarily concerning for the graduating classes due to the high unemployment rates and major layoffs in many professions. Many newly graduated students had taken out loans and needed to quickly adjust their financial plans or defer their loan payments to avoid interest. Ricky Da Costa, a graduate from SUNY Binghamton, completed his final semester in 2010. He also shared similar concerns about his post-graduation plans.

When asked about how the 2008 recession affected his job search, Da Costa said, "There were a lot of grads for a few years post-2008 that hit the job market in the aftermath of a major economic downturn that caused massive layoffs across industries. I was

competing for unpaid internships with mid-career professionals and people who looked a lot better on paper than I did, let alone paid jobs". Da Costa also noted that relationships were important while job searching. He explained, "I was raised by working-class folks with no meaningful connections in the white-collar world and I didn't know how important it was to have the right internships on your resume until my Junior year in undergrad, which put me at a little bit of a competitive disadvantage".

Da Costa was still able to continue in the career path he anticipated post-graduation, and he said, "I didn't really end up on the right track until about 2015... If you would have asked me in 2009, I would have expected that I'd have gotten a lot further down the path by now, but the journey has taught me a lot about myself that was worth learning".

Da Costa also had advice for the class of 2020:

"Life is not the linear path you are taught to expect, but I think that ends up being a good thing. I am, in many ways, more grateful for my failures than my successes throughout the years and honestly don't think I would do a lot different if I could turn back the clock. I would also return to something I hinted at earlier and stress the importance of relationships. I say relationships rather than networking because the superficial stuff doesn't amount to much, but genuine human connection based on trust and communication is extremely valuable and can end up being helpful at the most unexpected times. It's obviously a bit more challenging since nobody is going to be going to crowded job fairs or networking events for the foreseeable futures but get zoom coffee with your friends, professors you admire, mentors, etc... Having been on the other side

of the hiring equation myself, it can be hard for a resume to stand out among hundreds (or thousands), but a good word from a trusted mutual connection can get a hiring manager to spend 45 seconds on your resume instead of 15 which can be incredibly valuable in a tight job market". Da Costa ended with words of encouragement saying, "I would just end by saying don't be so hard on yourself. Unless you belong to the privileged elite of America, you're going to struggle to make sense of the world and that's okay... You have your whole life ahead of you and it's really never too late to pivot, so keep an open mind and learn to recognize an opportunity when it smacks you in the face!"

Even with the concerns graduates are currently feeling, many are wishing the best one another. Rahman wanted to emphasize, "There have been pandemics before, and great widespread economic turmoil before, and we will always manage to bounce back from it. We can manage to bounce back from this too". Aracena concluded with the final thoughts saying, "I find it unfortunate that the graduating class of 2020 had to graduate in a particularly auspicious time.

It remarkably altered our final moments as seniors. It has made us stronger as we had to be more competitive to find toilet paper and be more adaptive and flexible when it comes to planning our futures" and Zaheer's final words embodied what most graduates are feeling towards each other when she said, "I hope all of the graduates this year prosper and do well!"

**REMEMBER,
THIS TOO
SHALL PASS.
STAY SAFE AND
ONCE AGAIN,
CONGRATULATIONS
TO THE
CLASS OF 2020!**