

Taylor University's Isolation Experience: Life in the Dome

My name is Logan Lockhart, and I am a junior social studies education major at Taylor. I am from Colorado Springs, Colorado, and so, like many Taylor students, I was not able to go home to isolate. I was just recently released from my isolation period after testing positive, and I want to record my experiences and add to the voices that are documenting Taylor's response in processing the pandemic. However, I must first recognize my role as someone writing and recording this experience. My interest in history, achieves, and primary sources have led me to gain an interest in creating some first-hand accounts of the pandemic. Of course, I have a special interest in Taylor's storied history, and my experience in the dome during my isolation period seemed like something worth recording as a point of interest in this history. I will be attempting to recall my experience in the most objective way possible; granted, everything will be filtered through my own personal perspective. My experience and perspective lend themselves to displaying the culture and creation of the dome is a testament to Taylor's purpose, mission, and identity, and my experience evidence that, despite the challenging circumstances.

I first received my positive test on the evening of January 28th, 2021, and I was released from isolation on February 6th, 2021. Upon entering the dome, I was struck by the feeling of the impromptu nature of its creation. Many parts seemed to be under construction, and several walls erected to separate the men and women's bedrooms seemed to have been just recently made. My freshmen year the dome was an extension of the campus store, and I had never been inside. The entire building was foreign to me. As I entered into the apparent men's bedroom bewildered, I saw about 12 beds facing each other with a narrow aisle down the middle. Almost all of them were filled with other students on their phones or computers, and two men even brought their own TVs for playing games on their consoles. I was given a tour by the oldest resident of the dome, David, who was a Korean student staying for Taylor's J-term program. The layout of the dome was initially confusing and seemingly barren with a handful of motivational posters on the walls.

The "kitchen" was at the entrance of the building and had shelves full of food and two refrigerators. There were also small gifts from Taylor parents with snacks that were provided to new arrivals. Some microwaves were placed near working outlets across the dome and changed locations several times but were near the kitchen. I usually enjoyed meals with chips, sandwiches with cheese and lunch meat, and bottled water. Around the corner, the sleeping quarters for men and women were separated and there was a private room near the men's room. At the end of the row of beds were the double doors that led to the open expanse of the dome itself. When I first arrived, it was disheveled with chairs, mattresses, balls, and nerf darts and guns strewn about. On the other side of the men's room was an entrance to the showers that was accessible by walking through a corridor with exposed concrete, which was usually cold. The two showers were separated by a wall and each had two curtains that ensured privacy. These showers were next to a door that led across a hallway to the men's bathroom with a toilet, urinals, and a sink. Of course, I am not able to speak to the women's room or their bathroom.

It is important to note that I am not trying to criticize the amenities that Taylor provided. I was thankful to have a place to sleep, eat, and keep clean. However, this was an unavoidable criticism of the residents of the dome, but I want to address that when I speak more to the "culture" of the dome. This is also a prominent facet of the student body's perception of the dome.

Interestingly, I was in the dome for J-term, J-term break, and the beginning of the second semester. The feel of the dome changed according to the time period in the school year and with people coming and going nearly every day. People would usually stay for anywhere from three to ten days. Over J-term break, there seemed to be the least amount of attention given to the dome, but once the semester began, food was replenished more regularly. Additionally, the parents provided a welcoming gift bag with some food and snacks for every new resident of the dome, and they even paid for pizza from Greek's pizza to be delivered to the dome every Friday.

The dome itself was just about the most private space available to everyone staying there. Once classes started, everyone would spread out across the dome to separate areas that were usually towards the dome's edges near the windows and attend class virtually. Towards the end of my stay more tables and chairs were added, but at the beginning, there was only one desk, and one long table with a good number of chairs, booth style seating, and even a couch all spread across the dome. One of the most popular facets of the dome were the two provided games: foosball and a pop-a-shot style basketball game with miniature basketballs. Later on, more people were added to the dome with more ideas, and we eventually made a makeshift ping pong table with a wooden plank as a net on a table and used the provided balls and paddles. Also, as people left, they would add their handprints to a plywood wall with the handprints and initials of some of the previous residents of the dome. There was even a group of people that made a gaga ball pit by arranging the booth seating so that the backs of the booths all faced each other. There was an elliptical and an exercise bike that a few people used, including a track and field athlete, and there were two 35-pound weights that saw occasional use as well.

However, the physical space of the dome is much easier to describe than the "culture" or atmosphere of the dome. There were several comments where people repeatedly said it felt like a sort of reality TV show or a social experiment of some kind. The surrounding windows peering into the only sort of privacy or leisure space was strange phenomenon. When I first entered the dome, there was not much cohesion or sense of a group identity. Several people on both the men's and women's sides just kept to themselves and rarely left the sleeping quarters. People would also comment on how fast time seemed to pass in the dome. It was easy to sit around and talk or not do anything for an afternoon and lose track of time. There was also an uncanny feeling surrounding some of the activities that would simply not be possible with the COVID mask wearing and distancing precautions. Things like sitting and watching a movie, talking over lunch, and even seeing everyone's entire face were refreshing and odd moments. By the end of my time in the dome, I had made new friends and there were even some organized events that everyone took part in.

There were also some notable happenings in the dome during my time we began appointing a dome PA, personnel assistant, just like the residence halls, and Jordan Nichols even made a custom shirt for the dome. Once the appointed PA would leave, they would appoint another to take their place. This position was mostly just a sort of elaborate joke, but it gave the dome some character and occasionally, depending on the PA, they would organize evening events or virtual church services. At the time of writing this, there have been four informal dome PAs: Jordan Nichols, myself, Lisa Hochstetler, and Jorge Martinez.

On a more subjective and personal note, my experience in the dome allowed me to understand the Taylor community more completely. I was amazed that strangers could become friends so quickly in the dome. There were some difficult moments, and I am sure that many people may have felt lonely, especially being separated from their friends on their wings and floors. However, personally, I relished the opportunity to experience Taylor in a different way

and get to know more people that I would not have otherwise gotten the chance to know. It was also a great opportunity to be inclusive in loving one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and coming alongside people who may be struggling. The support from the administration, namely Jesse Brown, and the parents was overwhelmingly hospitable and kind as well. The kindness is and around the dome is a testament to the community of Taylor, as seen in its students and even those outside the immediate study body.

I also want to address the fact that I have not spoken on nearly anything to do with sickness to this point. Again, personally, I did not feel sick, but others may have been feeling awfully. The subjective nature makes it hard to speak to accurately. Many students said they lost their sense of taste and smell while in the dome, but others were completely fine. The virus affected everyone differently, but no one seemed to be too sick to go to class or interact with others. There were also some thermometers provided.

Looking back on my experience in the dome, I am thankful for it. The new perspective on Taylor and its community was refreshing, and I regularly still see and warmly greet the people I met in the dome. I know I could not capture every aspect of what life was really like in the dome, and the fact that now it is inhabited by people who are entirely different than anyone I was in the dome with does not make it easier to define. Hopefully, I captured a snapshot of what life was like in the dome at Taylor during my short time in isolation. Regardless, the community of Taylor has demonstrated Christlike love and kindness in real practical ways that should not be forgotten.