

Students in the dorms find community

Around 40 students left on campus

By MATTHEW PHILLIPS



From front, students Daniel Robb, Jason John and Autumn Thompson take a break from their studies for a socially distanced rest in the sun outside Gerig Hall.

While most of Taylor's student body left campus in the mass exodus around spring break, roughly 40 students remain in housing, according to Scott Barrett, director of residence life.

Scattered in residence halls across campus, these students — primarily international students and missionary kids — have continued with their classes online, while coming to terms with life on a campus mostly devoid of people.

For freshman Autumn Thompson, walking around a basically abandoned campus has been a surreal experience.

"The buildings all look the same but when you get closer and realize there is not a single person inside, it kind of hits hard," Thompson said. "You see more families walking around than students. If there's screaming, it's either the few of us left losing our minds, or it's the little kids who are thrilled about the warmer weather that spring has finally brought around."

Due to the reduced numbers of students, food service has been cut down as well, with the LaRita Boren Campus Center open only one hour each for lunch and dinner. These limited hours have served as yet another form of intentional community, Thompson said.

However, the most important part of life on campus is the changing forms of intentional community that have emerged. From late night walks around the loop in the rain, to pick up basketball games in the DC parking lot and long talks about life in the pillow fort that now occupies the Gerig lounge, the unique experiences have drawn people together.

"Community on campus — at least for me — has never been more intentional," said sophomore Jason John. "Those who have stayed back to hold down the fort in Gerig have become nothing short of siblings. We annoy yet support each other and are quite open about

everything. We have come to know each other well enough that we can communicate using grunts, sighs and screams.”

Despite the bonds that have formed on campus, students face the same challenges of online learning and separation from friends that the rest of the student body faces. Between struggles with technology and the continuing pressures of lockdown, students on campus are feeling stressed.

For some students, the stress has led to low energy and motivation, leading some to feel overwhelmed to the point of paralysis and unable to get any work done, Thompson said.

“I’m certain that every single person on campus is struggling in some way or form,” John said. “Some are fighting alone. Some have help from online friends and a few lucky ones have help from friends on campus. I am one of those lucky few and I thank God every day for that.”

As the semester draws to a close, students on campus are starting to make plans for the summer. Summer housing will be available for students who are unable to return home, Barrett said.

For students who wish to stay on campus into the summer, they will need to fill out a petition by 5 p.m. on May 8, according to a recent housing announcement. If students are not approved to stay, they will need to move out by 10 a.m. on May 22.

For students who are approved to stay, Taylor is working on opening one or two buildings as limited summer housing, Barrett said.

Despite the many changes in recent weeks and the uncertainty of the future, students on campus still have hope.

“If I could summarize this entire fiasco — people are broken and messy, but so beautiful,” John said.

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