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Finals Week



Graphic by Ben McClary

What are alternatives to finals?

By Julia Mertes
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

Chugging espressos and overly-cafeinated energy drinks in dorm rooms after pulling all-nighters filled with endless studying, most Penn State students are finishing the spring semester with a traditional stress-filled finals week.

While finals week has been a customary part of the college experience for decades, students have differing opinions on whether there should even be a finals week and what changes should be made to improve the stressful academic season.

Many students, including Alex Snyder, said they acknowledge why finals are necessary, but they said improvements could be made in how exams and projects are administered.

“I understand why finals week is needed to evaluate what students have learned throughout the semester,” Snyder (sophomore-biomedical engineering) said via email. “But this semester has been extremely taxing on students’ mental health — in light of the pandemic and in the absence of any real form of a break to recover from burnout.”

Snyder said a vacation period before finals week would have been beneficial this year. A break would have aided students’ mental health and improved their academic performance due to less “mental exhaustion,” she said.

“The pandemic has definitely added to my stress and caused severe burnout by limiting the activities I can participate in that I would normally use to cope with stress,” Snyder said. “Finding motivation [is challenging since] we’ve all been in remote settings for over a year, especially when we were denied a real break from studying this semester.”

Between balancing academic requirements and personal obligations, including those directly caused by the pandemic, Snyder said finding time and motivation to study has been “pretty difficult for this last half of the semester.”

In addition to break periods before finals week — beyond the wellness days added to the spring semester — Snyder said finals week could be improved by removing specific time requirements students need to take their exams within.

“Some of my professors are having their exams be open all day, and I really appreciate that because it allows me to have more time to study properly and take breaks to minimize stress,” Snyder said.

Snyder said she thinks an open exam period also benefits international students by preventing stress pertaining to taking exams



Lily LaRegina/Collegian

After a semester of virtual classes amid the pandemic, some students said they’d prefer a more nontraditional approach to finals week — some suggested the removal of timed exams and more open-ended questions.

in different time zones.

Other students, like Camila Pena, said there are benefits to open time frames for exams — especially during finals week.

“Having exams opened for an entire day — even if there’s a time limit of an hour once you start the exam — gives you more time to coordinate your schedule and feel more in control over the situation,” Pena (sophomore-geography) said.

Pena said “less restrictive deadlines” would help students, especially in alleviating apprehensions associated with final exams.

Additionally, Pena said opening final exams for longer periods of time would help students in case of unexpected family or personal emergencies.

Even for future semesters, she said students should have the opportunity to take their “hour-long final exam between 8 a.m. and 12 [a.m.] instead of a specific time given by university administration.”

Claire Lewis said she would prefer courses to not administer timed examinations, especially for challenging subjects that require a lot of thinking and consideration.

Lewis (freshman-photojournalism) said she’s taking an economics course heavily focused on mathematical equations and formulas. She said these exams are timed.

“I can be good at math, but I have to take my time through the problems,” Lewis said. “Mathematically-skilled people can just fly through an examination, but

for me, I worry if I’ll be able to finish the exam in two hours.”

Consequently, Lewis said she “thinks it would be ideal to stretch [exams] out — allowing no time restrictions, maybe a set date and nothing else.”

“I do think it’s important to accumulate the knowledge you’ve learned throughout the semester and put it down on a final exam so you know you learned that, which is kind of the whole point,” Lewis said.

However, Lewis said “the removal of timed examinations” and more class study groups prior to exams would better allow students to showcase the skills they learned over the course of the semester.

Besides administering new time requirements for exams, Pena said she’d prefer different testing formats as well.

Instead of having exams with “only multiple choice answer sections,” Pena said she thinks there should be a mixture of multiple choice questions and short essay sections for all final exams, depending on the subject.

She said well-rounded exams — with an assortment of question styles — would “help students with different learning styles” demonstrate their skills and academic progress.

Pena said multiple choice exams can be challenging for students because they’re forced to “select the best answer,” which she said only adds frustration and test anxiety for students.

Ethan McLaughlin said he’s “never been a fan” of high school or college finals due to the added

“unnecessary stress” after a semester filled with work.

“All the information from an entire semester is packed — more so [dumped] — all into one test, which is stressful on students, and I don’t think it’s a good way to assess accomplishments academically for students,” McLaughlin (freshman-mechanical engineering) said.

Based on personal experience, McLaughlin said two main changes need to be implemented into the traditional final exam formatting, both of which would improve students’ final exam experiences.

He said the exams administered during finals week should be non-cumulative, and the weight of the final exams should be comparable to the other exams and projects in a class.

Additionally, McLaughlin said “more flexibility” during exams would reduce the “pressure to do well” and allow students to demonstrate what they’ve learned “more efficiently.”

For Arden Ericson, a student in the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications, a majority of her finals are papers and projects — not timed examinations.

“I feel like if [the university is] going to have finals, the con-

cept would be better executed as a paper or a project rather than an exam,” Ericson (sophomore-public relations and French) said.

She said she thinks having papers and projects due at the end of the semester alleviates some stress — especially compared to the process of “studying for huge exams worth a huge portion of the class grade.”

However, Ericson said she’s still “constantly overwhelmed” because she’s not only concentrating on academics but also on her involvement in greek life, extracurricular organizations and an internship.

When she had a full schedule of finals last year, Ericson said she felt “overly stressed” with the situation and “found [herself] staying up all night — pulling all-nighters — and cramming for the exams,” which she said further harmed her mental health.

“I definitely think it’s important for Penn State to adapt and have more efficient modes of instruction and finals because I see so many people who are pre-med and other very intense majors struggling,” Ericson said. “There’s no way you can balance mental health with [the demands of finals week].”

Ericson said adjustments and changes to finals week would be beneficial for all students, especially since some people are struggling with increased mental health issues since the beginning of the pandemic.

“It’s been extremely overwhelming just keeping up with classes since the beginning of the pandemic since everything’s virtual,” Ericson said. “I feel like everything has been going too fast, especially since we didn’t have a spring break, which was not good for anyone’s mental health.”

Spreading the testing period over a longer time frame — like two weeks —

may help students better manage the material, their schedules and their own health, Ericson said.

She said the pandemic demonstrated that academic adjustments and exam flexibility are possible — even during finals week.

“Since the start of the pandemic, Penn State has been forced to adapt and enforce different changes [amid coronavirus restrictions],” Ericson said, “so I think it’s definitely possible to change [the formatting of finals week] in the future.”

“There’s no way you can balance mental health with [the demands of finals week].”

Arden Ericson

sophomore-PR and French

How student leaders balance exam weeks

By Paul Sabini
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

As many Penn State students work to keep themselves afloat while taking heavy course loads, some are simultaneously attempting to balance leadership roles in extracurricular activities.

For Erica Mi, her position as president of Penn State’s student-run consulting club Engineering-Consulting Collaborative is like a full-time job.

“The club is like employment,” Mi (sophomore-information sciences and technology and telecommunications) said. “It’s a lot of work.”

In addition to her leadership position for E-CC, she is taking 25 credits while balancing her pending fall enrollment in a Penn State master’s degree program in informatics.

For many college students, the end of semester poses the threats of tests that could make or break a grade, thesis papers that demand hours of research, or

mundane exams that still deserve the full breadth of one’s studying capabilities.

But for students like Mi, the rigors of finals week are amplified by their leadership positions.

Zoe Cykosky is the president of Club Tennis and the Club Sports Council.

Additionally, she manages the women’s tennis team and interns for the Center for the Business of Sustainability at Penn State Smeal College of Business.

“I’m super involved, and it’s been kinda crazy this semester,” Cykosky (senior-supply chain management) said.

For Cykosky, her involvement didn’t really play a major role when she was scheduling classes this semester, she said, nor did the prospect of a crowded finals week.

“For me, being busy is really important — if I have smaller amounts of time [to complete work], I’m definitely more focused,” she said.



Ernesto Estremera JR/Collegian

Finals can be difficult to manage for many, but some heavily-involved students leaders face different challenges. “The club is like employment,” Erica Mi, president of Engineering Consulting Collaborative said.

Furthermore, Cykosky’s deft allocation of her time allows her to focus completely on the task at hand — whether that be a club sports resolution or a supply chain management test.

Prior to the pandemic, Cykosky, on average, said she would spend more than half of her time on the Club Sports Council.

However, since the pandemic halted club sports and in-person activities, such as meets or practices, Cykosky toned down her activity to the point where her time is evenly split between her classes and her extracurriculars.

“With club sports, we didn’t have to do anything, but Club Tennis really tried to keep people engaged, so it did still take up time,” Cykosky said.

For Mi, she decided to end her club’s workload early, concluding its various projects on April 18, to give both her and her club members time to study.

“I kind of planned this ahead of time when I was teaching classes,” she said.

Mi has her hands full with E-CC, and when she was choosing which classes to enroll in this semester, she said she looked for ones that would favor end of year projects more so than exams.

“You do learn time management,” she said. “I am not really stressed at all [about my workload], and there is no need for urgency.”

Just as it was important for Cykosky to establish a balance between her commitments to club sports and Smeal coursework, Mi also had to make the distinction.

“I treated the club like a full time job,” Mi said.

On the other side of the spectrum, the pandemic took a larger toll on the Bass Fishing Club.

Treasurer and soon to be president Thomas Shockey said his workload was easier since members were not allowed to compete in person during the pandemic.

As a result, Shockey (sophomore-mechanical engineering) did not need to weigh the

constraints his leadership position might have held on his workload.

“This semester, scheduling did not play a role, mainly because we really haven’t had a chance to do anything,” Shockey said. “And we didn’t get the go ahead to go in person until about a month ago.”

However, next semester, with the hope of increased in-person activities, Shockey said he will have to determine how best to balance his club presidency and his mechanical engineering coursework.

But none of the involved students have regrets about the way this semester has gone and said they would not do anything differently — including scheduling differing workloads.

“I look back at the year and I think, ‘This could have been the worst year ever,’” Cykosky said.

“But, I think I balanced everything really well.”



James Riccardo/Collegian file photo

Certain club leaders designed their schedules to allow more time to focus on their leadership positions.

Are virtual or in-person finals better?

By Anjelica Rubin
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

Finals week — two words all too familiar to many Penn State students who know the long nights, lack of sleep and caffeine overload associated with this time of year.

However, over the past three semesters, students and professors alike have had to adjust to a virtual learning environment for finals no one expected.

Following Penn State's recent announcement to return to in-person instruction for the fall semester, some students said they have mixed feelings when it comes to saying goodbye to a format that allowed them more flexibility and time to study.

Emily Bober said while she prefers to have the extra time to prepare, it is a constant struggle to keep herself on track throughout the semester to be ready for the exams.

"While it was a lot easier to take finals at home in the fall, it was also easy to get off track," Bober (sophomore-biology) said. "I struggled a lot to adjust to the virtual format in the beginning because you really can't procrastinate."

Bober said she feels less stress when taking online finals now, but that it was hard to maintain relationships with professors outside of the classroom — a component she said she believes to be integral in her success on exams.

"Going to professors to make sure you understand the content in a class is such an essential part of the college experience and a key to doing well on finals," Bober said. "However, with the pandemic, I definitely struggled to go to my professors because office hours on Zoom are not appealing at all."

Bober said talking to a professor "can't happen successfully" without the ability to be in a shared space like a classroom.

"Professors have been trying to do all they can to make sure they are accessible, but it's really hard," Bober said. "It's hard to stay on top of everything when you can't focus, and it's hard because you are tired all the time when getting ready for them. Honestly, I'm already burnt out."

Like Bober, John Christie said he valued not having to take finals at a certain time or place in the fall, but he expects this semester to be notably different.

"I think finals this time around will be harder because professors know the time constraints better," Christie (sophomore-economics) said. "Last semester, I had a lot of time to finish, but now, I think they are more adept to tailoring exams to the virtual format and making sure students take no shortcuts."

As a sophomore, Christie had one semester of fully in-person finals. He said while he's not looking forward to taking his exams this year, he is "excited

about the prospect" of the fall.

"I am looking at this semester's finals as the key to get over this hump we've been in since the pandemic started," Christie said. "I just want next year to be better, and if that means having in-person finals as part of it, I'll take that chance."

But for students like Alyssa Sweeney, virtual finals have been "a blessing."

"I prefer virtual finals any day no matter what," Sweeney (junior-psychology and English) said. "Usually, I would feel a lot of pressure with finals in a normal year, but with everything remote, I found that I thrive in a study space like my own apartment versus an actual testing space."

Sweeney said she "detests" taking tests in lecture halls, as she said she feels her anxiety hinders her performance on exams.

"Being virtual, I don't have that anxiety pushing back on me as much as I would have," Sweeney said. "Contrary to many of my peers, I'm doing better than I ever have."

All of Sweeney's finals will be online this semester, but as she looks ahead to Penn State's plan to hold in-person classes in the fall, she is "skeptical of the feasibility."

"Even with vaccines, I don't want to assume anything because the pandemic shifts things so abruptly. For all we know, what the university is telling us now may not be reality," Sweeney said. "At least we know what the online format is so we can all prepare to be successful."

Though Sweeney feels quite comfortable, she said she is aware that finals can bring unforeseen challenges no matter the format.

"Exams are still exams," Sweeney said. "I'm just going to have to grit my teeth and do it."

Other students like Jake Eranackal have enjoyed getting out of bed and being in the classroom "with a click" on Zoom.

"I'm not really that attached to which format," Eranackal (junior-computer science) said. "A final is a final at the end of the day, but having it on Zoom has been way more comfortable. There's nothing competitive about the environment that is my room — it's just me trying



Lily LaRegina/Collegian

Some students believe it's easier to focus during in-person finals, while others prefer virtual exams because of the low-pressure environment.

to grind out a good grade."

While Eranackal said he "doesn't feel a difference" between virtual and in-person finals as a rising senior, he doesn't want to end his senior year taking finals on Zoom.

"I've had two years of my college experience with regular finals weeks," Eranackal said. "Now, I want to have to wake up early to get to my 8 a.m. or be in a lecture hall trying to cram in preparation for a final the next day. The little things — I just want to get back to that."

Madison Kodman said virtual learning has remained "emotionally and mentally draining" since her first semester.

"During the fall of my freshman year in preparation for finals, I was able to study different places and change up the scenery," Kodman (sophomore-health policy and administration) said. "Now being online, I have had to stay at my apartment or work at the [HUB-Robeson Center], and it is much more limited."

Kodman said studying is essential for her performance during finals week, and like Bober, said professors have not been as flexible as previous semesters.

"Now that professors are so used to the online format, we are now getting so much more work," Kodman said. "I didn't think not having a spring break would be that bad, but I am feeling more overwhelmed

and stressed because of it."

According to Kodman, Penn State's three wellness days, days off for student mental health, have done little to stop the overload of work as finals draw near.

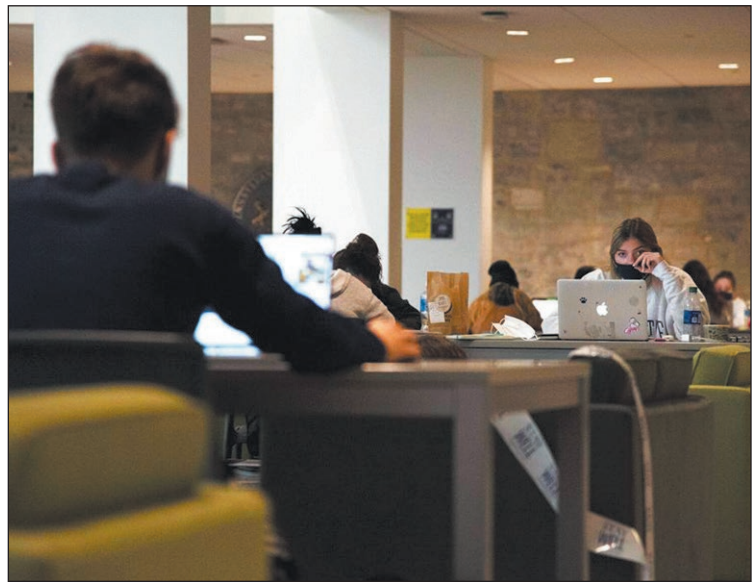
"One random day in the middle of the week can't make up for a break from the stress that comes with looming finals that symbolize the end of a semester," Kodman said. "We are burnt out, at least with in-person finals, we had more of a schedule to follow."

Kodman said she "struggles to balance it all," and estimates she spends every other hour on her laptop studying.

"Virtual finals week is one of the least favorite things I have had to adapt to since the pandemic has shifted life upside down," Kodman said. "I am practically on my laptop all the time, so it's just hard to stay motivated and present."

Kodman said she looks forward to the summer and what will come after finals week, however, it's not enough to increase her optimism about another potential semester of online exams.

"Obviously we're not all fans of finals, but being in person and going to different rooms and having that change is so needed," Kodman said. "I never realized that before now — the normalcy of in-person finals, I mean — and I don't think I'll ever take them for granted again."



Lily LaRegina/Collegian

"Exams are still exams," student Alyssa Sweeney said.

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Freshmen reflect on ‘chaotic’ year

By Olivia Estright
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

After a year of coronavirus protocols, virtual classes, wellness days and a twerk circle, many Penn State freshmen feel like it’s time to move on.

Jeremy Laguerre said although his first year “could have been worse,” he’s prepared for it to be over.

“To sum up this year in one word: chaotic,” Laguerre (freshman-meteorology and atmospheric science) said.

As a freshman experiencing his first college experience during a global pandemic, Laguerre said he wished the university could have been more transparent with protocols.

From social distancing to contact tracing, the university continues to implement coronavirus guidelines in hopes of keeping students and the greater State College community safe.

“I understand why the [coronavirus] restrictions were there, but I think sometimes the university wasn’t clear on what they wanted,” Laguerre said. “It just got confusing.”

Laguerre said he followed the guidelines, but when he noticed peers stepping out of line, they rarely faced consequences. Often, he said his upperclassmen friends were the ones breaking the protocols.

“I find it ironic that [East Halls freshmen] were blamed for the rise in [coronavirus] cases throughout the year,” Laguerre said. “Blaming the freshmen for one incident isn’t fair.”

The incident Laguerre referred to was known as the “twerk circle” — when a large group of freshmen living in East Halls gathered in the quad at the beginning of the year. Laguerre said because of this incident, the community pointed fingers directly at East residents.

Laguerre said he’s grateful for all he was able to do this year,



Josie Chen/Collegian file photo

Many freshmen didn’t get the chance to know the true Penn State through coronavirus restrictions on campus. However, they said they did their best to make the most of their first year as students.

but he wishes he would’ve been more involved.

“I think I’m glad overall to see what it was like,” Laguerre said. “I’m glad I was here to experience the learning environment.”

For international student Arwen Borowiak, being over 4,000 miles away from home did not help his transition to college life.

Borowiak traveled from Germany to be part of Penn State’s fencing team. Although he understood the coronavirus restrictions across the world, he said he was still underwhelmed.

“Before coming, I heard there were a lot of rumors about parties, football games and just everyone having a lot of fun, but I didn’t really see that,” Borowiak (freshman-supply chain management) said.

“I feel like I made the most out of the experience with the circumstances at hand.”

Samantha Colon
freshman-marketing

Borowiak said while the fencing team allowed him to meet more people, the pandemic hindered the possibilities of more interactions. He said his worries of meeting people stemmed from contracting the coronavirus.

“Getting to know people was very hard,” Borowiak said. “My sports team was nice with helping me meet people, but outside of that, it was really difficult.”

After not being able to go home during winter break and not seeing his family for 11 months, Borowiak said he’s ready to go home.

“I just don’t feel like I got the real experience,” Borowiak said.

S a m a n t h a Colon said she respected the university’s coronavirus guidelines and didn’t find it as hard as others to meet new people.

“I feel like I made the most

out of the experience with the circumstances at hand,” Colon (freshman-marketing) said. “I was happy to be on campus and join organizations, even if they were on Zoom. I was still able to get something out of it.”

However, Colon said she wishes she would have talked to “random people” throughout the year rather than just in the beginning.

“You talk to so many people in your first few weeks of college, then it slowly dies down,” Colon said.

However, coming to Penn State, Colon said she thinks the university could’ve done more to help freshmen socialize.

“We go to such a large university, so the number of people we can meet is endless,” Colon said.

Ben Minick said after his first year, he’s “happy” with how everything went.

“In the beginning, it was really hard to make those new connections with dorm restrictions and virtual classes,” Minick (freshman-finance) said.

“I was fortunate enough to be

accepted into a program that allowed me to meet a bunch of new people who I immediately connected with.”

With his friends from home and the new people he’s met, Minick said his year was socially OK, and it didn’t overwhelm him.

“It allowed me to focus on the academic side of school rather than to get caught up in the social scene of school,” Minick said.

When she first arrived, Maddie Ade said the initial college experience “felt like summer camp more than anything.”

Ade (freshman-fine art) said at the beginning, due to coronavirus protocols, she felt like she was having an abnormal experience. But, she said she knew the university was doing what it had to.

“Over the year, there were definitely a lot more opportunities, and I think Penn State genuinely tried to make it as normal as possible,” Ade said.

Being an art major, Ade said she wishes there could’ve been more in-person options for her.

“For my one class, we would normally be in the studio doing woodwork and sculptures, but instead, we’re stuck doing paper projects,” Ade said.

Ade said because she hasn’t had the in-person class experience, she wishes she would have gotten more involved with other activities.

“There are some nights where I’m just sitting in my dorm on my laptop thinking, ‘I wish I had something else to do,’” Ade said. “Everyone’s making the most of it, but it’s definitely not the same.”

Ade said while she hopes the freshmen continue looking forward to the next few years, it’s difficult for her to not wonder what she’s missed.

“I can’t help but think about what we could’ve done this year without the pandemic.”

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Follow her on Twitter at [@OliviaEstright](https://twitter.com/OliviaEstright).

Seniors: A bittersweet, virtual end

By Phoebe Cykosky
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State seniors have had nearly a year and a half of college amid the coronavirus pandemic — an experience largely different from what they expected when they committed as freshmen. Some seniors reported struggling overall but made the best of their situations.

Gabriella Fournier said she found positives within all the negatives thrown her way during the virtual year.

“Some of my professors actually got to know me more virtually in my smaller classes,” Fournier (senior-public relations) said. “There’s more availability to meet with them since they can take a Zoom call from anywhere, and it’s easier to reach out.”

However, Fournier said she struggled with motivation to “finish strong” during her senior year, similar to other students.

“This has made me less motivated since my house is the place where I have to do everything like sleeping, eating, school work and work,” Fournier said. “I’m someone who likes to get up and get ready early to start my day on campus, so this has been harder for me.”

Fournier said she found Penn State’s virtual and in-person policies “unclear,” which she said made the year harder.

“Everyone was so worried because of how Penn State’s reaction was delayed with the pandemic response,” Fournier said. “There were so many unknowns, but they know now how to be prepared for something like this.”

Fournier said it was difficult to engage with organizations in person because of the restrictions from the university.

“I’ve always been someone to respect the rules and acknowledge people’s feelings, and I’ve tried to stay so positive during this,” Fournier said.

Fournier said she was disappointed with how the university

handled the final spring football practice, initially opening it to only freshmen.

Carter O’Sullivan said he felt the university could have responded better to make his last year “memorable in a different way.”

“Penn State’s response to everything this year was underwhelming,” O’Sullivan (senior-supply chain management) said. “State College was one of the worst hot spots nationally, and Penn State wasn’t transparent with what was going on.”

According to university spokesperson Wyatt DuBois, the university has worked to keep the Penn State community updated through online resources such as the “Virus Info” website, the COVID-19 dashboard and virtual town halls.

“The university has provided proactive updates to educate our entire community and is working closely with critical partners,” DuBois said in a statement via email.

O’Sullivan said he felt bad for freshmen because he said he would have been even more “confused” coming to Penn State amid the pandemic.

“I felt bad for the freshman as a senior because of the delusions of grandeur the university promoted,” O’Sullivan said. “Penn State made them look like villains at their first taste of freedom when [the university] could’ve just made different decisions originally, [like keeping freshmen home].”

O’Sullivan said he thought there was a bigger “barrier” between him and his professors as a senior but had smaller class sizes to overcome it.

“I’m lucky because my classes were already more niche in size, and I have things figured out by

“Penn State’s response to everything this year was underwhelming.”

Carter O’Sullivan
senior-supply chain management

now being a senior,” he said. “But, there was a separation between students from their professors and other classmates in the virtual setting overall.”

Additionally, he said he was disappointed with the Virtual Involvement Fair and struggled to engage with his THON organization while enduring the loss of other opportunities.

“Virtual involvement was a joke,” O’Sullivan said. “Penn State is good with academics, but there are so many other opportunities that people lost out on because it wasn’t prioritized despite being one of the biggest parts of student experiences.”

Brian Ouzomgi has stayed home since the start of the pandemic, but he thought the pros of virtual learning outweighed the cons.

“Virtual learning didn’t affect me too much, because I was growing sick of school, and I was able to save money by living at home,” Ouzomgi (senior-computer science) said. “It was very nice to spend extra time with my family before moving out, which is time that wouldn’t have been possible if classes were in person.”

Ouzomgi said he felt his education quality didn’t decrease, but his attention span did.

“In a normal semester, I’m very attentive, but it was very difficult to keep a stronger attention span,” Ouzomgi said. “I didn’t even take notes this semester, but that was also because some classes didn’t require it as much.”

However, Ouzomgi said he was able to visit Penn State’s campus for a weekend to get a better sense of closure for senior year.

However, Victoria Kipiller said she felt it was harder to find closure after the virtual year. She said she has some regrets, but they were out of her control.

“It’s harder finding closure for seniors in this situation,” Kipiller (senior-business management) said.

“Only recently, I felt like we were actually finishing school, but it’s a shame that we can’t see people that we were in clubs with for a last goodbye.”

Kipiller said her classes focused on group work, which was harder with the online format, and she didn’t know how to balance time for herself.

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Samantha Wilson/Collegian file photo

Professors believe there’s a right and a wrong way for study, and the traditional route might not be the way to go.

How should you study?

By Emily Carter
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

With final exams approaching and the end of the semester looming, some Penn State students take this time to reflect on their study habits — and most realize sleep deprivation and caffeineation is not the best way to approach studying.

Many students don’t know who to talk to about study skills. Instead, they attempt an endless cycle of trial and error.

Ultimately, professors may be the best resource for study tips — believe it or not, they were students once too.

According to Dustin Elliott, assistant teaching professor of psychology, memorization is the most ineffective study method.

Elliott said he tried this approach during his first years in college. “This was something that I, as many college students do, found out the hard way,” Elliott said. “As my college career continued, I learned to translate my notes into my own words. I also learned that in order to thoroughly understand the information I was learning, I needed to be able to apply that information to novel situations.”

After a year of virtual classes, Elliott said it’s important to know how to study for these online courses.

“That process has to happen before students can even hope to study effectively. As students sit at their computers, they are tempted to have several [unrelated] windows open simultaneously,” Elliott said. “This causes them to try and multitask with several things at once.”

According to Elliott, cognitive research proves multitasking isn’t possible and students should be “diligent and organized.”

Bradley Markle, a lecturer in the English department, disagreed with Elliott, however.

“Don’t study,” Markle said. “Ideally, do the thing that you’re learning. If you want to learn to cook, don’t read about it — start making pancakes.”

But, Markle offered an alternative to those who cannot actively do what they are learning about.

“If doing this isn’t an option, then carry around some flashcards with you — there’s wonderful apps for this — and just periodically flip through them for five to 10 minutes at a time,” Markle said.

“Waiting on the bus? Flip through them. Commercial on TV? Flip through them. Smaller sessions of study are more tolerable than cram sessions and [they] keep information fresh.”

He also suggested students spend as much time outside as possible — especially amid the coronavirus pandemic.

“Finding any excuse to leave the house and get out in the world will probably help with one’s sanity,” Markle said. “Being locked inside for a year certainly takes a toll, and being locked inside surrounded by esoteric texts that you’re supposed to memorize is even worse. Make some flash cards and go for a hike.”

Curt Chandler, associate teaching professor of communications and journalism at Penn State, said his friend group in college was what kept him on track.

“Fortunately, I ran with a group of people that would study hard and party hard,” Chandler said. “We knew how to have a good time, but we also knew that we were there to get something done. I was pretty notorious for disappearing when I was working on an important project.”

Visit collegian.psu.edu to read the full story.



Lindsey Toomer/Collegian file photo

Senioritis was harder this year than usual as seniors struggled to stay focused and motivated in their final year with Zoom classes.

AN ATYPICAL SPRING

Recapping the major news from throughout the semester

By **Samantha Verrelli**
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

After another unconventional semester in Happy Valley, students are finally starting to see a sliver of normalcy return to college life — but that’s not without undergoing a couple of months of pandemic life.

Here is a recap of some of the major news and events from the semester.

Wellness days were created

Rather than flocking to beaches for spring break, students had three “wellness days” — Feb. 9, March 11 and April 7. No classes were held on these days, and students were encouraged to focus on different aspects of wellness.

Palmer Museum of Art reopened

Students were able to visit the Palmer Museum once again beginning Feb. 10, which had been closed since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The on-campus space for art and culture is available for students to experience again, though advanced registration is required.

First virtual THON held

Penn State wouldn’t miss a year of THON — not even due to a pandemic. THON, the world’s largest student-run philanthropy, was held virtually this year, raising \$10,638,078.62 for pediatric cancer. Though THON was held through a livestream, there was still the traditional line dance with dancers standing for hours on end. Quinn XCII and Louis the Child performed during the 46-hour event.

Homecoming 2021 Theme revealed

At this year’s virtual THON, Penn State Homecoming revealed its 2021 theme: “Together, State Prevails.”

3/20 Coalition held events to commemorate the two year anniversary of the death of Osaze Osagie. The 3/20 Coalition held “10 Days of Action” starting March 12 to commemorate the two year anniversary death of Osaze Osagie. On March 20, 2019, State College Police were serving a mental health warrant at the apartment of Osagie, who had autism and a history of schizophrenia. Osagie ran at the officers with a knife. After an unsuccessful attempt to deploy a Taser on Osagie, he was allegedly shot by Officer M. Jordan Pieniazek. The three officers involved in the shooting have not been charged.

New men’s basketball coach named

Micah Shrewsberry was named the new head coach for men’s basketball on March 15 following the resignation of the previous leader Pat Chambers in October 2020. Shrewsberry has never held a Division I Head Coaching title, but he has coached for the NBA and the NAIA.

Barron announced in-person graduation

On March 17, President Eric Barron announced that seniors will have the option to attend in-person or virtual graduation commencement ceremonies this spring. The in-person commencement weekend will take place May 7-9, regardless of weather. Graduates are allowed two guests, and the ceremony will be livestreamed. Tickets are necessary for both graduates and guests.

Chick-fil-A closed

To students’ dismay, HUB-Robeson Center announced it would replace the Chick-fil-A with a Slim Chickens — a fast food chain from Arkansas.

Berkey Creamery reopened



Samantha Hendrzak/Collegian

Cornerback Johnny Dixon chases wide receiver Winston Eubanks during the spring practice game on April 23. The first spring practice was open only to freshmen, but a second spring practice was later held and open to initially only seniors and later all members of the public.

To students’ and locals’ delight, the Berkey Creamery began offering hand-dipped ice cream again on March 22.

Although, those who still prefer buying ice cream by the pint to finish in one sitting still have that option, of course.

Old Willow fell

On a more somber note, the “Old Willow” tree that sat on Old Main lawn succumbed to strong winds on March 26. The cuttings from the third generation tree are being saved for a new tree to be grown so students in the years to come can continue to partake in traditions surrounding the tree.

New UPUA president, vice president elected

On March 31, Erin Boas and Najee Rodriguez were elected as undergraduate executive president and vice president, respectively.

BJC announced Kane Brown to visit

in the fall

Finally, after a year of silence within the Bryce Jordan Center, music will return in the fall. American singer-songwriter Kane Brown will perform at the BJC on Nov. 6 as part of his “Blessed and Free” tour. General public ticket sales opened on April 16, and Penn State students received a discount.

Students learned most fall 2021 classes will be held in-person

On April 13, Penn State announced 96% percent of classes will be held in-person in the fall at University Park.

Gov. Tom Wolf lifted certain coronavirus restrictions

On April 14, Gov. Tom Wolf lifted some restrictions on bars and indoor dining and increased gathering limits across Pennsylvania. The new mandates removed the alcohol curfew and increased indoor capacity to 75%.

Penn State opened vaccination clinics

As vaccinations roll out across the country, Penn State’s BJC and Pegula Ice Arena administered student coronavirus vaccinations through clinics. The BJC began vaccinations on April 9, and Pegula offered vaccinations from April 22-24. Operations at the BJC briefly halted following a pause of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Currently, the facility offers both the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

Chumley’s reopened after a year

Chumley’s, a gay bar downtown, reopened its doors on April 14 after being closed for renovations — right in time for Penn State Pride Month.

SCPD opens hate crime investigation after defacement of

MLK Jr. mural

State College Police opened a hate crime investigation after the defacement of the Martin Luther King Jr. mural at 131 South Fraser St. on April 16. There was later a silent vigil denouncing the defacement.

Mount Nittany named among best hospitals in the world

Newsweek Magazine named Mount Nittany Medical Center a “World’s Best Hospital 2021” and was one of 350 hospitals chosen from the U.S. 15 of the honored hospitals are in Pennsylvania.

Penn State Football holds final spring practices

Students were unable to take part in the usual football traditions at Penn State this past fall including tailgating, singing the alma mater and decking out in blue and white. However, freshmen at University Park were able to enter Beaver Stadium for the first time as a class for the football team’s rendition of the Blue-White game on April 17 with a spring practice. Seniors were also given one last hurrah at a special spring football practice on April 23 that was eventually opened to the general public to attend.

Movin’ On festival held virtually — for the second year in a row

Penn State’s annual music festival, Movin’ On, will be held virtually Friday. Performers will include rapper Flo Rida, singer Pink Sweat\$ and student band Flooringco.

Arts Fest canceled for the second year

The Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts, an annual event in July, was canceled for the second year in a row due to the pandemic.

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Lily LaRegina/Collegian

Tierra Williams, co-leader of the 3/20 Coalition, speaks during the lineup of events for the Honoring Osaze’s Legacy festival on March 20. The festival concluded the 3/20 Coalition’s Ten Days of Action.

Students share fall 2021 predictions

By **Nate Lather**
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

and a half of online learning, Penn State announced most classes will be held in person for fall 2021. With the spring semester

coming to a close, most students and faculty are no strangers to online classes. Students who experienced in-person exams in the past like Mark Richards are excited for the return to in-person learning. However, he said he has looming concerns for the upcoming academic year. “It’s going to be a culture shock,” Richards (sophomore-finance) said. “The idea of going back to in-person is nice but, of course, there’s a little extra help from online classes.” Richards said he believes while most students are ready to go back, it is going to be an adjustment for students who have only experienced online learning. Since the university switched to a mostly virtual format, many students have not had the chance to take classes in person — especially the freshmen class. Samantha Frank said she also believes the transition may be difficult for first-year students like herself.

“A lot more people have become reliant on the web,” Frank (freshman-division of undergraduate studies) said. “The people who have been cheating or relying on other resources online may lack motivation to be prepared for next year’s classes.” However, not all freshmen believe the change will be difficult. Jaisia Spencer said in-person classes and exams may be easier than online — she said having a more “normal” experience will make the transition to collegiate life smoother. “We will get the chance to have a lot more preparation,” Spencer (freshman-

telecommunications) said. Luke Stoey echoed Spencer’s sentiments. “The opportunity to go back to in-person is going to be a game changer for me... and for my grades,” Stoey (sophomore-earth science and policy) said. There is also plenty of anticipation as students begin to schedule classes for the fall 2021 semester. Andrea Prest is already taking the transition back to in-person into account. “When I was planning classes, I had to take into consideration how far I have to walk between each class,” Prest (freshman-public relations) said.



Lily LaReinga/Collegian

Some students said the fall semester will be an adjustment.

Finals week horrors haunt students

By Nick Stonesifer
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Finals week can be discerned by many as a strenuous week — hours and hours of studying go into preparing oneself for the last week of the semester.

But for some Penn State students, finals week can be a nightmare.

On top of the aforementioned work, some students have found themselves living through a crazy final exam.

David Miller said he became sick right as one of his final exams started. Miller (junior-management information systems) said he was taking a Spanish exam when he suddenly began to feel nauseous.

“I asked my professor in the middle of my final — maybe five minutes into the exam — if I could go to use the bathroom, and I actually ended up spending the next 40-50 minutes just throwing up,” Miller said.

Miller said the professor was “very accommodating” and allowed him to finish his final at a later date. He said he was appreciative of how the professor allowed him another chance on the exam, and it taught him that “professors are actual people at the end of the day.”

For Faisal Katibi, he almost slept through one of his exams after pulling an all-nighter to study.

“At about 6:30 a.m. — the exam was at 8 a.m. — I was so tired. I

felt like I couldn’t go to the exam that tired, so I went to sleep for a little bit,” Katibi (senior-mechanical engineering) said. “I set my alarm, but somehow I slept through the alarm. But luckily for me, one of my friends was passing through at about 7:50 a.m. And when he got there, he woke me up.”

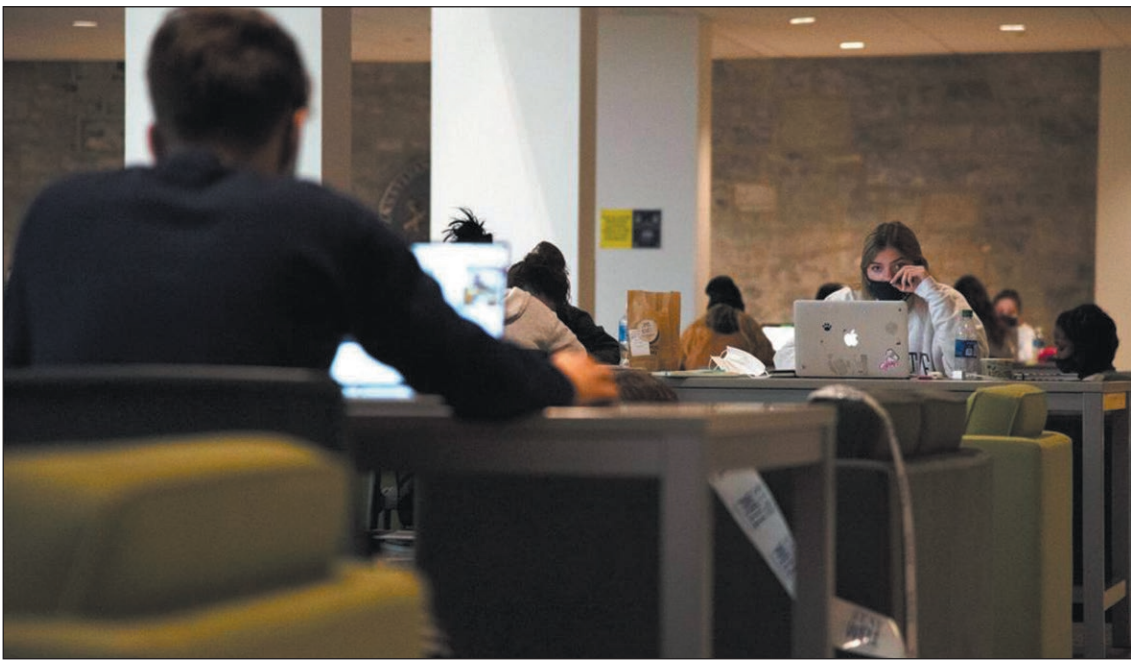
Katibi said the place where he was taking his exam was a few minutes away from where he lived, so he made it on time. He said he understood the material on the exam, but because of how tired he was, he couldn’t perform as well as he would’ve liked.

“It wasn’t great, and that’s the thing about final exams,” Katibi said. “Just preparing for the exam in the wrong way can mess up all of your work throughout the semester.”

When taking a final exam, one would hope there are no outside distractions, but what Anushka Shah wasn’t expecting was the fire alarm to go off in the middle of her exam.

“We had to all leave in the midst of it, and this is a final I was already feeling short on time with,” Shah (senior-biology and English) said. “I remember a lot of us kind of standing against a brick wall trying to finish the rest of it.”

Shah said there wasn’t actually a fire in the building, and the professor was frustrated about the event. Shah said she received more time on the exam to finish, but the fire



Lily LaRegina/Collegian

From getting sick to waking up late and even an unanticipated fire drill, finals week at Penn State is not a highly anticipated period, especially for students who have had unpleasant experiences in semesters past.

“It wasn’t great, and that’s the thing about final exams. Just preparing for the exam in the wrong way can mess up all of your work throughout the semester.”

Faisal Katibi
senior-mechanical engineering

alarm going off was “kind of stress inducing.”

Kingsley Yeon said during one of his exams, he spilled hot coffee all over himself.

“I had this full cup of coffee — venti Starbucks, super hot coffee — and midway [through] taking the exam, I spilled it all on myself,” Yeon (junior-computer science and math) said. “But it was a Zoom live recording, so I did not do anything.”

Yeon said he was so focused on the exam he wasn’t thinking about cleaning up the coffee. He said there was “a lot at stake” with this exam and had been studying for two weeks prior to taking it.

Zoe Merriman said for one of her finals, she spent weeks writing a final exam essay just for the

professor to decide there wouldn’t be a final exam.

Merriman (senior-wildlife and fisheries science) said the professor kept pushing the deadline of the final exam back until she suddenly decided the students didn’t need to complete one.

Even after Meriman had completed her essay, the professor said she wouldn’t take it for credit.

While some students may have lived directly through a frantic final exam, others can be witnesses to a rough experience. Aakash Viramgama said he was one of those students.

Viramgama (junior-management) said a friend’s geology professor was skeptical that students were using outside websites like Chegg and Quizlet for answers to quizzes.

“What [the professor] did was make one of the TAs put in wrong answers on purpose on Chegg,” Viramgama said. “And whoever used Chegg — like 40 of those people — were failed or required to send an email saying, ‘We admit that we violated the academic integrity.’”

Viramgama said when he heard the story, he thought “red alert.” He said he believes it’s understandable for students to use materials like Chegg for study help in the middle of a pandemic.

“But that was something really alarming,” Viramgama said. “It was really extreme, having a TA put in wrong answers on purpose to get these people.”

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Becky Marcinko/Collegian

Finals week can be stressful, but there are several activities that can help relieve anxiety. From taking a walk to reading a book or calling a loved one, physical and mental health don’t necessarily have to be thrown away.

Self-care activities to improve your mental health for finals week

By Victoria Gough
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

With all the stress finals week brings, many people neglect their wellbeing in the name of cramming for exams.

But it’s important to remember we should prioritize our mental health — no matter how many tests and projects we have.

A break for self-care doesn’t have to take long: Engaging in a positive activity for just 30 minutes during a study break can do wonders to improve your mood and reduce stress.



Rachel Suga/Collegian File Photo

Relaxing outside in the sunshine can be a great way to relieve finals week stress. Penn State offers several outdoor recreational areas.

Here’s a few things that have worked for me during finals week — try them out and see if they work for you.

Take a walk — without a goal in mind

College students usually only walk for a purpose. Whether you’re shopping, rushing to class or trying to get 10,000 steps in every day, there’s a pretty good chance you have never slowed down to take in the view and enjoy some fresh air.

Walking is not just a mode of transportation: It’s an excellent way to clear your mind and take a break from your studies.

Step outside and take a stroll around campus or downtown State College and see where you end up. Don’t rush — enjoy the weather and your last week on campus for the semester.

Read a book (not a textbook)

Be honest— what’s the last book you read? And no, it can’t be a textbook or any other required reading for a class. When was the last time you actually sat down and read for fun?

That’s what I thought.

Reading is a great hobby that can sharpen your mind, help you learn and allow you to get lost in different worlds.

After a stressful day, I love winding down with a cup of tea and a book.

Pick up an old childhood favorite and let the nostalgia flow in. Alternatively, you could get around to reading that book on your shelf you’ve been meaning

to read for three years.

Call a loved one

For many students, studying for finals means holing yourself up in your room for an indefinite period of time with no contact to the outside world.

If this sounds like you, try reaching out to someone you love during your study break.

“Take time to care for yourself — school can wait, but your health can’t.”

Victoria Gough
student life reporter

your mom and catch up, or reconnect with an old friend from back home.

Relax outside — any time of day

One of the benefits of being a Penn State student is we live on one of the most beautiful campuses in the country.

With countless outdoor spaces, it only makes sense to make the most of our time here by enjoying the spring weather and the budding trees.

Bring a blanket and some sunscreen and give yourself a well-deserved break from studying — think an afternoon nap in a shady spot or a picnic with friends.

Personally, I love getting a pint of ice cream from the Berkeley Creamery and watching the sunset at the Arboretum.

Take time to care for yourself — school can wait, but your health can’t.

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The good, the bad and the caffeine

Students talk finals week highs, lows

By Courtney Benedetto
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

From the low lows to the high highs — and everything in between — Penn State students are in for a rollercoaster of emotions with the countdown to finals week at T minus 10 days.

For many students, the stress of studying for finals is overwhelming, but for Addison Miller, she said her stress comes from the tests leading up to final exams.

“It’s frustrating whenever professors give you an exam literally the week before finals,” Miller (freshman-accounting) said. “Then you have another test day for them too.”

Miller said she has only experienced one finals week so far, but this semester, she is scheduled to take one exam late Thursday night and another early Friday morning, which she said she finds annoying.

Akshay Khanna, who experienced a similar situation with back-to-back finals, said he pulled an “all-nighter” to study for his chemistry exam.

Despite doing it himself, Khanna (sophomore-premedicine) said he doesn’t recommend staying awake the night before a final exam.

“I ended up watching a movie at 3 a.m. because I got bored,” Khanna said. “I got through about three-fourths of the exam and ended up falling asleep.”

Familiar with the lack of sleep during finals, Allee Pericles said she stressed over her world literature exam so much she overdid the caffeine.

“I drank way too much coffee,” Pericles (junior-letters, arts and sciences) said. “I ended up staying up all night, and I was really tired in the morning.”

Pericles recalled sitting down to take her exam and not remembering any material, which she said was enhanced by the caffeine in her system.

“I remember my blood literally felt like lava,” Pericles said. Sucked into the world of

caffeine himself, Jason Vanderhoff said he has many meal points left this semester, and for a few weeks, he decided to buy several cans of Bang Energy drinks.

“I got hooked,” Vanderhoff (freshman-electrical engineering) said. “I would be up for 18 hours a day just doing various things like studying [and] playing video games.”

Since then, Vanderhoff said he stopped drinking so much caffeine because he realized how much it was affecting his sleep schedule.

With finals week on the horizon, Vanderhoff said he is still unsure whether he’ll revert back to Bang to give him the energy to study.

Not taking the caffeine route to finals, one student overslept and missed his chemistry exam.

Dilara Waxman said she never had any problems during finals week, but her friend told her about his craziest exam experiences.

“He begged the professor to let him take it again,” Waxman (senior-biology) said. “Fortunately, she did, and he got a 100%.”

Although Waxman said she was impressed by his resilience, she advised others to not sleep through any finals and to “set 10 alarm clocks if you have to.”

On the flipside of the horrors of finals week, some students said they appreciate how it’s the last week before summer vacation.

Jackson Pavlik said he doesn’t dread his finals because as a musical theatre major, he has gotten the opportunity to watch his classmates sing.

“It was lovely just to sit and watch people perform,” Pavlik (freshman-musical theatre) said, “because that’s not something we’ve gotten to do over the past year and a half with COVID.”

Excited for his own finals week performance, Pavlik said he loves sharing his work with his friends and doesn’t mind keeping busy at the end of the semester.

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