

So long, farewell.

NICK HAZELRIGG, OU DAILY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Each semester at the OU Daily begins, without fail, with the same thing: goals.

When we all come back from summer or winter break to begin our planning for another semester of work, our newsroom is brimming with students writing on white boards and talking through all the ambitious things we want to accomplish.

The same was true for The Daily's graduating seniors as they returned to the newsroom in January. From the Norman Music Festival to the OU spring game to coverage of an interim presidency, our newsroom planned and brainstormed how we could best cover the spring semester for our audience.

But after March 12, our newsroom — like the rest of campus soon would — lay silent, dark and empty.

As it would for so many seniors around the country, the spread of COVID-19 cut short our time at OU and at The Daily. We lost half of our last semester, and with it we lost many of our ideas and plans that we had hoped to execute.

The sadness we feel is hard to describe. It's hard to accept that, as students, we'll never again pile into The Daily's conference room for another 4:30 editorial board meeting or plop down in the wooden chair in our adviser Seth's office. We'll never again hear the familiar sound of the newsroom's metal door clinking shut.

Even in this time of grief, we must not lose sight of all the goals we've already accomplished.

Our seniors on the news desk have covered years of university history — three presidents, community upheaval over racism, dramatic shifts in OU's financial situation and now the impact of COVID-19 on our community. Our seniors on the culture desk have spent years invested in Norman's artistic scene and have written extensive features on underrepresented members of our communities, both at OU and across Oklahoma.

We have seniors who have covered — in words, photos and videos — OU's football team for three seasons or more as well as the professionals do. Those seniors have followed OU athletes to Heisman Trophy ceremonies and the College Football Playoff and, along the way, they have presented some of the best sports journalism in college media.

But our seniors have not only invested in their own work — they have changed our organization for the better. Seniors on our copy desk have spent countless hours fact-checking and editing to ensure our work is accurate and easy to read on every platform and at any hour, while our designers have worked diligently to reinvent the way our work is presented.

Above all, this class of graduating seniors has had one goal in mind: maintaining and building upon the trust that those who came before us built with our audience.

It's hard to leave unfinished some of the goals we set for ourselves, but we can leave knowing we did what we could to make The Daily a better place for those who will remain and for our community.

Departing from undergraduate life is difficult enough, and it's even harder when that departure comes sooner than we expected. We have much more work to do, with a university and world forever changed by the effects of COVID-19 — and there's much more left to document. But we must do that work in a fundamentally different way as our newsroom is now beyond our grasp.

More than the professional accomplishments we will leave behind earlier than expected, we grieve for the friendships and relationships we weren't ready to say goodbye to.

Yet here we are, and for our seniors, the end of our time at OU will be much like the beginning of each semester at The Daily: a time for us to set goals. This time, though, our goals will focus on our careers, our futures and what we want our lives to look like after The Daily. Not one of us plans to let this difficult time stop us from reaching as high as we can when we set those goals.

Still, we couldn't have gotten here without one another and without our community, large and small. It's for this reason that our seniors' work will continue until the end — because that's what our readers deserve.

Our seniors spent much of the semester counting the days until graduation, planning each moment and reminding ourselves how much time we had left together, until that time was cut short.

What we've learned — at The Daily, at OU and around the world — is every single second we have is priceless and deserving of our full attention.

THANK YOU.