



MILES FRANCISCO

We're in a liminal space now, and it feels quite odd.

It's odd that we likely won't see our friends on campus again. Odd that we won't sit in a campus classroom again or plan another event, or pass by Evans Hall knowing that we did some good there just weeks ago. I'm truly not sure what to make of it or how long this will last. I don't have any revealing thoughts on what all of this will mean in the long term — right now, I'm just existing. But what is clear to me since COVID-19 came swooping in and ended our last months on campus is this: we are all we got. We're here on this Earth for a finite amount of time. We try to make the most of it while we're here, we mess up, and we try again. As seniors we looked forward to our last month at OU, carrying out all of our "lasts" as undergrad students. But we don't get that luxury. What we do have is each other, even if it's virtually for a bit.

Where our government has failed us, we have shown up in droves to fill these voids. For many of us, we have seen the intrinsic failures of American systems all our lives — for others, this is their first look into the injustices that so many marginalized people face daily. I think this is telling of who we are as a people. As human beings.

I was asked to write about my time at OU and what lessons I'll bring from my time there. This is such a difficult time to sum up all of my experiences. Much like what many of us are experiencing right now in the middle of this pandemic, what I got out of OU was not so much a result of the institution but rather in spite of the institution. I love OU, but not because it was so

great to me. I love OU because I found my home, found my people, found who I was through all of it.

Through the myriad of racist incidents, I learned that a community that continually was belittled and harmed would come out of every instance stronger and more tight-knit. We had a community, and that was all we needed. The student community at OU is an immensely courageous one, and one that I am proud to be a part of. This courage came to the forefront during our occupation of Evans Hall earlier this semester. What I saw as I walked through the floors of one of the oldest buildings at OU was a dream of mine. I saw Black students finding joy in an unjust time. I saw students from all across the world who had been subject to their own share of injustices at OU show up in support as if it were their own fight. Because it was. I saw staff members and professors risking their positions to do all they could to support us. I saw a beauty in our differences as we came together and fought for one another. We are what we need, we are who we need.

As I think back on my time at the University of Oklahoma and this abrupt end, I will always remember the beautiful people who made the most of a place not built for their survival. I have great appreciation for the love and solidarity that always showed up when needed. OU as an institution has a lot of work to do. We've known this. But it is the people of OU — those of us who care for one another and advocate for the whole of us — who I will cherish forever.

A. Mint