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The Grizzly, April 2, 2020

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The Canvas Commencement?

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With the remainder of spring semester moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ursinus College is scrambling to figure out what to do regarding commencement for the class of 2020.

Seniors of the college have expressed considerable disappointment about the loss of their traditional spring celebration, as well as the senior events that accompany it. Over the past couple of weeks, some have also expressed frustration about not knowing whether and what will replace them.

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This week, the school announced plans to hold a virtual commencement this spring, and a physical celebration during next year's Fall Break – although what exactly those events will look like remains undecided.

An email sent by President Brock Blomberg to the Ursinus community included updates about commencement. After the cancellation of the traditional ceremony, a small team of faculty, staff, and graduating seniors worked together to search alternative options, he said. Blomberg also mentioned a survey, which at the time some seniors had not yet received, asking seniors for feedback about what a “virtual program” in May should look like, and what an on-campus event in the fall might entail.

Associate Dean and professor of English Meredith Goldsmith works on the committee that recruits the honorary degree recipient for commencement. She explained that once the news broke regarding the cancellation, she and her colleagues knew they would have to create something different in its place.

A summer ceremony was considered, but there was too much uncertainty about whether campus would be accessible and safe at that time. The logistical challenges of holding the event in September during Homecoming and Family Weekend were deemed too great.

For the virtual commencement, the school plans to include some aspects of a traditional ceremony, especially for those who won't be able to attend in October.

“The idea is that whatever we do in May would be kind of like a video package, and would be complementary to the physical celebration that would occur in October,” she said.

“We're thinking that this may involve the names on a screen, or on a ticker. They won't be read aloud because we just think it would be awkward and weird. We don't want to make this like a fake commencement. We want for whatever we do in May, a virtual celebration for the class that could involve some photos and videos of students, some wisdom or speeches that can come from student leaders, like the typical people who would give speeches at commencement,” shared Goldsmith.

Novelist Min Jin Lee, who was scheduled to address the class of 2020 during the 147th commencement ceremony, will take part in the virtual package, through video from her home.

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Aspects still under discussion include the possibility of having faculty winners of the teaching and mentoring awards give well-wishes to the seniors.

The virtual ceremony would be shorter than a typical commencement, given that students won't be able to walk on stage.

As of now, the date set for the physical celebration is the Sunday of Fall Break. This is not definite, however.

As for the survey, small groups devised by Goldsmith and Dean Todd McKinney, consisting of students they know personally, developed questions soliciting feedback from the senior class. These included questions about interest in a virtual celebration and what students might want from it, and asked students to rank their interest in features such as president's remarks, student speakers, caps/tassels/cords and more. Lastly, it asked students to express any other ideas, concerns or questions.

For many seniors, commencement is a big deal. It's important to receive recognition for the hard work that goes into completing a higher education.

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Film festival adapts to online world

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Madison Rodak

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Ever since Ursinus made the announcement on Mar. 17 that all classes would go online for the remainder of the semester, several clubs and activities across campus have also made the decision to switch to a virtual format. “The International Film Festival: Films from Latin America and Spain” is one of them.

Dr. Chisu Teresa Ko, Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Latin American Studies Coordinator at Ursinus, explains, “Pragda, the film distributor was helpful and efficient in facilitating this move to an

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online festival. I'm thankful that the Spanish faculty involved will continue to present the films that they picked."

While the new online format of the film festival loses the sense of community it once had, having to forgo face-to-face discussions of the films, the festival still offers the opportunity for students to connect digitally. "We will certainly miss the experience of watching the film in a big screen as well as the communal feeling when you are gathered together," Dr. Ko says. "The in-person discussions after the screening were also a great way to think through the films and listen to other people's observations and reactions. But given the circumstances, we are glad and grateful to be able to offer the films online."

Dr. Ko also hopes that the new virtual format will reach more students and staff members. "Having the films online, in a way, makes them accessible to a greater audience. We hope that viewing these films will give everyone a little break from the current situation. I also hope that these films will be windows to the diverse experiences and expressions in Latin America and Spain."

As mentioned, students that are interested in participating in the film festival can still give their reflections on the films and read others' thoughts. "In place of the post-screening discussions, we have opened an online discussion board on Canvas," Dr. Ko explains. "Please share your thoughts and reactions!" The next film for the film festival is "Asier and I." It will go live on Apr. 1.

Despite the sudden and difficult adjustment to online classes and closure of campus, it is nice to see some clubs and activities are still trying to bring the campus together. On Mar. 28, the Association for Computing Machinery held their Hackathon online, speaking with participants through Discord. Also, though still unannounced, Dr. John Volkmer hopes to arrange for a virtual launch of "The Lantern," the college's literary magazine.

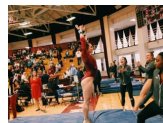


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“The Circle Brazil” and demystifying the foreign

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There has been a growing uptick in xenophobia since the spread of the Coronavirus, as many of you have already experienced. This in turn has led to violence and hate crimes amongst those perceived as foreign, most notably Asian peoples. This problem is not new, but the current presidency and rhetoric used to alienate other countries also exacerbates the fear that many Americans have of the unknown. What can be done that hasn't been done already? How do we curb the hate?

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Enter a dumb reality TV show where people sit in their rooms and sext catfishes. Yes, really.

Netflix's "The Circle," which had its start in the UK and has since moved onto the US, Brazil, and soon France, has increased rapidly in popularity as its premise becomes increasingly ironic. This growing franchise is, in a way, about friendship; the goal of the game "The Circle" is to make friends and influence people, to win 100,000 big ones. You can't see or interact with any other people in the building — you're literally spending your days in social isolation.

The United States version of the show has achieved rapid success, but its Brazilian counterpart may be even more popular. Many commentators have noted that the strategies from the Brazilian players were better, and thus was the more entertaining season. But that's not what I want to focus on today. I want to look at the potential impact shows like "The Circle Brazil" have when viewed from an American lens.

When many Americans think of non-American cinema, it is likely that they either think of British television and films, Oscar-bait foreign language films few people watch, or the Bollywood movement. It is difficult to bridge that divide when a nation as us-centric as the US doesn't even teach their children to be multilingual.

Enter trash TV. I kid, but reality TV is well known for having more universal appeal than more critically acclaimed works that come out every January. When you want to reach a wider audience, the lowest common denominator is usually a good place to start. Shows like "The Circle Brazil" force Americans who are watching to see participants not as alien entities but as players in an equal opportunity game. In so doing, they shine a light on the more relatable aspects of the culture (such as the schism mentioned in the show between a largely poor North and a far wealthier South). See, other countries can have stigmas too!

It's frustrating that it takes shows like this to have some Americans even see Brazilians as human, but unfortunately it's true. Representation is the number one means of normalizing and demystifying things Americans aren't used to. We've seen this demystification occur before; a big example would be Ellen Degeneres, whose coming out in the 90s initially sparked outrage before her talk show became celebrated nationwide. And when that bubble is popped, just like it was then, Americans will look back decades from now and wonder what took us so dang long.

And hey, at the end of "The Circle" there's a big cash prize. What could be more American than that?

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DiCicco, Photo Courtesy of Sam Aguirre

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It's 10:55am, the Thursday of Spring Break. Hailey DiCicco is getting ready for gymnastics practice scheduled for 11:30AM when her coach sends out an urgent message: "Let's meet at 11:00 team. Get there when you can."

COVID-19 was becoming a more prominent part of our lives, but DiCicco hadn't yet processed what was going on. "I was too flustered," she explains. "I grabbed my stuff for practice and walked over to the gym. When I walked through the doors into FLB I felt my stomach drop."

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DiCicco has been an essential part of the Ursinus College Gymnastics team since 2017. She was a top recruit with considerable expectations coming into freshman year. “I had a lot of big goals for myself and I had a lot of expectations,” she proclaims. “College [gymnastics] had always been the end goal for me, it was my biggest motivation for getting out of high school and the club gymnastics space.”

However, DiCicco had no clue what her freshman year actually had in store for her. “It was a rough start for me to begin with because I really overestimated how easy it would be for me to adjust to new equipment and new coaches,” said a disappointed DiCicco. She remembers every detail of what would come next.

“Two days before Halloween, on a Friday practice, I was doing flight series on the beam and was finally feeling confident in it. I did a few too many and was more tired than I realized but I decided to try one more before I called it a day,” explains DiCicco. “That was my last flight series, or any gymnastics skill, for the next four months. I crashed pretty bad on my wrist... This [season ending] injury threw a wrench in every part of my freshman year.”

Fast forward to sophomore year, and DiCicco was ready for redemption. Still, DiCicco’s season fell short of her expectations. “I was not able to find my groove and compete in a way that would make myself and my team proud. I always struggled with having confidence in my gymnastics...I failed more times than I succeeded and was never able to walk away from a meet feeling like I did what I could,” she recalls. However, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Come junior year DiCicco was able to finally be proud of her hard work.

DiCicco attributes a lot of her success this year to head coach Kim Valenti. During an incredibly discouraging practice, Valenti pulled DiCicco aside to discuss what was going through her mind. “I did not believe I could be good,” DiCicco explains. “As soon as it mattered and people needed me to do well, I crumbled.” With tears in her eyes, DiCicco says that this talk with her coach helped her change her mentality. “Our next meet I hit my events in a way that made myself proud.”

“I am really getting emotional as I answer these questions,” says DiCicco, with tears starting in her eyes. “There are really no words I can find to describe the feeling of that weight of sixteen years of being disappointed being lifted off my shoulders.”

I asked DiCicco to elaborate on her favorite meet from this season. Her eyes lit up, and without hesitation she dove into detail. “My favorite meet

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without a doubt was our Springfield meet.” The team was coming off a season high the week prior to this meet. “We knew this momentum was going to carry us even higher at this meet, and our collective excitement was very evident...we were there to hit. The meet was electric to be quite honest. I just remember having a smile stuck on my face for every second of that meet. The moment of the meet that will be cemented in my mind forever is my bar routine, specifically the dismount. My feet hit that mat and they did not move, and I realized I just stuck my routine. In the video of my routine I’m pretty sure you can see the shock on my face and then the huge grin as I salute and proceed to jump up and down with joy. [At the end of the meet,] I turned to our manager, and one of my closest friends, Sam Aguirre, and I just started crying.” Crying tears of joy, that is. The team garnered their highest score of the season that day.

There was a fire lit under DiCicco as the team trained over Spring Break for the biggest competition of their season; NCGA East Regionals. This meet would determine who the top three teams in the conference would be, and essentially who would qualify to Nationals, a meet the Bears had missed out on since DiCicco’s time at Ursinus.

With the Coronavirus pandemic already affecting major sporting events such as NBA games and possibly the Summer Olympics, DiCicco had a gut feeling that the message from their head coach calling for an urgent team meeting could not be good news.

Upon walking into the FLB, DiCicco vividly remembers, “I walked past the entire Women’s Lacrosse Team [who were all] crying.” DiCicco silently continued past them into the gym. “I just sat down on the floor next to everyone and felt absolutely nothing. As soon as I saw [Coach] Valenti walk in with her head down, I knew we were done. She sat down in the circle, and as soon as she tried to open her mouth and explain the situation she started crying. When that happened I felt tears running down my face.”

After what felt like hours of Coach Valenti gathering her thoughts and emotions, she told the team with sorrow in her voice that their season would abruptly come to an end due to the virus. The continuation of training and traveling was just not going to be the safest decision for anyone.

“A heartbreaking piece is not getting those final moments and closure with this team, because we will never have this same team again,” DiCicco notes. “The fact that since I have been on the team we haven’t made Nationals, and this year we truly had that potential made it just a

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bit more disappointing...we had gained so much momentum this season and we were headed towards something really special.”

However, DiCicco has never been someone to dwell on the past. She is already shifting her mindset to next season and how the team can use this frustration and lack of closure to succeed next year. “I am so lucky I get to come back next year...I already feel so motivated for next season. There is so much that we all wanted to do with the rest of our season, and I want to get back out there so badly.”

For DiCicco specifically, she knows she has some unfinished business to take care of. “I know that this summer [during training] I will have a few specific goals in mind and there are a couple of things left that I really want to compete before I am done for good...My class has never made Nationals, in fact the senior class this year were freshmen the last time UCG made Nationals. I think we all know what we plan to work towards and getting done next season, I’ll just leave it at that.”

DiCicco will be a key player to watch next year in Ursinus College Gymnastics’ redemption year. Nothing motivates a team more than having unfinished business to take care of.

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