

Date: 04/22/21

Subject: Effects of COVID-19

Interviewee: Kayla Smith

Interviewer: Benjamin Drake

Place of Interview: Zoom

Ben Drake: This is Ben Drake with Kayla Smith. It is 4:11 PM on Thursday, April 22nd. Are you ready?

Kayla Smith: Yes

Ben Drake: Awesome. So, in your own words, what are your roles on campus and within the community?

Kayla Smith: As far as being on campus, I'm just a student. I'll do my daily activities, go to class, go back home. I live in an off-campus apartment, so I also have a dog, I'll take care of my dog. We'll go on walks around campus and stuff, but in the community, I just kind of work at a daycare center. Other than that, I don't really do a whole lot.

Ben Drake: Great. Thank you. So, focusing on the daycare aspect of your role what about that has changed because of the pandemic?

Kayla Smith: Okay. So, we have definitely limited how many students we can have, like within the building. We have a mandatory for like, 'Hey, their parents cannot find another resource or someone else to watch their kid' because our numbers were limited too as they already were, but they got limited even more. Even our students are wearing masks. We have to wear a mask. We are also very like very

onto our students about, 'Hey, we have to wash your hands more.' And like, we say it more. We always tell them in the first place, like, 'Hey, you have to wash your hands,' but we are definitely more charismatic about it. We have changed our hours so that the workers can stay late, and we'll do a lot of deep cleaning weekly instead of like just every other week. And we like keep up our daily cleaning schedule, but we like do a deep cleaning like every week now.

Ben Drake: I'm muted. That was embarrassing. Do you have the numbers of like what they were reduced to, like, what was your capacity and then what was it reduced to?

Kayla Smith: Okay, so for preschool, it's like six to eight kids per adult. And we do have usually around two adults per teacher in the classroom, and it did get changed down to about square footage. And I don't have those numbers of my daycare. So, we have about, I've had about 10 to 12 kids since COVID in my classroom at a time. And we'll like go outside a lot. Like we'll walk to the park, which is right on the next block over just so that they are spaced out more. Because we do have to try and remind the children to socially distance and do every other chair during snack time.

Ben Drake: Right. So, obviously kids aren't perfect. And I was just wondering how the kids were kind of like reacting to the changes how well did they go along with the social distancing, the mask wearing, stuff like that.

Kayla Smith: So, it's definitely not easy, especially for preschoolers. We do talk with their parents and they're very helpful and they'll talk to their kids at home and they're

like, 'we just have to do it' because they understand that there's a pandemic. They might not understand everything about it, but kids are very smart. So, they were like, understanding, 'Hey, people are getting sick, I'm doing this for other people. I'm doing it for me.' And some of their, I know one of my children, their mom has a lot of health things, so that kid's parent is like very vocal. When she comes in and she's talking to us and she's like, 'Hey, just a reminder, make sure you're, and we just let her know, 'Hey, we are doing this. The kids are working. They do wear their masks.' Sometimes we'll like give them that grace period of during nap time, they could take it off and during snack time. But other than that, they do need to keep it on, and we'll say 'Oh, we're getting too excited while we're playing and we can't take, keep our mask on, then we'll do something like more calming, like reading a book together so that we remember it's okay to have fun and be excited, but we do have to remember to keep others safe.'

Ben Drake: Right. Wonderful. So, campus wise, what do you think has been impacted the most because of the pandemic?

Kayla Smith: I definitely feel like it is events going on. Because I feel like Eastern still trying their best to hold events. Because mental health is such a big thing, especially for college students that they're trying to hold things, but then it there's so many limits that it's kind of like hard for people to plan out for like them to go with their friends or they can't go in more than six, you can't go in a group of six. So that's definitely been a thing where it's kind of like there's seven of you and you can't, they won't split you up into two, a group of four and three. So, it's just kind of

maintaining events, going to football games. During the regular hours, the basketball games, it's more you have to like reserve ahead of time and that's just a little difficult for some people and their schedule

Ben Drake: Thank you. So, for you personally what's been the biggest change for during the pandemic?

Kayla Smith: Definitely being around my friends, a lot of my friends. I know we've all cut back on that and since we've gone to online classes a couple of my friends have been staying home and I've known it's been draining, not seeing some of my friends cause that's like the biggest part that I look forward to when I'm on campus, is doing homework with friends and just going out and just walking and just visiting. But since they're like at home doing other things, it's hard to kind of keep connections going.

Ben Drake: My brain is blank right now. So, the university over the course of pandemic has put in many policies to kind of like mitigate the spread, you know helped us stop the spread of the pandemic. I was wanting to get your thoughts on those. Examples would be the mask mandate. You mentioned canceling events now groups of six, you know, limiting capacity, stuff like that. How do you feel about them, and do you think that they keep you safe?

Kayla Smith: I feel like they're doing the best they can, but to some extent it's hard to enforce certain things that are happening off campus with campus students, because in reality you still have parks that are open and other inquiries that people might go

to. And some rules just aren't in place as hard as they are on campus. I do know that if you take your mask off, professors are very like, 'Hey don't forget to wear your mask' if you like, forgot it. Hey, like this is for other people it's not just for us.' So, I feel like it's just hard for everyone to like do a full 360 and it's hard to kind of mandate what's not in their control.

Ben Drake: Yeah, totally. So, follow up. Do you think that the university could be doing more? Do you think they're doing like too much? Or do you think that they're doing like, just like what they should be doing?

Kayla Smith: I feel like for what they can do, they're doing just enough. Cause it's always, you could always have that you could be doing more, but it's hard to say unless you really have the idea, and you can explain how to put it into place.

Ben Drake: Yeah. so, what do you think the university has been, sorry, what do you think that the biggest challenge for the university community has been over the course of the pandemic?

Kayla Smith: I definitely think that they have had hard times keeping things like in play because people are starting to get rowdy and they're trying to like keep things as normal as possible while still like implementing what they are trying to keep in play. So that's been the hardest thing is just keeping everything in control.

Ben Drake: Okay. Thank you. Moving on to more like you-specific questions. So how, how were you over the course of the pandemic? What do you think was like what was going through your mind? Kind of just give me a play by play.

Kayla Smith: So, the pandemic actually hit me pretty hard because of a lot of personal things going on at the time. I felt like I was like stuck in my apartment, so I didn't do a whole lot of much. I lost my first--I used to work at another daycare and I lost my job there just because they closed the daycare because we weren't considered a mandatory. And it was just very hard. I struggled with my mental health for a little bit. I definitely just now started getting better when I started working at this new daycare, having that to fall back on and like, I'm just loving it there. So that keeps--that's helped me out. But I feel like I've been stuck in my apartment so much since the pandemic has opened and I'm not seeing as much family as I would normally be seen because they're also and some of them are in nursing homes. Some of them are very sick, like have a lot of things going on. So, it's just hard to keep them safe. If I'm trying, if I'm working with kids that go home and see their parents, I don't ever know what they're. So, it's just hard to see my family and keep up with like my good graces.

Ben Drake: So, you mentioned before we started recording that you turned 21 in June. So happy late birthday, by the way. So obviously 21 is a huge milestone for a person. And you celebrated during a pandemic. So how was that?

Kayla Smith: So, it was just kind of me and one of my close friends, we just kind of chilled out my apartment. We didn't even do anything for my 21st thing. We had a movie date. Like it was very boring, but I was very content with it just because, I don't know, it's just having someone there with me was like, what made my birthday special for me.

Ben Drake: Yeah. I love that. So, we're going to move into spring of 2020. So obviously when, when that was, when the pandemic first hit so I kind of want to know what went through your mind when Eastern announced that it was going to be wholly online for the rest of the semester? Well, actually let me back up. What went through your mind when it was first, when the, when the virus was first reported in the U.S. And it was like, like Eastern hadn't announced that it was closing yet, but like the virus was like in Illinois?

Kayla Smith: Okay. So, I don't know. I didn't really have an opinion because I was like, I don't know anything. And I'm one of those people that I guess you can say if I don't have like all the facts that I like, I don't really like to throw my opinion out there and I'm very that much way with everything. I try not to make my opinion too distinct because I don't want the argument. I don't want to like fight someone, especially if I don't have like all the facts, all the knowledge, because I'm just not a very argumentative person. I don't want to always have them defend what I'm saying. So, I was just kind of like, 'Oh, this will be something new.' And I didn't know it was going to be this big and like get this bad. But I knew it was definitely going to be something like it's going to be a concern. Especially considering EIU's going all online, I was just like, 'Oh, this will be interesting. How is this going to happen?' Cause I've never had an online class before that. So, it was just kind of like, whoa, everything's happening at once.

Ben Drake: Right, so how well were you able to finish the spring semester? What did you struggle with the most? What was easiest?

Kayla Smith: I was in an art class where it was teaching it to students and it's very hands on and not having a professor there to, well, I had a grad student, but not having her there to kind of like show us what we're doing or kind of like being able to explain it. It turned to more sketches and you're going to draw this and turn it in. So, it was like a complete switch of what the class was. And from that class, when I first started to, when it went online, I felt like it was just more like busy work drawings kind of thing. And then I was in another class that had group work and it was something you have to meet for, and you have to plan it out because it was an Economics class. So that was very hard, meeting online because it was hard to like to communicate with everyone, your ideas. Cause we would get cut off with time limits. We didn't have unlimited and we and then it was like shorter than our class period. So, there's just a lot of difficulties brought with the online class. And it was a new thing for everyone I feel like. So, we were all just kind of like, 'Oh, what do I do?' Like, and we were all just pretty stressed out.

Ben Drake: You feel like you've finished that semester well, or do you finished it or were your thoughts more like I did the best I could kind of thing?

Kayla Smith: So, my grades show that I did really good. That's good. But my mental, like state was, 'I'm glad this is over with because that was rough.'

Ben Drake: Yeah, totally. So how did you, how did you feel about the resources that the university provided? And did you take advantage of any of them more specifically, like an example would be the credit/no credit option?

Kayla Smith: So, I was always told that like, even before we hit the pandemic, that if you could have the option for certain classes and you could still get credit or no credit, but sometimes for certain classes it's going to like affect you. And like, depending on what job you want, if they want that class to be like a B, and you have as just credit, like it can affect you. So, I was just a little misinformed, I feel like on that situation. So, I did not opt into using it when I feel like it could have benefited me a little bit.

Ben Drake: Do you feel like the university handled the, the beginnings of the pandemic well, do you think that they handled like the switch well, or as like, as best as they could?

Kayla Smith: Yes. The only thing that I did not agree with that the university did was the wellness days. I feel like that's the only thing they could've really done differently.

Ben Drake: Yeah. Hold on to that thought because I have a question coming up about that. So now we're going to switch into academics. So, in, what do you think academics wise has been the biggest change for you in your classes?

Kayla Smith: So, a lot of it is I'm studying early childhood. So, a lot of the classes are like group work, or you need that extra assistance with your teacher just to kind of make sure you're getting the idea of it and sometimes zoom meetings, just aren't getting there. So, it's just kind of like hard to have, like all access, like you need.

Ben Drake: So, so since you're an education major, I was wondering if the curriculum has changed at all. For instance, like, has it included aspects related to the pandemic? What's changed within the curriculum itself?

Kayla Smith: Yes, I've definitely had- I'm in an English class this semester actually. And we wrote the very first paper we wrote was on the pandemic. What we know about it, how it's affected us what we're doing differently. I also had geography class last semester and we brought in aspects of COVID and how it's like changing things. And then one thing that I noticed was that a national forest park, like more animals were out and about, and was that because less people are traveling it because they couldn't go in it? So, I did bring that up with my professor. That was one of the key notes I brought up, but that was definitely brought into a couple of my classes.

Ben Drake: Yeah. Yeah, totally. So, comparing fall 2020 with spring 2020, they both went online at the, like near the end of the semester. Fall, our spring was in March fall was in November. Do you think comparing the two, do you think that the university handled spring better or fall better?

Kayla Smith: Oh, I think maybe spring semester, a little bit. Just because they did have wait, let me just change that fall better because they had more experience. So, they had more time to like prep and prepare for it.

Ben Drake: How did you feel about the change in the no credit/credit option? Specifically, was in spring they did it after you got your grade, your final grade and then in fall,

they did it before you got your final grade. Did you- what were your thoughts on that?

Kayla Smith: So, I feel like they should have kept it for after your final grade, because at like, it is a whole new environment everyone's still like under different stressors so that it would have just been a unique and good option to have.

Ben Drake: So, you mentioned that you're an off-campus student, correct?

Kayla Smith: Correct.

Ben Drake: Um so how different has this year been then? Other years because, as, with being an off-campus student?

Kayla Smith: I definitely, because I live like right across from the castle, so I do see that there's less people traveling outside. There's less people outside having picnics. There's just like, not as much of an outside community as there normally is. Because that's kind of how, like I met a lot of my friends is through like being outside and just walking to campus, but now there's less people traveling, so it's kind of hard to meet new people.

Ben Drake: Thank you. So do you think that the pandemic has affected your sorry, not do. How do you think that the pandemic has affected your college life because of you being an off-campus student?

Kayla Smith: Especially given me like more, kept me more secluded from everyone, I feel like, but for me financially, that was like the decision I had to go with because of

payment plans and how I was able to get through the semester with all like my personal life and with school, it just kind of worked out. That's how it had to be for me. I feel like.

Ben Drake: I'm muted again. Uh so how do you think that COVID-19 has changed the quote unquote 'college experience?' what do you think it- specifically, I would like you to describe what it was before the pandemic and then what it is now.

Kayla Smith: So, one thing I have an opinion on, but not a good one is the sorority rush week. Because before the pandemic, there was all kinds of events leading up. They had all kinds of meet and greets. They were very active in the community and within the school, they were everywhere. They were like, we want to meet you. And I feel like after the pandemic, it's kind of a zoom call. So, you can't really get to know someone through a zoom call because like right now you're seeing from my neck and up. So, you're not seeing like, this is how I am, like how I could be like shaking right now, talking to you. You don't know that cause I'm on zoom. And that's kind of what that is with the recruitment is you can only see so much of someone through a video camera. So, I feel like they didn't get the full experience that the girls that rushed before the pandemic.

Ben Drake: Thank you. Are you part of a sorority?

Kayla Smith: I am not, but that was just the people that I've always relied on.

Ben Drake: Okay. Okay. So now we're going to, so now we're going to move into like I can't even think the word National Guard. Oh my gosh. I don't know why I forgot that.

So now we're going to move into like that, if there's anything within these that you can't talk about, I understand. Just let me know and we'll move on to the next question. Okay. so, in your own words, can you describe what you do for the National Guard?

Kayla Smith: So that I can answer. I did get activated, I am local in the state, but I am living out of a hotel room. So, this is my lovely home for the next couple months. I am assisting Cook County with their vaccines, so we give out from just my little humble area and my unit anywhere from 300 to 500 shots day. I know some of my friends are in my unit that are also activated they're in different locations in the same area they are working, what's called a mega site and they are doing anywhere from 800 to 3000 vaccines a day. So, we are doing like the check-in, the temperatures, all the pre-screening questions, to check out like the rescheduling setting up their appointment, like not setting up all their appointments, but checking them in, registering them. Like we are like the backbone of everything going in through it besides, hey, producing the vaccine and giving the vaccine. But the medics that I'm with, they are able to assist with the vaccines. Because that's what they're trained to do.

Ben Drake: So, when were you activated? Like what do you, do you have the date? Do you remember?

Kayla Smith: So, I got a call from my readiness NCO on May, no, not May, March. It was a couple of days before I left. It was like March 2nd and I left March 3rd. I was in the middle of the class, like walking to class, get the call and they're like pack up

your things. You're going to be leaving two days and you're going to be going to, where I'm at I can't say my location, but you're going to be going over here to this county. Well, Cook County and you're going to be helping. So, get ready.

Because that's what you're about to be doing. And it was like no preparation. I had two days to prepare and then I was just gone.

Ben Drake: So, what was like going through your mind when you like got that call, you know, you were on your way to class. Well, what was he like your first thought? What was your subsequent thoughts after?

Kayla Smith: So, I am a very stressed-out person. Of course, I've been, I knew there was a chance that it could happen. So, I've been talking to all my professors. I've emailed them since like the day one that I've heard. There's a chance of it. I'm walking in that class. I just walked straight up to the professor. I was like, 'Hey, so it's happening. I'm not going to be here. I might leave class early today. Depends on how like, well I'm able to focus,' that whole class. I sat through it just because I didn't want to be rude and disrespectful, but there was no way I was able to focus. I was sitting there. I was like nervous, like trying to hold back tears because I didn't- because I'm a very big family and friend person. And like I said, I'm just kind of like, oh, I don't even know who's leaving with me what my situation is going to be. It's my first activation. So, I was a little scared of like the big change and how that's going to work with me doing schoolwork. And how I'm going to like go, just get, not ripped from my home but, just like leaving my home for months. And I also have a dog, so like I was immediately like trying to make sure

she's good for the next couple of months. And it was just kind of like, boom, here's what's happening. You got to go with it.

Ben Drake: So how have you been, you know, obviously you like, you like left very, very fast, you very short notice, very fast, you know, relocation. Did that affect you at all? Mentally, physically. And how are you like now mentally, physically?

Kayla Smith: My mental health has definitely struggled a little bit since I've been up here. I am, but I have worked on it a little bit. I've can't say it's been easy cause it's definitely not like up here. So, my professors, most of my professors are very understanding. They're working with me, we're in communication. So, and they do get what I'm going through, but I feel, but at the end of the day, they're still my professor and they still have to give me like the same work that they're making everyone else do. But I feel like for some of my classes, it's kind of like I get off at anywhere from like six to seven at night. And I it's like about a 40, 50-minute drive home depending on traffic. And then I come home, and I have to watch like an hour-long lecture, video, send notes. And I feel like I do have a little bit more work than the average student has since I've been up here. So, I've just been very busy and I'm like just exhausted all the time. And today was like a lucky day for me. Cause I had, I got the day off because we were, we had short lists of patients today. So, I was like, 'Perfect. It'll work. And I won't make him have to interview me at like nine o'clock at night.'

Ben Drake: So, so you by, so when, you know, the university has like personal wellness days and like, you know, all that, you don't actually get, you know, a personal wellness day because most likely you're still working. Right?

Kayla Smith: Yeah. So, I'm like, yeah, I'm still doing homework while I'm up here. I'm still doing my job while I'm up here. And then at the end of the day, I'm still working on other assignments. That I have, I feel like that will one day through like one, every two to three weeks wasn't enough. And like, because I didn't get that mental break of, 'Oh, I don't have to focus on class.' Like I was still focused. I was still busy and then I'd come home and still be working on homework. The only thing I wouldn't have to do is watch another lecture video from that day and type up my notes on it, which was really nice. That was like the only little break I got, I feel like from the wellness days, but I feel like having a full week would have been great because then I could have just focused on work, take a minute to breathe and be like, 'Okay, it's going to be okay. But I feel like I never really got that.'

Ben Drake: So, so what's your schedule like with the national guard? Do you like work every single day of the week? Do you get days off? Like can you go into your schedule?

Kayla Smith: Yeah, so I work every day, except for Sunday, from time to time, we do get a day off. It's very, very scarce. Like today was a very lucky day. Of course, we all have real life problems going on. So, like some people up here that I'm with have had family deaths and stuff that they're dealing with. So, then they'll have to take a leave of absence and we're working harder because there's we're shorthand. So, we're doing more work. Yeah.

Ben Drake: Yeah. Thank you. So, you've kind of touched on your job conflicting with your classes a little bit, but I was wondering if there was any part, any other parts that conflicted with your academics that you didn't get to touch on? I kind of just want to like see if you had any more on that.

Kayla Smith: Not really. Cause I'm kind of used to the all-online class for me because of the pandemic. So that did prepare me for this a little bit. It's just a little different for me. That's some of my classmates.

Ben Drake: Right. wonderful. We have few more questions. So, something that a lot of students have been talking about is burnout from school. I was wondering if you have suffered from burnout.

Kayla Smith: So last week I was there's another girl up here and she's in school as well. And I was just telling her like I was just counting down the days because it started, I'm starting to work on final projects now so that I can kind of get a break by next week and I'm really hoping to be done and ahead of like my classes by then. So, we're just drained and we're like, 'Ugh.' I'm hoping and I'm just praying that I did good, but it's probably not my best work. I'm just hoping that it's good enough to where I'm getting by for that grade. Like I just don't want it to like be overall. It's been showing a little bit, I think.

Ben Drake: Do you think that the university should again provide the credit no credit option?

Kayla Smith: Yes. I feel like that should be a continued thing.

Ben Drake: Yeah. so, we've touched on personal wellness days a little bit. So now I would like to get your, your full opinion on the personal wellness days how you felt about them, what they should have done instead. If they should have done anything else instead stuff like that, there's that whole shebang.

Kayla Smith: So, I really think they should have just stuck with the original spring break because a lot of things were still admitted. Even Florida was starting to have a curfew. So even if people did travel, they wouldn't be out, there are mask mandates in place. And I feel like if people did travel, they could, they would make, they should have them. Like they would have to quarantine for two weeks. So, they're not around anyone anyway. So, there are procedures put into place that could have like prevented us from having to do like one day every so often because who's to say those students aren't going out and like doing things on the days off around a lot of other people where they're not taking the precautions that Eastern has put into place.

Ben Drake: Totally. well Kayla has all that I have, I do want to give you a, a brief time if you need it to put anything else on the record that you want to be on the record for your interview. This could be related to anything with the pandemic, anything with the university and the pandemic, pretty much whatever you want within reason. So, I'm going to give you that time and you just, if you don't have anything, you just tell me now. But yeah, thank you.

Kayla Smith: Yeah, I don't have anything. Thank you.