



## Student Voices

# Making Friends in College During a Pandemic.



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**Despite the challenge of socializing in college during a public health crisis, students can make friends through social media, online classes, and campus jobs.**

Having transferred to a new college during the COVID-19 pandemic, my experiences with socializing and finding my place on campus have been far from ordinary — but if there's anything I've learned, it's that I'm not alone.

I moved to Moscow, Idaho, in September to attend the University of Idaho for my junior year. I came here not knowing anyone, and it certainly hasn't been easy to meet people. Although the stay-at-home mandate had been lifted when I arrived, all social events and nightlife remained shut down.

Because I was late signing up for housing, I got stuck leasing a room in a five-bedroom apartment. But little did I know how much having that built-in social setting would help me.

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None of us knew each other before moving in together, but we all get along well. My roommates and I regularly hold movie nights in which we all watch movies, play board games, and just hang out. It's a great way to feel normal again and to take a break from the insanity of the world, if only for a little while.

Indeed, my roommates have become a vital part of my day — seeing and interacting with them reminds me that I'm not alone, and I think they feel the same.

Still, settling into a new area during a pandemic has been challenging. There are few places to meet with friends and barely any activities or local events. Despite the uncertainty this past year has brought, I've been able to forge connections and pursue unique opportunities that would have otherwise not existed.

## Connecting With Peers Through Synchronous Classes

One day last semester in my Western literature class, one of my classmates messaged me. She started up a conversation, and we soon realized that we lived in the same apartment building. Like me, she was a transfer student who didn't know anyone in the area.

We quickly became study buddies, holding the occasional wine-and-movie night when we needed a break from homework. It was comforting to know other students were experiencing the same struggles as me.

I attend multiple [synchronous Zoom classes](#), meaning I meet with my teachers and peers for discussions, lectures, and [presentations](#) at the same time every week. I prefer this method of online learning to asynchronous classes because it makes me feel a little closer to being in a classroom again. I also believe I learn better this way.

Connecting with my peers over synchronous [Zoom classes](#) has helped recreate the in-person college experience, and so far I've found it much more engaging than other forms of online learning.

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## Using Social Media to Combat Depression and Isolation

According to the [National Health Council](#), depression and anxiety rates in the U.S. have skyrocketed since the pandemic began. Suicide rates and suicide attempts have also increased. The lockdown has no doubt [negatively impacted people's mental health](#) and poses serious risks.

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Fortunately, there are [many resources available online](#) from both schools and medical professionals to assist students experiencing mental health issues and increased feelings of isolation.

A friend of mine from high school recommended using Instagram, for example, as a way to talk to people. She said she's made friends she regularly stays in touch with through the app. College students can also use social apps like [Bumble BFF](#) to get to know others in their area. I myself have been able to connect with some of my peers through this app.

While social media offers a convenient way to connect with others during the pandemic, it's important to remember that too much time spent on social media has been found to exacerbate and lead to depression. According to a study funded by the [National Institutes of Health](#), those who use social media more frequently are 2.7 times more likely to be depressed.

## Owning a Pet Offers More Than Just Health Benefits

[Studies show](#) that owning a pet can reduce stress, boost serotonin levels, and even lower blood pressure. Since the start of the pandemic, the total [number of pet adoptions has risen dramatically](#). Many people are now working from home and able to give a pet the attention they need when first settling into a new environment.

I've always had a pet, so moving to an unfamiliar area and having to deal with nearly total social isolation was a bitter pill to swallow.

I adopted a dog in October, and having him has been wonderful. He is a great companion and gives me motivation to head outside every day. Even if I go out for only 30 minutes, breathing in fresh air and taking in the nature around me has had a huge positive effect on my mental health.

Owning a dog has also turned into a fantastic way to socialize, even if just from afar, as the dog community is so friendly. Just a couple of weeks ago, I took my dog for one of his daily walks, and on our way back home we ran into a fellow student and her dog. I soon discovered that she lived in the same apartment complex as me and had just transferred to U of I.

Shortly after we began hanging out and letting our dogs play together. Now, we've become friends and will often meet up to do homework, watch Netflix, or bake cookies.

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## Taking Advantage of Unique Professional Opportunities

Although online socializing isn't my forte, the mass transition to virtual events and activities has introduced new opportunities for forging academic and professional connections.

For instance, experienced professionals in a variety of fields often host Zoom lectures, open to all who wish to join. U of I regularly sends emails about a new featured guest speaker, often someone who otherwise wouldn't have had the time to speak at my school or the ability to travel to my campus. Now that nearly everything is virtual, people from all over the U.S. and world can share their knowledge and experiences with students willing to listen.

**With fewer students on campus, more jobs have become available to those looking to gain professional experience while in college.**





In addition to welcoming enlightening guest lecturers, my school has extended many job and internship opportunities to students during the pandemic. With fewer students on campus, more jobs have become available to those looking to gain professional experience while in college.

After moving to Idaho, I secured a writing internship and became a staff member of the campus magazine. I was able to work with peers, and I still keep in touch with the students I met through my internship. Currently, I work as a photographer and journalist for The Argonaut, U of I's campus newspaper. Though all of our meetings take place online, I've been able to get to know some incredible people and enjoy covering stories with them.

My college experience has been far from normal, but it's created new opportunities that I never expected to get and has allowed me to bond with peers in ways I never thought possible.

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