Missing your last semester?

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First, I am so sorry that you are missing out on your last semester before you graduate. I’m guessing you had some hopes and a plan for this semester and are frustrated and disappointed that this COVID-19 related shut down has spoiled those.

Second, I hope you are taking care of yourself and others and doing what you can to minimize the spread of the virus. Your health, and the health of everyone around you, is important.

Third, let’s talk about ambiguous loss and grieving over the loss of this semester. Ambiguous loss (ambiguousloss.com) is the kind of loss or grief that comes with living with uncertainty.

We are all living with uncertainty at this time and the situation keeps changing. Spring Break was extended by a week, and then two; university buildings were open, now they are not; sports seasons have been cancelled, and now the commencement ceremony is too. These changes are directed towards making us all physically safe; however, you may be feeling increased anxiety, frustration, sadness, and unease. You might be asking yourself: How long will the COVID-19 virus impact me and everyone I know? How long do I need to stay inside? When will life return to normal? What will life after college look like?

These are all questions and circumstances that do not have concrete, real answers at this time. This ambiguity is uncomfortable – probably even miserable. And there is no direct way to get rid of that discomfort. So what can you do?

Here are some tips for being well while you are experiencing an ambiguous loss:

• Pay attention to your wellness needs
  o **Eat** – not too much, not too little.
  o **Sleep** – not too much, not too little.
  o **Move** – not too much, not too little.
  o These are foundational to dealing with any kind of stress. We become more susceptible to stress, anxiety, and depression when we are not getting enough sleep, nutrition or movement. So make a plan and stick to it to get these basic things that you need.

• Avoid drugs and alcohol
  o Mood altering substances lead to more stress, more chaos, and more anxiety and depression. Using drugs and/or alcohol as a way to cope is harmful to your wellness.

• Seek out help
  o Talk to your counselor, adviser, spiritual support person, doctor, and other support people.
  o Remember that even though you are not on campus in Mankato, all campus services remain available to you remotely!
  o Don’t wait to get help – the sooner, the better for your wellness.

• Keep a journal
• Writing out what you are thinking and feeling can be a helpful way to process uncomfortable thoughts and feelings and move through them.
• Often, our first response to feeling grief (and all the icky feelings that come with it) is to push it away and pretend it is not there. That does not work very well or for very long.
• If you write down what’s happening internally (pen to paper – not fingers to keyboard), this helps us process those thoughts and feelings and leave them behind or view them in a different and healthier way.

• Stay connected
  • When we are feeling bad, one of the first responses is to isolate. Don’t do it!
    - Yes, engage in healthy social distancing and self-isolation practices. But say no to not talking to people and zoning out with Netflix or videogames all day, everyday.
  • Reach out to your friends who are also experiencing this loss. There is an entire class of fellow soon-to-be graduates who are saddened and frustrated. Talk with them about this disappointment, but also talk about fun things, future plans, and good times.

• Staying balanced is really the key to getting through this stressful time. I hope you connect with friends, celebrate your successes, and complete your education by learning all that you need to learn.

When in doubt, remember the PLEASE acronym.

Remember to take care of yourself and to take care of others by washing your hands and remembering that your mental health is important! If you need some additional support from the Counseling Center, call (507) 389-1455 (M-F 8:00 am – 4:30 pm) and ask to talk with a counselor about your concerns.