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Serving a Strong Community Remotely

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Author Bio:

Emily Nicks is the 2019-20 editor-in-chief of The Bison newspaper. A senior public relations major, she is passionate about writing, communicating and giving a voice to the voiceless. Emily never imagined the end of her undergraduate college career would end in such an unprecedented way, but she is thankful for her time at Harding and the community she found there.

SERVING A STRONG COMMUNITY REMOTELY

By Emily Nicks

For some people, the news hit like a punch to the gut. Learning that Harding was cancelling on-campus classes and activities until further notice was a shock to many when the email arrived in our inboxes around the country March 12. That wasn't the case for me. The shock would come later — so would the tears, the emotions, the sadness.

For the time being, we got to work.

I had arrived in New York City about seven hours prior to hearing the news. Early that morning, I joined the other Harding representatives attending the annual College Media Association spring conference: April Fatula, Student Publications adviser; senior Emma Aly, Petit Jean yearbook editor-in-chief; and senior Hannah Wise, Shockwave digital team editor-in-chief. Although we were looking forward to a fun weekend in the Big Apple, things changed quickly with Harding's announcement.

You see, the three of us students there in New York — under the direction of our mentor and adviser — had been entrusted to communicate fairly, accurately and quickly with our peers and the Harding community as leaders of student media outlets.

Because of that, we worked tirelessly over the next several hours.. We wrote, asked for clarity, answered questions. We fielded dozens of questions through our social media channels; we even went live on Facebook for almost 30 minutes answering questions in real time. We were in an Uber on the way to lunch when we received the official notice, though I had heard rumors of the possibility a few hours earlier. Even in the car and while hurriedly eating a few slices of pizza, we typed preliminary story drafts using Google Docs on our phones and came up with a social media strategy.

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“This doesn’t feel real,” Wise said quietly as she continued to work. Aly and I knew exactly what she meant.

When our live video ended around 6 that evening, we all felt the dust settle for a moment. Finally, we processed what this meant to us as individuals, as students, as seniors — not just as student journalists. We ate dinner slowly, thoughtfully and quietly joined by our professor, Jack Shock. It was a much different scene than the hectic lunch we had rushed our way through just a few hours previously. We treated ourselves to dessert, made a brief stop to glance at Times Square and returned to the hotel. We were leaving in the morning in the wake of everything that had happened and a conference on the verge of being shut down.

The entire day was a storm — a calm beginning interrupted by waves tossing us back and forth, just to be followed by a sudden stillness. Through it all, we pressed on. Though it had been tempting to just shut down and individually process the unprecedented decision made that Thursday afternoon, we knew we had to serve a different purpose for the benefit of our peers and community, at least for the time being.

A key part to any successful, tight community is the understanding of roles. Many people play many different roles within these communities that mean so much to us, and each of us is no different. When it is time for you, in whatever role you play, to serve in whatever way you are needed, you must do so. You leave behind a void when you don’t. For those several hours on March 12, we had to fulfill our roles. As The Bison newspaper editor, I have always said that our purposes as a publication are to inform our current community and record history for the community to come. On March 12, and in the weeks to follow, those needs were very present.

Over the last several weeks, I have felt the strength of community greater than ever before, even while uncertain circumstances drive many of us away from one another physically. I felt the strength of community on March 12 in New York City between the few of us there, working together to do what we never would have been able to do alone.

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I felt the strength of community when I received grace and understanding from my peers as they let *The Bison* readjust to the new normal and figure out how we were going to continue our work for the rest of the semester.

And I feel the strength of community now, even in the middle of a continuing crisis. I feel it every time a professor asks how we're doing via Zoom. I feel it when I'm able to meet in the mornings with a prayer group thanks to the Spirit and technology. I feel it when our readers respond to the articles we now publish exclusively online.

The strength that comes from community is a powerful one. Our community looks different now, but the heart remains the same. I'm honored to be part of it.