My name is Aldo Negrete and I am a senior at Humboldt State University. I am set to graduate in the coming weeks at the end of the Fall 2020 semester. I wanted to create this post as a way to tell my story on the ways COVID and the quarantine has altered my school experience. Also as a way to share my time working on the project “Humboldt in the Time of COVID” as an intern. Humboldt in the Time of COVID is a project by HSU special collections, the goal behind this archive is to create a place where everyone in the community can share how the quarantine has affected them personally. Placing all the files in one location for future generations of scholars and students would be able to access to better understand in which ways the community was altered.

I am originally from Salinas Ca, and transferred to HSU back in Fall 2018 as a history major. I chose this school because I wanted a place where you can go explore. Where anyone can go in the middle of the forest one day and to the beach the next. A place that is far different from the place I grew up. I was always more of an indoor kind of guy playing video games, watching sports (mainly football, I am a 49ers fan), or spending my time reading Stephen King novels. And while I did drink and smoke, I always preferred to just chill in bed watching a movie. I did make the right choice picking this school as I really enjoyed my time here meeting so many different people, the friends I made, the classes, the professors, and the general Humboldt experiences I had.

With that said, COVID has stripped a large part of my HSU experience, affecting both my spring and fall 2020 semesters. I remember when COVID first started to appear in the US back in early spring 2020 semester. And while I joked about it with some friends, saying the whole world is about to die, I did not think anything about it. I remember that my spring semester I was originally set to graduate and many of my friends and I were hella excited about graduation coming up. I ultimately ended up staying another semester. With half the semester done and headed to spring break I was not sure what was going to happen, but I assumed I was at least going to return back to Humboldt. When news broke that school is shut down and that classes are going to be virtual I was hella bothered by it. I did not know when it was going to be the next time I was going to be in Arcata. There were many friends and classmates who I never saw again, I had to move back home and while I love Salinas I do not have the freedom I have back in HSU, and it ruined my chances with this one girl. One of the most annoying moments of this time was that HSU did not send an email that school was going virtual until I was back home. I was hella mad because that meant, I had to drive about 7 hours just to get all my stuff from my room and drive straight back. It was a total waste of time and money. Had the school just sent an email the week before spring break I could have saved about 100 dollars on gas. The rest of the semester was all through zoom and personally I felt like I wasn’t learning anything over zoom. I was still doing the work and assignments but school did not feel the same.

I would end up going back to Humboldt for the 2020 fall semester because one of my classes (museum and gallery practices) was in person. I was excited moving back because I could at least be back in Humboldt and have a proper last semester for my college experience. My one concern was, how will HSU deal with COVID situation, how many students are actually going to be here, and did any other friends/ classmates return? I do give props for HSU for having mandatory COVID tests to all the students and faculty to make sure the campus is safe. And we had to do the test twice in the first couple weeks.

All I have to say is that my final semester in HSU never felt the same. School did not have the feeling of actual school. On one hand, I was living at creekview, I had my own room, and it was cool being free. But I would walk the school through the quad and it felt so lifeless and dead that it never felt like school was even open. Personally, it was a much more boring semester because of this and I feel that was the case for many. I did go out this semester more to new hiking trails and beaches than previous semesters but that was to just get out at least for a couple hours. The social life was worse than previous years, I would from time to time hang out every once in a while for drinks, movies or poker night, but like I said there were never huge events.

My in person class was actually pretty cool. I was taking Art 356 which is a museum and art gallery class, and even though it was a really small class, it was at least fun to be in a class setting at least once more. It was a very chill class and we went to the marsh a couple times which was cool. My overall experience was meh. Half the time I was in my room working on my 25 page research paper for my senior seminar class or working on my internship class. I will say keeping track of the 2020 presidential election was a fun pastime. It was just a really weird year with so many COVID cases the majority of the people tired of the pandemic, and at the same time feeling relieved that president Trump is finally leaving office in about a month. One of the things that really pissed me off was that HSU invited San Jose State to use the field. It just felt irresponsible for administration and the school to let other people come and live on campus in the midst of the pandemic. San Jose is a very populated area and I did not want them to come here, potentially bringing the virus.

With that said, working on this ‘Humboldt In the Time of COVID’ was a fun experience. For starters, Carly, the person in charge of Humboldt in the Time of COVID, was super cool and laid back that it made me want to actually work for her. I was the student intern working to create the archive. The whole project itself was cool to keep a record of all the information that has happened since the start of COVID. I do think it was cool working on an archive that gave me a cool new skill and this will look good on a resume.

What I am most mad/ disappointed about COVID was that it took away was graduation. I am bummed out that there is no commencement ceremony, or anything. Honestly it's not fair for me and all the other students who graduated this past year. It is an achievement, I wanted the whole experience and it just feels underwhelming that I wont have that. I am still happy that I am healthy and all but I’m just mad about it. It is what it is. Just a weird semester that feels surreal.