

Interview with Dat Nguyen

Marvellous Ogunsola, Interviewer

April 17, 2021

Macalester College

GEOG 256 - Medical Geography

New Carrollton, Maryland (Interviewer) and Wichita, Kansas (Interviewee)

Date and time: April 17th 2021 11A.M CT/12 PM EDT.

Location: Zoom call; Dat Nguyen's Personal Meeting Room- Shared screen with speaker view

Summary.

Medical Geography classmate, Dat Nguyen met with me via Zoom to share experiences pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. We talked about his plans before the pandemic, the disruption of those plans and how he was able to push forward despite them. We also delved into what it meant to be an Asian during those times, and how he handled those emotions.

Furthermore, we talked about habits developed during the pandemic, such as the use of Zoom to communicate, developing new hobbies like watching T.V and exercising more. He also shared his outlook on how the college and the nation have handled the pandemic. To end the interview, Dat said he was looking forward to connecting in-person with friends, taking public transit and eating airplane food once the pandemic is behind us.

Audio Transcript

[00:02]

Dat Nguyen: Are you recording on the cloud?

[00:05]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yes.

Dat Nguyen: Oh yeah is it will give you a transcript later that's good.

Marvellous Ogunsola: Okay.

[00:16]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Okay. So how are you today?

Dat Nguyen: I'm good. how are you?

Marvellous Ogunsola: I'm great. yeah you already asked me, I said I was. Let's get right into it.

[00:32]

Marvellous Ogunsola: So just a moment. Think back to right before the pandemic, what were your plans and was there a drastic change from before compared to now?

[00:51]

Dat Nguyen: Yes, so. March 2020 was when everything started happening really fast, really, really out of nowhere, and I think. I remember March 13 it was a Friday, where.

It was the Friday before spring break into college told us that spring break could be extended.

So I remember. My plan was to go home for a week and then come back after spring break.

And then I remember going home that weekend and then never coming back to college again. So I went home yeah so my plan to...To finish my sophomore year of College on campus was what's over and I've been noticed, I went home and I never came back and I've been staying with my family ever since that time, at that time. [Let's] See for my summer plan and I was planning to have an in-person internship somewhere and turns out a lot of programs got canceled. A lot of internship programs got canceled because they were adapting to the pandemic so I ended up doing a virtual internship, which I didn't plan on at all, which was a program but I didn't plan on doing it with yes, a lot of that changed, but what else would you like me to say?

[02:47]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Oh, that's a good answer. How did you feel in the onset of the coronavirus, because I know that about the pandemic, the virus and the things people said about Asian people bringing in the virus, as did you feel about that, if you are comfortable answering that question?

[03:24]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah it was a lot of anti- Asian sentiments and Asian hate crime started happening. Honestly, I was kind of scared when all of that happened. I remember going with my mom to the supermarket all the time just to make sure she's safe. Because I know I could handle it by myself. I can handle it by myself. I'm not sure if she could by herself, so my mom goes to the supermarket a lot. I got really scared every time my parents would go to work or go out to like just to the store so it's like what if something happens to them. And then let's see. Yeah a lot of. There was also a lot of I guess activism too to push back against those anti Asian sentiment, but I

edited

mean looking at it now, I also don't love how Asian Americans responded to that. It was a lot of model minority myth, it was a lot of I guess boot-licking and shifting the blame to someone else instead of addressing the issues which is systemic racism, white supremacy, imperialism in Asia, a lot of those I think that I realized that Asian American politics, the mainstream Asian American politics was quite liberal and quite limited and its understanding of political theory and political history.

[05:12]

Marvellous Ogunsola: That's interesting that you say that. Do you feel like your outlook on life has changed as a result of this pandemic in any way.

[05:25]

Dat Nguyen: yeah I'm more, I guess it made me realize how much I love convenience. I'm all about convenience these days. I love not traveling to stuff that I don't have to go to. I love opting out of stuff that I don't have to go to. Zoom has made it quite convenient and accessible for all of us, which is really nice. Yeah, just the time to prepare, like get up, prepare and travel to some place takes so much time in your day and I'm glad, I love having not to do that, or like doing it in a short amount of time.

[06:05]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Really yeah. No, I don't mean to talk about myself but I'm surprised because, like most of the people I meet don't like the zoom thing. I don't know it's interesting that you have such a positive outlook on connecting via screens.

[06:26]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah, I think I had a strong foundation, I guess, coming into the pandemic and because I was already into my second year at college. I had a community where I knew my support system. I have friends that I often talk to. So, like doing zoom and not being required to connect with people, it's not that hard, because I already have those connections established for me.

Marvellous Ogunsola: That makes sense.

Dat Nguyen: But we'll go, could you repeat your question again? How did my outlook change?

Marvellous Ogunsola: yeah yeah.

[07:15]

Dat Nguyen: All right. Well let's see, my outlook. I mostly realized that I'm quite capable and resilient more than I thought. Just have the difficulties and challenges that I faced, I got through them and I thought wow I did that. I also realized that I'm also quite comfortable being by myself, now. I remember at first, I wasn't because I went home and I went and I got cut off from everyone else, it was so abrupt that I struggled to talk to everybody that I knew, but now I am now quite comfortable being by myself, doing stuff by myself, doing it for myself. And that made me, there was a new perspective that I gained.

[08:24]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah. Can you please tell me about your pictures or things that you brought, you can start with one that made you feel the strongest emotion.

[08:38]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah I can start. Three things I bought. I will start first with my phone.

Yeah, it got me through this pandemic. It kept me informed, I learned a lot, I remember reading a lot of knowledge that I didn't know before like political theory, or like knowing about books I didn't know was available, yeah a lot of accessible information through this phone.

I stay connected with a lot of people on this phone. I watched a lot of stuff on this phone. This phone provided me with entertainment and relaxation a lot of times. Yeah my phone is definitely one.

[09:27]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Do you feel like you got addicted to your phone because I feel like I cannot put my own phone down anymore.

[09:37]

Dat Nguyen: I dont think I'm addic-- Well, maybe I am, I just didn't realize it. I carry it with me a lot of times whenever I go. I'm quite yeah—yeah I guess I am kind of addicted to it just to like Twitter, Instagram and all of that. But I think I do have some control over myself personally. But the phone also kept me focused. I use a lot of apps on it for studying too. I use it for class.

[10:11]

Marvellous Ogunsola: what apps do you use? If you may?

edited

Dat Nguyen: Yeah, I use the one called flora. Flora is [an app] that you study on for 25 minutes and it grows a tree. It grows like a plant and it's a reward system thing. It's cool like you set it for 25 minutes, and then if you access your phone during that time, your plant dies, and I don't want my plant to die so that's why it keeps me focused.

[10:41]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Wow that's a really good system.

[10:43]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah and apps like Flashcards Apps on here are cool i'm also studying to go to Medical School. I have an **MCAT**[Medical College Admission Test] app and it gives me like one question per day, so I try that.

[11:01]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah, that's interesting. What was your second choice?

[11:09]

Dat Nguyen: Right, my second choice is this book i've been reading. Called— it's a poetry book, it's called Night sky with Exit Wounds by Ocean Vuong. It was gorgeous, It was just beautifully written, beautifully crafted. I like the author a lot. He's also Vietnamese. Beautiful— I've been listening to a lot of his podcast and his books and his talks and I like what he has to say. Yeah so life —usually before I didn't have that much time to pleasure read. This is one of those that I've been reading [nervous laughs].

[11:58]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Well, that's nice. You said you didn't have time before. Do you feel like you have more time now than you had before and like— I guess what I'm trying to ask is: Did you just take up reading during this pandemic or you'd been reading before, you just didn't have time.

[12:32]

Dat Nguyen: I think I've been a strong reader all my life. I just think college [starts, and] I just didn't have that much time for it. So I guess during the pandemic, I'm not sure if I had more time. I think I've made more time to read whenever I can.

[12:54]

Marvellous Ogunsola: That's a nice distinction like making time versus having time. I think that's an important lesson to have going forward like even if everything goes back to normal that you can still make time yourself and it's an active choice.

[13:26]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah. If there's a lot of stuff you don't want to do, then don't do it. Yeah, just don't do it. Can I do my last item?

Marvellous: Yes, yes.

[13:35]

Dat Nguyen: This is My vaccination card. Yeah, cool. It makes me happy that I can be fully vaccinated, my family can be fully vaccinated. Yeah good stuff to look forward to to get through this pandemic.

[13:58]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah do you feel like the vaccine makes you feel um[pauses] confidence.

Dat Nguyen: [interjects] Hopeful?

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yes

Dat Nguyen: Yeah definitely I think at first I wasn't sure about it, I was like I'm gonna let other people try it out for it, but now like People are trying it out, people are feeling good about it. Yeah I do feel hopeful about having the vaccine.

[14:40]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Okay. Have you experienced any feelings of loss throughout this pandemic. It doesn't have to be like losing a person, it could be a loss of self or loss of control or normalcy or even a loss of the future as you saw it, and how did that make you feel?

[15:01]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah loss. Sometimes I feel like I lost connection with some of the people I used to talk to, like, I think, because we're all far apart from each other, now and we're like struggling so hard to maintain connections and it just-- it's just too hard to maintain that connection, so we stopped talking. And then, I feel like when we stop talking, I feel like oh I lost that person, but.

edited

But after I realized that I didn't lose anyone they're still there. And I think, even though we don't talk to each other anymore, we still know we're still there for each other. Now that sense of loss is very I guess brief for me once I grew out of it.

Sometimes, I feel loss of control, especially over my schoolwork. Like the module system was really fast. And I felt like there was so much to do all the time and I just-- And I just didn't feel like I could control my day like it was always school school school. And I want to do something--If I schedule something else, I'd have to push it back. And I just couldn't do at the end yeah loss, a loss of control over what I want to do because of academics.

[Let's] See. Loss of self but mostly, because I think I grew out of myself like I matured. Like my old self has gone. Like I lost him, like there's no more he now. This is like a better newer version of me now.

[16:56]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Do you feel like you've matured differently if the pandemic had not happened, or do you feel like it's the same trajectory anyways.

[17:05]

Dat Nguyen: Oh yeah. [pauses] same trajectory? I'm not sure. I think I might have grown a little bit different without the pandemic, I think I would have been a bit more dependent on other people. I don't know, I'm not sure, but I think it would have been different.

[17:35]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you experience any anticipatory grief and anticipatory. Anticipatory grief is the morning that occurs when you or someone you know is expecting a death so did you feel like you were grieving before any bad thing had happened to you due to the pandemic?

[18:05]

Dat Nguyen: Was I grieving before the pandemic, is that right?.

[18:11]

Marvellous Ogunsola: No, [I meant]were you expecting-- did you have any feelings like somebody you knew was going to get the virus and die due to it.

[18:21]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah I was nervous. There was a scare of that. I feared that but grieve? kinda? Like I think-- I felt a bit of grief once while into the pandemic, we heard these stats that the US[United States] has the highest rate of death. Yeah well and I felt bad for that as a cloud that that's a lot of people off like futures and family members last. Grieve for that.

[19:01]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah you talked about connecting with people like your friends, how did your communication styles with people change considering you are not interacting in-person to them, like Was there any changes?

[19:25]

Dat Nguyen: You start playing online games, a lot more. My friends and I play a lot of Stardew Valley, play a lot of-- Occasionally we host game nights like online game nights and we invite other friends to come. A lot of us communicated through zoom. I facetimes a lot of people. Yeah I think that was like the beginning and the middle of the pandemic. And then I think afterwards, I think I started to become a bit more, a lot more comfortable being by myself and not talking to people as much. So, like that change.

[20:16]

Marvellous Ogunsola: So what are some lifestyle changes, you can point to now, for instance, How did your diet change and what was your self care like?

[20:34]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah, [about] my diet, I eat a lot of homemade food now. I don't eat cafeteria or Macalester food anymore. Yeah I eat a lot of Vietnamese food because my family is Vietnamese. And I don't really-- sometimes I kind of miss the peanut butter, pb&j sandwiches or like the cereal from cafe MAC.

Marvellous Ogunsola: Was cafeMAC's food good because I've not had it yet?

Dat Nguyen: It's okay. it's good on certain days. On a lot of days, it is not that good.

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah

Dat Nguyen: See other self care things I do: I exercise more now. Yeah I do strength and Cardio to help you just stay fit. But I also listen to my body more. So, like if sometimes my body just can't do it, I won't push it to do it. Like if it was, it was like a really tough week. Like just

politically, socially and emotionally. And I just can't have the energy, I just won't do it and that's okay.

[22:00]

Dat Nguyen: Other things I'm doing I've been doing this thing where I do homework and at 10pm I stop. I stop doing homework, whatever it is. Yeah it's-- I think [to myself] that's enough for today I'm just going to go do things I enjoy now.

Yeah at 10pm, I would go moisturize, wash my face, do some reading, and watch TV shows. It's been really helpful for me.

[22:32]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Those are really good habits to have. Did you pick up any hobbies?

Dat Nguyen: [chuckles] hobbies.

Marvellous Ogunsola: I mean you talked about gaming.

Dat Nguyen: Gaming is fun. I got into K-dramas. I watch a lot of Korean dramas now. Let's see. So at the beginning, I tried to practice the harmonica. But I just couldn't. Yeah, I wish I had more energy. Because it looks cool. Yeah other hobbies: I kind of do my own yoga; yoga deep stretches exercises now. Yeah, let's just say i'm more flexible. I exercise more.

[23:56]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you have any anxiety about getting the virus?

Dat Nguyen: A lot in the beginning, in the middle. And then kind of in the middle, I realized that I, I was at home almost every day. I didn't go anywhere, so I am. So, like my fear kind of

decreased. Because I realized that my habits and lifestyle was working to prevent me from getting the pandemic [the coronavirus]. But yeah definitely I got fear of getting COVID-19. My parents-- my parents go outside a lot. My mom shops and then my dad works so I'm scared they might give it to me. Yeah every time I go outside I like I really stay away from people I double mask. I don't eat, I don't eat indoors or I don't eat at restaurants. I only do take outs.

Marvellous Ogunsola: let's take a moment.

Dat Nguyen: yeah no problem.

[25:14]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Let's talk about mental health, how have you been?

Dat Nguyen: [chuckles] Mental health, I think I've been good. Quite better than I expected this week was hard, it was like it was a ton. Like with Dante's [referencing Daunte Wright's killing in Minnesota during the week of April 11, 2021], police brutality and like the protests that are happening. Because this was such a heavy week and, like, I felt it. I felt it from my peers as well. Yeah, a lot of the stress of it all.

School. so school is another stressor. Like I'm always scared about school like what's gonna happen next what's gonna-- Like I always feel like I'm falling behind because it's going so fast. The Module system. Yeah and I am always working working until I'm like really burnt out. Burn out is another thing. I-- [hesitates a little] I get burnt out because of school a lot.

Let's see. I remember First module I was taking, Biochem and that's a really hard class. I remember having so much anxiety and stress over that class. On test day, before test day and I remember like throwing up one time on test day because I was like, ugh so stressful.

[26:47]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah I know, how you feel. Yeah. [brief silence]

[26:58]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Did you-- Sorry, I was gonna ask if you got any help or reached out.

[27:05]

Dat Nguyen: Sometimes--[pauses] I think I handle a lot of it by myself. So I didn't reach out to my counselor or Health and wellness or anything. I think it didn't become--It wasn't that serious, for me, I think, it was like momentarily it's like once I did the test, it's over. Like I feel I don't feel that stress anymore. And, as I go, as I keep going through the class I started becoming better at adapting to it. I remember. I remember feeling alone, sometimes lonely. [brief pause] But I guess I kind of got over it. No, I like, I like being alone, it feels great. Because I know I'm connected and I know people are there for me, which I guess it didn't click to me before.

[28:07]

Marvellous Ogunsola: All right, did you make any connections to your family or develop more connections?

[28:18]

Dat Nguyen: Kinda I guess we-- I guess I kind of have been the same way with them before the pandemic. Now I just see them more and I eat with them. I think it's a good-- we have a good relationships. Now, nothing has changed much. Well I'm kind of closer to my little sister because

I got to Korean dramas and she--- And she is just a Koreaboo. Yeah nothing, there's nothing drastic has changed much.

[29:00]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What moments stood out to you? During this all pandemic.

Dat Nguyen: wow, i'm not sure. I can't think of anything more. All the days were the same to me. I remember talking with my friend groups and playing games with them. That was a really good moment, like I enjoyed that at the beginning. who are staying connected. It was really good. I guess getting my vaccine. My first dose of vaccine was really momentous because I finally got it. Because---I because I remember a lot of people having trouble getting vaccine appointments. I was lucky that my family and I got appointments. Yeah I can't think of more things, nothing drastic happened to me.

[30:42]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah. That's fine um, What is your outlook on how this school, Macalester has handled the pandemic?

[30:56]

Dat Nguyen: Oh god. [pauses] I don't think it was that great to be honest, I think during the summer, they were so wishy washy about stuff. Like there was never a decisive moment until like later. Like you, you couldn't just make a decision now, you know? I don't know, people

were--I think they were just trying to make everybody happy. But then, I don't kn-- i'm not sure if, like people's safety were-- I don't....It was just too risky to have people come in person.

And it was they were debating on that for so long to me. The module system, I think it's kind of bad for learning, for mental, physical health. What else? I think the good experiences come from Individual professors and individual communities on campus but not exactly the administration itself, you know? I'm sure Mac could have been better in a lot of ways. I also think we kind of handled it a lot better than other schools.

[32:37]

Marvellous Ogunsola: I don't really know about other schools either. Yeah, my next question.

What is your outlook on how this nation, America has handled the pandemic?

Dat Nguyen: Can you say that again.

[32:59]

Marvellous Ogunsola: What is your outlook on how this nation, America has handled the pandemic?

Dat Nguyen: I think we handled it horribly, so bad. I mean, look at our death rates, look at our contact rates. The virus really preyed on social injustice and the vulnerability of America. Like elder housings and prisons and incarcerated people, that's such a high death rates and COVID cases rates.

[33:43]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Was any of these like new to you or new information? Do you feel like you learned something new about America or did you just anticipate this happening?

[33:57]

Dat Nguyen: I think I didn't realize the full extent of how horrible this country can be.

Like white supremacy, like that-- [pauses] that's our whole government.

And then like people like white supremacists too like in the community, in the streets there, I think the pandemic brought out so much worse in them. Like and then like how people handle,

People couldn't handle not wearing a mask--- people couldn't handle wearing a mask, people couldn't handle getting the vaccine, people couldn't handle being told what to do for their own

safety and other people's safety too. Like I think this is really a messed up notion of freedom ingrained in America. I think it's just much so much more detrimental to everybody's health.

Yeah and then, our health structure couldn't handle it. People were being charged expensive bills for getting COVID.

[35:23]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah, that's awful. What lessons learned are you going to take away from this experience?

Dat Nguyen: For me, I think. I realize that I'm more capable.

Marvellous Ogunsola: Yeah, did I ask this question already?

[35:42]

edited

Dat Nguyen: No, I think it's just the same response. Yeah, I think I am more capable, than I realized. I can do a lot of stuff and I think I've become more disciplined. I've become more secured in myself. For other people, I realize that a lot of accommodation, a lot of like understanding came off this pandemic too, right? And I hope people realize that all of that, all of the compassion, all the understanding, empathy was possible without the pandemic. Like there was no need. Yeah, I think there was no need for like a strenuous, such a strenuous crisis to bring it out of us. It was always capable, it was always possible, from the start.

But I hope, professors realize that they could have always been more understanding, I hope, higher education realizes that they could have always been more supportive of their students. Yeah, people realize that could have always been more empathetic and nicer, not just because people are dying around them.

[36:55]

Marvellous Ogunsola: That's a good answer. Lastly... So my last question, what are you looking forward to doing once all this is over.

[37:08]

Dat Nguyen: Yes. Senior year. Be fun, I hope, to be back on campus again. I hope to live with my friends. Hope to hang out with people more. I hope to, I don't know, can I continue just what I'm doing now like being by myself playing games, being by myself. Yeah what I look forward to... going to the movies, maybe going to concerts. Eating out, foodies. Taking public transit.

[37:55]

Marvellous Ogunsola: You can take public transit now.

[37:58]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah but I wouldn't want to.

Marvellous Ogunsola: Oh, okay.

[38:03]

Dat Nguyen: I don't know. Being on air, airplane foods. yeah.

[38:15]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Okay, this was nice. That's all my questions.

[38:20]

Dat Nguyen: Yeah, thank you.

[38:22]

Marvellous Ogunsola: Thank you, goodbye.

Okay, yeah. I'm going to stop recording now.

[End of Interview, Part 1 of 1, 38:37]