

My School Life During Pandemic Era (Wonder N. Dlamini, NCHU)



I thought COVID-19 would not last more than the year 2020. However, I was very wrong since the virus continuously spread rapidly throughout the entire world even in the year 2021 shutting down our usual way of life. During the pandemic era I lived in the most famous and wonderful country Taiwan, an island in the western Pacific Ocean which became the world's envy because it has been one of the most successful nation in the world to deal with the virus. The invisible enemy attacked our continent few months after I started Master of Science degree in one of the best university under Taiwan Comprehensive University System (TCUS), National Chung Hsing University (NCHU), located in Taichung city, known as the super convenient city in Taiwan.



NCHU is among the universities that switched to online instruction after the Taiwan government's Central Epidemic Command Centre raised the epidemic alert to Level 2 on 12 May 2021. Unlike many places where online education was hurried as a results of COVID-19 emergency response, TCUS was able to get ready in advance, by conducting practice runs in 2020 hence NCHU was able to switch to online learning under short notice in 2021. The university was able to set up appropriate software to support online learning and the lecturers in NCHU have a good experience of teaching online. My school life had many changes during the pandemic but as a responsible graduate science student I still had to conduct my lab experiments and attend seminar lessons online during this time of isolation. Among other things as a researcher and teaching assistant I helped undergraduate students online and I observed that under the pandemic most of the students panicked and asked lot of questions online.

The impact of this pandemic has been massive on my habits and lifestyle hence affected my healthy life both physically and emotionally. Extracurricular activities were shut down and I could no longer go to the school gym as I used to because it was closed. Educational trips and all places of entertainment were closed. It was no longer possible to meet up and socialize with a group of people including my friends, classmates and lab mates. Gathering of more than five people indoors was also prohibited. Eating inside all restaurants was banned. Most of the time I would prepare my own meals and bring some food to school. Cooking my own food also meant changing my diet. I had to maintain social distancing and wear a mask all the time when I go outside my house. I was expected to keep my mask on when doing experiments or sitting in the student office at school. At first it was very difficult for me to breath well when wearing a mask because this was my first time in my lifetime to wear a mask. I would sweat a lot when riding my bicycle because of the mask.

All in all, I would consider myself very fortunate to be in NCHU during this time because I was not hugely affected by COVID-19 when compared to other places across the world. This was as a results of Taiwan government protective measures which were followed by NCHU. The protective measures might have been uncomfortable but I was very happy to follow all guidelines set by Taiwan government because they were meant to keep us safe. Another good thing is that there was only partial lockdown in Taiwan as opposed to full lockdown experienced by many countries around the world. In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic being in NCHU meant feeling safe because Taiwan has been ranked one of the most technological advanced country. In addition to innovative technology, Taiwan's health care system has been ranked as the very best in the world three times in repeatedly years under Numbeo's annual online survey.



The COVID-19 affected everyone but NCHU remained in control and responded appropriate with the right approach. NCHU has been very helpful in pandemic era. The university provided correct information and tips on how to survive and copy with life during challenging COVID-19 time. There would be emails to keep us informed of everything that was going on including what was expected of us.

I strived strategically with hard work and great support from my advisor as a result end of June 2021 I passed my master thesis oral defense with flying in the department of Soil and Environmental Sciences. I would like to praise and thank the almighty living God for his protection, wisdom, countless blessings and giving me the strength to keep going and that of those around throughout my school life during the pandemic error. I cannot imagine being the person I am today without such a great support system from those around me through the years. I consider our lives a journey, in which opportunities and the remarkable people we interact with divide us on different paths to bringing change in the world.

