

My name is Jonathan Pena and I'm a 21 year senior from the Bronx. I am a Psychology major at St. Bonaventure University in Cattaraugus county, and part of the HEOP program. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today.

COVID-19 has impacted me academically as well as emotionally. Being forced to transition to online classes was very difficult and although I made it out with a GPA over 3.0, some other students may not have been as fortunate. Many students in New York had to leave the safety of rural campuses like St. Bonaventure University to go home to areas where COVID-19 was more prevalent.

I was able to learn online because my family understood and allowed me the ability to focus without having many distractions. However, some students who left campus may have gone back to an unhealthy home environment during quarantine instead of being in the safety of the university.

A big hardship was trying to take advantage of tutors and professors remotely because we couldn't learn how we were all used to — in person in a classroom setting. Studying in the place where you sleep is ineffective because it's harder to focus at home than at a library or a classroom.

I'm grateful we will be able to resume classroom instruction this fall because I think it's the best way for us to learn. But I still hope professors are patient and fair when assigning and grading work.

There will still be some academic stress, having to take some classes in a rotating fashion — one day in a classroom, one day in our dorm rooms — or perhaps even the occasional class totally online. Everyone needs to understand the disadvantage students will be experiencing, not only academically but emotionally.

Although we are in a pandemic, I am excited to go back to St. Bonaventure. With the steps the University has taken to ensure safety of all people in our community, SBU is where I want to finish my undergraduate education. In addition, as a HEOP student, the resources I am given are essential to my learning experience, some of which can only be effective in person.

I want to thank the Legislature and Governor for taking the time to listen to my concerns over pursuing my education during this pandemic.