

# Mercy Students Reflect on

## THE YEAR OF STUDYING VIRTUALLY

The fall 2020 term was like none other. In the midst of a worldwide pandemic, Mercy students had to navigate a new way of learning virtually and find new ways to connect both in and out of the classroom.

From learning how to log in to classes, participating in virtual discussions and student life events, to staying connected with PACT mentors and faculty and learning new technologies, these students persevered with the help of many support services offered by Mercy College.

Jason Gloe, Mercy's associate director of student life, works directly with students to guide them through the changes and opportunities presented as a result of COVID-19.

"Our students are dealing with all kinds of circumstances in their lives, explains Gloe. "We are devoted to creating a community of meaningful connections and shared experiences for them."

Bingo games, trivia contests and entertaining get-togethers kept spirits up during the long months.

For students, **Kerlisha Mason Broomes '21, Yesting Morales Vela '20, M.S. '21 and Mujahed Alawadi '21**, this adjustment called for new strategies to enable them to survive – even thrive – while transitioning to remote learning.

Amidst the Zoom classes, social distancing and enhanced safety protocols, they honed new abilities and developed extraordinary adaptability.

"This semester has been one of the most trying and one of the most enjoyable," says Mason Broomes, who completes her psychology degree in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences this spring. She, Yesting and Muhajed have maintained old connections, forged new ones and learned some powerful life lessons.



## Kerlisha

### ON SCHEDULING

Long before COVID-19, Mason Broomes' plate was full. She worked for a non-profit, co-owned, with her husband Samuel, an overnight cleaning service, and cared for five-year-old daughter Kiana while serving as a Mercy peer mentor, orientation leader, mediator and academic superstar.

"I just loved being in the classroom," she recalls.

Fascinated by behavioral psychology, she loved interacting with others. But virtual learning seemed limiting.

"I just wasn't sure how I'd transition into remote classes."

Aware that she needed more rigor and discipline, Mason Broomes connected with her PACT Mentor Xiomara Hernandez to help construct a workable plan.

With Hernandez's feedback, Mason Broomes arranged her classes and study time to accommodate her work schedule.

"I was determined to make it work, and when I commit to something, I make it happen."

The tough discipline yielded results. Mason Broomes maintained her schedule, continued her Mercy activities, kept up connections, and emerged with an unexpected benefit: a greater sense of accomplishment and confidence.

"The pandemic taught me the value of maximizing my time and potential," says Mason Broomes.

# Yesting

## ON CREATING STUDY SPACE

Yesting Morales Vela and his wife Crismilla had successfully balanced work against ambitious graduate courses, but the lockdown made their cozy apartment suddenly feel suffocatingly tight. “There was simply no way we could avoid interfering with each other,” says Morales Vela, pursuing a master’s degree in the School of Health and Natural Sciences to become a physician assistant.

Years earlier, Morales Vela’s family fled Mexico to escape economic hardship, only to face a scary new world and a brush with discrimination that was deeply demoralizing. He wasn’t sure of his place. But after he was tapped as the family translator during a relative’s terminal illness, he developed a fascination with health care – and a passion to become a physician assistant.

“I had to push and discipline myself to stay on track,” he admits.

Just as things were falling into place, the prospect of distance learning arose.

“I never liked it,” admits Morales Vela. Maintaining focus would be tough with lectures delivered via computer, especially without a distraction-free space. So the couple reconfigured their small quarters, established new rules and buckled down.

“This was another of life’s challenges that I feared at the beginning but later overcame thanks to the dedication and support of Mercy’s faculty and staff,” says Morales Vela. “And I think when that happens, you learn an important lesson – that anything that seems hard at first can be done over time with effort and dedication.”



# Mujahed

## ON CHANGING LOCATION

For Mujahed Alawadi, living with three brothers, one sister and both parents while carrying a heavy college course load, was challenging but manageable. Then the pandemic threatened to change that.

“I was in a situation where my family was always around,” says Alawadi. Struggling to find a way to focus, he tried using his bed as a study area — with predictable consequences. “Naturally, you start feeling like taking a nap,” he says. He was temporarily stumped.

A native of Amman, Jordan, Alawadi’s first educational experiences had been difficult. Someone who had once feared teachers found American educators patient, understanding and surprisingly helpful. He vowed to study education himself, and the Mercy College Dobbs Ferry Campus was the perfect setting. But it was now temporarily off-limits.

However, when Mercy opened up their campuses and resources to students in need, Alawadi wore two masks, carried abundant hand sanitizer and made the daily trip to campus to utilize available study areas.

This strategy carried him through graduation from his five-year Behavioral Science/Education track this winter.

“Even though I was worried about distance learning, I am grateful that Mercy kept their campuses open so I could have the needed privacy to maintain a consistent study schedule,” says Alawadi.

Kerlisha, Yesting and Mujahed proved resilient in achieving their academic goals. While the pandemic brought on unique challenges Mercy worked directly with students to provide the necessary support to continue their education uninterrupted. And now, with new vaccines about to be distributed students are convinced they’ll join the post-COVID world with greater self-knowledge and stronger life skills.