Writing About COVID-19 in Your College Applications

Cretin-Derham Hall will include the following information on our School Profile about how the virus affected the CDH 2019-2020 school year. This official school information will also be included in counselor letters of recommendation so the colleges will already know this much about your junior year experience.

When the State of Minnesota closed schools in response to COVID-19, Cretin-Derham Hall quickly transitioned to online learning with students missing only one instructional day in March of 2020. The school building was closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year (the entire third trimester). As Cretin-Derham Hall is a 1:1 iPad school, all students had the necessary hardware for online learning, but individual student access to and availability of reliable Internet varied. Instruction took place through a variety of platforms including Google Classroom and Google Meet. Students were required to check in daily for attendance and scheduled classes were held on alternate days. Cretin-Derham Hall kept all curricular offerings and students received letter grades for the third trimester as per our regular grading system. Exceptions to this included students with academic learning plans and these students may have received P/F grades. ACT testing in Minnesota was cancelled in April, with very few testing sites open for June and very limited seating for July. Most of the CDH Class of 2021 did not have the opportunity to test as juniors.

Should you write about your COVID-19 experience? And if so, how and where?

If your experience this spring was OK aside from online school not being that great, you were bored, missed your friends and hung out more with your family – there is no need to write about COVID-19.

If your experience this spring was very negative or very positive you might want to include some additional information to provide your admissions reader with "context". You have three choices:

1) Common Application Personal Essay Prompts (250 to 650 words:
We recommend that you use one of the original seven Common Application essay prompts to write about something important to you **aside from** the COVID-19 virus. Use this personal essay space to write about COVID-19 *only if* this experience has indeed been the most important thing that has ever happened to you, you can't possibly fit your COVID-19 experience into the 250 word section or the 650 word additional information section and if writing about the pandemic is really the BEST way for you to show your values, skills and personal qualities.

COVID-19 is likely to be a very widely used topic this cycle so writing about it here could make it harder for you to stand out.

2) Common Application COVID-19 Question (appears in the additional information section, optional, 250 words):

"Community disruptions such as COVID-19 and natural disaster can have deep and long-lasting impacts. If you need it, this space is yours to describe those impacts. Colleges care about the effects on your health and well being, safety, family circumstances, future plans, and education, including access to reliable technology and quiet study spaces."

If there is additional information you would like your reader to know about your experiences with COVID-19 this past spring and summer this is the best place to clarify your situation. Include any impacts directly related to the virus both negative and positive. Maybe your family was touched by job losses, unreliable Internet connections, a lack of quiet space to study or even sickness/death. Perhaps you used your time well to learn new things, take on a special project or volunteer.

If you need more than 250 words to describe your COVID-19 experience use this instead …

3) Common Application "Additional Information" Section (650 word maximum):

"Do you wish to provide details of circumstance or qualifications not reflected in the application? (yes/no) …You may use this space to provide any additional information you wish to share."