

The day of a West Coast student attending Hampton virtually

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(JAC 210 assignment for Prof. Waltz)

Ross Watkins frantically jumped out of bed scared that he had overslept for his first class. It was 5:30 a.m., which meant he had less than 30 minutes to get ready.

Watkins' computer science class began at 9 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, when he would normally physically attend classes at Hampton University on the East Coast.

But in California, where he is currently residing, Watkins was three hours behind, blurry eyed and fuzzy brained after just three hours of sleep.

With no time to shower, Watkins threw on a button-up polo shirt to be 'presentable' for class, then opened his laptop, logged onto Zoom, and gave a big smile as his name was called for attendance.

Welcome to a day in the life of a typical West Coast Hampton University student in Fall 2020. In response to COVID-19, Hampton University began its Fall 2020 semester online and early on August 10, and plans to close for winter break on November 20th.

According to the Hampton University Registrar office, about 40% of the student body is from the West Coast, and the majority of these students are enrolled in the School of Business.

Watkins, a strategic communication major from Los Angeles, struggles with virtual classes in a different time zone and is constantly exhausted.

When he talked to other West Coast students and found they were having similar experiences, he started a petition, asking the university to make allowances for the time differences.

Now, Watkins has over 900 signatures and hopes to have 2,000 by October. If enough students protest the hardships of the time zone differences, the University may have to accommodate them.

"I hate having to wake up at insane hours just to open a computer," Watkins said.

His grades have dropped significantly, and he has a hard time prioritizing his workload along with staying focused. He is not alone.

"I have to be very conscious in remembering that my homework is not due at midnight. It's due at 11:00 p.m.," said Alex Harmon, a second-year business major from St. Louis, Missouri.

Throughout the semester, Harmon has turned in multiple late assignments

because he turned in his homework at midnight in the central time zone.

"The time zone is affecting my grades because I have less time to do assignments," Harmon said. "I am not a morning person, so I scheduled my classes at a later time just to have them pushed an hour earlier because of the time difference."

Harmon is frustrated, feeling that students residing in a different location such as the Midwest or West Coast should be given extensions to deadlines.

"This disadvantage either makes me sleepy during class or I miss class altogether," said DessRae Lampkins, a second-year chemical engineering major from St. Louis, Missouri.

Lampkins has an attendance rate of 80% due to accidentally sleeping through some of her classes. She admits that she forgets her school follows the Eastern time zone, and it is negatively impacting her grade.

"Imagine waking up at 5:00 a.m. to attend 9:00 a.m. classes in addition to having your homework due at 11:59 p.m. which is actually 9:00 p.m. if you live on the West Coast," said Genea'Vi Smith, a second-year psychology major residing in Los Angeles, California.

"I feel like I am being punished for living in California!"

Like Watkins and Lampkins, Smith also complained of a lack of sleep, so she asks every teacher to record class sessions.

"Even if it may not be beneficial to you, it could significantly impact someone else. I know that I am always going back and watching recorded lectures."

Lampkins is sick of the virtual semester and hopes classes will resume physically in the Spring 2021 semester.

"Can we please make more classes so time zones can be accommodated and there will be less homework?" Lampkins asked.

Later class times will help students function more efficiently, they said.

A lack of physical academic support is also a problem. The distance from classmates is difficult and virtual study groups are not as beneficial.

Another common hurdle is the mind-numbing routine of constantly staring at computer screens.

"Teachers need to try and make the classes more interactive. It's hard to stay engaged when staring at your screen for an hour while being lectured," said Harmon.

Also, with the Fall 2020 semester being cut short, professors have to condense course information into a shorter time frame.

Students are pleading for their professors to understand the challenges that come with a virtual, and shortened, semester.

"Stop trying to make us turn on the cameras. We are virtually learning. Why

do you want to see my face? What is it that you're trying to see that I'm doing? It seems like teachers are trying to be dictators and not everyone has a fancy laptop with camera and audio," said Imani Johnson, a junior liberal studies major from Chicago, Illinois.

"A lot of classes want you to turn your camera on and look presentable. So, you have to still get ready even though classes are virtual. This makes you have to wake up usually an hour before class."

Some professors are making allowances. Professors in the Scripps Howard School of Journalism, such as Lynn Waltz and Christopher Underation, have given out their cell phone numbers on the syllabus and have advised students that text is a great method of communication.

As night begins to fall, Watkins prepares for bed with a sense of optimism. He feels better knowing that he is not the only one having a hard time