The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the whole world, including me and my aspirations.   For many, the pandemic brought about heartache, extreme sickness and sadly, death. For me, it brought all those things but also altered the course of my educational path. As a sophomore, I studied abroad in a tiny town in the southernmost part of Argentina.

While the experience was an amazing opportunity for growth and leadership, it was scary and sometimes lonely. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic hit and abruptly brought my experience to a halt. I had planned that living abroad with a Spanish speaking host family would be a basis for setting me apart from others in hopes that I could use the experience to show growth at an age when most of similarly aged high school students didn't even think about the value of a study abroad opportunity. Though I learned a lot it was cut short, and I felt like my plans and I, were on a collision course to fail. So, I returned home amidst the chaos of canceled flights and closed borders and was forced to complete my sophomore year via home-school. Unfortunately, I faced this option because my school refused to let me return to my classes at that juncture of halfway through a semester. This further impacted my preparedness for college because I soon realized I wasn't learning well at home and then even remotely with the eventual introduction of virtual instruction through my school. By the time my senior year began, I hadn't seen my classmates in-person since my freshman year! I had to get to know my teachers, counselors and friends all over again. The stress and isolation caused by the pandemic contributed heavily to my mental overload. As a result, my school performance dropped off tremendously. I was no longer a regular recipient of scholarly achievements and the accolades I'd received in my earlier years that I was counting on to lift me into the colleges of my choice with acceptances and scholarships. While I'd thought my plan for getting into college was solid and had grown accustomed to coasting, the COVID-19 pandemic taught me that I couldn't take anything for granted. My college aspirations didn't change but I learned that nothing was promised, and nothing was guaranteed. Despite the mental and physical stress the pandemic caused in my life, I will still strive to go to college and get a degree in computer science with an eye towards cyber security as a career. I'm re-setting, digging deep and hoping to finish my final year back on top.