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Welcome to *The Tartan's* 62nd newspaper since I have been EIC, and frankly, my last, as crazy as that sounds - but I got to graduate!

Highlander Student Media (HSM) hired me as the first-ever freshman Editor in Chief of *The Tartan*, Dec. 2017, and I have spent the past three years through the wringer. From 4 p.m. to 4 a.m. Tuesday nights in the office, to a complete overhaul of the newspaper and the organization, to an increase of *The Tartan* distribution on- and off-campus from seven stands to 35 stands, to the creation of every HSM website, to much more ... but don't let me bore you with the details.

Highlander Student Media (HSM) hired me as the first-ever freshman Editor in Chief of *The Tartan*, Dec. 2017, and I have spent the past three years through the wringer.

During my time at Radford, I have seen or been through it all - *The Tartan* Paper Theft that shook Radford's administration, a discrimination lawsuit, a "not a lockdown" lockdown, credit policy changes, untimely and unfortunate deaths of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, Radford's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, marches, a presidential election, and even watching students deliberate with each other about whether they should blackout or not on any given day of the week.

It's my last newspaper and my last letter, so I want to spill tea all over the good, the bad, and the Radford of this university. [For grievances, please email dlepore1@radford.edu].



Photo Credit: (Sarah Steffey) Since my arrival to campus in August for my last semester at Radford, the university seems different.

The Good

2020 has been a big year. With COVID-19 impacting the world around us (whether you think so or not), the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor heard worldwide, the marches stirring up communities, and even the presidential election, the U.S. seems divided right now.

Taking things back to the Radford community:

Since my arrival to campus in August for my last semester at Radford, the university seems different ... in a good way.

COVID-19

Radford University had 45 days to work on a reopening plan that they, honestly, didn't quite pull off, but they did ok. There were a lot of "you can't have your cake and eat it too" moments, but they did what they did.

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pull off, but they did ok.

Truthfully, Radford University's response to COVID-19 has been great, with overall positive cases going down with every passing week, the precautions, testing events, signs, campaigns, and the face mask requirement while indoors on campus.

The university has even given out punishments to fraternities such as Rho Theta Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi and Theta Chi's Iota Zeta and has suspended many individual students for violating rules related to the pandemic.

A silver lining to Radford University's ever-dwindling fall [undergraduate enrollment](#) since its last peak in Fall 2013 at 8,913 (which is down to 7,307 students this year, according to the [Radford University Fact Book](#)) is kind of good for the control of COVID-19 on campus - fewer students equal fewer variables.

Marches

The university showed support for their students by creating barricades, hiring security, providing necessary equipment, and somewhat maintaining COVID-19 guidelines.

One other important event hosted on campus during mid-September was [The Bigger Picture March](#), which saw hundreds of students gathering at Moffet Hall and McConnell Library speaking on topics such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and injustices in the world.

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Another similar event was held by a university club called [100 Collegiate Women](#) a few months later, that held a Breonna Taylor Sit-In.

Other notable good:

- Lower/extending gathering limit
- COVID-19 moving in and out procedures for those in university-owned buildings
- Construction largely removed from campus
- Radford University merger with Carilion Clinic and Jefferson College of Health Sciences
- Tuition Freeze
- Radford University [REAL](#) curriculum

- A senior becomes the first Radford student accepted into [New York Fashion Week](#)

As a Radford University student, I feel that the university cares about its students more than ever now, and COVID-19 has something to do with that. I can only hope that this newfound care and support for their students only grows even after COVID-19.



Photo Credit: (Sarah Steffey) As a Radford University student, I feel that the university cares about its students more than ever now.

The Bad

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There is still no conclusion ... and there probably won't be any time soon due to the interruption that is 2020.

Even with that, the university was, without the knowledge of *The Tartan*, taking a small

stack of papers from the Armstrong Complex (now our old drop-off location) about four hours before the campus community received their copies.

Theft

In an email sent out March 6, 2020, by University President Brian O. Hemphill, it states their reasoning, "A long-standing component of the distribution process has included Inter-Campus Mail Distribution staff obtaining and then delivering a very limited number of newspapers to the Office of the President. Dating back to 1996, a total of 20 copies were delivered in order to facilitate direct mailing to members of the Board of Visitors and individual sharing with staff."

"In 2017, a decision was made to request a fewer number of copies from Inter-Campus Mail Distribution staff due to *The Tartan* content being available online," the email reads. "Currently, 8 to 10 copies are delivered to my office, and staff have been directed to return any remaining copies to the closest newsstand. This clearly explains how and why the newspapers were placed and found in the newsstand located in Martin Hall as described in the aforementioned article in *The Tartan*."

"Again, this is an administrative practice that has been in place throughout my tenure as president and was in place during a time in which President Covington led Radford University. As such, this standard institutional practice has occurred for nearly 25 years and is in no way a form of censorship or theft."

Lawsuit

Jan. 4, 2020, "Virginia paid \$60,000 to settle a race discrimination lawsuit filed by a former administrator at Radford University", [according to a report from WHSV-TV 3](#).

"Kolajo's federal suit alleged that the school eliminated his job in 2018 because he is black and of Nigerian descent. RU denied the allegations," said the report.

"The suit claimed Kolajo had positive job performance reviews before a new superior criticized his department, said she couldn't understand his accent and corrected his pronunciation," said the report.

"Not a Lockdown"

How is Radford University not on a lockdown if all buildings are "locked down?" If I show you an orange, could you tell me that it's orange?

A nonactive shooter isolated incident occurred, Oct. 30, 2019, scaring and confusing the Radford community as Caitlyn Scaggs, the Associate Vice President of University Relations, said, "Social media reports of shots fired on campus are false. No injuries have been reported. The campus is not on lockdown, but individuals are encouraged to remain inside until an all-clear is issued."

As reported by [***The Tartan***](#), "Despite campus not being on lockdown, multiple students reported being urged into safer rooms. Students who were outside at the time of the alert found themselves unable to enter the buildings, using their RU ID, that they normally had access to."

How is Radford University not on a lockdown if all buildings are "locked down?" If I show you an orange, could you tell me that it's orange?

Policy Changes

More than 100 people attended a forum hosted by the Honors Council, Oct. 2, 2019, about the impending change in Radford University's credit policy, which lowers the maximum credit hours from 18 to 16. Radford did implement the policy, [**stating in an email that it**](#) "would impact approximately 12 percent of the total student body."

There are many more reasons I could bring up, but this letter can only be so long.

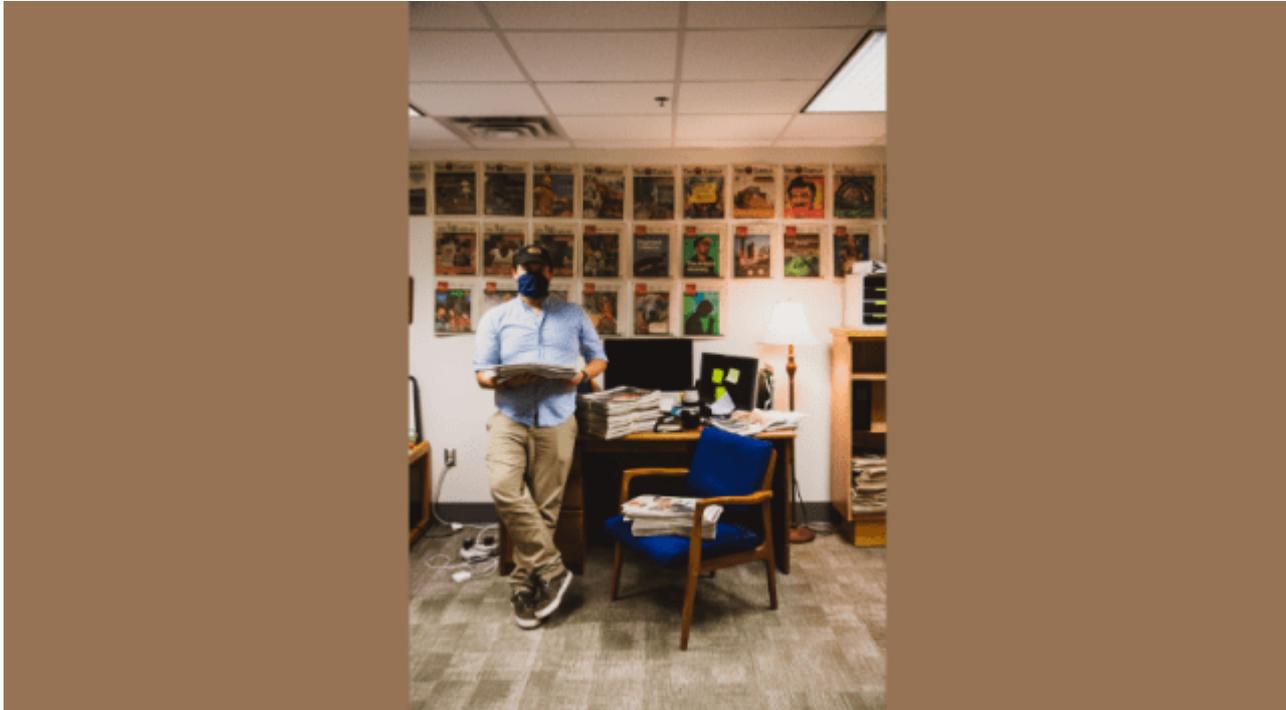


Photo Credit: (Sarah Steffey) While I love being on campus, if I were a freshman, I wouldn't go live on a university campus during COVID-19.

The Radford

Radford University has been through troubles even before COVID-19: cutting costs, [Radford University board gives broad powers to the president to slash the budget](#), going against the Teaching and Research Faculty Handbook, [talk of cutting the positions of longtime faculty and staff](#), and more.

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Radford University announced it would remain completely open, April 28, [through an email sent out to students](#). This earlier decision, along with the university's financial struggles, and their decline in fall undergraduate students, makes one wonder why they would be one of the first universities to stay open.

They really need funding.

While I love being on campus, if I were a freshman, I wouldn't go live on a university campus during COVID-19 to spend \$10,000 to sit in my room and make calls on Zoom all

day and not go out and join clubs because of fear of sickness. I have seen this first hand as my dormmate this year is a freshman.

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However, Radford University is just ok, and that's just fine. It's not the best school, but it's not the worst school by far. It's cheaper than most public universities, and it gets the job done.

I believe Radford University is attempting to set the bar higher; however, I wouldn't call them "world-class," as President Hemphill says in many of his letters.

The Next EIC

So, without further ado, it's my pleasure to welcome your next EIC of *The Tartan*, freshman Kylee Walling. I trust she will keep up the newspaper's consistency and improve it even more.

Please file all non-letter specific grievances to Walling from here on out at kewalling@radford.edu.

Being *The Tartan* EIC is not a walk in the park; I know firsthand, but you get out what you put in, and working at *The Tartan* has been the best experience I've had at Radford University.

Please file all non-letter specific grievances to Walling from here on out at kewalling@radford.edu.

It's been fun.

Signing off,

Dylan Lepore

Editor-in-Chief Dec. 2017 - Nov. 2020

The Tartan

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