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CHITRA PARIKH: This has been an interesting experience, because amidst the difficulty and the uncertainty of such a stressful time, we now have to think about what's going on outside the broader Princeton community. And that's not something that as campus leaders we often have to think about, but it is something that definitely informs how we can best support students.

MARGARET KOVAL: Hello, Princeton. This spring, with coronavirus disrupting all our lives, we're reaching out to Princetonians everywhere to hear how we're continuing our collective and personal missions, how we're staying together while far apart, and how so many of us are working to serve the wider world. In this episode of "We Roar," we hear from Chitra Parikh, president of the Princeton Undergraduate Student Government.

CHITRA PARIKH: My name is Chitra Parikh, and I am a junior. I study architecture, and I'm currently serving as the Undergraduate Student Government president. A lot of my work involves aggregating and relaying student concerns, so reaching out to different students on campus as well as different groups on campus to understand how various campus life policies may affect them.

With coronavirus, there are many new concerns that students may have, especially for those who may be remaining on campus or those who had questions about moving and storage and this abrupt change that happened in all of our lives. For students remaining on campus, particularly, USG has been trying to play an active role, by relaying concerns that they've reached out to us with and that we've been hearing about.

It's really hard to be on campus when there's so few people, given that we're used to seeing campus at its full radiance and capacity with more than 5,000 people on a daily basis. Beyond that, a few students have concerns about their home situations. It's extremely difficult to be away from home during such a stressful time for some of the students on campus, especially for students who were unable to return home due to borders closing or travel restrictions.

So as USG president, my role kind of shifted to being on top of how various students on campus were feeling, but also thinking about how we can make sure that we all feel connected in such a difficult and uncertain time. What that means and what that looks like for me is more than just relaying and aggregating student concerns. I also hope that we can be a point of community for the student body.

So, I'll give you an example.

For instance, our Undergraduate Student Life chair recently launched a program called Buds at a Distance, with Letters to Strangers, which is a mental health nonprofit that runs a chapter on campus. And they're essentially trying to connect students from all over the world, to help current students meet new students that they may not already know, to continue fostering that sense of community and to help us feel a little bit more "closer to campus," even though we're all so geographically dispersed.

Beyond that, I've seen various students' groups host different reunions over Zoom. I've seen some students' groups host workshops, for instance, dance workshops or workshops with alums. I've also seen various programs being held by not just the University but also different students.

My good friend Alex Kaplan, who is Class of 2021, and he is the founder of Coffee Club, hosted a session over Zoom to teach people how to brew coffee. So there's really this sense of community that almost feels spontaneous. But I've been amazed at how supportive the Princeton community has been over these last few weeks.

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So I will say that this has been an interesting experience, because amidst the difficulty and the uncertainty of such a stressful time, in thinking about campus, we now have to think about what's going on outside the broader Princeton community. And that's not something that as campus leaders we often have to think about. There is a student body president resource network, and we've all been chatting to think about how we can all support our campuses, keeping in mind that every campus looks different and every campus operates differently.

We've been able to share what we're doing and hear about what other student governments are doing. And the New Jersey student government representatives from all over — schools such as TCNJ, and Rutgers, us, obviously, and other New Jersey institutions — have also been talking about how the rules in New Jersey specifically might be affecting students on campus, and it is something that definitely informs how we can best support students.

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In addition to being USG president, I'm also premed, and I'm pursuing the Global Health Certificate on campus. The current situation, both on a global and a national scale, is something that has informed how I view not only my education but also my career choice. I think being premed at a time like this is a very inspiring time to think about how we can make an impact in the worlds — in the communities — that we live in.

I've previously volunteered at Princeton First Aid and Rescue Squad. I've volunteered at many local hospitals. And I think the situation in health care right now, broadly, just has made me realize how important it is for us to make sure that various clinical staff have access to personal protective equipment, that they have the resources they need to do their job, because, really, they're the ones sacrificing a lot to make sure that we're all safe and taken care of.

Princeton's motto is "in the nation's service and the service of humanity," and I think this motto is particularly exciting for students in a time where we're all looking for hope and, sort of, calm and certainty, because it reminds us that we can all be there for each other, we can all support each other, and we can all think about how we make a difference, no matter how small it might be.

For context, I live with six people in my house: I live with my sibling and my parents and my grandparents. So there's a lot of fear, understandably, about what would happen if my

grandparents were to get sick or if one of my mom's siblings were to get sick, et cetera. But in terms of a little bit of optimism, my brother was recently accepted to Princeton. And as of now, he is accepting, and he will be part of the Class of 2024.

I think the spirit of Princeton has extended far beyond campus in my experience, with how students and how the University has transitioned over to virtual instruction, and how we've all dealt with the seriousness of COVID-19. It's really a time where we all have bonded over being part of the Princeton community and being able to know that no matter where in the world you are, there is a group of 5,000 — if not more — students that support you and are thinking of you, no matter what your situation is.

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