

## Accidents: My Allegheny Experience and The COVID-19 Pandemic

Throughout my time at Allegheny I have found myself thinking -- and more than ever as a senior -- how my experience here feels like a complete accident. And, since Spring break, I also find myself grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic which also feels accidental in so many ways.

As a high school student, Allegheny College was located five hours from my house and was not on my radar. Allegheny was a school that I happened to come across when I was scrolling through a list of college coaches that would be at my upcoming soccer tournament. But, as chance would have it, a year and a half after that same soccer tournament, I was in Meadville, PA moving into Baldwin Hall and the school of my dreams.

I have been fortunate to meet so many amazing students who have made an impact on me at some point during my four years; I find it hard to imagine what my life would be like if I had never met these students. Of course, the reality of college is that not everyone stays for the entire four years, some people will inevitably transfer, and others will leave for a semester to take a leave of absence. In fact, it was after a teammate who left after the first semester of my freshman year that I started to think about what the odds were that my path would have crossed with hers and the many others I had met at Allegheny by that point. And, overtime, this thought has crossed my mind so many times--what were the odds that I and my classmates would have ended up at Allegheny College?

Here are the probabilities I calculated, in an overly simplistic and generic manner:

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in the United States there were 4,298 degree-granting postsecondary institutions as of the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>1</sup>

Allegheny is thus, 1 out of 4,298, giving me a 0.02% chance to have ended up at Allegheny. (For the mathematicians reading this, you are correct, this calculation neglects the fact that not all schools were equally plausible. Please humor me anyway.)

It seems unlikely that I would have chosen Allegheny, and yes, with a 0.02% chance it was.

But, what are the odds that say, my very best friend from Allegheny, also ended up in Meadville?

Well that would be a 0.0000054% chance. It was very unlikely to say the least!

Like many other Allegheny students though, the college has given me more than one best friend. But, even beyond the people I would consider to be my best friends, there are so many people at Allegheny whose friendship I cherish including fellow students, professors, Parkhurst employees, various other faculty and staff members, and local community members, all of whom I cannot imagine my time at Allegheny without.

So, what are the odds of all these amazing people and me ending up in Meadville together?

Well I am actually not sure how you would calculate this, but I imagine that with each relationship the percentage would diminish, eventually getting closer and closer to a 0% chance.

Thus, I cannot help but think that my Allegheny experience seems entirely accidental. And, yet, since Spring break I have had to consider another “fluke” event, the COVID-19 pandemic. What are the odds that a once-in-a-century event would abruptly end the normalcy of Senior year and turn the world upside down in such an unprecedented fashion?

Some days it feels like the universe played a trick on me, creating two accidental situations that would collide and change my world and perspective. My time at Allegheny seems accidental, in the same way our current global pandemic feels accidental. Both events seem to have occurred against the odds. For one, my time at the college, I am immensely thankful; for a fluke pandemic which upended life on the planet, I have immense animosity. In moments where I find myself immersed in thought and grappling with these two events, I am again reminded of the randomness of the universe, of chance and fate. I am reminded that life is made up of so many events, some that feel like beautiful miracles, like my time at Allegheny, and others that feel like horrific tragedies, like the COVID-19 pandemic. But as I consider this miracle and this tragedy, I have come to recognize that both create an invaluable perspective that magnifies joy and reminds me to cherish each and every beautiful moment, experience, and friendship, realizing how unlikely and accidental the people and forces that come together to create these treasures really are.

Sources:

- 1) <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2019-02-15/how-many-universities-are-in-the-us-and-why-that-number-is-changing>