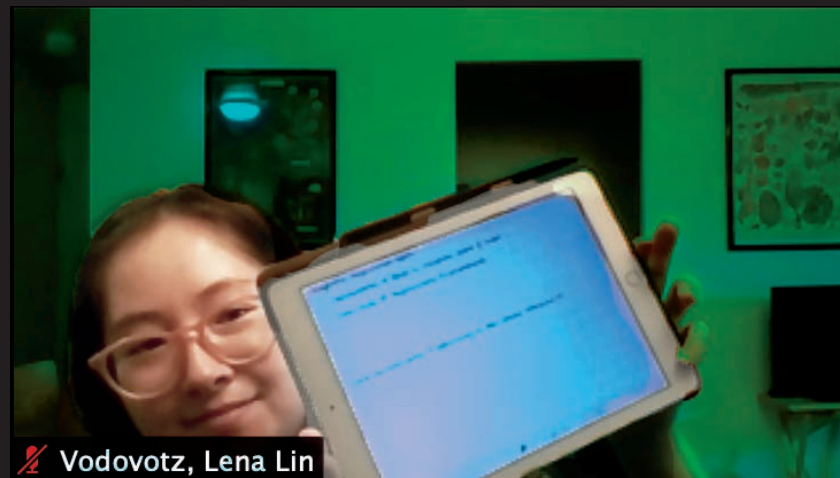


Li, Anna



Vodovotz, Lena Lin



Venkatesh, Shruthi



Nawash, Baraa

When it comes to studying, many students say they do better together.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The group study session—it's a fixture of medical school: people around a table, open books, laptops, cups of coffee, scribbles on a nearby whiteboard, young minds being honed together. Before COVID-19, students might have taken these sessions for granted. Jason Rosenstock, associate dean for medical education and professor of psychiatry, believes that being part of a study group not only facilitates learning, but also fosters community, reducing isolation. Some students say they appreciate the dedicated energy these groups generate, rescuing them from YouTube's unrelenting pull.

In response to the pandemic, the University implemented safety precautions for the group study rooms in Alan Magee Scaife Hall. Once accommodating 15 people, the reconfigured rooms now hold no more than a mask-clad three, sitting physically-distanced at X-marked spots. Students must sanitize surfaces after using them. Many students have, of course, incorporated video chats into their studious camaraderie, and that can be surprisingly effective. In an online practice session for Intro to Medical Interviewing, for example, first-year Baraa Nawash and others entered breakout rooms to rehearse and critique their partners. "It was great to observe my classmates' perspectives and improve my own skills," Nawash says. Students appreciate the little things, too: shared digital flashcards, pets slinking past cameras.

The virtual study sessions remind Nawash, 22, of the moment she realized Pitt was her top choice for medical school.

In spring 2020, when Nawash joined more than 40 others in her first virtual meetup for admitted students, she wasn't sure if Pitt Med was the next step in her educational journey. But multiplayer games and icebreakers turned into late-night heart-to-heart conversations. She left the video call smiling, and soon after, she was Pittsburgh-bound.

"I felt like I was already talking to lifelong friends. If not for those evenings, I wouldn't be here today," says Nawash. —*Nithya Kasibhatla*