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DESPITE THE University of West Indies (UWI) suspending classes until after the Easter period because of the COVID-19 outbreak, some international students have reported that they are stuck on campus halls, or have opted to stay put to avoid contracting the virus and taking it back to their respective homelands.

In a memorandum sent to the students, the university advised all students residing on the campus to make all necessary arrangements to return home and engage in online consultation.

The UWI also noted that while it understood that a small number of students were unable to leave because of unavoidable circumstances, Jamaican students, in particular, were urged to return home to reduce the on-campus population.

Noellissa Swaby, an international student from the Eastern Caribbean state St Kitts-Nevis, said she initially opted to stay on campus out of fear of carrying the virus back to her home country

“At first, I was thinking about the risk of going through the airport and carrying it back home; and because I’m from a small island, I don’t think that they have the resources to deal with such a pandemic, and I didn’t want to take the risk of being the one take it back there,” Swaby told **The Gleaner**.

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She further said that as the borders are now closed, even if she decided to go home, it is too late.

St Kitts-Nevis has recorded at least two COVID-19 cases involving patients who recently travelled to the United States. Emergency powers have been imposed, curfews set up, and travel restrictions implemented.

However, another Kittitian, who requested that his name be withheld, said that he was left stranded in Jamaica because he waited until it was too late to get clarity on how classes would be conducted.

“I’m still here because I was waiting on UWI to give a definitive answer, because they indicated that they will get back to us about whether we will have face-to-face classes or on an online platform,” he said.

By the time he booked a ticket, Trinidad had shut down the Piarco International Airport, putting paid to his flight plans via Caribbean Airlines. Flights to the Eastern Caribbean are generally routed through Trinidad.

## NO US VISA

“They, however, cancelled that flight. But I don’t have a visa, so I can’t catch the American Airlines, so I got stranded,” the student said.

He disclosed that although he won’t be around his family amid the coronavirus outbreak, he was thankful that he could remain on campus, and shared that he had faith in the Jamaican Government’s handling of the crisis.

Another international student at the University of Technology, Jamaica shared that she, too, was fearful of contracting the virus while travelling and unknowingly bringing it home.

Nisha Dupuis, a national of Anguilla, said that although she and her sister also attend the same university and wanted to be with their family, they agreed that it would be safer to remain on campus.

“Our priority, simply, was to successfully complete this semester, and we feared that if we travelled home, we will not be able to return when school eventually reopened,” Dupuis told **The Gleaner**.

“Also, we really did not want to be quarantined in our own country, because at the time they had no reported cases ... .The last thing anyone wants is to be the first person to introduce the virus into their country.”

[\*\*danae.hyman@gleanerjm.com\*\*](mailto:danae.hyman@gleanerjm.com) <sup>[3]</sup>



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