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An ode to claustrophobic Flagstaff

Megan Troutman Apr 12, 2018



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I drink black coffee and say “have a good day” to about 50 people every morning. Most of them are from the States, but occasionally I converse with an Australian, Canadian or even with families from Switzerland.

I work at the front desk of one of the five Hilton hotels in Flagstaff, which is only a fraction of the total amount of hotels in town. But if you think about it, all of those hotels are *still* not enough for the visitors.

Most hotel guests come to see the Grand Canyon because Flagstaff is the closest town with the most hotel options. Other guests come for Snowbowl or to escape Phoenix heat for a weekend.

But the majority of visitor traffic comes from NAU's December and May graduation ceremonies.

For the weekend of May 11, graduation weekend, the hotel is completely sold out. It was sold out back in January. While not all hotels may be sold out, most of the nicer ones were booked up months in advance.

Flagstaff is about to feel claustrophobic.

If you break down the numbers, it makes sense. In May 2017 there were about 5,600 graduating students. So if you take that number and multiply it by four, the average amount of guests each student will bring to graduation, then you have the number of people potentially joining us in our already small town — 22,400.

No wonder hotels fill up so fast.

Then when hotels start to fill, prices start to rise. It's just how life works. Currently, the going rate for a room on our property for the night of graduation is \$309.99 per night.

That's almost my monthly rent, for *one* night. Graduation better be entertaining.

But I digress. My whole point is that Flagstaff is out of control. We need an epidemic. OK, maybe not, but we need to do something to balance Flagstaff locals and the students who are slowly taking over like roaches.

I realize how hypocritical I sound, because I am a student, but I really do feel bad for the locals. The town has become overpopulated, resulting in innovations like The Hub or ParkFlag, the downtown parking system.

One of the main reasons I chose NAU was because of the advertised “small town community.” But the small town, with a tight knit university, is quickly becoming a city.

At the May 2017 graduation ceremony, I drove from Lake Mary Road to south campus to see my friend graduate. That drive usually takes five minutes tops, but because there were probably around 22,400 extra people in town specifically for graduation, it took me nearly 20 minutes to navigate traffic from Milton alone.

So from a hotel employee who can see the future of Flagstaff’s population growth, I warn you all: it’s about to get a little more crowded.

And thanks to NAU accepting more and more students, it’s not going to stop.

Megan Troutman is the editor-in-chief of The Lumberjack, Northern Arizona University's student newspaper. College Chronicles aims to connect FlagLive! readers to various aspects of campus life.