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Margaret Koval \*83: Hello, Princeton. Everywhere we are this semester, coronavirus is changing our lives. But during this extraordinary time, the University's mission and community are stronger than ever. We may be apart, but together, we roar.

The Princeton community is always growing, is always evolving.

I think students from all around campus are trying to come together in this moment of extraordinary highs and lows.

What matters is that we're all going to try our best to be healthy and safe.

This is a special community, and while these are really hard challenges, I know that we will succeed in facing them as a community.

Margaret Koval: This spring, we're reaching out to Princetonians everywhere, to hear how we're continuing our teaching, learning and research; how we're staying together while so far apart; and how so many of us are working together to serve the wider world. Today, Kara Amoratis updates us from her home near the Princeton campus.

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Kara Amoratis: My name is Kara Amoratis, and I'm the associate director for global safety and security here at Princeton. I am responsible for monitoring and keeping track of incidents and events that happened in the world that might have an impact on the Princeton community overseas — and that's for study abroad students, people doing research, people visiting other institutions.

So, the first time that I heard anything about the virus that would become known as coronavirus was sometime in early December. Someone sent me a message about, you know, an illness that was cropping up in Wuhan, China, and asked, you know, "Do we have anyone in that part of the world?" And I was pretty sure we didn't, and I was able to verify that we didn't have anybody there. And then, you know, as the weeks passed, and as we saw, you know, towards the end of January into February, it became not just a problem of coronavirus in China, it was now in Italy, in Iran, in South Korea, and we were seeing cases of coronavirus popping up in other parts of the world. And that's when it became, you know, really concerning at that point.

It's been a marathon since then. [ LAUGHS ] Right before spring break, we issued a recall to students saying, "We think it's time for you to come home," specifically students that were in Europe, the United Kingdom and Ireland. And then within just a few days it became clear that it should be: recall from the entire world.

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I first became concerned about Morocco probably when I heard the announcement that they were going to be closing all their air space and not allowing international travel. We had noticed that there had been quite a few flight cancellations into and out of Morocco. And we knew that we had two students that were still there that, you know, had plans to leave, but it was after that

closure point. And the challenge became finding options for them to leave commercially out of Morocco to come back to the United States.

That's really when the challenges were born, because it was becoming less and less likely that they would have a pathway out. I had been in contact with International SOS a few times to see if they had any suggestions. They provide emergency medical and security related advice, referrals and assistance for people that are traveling overseas.

We kept trying to schedule students on flights, and they would, you know, get flights and they would be ticketed, and the flights would seem like they were going to go. Some did, some were canceled. And it just became more and more uneasy, and eventually it ended up that International SOS launched an evacuation out of Morocco for several clients, and we joined up with several other people that had students in Morocco to get them out. And they flew from Morocco to London, and then London back to Newark, and came to campus to sit out their 14-day quarantine period. But that one was sort of, you know, I hesitate to say the word "easy," but that one was easy compared to the challenges in Peru.

So we had six students that were in a town called Urubamba, which is about an hour from Cusco. So that was sort of a smaller, not totally rural, but a little bit more — it's certainly not like being in Lima. And then we had one student, a graduate student that was conducting research in a place called Iquitos, which is in the northern Amazon, and it is only accessible via air or boat, which presented very unique challenges since all, you know, air traffic was halted, including domestic. So it wasn't as if we could instruct that student to get on a plane and join the group in Cusco and wait for, you know, the evacuation from there. So we wanted to get them home just to wrap up everything and get them home, and realized I think on the 21st, potentially, that no flights in, no flights out, all airspace was closed, all flights were canceled, you know, carriers were not permitted to enter or exit. So if you were there, you needed to stay there. You were not allowed to drive, and be out on the street. If you were, you were directed to go home. So it was, you know, it was a full-on lockdown, in an effort to stop the spread of coronavirus in Peru. So it was sort of a challenge as to how, and — who can we contact and call to help us.

If I gave students information, and then I let them help make a decision, that — that really went a long way with keeping them calm and keeping them, you know, on board with the plan, right? So if students felt like they completely had no control over anything, then that's sort of when panic will start to set in. But all along the way, you keep giving information, even if it's not much, you just keep, sort of, offering up these pieces of information and letting them know what the planning stages are. And then being honest when there are setbacks, right? So for the students that were in Peru, you know, it wasn't like we ever wanted them to not know that we were having challenges. But we wanted them to know that even though there were challenges, that we were working on multiple plans at the same time, to make sure that we had a solution for them in the end.

I sort of had, like, a back of my mind concern that, you know, I tend — I don't tend to share that kind of thing. It makes people nervous if I tell them that I'm nervous, right, being the emergency person. But I think, you know, there was a moment where I became frustrated with the fact that we couldn't seem to make any progress with all of the resources, and all of the skills, and all the people that we had access to.

And, you know, it was just looking like we wouldn't be able to — we would have to move from a place of evacuation to, how do we safely keep these people in place, and how long can we do that, and what does that look like? And I had sort of felt like, if I got there, then that would be like a point of failure, in my mind, that we weren't able to get them out and had to move into that different space.

I think that, you know, after the second time that International SOS was turned down for their permits to enter Peru, that's when I really kind of had that moment of "This is bad. I don't know how this is going to turn out."

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Joyce Rechtschaffen, who is the federal government relations person and head of the office down in D.C., was the person that I reached out to, to ask for some assistance in, you know, seeking out government, you know — ways to make connections with government officials that might have some influence or ability to negotiate.

I had had the great pleasure of working with Joyce on a previous case, and knew that if anybody could help make connections with the embassy in Peru, it would be Joyce. So I gave her a call and I said, you know, "Here's the situation we have: a group of students that are stuck in Peru. And I don't have any contacts in the embassy. I don't know anybody at the consulate. And I'm trying to track somebody down. Do you think you can help?"

And she just took it and ran, just like she has with every other situation that has needed that higher level of support. She was able to tap into her, you know, rich network thanks to her long career, you know, with the U.S. Senate to activate, you know, Senator Bob Menendez and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to put some pressure and write a letter to Secretary Mike Pompeo, as well as talk directly to the embassy folks and the Peruvian government to say, you know, let us come and get these folks out of there. You know, the U.S. government always likes to say, please don't rely on us to be your evacuation provider, but in this case they really had to be that because ultimately, the only conversation that could be had was between two governments, right? It wasn't something that a private charter company could work out with the Civil Aviation Authority because they needed to have that higher level of involvement by the authorities to do that.

And I seriously lacked confidence in what the plan was going to be, because I thought, if the only choice left is the embassy option, you know, there's 4,000 Americans that are in Peru — or some number like that, that someone threw out at me, 4,000 or 5,000 people — you know, our students are just on that list, and who knows when they'll be able to get out. I mean, it was near constant, you know, back and forth at all hours of the day and night. You know, I think I talked to Joyce seven or eight times a day, and lots of emails back and forth, and connecting with colleagues at other institutions. And then, you know, there's some key staffers that worked for Senator Menendez that just really went above and beyond, and, you know, would call me at 5 o'clock or midnight or answer my emails at any time, and it really was a big lift on their part to provide this assistance. And I know we weren't the only ones that they were helping, so that makes it even more incredible — is that it felt like that.

In the middle of the night — at midnight — I received a message directly from the embassy in Lima saying, "All of your students are on a manifest for a flight on March 25th. They need to be at the airport at 9:30 a.m." So we sort of scrambled everybody, and woke people up, and made

sure that there was a vehicle that had a driver that had permission to drive, had a letter from the embassy that stated that they were part of an embassy evacuation, and that they were authorized to be out and about, and get everybody to the airport for the long wait in line. I think there was, you know, a very large crowd when the students arrived, and people were — the police were coming through and checking and making sure people were on the list.

And at the end of the day, they were able to fly out. And I have to say that — my gut is that — that is thanks to the efforts of Joyce and the senators from several states that had students that were in Peru just continuously asking, and asking, and asking, and asking again to help these Americans get out. So, I mean, it was just — it was all hands on deck from every angle possible. And I've literally never seen anything like it. And I've been through, you know: earthquake in Haiti, and the Egyptian revolution, and I've just never seen something come together in such a way as this one did. It was remarkable.

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