COPING STRATEGIES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

COVID-19 and Remote Work

CDC Guidelines and resources
TIRED?

Trauma/Stress/Anxiety

Physical/Emotional Exhaustion
LOWER PRODUCTIVITY EXPECTED

Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure

By Aisha S. Ahmad | MARCH 27, 2020

The Chronicle of Higher Education
WHAT YOU CAN DO...
COPING DURING COVID-19

Schedule & Routine + Small, Attainable Goals
WHAT YOU CAN DO...
COPING DURING COVID-19

Take care of your body

Exercise  Sleep
Eat healthy
WHAT YOU CAN DO...
COPING DURING COVID-19

Connect with others

Healthy relationships

Support system

Academic & personal
WHAT YOU CAN DO...
COPING DURING COVID-19

Take breaks
Breathe
Calming activities
WHAT YOU CAN DO…
COPING DURING COVID-19

Stay informed . . .
BUT avoid too much exposure to news/social media
WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Self-compassion

• Don’t beat yourself up over lower productivity (or resting, eating, etc.)
• Don’t compare yourself to others – we all deal with these things differently (limit social media)
• There is no “right way” to cope – it looks different for everyone.
COMMON SIGNS OF DISTRESS:

• Feelings of numbness, disbelief, anxiety or fear.
• Changes in appetite, energy, and activity levels.
• Difficulty concentrating.
• Difficulty sleeping or nightmares and upsetting thoughts and images.
• Physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and skin rashes.
• Worsening of chronic health problems.
• Anger or short-temper.
• Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
WHAT YOU CAN DO...

COPING DURING COVID-19

Seek help when needed...

Graduate Life Coach

Student Care Network
NATIONAL CENTER FOR FACULTY DIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT

NCFDD member resources include:

- Weekly Monday Motivator
- Twelve monthly core training webinars
- Twelve monthly guest expert webinars
- Access to their Multi-Week Courses
- Audio, slides and transcripts of all workshops so members can learn at their convenience
- Private Discussion Forum for peer-mentoring & problem solving
- Monthly accountability buddy match
- Moderated monthly writing challenges
- Access to their Career Center where members can post and search job listings
- Access to their Member Library, which includes past workshop materials, referrals and readings.
- Targeted online writing retreats led by faculty facilitators

How to Activate Your VU Sponsored Membership:

1. Go to the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity website (http://www.facultydiversity.org/).
2. Select the “Join NCFDD” tab and choose Vanderbilt University from the menu, then “Continue”
3. Click the “Activate my Membership” button
4. Complete the registration process
SCIENTIST WITHOUT A LAB? A PhD RESEARCHER GUIDE TO COVID-19

In these unprecedented times, many of us are finding ourselves without the ability to perform lab work and are having to self-isolate. This poster explores some of the options for PhD researchers in these uncertain period to help alleviate pressure, guide productivity and maintain mental wellness.

1. WRITE YOUR INTRO
   - Take this opportunity to review your field, understand seminal work and write your thesis introduction. Consider writing a review article - this often can be used as an introduction!

2. BUILD YOUR EXPERIMENTAL
   - You know roughly what techniques you will use. Write about how the techniques work and detail your procedures from your lab books. If your lab books are, well, lacking - time to fix that!

3. MAKE BEAUTIFUL FIGURES
   - Often neglected - make some great figures to go in your thesis. Use the time to get to grips with graphical software - a skillset useful beyond the PhD.

4. CONNECT WITH COLLEAGUES
   - Use online tools to speak to colleagues such as Zoom/Skype. Consider team coffee breaks or lunches too! Use this time to connect with collaborators across the globe.

5. CREATE A SCHEDULE
   - Think about creating a schedule to stick too, as well as using tools like the pomodoro method to manage your time. Remember no one works solidly all day - take breaks!

6. LEARN TO CODE
   - Automating data processing by investing in your ability to code will ultimately make your lab work faster and smoother when you return to the lab.

7. CREATE TEST PLANS
   - Plan out your experiments so that when you get back in the lab you can be super efficient with your remaining time. Don’t underestimate the importance of thinking time!

8. WORK ON PAPERS
   - Use this time to write up papers for publication. Not enough data? No problem! Write about what you expect to see and collect the data/modify the draft when you return.

9. LET GO OF THE GUILT
   - Remember, everyone is in the same position and productivity will drop. COVID-19 is *not* your fault. Doing what you can is good enough.

10. TAKE TIME FOR YOU
    - Isolation can take its toll. Make sure to take time for you, doing other things you enjoy. Most importantly, look after your health. Family and your wellness comes first!

STRUGGLING WITH ISOLATION? NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO? CALL SAMARITANS NOW ON 116-123

Part of the #mentalhealth series by Dr Zoe Ayres (@zjayres). Free to distribute.
The MISTRAL Guide for PhD students working under COVID-19 restrictions

Adapted with permission from the #mentalhealth series by Dr Zoe Ayres (@zjayres)

Many of us are finding we are unable to work normally because of closures and the need to isolate or distance ourselves. Here are some suggestions to help you feel less pressured, improve your productivity, and maintain your mental wellbeing.

- **Write your introduction chapter**
  Use this time to review the overall context of your project, how it relates to the wider field of research and sharpen how you can articulate the original contribution you will make. Now is a good time to write your literature review and draft your thesis introduction. Can you write a review article with someone else? (See also ‘Draft papers’)

- **Draft papers**
  Even if you don’t have enough data to submit a publication, you can use this time to map out the papers you would like to write. Could we organise a virtual writing retreat? Would you attend?

- **Think creatively about communicating**
  Time to film that 3 minute thesis introduction! Take the opportunity to think about novel conceptual diagrams that can highlight key aspects of your work. Design slides for conference presentations. Write a blog! What software expertise is there within the ESIs that you could use or learn?

- **Show solidarity of purpose**
  Maintaining productivity will be a challenge for everyone. COVID-19 is not your fault, so instead of feeling guilty, do your best and support others. It feels a lot better.
  Tell someone about something you did every day, and be proud!

- **Turn off the news**
  It’s easy to be caught up in the constant cycle of updates and reminders of the situation. It’s as important to distract yourself from your news and social networks for parts of the day and focus on other things.
  Have you found something good (website, news programme, video) at the end of the day to catch up? Can you recommend it to others?

- **Keep moving in mind and body**
  Advice to stay indoors might seem like a good excuse to stop moving, but it’s important to be as active as you can whilst staying safe (running a marathon on a balcony is not required). Try out new ways to break up sitting at your desk. Be creative.
  Can you suggest a MISTRAL 30 day challenge?

- **Make a timetable**
  Structuring your day and sticking to it regularly will help you to manage your time and keep your productivity rolling. Remember to take breaks too! Stay focussed with apps like Forest.
  Could you structure your week differently if you don’t have to stick to a 5 weekdays and 2 weekend days format?

- **Self-maintenance**
  Isolation will be hard for everyone. Doing other things you enjoy, looking after your health, family and other close to you is vital. Make sure you get the exercise you need, and the treats you want to eat. This is a long distance run, not a sprint.
  What’s the best way you have found to switch off and forget about work? Would others benefit from that?

- **Look for new training opportunities**
  You may have mapped the training you need in a Career Development Plan but think about other skills that you would otherwise not have time to explore; a new language, familiarity with new software ... Find something to learn to get you ahead.
  Could the MISTRAL network help with this – are there a number of researchers who would like to be involved, such as helping each other with a new language?

- **Revisit your research proposal**
  Although you know roughly what data you want to collect, you may need to reassess how you will gather it, especially as this may now be delayed by the health crisis. Consider the pros and cons of alternative methods that don’t involve face-to-face interaction or minimise travel. You may want to now prioritise tasks that you were planning to tackle after data-gathering. Don’t grandiose: you will still have time to collect data when the pandemic passes.
  Can you team up with another ESR to generate data?

- **Connect with different communities**
 Explore new ways of communicating with others, for example email or online meetings like the MISTRAL hangouts. We can try coffee breaks, lunch, and happy hours too!
  This is just not about other researchers – reach out to those in your neighbourhood as well.

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[Logo of Vanderbilt University]