



# Supporting Graduate Student Well-being During the Pandemic

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# Goals for Today



- ▶ Impact pandemic is having on everyone's health and well-being
- ▶ Re-setting expectations for learning and productivity
- ▶ Experiences our graduate students are having and how to respond and support them
- ▶ Dealing with difficult academic situations in light of this new context
- ▶ Resources available for situations/challenges a student may experience
- ▶ Role of the DGS in supporting students





# Why COVID-19 is Uniquely Stressful



- ▶ We are all going through this at the same time; students, staff and faculty!
- ▶ News coverage hyper-focused 24/7 on increased impact
- ▶ Opportunities for social connection severely limited
- ▶ Feeling of a lack of control/uncertainty over the situation can induce fear
- ▶ We all have increased thoughts and worry about:
  - ▶ Uncertainty about the future
  - ▶ Concerns related to managing our own health or that of family members
  - ▶ Financial concerns or changes
  - ▶ Traversing unknown territory and 'new normal'



...It's not business as usual...

## **Working Remote - COVID 19 Principles**

1. You are not "Working From Home", you are "At your home, during a crisis, trying to work".
2. Your personal physical, mental, and emotional health is far more important than anything else right now.
3. You should not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours.
4. You will be kind to yourself and not judge how you are coping based on how you see others coping.
5. You will be kind to others and not judge how they are coping based on how you are coping.
6. Your team's success will not be measured the same way it was when things were normal.



Who do I  
want to be  
during COVID-  
19?

**FEAR ZONE**

I grab food, toilet paper  
and medications that I  
don't need

I spread emotions  
related to fear and  
anger

I complain  
frequently

I forward all  
messages I receive

I get mad easily

I recognize that we are all  
trying to do our best

**LEARNING ZONE**

I stop compulsively  
consuming what hurts  
me, from food to news

I identify my  
emotions

I become aware of  
the situation and  
think how to act

I evaluate information  
before spreading  
something false

I practice quietude,  
patience, relationships  
and creativity

**GROWTH ZONE**

I live in the present and  
focus on the future

I am empathetic with  
myself and with others

I thank and appreciate  
others

I keep a happy  
emotional state and  
spread hope

I look for a way to  
adapt to new  
changes

I think of the others and  
see how to help them

I make my talents  
available to those who  
need them







# What Grad Students are Experiencing...



- ▶ Diversity of Response – no two situations are the same
- ▶ Massive Loss
  - ▶ Routine, safety, social support networks
  - ▶ Income / financial security / future job market
  - ▶ Home resources/situations - student-parents
  - ▶ Loss of loved ones and secondary or vicarious trauma
- ▶ Academic Concerns
  - ▶ Productivity and motivation
  - ▶ Next steps with employment – jobs
  - ▶ Balancing mentor expectations with stressors of transitioning to a new way of living
- ▶ International Students
  - ▶ Inability to return home, fear for family, escalation in racism





# What graduate students want their mentors to know...



- ▶ "A writing project that once took me 1 hour is now ending up taking 3 hours. I'm sleeping less and only waking up to spend longer hours on my computer and finding myself more exhausted than before."
- ▶ "I am worried about what the next steps are for me and my family. I need a job this next year and it looks so bleak that this will never come to be."
- ▶ "I used to love my work, but it now all feels not at all important nor significant compared to the reality of the crisis."
- ▶ "I am confused by the mixed messages of take care of yourself and my mentor expecting that more work should be done as there is "nothing" to do."
- ▶ "I am slowly losing my sanity."
- ▶ "I have so many people losing their families... [one friend] had to go home because his sibling is alone now because the rest of the family either passed away or is in the hospital."
- ▶ "My mentor says to keep working because that's how you deal with stress."
- ▶ "Why are my mentors/supervisor/PI so not understanding?"
- ▶ "The faculty just don't get it!"

We are all in the same storm, but not in the same boat. Kindness and compassion are critical.





# Today



- ▶ What can you do to support your graduate students?
- ▶ What academic considerations look like in relationship to COVID-19?
- ▶ What resources and support should you consider now?





# Take care of yourself (you can't give what you don't have)



- ▶ Reset your expectations for yourself, your friends/family, your students
- ▶ Set up a daily routine if possible
- ▶ Stay connected (e.g. schedule video chats, virtual coffee breaks)
- ▶ Get adequate sleep, exercise, and nutrition
- ▶ Go outside
- ▶ Moderate your media consumption
- ▶ Practice gratitude and/or other present moment awareness



# Keep Lines of Communication Open

- Is every graduate student accounted for? Do you know the COVID-19 challenges that are happening for your graduate students?
  - If not, reach out today and ask!
- Note: Prior to COVID-19, a main stressor for graduate students is being unable to be honest/open with advisors about research progress<sup>^</sup>
- Normalize help-seeking as part of the process of learning, as well as life, by reminding students that it is a sign of intelligence to seek support\*
- If concerned about an individual, reach out to the student directly
- Provide referral when appropriate

<sup>^</sup> [https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/bolotnyy/files/bbb\\_mentalhealth\\_paper.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/bolotnyy/files/bbb_mentalhealth_paper.pdf)

\* Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., & Lovett, M.C. (2010). How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



# Sense of Belonging

- ▶ Increases psychological resilience which improves mental, physical and emotional functioning
- ▶ Increases student learning \*
- ▶ What to do?
  - ▶ Understand COVID-19 context and social distancing is the biggest challenge
  - ▶ Take inventory of what currently is happening between faculty and students right now
  - ▶ Talk with students directly about what would be meaningful
    - ▶ Online Happy Hours, Trivia Nights, Accountability Buddy
    - ▶ Encourage conversations about strategies to overcome stressors (topics such as motivation challenges, job search concerns, etc.)
      - ▶ Partner with campus resources to bring these topics to your programs

\* Meyers, 2009; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005; Witt, Wheelless & Allen, 2004





# Help Students Find Meaning & Purpose



- This is particularly true right now!
- Encourage self-reflection practices that allow students to gain insight to self (e.g. participate in Graduate School Programming, work with Graduate Student Career Advisor, and independent online assessments such as Myers-Briggs).
- Encourage activities that allow students to explore what is most meaningful to them right now in addition to student's research (e.g. engage with nature, Gratitude Journaling, Mindfulness Meditation, CURW).
- Talk about the concept of "service" – even in very small ways – even in this time – as one way to help overcome challenges like we're all facing now and to discover moments of meaning and purpose.
- Now more than ever, support student career exploration outside of the academy!





# Endorse stress management and self-care practices

- Validate the importance of sleep! (No shame, no blame if this isn't so great right now.)
- Endorse stress management strategies such as exercise, eating regularly, yoga, meditation, **self-compassion**, positive social relationships, gratitude practice, and taking breaks ^^

**Coping During COVID**

STAY HOME

**TIP** 

Try an online exercise class. They're a great way to break a sweat & also connect without spreading COVID-19.

Cornell Health provides tips & resources to help you Cope During COVID-19:  
health.cornell.edu/connect

Cornell Health  
live well to learn well

Whether you're healthy or self-isolating, be sure to stay at least 6 feet away from others.

**Coping During COVID**

STAY HOME

**TIP** 

Social support is one of the most important determinants of well-being. Connect online & by phone with family/friends.

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health.cornell.edu/connect

Cornell Health  
live well to learn well

Whether you're healthy or self-isolating, be sure to stay at least 6 feet away from others.

**Coping During COVID**

STAY HOME

**TIP** 

Try a bit of mindfulness today. Be present to your breath & all your senses. Experiment with meditation.

Cornell Health provides tips & resources to help you Cope During COVID-19:  
health.cornell.edu/connect

Cornell Health  
live well to learn well

Whether you're healthy or self-isolating, be sure to stay at least 6 feet away from others.

<https://health.cornell.edu/about/news/2019-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-media-slides>

^^ Karen May Barry, Megan Woods, Angela Martin, Christine Stirling & Emma Warnecke (2019) A randomized controlled trial of the effects of mindfulness practice on doctoral candidate psychological status, Journal of American College Health, 67:4, 299-307, DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2018.1515760





# Review Expectations and Provide Feedback



- Encourage modified academic plan in light of COVID-19
  - Student Progress Review (SPR) perfect time
  - Include new expectations, timeline and assessment criteria!
- Provide timely, ongoing feedback on performance
- Be flexible in not meeting timeline; offer Student Disability Services for support
- Motivate through positive reinforcement, rather than negative



# Graduate Advising in the Time of Covid-19

by Leonard Cassuto

- Do NOT ignore your students
  - Ask your graduate students what they need
  - And, ask them again. Situation is changing quickly, need to be responsive
- Graduate students want STRUCTURE!
  - You may need to mentor differently to provide this
- Graduate students need community, connection and conversation
  - Connect regularly and often. Consider recognition and celebrations
- Highlight with peers about creative ways we are supporting our graduate students
- Many of the challenges are the same, but heightened right now

“Doctoral students need more comprehensive attention in this uncertain moment than we usually give to them – but then, they needed that for a long time before the pandemic, too.”, Leonard Cassuto





# Tips for Handling Challenging Academic Situations



- ▶ Slow down the entire situation!
- ▶ Key - Find out context to what is happening
  - ▶ Enlist others for support (including Graduate School)
  - ▶ High stake situations which are amplified by COVID-19 impact
- ▶ Give academic structure with clear consequences. Put in writing
- ▶ Simultaneously, provide support and resources to student
  - ▶ Offer all support possible. Consider changing mentoring strategy
- ▶ **Be strategic with timing. Some actions can potentially be delayed until less stressful times** – For example, if a chair resigns today, same outcome as resignation during summer/start of Fall (student can be registered through the end of fall).





# Know Your Resources



- ▶ Cornell Health – Community Consultation & Intervention (CCI)
  - ▶ Counselors who provide consultation services to faculty and staff who are working with students with possible mental health concerns.
    - ▶ Consultation
    - ▶ Advocacy
    - ▶ Case Management
    - ▶ Crisis Intervention
  - ▶ **Please call 607-255-5155 and ask to schedule a CCI consultation.**
    - ▶ You may also contact a CCI counselor directly with questions:
      - ▶ Karen Williams, PhD
      - ▶ Katherine Goldberg, DVM, LMSW.

More Information: <https://health.cornell.edu/services/mental-health-care/resources-faculty-staff#covid>



## Cornell Health Telehealth Services

- 1** Medical & mental health care are available via video appointment & phone/online consultation.
- 2** There is no copay for telehealth appointments. Learn more at [health.cornell.edu/telehealth](https://health.cornell.edu/telehealth).
- 3** Call us during business hours to schedule an appointment:  
607-255-5155.



Your NEED & LOCATION  
will help determine the  
appointment type you receive.

### Eligibility:

- All students, regardless of location, can access services by phone and online.
- Video appointments are available to students in the U.S.
- Some services are available to student spouses/partners.

Cornell  
**Health**

[health.cornell.edu/  
telehealth](https://health.cornell.edu/telehealth)



# Know Your Resources



- ▶ Graduate School Deans Office, from left
  - ▶ Jan Allen, Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs
  - ▶ Sara Hernandez, Associate Dean for Inclusion and Student Engagement
  - ▶ Barb Knuth, Dean of the Graduate School
  - ▶ Janna Lamey, Sr. Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Life
  - ▶ Jason Kahabka, Associate Dean for Administration



# Your Turn...

► Questions and Answers



# Thank you!

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