The Chronicle Guide to Coronavirus and Your Career

A faculty handbook for surviving the pandemic

Navigating the Future
Managing Your Career
Teaching in Uncertain Times
Coping on the Home Front
Navigating the Future

Bryan Alexander, a higher-education futurist, looks to the year ahead to see how the pandemic could change faculty life and higher education in general. Among his recommendations: Buckle up. It’s going to be a wild ride.

Managing Your Career

In these constantly shifting times, there are no guidelines on how to do your faculty job. So we’ve created this guidebook, drawn from our most essential coverage. Confused about tenure, publishing, the job market, and other career concerns during coronavirus? You’ll find guidance here.

Teaching in Uncertain Times

Whether your classes are online or in-person, you’ll need to be prepared — and, yes, ready to pivot. While you may have heard enough of that term, agility is key. Here are tips on how to cultivate it.

Coping on the Home Front

Working these days has many challenges, and we can help you meet them. Here you’ll find advice on how to stay motivated, how to balance work and family concerns, and more.
The Future of the Faculty: Uncertainty and New Responsibilities

By BRYAN ALEXANDER

To offer a glimpse of what professors and instructors can expect in the months ahead, The Chronicle asked Bryan Alexander, a higher-education futurist, to write about how the outbreak and its financial fallout are likely to change faculty life, work, and careers.

It is January 2021, and you are getting ready to begin the new semester. Fall term was a wild ride, as Covid-19 continued to wrack the nation. The pandemic roared through and receded in repeated cycles of infection, relative safety, and reinfection as death tolls rose. During viral lulls, campuses welcomed back students and faculty and staff members, then sent them off campus again as infections and death rates soared. HyFlex term, some called it, a blending over time of face-to-face and digital-learning experiences. Meanwhile, colleges froze or cut spending while the economy staggered through on-again, off-again recessions.

Fall was also your first semester teaching at Tweed College. After winning that rarest thing over the summer, a job offer, you gladly moved cross-country. You coped with the problems of taking such a complex step in an era of temperature checks at roadblocks and social distancing with movers. It was a whirlwind of unpacking and teaching, committees and departmental meetings. You learned a thousand operational details while trying to keep your research going, your family afloat, and your sanity intact … and all with the novel coronavirus gnawing at our lives.
At last, the winter break gave you a welcome respite, badly needed downtime, and some hours to plan ahead. You are starting the spring semester afresh and with new perspective. What will the new year hold for you?

Teaching responsibilities one year into the global pandemic may differ in some ways from those of the pre-Covid-19 era, depending on one’s institution. Faculty members may be asked to take on larger teaching loads if enough adjuncts have not replaced full-time instructors who have been furloughed or laid off. Instructors in pandemic-centered fields, such as nursing and gerontology, may see class sizes expand, because of student demand and administrative imperative, while those leading classes in other fields see fewer students. Professors may be encouraged to play a greater role in supporting students’ mental health, with status check-ins and closer work with campus counseling centers. Changing class assignments and developing new classes is difficult without a capacity for professional development.

Adjunct faculty members will face a new marketplace. Some colleges will expand their reliance on contingent academic labor to reduce costs, once they remove full-time faculty members through early retirements or layoffs. Others will cut back on contingent faculty members and assign more work to tenure-track and other full-time professors, because adjuncts’ contracts are short-term and can be more easily ended. As colleges and universities emphasize pandemic-related classes, adjuncts with skills in those areas have a better shot at landing gigs; instructors specializing in other fields may well have a harder time.

TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE

Most teaching is either entirely online (when the pandemic is at peak) or relies heavily on digital platforms. Instructors have extended their individual classroom styles online, giving their in-person pedagogical personae a digital extension. Each pro-

Faculty members may be asked to take on larger teaching loads if enough adjuncts have not replaced full-time instructors who have been furloughed or laid off.
Professor considers the best mix of synchronous and asynchronous technologies for each class, based on pedagogical preferences, campus IT support, and a sense of what works best for the students. Social media of all kinds house peer-to-peer instructor networks for comparing online teaching practices and tools. When classes meet in person, some students prefer to remain online — whether from convenience or fear of infection — yielding hybrid-class experiences; some students appear through video, while others prefer to use telepresence robots. Managing all of this requires more than a little IT management and troubleshooting skills from faculty members. Any instructor’s research agenda may be altered. Professors working in medical fields could enjoy greater institutional support and outside funding, given Covid-19’s urgency. Other researchers may succeed in making the case for greater support by arguing that their fields are necessary: economists, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists dealing with social reconstruction in the pandemic’s wake. Their institution may support them in public roles as they share their expertise through social or traditional media. A year into the pandemic, the hunger for information about viral mutations and microeconomics has not abated. Meanwhile, research in other fields suffers a reduction in support as such work is deemed noncritical, even nonessential. Project timelines can advance, extend, or be suspended accordingly. Professional travel is rare, and academics become used to meeting with one another through videoconferencing tools.

Faculty service duties may change in our speculative 2021. Responsibilities for advising could expand or deepen — despite perhaps tightened advising budgets — as colleges and universities seek to hold on to the students they manage to enroll. Some committee work will bear closely on curricular and staffing shifts, as each campus grapples with changed demands for classes and research support. Other committees will explore revising grading policies, evaluation policies, assessment strategies, and changes in the academic calendar. Tech-

Professors may be encouraged to play a greater role in supporting students’ mental health, with status check-ins and closer work with campus counseling centers.
nology committees will balance exhausted IT-staff capacities with stressed-out faculty requests. Library committees explore just how much to cut library budgets, services, hours, holdings, and staff, while consortial holdings and off-site storage are reviewed. Colleges and universities facing accreditation renewals will demand faculty time in seeing through that process, which has become much more complex as institutions revise their curricula, shed faculty and staff members, and toggle among different instructional modalities.

GOVERNANCE, STUDENT SUPPORT, AND FINANCES

Faculty members in general will seek to maintain their governance rights, depending on the local culture, as they and administrators struggle through the continuing crisis. By 2021, colleges have each established some form of emergency-management body, either formal or de facto, and faculty members lobby hard to make their concerns heard. Committees decide on when and how to make decisions on tenure review and promotion. Hiring committees’ work will very likely slacken or suspend entirely. Younger faculty members than usual may find themselves leading departments or divisions once their elders take early retirement. Not all senior faculty members are offered or accept such options. Some stay on because institutional retirement contributions have been slashed, leading to further hiring freezes. Professors may spend more time managing contingent faculty members on campuses that rely more on them. Professors can also devote hours to managing student workers, who increasingly take the place of laid-off professionals in many campus positions, like staffing maker spaces or taking front-line IT roles.

The professor of 2021 is more likely to work with institutional staff members than was one from 2019. More responsible than ever for student well-being, this faculty member connects with residence life (to the extent there is such a thing) and mental-health counseling. As classes stay online, each instructor works closely with the full...
range of information services: IT support, academic computing, instructional design, the library. Curricular shifts and the likelihood of academic-program prioritization (thanks in part to economic distress) mean that professors spend more time politicking with or against their peers in other departments. Economic distress also sees enrollment management, communication, and development working more closely with faculty members as institutions try to win as many students and gifts as possible. Faculty members are increasingly pressed into service to help lobby state governments, nonprofits, businesses, and foundations; those with reputations as public intellectuals are especially sought in this role. Overall, professors are knitted more thoroughly into the campus community in 2021 than they were in 2019.

For these reasons, academic institutions are altered by 2021. Epidemiological and financial stresses give campuses a different physical appearance. Crowds and clusters of students are rare, as most try to maintain social distancing, even when classes are actually in-person sessions. There are fewer people on campus, even during those times, as many students and faculty and and staff members prefer to work remotely, especially those at greater risk of infection or death by reason of age and/or pre-existing conditions. Building maintenance has fallen behind schedule, in some places visibly so. Analog and digital infrastructure may have degraded somewhat; computer hardware and software replacement cycles have been extended. In contrast, some construction projects continue and new ones are launched, as low interest rates make loans and bonds for capital projects easier to obtain.

Many campuses suffer financially. Public universities see appropriations dwindle as state governments are hammered by revenue drops and spending increases. Presidents lobby their state legislators as well as the federal government, pleading the important contributions their institutions make to the commonweal, especially for mitigating and recovering from the pandemic. Enrollments are lower as some students fear infection or lower-quality instruction online. Endowments can be chaotic or simply smaller, sometimes drawn down during the darkest moments of 2020. Charitable giving has taken a hit, and donors are increasingly eager to use their gifts to address the pandemic. Businesses are similarly concerned with using their investments. Organizationally, colleges and universities may change in oth-
er ways, depending on their situations. Those hit hard by enrollment drops and recession can turn to academic programs in order to reduce expenses, cutting and perhaps expanding departments. The most threatened campuses may take the drastic step of declaring financial exigency, letting their administrations remove tenure-track faculty members. Staff members at all levels may be cut, whether food service or grants offices. Senior administrators may see their compensation or their positions cut. Overall, fewer people may work on campuses in 2021. There is pressure for colleges to close or merge with others, and some have quietly started those processes.

THE BALANCE OF WORK AND LIFE

Professors use different strategies to preserve their mental health during what some have quietly nicknamed the Emergency. For some, work is what gives their lives meaning, and they throw themselves into teaching, research, and service. Others try to demarcate their professional and personal lives, struggling to balance them even as stresses mount up in both. The Covid-19 deaths and serious illnesses of colleagues weigh heavily. The digital world becomes an escape for many — social media, videos, and games. Some faculty members develop deep skills in hobbies — baking, crafting — during quarantine. They may consult the same mental-health professionals that their students do.

As winter 2021 becomes spring and the pandemic order of things persists, faculty members gradually accustom themselves to these changes. After all, the tenure-track triad of teaching, research, and service still exists. So do familiar professional disciplines, and faculty members get to devote their days to their fields, if with some adjustments in class assignments and research support. Adjunct life can amount to a humanitarian crisis, but it has been so for years. The pandemic’s many requirements have become familiar or habitual, whether wearing masks in the library or talking with colleagues through clear plastic barriers. For many there is an urgency to conducting their work in the Emergency, applying their hard-won academic credentials to expand and share knowledge, helping a stricken society survive and recover. Similarly, working hard to preserve their home institutions is, for some, a fair responsibility to shoulder. Doing so successfully while maintaining one’s physical and mental health is for them, the great challenge of being a professor during the pandemic.

The Chronicle Guide to

Managing Your Career

14 Stranded on the Academic Job Market This Year?
18 How to Ace the Virtual Interview
22 How (Not) to Evaluate Teaching During a Pandemic
27 Should You Keep Working on That Book Manuscript?
33 Would-Be Academics: It’s Time for Plan B
38 Faculty Members Fear Pandemic Will Weaken Their Ranks
Stranded on the Academic Job Market This Year?

By KAREN KELSKY

In some ways, job seekers and departments are in the same position right now — trying to catch the last train, as it were.

Thanks to Covid-19, we are in a brave new world — except we are all scared, and it feels downright medieval in many ways.

As a career consultant who works with academic-job candidates, I’ve been hearing many questions and anxieties voiced by clients as well as by readers of The Professor Is In series. Higher education is reeling from this global pandemic, and everyone is stressed about budgets and money. But a lot of untenured faculty members and graduate students, in particular, are worried about what’s next for them and their future in academe. I’ll be blunt: The prospects are not good.

What does Covid-19 mean for people in the middle of job searches? Here’s what I’ve been telling clients who have a tenure-track offer in hand and need help negotiating the terms: Try to sign the contract as soon as possible. I am not saying don’t negotiate at all. I’m saying: Do your very best not to drag it out.

Colleges and universities are adopting hiring freezes left and right, and taking
different approaches to searches that were already in progress. Some institutions are allowing searches that were already authorized to be completed. Others are hitting “pause” on all searches, regardless of what stage they were at, or rescinding job offers altogether. Some places seem to be honoring signed contracts of new hires but effectively nullifying ones that may have gone through every stage except for the final signature.

This is all understandably anxiety-provoking for candidates and hiring departments. The only slim silver lining: This crisis is motivating administrators in usually slow-moving hiring systems to move fast, as departments want to salvage the hires they often desperately need and probably will not be able to get reauthorized for the next budget year.

In some ways, the job seekers and the departments are in the same position right now — trying to catch the last train, as it were. So, as you negotiate, if it seems as if the institution is anxious to wrap things up quickly, that’s very likely because some sort of hiring freeze is imminent.

Don’t drag out your asks. That may be especially difficult if you are juggling two or more offers, if you are seeking a counteroffer from your home institution, or both. You may have to accept that the timelines you would normally have at your disposal are drastically shrunk right now.

What does this crisis mean for assistant professors going up for tenure? Research and teaching are disrupted, just like everything else. In addition to the daily trauma, anxiety, and uncertainty that is taking a mental toll, and the disappearance of child care for millions of people, research has become literally impossible for chemists who need access to lab equipment, historians whose book requires archival research, anthropologists who usually spend summers in the field. We don’t know how long scholarly infrastructures — laboratories, libraries, air travel — will be closed or severely restricted.

Additionally, academic conferences are canceled, scholarly-book presses are dealing with their own budget cuts and disruption of operations, and the editor of that journal where your article is under review may be sick with the new coronavirus, or have a family member who is sick, or just have a hard time finding reviewers, because everyone is shell-shocked.

Meanwhile, the rapid shift to remote teaching has been hard on professors and students alike — courses suddenly look very different from what they were designed to be.
So if you are an assistant professor, what does that mean for your tenure dossier, which is built on specific deliverables that are now impossible to deliver?

Some institutions have been trying to respond to those pressures on junior faculty members. If your campus has not, advocate for some or all of the following — via the leaders of either the faculty union (if there is one on your campus) or the faculty senate (or other shared-governance system):

- Give assistant professors the option to extend their tenure clock by at least a year. That is the only sane and reasonable thing to do under the circumstances. The optional part is necessary, though, because people who already have met and fulfilled their tenure criteria may desperately want the security (possibly illusory) of going through the system and securing tenure and the contractual salary bump that often comes with it (not illusory, although some places may postpone or eliminate it as a result of the austerity measures sweeping higher education). Many professors may now find themselves their household’s sole earners if family members are part of the wave of Americans who have filed for unemployment in recent weeks.
- Cancel any requirement that makes student evaluations of teaching mandatory, at least for this term. Let assistant professors choose whether to allow this year’s evaluations to be included in their tenure dossiers. Colleges that require course evaluations for a certain number of semesters or quarters, as well as classroom observations of teaching, need to make it possible for those to be rescheduled.
- At institutions where service duties are a heavy component of the tenure dossier, scrap and/or overhaul the established criteria that usually pivot around committee membership and campus organizational activities. Make sure tenure-track faculty members are not penalized for not being able to do any of that during the Covid-19 crisis.

**What does this crisis mean for contingent faculty members?** Unfortunately, as is always the case in an unequal society, the most vulnerable groups are hit hardest by a crisis, and we see that playing out in every way in the United States today. Race and class disparities are reflected in morbidity and mortality rates from Covid-19 itself, and in the fallout from the
socioeconomic crisis unfolding.

Contingent instructors are the most vulnerable in higher education’s faculty hierarchy, and they are the most in danger of having their contracts revoked or not renewed. This is where tenured professors should step up and petition that the first fiscal steps their institutions take should be salary cuts at the top echelon of administration — as senior administrators are already doing on some campuses — rather than eliminate precariously positioned contingent labor.

What does the pandemic fallout mean for new and returning graduate students? Depending on your personal situation (finances, family, location), if you are newly admitted to a graduate program with guaranteed full funding for 2020-21, or are already enrolled in one, that may be as good a place as any to weather the economic storm of the next few years.

For students in American graduate programs, the April 15 deadline for accepting financial-aid offers has just passed. Students and programs are governed by that deadline, which means the universities that were (shamefully, in my view) going to rescind funded offers have already done so, and students deciding between graduate programs have made their final choices.

So I won’t sound the same alarm of “try to wrap it up fast!” as I did for job candidates with an offer in hand. But everyone enrolled — or about to be enrolled — in graduate programs needs to be aware that the funding sources you had in mind may disappear or become attenuated and, consequently, more competitive in the months ahead. You may be TA-ing online rather than in a bricks-and-mortar classroom. Your research agenda may need to change drastically in ways that are impossible to anticipate right now.

What does this mean for all academics? Covid-19 is, in my view, an extinction event, not just for some small and marginal campuses, but for a whole traditional mode of operations in higher education. Remember that once financial exigency is declared on a campus, even tenured professors can be removed. Academic hiring never recovered from the 2008 recession, and this contraction may dwarf that one.

In short, it is folly to count on any form of academic employment for those who are not yet on the tenure track. And for those who are, it is unwise to assume you are safe. Everyone in academe, including the tenured, should be entrepreneurial — imagining how they might translate skills into freelancing and other consulting work in the event of sustained unemployment, unexpected job loss, or deep salary cuts. Avail yourself of the many resources on the web about career options for Ph.D.s and career transitions. Begin to allow yourself to imagine a life outside the academic career.

I hope all of you are safe and healthy.

Karen Kelsky is founder and president of The Professor Is In, which offers advice and consulting services on the academic job search and on all aspects of the academic and postacademic career. She is a former tenured professor at two universities.
How to Ace the Virtual Interview

By KIM BRETTSCHEIDER

There is more than one good reason these days to avoid touching your face.

Interviews for campus-leadership positions have shifted entirely to video, in our Covid-19 era of travel bans and social distancing. Many of the clients I work with as a campus search consultant expect that shift to remain a trend, even after our shelter-in-place era passes. Video interviewing has its advantages — it saves money, for one — but it also creates a unique set of stresses for candidates.

In more than 100 administrative searches, I’ve seen an array of video snafus: cameras angled to focus on shiny foreheads, cameos by pets and naked toddlers, unmade beds clearly visible in the background. I’ve seen candidates — thinking they were on mute — shout at a spouse to be quiet and tell a child to "go pee." I’ve seen committee members — thinking they were on mute — talk about a candidate. I’ve watched candidates put on their eye makeup, sneeze into the screen, and bring in their kids to help manage the technology.

There is more than one good reason these days to avoid touching your face. In one video interview, the candidate’s screen froze for the rest of the conversation. Unfortunately she had just scratched her lip, so it looked like she was picking her nose.

Some of those mistakes are recover-
able and some aren’t, yet most are entirely avoidable. The following video-interview tips can help even the most senior and technologically savvy candidates navigate popular videoconferencing services like Zoom, BlueJeans, Webex, Google Meet, or Skype.

Consider an artificial backdrop. In a video interview, you need to focus on nuances you would normally ignore — like the setting, which matters far more than whether you are wearing nice pants. If you can’t create an attractive, office-like background at home, utilize virtual backdrop settings available on most of the video services.

I don’t mean virtual backdrops of forests or beaches. It’s best to use a neutral office setting. You can navigate those features easily on newer phones, laptops, and tablets. If you can’t figure out how to do that, or your laptop and phone won’t allow it, good lighting and a plain white wall or sheet will do the job.

The backdrop option allows you to block out everything behind you, such as piles of laundry or your bathtub, if the bathroom is the only quiet place you can find in your home. Wherever you are doing your virtual interview, be sure to lock or barricade the door from curious pets or bored spouses in pajamas, because if they get within two feet of the camera, they "pop" unexpectedly through the virtual background.

If life happens, roll with it. Sure it’s amusing when someone’s awkward moment goes viral — like that talking head whose children popped into his tranquil BBC interview on foreign policy, and chaos ensued (there’s even a virtual background of this moment). But most administrative job candidates don’t want to be that guy. And the backdrop feature is not perfect in blocking out the realities of family life at home.

Still, if some awkward moment disrupts your virtual job interview, go with it. Pick up your toddler, give your dog a bone, and continue the interview. Everyone is much more understanding of awkward live moments during this time of quarantine. For young children, try leaving a note with drawings to remind them what they can do for the hour, or, if needed, set them up next to you with their own "work" and crayons and introduce them before the meeting.

How you handle an unexpected interruption — assuming you do so gracefully and not by blowing up at the intrusion — can offer a human connection with the hiring committee that is sometimes lacking in virtual interviewing.

If you can’t create an attractive, office-like background at home, utilize virtual backdrop settings available on most of the video services.
**Pre-emptive muting is your friend.** It helps keep those pesky distractions in check. Play it safe if you are worried about a sudden meow, bickering children, or loud blenders in the background. Leave your screen muted and hold down the key to unmute only when you want to speak so that noise does not interrupt the other side of the conversation as the committee speaks. Shut down email and any online chatting so you do not get noisy notifications or pop-ups.

On Zoom, you can use the spacebar to open your microphone. On BlueJeans, press "m." Finding one key is easier than fumbling with your mouse to silence a chirping text message.

**Practice like a TV analyst.** Search committees are seeking executives and senior administrators who are a good fit with campus culture, but it is hard to make a personal connection and convey enthusiasm over a medium that is more like television than our regular day-to-day interactions.

The key is to practice the way you communicate, like professionals do on television. Write out your talking points. Rehearse them in front of a camera. Practice repeating the question in your answer. There is a record feature on most videoconference programs. Record a mock interview, and watch yourself to make sure you convey energy.

When it’s time for the actual interview, however, don’t try to mimic exactly what you said in your practice sessions. What matters most is to be fully attentive during the interview and ready to improvise based on what you hear. Active listening is even more important in a video interview because you can’t take in as many visual cues as you do in a face-to-face conversation.

**How you handle an unexpected interruption — assuming you do so gracefully and not by blowing up at the intrusion — can offer a human connection with the hiring committee that is sometimes lacking in virtual interviewing.**

**Keep your notes handy on your screen.** Most videoconference programs offer a minimized view box of the speaker — a picture inside a picture. Make sure you know how to use that feature. It allows you to focus on the interviewers while still being able to sneak a peek at other boxes on your screen with, say, your notes or the job’s leadership profile. That’s actually an advantage of video interviews since it’s something you can’t easily do in person. (During your mock interviews, practice having your notes in view on your laptop screen.)
**Make eye contact with the camera.** Try to keep your eyes on the camera as much as possible, except in those quick moments when you are scanning your notes or glancing at the faces of search-committee members.

Experiment with the settings in advance. If you don’t know much about taking a good selfie, ask someone who does. You want to center yourself on the screen, so your torso is visible and you don’t look like a floating head. Once you see that you are eye-level with the camera, try not to look at yourself too much. It is human nature to become more self-conscious or distracted as you talk into a “mirror.” Practice resisting that instinct.

**Usernames matter.** Especially if you are borrowing someone else’s device or account, make sure you retype the username, and include your first name. Our search team recently had an interview in which a child’s nickname loomed below the candidate onscreen, which was both confusing and distracting.

A friend with a keen eye for detail can assist with a practice call and confirm you have the right professional details.

**Keep your cellphone handy (but silent).**

If your computer freezes, give it a second before shutting down. Check your internet connection. If all else fails, log out. Have the number of your main contact saved in your cellphone, and call if things go south.

You can practice this, too. Get a sense of rhythm for a slightly more delayed microphone setting, and pause when you complete your main idea to allow for interruption and questions in case there is an internet delay.

**Smile early and often.**

You are on camera with your future colleagues. Smile (naturally), sit up straight, and speak clearly. Enjoy the chance to talk about your proudest moments.

It’s well established that all sorts of factors — personality type, gender, race, disability, body type, height, distance from the region, and even ability to travel at the last minute — can distract the hiring committee from what really matters: you, your record, and your leadership style. In some ways, a flat screen levels the playing field and allows more equal opportunity to shine in an interview setting and demonstrate advantages.

Use these tips to embrace the new normal. We are in a historic crisis, but creative and diverse leadership is still needed in higher education. The move from in-person to online interviewing is just a small piece of that puzzle. But the message is clear: You can make an important difference in your own career, even from the comfort of your home.

*Kim Brett Schneider is a senior associate at the executive-search firm WittKieffer.*

---

21
How (Not) to Evaluate Teaching During a Pandemic

By JODY GREENE

In the initial days of academe’s shift to remote teaching (formerly known as “spring break”), one of the many concerns weighing heavily on the minds of faculty members was how their teaching would be assessed this term. It made my heart, and head, ache to think that instructors — especially at adjunct and tenure-track ranks — worried about that at all in the midst of global catastrophe.

In the chaos of the past month, few institutions have issued clear and compassionate statements about faculty evaluation. At least in part, that’s because communications from the top have largely focused on urgent matters of policy and public health.

We’ve already seen some heated debates on whether to use this crisis to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching (in summary: now-is-a-good-time versus it- absolutely-is-not). So I hesitate to even waste words on whether, and how, to assess anyone’s job performance during a pandemic.

But it does seem useful to offer some thoughts, suggestions, and reassurances
on a more nuanced topic: How might we rethink and remake our prac-tices of "evaluating teaching effectiveness" during the Covid-19 pandemic, and in the years ahead?

What follows are suggestions for: (a) adjunct and tenure-track faculty members on how to record and represent the teaching choices you have made this term, and (b) professors and administrators who will do the "evaluating" of a profession thrown into tumult this spring (and probably, this summer, too). My main advice is twofold:

- If we're going to assess anything about this year's teaching, let's limit it to a cautious and compassionate evaluation of what — if anything — we have learned about specific technological tools and flexible teaching practices. What worked in this crisis? What didn't?
- Don't imagine that we can meaningfully assess the capacities of people rapidly deploying those tools and practices, with minimal support, in conditions unlikely to be repeated (one would hope) in quite this way ever again.

Our usual approach to evaluating teaching focuses on rankings and metrics. I am proposing we shift that approach — in the near and possibly even long-term future — toward narrative and reflection. By shifting our collective focus from an evaluative approach to a documentary one, we might diminish faculty anxiety during circumstances already inclined to provoke enormous insecurity and widespread suffering.

There may well be a secondary benefit to a documentary approach: By encouraging instructors to provide an account of what worked and what didn't during our emergency remote teaching — and of how they responded to the latter — we might get a much more accurate picture of the utility and value of some of the tools and practices that have been around for a while but that many instructors have hesitated to adopt.

Like everything else this spring, the best way to proceed on this front is to keep things simple. With that goal in mind, here are three suggestions for instructors nervous about how their teaching will be "evaluated" this year:

**Keep detailed records.** Take the time now to document the changes you have made in your courses in the shift to remote teaching. Chances are you won't remember all of the changes you made after the fact. This is a traumatic time for everyone, and large-scale upheaval messes with our memory. Keep a copy of the syllabus you originally planned to teach on your desk, or what passes for your desk these days, and annotate it with all the changes you made in how you delivered your course, how you communicated with students, how you rearranged assessments, and so on.

The more detail you can record, the more you'll be able to recall later, when you tell the story of the effort, responsiveness, and creativity you put into your teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. If you were able to be a
resource to other instructors — mentoring colleagues or guiding teaching assistants — during this time, keep track of that and be sure to include it in your narrative.

**Check in with your students — a lot.** Standard evaluation forms are unlikely to yield high return rates and may contain a lot of feedback not specific to the instructor, and yet it has never been more important to find out how your students are responding to your teaching choices. Regular check-ins will allow you to course-correct, but they will also provide valuable evidence when you come to tell the story of your teaching during Covid-19 in future reviews.

Whether you use polls, exit tickets, email, or message boards, find out how the changes you’ve made in the course are working for students, and, where appropriate, make further changes accordingly. Be clear and transparent about your learning goals, and in addition to keeping an eye on what their tests and assignments tell you, ask students how they are doing in accomplishing those goals. Take their concerns seriously, and respond or, where necessary, make adjustments where you can.

Imagine that “responsiveness” is the highest pedagogical good under the present circumstances, and make it a priority.

**Don’t be afraid to course-correct frequently.** And view those course corrections as evidence of your teaching effectiveness.

Changing your approach when something isn’t working for students isn’t a sign of failure — it’s a sign of professionalism and expertise. If you chose primarily synchronous instruction and students turned out to be unable to meet the class in real time, modifying your plan to make room for asynchronous options is evidence of teaching effectiveness, and you should report it as such. If the workload you’ve assigned is too much for students trying to work from home, with other largely unanticipated responsibilities and concerns to attend to, dropping assignments is not a cop-out. It’s a sign of responsive teaching. And that’s how you should present it on your CV.

Fundamentally, for instructors, be prepared to tell the story of the spring semester:

- The attention, reflection, and care you brought to both your teaching and your students during this time.
- The help you received and the help you gave.
- The things you learned that will change your pedagogy.
Now, for those administrators and professors who will — at some point — be evaluating a junior hire’s teaching effectiveness during the pandemic, here are three suggestions:

**Be compassionate but, mostly, be amazed.** Recognize and reward the labor put in by every instructor at every level who had to respond in next to no time to the demands of emergency remote instruction.

The vast majority of our institutions were, and are, pathetically underresourced when it comes to the kind of instructional support necessary to meaningfully accomplish a shift to remote instruction in a matter of days. At my own institution, the ratio of instructional-support personnel to faculty members is 1:200 — and that’s a generous approximation.

That nearly all instructors managed to make this shift — to learn new technologies, redesign courses, write new assessments, procure equipment (like home-document cameras and tablets), connect with colleagues with similar instructional challenges, and just plain finish the term (and at universities, like mine, on the quarter system, start another one), while also dealing with the stresses of their own life, health, and family under Covid-19 — is nothing short of miraculous.

Pause long enough to notice the scale and agility of that pivot. What we have just accomplished, and are still accomplishing, is a magnificent achievement that should give you enormous faith in your faculty members.

**Put student complaints about a course in context.** Students and their families are understandably frustrated, frightened, and unsure about the return on investment they will receive for staying in college right now. As is always the case, but never more so than now, recognize that when students give harsh feedback on evaluations or surveys, that may have a great deal to do with context — in this case, the overall upheaval of 2020 — and not much to do with the instructor in question.

There may be good and useful information from student evaluations of teaching. But you must anticipate that this round of course evals and surveys may be the only time an institution actually reaches out to students directly to ask about their educational experience this winter/spring. Students may use that invitation to articulate a range of frustrations that are not specific to the course instructor.
**Be more interested in learning than in grading.** I don’t mean what the students are learning; I mean what the institution as a whole can learn during this time about pedagogical innovation and transformation.

Many of us have been wondering for a long time about the scalability and effectiveness of using "universal design for learning," of hybrid courses (i.e., a mix of in-person and online instruction), of assigning multiple low-stakes assessments, of adaptive learning, of ungrading, of student-centered pedagogy, and so on. It has been hard to gather broad data about those techniques largely because their use has varied so much from instructor to instructor on any single campus.

Why not devote our evaluative resources in this time to gathering information about those collective innovations, and particularly about what works for students, what is viable for instructors, and where those two overlap? Rather than grading instructors along a static continuum of individual pedagogical effectiveness, now might be the moment to recognize that a great disruption has occurred in how we deliver instruction, and that disruption may or may not give us useful information about long-term prospects for how we "do" teaching and learning in higher education. Curiosity rather than critique might be the most appropriate, and informative, response.

Ultimately, my hopes for a shift in how we evaluate teaching go beyond the immediate moment. I hope this crisis prompts academe to adopt and nurture a developmental evaluation system — one in which we assume faculty members have something to learn about teaching, and are encouraged to make changes, assess, and improve as teachers throughout their careers.

For better or worse, that is exactly what’s happening at colleges and universities all over the world right now, on a mass scale, possibly for the first time in the history of higher-education pedagogy. The vast majority of us — albeit under extreme pressure — are clarifying what we most want our students to learn, making small and large changes in our teaching, communicating with students more than ever before to find out what is and isn’t working for them, and making further adjustments based on what we hear from them.

To put this another way, we’re in the midst of a global teaching experiment — nothing less than an improvised emergency response. Let’s acknowledge that assessing "teaching effectiveness" amid that crisis is somewhat beside the point. Let’s figure out, instead, what institutions as well as individuals can learn from this extraordinary outpouring of ingenuity, risk taking, adaptation, creativity, and love.

*Jody Greene is a professor of literature, associate vice provost for teaching and learning, and director of a teaching center at the University of California at Santa Cruz.*
Should You Keep Working on That Book Manuscript?

By RACHEL TOOR

If you weren’t already thinking about reaching a broader audience with your scholarly work, you probably should start now.

Anyone who claims to know the future of book publishing — or the future of anything right now — is bound to sound foolish. Yet scholars at all stages of the academic career have questions about what the Covid-19 crisis will mean for the book world. So I reached out to some folks at academic presses to get their sense of the intellectual and financial fallout.

And it wasn’t entirely grim. In fact, the publishers I spoke with seemed cautious yet optimistic. They were moving forward with their planned fall 2020 lists, especially for scholarly books. Most said they expected to maintain their scholarly output but wouldn’t be expanding any time soon.

"We intend to continue publishing our scholarly lists at the same levels as before this crisis," said Tony Sanfilippo, director of the Ohio State University Press. "For us, what is changing is we were growing our scholarly lists before this happened. That will end. We were also acquiring journals. That will also be harder to do as they often have large upfront investments."
Yet editors are still working with manuscripts and authors, even if they’re doing it at home in their pajamas surrounded by stir-crazy kids and keyboard-loving cats. "We will not be in this state forever, and all systems are normal as far as acquisitions are concerned — just maybe a little slower," said Ilene Kalish, executive editor for social sciences at New York University Press. "I am proposing books, I am signing books, and we are planning for future seasons."

That’s the case at Oxford University Press, too, said Susan Ferber, an executive editor. In her own work, she has noticed that her "reading on screen is slower, and I’m more tired from it, but this is because I prefer paper." Likewise, she added: "We’re seeing a lot of distracted faculty who are juggling online-teaching responsibilities, mentoring students, homeschooling their kids, taking care of relatives, and dealing with illness." Yet she’s also getting "a deluge of projects because so many faculty are home and not conferencing and using that time to get projects finished and off their desks."

Naomi Schneider, executive editor at the University of California Press, said she has "already gotten a few coronavirus proposals that I’ve had to turn away, given the fact that books take a long time to write and publish. It’s hard to publish on issues that are moving targets. So this subject might be more appropriate for an article now."

However, in the months to come, she said, "there will be a thirst for books that make sense of how we got here, how we’re coping, and where we’re going next."

**What kinds of books are publishers looking for now?** Most presses tend to have well-defined interests and lists, and few will shift their emphasis drastically because of Covid-19, so authors should continue to approach places that already publish in their fields. But the editors I interviewed said it was a good time to pitch proposals that relate to big-picture aspects of the current crisis.

"We’re a socially and politically oriented press," said Doug Armato, director of the University of Minnesota Press, "and the work we do seems all the more urgent to us as the pandemic brings into even sharper contrast the fault lines in our nation and our world. So we don’t see our editorial focus changing, even as how we do business certainly is and will."

In other words, the publishing world, like most other facets of life we used to take for granted, will no doubt look different in the future. Niko
Pfund, president of Oxford University Press, noted some obvious ways things are changing: "Supply chain, printing logjams, the ‘double whammy’ effect of higher-education budget cuts on libraries and publishers (particularly in states with significant public-pension deficits), and the uncertainties around brick-and-mortar retail."

However, at UC Press, Schneider said authors should "keep thinking and writing in this period of wholesale crisis. There are so many fertile issues out there: How has the internet become our one true friend amid social distancing and plague? How has the environment been affected by us staying at home? How does a ‘first world’ country come to terms with widespread food scarcity, and what can we do about it? What lies ahead for issues of gender equity, including abortion rights? How do our thoughts about globalization morph as a consequence of this?"

Books with a more narrow focus, however, might have a harder time getting published. As Sanfilippo, of Ohio State’s press, said: "I acquire the regional list, and those books are going to be much harder to economically justify. At this point we’re actually much more focused on our national trade list as that has the greatest potential for revenue."

If you weren’t already thinking about reaching a broader audience with your scholarly work, you probably should start now.

What changes can authors or would-be authors expect? The format of your book may not be print. "If you are not currently signed with a press," Sanfilippo said, "you can’t assume your book will automatically be a print book. It’s growing more likely it will be born digital, maybe exclusively, and open."

Oxford’s Pfund underscored the changes ahead: "It’s essential for university presses to continue publishing (scholarship will out!). If there are bottlenecks in the print process, some scholarly publishers will likely proceed to publication with other formats (online databases, e-books, aggregators, etc.) with the print edition to follow as soon as possible. This is not ideal, but for scholarship that is increasingly found and referenced online, it’s critical that the entire scholarly system not suddenly stall."

We’ve all had to learn to be more patient. So it won’t surprise anyone that with university budgets in the soup and across-the-boards hiring freezes, you can expect delays from academic presses, too. "We have three open FTE positions that we can’t fill," Sanfilippo said, "so that, too, is likely to affect our productivity. But it also helps to reduce costs going forward."
What are the major uncertainties in the publishing marketplace? The big unknowns are, according to Armato of Minnesota, "in the book and journal ecosystem — bookstores, distributors, libraries — on which we’re dependent. There is a lot of energy being deployed across the industry toward patching that network back together. We’ll adapt to whatever things look like on the other end of this, but we’re gaming out scenarios for a drastically changed bookselling and scholarly access landscape and potentially a slow climb back to self-sustainability."

Many academics are worried about the independent bookshops that most of us love, "The famed City Lights in San Francisco is struggling to remain viable, even as we speak," Schneider said. "Of course, the ‘upside’ [of this national shutdown] is that people might have more time to read books. Your neighborhood bookstore almost certainly would ship you any requested title."

But faculty members report they have had trouble getting books, especially when the Chicago Distribution Center, which is responsible for distributing the books of many academic presses to readers, closed briefly. That, says Armato, "was a real shock to the system, but they’ve been great in providing publisher workarounds and highly responsible in only reopening when they had a way to do it that was safe for their warehouse employees. The staff raised a virtual cheer last week when we heard they were reopening."

What about marketing and book promotion? Most academics have friends on Facebook who are doing what they can to promote their own new books even in this disturbing, unending, and mind-numbing news cycle. But the professionals are still at work. "Our marketing folks are brainstorming about how to reach readers in a period in which bookstore talks, speaking engagements, and book-festival appearances have all been nixed," said Schneider of the UC Press. "We have been online for a long time, but we’re planning to stage online book talks and Q&As, digital book launches, etc."

And yes, some books are being postponed, said Oxford’s Pfund: "Is this a seismic event that changes the likely reception of some new books, and narrows the bandwidth for publicity, marketing, tours, and other promotional opportunities? Are other books being accelerated, given their sudden relevance?" Yes on all counts.
Susan Rabiner, a New York literary agent who handles many political books, said the writers who "may get hurt are the ones whose books are coming out now and in the next few months. Many of the biggest books have been held back until September. But in September, even if most major cities have 'peaked' the corona curve, these big books will all be competing with each other."

**How easily did presses shift to remote operations?** We're all enjoying a bounty of free web content these days, like streaming movies and sweating through at-home workouts. Likewise, most presses have put some books online for free reading. Some were better prepared to do that than others, just as some professors adjusted more quickly to remote instruction than their colleagues. "That so many of our publishing processes moved to digital workflows over the past decade made the off-site move pretty efficient," said Minnesota's Armato. "We managed it over four days."

And like many presses, Minnesota was well prepared to provide scholarly books digitally. "We've seen a significant uptick in publisher interest in Manifold, our digital platform," he said "We have about 20 other presses deploying the platform. The University of Georgia Press, for instance, responded to Covid-19 by making available several of their key course books." Manifold has built-in annotation and comment tools, he said, and a new reading-groups feature that allows for the creation of classroom-specific groups so that instructors and students can collaboratively read and comment on texts.

"When many universities went to remote instruction suddenly after their spring breaks," Armato said, "we heard from a lot of instructors that students bought the books but couldn't get back into their dorm rooms to get them or that their libraries were closed and couldn't provide online access. To help out through the end of the spring term, we made about 20 Minnesota books available through Manifold for class-specific text access."

That was good news for faculty members and students, but not so great for presses. As Sanfilippo of Ohio State noted: "Most of our funds come from the sale of a linguistics textbook. Once this started, we decided to open our textbook to reduce the friction students were dealing with moving off campus and into online learning. So for the next few months, the book that supported the press will be open and free to the world, and we'll receive little if any revenue from it."
What about all the editorial work that usually happens at now-canceled conferences? Scholarly publishers like Oxford’s Pfund are worried about scholarly organizations: "Learned societies depend on a finite number of revenue streams, including annual conferences, many of which have of course been canceled. That is going to make for financial hardship for the societies most reliant on income from these gatherings, especially as there is likely to be a travel hangover even when these meetings resume."

Much of the work of academic publishing is done at scholarly meetings. "We’re assuming we’re unlikely to attend conferences until the fall at the earliest," said Sanfilippo of Ohio State, "so the future of the pipeline is less certain."

Is it all gloom and doom? "If I can just say a word from New York," said Kalish of NYU Press. "We have lived through many disasters: 9/11, Sandy, power outages, etc., and we just get back up, dust ourselves off — perhaps give that thing/person/storm/virus, or what have you, the finger — and then get on with it. NYC will not be beat. We have moxie, we have style, we have chutzpah, and we will be back."

And Schneider, of the UC Press, added: "Life might never return to our pre-Covid rhythms, in some ways. But books will still play an important role in our cultural lives. I’m still planning for the future while on my laptop at home, Zooming into meetings and talking to would-be authors about their work. I’m planning my editorial programs for when we get out of our homebound cages. I hope that’s not too naïve, but I still believe in books."

*Rachel Toor is a professor of creative writing at Eastern Washington University’s writing program in Spokane, and a former acquisitions editor at Oxford University Press and Duke University Press.*
Would-Be Academics: It's Time for Plan B

By L. MAREN WOOD

A lot of graduate students and recent Ph.D.s are in a dire state of limbo now that Covid-19 has brought faculty hiring to a screeching halt. I know how it feels to be a job candidate with spectacularly bad timing through no fault of your own. After all, I earned my doctorate in 2009 — a year after the faculty job market collapsed in the Great Recession of 2008.

Back then I spent three fruitless years on a tenure-track market with very few openings and far too many applicants. So let me offer would-be faculty members some advice that I wish someone had told me early on: Academe may be your Plan A, but this is no time to hold off on creating and pursuing a Plan B.

It is too soon to know what the long-term consequences of the Covid-19 recession/depression will be for higher education. Here’s what we do know: Institutions have canceled faculty searches this year and, in some cases, withdrawn job offers. Departments have no idea how soon they will be allowed to hire again, and some places,
such as Yale University, have already announced that hiring will be frozen through June 2021.

Once faculty hiring does resume, much like after the 2008 recession, there will be an even bigger glut of Ph.D.s competing for faculty positions, and jockeying for adjunct work and postdocs.

In the months ahead, some of you may double down on your academic search — much like we did in the 2009 cohort — in the hope that you will be one of the chosen few to land a tenure-track job. But the odds are heavily stacked against you. There are already too many talented people for the few academic jobs available, and that’s about to get worse, not better.

At this point, you might be thinking: Well, it’s not going to be any easier to execute Plan B, given the rising national unemployment rate. Hiring freezes aren’t just happening in academia, after all.

Right now, we’re all waiting to see what the long-term impact of this crisis will be on employment both in and outside of academia. Once that starts to become a little more clear, people in areas of the economy that are collapsing will begin to move into the growth sectors. That’s why you need to get in front of that wave now.

Once you broaden your search outside of academia, you’re no longer locked into applying for jobs that are defined by your subject-matter expertise. Instead, you will apply for jobs based on skills — communication, analysis, project management, research, critical thinking, creative problem solving, and innovation. You can take those skills into all kinds of jobs across industries and labor sectors.

The bottom line: Ph.D.s and graduate students who have the misfortune to be on the job market this year or next will need as many career options as they can get. Those career options will be in the private sector, not in academe.

Don’t do what I did. After I earned my Ph.D., I pieced together adjunct work, tried to publish, and hoped for an improvement that never materialized in the tenure-track market. I thought a Ph.D. would bring me "the life of the mind" — instead, it left me with debt, depression, no health insurance, and uncertain employment prospects. Like so many Ph.D.s, I was ill-equipped to make a career transition out of academe. Was I even good at anything else? Eventually I transformed that predicament into a career. Today I run Beyond the Professoriate, an organization I founded in 2017 to provide professional development and career education for Ph.D.s.
So the advice that follows is based both on my own personal experience and also on conversations I’ve had with hundreds of ex-academics who have found their way to satisfying careers. You can seriously consider, explore, and prepare for a Plan B and still apply for academic jobs. This is not an either/or. This is about minimizing your losses while maximizing your opportunities for career success.

**Get serious about Plan B now.** There’s a lot of chatter on academic Twitter and other social-media spaces encouraging people not to worry about their scholarly productivity in this uncertain moment of history. That’s fine if you already have a tenure-track or tenured job. But if you are a graduate student, postdoc, or adjunct who needs employment, you absolutely should be productive now — at least about your career planning.

It takes time to build a professional network and do research on career options, which is why my advice is to start yesterday. Few graduate students and new Ph.D.s will land jobs of any kind in the next six weeks, but waiting or delaying a career transition will put you at an even greater disadvantage in the months ahead.

But isn’t leaving academe tantamount to selling out? No, it’s survival. If your advisers or fellow students are disappointed in your decision, then they truly do not understand the depth of the hiring crisis, nor the toll that contingent positions take on people’s lives and health. Their disappointment should be at a system that churns out Ph.D.s with nowhere for them to go, and with little preparation for other kinds of meaningful careers.

Our research shows that too many Ph.D.s and A.B.D.s remain in academe indefinitely in low-paying positions because they believe that leaving will make them even more unhappy — that their lives and work will have less meaning. Academic work can be rewarding, but our interviews with Ph.D.s in nonfaculty careers show numerous ways for smart people to leverage their education and build impactful careers and engaged lives.

No matter how much you love your subject matter, teaching, or academic research, I guarantee I have interviewed Ph.D.s who loved all of those things just as much as you do, yet left academe and are intellectually challenged by the work they do today. They still collaborate with smart colleagues. They are making a difference in the world. You can, too.

**What to do from home right now.** First, put your research skills to work exploring career options:

---

The bottom line: Ph.D.s and graduate students who have the misfortune to be on the job market this year or next will need as many career options as they can get.
• Access free tools. Websites like Imagine PhD and MyIDP Science Careers offer plenty of free career-planning resources. Get in touch with your graduate program or postdoc office to see what virtual resources are available to you. You can attend our virtual career conference, which we hold each year at Beyond Prof.
• Get active on LinkedIn. Find alumni from your doctoral program, and connect with them. Ask to chat with them about their career transition.
• Right now is a fantastic time to do informational interviews via Zoom or similar tech tools because so many people are at home, bored, and looking to talk to someone who isn’t in their household. The idea behind an informational interview is to talk with people in jobs you find interesting. Don’t limit your interviews to people with Ph.D.s — most nonacademic careers don’t require a doctorate, but that doesn’t mean you can’t bring your graduate training and interests to bear in those positions. Ask your interview subjects what they do on a day-to-day basis; what they like about their work; what energizes them; and what kinds of entry-level positions someone with a graduate degree should consider if they are interested in this line of work.
• Spend time searching on the web for organizations that interest you in the city where you live, or where you want to live.
• Investigate online courses and programs to build a portfolio of skills that will impress nonacademic employers. Employers are looking for people with skills in project management, data analysis, marketing, and Excel spreadsheets. To boost your abilities in those areas, take online courses in project management. Learn Python or other programming languages. Earn a certificate in Adobe InDesign. Turn your academic research into blog posts aimed at the general public.

Second, embrace virtual networking. Few Ph.D.s land jobs by submitting résumés cold to online job advertisements; they primarily find opportunities through their network of contacts. Networking will become even more critical over the next few months. Employers prefer to hire people who are referred to them by a trusted network, and nobody wants to read 500 résumés. That personal connection to an organization is key.

Many of the ex-academics we’ve interviewed said they lacked a professional network outside higher education when they started their career transition but were able to build one over time. You can, too, but you need to start now.

Over the next months and years, if unemployment reaches the historic levels that economists are predicting, you will need insider information to help you be an effective job seeker. Your academic network will clue you in when hiring restarts in your field and subfield. But you need to be well networked in the private sector, too, so that your contacts can alert you when hiring picks up in companies and organizations that interest you.
Should you finish? Graduate students may need to evaluate if completing their doctorate makes sense financially and professionally. In 2008 and 2009, when the faculty job market fell apart for my cohort, people were still able to go to the library, do field work, head to the lab, attend conferences, and generally continue on with their academic work.

The Covid-19 crisis has interrupted all of that, making things that much worse for job candidates. Students and postdocs will be burning through funding and savings, waiting for a return to normalcy. There are thousands of graduate students whose academic careers are currently on hold, and, for many, this is an untenable situation.

Given that most nonacademic careers do not require a doctorate, it’s most likely you won’t be at a disadvantage if you start job searching in the private sector without finishing your degree. Don’t continue on in a graduate program simply because you started down that path. Don’t confuse what you do (in my case, that was studying history) with who you are as a person.

No, I’m not telling you to drop out. I’m suggesting you weigh all options seriously. See if your institution supports a leave of absence. You may be able to pause your studies and find work outside academe in the short term. When campuses reopen, you can examine if returning to your doctoral program makes sense. You may find — as many Ph.D.s have discovered before you — that a nonfaculty career suits you, and that you have more opportunities in the private sector than in academe. You may also decide that a Ph.D. still makes sense.

But you can’t make sound decisions in your own best interest if you have only explored one career path.

L. Maren Wood is a Ph.D. in history and co-founder and CEO of Beyond the Professoriate, a public-benefit company that works with individuals and universities, offering career services for graduate students and Ph.D.s.
Faculty Members Fear Pandemic Will Weaken Their Ranks

By MEGAN ZAHNEIS

“Principles of academic governance apply no matter how exigent the situation.”

The scenarios Christopher A. Makaroff was asking department chairs to consider were stark. Makaroff, dean of Miami University’s College of Arts and Science, recently sent a memo asking the college’s department chairs to revise their course schedules for the fall, as part of “contingency planning” to account for the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Among the possibilities Makaroff’s memo raised were a 20-percent drop in enrollment and teaching-load increases for faculty members. He also asked the chairs to create two schedules: one that included half as many visiting assistant professors as the department currently held, and one with no visiting assistant professors at all.

The memo rattled faculty members at Miami and drew consternation from those elsewhere who heard about it, including Michael Bérubé, immediate past chair of Pennsylvania State University’s Faculty Senate and a former president of the Modern Language Association. Actions of the sort...
outlined in Makaroff’s memo would be “way pre-emptive,” Bérubé said. “This looked opportunistic, and I’m sure there’s going to be places either increasing teaching loads or relying more on contingent faculty, where the motto is going to be, ‘Don’t let a good crisis go to waste,’” he said.

Carole Johnson, Miami’s interim director of news and communications, wrote in an email that the memo was hypothetical, designed to generate discussion among department chairs and “certainly not intended to imply anything about Miami’s future.”

Nor was the memo unusual in the measures it proposed, Johnson said. “We imagine you will find similar contingency planning at most nationally ranked universities,” she wrote.

Covid-19 is being described as both a crisis and an opportunity for higher education. But how “opportunity” is defined depends on where one stands in the academic hierarchy. While some hope the pandemic provides a chance to reverse troubling trends toward the adjunctification and casualization of academic labor, administrators may see it as a different sort of opportunity, to realign institutional priorities or exert greater authority over their faculties.

Indeed, as colleges brace for a drop in fall enrollment and other financial hits, a crowdsourced list of institutions that have announced hiring freezes has more than 250 entries. Academics on social media have described having job offers rescinded. And in explaining hiring freezes as necessary to avoid layoffs, administrators have sparked fears among non-tenure-track faculty members that their jobs will soon be eliminated.

Central Washington University even declared financial exigency as a result of the pandemic, a step that would put it in a position to lay off even tenured faculty members with impunity. Its president told faculty members in a memo that he does not intend to lay off any faculty members.

Amid such maneuvers, professional organizations are watching for violations of shared-governance principles. The American Association of University Professors, for one, warned that “principles of academic governance apply no matter how exigent the situation.”

At Miami University, another memo, this one sent to the faculty by the provost, Jason W. Osborne, seemed to assert the opposite. “Unfortunately, economic and budgetary crises do not respect, nor respond to, shared governance,” Osborne wrote in the March 30 memo. “They happen, without our consent or input, and we must respond decisively to avoid even greater problems.”

Cathy Wagner, a professor of creative writing and the president of the campus’s AAUP chapter, disputed that notion. “Decisions do need to be made to change things in this crisis,” she said, “but that doesn’t mean that they can’t happen in a way that’s informed by faculty contributions.”

In an emailed statement to The Chronicle, Osborne said his original memo had been “apparently misunderstood, as it was intended to be an affirmation of our shared governance in these uncertain times.” He added that Miami’s University Senate “continues to meet and fulfill its critically important role in the university’s shared-governance process.”
A TEMPORARY SETBACK?

Faculty critics are also concerned that the pandemic will be used as a rationale to further undermine the traditional faculty model. A statement by the Tenure for the Common Good group offers 20 recommendations for administrators, including that they “resist using the current crisis as an opportunity to exploit contingency further by hiring more contingent faculty into precarious positions.”

Among the recommendations, “that one jumps out,” said Bérubé, a member of the group’s advisory board, “because that’s disaster capitalism 101.” It speaks, he said, to a “mentality that sees this as an opportunity for systemic structural change that isn’t actually warranted by the underlying economics.”

That viewpoint is not exclusive to administrators. In a recent interview with The Chronicle Review, Robert Zemsky, a professor of higher education at the University of Pennsylvania, argued that colleges with many adjunct faculty members were in a better position to respond to the pandemic by eliminating “clutter” in their budgets. “Presidents will have to ask,” he said, “Is this the moment when?”

Bérubé, for his part, expects the next year and a half to be difficult. But he says he’s taking his cues not from academic soothsayers who predict wholesale changes in higher ed, but from financial advisers who promise that the pandemic won’t prompt a repeat of the 2008 recession.

“I can understand the short-term panic, believe me. If you take a snapshot right now, it looks like a systemic collapse,” Bérubé said. But with economic recovery in mind, he added, “I really hope that any institution in higher education that puts things in place for next year does so in the spirit that they would be temporary.”

Adrianna J. Kezar, co-director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California, issued the same warning. “You don’t want to have responses in terms of a future faculty role that are unthoughtful, short term, and just a reaction to a pandemic,” she said. Instead, she hopes for renewed investment in full-time faculty members and an appreciation of the labor involved in online learning.

As faculty members are asked to take on greater teaching, advising, and administrative responsibilities, faculty development and retention “will be more important to institutional resilience — survival — than ever before,” Kiernan Mathews, executive director and principal investigator of the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education, wrote on Twitter.

Mathews recognizes that advice might seem counterintuitive. “It sounds absurd, perhaps, to say, ‘You need to invest.’ They can’t invest in anything right now,” Mathews acknowledged. But he said retention and development costs pale in comparison to those an institution incurs by hiring a new faculty member.

If colleges fail to revise their tenure, promotion, and reappointment processes to account for the pandemic, Mathews said, an existing rift in high-
er education will only worsen. “We will see, as we unfortunately expect to see in times of financial crisis, a further widening of the gap between the haves and the have-nots, or the haves and the have-lesses,” he said.

That widening, Mathews wrote on Twitter, will be most profound for women and faculty members of color. “All the efforts and gains that have been made in advancing a faculty whose diversity reflects the student body will be at risk of being stalled,” he said, “if not reversed.”

‘I DON’T KNOW HOW TO THINK ABOUT MY FUTURE’

Tom DePaola, who with Kezar and a fellow Pullias Center research assistant, Daniel T. Scott, wrote The Gig Academy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University, said that it’s incumbent on faculty advocates and organizers to “convince leadership to not just suddenly start amputating limbs, but rather to come together and figure out a solution collectively.”

“No doubt there are administrators who see this as an opportunity to skip a few ranks,” DePaola said. “The university with a $20-billion endowment is looking at the other universities that they might now surpass.”

To DePaola, the pandemic doesn’t pose new problems to academe as much as it magnifies existing ones. “Everything was held together with gum and paper clips, and coronavirus came and just sort of knocked it all down at once,” DePaola said. “I think none of the crises that this virus is causing are new. They’re just accelerated greatly. And the contradictions of the system are heightened all at once for people to see.”

Some of those contradictions lie in the academic job market, which DePaola said “was already strained to its absolute breaking point” when the virus hit. That leaves him in a difficult place; DePaola plans to receive his Ph.D. in May 2021, but doesn’t know if he’ll venture onto the academic job market at that time.

“I think the market is just way too thin to bounce back in any way,” DePaola said. “I don’t know how to think about my future. I don’t know how anyone’s thinking about their own futures in the academy right now.”

Megan Zahneis, a reporting fellow for The Chronicle, is a graduate of Miami University of Ohio.
Students attend an online modern dance class at Weber State University.
The Chronicle Guide to

Teaching in Uncertain Times

44  5 Things One Professor Will Do Differently in the Fall
49  Recovering the Joy of Teaching After an Online Pivot
53  10 Tips to Support Students Online
59  5 Low-Tech Ways to Teach Online
63  Why More Students May Need Remedial Help
68  Graduate Advising During Covid-19
5 Things One Professor Will Do Differently In the Fall

By MICHELLE D. MILLER

One way or the other, I'm going to avoid anything that puts students in the position of cramming a lot of work in on a test or a project within a short time frame, just to satisfy a grade requirement.

Perhaps the most important lesson from academe's rapid shift to remote teaching is that there is no wrong way to salvage your courses during a global emergency.

During the spring semester, if you (a) made a good-faith effort to identify what was essential for your students and (b) set up ways for them to keep moving forward, you did great. From what I've seen and read, faculty members around the world have been doing far more than just putting in a good-faith effort during the Covid-19 crisis.

Most of us have moved heaven and earth to ensure some kind of continuity in our students’ education, even as we have spent our own days coping with emotional and personal strains we could hardly have imagined mere months ago.

We’ve spent hours videoconferencing with students. I don’t mean robotically delivering preplanned
lectures — I mean meeting with students in small groups or one-on-one to talk through problems. We’ve served as tech support for students (and sometimes for colleagues) on technology that we’ve just barely learned ourselves. And we’ve been rolling with the punches as campus policies and plans changed, then changed again.

In short, we did the job we signed up to do — under conditions that none of us signed up for. And, unfortunately, it looks like many of us will be in the same predicament come September.

Nothing about how we will teach in the fall semester looks certain. And that means faculty members must be ready to teach fully or partially online — either from the start of the semester, or as a sudden pivot if in-person teaching resumes and Covid-19 cases spike again. This time, however, you won’t be going in blind. You have time, as the 2019-20 academic year comes to a close, to think about lessons learned and what you’re going to do differently in September if your classroom shifts once again to the virtual realm.

For myself, I’m beginning this process by reflecting on what went well in my own courses during the spring semester, what didn’t, and what has surprised even me, a veteran of the educational-technology and online-learning scene.

**Lesson No. 1:**

**They've gotten a bad rap, but Zoom classes can be rewarding.**

Well before Covid-19, online education had identified one of the most important design choices in constructing our courses: the balance of synchronous (holding class at preset times that students attend together) and asynchronous techniques (organizing activities such as lectures, quizzes, and discussions that students can complete at a time of their choosing).

Perhaps the biggest surprise for me was how often institutions favored one approach over the other this spring, steering their faculty members toward either synchronous or asynchronous instruction.

There’s not really a right or wrong answer to which is better. Each has major upsides and downsides. Some institutions went for one extreme, strongly recommending or requiring that instructors teach “live,” while others heavily discouraged real-time courses via Zoom and other such video tools in favor of asynchronous techniques.

Equally surprising were the outcomes this spring from my own synchronous and asynchronous choices as I shifted my courses to remote instruction. Wary of falling into the trap of long, boring Zoom presentations, and worried about students who wouldn’t be able to attend required class-wide meetings (for all kinds of reasons), I set up only a few Zoom sessions and didn’t require attendance. Instead, I organized lots of asynchronous discussion boards and put out a standing offer to help students with any problems, in whatever modalities worked best for them.

But then, my optional sessions were not only well-attended but also unexpectedly rewarding for me and for the students.
Especially given that most of my teaching at this moment happens to be focused on graduate students, the opportunity for social support and maintenance of our group dynamic was a welcome one. I ended up scheduling a few more optional sessions than I had originally planned, and even brought in a guest speaker to help ring out our semester together.

So, yes, synchronous teaching via videoconference can be tiring and occasionally glitchy, and is no panacea. But my live classes turned out much better than I thought they would, which is a lesson I will take into future semesters.

**Lesson No. 2:**

**Have a pivot plan.**

This summer I will put together all the usual materials — syllabi, readings, quizzes — for my fall in-person courses. But I am also planning to prepare a list of alternatives in case I have to move my courses online or, conversely, if we start online but move back to a physical classroom later in the fall semester.

I don’t plan to build a whole backup course. But I do want to think about all the major elements and how they could be reconstructed or reconceptualized in a virtual classroom, if that proves necessary again.

**Lesson No. 3:**

**Student goals will take center stage.**

I’ve always prided myself on being a student-focused teacher. But the process of stripping down a course to its core purpose, in order to adapt it quickly to a virtual classroom, revealed how much further I could go with envisioning students as active creators of their own learning. This experience drove home a point I already knew but maybe needed to be reminded of again: What students want to get out of a course ought to be at the center of everything I do.

The contrast between me in regular-teaching mode and me in remote-teaching mode this semester reminded me of how easy it is to lose sight of that aim amid the nitty-gritty of grading policies, assessments, standards, rubrics, and so on. In the future, regardless of modality, I will explicitly invite students in every course I teach to reflect on what they want to achieve and tell me how I can help make that happen. I plan to rework my syllabi to convey that philosophy upfront, and I’ll start the fall
semester with an assignment in which students articulate what they want from the course and what kind of support from me would be most helpful.

**Lesson No. 4:**

**High-stakes assessments are overrated.**

And they’re going to recede even further into the background of my teaching, whether in person or online. The details will shake out as I get into the planning process for each course. But one way or the other, I’m going to avoid anything that puts students in the position of cramming a lot of work in on a test or a project within a short time frame, just to satisfy a grade requirement. Such heavily weighted assignments turned out to be the worst ones to try to run with integrity in a virtual environment. (They also tend to conflict with Lesson No. 3, where I am trying to shift emphasis off of my own goals for the course and onto students’ goals.)

For a while now, teaching experts have advised that students learn best from frequent low-stakes quizzes and other assignments — either in addition to, or in place of, traditional midterms, final exams, and term papers. These experts have also pointed out that high-stakes tests and papers are a breeding ground for academic dishonesty, and that online exams raise concerns about high-tech remote-proctoring options.

Summer is a good time to re-examine what I’m really trying to accomplish with those big midterms, finals, and projects, and to consider alternative ways to reach the same learning goals, while giving students more control and choice, and reducing the need for intense proctoring.

The alternatives could include assignments that are linked to students’ actual interests and engage their attention over a longer period of time — things like creating a series of blog posts, doing a project on real-world problems, or discussing examples of course concepts that show up in the news media. On my end, it could also mean trying out different ways to evaluate their work, such as ungrading or specifications grading.

**Lesson No. 5:**

**Student mental health will be on my mind.**

The importance of teaching with compassion and care has become a more and more prominent theme in discussions about college pedagogy, and there has never been a better time to listen to what those voices have to say. While it’s impossible to predict what will happen this fall, we can safely say that our classes will be filled with students who are struggling to cope.

Campus systems for dealing with student anxiety and depression were already under strain before the Covid-19 crisis, and so I think we will all need to pitch in, just as we did this spring, in ways that we haven’t before. At the same time, we need to respect appropriate professional limitations and boundaries — something that Karen Costa, in her podcast, terms "scope of practice." I don’t know exactly how my teaching will change to ac-
commodate these mental-health issues, but I know that it will have to. So I’ll go into fall with a much higher awareness of trauma-informed pedagogy.

**What institutions must do.** In the Covid-19 crisis, as in any stressful situation, it’s helpful to focus on the things that are within our power to control. But at the same time, I think it is important to avoid framing the goal of a successful fall semester as merely a matter of individual initiative.

Our institutions and our leadership also need to step up, with the same kind of intensive reflection and commitment to adaptability that faculty have demonstrated. And just as we teachers now need, more than ever, to see our students as whole people, our institutions need to recognize that faculty members are not just course-delivering machines, but human beings who are struggling to make sense of, and cope with, all that has happened.

It’s also an excellent time for academic leaders to beef up their engagement with all the great research and thinking that’s been going on in the field of higher-education pedagogy. That doesn’t just refer to research on online teaching (although that’s probably the most critical place to start). It also means getting up to speed on the learning sciences, inclusive pedagogy, and other important frameworks such as universal design for learning.

There are only going to be more critical decisions that come down the pike as we get through this. Grounding campus policies in research will make for better-quality decisions as well as better buy-in for those decisions.

If the Covid-19 crisis ends up making me a better-prepared, more supportive, and more agile teacher, so much the better. And if it spurs our institutions to put more priority on serious collaboration between administrators and faculty members, backed up by the best evidence and research out there — well, we couldn’t ask for more. I’m not one to say that this tragedy is full of silver linings. However, I intend to come through it stronger, and I hope our whole profession will, too.

Be intentional in taking stock of how you and your students are experiencing the course, and be ready to keep tinkering.

I clearly remember the immediate frenzy of activity that followed my father-in-law’s death from cancer at age 49. We were devastated by the loss, but we were so busy that we didn’t feel the deep and lasting pain until later, when the funeral was over and the out-of-town guests had gone. I expect something similar to happen with the Great Pivot Online Crisis of 2020.

In the first few weeks of the pandemic, a lot of faculty members were rushing out of their comfort zone, moving their face-to-face courses online, and figuring out how to teach from home with kids and pets. As head of a teaching center on my campus, I am seeing many of my earnest colleagues overcome their nerves and experiment with unfamiliar modes of instruction. They are excitedly posting their first attempts at recording mini-video lectures and drafting syllabus statements of flexibility and support for students.

But how long will that fizz last? After all, many faculty members are sacrificing much of what they love about
their chosen vocation.

It's only natural that folks have felt discouraged, disillusioned, and even grief-stricken once the initial frenzy of pivoting online has died down and the reality of remote instruction sinks in.

I've taught hundreds of online classes over the past 12 years, so I'm well aware that it can feel like a grind, if you let it. Teaching online, as I've noted before, can feel detached, remote, and impersonal. It's easy to lose sight of the fact that your students are people and to let your teaching become a to-do list of administrative tasks and a mountain of grading. I've worked hard to overcome that sense of drudgery — to rediscover the joy of teaching when, like a candle deprived of oxygen, it flickers and dies out in a sterile online classroom. And you can, too. There are ways to recover your fizz, as you face the months ahead.

First, don't ignore your feelings. I encourage you to pay attention to them more than usual during this period. Slow down from time to time and take note of what feels good and bad about your online pivot.

Facing up to your frustrations, rather than stuffing them down into a bottle and jamming the lid on top, helps you process the experience in a healthy way, take charge, and feel less like a victim.

Be transparent and vulnerable with your students, too. Talking with them about the challenges you're all facing will help them process this experience. Admit openly that the situation kind of sucks (or really sucks). It helps.

Restart. Pause. Continue. Those of us experienced in the online realm have been advising faculty members all over the country to start simple — to get a few basic readings and activities into their campus learning-management system (LMS) and to go low-tech and asynchronous, given that students may have varying levels of tech and internet access wherever they are at, away from the campus.

After the initial pivoting frenzy dies down, pause and reflect on your newly online courses. What's going well? What's not? Should you stop doing something that's not working, or refine it and try again?

Be intentional in taking stock of how you and your students are experiencing the course, and be ready to keep tinkering. Indeed, send out a quick anonymous survey asking students what you should stop, start, and continue doing in the course. As a colleague said to me the other day, students look an awful lot like people, and people like to have some say in their experience. So ask them. You won't be able to make all the changes they want, but you can share what you decided to keep, drop, or adjust, and why. They'll appreciate you closing the feedback loop.

I think one of the main takeaways from this big experiment will be to inject a huge dose of flexibility into higher education. You've proven — perhaps unwillingly — that your battleship can change course,
and quickly. This crisis has had plenty of downsides, but realizing that you can be flexible in the classroom is not one of them.

**Layer on more engaging tech.** Having started simple, you can add additional, media-rich content when you feel your energy and interest in online teaching start to lag.

For example, if you initially resisted adding videos to your course, try using your smartphone to record casual, 90-second videos of yourself giving a class update. Record the videos from your kitchen, or in a park while walking the dog. That doesn’t require a lot of time or planning. Have a couple free minutes? Need to talk to your students about something? Do it, using your phone, and post it. It’s good to be authentic — to let them see where you are and what your day is like.

Or, invite students to post brief video responses (using their phones) on your online discussion board. That does a lot to liven the atmosphere, which will likely increase your enjoyment of teaching in this mode.

Also, take a little time to investigate some of the more ambitious tech tools provided by your institution, such as VoiceThread or FlipGrid. Those tools may feel less daunting after a bit of practice with online courses. Most campus teaching centers will continue to offer workshops, tutorials, and other guidance to help you engage with your students.

But don’t overdo it. We faculty members are prone to being distracted by bells and whistles. As every instructional designer will tell you, if there’s not a pedagogical purpose to a technology tool, don’t use it. Be careful, too, about asking students to use third-party software that requires a new log-in or might not be fully accessible. Still, if your college offers a tool — and it meaningfully supports your students’ learning — play around with it to see if it might enhance your teaching and their learning.

**Keep interacting more with students, not less.** As we all know, the worst online courses have a well-deserved reputation as boring and unengaging. If you’re being thrown into the deep end of remote teaching with very little time to prepare, you are discovering that for yourself.

In the first week or two of your online pivot, you probably communicated a lot with your students, bringing everyone up to speed on how this new incarnation of the course was going to work. Your instinct may be to pull back on that communication as all of you start
to get (at least a little) comfortable with this online pivot. But now is not the time to be restrained with class interactions, and doing so can lead directly to dull online courses.

If you think about it, you’ll realize that you provide a lot of guidance, nudging, and reminding naturally when you teach in person: You remind students about the test next week, comment on how today’s activity builds on what they did last week, and check in and ask how group work is going. You give any number of helpful suggestions, and you adjust your approach, as needed, based on the verbal and nonverbal feedback you get in class.

That can happen in a virtual classroom but not anywhere near as naturally. Teaching well online requires intention, effort, and a commitment to working with students in different ways than you do in person.

One of the best tech tools for such class interactions is one you already know how to use: your smartphone. You communicate in meaningful ways with people at a distance all the time, day and night, with your phone. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that you conduct class on your phone. I am suggesting that you consider all the ways that students can “do classwork” on their phones, and how you might reimagine what classwork looks like. Might students submit Tweet-like reflections on course content? Micro-blurs that show their learning? Might you use an anonymous texting app like Remind to communicate more seamlessly with your class? (Don’t worry, you can set office hours to prevent notifications in the middle of the night.) Might they snap a pic of their location or learning activity (think kitchen-lab science) and upload it to the LMS?

With some creative thinking, the possibilities for smartphone-related communication are endless — and worth it. The more you interact with your students online, the more they’ll interact with your course content, each other, and you. You’ll find your remote-teaching experience to be more satisfying as a result.

**Be kind to yourself (and everyone else).** This is a stressful professional situation. You’re going to need to change your initial online plans, I can almost guarantee it. Things will go wrong, and you will have to be ready to flex, yet again.


It’s a weird world we’re living in. Businesses are closing. People are losing much-needed income. Fears abound. Toilet paper is scarce. We can be kind to one another amid all the crazy. It can only help.

*Flower Darby is a senior instructional designer at Northern Arizona University and director of its Teaching for Student Success program. She is the author, with James M. Lang, of Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes.*
10 Tips to Support Students Online

By KELLY FIELD

Decades of research show that relationships with professors play a key role in student retention.

When Hurricane Katrina struck the southeastern United States, in 2005, it forced widespread college closures and scattered an estimated 100,000 students across the country.

In the chaotic days that followed, Andre Perry, then a professor at the University of New Orleans, lost touch with a number of his students. Many never returned to the campus.

Now, as colleges nationwide have canceled classes, shifted online, and sent students away, that disconnection is happening on a much larger scale, with what Perry worries will be devastating results. He has been urging faculty members to check in with their students often.

“As someone who has been through the tragedy of Katrina, I can tell you that faculty have an obligation to reach out and connect with students,” he says. In times of disruption, when people’s education and lives have been upended, he says, “relationships matter more than ever.”

Decades of research show that relationships with professors play a key role in student retention. If such relationships weaken or lapse entirely in the shift to online learning, thousands of students could flounder, even drop out.

Staying connected to students and cultivating a sense of community are harder
at a distance than in a classroom. But those goals are not impossible, says Perry, a fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution. “People get married from online relationships,” he points out. It’s just that many faculty members aren’t accustomed to interacting with students only virtually.

Of course, faculty members can’t be solely responsible for engagement and retention; student success is, and must remain, an institutionwide effort. But as professors become the primary or even sole point of contact for many students, their role in meeting students’ emotional needs will matter more than ever.

“They have to deliver,” says Perry, “or we may collectively lose thousands of students across the country.”

Following are 10 tips, drawn from experts on the ground, to support students at a time of crisis through the transition to remote learning. Each can make a difference:

**Tip 1:**

**Survey students about tools and platforms.**

Find out which technologies they have access to and are comfortable using, says Gina Foster, director of the teaching and learning center at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, part of the City University of New York system. That’s not just for coursework, but also faculty-student and peer-to-peer interaction. Students who are in similar circumstances can be grouped together, she says.

When choosing among technologies, solicit students’ opinions, says Tamara Daily, a professor of psychology at the University of Mount Union, in Ohio. When she asked students if they preferred a new platform over the old, imperfect one, they picked the latter. The message was: “Don’t throw anything new at us,” she says. “I took that advice and am going to stick with what’s familiar.”

But if you do decide to try a new technology, and you aren’t sure it will work, be upfront about that, says Daily. “That way, they know we’re all in the same boat, and we’re going to figure it out together.”

**Tip 2:**

**Co-construct your class.**

Giving students some control over their learning can help combat feelings of helplessness in the current circumstances, says Jody Greene, associate vice provost for teaching and learning at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

When making decisions about deadlines for outstanding assignments, for example, or how to measure learning in the future, seek students’ input. That doesn’t mean relinquishing your decision-making authority; you still have the final say. But making students partners in their education can be empowering for them and instructive for you, says Greene.
“We are in uncharted territory,” she says. “We can be collective in making decisions.”

**Tip 3:**
**Favor asynchronous approaches.**

Many colleges that have moved classes online have continued to hold them at their regularly scheduled times.

While that may provide consistency for students, it puts at a disadvantage those who have to work, take care of family members, or share a computer. Requiring students to sign on at a particular time can compound the stress of the switch to remote learning. Those who don’t have internet access at home might have to find a coffee shop or public library to log in (if any are even open during the quarantine), and international students will be dealing with a time-zone difference. Are you really going to ask a student in Saudi Arabia to attend an online class at 2 a.m., local time?

“We absolutely can’t have synchronous learning,” says Anthony Abraham Jack, an assistant professor of education at Harvard University and author of *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students.*

If your administration insists on a synchronous approach, find ways to accommodate students who can’t join at the given hour. Record your lectures so they can be listened to later, then share those students’ responses with the rest of the class the next time you meet, “so they still feel part of the community,” says Christopher Heard, director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Pepperdine University, which transitioned to online learning for several weeks following a 2018 wildfire.

“The key,” he says, “is to keep students feeling like a class, rather than scattered individuals.”

**Tip 4:**
**Go low-tech and mobile-friendly.**

Be sensitive to students with limited data plans or weak Wi-Fi. Choose open textbooks that enable downloads over programs that require constant connectivity, says Kaitlyn Vitez, higher-education program director for the Public Interest Research Groups.

When assigning work, consider what it would be like to complete it on a mobile phone. For some students, that will be the only option.

And be wary of commercial products that offer temporary free access in exchange for personal information, says Vitez. “Think about
the student data-privacy considerations of any products you’re signing up for.”

**Tip 5:**

**Temper your expectations.**

That goes for both your students and you. Everyone is dealing with a lot right now.

With students, be flexible with deadlines, offer alternatives if someone can’t complete a particular assignment, and don’t assign high-stakes tests on a new platform. Be sensitive to the additional responsibilities students may be expected to assume, such as taking care of younger siblings.

“It’s really important not to make anyone’s life more difficult than it needs to be,” says Bri Rhodes, director of international-student advising at Mount Holyoke College, in Massachusetts.

Let go of your lesson plans, too. Decide what students really need to know, and make that the priority, says Amy Young, an associate professor of communication at Pacific Lutheran University, in Washington.

“We have to strip it all the way down,” Young wrote in a widely circulated Facebook post. “This one is hard for me. But these are not normal circumstances.”

Young suggests talking to your students about why you’re prioritizing certain things. “It improves student buy-in because they know content and delivery are purposeful,” she wrote.

Don’t demand perfection of yourself, either. You won’t be able to recreate your classroom online, and you can’t build the model online course on the fly. “Distance learning, when planned, can be really excellent. That’s not what this is,” wrote Young. “Thinking you can manage best practices in a day or a week will lead to feeling like you’ve failed.”

And try, if you can, to approach this disruption as a learning opportunity, says Carol B. Wilson, an English professor and coordinator of academic advising at Wofford College, in South Carolina.

“The transition to online learning is stretching us,” she says. “My hope is to couch some of it as growth — because it is growth.”

---

**Telling students how your life has been disrupted by the coronavirus, and inviting them to do the same, can create a sense of togetherness and community.**
Tip 6:

*Share your story.*

Telling students how your life has been disrupted by the coronavirus, and inviting them to do the same, can create a sense of togetherness and community, says Laura Horne, chief program officer for Active Minds, a national organization that supports mental-health awareness and education among students. The message you’re sending, she says, is that “I don’t just care about academics; I’m here for you as an individual.”

Jack suggests that faculty members treat the first online meeting as a check-in. “This is not business as usual,” they might convey. “There are new goals now, and this is how we’ll manage, together,” he says.

And be willing to be vulnerable. “We are scared, too,” Jack says, and it’s OK to let students know that. “We are people. We are not automatons that are able to spew data and facts regardless of the circumstances.”

Tip 7:

*Offer support and resources.*

Many of your students are dealing with depression and anxiety right now. For students with existing mental-health conditions, or housing or food insecurity, those struggles could become acute.

Simply letting students know you’re there for them, even if you can’t meet in person, can provide a huge comfort, says Mariah Craven, a communications consultant for the National Foster Youth Institute.

“If they’re struggling for any reason,” says Horne, “they should know that their faculty member is a safe person to talk to.”

That doesn’t mean faculty members have to double as counselors. Still, they can show they care about students, she says: “Lend a listening ear, connect them to resources, and report any concerns” to staff members who can help.

With homeless students, in particular, sharing resources can be more helpful than asking if they are homeless, says Marcy Stidum, who directs a program for homeless and foster youth at Kennesaw State University, in Georgia. Some will deny it, and others will panic, thinking you’re going to treat them differently. She suggests saying: “If you’re struggling with food or housing, these are the resources.”

“A lot of students,” she says, “are alone, or feel alone, and you want to give them clear, concise, reliable information.”

Tip 8:

*Create opportunities for students to process the moment.*

In William Horne’s first-year seminar at Villanova University, in Pennsylvania, the reading assignment for the first class that went online was John Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row,* which involves an influenza epidemic. The assignment was pure coincidence, but Horne used it to get students talking about how that fictional outbreak compared to the current one.
Traditional discussion wasn’t possible in the online format, so Horne recorded a video prompt and asked students to record their responses. “Some of them were frustrated because, in their words, ‘the university kicked them off campus,’” said Horne, who is married to Laura Horne, of Active Minds. “A few said the closures were important, as part of a mitigation strategy.”

Jean Giebenhain, a professor of psychology at the University of Saint Thomas, in Minnesota, is working with the campus archivist to document students’ experiences with Covid-19. Those in her “History of Psychology in Social Context” course recorded their reactions in a weekly diary, answering such prompts as “Where were you when you found out classes were going to be canceled?” and “What were you thinking and feeling?”

Approaching the pandemic in that way, looking at its context and legacy, gives them a bit of distance to reflect, she says.

**Tip 9:**

**Don’t forget about students with disabilities.**

With the shift to online learning, some students will require different accommodations than they had in a face-to-face class; others will need accommodations for the first time.

In the latter case, a professor may not even be aware that a student has a disability, says Kelly Hermann, vice president for accessibility, equity, and inclusion at the University of Phoenix.

So even if you included a note on your syllabus telling students to contact disability services at the start of the semester if they needed an accommodation, a reminder could help ensure they get the services they need, she says.

While students’ needs will differ, a good place to start is captioning videos and making sure that any material you post online is in an accessible format for a screen reader, says Kristie Orr, director of disability resources for Texas A&M University at College Station and president of the Association on Higher Education and Disability.

“We encourage universal design, but at this point, with everything going online so fast,” that probably isn’t realistic, Orr says.

**Tip 10:**

**Assign self-care, and model it.**

Start a lecture with a mindful moment, or share a meditation exercise with your students, suggests Laura Horne, of Active Minds. Assign them to do one thing a week to make themselves a priority, and report back what it was.

And take care of yourself, too. Take a break, take a walk, practice self-compassion. In this unprecedented moment, when so much is uncertain, says Rhodes, of Mount Holyoke, “you need to show grace to your students and yourself.”

*Kelly Field is a Boston-based freelance writer and former Chronicle staff member.*
Many faculty members are spending far too much of their time in low-return-on-investment efforts with individual students.

Failing forward is a concept that has been particularly resonant during academe’s shift to remote instruction. That’s because, for many faculty members new to online teaching, much of what they resolutely tried in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic went badly.

I’ve spent the past 12 years in online teaching, and I’ve come to love it. But what I’m hearing from instructors — via social media, email, and old-fashioned conversations — is growing despair. They are exhausted by their efforts to teach class in real time via Zoom and other videoconference formats, and so are their students.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. Chances are, you are making the same mistakes common to every rookie online instructor — assigning too much busywork (which requires you to spend endless hours grading) and relying too much on Zoom and other "live" teaching tools (without any of the re-energizing aspects of face-to-face instruction).

Yet when those of us in instructional design urge faculty members
to incorporate asynchronous teaching into their courses, we get a lot of questions. I’ve concluded that most professors new to remote instruction literally don’t know what "asynchronous online teaching" is, or how to do it. First, a quick primer:

- The concept of class time is very different in asynchronous instruction. You’re used to thinking of teaching in discrete, 50-to-90-minute chunks — planning what happens in each session and what students are supposed to do outside of class. Instead, you have to start thinking of class as something that takes place over the course of a week as students log in at different times of the day or night, depending on when they have access to technology.
- Don’t think about what you and your students will do during a particular class session. Instead, as a recent Chronicle essay, "Going Online in a Hurry," recommended: Structure online activities around your course goals.

How? Here are five low-tech, time-saving asynchronous techniques that will make your remote pedagogy easier and more interesting for you and will help your coronavirus-stressed students successfully complete this semester. All five can be used via your institution’s learning-management system and don’t require you to figure out any new tech tools. It’s not too late to adopt any of them — even if you’ve mostly been teaching live via Zoom. Just tell students you want to try something different. Model a willingness to experiment, and fail forward, both valuable lessons for students to observe in practice.

**No. 1:**

**Post static content for students to read and watch.**

It may be hard to imagine not lecturing the way you would in your usual classroom, but remote teaching is a different format, and so requires a different approach.

Students can get a lot out of high-quality readings and videos that you’ve selected from existing sources — online textbooks, articles, blogs, videos from credible news outlets, TED Talks (or TED-Ed videos, which come with lessons and activities), and even YouTube, where you can find a lot of great instructional videos (like this one) from professors around the world who teach your subject matter.

Or create your own content, including written-out lectures, narrated slide-show videos, or highlights and summaries of other course materials. Keep in mind, you can reuse all of the content that you’ve curated and created, so the effort required now will pay off in future semesters.

Two key considerations:
• Point out the important elements of your static content. In a face-to-face classroom, you highlight things you want students to focus on in an assigned reading, and you point out how new concepts relate to things they just learned. You must do that online, too. For example, give students questions to guide their viewing and reading, explain how one piece of content builds upon the previous, and describe the context for, and the purpose of, each reading or video.
• Hold students accountable for their learning (see strategy No. 2).

**No. 2:**

*Use the quiz and assignment functions in your campus LMS to make sure they're "doing the reading."*

We’ve all had students who didn’t do the reading before class and showed up ready to absorb new information from the lecture. We know that’s not very effective, but when students know you will be in a certain room, on a certain day and time, and that you’ll go over new material then, it can be tempting to skip or skim the reading. To get around that problem in an in-person class, you may give pop quizzes.

In asynchronous teaching, you can use the LMS to create quizzes and other required assignments that help students engage with the course content and demonstrate their learning. Students are unlikely to do the activities unless they are worth points, so make sure they are required. And make sure they are simple: To see if the students have read or watched the material, give an autograded, multiple-choice quiz with a restricted time setting.

**No. 3:**

*Wake up to the learning potential of asynchronous text discussions.*

Some have struggled to see the value of such discussions, but I am a strong advocate of them. In fact, in my view, that’s where the real teaching and learning happens in online classes. The benefit for an instructor is that text discussions can be very efficient in terms of the time required of you.

A well-designed online-discussion prompt not only creates strong social interaction among students but also fosters and deepens their learning. Craft nuanced, debatable questions that encourage students to relate new concepts to their own lived experience. Provide clear instructions, checklists, or rubrics so that students know what you want them to post, when, and how often.

Students really do learn from one another. Pop in to the discussion at preset times each week, so you can facilitate their co-construction of knowledge with additional questions, clarifications, and nudge. It’s all about strategy (more on that in No. 5).
No. 4:

Create a routine, reliable weekly schedule.

A structured schedule helps most people succeed. Your students were used to regular class meetups — Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11:30 a.m. With remote instruction, you will get varying results if you leave them to organize their own weekly routines.

Help your students with their time management by establishing a regular flow and rhythm for the week — quizzes on Thursdays; their initial online discussion posts are due Wednesdays, with replies due Saturdays; written assignments due Monday night, reflecting on the previous week's learning. Students will appreciate the predictability, especially at a time when so much is uncertain. With regular deadlines, they will know when tasks are due and can plan their week accordingly. Keep in mind, however: We're in a global crisis, so you may have to be flexible with some deadlines.

No. 5:

Make frequent, strategic, and highly visible appearances online.

Many faculty members are spending far too much of their time in low-return-on-investment efforts with individual students. I'm hearing of endless one-on-one sessions on Zoom or hours spent answering email questions from individual students. While admirable, that is absolutely not sustainable — or healthy.

Instead, aim for lots of publicly posted classwide messages. Think one-to-many communication. Here, again, I don't mean live lecturing. Rather, post low-tech communications that everyone can read, watch, or both. Your class announcements, your replies in discussion forums, and your summaries of course material — all of those can be typed up and posted for all students' benefit.

One-to-many communication can eat up a lot of your time, too, if you're not careful. So create a weekly schedule for classwide posts that will have the most bang for the buck. You can be "present" online in meaningful ways that are still manageable. (For more on the nuts and bolts of creating low-tech but effective online activities, read Daniel Stanford's post on "How Low-Bandwidth Teaching Will Save Us All.")

Meanwhile, be patient. Be willing to admit when things aren't going so well. And be ready to try something new (again), as long as it's simple. Your future self — and your current students — will thank you.

Flower Darby is a senior instructional designer at Northern Arizona University and director of its Teaching for Student Success program. She is the author, with James M. Lang, of Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes.
Why More Students May Need Remedial Help

By KATHERINE MANGAN

“We think of ourselves as a 24/7 connected world, and we’re finding that’s more of a fallacy than we’d thought.”

When classes were forced online amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Pam MacDonald had to scramble along with her students to find a decent internet connection in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains.

MacDonald, who teaches at North- west-Shoals Community College in Muscle Shoals, Ala., has settled into a new routine. Every Monday and Wednesday, she drives her family’s 29-foot travel trailer 11 miles each way to the parking lot of a neighboring town’s library, which has boosted its signal for those without Wi-Fi. Propped up on the bed by pillows, her laptop resting on a folding lap desk, she turns on her camera and greets her English 101 students. Fifteen minutes into the class, she mutes her microphone as the 4 o’clock train rumbles along the adjacent tracks, close enough that it causes the RV to sway.

MacDonald’s 16- and-19-year-old kids jockey for position at the motor home’s kitchen table, and the one who loses out nudges the family’s hound mix, Lola, aside to make room on the couch. They’ll use the Wi-Fi from the Falkville Public Library to work on their high school and college assignments.
As an adjunct who has worked for years with students needing remedial help, MacDonald is familiar with the mantra that instructors should “meet students where they are.” But recently that phrase has taken on a literal meaning for developmental-education instructors as students who used to congregate in a college classroom may now be scattered across hundreds of miles. They’re finishing their lessons on breaks from their grocery-store shifts, between home-schooling lessons in cramped apartments, and in unreliable cars parked outside public buildings.

That’s if they’re finishing them at all. Many students who are worried about making next month’s rent or who, like MacDonald, lack reliable internet access, have simply dropped off the radar. More than a dozen remedial educators told The Chronicle they are seeing fewer faces pop up on their Zoom screens.

With students across the country shifting to emergency online instruction for up to six weeks of their spring semesters, many educators predict that even more will start this fall unprepared for college-level work and needing the kind of personalized support MacDonald is providing her class of 11 English 101 students. Which begs the question: How can that be done at scale in a virtual environment for students who, studies have shown, are more likely to struggle when instruction is completely online?

A SHARED STRUGGLE

According to the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness, low-income and first-generation students are more likely than their peers to be placed in remedial classes, where many benefit from the face-to-face connections they make with classmates and instructors. And a 2013 study by Columbia University’s Community College Research Center showed failure and withdrawal rates were significantly higher when remedial classes moved online in two states.

Even though online support has improved since that study was published, the shift to virtual learning has many educators worried that the current crisis will leave already disadvantaged students even further behind.

Still, for those who have made the transition, the shared struggle to navigate new technology and juggle hectic schedules has brought some students and faculty members closer together.

“When Ms. MacDonald told us about driving her motorhome to the library because she lives in the sticks, that really struck me,” said Chris Boatwright, a 33-year-old aspiring teacher who is helping his pastor paint houses while his substitute-teaching jobs are on hold. “She said it’s going to be a push for me, but we’re going to figure it out together.”

Boatwright, a father of 8- and 5-year-old sons, is one of five students who meet with MacDonald separately during the week for supplemental instruction. Pairing a credit-based, college-level course with this kind of support class is a form of corequisite remediation gaining traction around
the country as a way to keep students moving ahead while simultaneously brushing up their academic skills.

Boatwright said that in high school, he cared more about football than academics and that he particularly dreaded English classes.

“I talk like a country redneck, and I don’t always use proper English,” he said. But when he decided, in his 30s, to pursue a degree in elementary education, MacDonald’s English class, with its supplementary support, became his favorite. He has a 97 average, he said, and is inspired by his instructor’s example. He plans on being the first in his family to earn a bachelor’s degree, and hopes to teach children and coach football.

“With her being so down to earth and understanding, it motivates me to work hard and to be the kind of teacher who will be reachable for any student,” he said.

MacDonald is helping another student in her corequisite class get ahead now so the student can ease up her studies when the job she was laid off from reopens. Another student without reliable internet texts her assignments to MacDonald using a cellphone app called Genius that converts photos to PDF files.

All of this requires extra flexibility from MacDonald, who also teaches high-school and dual-credit English classes. “I’m way more available than I was before,” she said. “I’ve given my cellphone number out to students, which I never did before. They’re respectful of my time, though.” Her students know that for several hours in the evenings, she isn’t plugged in when she’s caring for her mother, who has dementia.

She, in turn, respects their limitations. When a student can’t make a class or needs individualized sessions to catch up on missed work, she’s just grateful they’re sticking with her. Three students disappeared after the class moved online, and no amount of calling, texting, or “Facebook stalking” could locate them.

Those who remain “have proven that they’re dedicated,” she said. “I’d be the biggest jerk if I couldn’t understand that this person has to do what he needs to to make sure his family is taken care of.”

‘PASS RATES PLUMMET’

Kathy Stein, a professor of English at Sul Ross State University in Alpine, Tex., knows what it’s like to try to reach students dispersed over a large, ru-
ral community with limited technology.
“We think of ourselves as a 24/7 connected world, and we’re finding that’s more of a fallacy than we’d thought,” said Stein, who heads Sul Ross’s Academic Center for Excellence. “I’m so impressed and proud with how my dev-ed faculty have stepped up to serve our students’ needs. But we have students who are lost because they’re in a snail-mail world, and we’re trying to teach in an internet context.”

The spring, she said, has been frustrating. “It takes being there and whispering in their ear, saying, You can do this. It’s hard to do that when you don’t know where they are.”

Denise Lujan, who directs the developmental-math program at the University of Texas at El Paso, shares those concerns. “We have tried putting people online, and our pass rates plummeted,” said Lujan, the president of the National Organization for Student Success (formerly known as the National Association For Developmental Education).

In addition to their many life stressors, students enrolled in developmental education are more likely than other students, she said, to struggle with “poor time management, inability to prioritize, lack of focus, and an unrealistic expectation of how long it will take to understand the material.” Her other concern with online classes, she said, is ensuring that students aren’t having someone else do the work for them.

Assuming social-distancing rules continue to prevent colleges from offering placement tests, more students will likely enroll directly in college-level classes, possibly with corequisite support, Lujan said. Many colleges had already been shifting toward relying less on placement tests and more on measures like high-school grade point averages and grades in core subjects. But even those may be incomplete or marked with an asterisk given pass-fail options and truncated spring semesters. As a result, faculty members may be starting the fall semester with more questions about student preparation, and less information to go on.

Not knowing how many students will need extra help, colleges may be deciding just before classes start how many adjunct professors they need to hire to teach remedial courses. Those part-time instructors, who teach the bulk of such courses on many campuses, typically receive less professional development support than full-time professors.

This spring, “faculty who haven’t been trained in teaching online classes are having to figure it out at the last minute,” said Patti Levine Brown, an assistant professor of leadership and educational studies at
Appalachian State University. “If they’re underprepared and they’re teaching underprepared students, that’s an issue that will affect our populations.”

At least, that’s one thing that everyone has in common these days.

“This Covid situation has created a situation where no one is prepared,” said Desmond Lewis, who chairs the integrated reading and writing department at Houston Community College.

“Now, everyone knows what that feels like, and we’re having to pay much closer attention to the support students need to succeed.”

That support can be especially hard for students in developmental education to come by, according to Christopher M. Mullin, who directs Strong Start to Finish, a network supported by the Education Commission of the States. “For all students, a space to learn, time to learn, and a conducive learning environment must be coupled with access to the internet, a computer, and requisite supplies,” he wrote in an email.

**ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS**

Katie Hern, an English instructor at Skyline College, co-founded the California Acceleration Project, which supports corequisite approaches as a way to improve remediation. She’s also worried about the online shift.

One of her students is the only person in her household earning income after her relatives were laid off. Another “disappeared for a while” when he was kicked out of his home after a conflict with his parents. An older student who’d always thought college wasn’t for him bonded with his classmates and was getting good grades until the class went online, Hern said. Depressed and overwhelmed by the technology demands, “He’s now not even responding to email.”

Only 12 of the 21 students enrolled in her corequisite class took the midterm when it was initially scheduled. “There’s something about coming to class twice a week that creates structure that holds them accountable,” Hern said. “They have to turn in that paper physically, and they have a relationship with me and don’t want to disappoint me.”

Meeting the needs of underprepared students has always been difficult, but “the challenges the spring poses are larger and more global,” she said. “Everyone is going through this, as opposed to a few students we can label as underprepared. Everyone’s schooling has been interrupted, and we’re going to have to be compassionate and adjust our expectations.”

*Katherine Mangan writes about community colleges, completion efforts, and job training, as well as other topics in daily news.*
Graduate Advising During Covid-19

By LEONARD CASSUTO

Graduate school was hard enough before the plague. Ph.D. students already live with more uncertainty than most of the academic population. They engage in a course of study of long but indeterminate length. Many don’t finish. And their career prospects were decidedly unclear even before Covid-19 upended their already-unsettled world.

People with jobs — across academe and in every labor sector — are nervously wondering what those jobs will look like in weeks or months. It’s bound to feel even more disquieting for those who are still uncertified, still in training.

Many graduate students in the sciences continue to work at their labs, but in decidedly altered and anxious circumstances. Those in other fields have had to scatter, in many cases forbidden to congregate at their workplaces or meet with their own teachers.

How do we best advise our Ph.D. students in these times? Academics have lately been sprinting up a steep learning
curve as we move to remote instruction to teach undergraduate courses. Obviously that should remain a priority, but let’s not forget about our graduate students.

In the midst of our undergraduate triage, it might be tempting to leave doctoral students to fend for themselves. They do a lot of their work independently anyway, and they may not need our help in handling their remote teaching since some of them have more experience with it than their faculty advisers do. But leaving them alone would be a mistake.

It might seem impossible to give advice to graduate students when we barely know ourselves what the coming months will bring. How can we know what they need?

Here’s a suggestion: Ask them. Then, after an appropriate time, ask them again. Because this situation is moving so fast, you might have to ask fairly often. (You might also ask your former students. I’ve gotten a lot of good counsel that way over the years.)

When I asked my current Ph.D. students an open question on how I could best advise them at this strange moment, they mostly talked about working plans and deadlines. Their answers showed me that they wanted structure. That’s understandable, considering that the quotidian rhythm of their lives has fallen apart.

I don’t normally focus on deadlines when I advise Ph.D. students. I figure that they’re mature enough to manage their own workloads, and I believe that they should draw their motivation from inside themselves, not from me. But these aren’t normal times — so I’ll need to behave differently. I need to supply some of the structure that they’re missing, so I’m taking a more active role in their calendars.

Graduate students also need contact and conversation to make that structure real — and to give them some variety. One of my recently graduated Ph.D. students, Caroline Hagood, stressed "connection, connection, connection." She suggested more frequent emails "to check in." That’s advice I plan to take.

These months of quarantine and isolation remind me of another time I was voluntarily isolated, on a salmon-processing boat in Alaska one summer. The same group of people, mostly college students and ex-convicts, remained anchored in Bristol Bay for two months, gutting and freezing fish. Years before the internet, we had what few books there were on board, and we had one another’s company. With scant input from the outside world, we soon exhausted our supply of conversations, and they started repeating themselves. I needed the money I was making, but some
days I wanted to throw myself out the porthole.

Many graduate students are dealing with their own stir-craziness — that’s one of the few assumptions we can safely make these days.

With structure can come social opportunity that might help ease the cabin fever a bit. My department is planning to bring in some outside speakers for virtual presentations. Advisers also need to look for ways to substitute for the shared experience of graduate-student community. Caroline, my former doctoral student, suggested occasional Zoom meetings with adviser and advisees to remind them that “they are still part of a community.”

Students who may be graduating this year may feel the loss of community acutely. Like the undergraduate seniors who will miss their commencements, graduate students will find it very hard to celebrate a Ph.D. when there’s no one physically present even to shake their hand.

I expect that most universities will offer some deferred form of recognition when the public-health emergency subsides, but that will prove thin gruel for graduates who may have physically moved on. I hope that advisers will think creatively — and in partnership with graduating students — to try to formulate some kind of closure ritual.

Whatever the solution, it needs to be rooted in community. I just got off the phone with another of my former Ph.D. students, James M. Van Wyck, now an assistant dean at Princeton University. He and Will Fenton — another Ph.D. student of mine who is director of scholarly innovation at the Library Company of Philadelphia — have volunteered to coordinate with current and former doctoral students to virtually attend the public dissertation defenses our department will hold in the coming months.

It’s precisely those kinds of multi-institutional partnerships that this moment calls for. Does your graduate school have a great webinar on preparing for Skype interviews? Share it broadly. Have other ideas for sustaining virtual community among doctoral students? Share them on Twitter, in the comments below, and wherever you see colleagues looking to support graduate students.

Graduate students seeking jobs are facing some new and undefined obstacles, to say the least. They can’t get a teaching job when hiring freezes mean there are none to apply for, but they can prepare — and advisers can help.

But our students needed that kind of help already. We have to raise our standard in this area for two obvious reasons. First, today’s problems on
the faculty job market — which we hope are temporary — are clearly enormous. And second, we weren’t doing well enough in the first place to help our Ph.D.s prepare for academic and nonacademic career paths.

Many of the challenges that this year’s Ph.D.s face are just heightened versions of the ones our graduate students have faced all along.

Doctoral students in the arts and sciences had to learn to navigate multiple and uncertain paths before the novel coronavirus hit. Their advisers have had to honor the complexity and variability of their task even as we’ve tried to prepare them for it. Many of us were doing a better job at that before the virus arrived, but we weren’t doing well enough. The havoc caused by this virus shouldn’t distract us from that fact.

The temptation to leave graduate students to their own devices is hardly new. I experienced it as a student myself, in the 1980s. It didn’t work very well then, it didn’t work last year, and it absolutely doesn’t work right now. We need to keep track of our responsibility to our graduate students in both strange times and normal ones.

It turns out that the problems of Ph.D. students haven’t changed much because of Covid-19. The virus merely throws them into higher relief. Doctoral students need more comprehensive attention in this uncertain moment than we usually give them — but then, they needed that for a long time before the pandemic, too.

Lots of things are going to change in academe in the coming weeks and months. Taking more responsibility for the professional lives and futures of our Ph.D. students should be one of them.

The Chronicle Guide to

Coping on the Homefront

74  How to Salvage a Disastrous Day in Quarantine
78  Covid-19 and the Academic Parent
84  Teaching Remotely While Watching the Kids
89  Why You Should Ignore All That Productivity Pressure
How to Salvage a Disastrous Day in Quarantine

By AISHA S. AHMAD

The goal is to end the slump and re-establish stability. Your job for the rest of today is to take small, discrete actions to help you get unstuck.

Most of us have completed a full semester of physical distancing, working and teaching from home in the wake of Covid-19. As we settle into this new reality, many of my colleagues are questioning whether they are faring better or worse by this stage. Some are excitedly doing yoga, baking bread, and writing papers. Others have hit a wall and are crying into a bag of potato chips.

Are we "improving" or "failing" at crisis adaptation?

Having lived and worked under sustained disaster conditions in many places, I can assure you that that question is ridiculous. Crisis adaptation is not a linear, upward trajectory toward productivity and happiness. In fact, measuring your adaptation success by those metrics can leave you discouraged and stuck. That is especially true if you had a string of "good days" early in the crisis, then got hit with a series of train wrecks.

In the midst of this catastrophe, you may experience disruptions of your
sleep, appetite, work, fitness, and family life. Some days, you will wake up in a fog. You will wander around in your pajamas, and when you look up from your phone, it will be 3 p.m. You’ll have accomplished nothing and have missed your breakfast and lunch. Work and family commitments will be clawing at you, and you may start to panic.

Take heart. It is absolutely possible to salvage a disastrous day, even if you are in a crippling multiday slump. It is inevitable that everyone will have both good and bad days over the course of this pandemic, and it is absurd to compare the peaks and troughs. The sensible approach is to ride the wave, and work cooperatively with the psychological challenges that each day presents.

In my experience, successful crisis adaptation requires a flexible approach that allows you to reboot and reimagine your process in real time. For newcomers to crisis living, I’ll share some of my strategies here that may be of benefit. To make this practical, let’s start with that 3 p.m. rock bottom and conduct a rescue operation (Note: If you have small children in your care or other vulnerable people, this rescue operation is far more difficult; just take one day at a time).

**Restart your day.** When more than half the day has evaporated, it can feel impossible to get back on track. But at this critical moment, your feelings should not dictate your life. Rather, now is the time to take small, concrete actions that will get you unstuck and save your day.

First, turn off all of your devices and screens. No news. No cellphones. Nothing. Take the next 10 or 20 minutes to shower, change, and scramble an egg. It does not matter how you feel. Put one foot in front of the other. Your feelings will follow your actions. Just do it.

Next, identify easy domestic tasks that will improve your immediate physical environment: Put a load of laundry into the washer, vacuum a room, wash the dishes. Pick one chore and move. Do it for 20 minutes. By 3:45 p.m., your day will already be different. Keep those screens off.

Once you have made a solid restart to your day, you can turn to your seemingly daunting to-do list. Tackling that list will require finesse and humility. If you had planned to launch an ambitious new theoretical project today, scratch it. Bump such projects until tomorrow.
Instead, pick a handful of tasks that are important but fairly quick and simple to achieve. Look for the easy, outstanding work that requires minimal brainpower. Everyone has letters and reviews to write, outlines to draft, and administration to clear away. This is a great day for tedious tasks. Pick clean that low-hanging fruit.

Your to-do list also may have included personal care that slipped away in the first half of your day. Did you watch Judge Judy reruns instead of taking your Zoom yoga class? Did you miss the sunshine for your socially distant walk, and now it’s raining? We can salvage this. Do a “lite” version of those tasks: Find a 10-minute yoga video on YouTube, then open a window or get an umbrella and walk around the block. Count those as two wins.

The critical point here: Don’t aim for perfection. The goal is to end the slump and re-establish stability. Your job for the rest of today is to take small, discrete actions to help you get unstuck.

You are in "remedial" life class. For scholars and other high-achieving professionals, performance is an important part of our identities. We are used to tackling hard challenges, and we thrive on achievement and excellence. But that approach will not help you fix a hot mess of a day. This sort of day needs a different perspective.

As academics, we are accustomed to being advanced learners. But today you are in the "remedial" life class, where the learning objectives are basic physical care, responsible communication, and simple organizational tasks. Today you get an A-plus if you eat two or three proper meals, do any light form of exercise, are compassionate to your loved ones, and complete at least one basic work task.

The objective here is to get your wheels turning. If you started off terribly, but you meet 60 to 70 percent of your remedial life goals by the end of day, then you are actually out of the woods. This is a huge win, and your brain will be in a much better position tomorrow. It is also possible that once your wheels start to turn, you will want to pick up a more challenging task that you had scratched off your to-do list as too ambitious for this particular day. Resist that urge, and stick to the humbler plan.

In my experience, this strategy yields higher overall productivity, especially under chronic crisis conditions. I have used this mental technique for more than a decade, and it has been an integral part of my success as a security scholar. I choose the "remedial life class"
whenever I need it. At no point has it undermined my ability to produce award-winning research and teaching. If anything, it has improved my batting average.

**Bookend your day.** As your workday gets back on track, it is absolutely essential that you control its length. Just because you started at 3:30 p.m. does not mean you should push your workday into the midnight hours. Even if your salvage operation has sparked a burst of productivity, it is wiser to step off the roller coaster by early evening. Don’t try to make up for lost time.

The goal is to get back on track for tomorrow and the days ahead. That means that you are completely done before sunset — devices off, documents filed, desk tidy.

Finish with a modest list of goals for tomorrow. Keep your expectations reasonable, in case you need to reboot again tomorrow. As you are exiting a mental and emotional slump, you will fare better with a few psychological wins in a row. So don’t create a to-do list that sets you up to feel like a failure. You do not need to run 10 kilometers and write an 8,000-word paper to redeem yourself. Overkill will only land you back in a slump, when what you need now is confidence and momentum.

Finally, the best thing you can do with a disastrous day is end it gracefully — with a positive, affirming action. Make a donation to your food bank, call your friend who is a frontline worker, and offer to be of service. Set aside all of your harsh judgments about your day’s performance. Laugh at yourself with your loved ones. Give yourself a spiritual gold star for embracing imperfection. Eat a vegetable. Have some tea. Write a gratitude list. And ... scene.

*Aisha S. Ahmad is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Toronto and the author of the award-winning book Jihad & Co: Black Markets and Islamist Power* (*Oxford University Press, 2017*).
Covid-19 and the Academic Parent

By TRISALYN NELSON and JESSICA EARLY

Do the work that matters most to you, and that will make the most difference to your students, your colleagues, and your fields.

If there is one thing that has surprised us about social distancing and remote work in the Covid-19 era, it is how exhausted we feel at the end of every single day.

The two of us teach in different fields at the same university. We met several years ago at our kids’ school, and our third graders are in the same (now virtual) class. They were Zooming with their teacher one recent day when a fellow academic parent texted us to ask if we were getting any work done. We each sent a similar reply: What with child care, food prep, financial worries, and general Covid-19 anxiety, we couldn’t focus on work for more than a few minutes at a time. She replied: "Same here. I feel better knowing it’s not just me."

It’s definitely not just you. The shift to remote work has been hard on every faculty member, and having kids at home adds an extra layer of stress. That’s true for all engaged parents, but the juggling is especially difficult for academic mothers who tend to bear the burden of home and kids much as they do in nonacademic families. Already we are seeing reports of female professors submitting fewer papers during coronavirus.
Like most parents, we are trying to home school our kids and keep them healthy and comforted. And, like most academics, we have been moving our own teaching and mentoring online, running our research remotely, and attending all kinds of campus meetings via Zoom.

So how is that working out for us? Some days are better than others, as old routines fall away and new ones pop up. By no means do we have anything figured out, and we can’t resolve societal inequities. But we have a few realistic ideas about how faculty members can cope with working from home and parenting 24/7 in a pandemic. (Note: Our experience is based on working from home with young, school-age children. Academics with babies, rambunctious toddlers, or children with disabilities may be able to modify some of our suggestions to suit very different needs and attention spans.)

If nothing else, we hope the following invites an honest conversation and a reassurance that you are not alone.

To-do lists are your friend. Few things are more disorienting than having all sense of normalcy pulled out from under you overnight. For an academic, the sudden lack of a quiet campus office to retreat to means no time to concentrate on just one thing, no getting lost in solitary writing or reading time.

Without separation of work and personal time, managing your day can feel overwhelming. It is not possible to make every spare moment productive, and exhausting to try. Even when you are productive under quarantine with your writing, research, teaching, or advising, you may feel guilty about all the other things you’re letting slide while you focus on your work. Shouldn’t you be fixing the next meal? Teaching your own kids? Doing the laundry?

Two things have most helped us during this work-from-home-when-you’d-rather-not era: being organized and breaking tasks into bite-size chunks. We’re used to breaking down our academic work into manageable chunks — what’s new lately is organizing our lives in the same way. Each night, we set a list of tangible and realistic tasks that we hope to accomplish the next day. The list is subdivided into five categories related to work, life, and family:

• **Category No. 1**: meals. This is a space to loosely plan meals and snacks for the next day based on what is available. You can ask your kids to help fill in the list so you know what they are in the mood for, and encourage them to help cook. We have been turning to social media and websites for ideas on what to make with what we have in the house. It helps to have kids who like to bake. It has been a great gift of time at home together to watch them make homemade noodles, calzones, and giant chocolate-chip cookies.
• **Category No. 2**: kids. Besides school work and extracurriculars, we have each tried to schedule one "social" event a day so our children have contact with friends, family, or a teacher. That might be via Zoom or FaceTime, or it might involve riding bikes to meet a friend and wave or chat from a safe distance or leave a chalk message on the driveway. We also check our kids' Google Classroom or teacher emails to find out what they have to do for the week and see which tasks they may need help with. We've learned to pick our battles. If there are some tasks our kids resist, we think about which ones really matter and will most benefit them, and let the rest go.

• **Category No. 3**: self-care. We are trying to get ourselves and our family members moving and resting in some way each day. Sometimes we kick soccer balls in the yard or ride bikes around the neighborhood; sometimes we hold PE in the living room via virtual exercise classes. We hold family movie/TV nights every evening at the same time to create routine and rest. And we try things we never thought we would do (e.g., make a family TikTok dance video and take a virtual kids' bread-baking class).

• **Category No. 4**: meetings. List all the day's Zoom and phone meetings in one spot where you can keep track of them all, and make sure they don't overlap and you don't forget about any of them.

• **Category No. 5**: small work-related tasks. These are things — such as email, grading, letters of recommendation, paperwork, and recording lectures — that we can do when the kids are occupied. The big work tasks — such as manuscript revision or curriculum redesign — are off the list because getting to them is unrealistic right now — and that's OK. It's also OK to ask for more time on the most pressing, big work tasks.

**Four ways to manage your Zoom meetings.** We aren't sure why Zoom is so utterly exhausting; it just is. And a lot of faculty members feel that way. The technology is working well and we are impressed that we can have successful meetings with so many people from across the university, country, and globe.

But it's all too easy to spend your entire workday on Zoom, which is unproductive and tiring, not to mention unrealistic with kids around you 24/7. For us, the solution was aggressively managing our Zoom meetings and our time online with the following strategies:

• "**Can I cancel this meeting?**" Some of the things that were important to us as faculty members pre-Covid-19 don't feel that way anymore. Our priorities have changed. We are teaching differently, and managing changes in travel, budgets, and fieldwork. More and more, we have noticed that it's helpful to look at the week
ahead and revisit whether we really need to attend all of those meetings we’ve got scheduled. Some projects and activities are going to drop off while we pick up new and urgent tasks. We ask ourselves: “Is this meeting necessary to move forward with what most needs to get done now, or can it wait?” If it can wait, we cancel or re-schedule.

- **Put it in an email.** Some meetings don’t need to happen — ever. If the meeting is informational, just put the details in an email. If someone else is running the meeting, ask them to email you with the particulars. Even when we aren’t locked down in a pandemic, that’s good practice. It will save everyone time (which, along with toilet paper, is a precious resource nowadays).

- **Get up and move.** In our usual work routines, we walk between meetings on the campus or wander around the halls of our building. Right now, days come and go and we’ve only walked as far as the fridge. Meetings can be a great time to move. If we don’t need to take notes or see visuals, we try to walk during online meetings, sometimes just on a treadmill and sometimes outside. Shut off your video feed and stretch. It helps us to keep going.

- **Record now, watch later.** If you can’t make a meeting, if you’re double-booked, or if you were planning to attend but your child is suddenly melting down about a complicated math problem, consider signing in and recording the session. Or ask a colleague to tape it for you. A big benefit of everything being online is flexible access.

**Train your family and yourself.** Very few of us have worked at home this much, and there has been a period of mental as well as physical adjustment for the whole household. It’s been a month or so now, and our families are getting more accustomed to what it means when we say we need to work, including what it means for them. We’ve found a few home-management strategies that help us delineate between work and life in this crisis, and keep everyone in the house on the same page.

- **Be clear when you need uninterrupted time to work.** Develop ways to communicate that directly to your kids (assuming they are old enough to understand). For example, we tell our kids, "I’m
Zooming in FIVE!" as a way to let them know they need to shut their doors and keep their voices down. Or we ask them if they need anything (snacks, homework help, hugs) before a period when we can't be interrupted. Our kids have learned to ask, "Are you muted?" or to peek in and look for headphones before coming in the room to chat or play.

- **Work around your family schedule.** We try not to schedule Zoom meetings at times we know our kids need us to be present and available. Pro tip: Hangry kids and a Zoom-preoccupied parent are a recipe for disaster — don't do it! We also schedule breaks between online meetings so we can duck in and out of work and throw a load of laundry in the dryer or take a walk around the block.

- **Make sure your work space is functional.** Maybe you already have an inspiring home office — we don't. In "normal" times, when we worked at home, it was at the kitchen table, but that just wasn't cutting it during our national lockdown. Eventually we both moved our "offices" out of the main living area of the house, and behind a closed door. Otherwise our kids were running through our Zoom meetings (sometimes not fully dressed), and we couldn't concentrate.

- **Get comfortable.** If you are spending a lot of time at a computer, and most of us are, consider the ergonomics of your set up because it may be a while before you get to a massage therapist. If you need specific advice on your set-up, ask your university's HR office for help.

We are all vulnerable at this moment, some of us more so than others. Even with the challenges we are facing as we juggle work, parenting, and home schooling, we are also grateful to have work that provides us with income, purpose, focus, structure, and connection.

But we can't actually do it all. No one can take care of kids full time and work full time. The kids need to come first. So now is a good time to lower your expectations, hold your kids close, and take care of yourself. Do the work that matters most to you, and that will make the most difference to your students, your colleagues, and your fields. It's not about quantity. Getting one main work task done each day is plenty (and some days even that may seem impossible).

No one knows how long this is going to last, and, in many ways, that
lack of certainty goes against the training, goal setting, and planning that have helped us get where we are in our academic careers. As academics we are used to applying for grants and planning research and conference trips months and months in advance. But it’s helped to let go of that need for long-term planning and thinking, and instead to focus on what is immediately in front of us and what needs to be done to move forward to tomorrow.

Trisalyn Nelson is director of and a professor in the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning at Arizona State University. Jessica Early is an associate professor of English and director of English Education at Arizona State University. Together they write the "Faculty Survival Guide" series on academic work and life.
Teaching Remotely While Watching the Kids

By BECKIE SUPIANO

The coronavirus pandemic, like many a crisis before it, is revealing problems, like the toll of attempting work/life balance, that have been there all along.

Jenny Spinner is reworking assignments for the journalism seminar she’s suddenly teaching online. She’s grappling with how to use media coverage of the coronavirus pandemic as a learning opportunity without asking students to follow it so closely that it harms their mental health. And because Spinner also runs her department’s internship program, she’s advising students whose work experiences have been upended.

Spinner, a professor of English at Saint Joseph’s University, in Philadelphia, is doing all of that from a home office she now shares with a 10-year-old whose school, like the university, has moved to emergency online instruction due to the coronavirus. Well, when she’s not hiding out from him and her three other sons, ages 6, 13, and 17, in the bathroom so that she can try to concentrate.

The coronavirus pandemic, like many a crisis before it, is revealing problems, like the toll of attempting work/life balance, that have been
there all along. "As I breast-fed my children and also was an academic, I’ve shut myself up in my office and closed the door," Spinner says. "And I’ve been a parent where no one could see me." For many years, Spinner carefully separated her personal life from her professional one. "Here," she says, "the walls are down. I’m here with my struggles."

Having both children and an academic career is already challenging. But now many professors are juggling at least three jobs, says Julie Sievers, director of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship at Southwestern University, in Texas. They still have their regular jobs, which include research, teaching, and service. They’re also taking a crash course in online instructional design. And they’re now providing full-time child care — and, in some cases, schooling.

“What it’s going to look like to do all of this at the same time is sometimes hard to imagine,” Sievers says. “I think everyone’s doing their best.”

Spinner knows her family is lucky. Both parents are able to be home. The kids’ schools have plans for continuing instruction and have provided devices that they can use to complete it. They live in a house, not an apartment, so she has space. “Being able to hide,” she says, “is a privilege.” With four children and 17 years of parenting experience, Spinner says, she’s used to being physically exhausted. The challenge now, she says, is “mental exhaustion and the inability to carve out space for my brain to do my best work.”

Spinner has a lot on her mind. One thing she’s not worried about? “My kids showing up during my Zoom class meetings.” Spinner is already open with students about the challenges of being both parent and professor, she says, “because I think it’s important for them, especially for my women students, not to think that I’ve got it all together.”

WATCHING A LOT OF NETFLIX

No one has it all together right now, and some things will have to slide.

For Erin K. Anderson, one of those things is trying to gather her students online during their class time. Anderson, an associate professor of sociology and chair of the department at Washington College, in Maryland, is not very comfortable with technology. Her schedule is challenging. And her college is in a rural location where not everyone has reliable internet access. “I just realized really early on I was going to have to just give up any idea of having any sort of real-time interaction with the students,” she says.

Another thing Anderson is letting slide: her kids’ schoolwork. Anderson and her husband, a middle-school special-education teacher, are fortunate to both be able to work from home while their 8- and 10-year-olds are out of school. Even so, she says, “in all honesty, they have been watching a lot of Netflix and playing some games on their tablets.”
Because they live in a rural area with limited internet access, Anderson says, local schools are not expecting students to do coursework online. Given their parents’ professions, she says, her children are a little bit ahead at school anyhow. She is confident they will be all right.

Besides, work and child care aren’t her only responsibilities. Anderson’s 79-year-old father recently had back surgery. Anderson plans to stay at his home, two miles from hers, during his recovery, and has recently had internet service installed there so she can work. She’ll go back and forth to visit her husband and children.

Her situation is plenty complicated, but Anderson wonders how other families are supervising, much less educating, their children. How are the nurses and the police officer who live in her neighborhood doing this? Or families with lower incomes?

**STARK DIVIDES**

Those kinds of differences in families’ situations are among the reasons the pandemic is poised to deepen inequalities. Jessica Calarco, an associate professor of sociology at Indiana University at Bloomington, wrote a book, *Negotiating Opportunities: How the Middle Class Secures Advantages in School* (Oxford University Press, 2018), about the student, parent, and school behavior that drives those disparities.

The issue has been on her mind as she designed her remote courses, a large introductory one and another one on ethnographic research methods for graduate students. Given students’ unequal access to course materials, among other things, she has told her undergraduates that none of them will get a lower grade than whatever they had when in-person instruction ended. That makes all of the assignments for the rest of the semester effectively optional. Similarly, she has scaled back her assignments for graduate students and given them a number of options for completing the term.

Calarco has also thought about the inequities families experience at home. Her own situation is chaotic. Calarco’s husband is chief of staff for the university’s vice president for information technology, meaning he’s involved in nearly every IT decision related to its response to the pandemic. They also have two small children, the older one a kindergartener who is supposed to be completing schoolwork at home. Calarco has a Ph.D., but there’s already been one worksheet with instructions that took her a while to decipher, and printing out the school worksheets broke the family printer.

“My big takeaway here,” Calarco says, “is that if families like mine that are incredibly privileged” — healthy, employed and getting paid, well resourced — are finding this hard, “I can only imagine how much harder it must be for other families that have much more limited resources, especially when it comes to providing at-home learning support for kids.”
Not every college professor, of course, is on the advantaged side of this divide. Cassia Gammill is a contingent faculty member who teaches at two institutions: a composition course at Clark College, in Washington State, and a general-education course on popular culture at Portland State University. Gammill is an experienced online instructor who was already going to teach one of her courses online. Still, she’s dealing with two colleges’ different responses to the pandemic. She is paid by the course and hasn’t been compensated for the work of redesigning one for a new form of delivery. The future of her employment, should enrollment fall, as many anticipate, is uncertain.

Gammill is also a single parent of a 10-year-old. Generally, if she needs backup child care, Gammill might turn to her mother, but she’s in an age group at higher risk of getting seriously ill from Covid-19. For a while, Gammill planned to team up with another single parent, sharing child-care responsibilities. But the other family is in self-quarantine after exposure to someone who tested positive for the virus.

So Gammill and her daughter are on their own. At first, Gammill hoped she could find two-hour chunks of time to work during the day. “But two hours is just too long of a stretch of time to expect her not to interrupt me, I’m finding,” Gammill says. As a result, she’s getting a lot of her work done before her daughter wakes up and after she goes to bed, and running on inadequate sleep.

Gammill is under a lot of stress. But she has to hold it together, because so is her daughter, who misses her friends and has been crying. “I can see her starting to get depressed,” Gammill says.

At a time like this, Gammill says, a parent has to keep up morale. “You can’t let the relationship between the two of you go sour or get difficult,” she says. “You’ve really got to prioritize that relationship and buoying them.”

**FOCUSING ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL**

Andrew Gardner-Northrop was already busy, teaching as an adjunct at Saginaw Valley State University, in Michigan, on top of a full-time job as a therapist and manager of therapists at a primary-care office and parenting a 13-month-old. But his profession has equipped him with good coping strategies.
Like many families, Gardner-Northrop’s has found their house growing crowded. He and his husband, a teacher, are both mostly working from home, though Gardner-Northrop does have to go into his office occasionally for his full-time job. Their son’s day care is closed. Gardner-Northrop doesn’t have a dedicated home-office space, so he often works from his son’s playroom. But for video chats, he decamps to the living room, to “have a nice background where it’s just a solid wall with a nice picture instead of a ton of toys,” and he sends his husband and son to the basement, where they don’t have to worry about keeping quiet.

The logistics are complicated, but the family is also worried about the virus itself. Because his son was born prematurely, Gardner-Northrop takes extra precautions to avoid exposing him to the virus, leaving his clothes in the garage and immediately taking a shower upon his return from the primary-care office.

This is an anxious time to be a parent — an anxious time to be a person. As a therapist, Gardner-Northrop has tools for facing it. Focus on what you can control, like how to teach online, not the fact that it must be done. Pick just one thing you want to accomplish each day. “One goal that I had was that I wanted to clean out our freezer,” he says. “That’s a boring goal. But if I could clean out the freezer, that would be a successful day.”

That’s a much lower bar than academics usually set for themselves. And it’s the same one, Gardner-Northrop adds, they should be setting for their students this semester.

*Beckie Supiano writes about teaching, learning, and the human interactions that shape them.*
Why You Should Ignore All That Productivity Pressure

By AISHA S. AHMAD

Among my academic colleagues and friends, I have observed a common response to the continuing Covid-19 crisis. They are fighting valiantly for a sense of normalcy — hustling to move courses online, maintaining strict writing schedules, creating Montessori schools at their kitchen tables. They hope to buckle down for a short stint until things get back to normal. I wish anyone who pursues that path the very best of luck and health.

Yet as someone who has experience with crises around the world, what I see behind this scramble for productivity is a perilous assumption. The answer to the question everyone is asking — "When will this be over?" — is simple and obvious, yet terribly hard to accept. The answer is never.

Global catastrophes change the world, and this pandemic is very much akin to a major war. Even if we contain the Covid-19 crisis within a
few months, the legacy of this pandemic will live with us for years, perhaps decades to come. It will change the way we move, build, learn, and connect. There is simply no way that our lives will resume as if this had never happened. And so, while it may feel good in the moment, it is foolish to dive into a frenzy of activity or obsess about your scholarly productivity right now. That is denial and delusion. The emotionally and spiritually sane response is to prepare to be forever changed.

The rest of this piece is an offering. I have been asked by my colleagues around the world to share my experiences of adapting to conditions of crisis. Of course, I am just a human, struggling like everyone else to adjust to the pandemic. However, I have worked and lived under conditions of war, violent conflict, poverty, and disaster in many places around the world. I have experienced food shortages and disease outbreaks, as well as long periods of social isolation, restricted movement, and confinement. I have conducted award-winning research under intensely difficult physical and psychological conditions, and I celebrate productivity and performance in my own scholarly career.

I share the following thoughts during this difficult time in the hope that they will help other academics to adapt to hardship conditions. Take what you need, and leave the rest.

Stage No. 1: Security

Your first few days and weeks in a crisis are crucial, and you should make ample room to allow for a mental adjustment. It is perfectly normal and appropriate to feel bad and lost during this initial transition. Consider it a good thing that you are not in denial, and that you are allowing yourself to work through the anxiety. No sane person feels good during a global disaster, so be grateful for the discomfort of your sanity. At this stage, I would focus on food, family, friends, and maybe fitness. (You will not become an Olympic athlete in the next two weeks, so don’t put ridiculous expectations on your body.)

Next, ignore everyone who is posting productivity porn on social media right now. It is OK that you keep waking up at 3 a.m. It is OK that you forgot to eat lunch and cannot do a Zoom yoga class. It is OK that you have not touched that revise-and-resubmit in three weeks.

Ignore the people who are posting that they are writing papers and
the people who are complaining that they cannot write papers. They are on their own journey. Cut out the noise.

Know that you are not failing. Let go of all of the profoundly daft ideas you have about what you should be doing right now. Instead, focus intensely on your physical and psychological security. Your first priority during this early period should be securing your home. Get sensible essentials for your pantry, clean your house, and make a coordinated family plan. Have reasonable conversations with your loved ones about emergency preparedness. If you have a loved one who is an emergency worker or essential worker, redirect your energies and support that person as your top priority. Identify their needs, and then meet those needs.

No matter what your family unit looks like, you will need a team in the weeks and months ahead. Devise a strategy for social connectedness with a small group of family, friends, and/or neighbors, while maintaining physical distancing in accordance with public-health guidelines. Identify the vulnerable and make sure they are included and protected.

The best way to build a team is to be a good teammate, so take some initiative to ensure that you are not alone. If you do not put this psychological infrastructure in place, the challenge of necessary physical-distancing measures will be crushing. Build a sustainable and safe social system now.

Stage No. 2:
The Mental Shift

Once you have secured yourself and your team, you will feel more stable, your mind and body will adjust, and you will crave challenges that are more demanding. Given time, your brain can and will reset to new crisis conditions, and your ability to do higher-level work will resume.

This mental shift will make it possible for you to return to being a high-performance scholar, even under extreme conditions. However, do not rush or prejudge your mental shift, especially if you have never experienced a disaster before. One of the most relevant posts I saw on Twitter (by writer Troy Johnson) was: "Day 1 of Quarantine: ‘I’m going to meditate and do body-weight training.’ Day 4: ‘just pours the ice cream into the pasta’” — it’s funny but it also speaks directly to the issue.
Now more than ever, we must abandon the performative and embrace the authentic. Our essential mental shifts require humility and patience. Focus on real internal change. These human transformations will be honest, raw, ugly, hopeful, frustrated, beautiful, and divine. And they will be slower than keener academics are used to. Be slow. Let this distract you. Let it change how you think and how you see the world. Because the world is our work. And so, may this tragedy tear down all our faulty assumptions and give us the courage of bold new ideas.

**Stage No. 3:**  
**Embrace a New Normal**

On the other side of this shift, your wonderful, creative, resilient brain will be waiting for you. When your foundations are strong, build a weekly schedule that prioritizes the security of your home team, and then carve out time blocks for different categories of your work: teaching, administration, and research. Do the easy tasks first and work your way into the heavy lifting. Wake up early. The online yoga and crossfit will be easier at this stage.

Things will start to feel more natural. The work will also make more sense, and you will be more comfortable about changing or undoing what is already in motion. New ideas will emerge that would not have come to mind had you stayed in denial. Continue to embrace your mental shift. Have faith in the process. Support your team.

Understand that this is a marathon. If you sprint at the beginning, you will vomit on your shoes by the end of the month. Emotionally prepare for this crisis to continue for 12 to 18 months, followed by a slow recovery. If it ends sooner, be pleasantly surprised. Right now, work toward establishing your serenity, productivity, and wellness under sustained disaster conditions.

None of us knows how long this crisis will last. We all want our troops to be home before Christmas. The uncertainty is driving us all mad.

Of course, there will be a day when the pandemic is over. We will hug our neighbors and our friends. We will return to our classrooms and coffee shops. Our borders will eventually reopen to freer movement. Our economies will one day recover from the forthcoming recessions.

Yet we are just at the beginning of that journey. For most people, our minds have not come to terms with the fact that the world has already changed. Some faculty members are feeling distracted and guilty for

---

**Given time, your brain can and will reset to new crisis conditions, and your ability to do higher-level work will resume.**
not being able to write enough or teach online courses properly. Others are using their time at home to write and report a burst of research productivity. All of that is noise — denial and delusion. And right now, denial only serves to delay the essential process of acceptance, which will allow us to reimagine ourselves in this new reality.

On the other side of this journey of acceptance are hope and resilience. We will know that we can do this, even if our struggles continue for years. We will be creative and responsive, and will find light in all the nooks and crannies. We will learn new recipes and make unusual friends. We will have projects we cannot imagine today, and will inspire students we have not yet met. And we will help each other. No matter what happens next, together, we will be blessed and ready to serve.

In closing, I give thanks to those colleagues and friends who hail from hard places, who know this feeling of disaster in their bones. In the past few days, we have laughed about our childhood wounds and have exulted in our tribulations. We have given thanks and tapped into the resilience of our old wartime wounds. Thank you for being warriors of the light and for sharing your wisdom born of suffering. Because calamity is a great teacher.

_Aisha Ahmad is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Toronto and the author of the award-winning book* Jihad & Co: Black Markets and Islamist Power* (Oxford University Press, 2017)._
Explore the Store
No matter your area of expertise or where you are in your career, the right information is critical to succeeding in a rapidly changing world. Visit the Chronicle Store to get more of the essential tools, data, and insights you need to make the best decisions for your students, your institution, and your career.

Chronicle.com/TheStore
From breaking news to key insights to real-world advice, The Chronicle of Higher Education is dedicated to serving academic leaders and professionals. Our newsletters, subscriptions, special reports, and exclusive data projects provide a comprehensive view of the latest trends and critical issues affecting academe. For more than 50 years, higher-education professionals from around the world have trusted The Chronicle’s in-depth reporting and analysis to understand their world and make informed decisions.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION