Pandemic Resources for Graduate Students and Postdocs

It is an understatement to say that our lives are very different than back in early March. Everything is uncertain, and no one has any idea how long this situation will continue and how it will evolve. It’s important to figure out what you can control in your environment to make yourself feel more secure. This document provides suggestions for surviving—and even thriving—in your graduate career during the pandemic.

General Advice

Keep in mind that “Crisis adaptation is not a linear, upward trajectory toward productivity and happiness,” according to Aisha S. Ahmad (https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Salvage-a-Disastrous/248569?cid=cp275).

She suggests:

- Maintain reasonable expectations for yourself and your work
- Accept that there will be bad days and that they can be salvaged
- Be adaptable

Adaptability is a skill you already possess by virtue of being in graduate school. In another Chronicle of Higher Education article, Ariel Sophia Bardi said that because you may already spend many solitary hours thinking, studying, writing, and doing research, graduate students are better prepared to quarantine life than many other people (https://www.chronicle.com/article/Graduate-School-Prepared-Me-to/248328?cid=cp275). She also suggests the following:

- Determine a new daily routine that works specifically for you
- Break larger tasks into smaller components
- Find a designated check-in partner from your graduate cohort

Another important point to recall is that even in “normal” times, research plans sometimes go awry. In a blog post, Pat Thomson suggests that you develop a risk management plan and she provides a list of questions you might want to discuss with your advisor (https://patthomson.net/2020/03/23/managing-research-risks-riding-the-wave-of-phdpandemic/).

Suggestions for Speaking with Professors

For such research or related concerns, plan to share them with your advisor. Some of these conversations may seem difficult. For interacting with professors, first think about what you need from them:

- An extension of funding or dates for major exams or graduation?
- Figuring out how to change current research projects in some way?
- Increased contact or a different type of contact with advisors?
- Less pressure for productivity?
- Flexibility in working remotely longer than some other students (perhaps due to your own health concerns or those of the people with whom you live)?
Purdue’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) program has a document, “How to Talk to Your Professors,” that may help you decide how to discuss such important topics with your advisor:

https://www.purdue.edu/caps/covid-19/talk-to-professors.html

Dr. Drew Zaitsoff of CAPS suggests that students may want to speak with Human Resources (https://www.purdue.edu/hr/) or the Disability Resource Center (https://www.purdue.edu/drc/) to get information about possible accommodations before speaking with your advisor.

Career-Related Concerns

Students close to graduation may be concerned about the job market you will be entering, whether you are seeking work in academia, industry, government, or elsewhere. "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," according to L. Maren Wood (https://www.chronicle.com/article/For-Would-Be-Academics-Now-Is/248585/#.XrxoRkYYN5k.email).

- Consider your "Plan B" for employment based on skills rather than disciplinary expertise
- Use some of your time to upskill by acquiring new marketable skills or enhancing ones you already possess
  - Communication, analysis, project management, research, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and innovation

Sample Upskilling Resources at Purdue and Beyond

You do not have to look far to find plenty of opportunities to diversify your skillset:

- CoE Communication Workshops
  https://engineering.purdue.edu/Engr/Academics/Graduate/ProfessionalDevelopment
  - Register for ENGR 596 to earn one credit for 16 hours of workshops
- Graduate School Professional Development Workshops
  https://www.purdue.edu/gradschool/professional-development/workshops/index.php?_ga=2.68095185.1902486837.1590422836-956802092.1566311443
- Purdue Graduate Student Government https://www.purduegradstudents.com/who-are-we
- Writing Lab https://owl.purdue.edu/writinglab/the_writing_lab_at_purdue.html
- Graduate Research Information Portal (Purdue libraries) https://guides.lib.purdue.edu/grip
- Center for Career Opportunities https://www.cco.purdue.edu/
- Toastmasters (for public speaking practice--check which local clubs offer online participation)
  https://www.toastmasters.org/find-a-club?q=Purdue+University%2C+Tippecanoe+County%2C+Indiana%2C+United+States&radius=25
  &n=&advanced=0&latitude=40.4293&longitude=-86.9144&autocomplete=true&zoom=0
- LinkedIn Learning https://one.purdue.edu/?_ga=2.106703107.1267537244.1589805558-1548392339.1537448037