

Staying Connected with Your Scholarship while Social Distancing (Online Roundtable)

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1. What are our concerns about scholarship? What has been challenging?

Laura: For me a challenge has been the ability to focus and think deeply about my scholarly projects when there is so much going on that is new and is a source of anxiety. I also have different distractions at home (my husband and I share a home office). So when a day seems relatively quiet, that's a day to shift gears and work on research rather than other things. (Also, headphones have been helpful).

Yeonsoo: For me, the biggest challenge has been the distraction of the pandemic and how it suddenly changed teaching requirements and formats. Dealing with the sudden changes and managing my other duties seamlessly has become the priority to the detriment of my scholarship.

2. How do faculty members adjust expectations for scholarship in a way that enables us to cope with the pandemic?

Dayna: How do we prioritize among competing demands? First ask yourself, "what would a successful scholarship year look like for me?" Asking this question will help you prioritize among the many research projects we have going on. Post this list along with all your research projects in a place you work/look every day. Think about small successes and moving projects along at various stages of the research process.

Yeonsoo: Be realistic and adjust expectations. It is okay to adjust expectations to manage your life more sustainably. If you have a year-long scholarship plan, re-evaluate it to create a more realistic plan for yourself and your co-authors, if any. You can map out your scholarly projects monthly or quarterly but be very realistic and flexible, instead of trying to achieve everything that you initially planned. If you need any resources and consultations, CFI: Scholarship Consultations might be a good option for you. Please visit <https://www.jmu.edu/cfi/scholarship/scholarship-consultations/index.shtml>

3. What are effective strategies to keep up with scholarship while maintaining social distancing?

Laura: I like to think about "big" chunks and "small" chunks of time. If I have a big chunk of time, I can really work on a manuscript and make what feels like good progress. But if I only have small chunks, I can perform tasks that don't require deep thought, like checking my reference list and adding things that are missing - or creating a figure to depict my hypothetical model. These are largely mechanical tasks that can be done in small chunks of time, but that keep your project moving forward.

Aaron: Set small, realistic goals based on your context. To the extent possible, create a space within your home to devote solely to your scholarship. Practice mindfulness and quiet centering to help you focus on the task and take stock of the "noise" of the mind, focus and write. Lastly, forgive yourself if you are not productive as a writer. During a pandemic you should not feel like you have to write every day. Just make the best effort you can.

Dayna: *Block off time in your week for scholarship.* We all block off our classes, office hours and meetings but don't often put time in for research. Put a fairly large chunk of time each week for research and protect it. Use this block to complete the larger tasks from #2. If you can, select the time of the day when you are most productive (e.g., early morning or late at night). Don't grade during this time and don't allow others to schedule last-minute meetings during that time. Don't have e-mail notifications available and turn off your cell phone. If you need to work elsewhere, use the CFI writing studios, faculty space in the libraries or your favorite coffee shop.

When you find yourself free for a few minutes in between responsibilities, choose scholarship first. Complete the shorter time frame tasks identified in #2 in these small pockets of time. Bring your laptop/research work to appointments, kids sporting events, or to class. Instead of waiting and scrolling on your phone, while students are watching a video, completing an activity in class, or taking an exam, complete a small research task like reading an article.

When you have tasks for teaching, service and research, choose research first! Unless there is an immediate deadline for teaching or service (e.g., it's 20 minutes before the class or meeting you haven't prepped) choose research. Handing back student papers within a few days vs. taking a week is not going to affect your teaching performance. Make the choice to work on research.

If you are stuck because the task seems too big: set a timer for 5 minutes and agree to work on research for that time. After 5 minutes, you might get into it and if not, try again later.

Yeonsoo:

If you cannot write everyday, *figure out a 1 or 2 hour window when you are the most productive. Block off this time period* as your scholarship time. In my case, it is 9am to 12pm. I try to schedule any other obligations in the afternoon so that I can spend my most productive time to focus on my research projects. Sometimes, I can be much more productive when I spend 1 hour during my focus time than 3 hours in the later afternoon when I have less energy. *Set aside a couple of days during your most productive time period* as your writing blocks. Your brain will work best during that time period and you won't feel guilty about not working on your research everyday all day.

Join an accountability writing group or find an accountability partner. Meet your accountability group or partner through Zoom during a certain time period reserved for scholarship, share what you plan to work on, and turn off your audio/video, while working on your scholarship. Before ending the Zoom session, you can share your progress, thoughts, or anything else. Having that accountability group or partner really helps not only to have social (virtual) interaction with someone but also to keep yourself accountable for someone else.

Begin and end your week by checking on your research progress. I monitor my research pipeline through a google document with columns of each month. I just write what I want to accomplish during a certain month (not just the title of a scholarship project, but a little bit smaller breakdown of the project such as data collection, writing up the literature etc.). I set up an automatic notification email with the link to

Google docs so I can receive an email notification with the link every Monday morning and Friday morning so that I can begin and end the week by keeping my scholarship pipeline in mind.

4. Do you collaborate with colleagues on your scholarship? How are you continuing those collaborations in sustainable ways during the pandemic?

Dayna: Maintaining commitments to others and respecting when they say they are too busy to work on research right now.

Aaron: I'd echo what Dayna says above, first and foremost. However, when the collaboration is cross-institutional, it is important to understand and be responsive to the needs of collaborators who may not have been given as much tenure clock flexibility as we have been given at JMU. In which case it is important to have a clear timeline moving forward, adjust authorship when appropriate, and maintain and engage with one another in a mutually beneficial collaboration to the extent this is possible.

Yeonsoo: When the collaboration is cross-institutional, communicating openly and honestly about each other's situation and setting clear expectations and a timeline would be the key. While we can be supportive, understanding of each other's situations, some people may not have the luxury to wait until the co-authors can get back on track. To prevent any conflicts and keep the mutually beneficial relationship going among co-authors, communicating early on to adjust the expectations and timeline will be very critical.