

Academic Connection via Distance Communication for Mentors

#Academic Connection
#Social Distancing

Dear BGS Mentors,

We know that each of you have faced your own set of unique challenges during the pandemic impacting your research, your family, your community and you. We hope that you are weathering these difficult times and finding valuable alternative strategies for your time. As you can imagine this is also a challenging time for your trainees and we are writing to specifically ask for your help in supporting our graduate students *academically, professionally and personally* through these challenging times.

First and foremost, we want to emphasize that each person will respond to the pandemic differently, ranging from complete lack of concern to panic, with most landing somewhere along this continuum. Students will exhibit many of the same concerns as we faculty, such as concern for family and friends, or inability to do research and the potentially negative impact that might have on a career. However, some students may well exhibit distinct concerns that we faculty have not thought about. For this reason, please ask your student how they are doing. Do they feel safe in their environment? Do they have access to food and resources? How are they handling the isolation of social distancing? Please refer them to [University resources](#) or to the graduate group chairs, the coordinators or to BGS if they have needs that are beyond your ability to address. We want all our students to come through this whole, safe, and sound.

Second, as we approach the peak of the pandemic, students may start to be directly affected by SARS-CoV-2 as they, their family, or their friends develop COVID19 symptoms. We ask that you be flexible and understanding as they face these challenges. The student may not think to tell you that someone close to them is experiencing COVID19; they may feel you do not want to know, or do not need to know. We know all of you do indeed care. Each time you check in with your trainee a good habit would be is to ask how they and those close to them are doing.

Third, we want to find ways for students to remain connected to their studies, to their laboratories, to their programs and to BGS. We have sent out guidelines to our students to help them maintain academic connection while they are social distancing. These guidelines, which we are calling “[My Quarantine IDP](#)”, provides ideas for students to develop a plan to continue their educational journey and develop skills during the laboratory shutdown. Below we outline ways you can work with your student to develop a productive and flexible learning program.

- Discuss an individualized, goal-oriented plan with your mentee for this extraordinary circumstance.

- The main focus of the plan is to advance the research goals of the student's main project under these extraordinary circumstances.
 - Mentors should be creatively helping their students define the goals for such plan, and lay down markers for attaining them, in a manner that is tailored to the discipline, the stage of work, and the student/mentor needs.
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- Continue to hold or consider holding regular group meetings (remotely, e.g. by Bluejeans).
 - Continue to hold regular, weekly meetings one-on-one with the Mentee (remotely, e.g. by Bluejeans).
 - Some trainees in your lab might well be collaborating with more senior personnel in the lab, or even partially mentored by such personnel. In such cases, it may be important for you to directly engage both parties to collaboratively develop plans, discuss literature and stay connected.
 - Suggest academic resources to your mentee(s) that are project- and discipline-specific.
 - Suggest at least one area for 'enrichment' to your Mentee(s). Enrichment should not necessarily be a solo endeavor. Instead promote the idea that trainees should seek out 'affinity groups' or 'intellectual hubs' within their labs, within their collaborations, within their Graduate Groups, and/or within Student Campus Associations.

We **thank you** for all your efforts during these difficult times and hope you all remain healthy and safe. We look forward to seeing all of you in person soon.

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