BUILDING COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT IN PANDEMIC TIMES (AND BEYOND)

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The target audience for this presentation is graduate students. However, I hope that the tips and frameworks I share here are helpful for faculty, and others beyond academia.
I draw on several sources for this presentation including: my personal lived experience, the National Center for Faculty Diversity and Development, and Harvard’s Academic Resource Center.
A word about format. I will provide you with frameworks and information. I encourage you to do the guided activities in this presentation. You can do the activities with folks in our Department, or other people or groups you trust.
COMPASSION
We are living through a pandemic. It’s OK to not feel OK. Be kind to yourself. And be kind to those around you.
The pandemic has been a shock to our lives.
The life and work flow that we had just a month ago is no longer.
You are not alone.
THE MANY ROLES WE HAVE
As graduate students, we have several different jobs.

We are students, researchers, teachers, advisors, and mentors.

And we are also parents, partners, caregivers, community members, and more.
EDUCATORS
Graduate students are key points of contact – or intermediaries – between undergraduate students and ‘the university’.
Graduate students are currently on the frontlines of providing an education for undergraduate students.
And. Graduate students are also on the frontlines of providing mentorship and care.
Learn about the home environment and circumstances that your students are facing.
Do your students have:
• Access to high-speed, reliable internet
• A study space
• Quiet space

Your students might need help with:
• Developing new study habits
• Creating ‘study’ spaces in their home contexts
• Negotiating with families boundaries for studying
HOME + FAMILY CONTEXT

Your students may live in neighborhoods:
• Close to coronavirus hotspots
• Far from hospitals or clinics
• Grocery stores are low on goods

Your students may have family members who:
• Are “essential” workers
• Are still working in high-risk jobs
• Have lost their jobs
• Don’t get paid leave
• Don’t have health insurance
• Are struggling to pay rent
• Don’t have citizenship
Be sensitive to the home environments and circumstances that your students are facing.
GETTING THE SUPPORT THAT WE NEED
So as graduate students with many roles, we need a diverse set of supports to be well and to succeed.

Especially in these pandemic times.
A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT
The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity breaks down support needs into different component parts.

Here, I have adapted their framework.

Source: https://www.facultydiversity.org/
Network of Advisors, Mentors, Sponsors, Collaborators

SUBSTANTIVE FEEDBACK

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SPONSORSHIP

EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES

INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY

ACCOUNTABILITY (FOR THE THINGS THAT MATTER)

ROLE MODELS

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Network of Advisors, Mentors, Sponsors, Collaborators

**SUBSTANTIVE FEEDBACK**
People who seriously engage with your ideas

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
People who help you learn the formal/informal ‘rules of the game’

**SPONSORSHIP**
People who write letters of recommendation or ‘put in a good word for you’

**ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES**
Who is letting you know about or including you in opportunities?

**EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**
People who help or support your well-being

**ACCOUNTABILITY (FOR THE THINGS THAT MATTER)**
People or systems that keep you accountable (for important things, especially in areas with weak accountability structures: like writing, health and well-being)

**INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY**
People who share and nurture your intellectual ideas

**ROLE MODELS**
People who are doing things the way you aspire to them

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By categorizing supports into these different component parts, we can take better inventory of our support system.
We also notice other important things.

Like, we can’t rely on one single person, group, or team to provide us with all the support we need.
We notice that different people and groups provide us with different support.

We also notice some overlaps. People might provide us with more than one type of support.
It takes a village.
Who is providing you with support in your life?

- Substantive Feedback
- Professional Development
- Sponsorship
- Access to Opportunities
- Accountability (for the things that matter)
- Emotional, Physical, Mental Health Support
- Intellectual Community
- Role Models
Let’s talk about a few of these.
EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL + MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
Above all other needs we must prioritize emotional, physical, and mental health wellbeing.
Think about your physical health. Are you in pain? Are you moving your body? Are you staying hydrated?
Think about your emotional and mental health. How do you feel? Can you name your emotions?

All of your emotions are valid.
How are you taking care of your physical, emotional, mental health, and or spiritual well-being?
You don’t have to do it alone.

Among others, mental health professionals can be of support.
Who do you trust to speak about your well-being?
1. Reflect on the current support you have. (3 mins)

2. Are you lacking the support you need in this area? (2 mins + discussion)

3. Reflect on what has prevented you from getting the support you need, or how you can get more of it. (2 mins + discussion)

4. Brainstorm ways you can move towards getting this support. (3 mins + discussion)

5. Take a concrete step toward getting the support you need! (volunteer accountability partner)
CREATE A CARE PLAN
CREATE A CARE PLAN

1. Set up a call/video chat with people you trust. This can be one person or a small group.

2. Review these slides and talk about your needs. How can y’all support each other?

3. Create a care plan or an emergency care plan.

5. Here are some elements you can include in your plan: Who can you call or contact if you experience any of the following?

   • Experience coronavirus symptoms
   • Have a panic attack
   • Have trouble staying active
   • Need emergency child care
   • Experience a racist attack
HYDRATION BREAK
SUBSTANTIVE FEEDBACK
We need a lot of substantive feedback throughout the PhD journey.
As early-stage graduate students, we need thoughtful engagement with our brewing ideas.

As prospectus writers, we need experts to help us design and frame our projects.

As dissertation writers, we need serious engagement with our research and writing.
Who is providing you with substantive feedback on your research, writing, or other work?
1. Reflect on the current support you have. (3 mins)

2. Are you lacking the support you need in this area? (2 mins + discussion)

3. Reflect on what has prevented you from getting the support you need, or how you can get more of it. (2 mins + discussion)

4. Brainstorm ways you can move towards getting this support. (3 mins + discussion)

5. Take a concrete step toward getting the support you need! (volunteer accountability partner)
ACCOUNTABILITY
Think about the different roles in your life.

ACCOUNTABILITY

What are you accountable for?

Who are you accountable to?
Who is holding you accountable to your goals?

How are you holding yourself accountable to your goals?
1. Reflect on the current support you have. (3 mins)

2. Are you lacking the support you need in this area? (2 mins + discussion)

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4. Brainstorm ways you can move towards getting this support. (3 mins + discussion)

5. Take a concrete step toward getting the support you need! (volunteer accountability partner)
The Harvard Academic Resource Center provides graduate students with many services.

I will highlight some resource that can help keep you accountable to your research, writing, and teaching.

Source: https://academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu/
Tailored calendars, weekly, and daily work schedules are tools to help keep you accountable.
The ARC offers a “bird’s eye calendar.”

A bird’s eye calendar is a great tool for making a semester plan.
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ACCOUNTABILITY: A SEMESTER PLAN CAN HELP

Include your key deadlines and major dates.

These can be work + personal-related deadlines/events.

You can then backwards plan from key deadlines, to help you plan the work distribution across weeks.
ACCOUNTABILITY: A SEMESTER PLAN CAN HELP

The ARC offers workshops and worksheets to help you make your own bird’s eye calendar. Check out their website. You’ll find a worksheet titled the “Steps for Making a Bird’s Eye Plan.”

Steps to Making a Bird’s Eye Plan

- Gather syllabi & other places your commitments are written
- On the bird’s eye calendar,
  - List all exams, paper & project deadlines
  - Add weekly reaction papers, p-sets, quizzes, etc.
  - Block out days when work is unlikely (holidays, friends visiting, weddings, etc.)
- Add a plan
  - Create early deadlines for deliverables whenever possible
  - Space your deadlines apart
  - Starting at each of your new deadlines, plan the steps back to the beginning

More Planning Tips

- Rewrite tomorrow’s plan the night before, with one “must do”
- Make steps active and specific
- Allow 2-3X more time for projects than planned
- Create routines
  - Bedtime
  - Morning
  - Study
- Create structure (especially on “free” days)
- Be clear when you’re “on” or “off” duty
  - Date night
  - Friends & family
  - Whatever

Harvard University x Academic Resource Center x 150 Mass Ave 3R x academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu

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ACCOUNTABILITY: A WEEKLY + DAILY PLAN CAN HELP

Now that you have master plan, it is also helpful to have a weekly and daily schedule.
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ACCOUNTABILITY: A WEEKLY + DAILY PLAN CAN HELP

Some tips:

1. **Schedule your most important/difficult tasks early in the morning** (or whenever you work best).

2. **For your most intensive tasks, try organizing your work into periods of 30 to 45-minutes.**

3. **Writing or working in “bursts” can help keep you focused.**
ACCOUNTABILITY: A WEEKLY + DAILY PLAN CAN HELP

Some more tips:

1. In addition to listing ‘projects’, also list specific tasks. Example: instead of saying “work on dissertation chapter” say “work on the first three paragraphs of my introduction chapter”

2. Things always take longer than you think. That’s OK. No judgement. But do give yourself more time for completing tasks.
ACCOUNTABILITY: A WEEKLY + DAILY PLAN CAN HELP

Some more tips:

1. Include all key elements of your life. Block off time for lunch, walk with the bae, FaceTime with family, virtual happy hours with loved ones.

2. Consider the needs of those you live with. Have a conversation about sharing spaces. Will you take turns using the desk or the kitchen table?
SUPPORT GROUPS
SUPPORT GROUPS

We are in a pandemic.

Many of us are effectively locked in a room, apartment, house. Our outside time is limited.

Many of us are far from family, friends, co-workers, advisors, mentors, colleagues, and other forms of support.

And it can feel lonely.
SUPPORT GROUPS

You are not alone.
There are groups that we can create or plug into. These groups can help us meet some of our needs.
Are there any groups you can create/join to support you?

**SUBSTANTIVE FEEDBACK**

**SPONSORSHIP**

**ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES**

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

*(FOR THE THINGS THAT MATTER)*

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

**INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY**

**ROLE MODELS**
You can plug into existing accountability groups (like the Writing Oasis, or the ARC’s Graduate Student Accountability Groups).

Or you can create your own group.
SUPPORT GROUPS: WORK/RESEARCH/WRITING

Some tips:

1. Experiment with which group works best for you.

2. Smaller works may work better than larger groups. Smaller groups allow for more intimate support. This way, the group can be invested in each other’s success and well-being.

3. Experiment with format.

4. Some key elements can include: introductions, talk about goals the week, daily check-ins, encouraging emails or messages.
Some tips:

1. Build community, not just work check-in. Ask about how folks are doing, how are their families doing?

2. Finds ways to reward yourselves, as individuals and as a group. Perhaps schedule a happy hour.
1. Reflect on what groups you are currently a part of. (3 mins)

2. Do you wish you were a part of more groups? If so, for what purpose (work, work-out, mental-health, other) (2 mins + discussion)

3. Reflect on what has prevented you from getting the support you need, or how you can get more of it. (2 mins + discussion)

4. Brainstorm ways you can move towards getting this support. (3 mins + discussion)

5. Take a concrete step toward getting the support you need! (volunteer accountability partner)
COMMUNICATION WITH FACULTY ADVISORS
This is a good time for advisors and advisees to check-in.
COMMUNICATION WITH ADVISORS

Advisors-advisees should talk about: updated deadlines, modified expectations, updated timelines, and plans for remaining in communication.
The University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Institute for Clinical and Translational Research offers resources for how to create effective mentorship relationships.

You can use ICTR’s Mentorship Agreement to help guide your conversations.
Mentorship Agreement Template

The purpose of this template is to assist you in documenting mutually agreed upon goals and parameters that will serve as the foundation for your mentoring relationships. While mentors and mentees may find mentorship agreements to be useful, they are optional. This template is expected to be altered to meet individual needs.

[1] **Goals** (what you hope to achieve as a result of this relationship; e.g., gain perspective relative to skills necessary for success in academia, explore new career opportunities/alternatives, obtain knowledge of organizational culture, networking, leadership skill development, etc.):

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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[2] **Steps to achieving goals** as stated above (e.g., meeting regularly, manuscripts/grants, collaborating on research projects, steps to achieving independence, etc.):

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[3] **Meeting frequency** (frequency, duration, and location of meetings):

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[4] **Confidentiality:** Any sensitive issues that we discuss will be held in the strictest of confidence. Issues that are off limits for discussion include:

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[5] Plan for **evaluating relationship effectiveness** (e.g., bi-annual review of mentorship meeting minutes, goals, and outcomes/accomplishments):

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[6] **Relationship termination clause:** In the event that either party finds the mentoring relationship unproductive and requests that it be terminated, we agree to honor that individual's decision without question or blame.

[7] **Duration:** This mentorship relationship will continue as long as both parties feel comfortable with its productivity or until: ______________________________

Mentor’s Signature ___________________________ Mentee’s Signature ___________________________ Date __________
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___________________________________________________________________________________

Mentor's Signature

___________________________

Mentee’s Signature

___________________________

Date

__________

Source: https://ictr.wisc.edu/mentoring/mentoring-compactscontracts-examples/
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_Mentor’s Signature_________________________ Mentee’s Signature_________________________ Date_________
Note: One issue faculty can’t accept confidentiality relates to Title IX harassment issues.
COMMUNICATION WITH ADVISORS

You can tailor this template to meet your needs.

It’s OK if you don’t want to use this document. You can use the prompts to guide your conversations with your advisors.
COMMUNICATION WITH ADVISORS

Develop agreement(s) with your advisor(s).
Remember, you may need different supports from different advisors or mentors.

Tailor your conversations accordingly.
OK TO COMMUNICATE SPECIAL CONCERNS
YOU HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS

Not everyone has a safe “home” environment.

Not everyone has a stable internet connection.

Not everyone has a desk.

Not everyone has a reliable laptop.
Some of us or our loved ones loved have been or could be physically affected by coronavirus.

Some of us our our loved ones have been or could be economically affected by the pandemic.

Some of us our our loved ones have been or could be socially isolated.

YOU HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS
YOU HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE YOUR NEEDS AND TO ASK FOR SUPPORT
COMPASSION
I repeat.

We are living through a pandemic. It’s OK to not feel OK. Be kind to yourself. And be kind to those around you.