

MENTORING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH REMOTELY

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

In May 2020, the Undergraduate Research Center for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (URC-HASS) conducted a survey of UCLA students conducting research in the humanities, arts, and social sciences during the spring 2020 quarter. A total of 77 students doing research with mentors in those fields (including psychology) responded. Here are some of our findings:

- Most students surveyed (over three-quarters on most measures) were able to implement good practices for time management and work environment. For example, they reported that they:
 - Have somewhere they can work quietly
 - Have set quarterly expectations
 - Set out weekly goals and break larger components into smaller tasks
 - Meet regularly with their mentor
 - Have periodic deliverables leading up to a final product
- Despite this, only 29% indicated they were able to maintain timely progress on their research. The top reasons cited for falling behind included:
 - Too many distractions and disruptions in home life (35%)
 - Worry and inability to focus (35%)
 - Lack of motivation (32%)
 - Additional time commitment needed for online classes and assignments (30%)
 - Planned research activities became infeasible or more challenging to access (23%)
 - Additional responsibilities in home life (23%)
- Nonetheless, 32% of the respondents expected (at the time of the survey) to accomplish the same amount as originally planned for the spring quarter, 48% stated they would accomplish a little less than planned, 12% expected to accomplish much less, and 7% were on track to accomplish more than they expected.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Students were also asked to reflect on what has worked best for them in remote research and mentoring. From their feedback, URC-HASS compiled the following steps to consider when mentoring students remotely:

- Scheduling and Accountability
 - Plan meetings in advance, ideally around a set time every week or bi-weekly
 - Break up work into smaller tasks, with deliverables corresponding to meetings
 - Encourage students to make lists of their tasks or collaborate on a to-do list in a shared document (such as a Google doc)
 - Encourage students to structure a small amount of work into their day on most days and avoid binge working

- Encourage students to share their work with peers and create peer accountability groups
 - Communication
 - Discuss demands on students' time and limitations on working effectively from home
 - Encourage students to ask questions about expectations and timelines
 - Assist students in adjusting timelines if research tasks are added beyond initial expectations or if some tasks take longer or become infeasible in the current environment
 - Explore a variety of communication methods and tools (e.g. Slack, Trello, texting); some may work better for different types of research and communication
 - Use sharable resources, e.g. shared calendars, Trello boards, Google docs, Zotero libraries
 - Encouraging Student Motivation
 - Learn about students' interests and how their research resonates with their interests
 - Ask about students' short- and long-term goals and frame research tasks in relation to them (e.g. writing up their research in a way that will be useful for a graduate school application, learning a software program that may be useful for a desired career)
 - Remind students of the progress they have already made
 - Provide support and encouragement, especially when giving feedback
 - Remind students that it is fine and healthy to adjust their expectations
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Please feel free to reach out to the URC-HASS directors to discuss remote research questions, support, and resources:

- Director: Dr. Whitney Arnold (warnold@college.ucla.edu)
- Assistant Director: Dr. Jacquelyn Ardam (jardam@college.ucla.edu)
- Assistant Director: Dr. Kelly Kistner (kkistner@college.ucla.edu)

The [UCLA WI+RE team \(Writing Instruction and Research Education\)](#) provides a number of online workshops and tutorials for students on topics including: getting started in research, writing a literature review, using the UCLA Library website, collecting and citing sources using Zotero, and creating a research plan.

We also recommend the following documents, which feature collaboratively-sourced resources for remote research and mentoring:

- [Council on Undergraduate Research \(CUR\) Remote Undergraduate Research Resources](#)
- [Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic](#)