

## MENTORING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH REMOTELY

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### 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.

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### 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](mailto:warnold@college.ucla.edu))
- Assistant Director: Dr. Jacquelyn Ardam ([jardam@college.ucla.edu](mailto:jardam@college.ucla.edu))
- Assistant Director: Dr. Kelly Kistner ([kkistner@college.ucla.edu](mailto: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](#)