

THE SEISMOGRAM

News and info to help our student and early-career scientists advance their careers

Seismological Society of America:
Advancing Earthquake Science Worldwide

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Keeping Your Career Afloat in Challenging Times

With help from your SSA colleagues, here are a few ideas for managing your days and holding onto your passion for seismology in the age of coronavirus.

SET YOUR SIGHTS ON YOUR NEXT SCIENTIFIC MEETING. Need something to look forward to? Apply for an [SSA Global Travel Grant](#). Open only to SSA student and early-career members, these grants can help take you to a scientific conference or workshop when it's safe to travel again. Applications close 31 July.

FIND PEERS TO KEEP YOU MOTIVATED. In recent weeks, new online meetings have emerged for students to discuss research papers, bounce ideas off one another and provide moral support. Sara K. McBride, social science coordinator for ShakeAlert at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), launched a "Social Writing While Social Distancing" group. Made up of post-docs and early-career researchers at the USGS's Earthquake Science Center and California Volcano Observatory, the group meets daily on Microsoft Teams for a short video chat followed by writing "sprints." During breaks, members discuss their progress and stumbling blocks. Alicia Hotovec-Ellis, a USGS research geophysicist, is among the members who appreciate the online support system. "Most of us are working on manuscripts... writing outlines,

prose, editing or working on figures,” she explains. “I’ve found that having the company (via chat) and accountability have been instrumental in helping me stay focused on my manuscript.”

MAKE SMALL DAILY GOALS. M.I.T. Professor Thomas Levenson’s recent piece in [The New Yorker](#) points to the unrealistic expectations for our work-from-home productivity that have been circulating as of late: “Get that novel written, or that screenplay, and, if you don’t, you should at least refocus your life and find your purpose. If not, you’ve failed the take-home epidemic exam.”

Instead of thinking that the solitude of social distancing should lead us to dazzling feats and scientific breakthroughs, we might be better off seeking to simply survive these strange times as best as we can. As Sean Bemis, a research scientist at Virginia Tech, puts it, “I am putting maintaining a happy, functional house with my kids and wife as first priority. Anything academic that is completed is a bonus.”

KEEP REGULAR WORK HOURS. “Set the alarm and arrive on time every day for work,” advises SSA Treasurer Mitch Withers, associate research professor at the University of Memphis Center for Earthquake Research and Information. To protect yourself against burnout, overload and exhaustion, you may also want to consider setting alarms to signal the end of your work day and/or bedtime. Share your home with others? A short daily meeting and a shared calendar for you and your new work-from-home colleagues can help you plan each day and support each other when possible. This might mean taking a loud dog on a walk or covering childcare during someone’s most important online meeting or teaching duties.

TAKE AN ONLINE CLASS. Whether you want to learn how to improve your presentation visuals, become a better public speaker or acquire new technical skills, there has never been a wider array of affordable online education options. SSA’s offerings this summer will include “Ally Skills Training.” Led by Sherry Marts of S*Marts Consulting, the workshop is an opportunity to learn how you can help create a more inclusive culture in any organization or environment.

SOCIALIZE WHILE SOCIAL DISTANCING. “Sometimes I feel alone,” one SSA member recently told us. It’s a reminder that we all need to continue our frequent check-ins with one another. *How are you? How was your weekend?* The questions we once asked our colleagues in passing are filled with new meaning. Keep asking them.

Likewise, don’t let your online interactions with colleagues become too formal or stiff. “Use video calls and feel free to let the conversation roam just the way it would at work. Don’t let every interaction be a meeting focused on one topic,” says SSA Past President Andy Michael, a geophysicist with the USGS Earthquake Science Center. “Consider having a weekly group video lunch to keep everyone involved.”

THANK A PROFESSOR OR COLLEAGUE. Have you been meaning to thank someone for helping you work through a complicated research problem or connecting you to the job you have today? You don’t need fancy stationery, stamps or a trip to the mailbox. It’s the words that

matter, so share your gratitude in a thoughtful email. We could all use more day- brightening messages amid the current news cycle.

PLAN YOUR NEXT CAREER STEP. Now is a great time for exploring new possibilities in your career. Sign up for alerts from [SSA's job listing page](#), which features the latest fellowship, post-doc and job opportunities in seismology worldwide. Request a brief online informational interview with someone on a career path that interests you (perhaps someone you met at our last Annual Meeting?). Focus on updating and polishing your LinkedIn profile and resume.

GO EASY ON YOURSELF. Daily life has become stressful to say the least. Small hands are tugging at many of our own as we attempt to type e-mails and field video calls. Our daily routines now include worrying about friends and family who are ill or tending to the ill, juggling work responsibilities while trying to educate our children, sanitizing mail, sewing face masks and searching for elusive online grocery delivery windows. "The usual suggestions for work/life balance need to be thrown out the back window, axed to pieces and then lit into a giant bonfire," says Claudia H. Flores, a USGS geophysicist at Woods Hole Coastal and Marine Science Center. "Stop yourself from feeling guilty about not finishing that paper you were supposed to submit before the stay-at-home orders, or that seismic processing script you can't run because it's locked inside the one computer to don't have remote access to. These are not normal times. Science will be there waiting for you to pick up from where you left off."

Congratulations, Global Travel Grant Recipients

Piotr A. Bońkowski, Karthik Reddy Sai Krishna Konala and Erika Schiappapietra will use their SSA Global Grants to attend the 17th World Conference on Earthquake Engineering. Ezgi Karasozen is headed to the General Assembly of the European Seismological Commission. Chris Milliner will attend the COMET Annual Meeting. Where will an [SSA Global Travel Grant](#) take you?

Stay in Touch

Have a career-related question or issue you'd like us to explore in a future issue? E-mail info@seismosoc.org.



