

# PRODUCTIVITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

STRATEGIES FOR BALANCING WORK, TEACHING,  
AND PARENTING DURING THE COVID-19 ERA

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Instructional designer; University instructor; sudden home-schooler;  
pet-wrangler; mediocre chef of 3 meals a day; “mom! Mommy! *MOM!*”



# DISCLAIMERS

- Recognize that each person and family's situation is DIFFERENT
  - Family size, age of child(ren), challenges, other dynamics
  - Socioeconomics, home environment, finances, layoffs, essential employees
  - Mental health and how we're "dealing" with it all
- I AM NOT:
  - A psychologist, counselor, or mental health expert
  - A life coach
  - An expert on anyone's situation outside of my own
- Session from TTADA: *Wellness and Self Care During Times of Isolated Uncertainty* – by Angie Muhs, Assistant Professor of Social Work and mental health expert
  - Friday, May 8 from 10-11 AM via Zoom
  - Google “UND TTaDA Programming” to find registration link

# WHY ME? WHY THIS TOPIC?

- Professional expertise: curriculum development, particularly online/distance formats
- Personal interest / hobby is organization and finding efficiencies to make my life easier!
- I wear many hats:
  - Full time UND staff; Adjunct professor at two schools; Mother of one six-year-old, extroverted first grader
- My privileges are MANY. My biggest challenges are:
  - Managing my three professional jobs, parenting/entertainment, and homeschooling assistance
  - Only child is always bored, hasn't played with other children in nearly 60 days
  - My preferred self-care is solitude





# FOR THE REST OF THIS SESSION

- What I Hope All Leaders Understand AND Exemplify (UND and Beyond)
- COVID-19 Productivity as a Gendered Issue
- Responsibilities to Students (the ones we teach, not our kids)
- Some Quick Calendar Tetris
- Kindness and Patience: Easier Said than Done
- Open Discussion



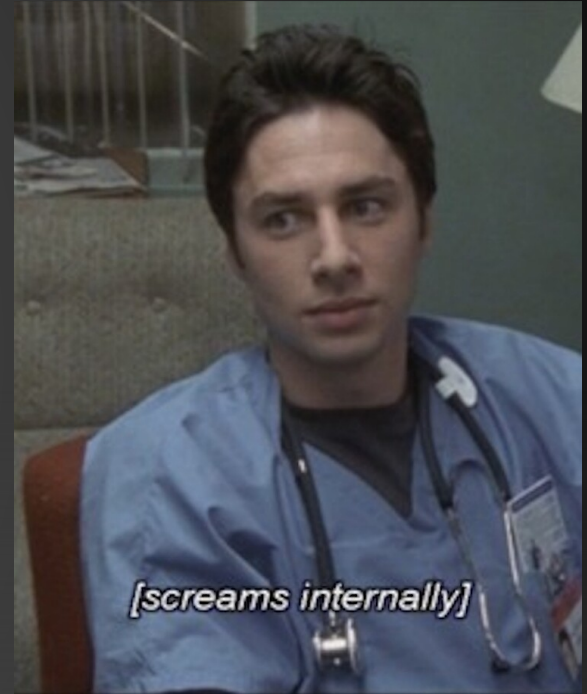
# GREAT LEADERSHIP MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE (ESPECIALLY NOW)

- Productivity -
  - Three Hours Longer, the Pandemic Workday Has Obliterated Work-Life Balance (Bloomberg)
  - Emails from my Children's School Before 8 AM during COVID-19 (McSweeney's)
- Less meetings or shorter meetings, *PLEASE*.
- Flexibility without penalty.
  - Allow work outside of regular hours if possible
  - Allow work from mobile devices if possible
  - Understand meeting lateness/leaving early
  - Trust us to get our work done; very few are TRYING to “steal time.”
- Recognize: this is NOT what normal remote work looks like. Don't judge that by this.

# “HOW ABOUT A QUICK ZOOM CALL?”

“I’m burned out on meetings. It feels like everyone thinks we can just have meetings more often now because we aren’t on campus teaching our classes. I cannot get work done if I’m also in Zoom meetings.” – *A UND faculty member and mother*

- Make shorter (30 minute) meetings standard or **WRITE AN EMAIL INSTEAD**
- Try to avoid overscheduling or having too many meetings back-to-back
- Don’t judge employee effectiveness by the state of their home office
- Do not require video to be on



# COVID-19: A GENDERED ISSUE?

- Kids (especially little ones) want “MOMMY!”
  - “My 2-year-old is in the “mommy only” stage, so it does not work for me to shut my office door and be in Zoom meetings. She cries and screams “Mama...”  
*--an employee with young children*
- Historically, motherhood seen as a weakness or distraction from profession
  - Some see it as a strength for fathers
  - The Motherhood Penalty vs. the Fatherhood Bonus (NYT 2014)
- We cannot concentrate!!
  - No Room of One's Own: Early journal submission data suggest COVID-19 is tanking women's research productivity (Inside Higher Ed)
- Domestic violence rising during lockdowns



# RESPONSIBILITIES TO OUR STUDENTS

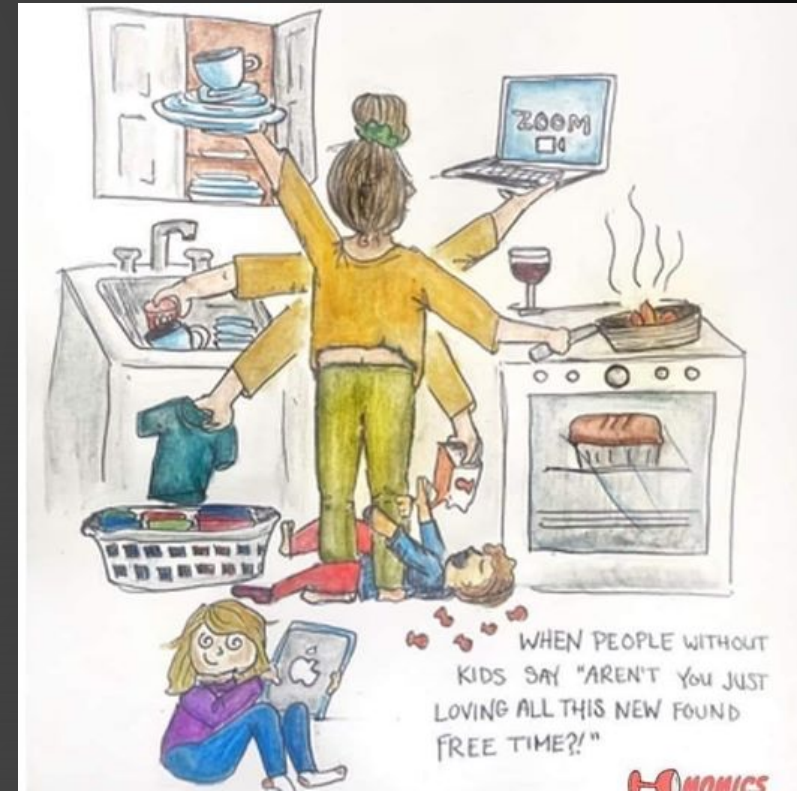
- “I'm hearing a lot about the need to connect with our students, to make sure they're OK and that they'll return in the fall semester. And a lot about how this is unequal and unvalued work typically performed by women.” *–A UND faculty member*
- “... my husband is a nurse and he has the coronavirus, it has all been so scary and I can't even see him... Can I have until Sunday to complete my project? I am not normally like this and I am SO sorry to be late on the assignment. I understand if I cannot have the extension.” *–an email I received from a student at 1:30 AM a few days ago.*
- Be FLEXIBLE
- Pick a method of communication and USE IT (\*with a plan...)

# COMMUNICATION TIPS

- Avoid information overload
  - When teaching: Decide when to post announcements or send messages.
  - DON'T bombard students (or faculty or staff!) with messages.
  - DO make things concise and keep information in one place.
  - DO provide instructions for online tools and assignments and clearly state how to get help.
- “Send Later”
  - A lot of tech allows this, including Blackboard (“adaptive release”)
  - Really valuable if you’re working unusual hours
  - Do It Now: Share It Later handout: [https://med.und.edu/education-resources/\\_files/docs/resource-send-later.pdf](https://med.und.edu/education-resources/_files/docs/resource-send-later.pdf)
- For summer online classes, names without faces.
  - Create a Knowledgebase of Student Fast Facts: [https://med.und.edu/education-resources/\\_files/docs/resource-student-fast-facts.pdf](https://med.und.edu/education-resources/_files/docs/resource-student-fast-facts.pdf)

# IT'S A LOT

- Our many priorities all stirred up together
  - The extra coordination that goes into making it all work
  - The pressure is on: what if we miss something important?
- Some of our kids' schoolwork is HARD!
- Layoffs, furloughs, and job uncertainties
- Our fears if we or our loved ones have co-morbidities
- The troubled economy
- Our general stress about the uncertainty of the pandemic and normalcy
  - Information overload from the news, conflicting advice
  - Pressure from social media about how we should be reacting
  - Helping children, friends, and family process THEIR feelings about it
- Inability to de-stress by enjoying common hobbies or events





# WE HAVE TO PLAN

- Our schedules used to plan for us.
  - An hour of structured morning chaos (wakeups, breakfast, dropoff), followed by several hours of uninterrupted work, followed by afternoon pickup and a few hours of family time in the evenings.
- Now...
  - “I do 30-min Zoom meetings but not longer (my kids are at “needy” stages). I do grant writing and recorded presentations after 8 PM or early morning. It’s sucks, but it’s what works. I set out water and a snack for both kids because literally every single freaking time I have a meeting, they need water and a snack. I also work in chunks... I know that from 7-8:30 the kids are eating breakfast, getting dressed, etc., so I put my laptop at the breakfast table and answer as many emails as possible...”  
–a working parent with young children

# SKETCH OUT ALL OF YOUR DAILY RESPONSIBILITIES

- When are kids doing schoolwork?
- When are kids awake vs. napping?
- When are kids able to be distracted by quiet activities or screen time?
- When are kids the most needy?
- When are your standing meetings?
- Can you exchange a “chunk” of daytime for a “chunk” of uninterrupted before or after regular hours?
- What are the big projects and how can these slide into that uninterrupted time?

[Article: Covid-19 and the Academic Parent](#)

# NOW, MUSH IT TOGETHER IN A CALENDAR

	WORK	KIDS
5 am	work projects	
6 am	work projects	
7 am	work projects	wake up
8 am	work email etc	breakfast
9 am	work meetings	schoolwork
10 am	work meetings	schoolwork
11 am	cook/cleanup	lunch
12 pm	housework	Screen free time
1 pm	kid time	Screen free time
2 pm	kid time	Screen free time
3 pm	work meetings	Screen time
4 pm	work projects	Screen time
5 pm	cook/cleanup	dinner

- In work calendar, block off the 'hard times' as 'tentative' and request people avoid scheduling (if possible).
- Important for hourly and staff: be sure to let supervisors know your work plan.
- School-age children CAN follow simple schedules with some encouragement.
  - MOM/DAD - I'm BORED.
    - Point them to a list.
    - Google and Pinterest are your friends!
  - Pre-cut / portion snacks and place in a drawer children can reach?
- Not perfection but better than nothing.



# MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

- Few people are working the same way they did in the office
- Give yourself some breaks before YOU break
  - Step outside for a few moments, take a quick walk – fresh air, sunshine
  - Drink some cold water or hot tea
  - Play with kids or pets (or both)
- Recognize that things take longer and plans aren't set in stone
  - Lower your standards
  - Make lists and take lots of notes – more than you would at work
- Give this same grace to your colleagues and your students

## BE KIND.

- Be kind to yourself, your partner, your friends, your peers, your kids' teachers.
  - Recognize the strain you and others are under
  - Do what you can to mitigate it with planning (I'll get to that), lower expectations, and reassigning duties around the home (if you are the primary caregiver, but others in the home are capable).
  - Don't do the extras (unless it brings you joy to do so).
- Be extra kind to your kids
  - Kids have lost EVERYTHING they enjoy
  - eLearning is not ideal for young ones especially
  - This feels bigger to them because they have less life experience
  - At a time when things are at their worst, working parents need kids to be on their best behavior...



# LET'S DISCUSS.

SHE BELIEVED SHE COULD  
AND SHE ALMOST DID  
BUT THEN SOMEONE ASKED  
HER REPEATEDLY FOR A  
SNACK UNTIL SHE FORGOT  
WHAT SHE WAS DOING  
SO SHE DIDN'T.

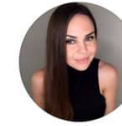
“My kids can't stay quiet all day long... and the only time I've been more than 20 feet from them in the past 5 weeks was when I allowed them to ride their bikes around the block without me.”

-a UND faculty member with elementary children

“I get up three hours before my kids and then I work into the night because because I have to keep up. I'm worried I'll be laid off because of the chaos in my home “office” between kids, pets, and spouse.”

- a UND staff member with elementary children

When you have to work from home but you're also a parent



Mommy Owl  
@Lhlodder

Today I worked from home, ran 10 miles, homeschooled my kids, cleaned the house, made a delicious dinner, and got my kids to bed early. It's amazing what you can accomplish when you lie.

“Working full time, working on summer and next fall classes (more meetings!), my spouse leaves for work so I'm alone for meals, cleaning, laundry, and kid homework help/entertainment.”

- a UND faculty member with young and elementary children



# SOURCES AND LINKS FROM EARLIER SLIDES

- Most images in this presentation are memes, widely distributed on social media. Because of this, I do not have direct sources.
- Teaching & Learning productivity / efficiency handouts: <https://med.und.edu/education-resources/repository.html#efficiency>

## Articles:

- Three Hours Longer: The Pandemic Workday Has Obliterated Work-Life balance.  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-23/working-from-home-in-covid-era-means-three-more-hours-on-the-job>
- Emails From My Children's School Before 8 AM During Covid-19  
<https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/emails-from-my-childrens-school-before-8-00-am-during-the-covid-19-crisis>
- No Room of One's Own: Early Journal Submission Data Suggest COVID 19 is Tanking Women's Research Productivity  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity#.Xp8cyWbAPSw.facebook>
- The Motherhood Penalty vs. the Fatherhood Bonus  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/upshot/a-child-helps-your-career-if-youre-a-man.html>
- Covid-19 and the Academic Parent  
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Covid-19the-Academic/248643>

## Handouts/Tip Sheets

- Do It Now: Share It Later handout: <https://med.und.edu/education-resources/files/docs/resource-send-later.pdf>
- Create a Knowledgebase of Student Fast Facts: <https://med.und.edu/education-resources/files/docs/resource-student-fast-facts.pdf>