

## FACULTY ADVANCEMENT NETWORK

### KEELING AFLOAT: STRATEGIES FOR BIPOC JUNIOR FACULTY

*December 4, 2020: noon–1:30 p.m. EST/11 a.m.–12:30 p.m. CST*

Here are some tips for BIPOC early career faculty to keep productive during this challenging time.

#### Techniques to maintain productivity and motivation

Regardless of your particular circumstances, maintaining a routine with small and realistic goals can serve as a protective factor for dealing with professional challenges.

- Develop a daily writing habit and/or a writing community within your university or outside your university. If feasible designate blocks of time to write, even if it is just 30 minutes. Take breaks from email, and news and social media. Experiment with an “accountability buddy” or initiate a virtual writing period for a group of scholars. There are many online resources to support this including [“Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks”](#) by Princeton professor Wendy Belcher.
- Learn to say “no.” At this time of racial reckoning, you will be even more likely to be asked to serve on committees, represent your department/institution, and provide your perspective. Given the disproportionate service work and hidden labor BIPOC faculty take on, evaluate these requests carefully, especially those that are time-intensive and emotionally draining. There are [many gracious ways](#) to say “no,” particularly when service requests go beyond what is typically expected of faculty in your program.
- Create and reinforce boundaries between work and personal life. Set work hours and decline to join meetings, answer emails, or take phone calls outside of those hours, except in urgent circumstances. Consider a [“digital Sabbath”](#) for some or all of each weekend. Set vacations ahead of time and protect that time by declining commitments that would interfere with your time away.
- Record how the pandemic is adversely impacting your work. This might include increased service responsibilities or additional roles to support the campus or the profession. Some schools may ask for “impact statements” when you come up for tenure, so tracking this information now may be helpful in the future. Let your chair know about the impact of the pandemic on your progress and take advantage of any accommodations your university is offering, including tenure clock rollback.
- Consider delegation for mundane personal and professional tasks. Ask yourself if you are the *only* person who can do a particular task or if someone else can do (some part of) it. Think about graduate students, postdocs, research assistants, department administrators, lab managers, partners, neighbors, etc. Remember your chair, department, or school may be

able to provide modest support for tasks like creating a book index, copyediting an article, or scheduling a group meeting. Some of your colleagues are aware of the particular impact of the pandemic on BIPOC and early career faculty, so specific and reasonable asks may be met with positive answers.

- Inquire about and take advantage of any financial resources and services for childcare and eldercare, such as an emergency caregiving fund. These resources are sometimes available but not always advertised.
- Release yourself from [unrealistic expectations](#). For example, your standards of teaching excellence in the classroom may need to be adjusted to the reality of teaching online, your research and writing goals in your [semester plan](#) may need to be adjusted, and even your definition of your child's playtime activities will need to become more flexible.

## **Strategies for physical and mental well-being**

**Create boundaries around your consumption of media, social media, email, and text messages.** While staying informed, aware, and connected to others is important, spending time on these behaviors can leave us feeling even more overwhelmed and anxious.

- Keep your consumption of information contained to scheduled blocks of time each day. If this seems impossible, try putting your devices in another room and setting a timer. Start small (say, 30 minutes) and work your way up from there.
- Be intentional and thoughtful about the information sources you follow and trust. Seek sources of information that aim to inform and educate rather than enrage and incite fear and divisions.

**Stay active and prioritize your physical and mental health.** Staying physically active may be particularly challenging during this time, so consider some of these options.

- Stay active. If gyms are permitted to be open right now in your area, many institutions have on-campus gyms and/or subsidize off-campus gym memberships. If you feel unsafe at the gym, explore online resources for physical activity. A large variety of apps and online streaming content are accessible at little to no cost. If you have a paid membership to a local gym or studio, ask about virtual access to classes or other resources during this time.
- If possible, spend time outdoors safely walking and hiking. Consider taking some of your meetings by phone instead of video so that you can walk and talk. As winter arrives, take up an appropriate winter sport like snowshoeing or ice skating or invest in a stationary bike or treadmill.

- Ensure you get sufficient sleep. Ideally, have a consistent time you go to bed and wake up each day. If possible, keep your devices away from your bedroom at night and use a white noise machine to block out distractions. If you cannot get enough sleep at night, take naps during the day if your schedule allows.
- Explore or revisit leisure activities that contribute to your relaxation, joy, and balance. Lists of suggestions have been popping up online that include everything from reading a novel, cooking a new recipe, drawing or painting, learning a new craft or hobby, or hosting a mini dance party with yourself or your friends and loved ones.
- Keep in mind that completing small tasks can be useful in maintaining some sense of control. Identify those you can complete each day when you are stuck indoors, such as organizing your files (electronic or hard copy), cleaning out your junk drawer, or rearranging your closet.

**Maintain connections with others.** Social connections are essential to our survival.

- Schedule time to connect with others virtually via video chat and phone. Creating a recurring meeting (weekly, monthly) means that you do not need to re-initiate and always have something to look forward to.
- Check in with others and ask how they are doing. A simple text message or sharing a funny meme can help to stave off feelings of loneliness and maintain bonds.
- Connect or reconnect to a faith community or social organization that you belong to. If you have not found appropriate congregations or social organizations in your physical community, now is your chance to engage with them online.

**Exercise patience, kindness, and compassion toward yourself and others.** We must be compassionate with ourselves and one another as we experience the effects of the pandemic.

- Remember the strengths and coping resources that helped you get through other challenging situations. Tap into those internal resources and share with others.
- Connect with faculty colleagues with whom you feel safe including former and current advisors, mentors, and even colleagues from your undergraduate, graduate, and postdoc days. Reconnecting with academic colleagues can be a powerful reminder of your strength, resilience, and success.
- Take deep breaths, listen to calming music, do a yoga session, or listen to a guided meditation to promote relaxation. Freewrite or journal for a few minutes to clear your mind.
- Give grace to others and keep in mind that everyone is managing stressful situations, including families with ill members, students who remain in relative isolation, and health

service providers with growing clinical responsibilities. If you can afford it, donate to organizations that are working hard to get people through the current crisis, such as your local food bank.

- Use free health apps on your smartphone (such as Woebot, Happify, and Remente) to aid in ongoing wellness.
- If you are having difficulty coping with stress, connect with a counselor. In addition to resources available on your institution's website, look for providers through [Queer and Trans Therapists of Color](#) (better search capability on smartphone), [Therapy for Black Girls](#), the [American Psychological Association](#), the [Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies](#), and [Psychology Today](#).

**This advice is heavily adapted from Mindi Thompson's *Inside Higher Education* article "[Advice for Faculty Members in a Turbulent Time](#)."**

**Additional resources:**

- National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD) membership organization: <https://www.facultydiversity.org/>. The following FAN institutions are members of NCFDD: Brown, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Duke, Penn, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale.
- Resources for Self-Care (Harvard): <https://projects.ig.harvard.edu/antiracismresources/bipoc/selfcare>
- Intellectual Self-Care (Emory): <https://cfde.emory.edu/resources/mentoring/intellectual-self-care-resources.html>
- TEDx Talk: Cultivating Unconditional Self-Worth by Dr. Adia Gooden: [https://insighttimer.com/dradia/guided-meditations/cultivating-unconditional-self-worth?branch\\_match\\_id=810562677093283071&utm\\_campaign=app-share&utm\\_medium=GuidedMeditation](https://insighttimer.com/dradia/guided-meditations/cultivating-unconditional-self-worth?branch_match_id=810562677093283071&utm_campaign=app-share&utm_medium=GuidedMeditation)