

TIPS FOR COPING WITH THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED SEMESTER

We have seen almost 18 months of Global Pandemic affecting the entire world. Very few understand the massive impact it is having not only on the studies of the college students but the stress it has generated due to so many complex factors. Online teaching may continue for one more semester.

During major upheavals, it is not the strongest or the most intelligent who survive but the most adaptable ones. The challenges the students face are indeed many and massive. Such periods divide the student community into winner and loser groups like never before. Those few who strongly believe that they are strong and resilient enough to do their best will be the winners and make most of the opportunities which come their way. However, the group that looks at only the negative side and feels overwhelmed will make things far worse now and in the future. It is always good to focus on what you need to do for your happiness and a promising future. You always have a choice. Continuous self-awareness of how you are doing internally and externally allows you to choose wisely.

Most of the students have remained off-campus during this period. With a lack of movements in online teaching, physical health suffers. However, more serious is that the psychological health also suffers from anxiety, worries, stress, anger, frustration, and sometimes even depression. These are all highly harmful to your present and future. You are the weakest when you need to be the strongest to meet these challenges. However, it need not be that way.

Even before the pandemic, the students' extensive use of digital devices has been a cause of concern. In this period, your use of these devices has gone to the next level, which is a significant cause of concern from a physical and psychological health point of view. You must make sure that your eyes get enough and frequent rest.

Plan for off-hours on working days and weekends. Unless you plan wisely, you will most likely waste this precious period. We can invest or spend time. The former gives a return in the future, and the latter is wasted forever. Pleasurable activities are attractive and make you feel good for a while but cause frustration later. Have a balanced plan which includes work, rest, recreation, exercise, deep and mindful breathing. Audit your day and modify the plan if required.

Seek good mentors for academics and how to be happy. Connect with positive and caring persons regularly. Share your worries to prevent stress build-up.

Online Learning:

You must strictly attend lectures. It is not easy, but there may not be a better alternative. Recorded lecture availability can make you feel complacent into thinking that you can do it later when you are in a mood. It is a mind trap. Most of the time gets wasted on non-productive things like watching Netflix, playing games, or net surfing.

The home environment is far from ideal for attending regular lectures. Moreover, not every home is good enough for such learning. Some students don't even have a good room to concentrate undisturbed. Some persons face network connectivity issues. However, we need to

do our best with whatever we have. Comparisons and complaints will only spoil our mood and worsen our efficiency.

If possible, use good-quality headphones. It prevents disturbance to others and improves concentration significantly by shutting out external distractions.

Such lectures are generally recorded and available for future use. Many students find concentration in an online mode challenging for a long duration and may either miss classes or log in and be busy with something else. Students rarely take notes, thinking that the entire lecture is available to refer to anytime they want. It is deceptive and highly wasteful in time. As discussed earlier, the purpose of taking down brief notes is manifold. The first one is the concentration that is automatic with this. Moreover, these notes are always helpful for future reference. Note down the points which are not clear for seeking clarifications later on.

In larger-sized classes, asking questions during an online lecture is not easy. Hence, it would help if you learned to reach out to the teacher and TA through the already agreed alternative modes of communication. Never keep your questions pending. Be polite but aggressive in this for your benefit.

Regular online teaching is also new for the teachers; hence, students need to provide feedback about their difficulties. The students can know from multiple courses of their own and friends what style and strategy work well. The teacher rarely makes enough effort to find out from many about this. Hence, the students must encourage their teachers to adopt the best methodologies to the extent possible. Please ensure that the teacher doesn't feel threatened with the feedback, perceiving it as criticism. It is a challenging period for all, and cooperation for a win-win solution is the only way.

Studies During Pandemic:

Even if you have recorded lectures or PPT available, you must prepare your lecture notes for improved understanding and concentration. You can use all the resources for this, including textbooks.

Online lectures, studies, and exams are extremely challenging during the pandemic. However, the only thing you have control over is what best you can do. Falling prey to distractions is far more likely during this period because of the lack of a conducive environment. It will help if you keep reminding yourself about your focus on your career goals. It would be best to use intelligent strategies to keep distractions at bay. Keep separate time blocks for entertainment, social media, net browsing, etc. Keep if-then rules ready to deal with the temptations. Your friend circle becomes even more critical in this challenging period. Keep in touch with them and have joint strategies for studies.

Handling Online Exams and Assignments:

Online assignments have been one of the thorniest issues for students and the administration. This mode is relatively new for both the students and faculty. Even with technology, perfectly proctored exams are not feasible for medium to large classes. The examinations are generally easy in student interest, and evaluation and grading are liberal. Copying in assignments and lab

reports is very common. Many students are tempted to cut corners as well to get good grades with lesser efforts. However, the students don't realize that they are the worst losers in the longer run.

If you are new to this mode of exams, it is better to request the teacher to conduct a short-period mock test to get thoroughly familiar with the possible difficulties. Then you have a chance to consult teachers, seniors, or other batchmates who may know better to get them sorted out before the actual exam. You can even have a full-time mock test with the past question papers. Care must be taken such that you get the question paper only a few minutes before the exam.