Dear Colleagues,

Due to overwhelming demand, applications have closed for the UCSF COVID-19 Relief Program [1]. But we believe there is a greater need for this relief. To help relaunch the program which provides tax-free grants of up to $1,000 to UCSF employees who are facing financial hardship due to the pandemic, members of the UCSF community who are financially able to contribute are encouraged to visit the UCSF COVID-19 Qualified Disaster Relief Fund [2] website to donate today. An appeal like this is unusual, I know, but I’m asking those of us who have the means to help ease the very real challenges others are facing during these most unusual of times. Please contribute.

I also implore you to prepare to vote. We have just over four weeks before the 2020 election, and mail-in ballots are en route. There are a lot of important local and state initiatives and a presidential election that stands to change the course of generations to come. Exercise your right to VOTE. It’s no cliché— we need to vote like our lives depend on it. It is the only real mechanism we have for change.

And directly related to this, last month the White House issued an Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping [3]. The order puts a halt to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training that inculcates in its employees any form of race or sex stereotyping or any form of race or sex scapegoating, but you should read the text of the executive order to get a full sense of its implications.

My dedication to combating racism is a lifelong journey. In July, Vice Chancellor Renee Navarro and I were appointed as co-leads to the chancellor’s Safety Task Force. The charge letter opens with, ?The national conversation about race and discrimination has clarified the ways in which racism is woven into the fabric of our society.? I would not have accepted the post if I did not believe that statement to be true.

Like the AAMC, which issued this statement [4], we remain committed to DEI training, and nothing in the executive order will prevent us from moving forward with the UCSF Anti-racism Initiative. I encourage you to join UCSF leaders and your colleagues on October 16, noon-1:15 p.m. via Zoom [5] for the second in a series of quarterly town hall meetings focusing on the initiative. This forum will address racism’s impact on staff and ways we can achieve equity and improve the UCSF experience for all employees.

For an update on efforts across UCSF to make life better, read this month’s Expresso stories:

- Stronger Together: The vital work of the COVID-19 Research Coordination Task Force
- Your Experiences Matter: Anti-racism, telework, and finances
- Better Body Language: Tips from the UCSF Ergonomics and Human Factors Program

Please also tune into the COVID-19 Response Town Hall [6] on October 9, 4-5 p.m. featuring
Stronger Together: The vital work of the COVID-19 Research Coordination Task Force

A few weeks ago, we passed the six-month mark of our shelter-in-place order — a life-changing experience. In mid-March, all the moving parts that make up UCSF kicked into high gear and yet came to a halt at the same time. We asked researchers to cease all activity and not return to their labs and work spaces, but some of our colleagues with the necessary expertise immediately pivoted to investigating novel coronavirus — everything from how it spreads, to how it affects people, to how to prevent and treat infection.

How does UCSF lead our pandemic response and avoid duplicative efforts? That's where the COVID-19 Research Coordination Task Force [10] fits. The charge to the group is aimed at coordinating, facilitating, and fostering current and planned research at UCSF to address COVID-19 as well as position our institution to be a leader in responding to potential future pandemics.

Kathleen Liu, professor of Medicine, and Anita Sil, professor of Microbiology and Immunology, co-chair the task force. They are an ideal team because of Kathleen's grounding in clinical research and Anita's expertise in basic science. Membership comprises at least 50% women and underrepresented groups, representing units across UCSF — the schools of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy; the Mission Bay and Parnassus campuses; the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub; the Gladstone Institutes; the Veterans Administration Hospital; and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center.

Regarding the immediate situation, Kathleen says, “this pandemic is predominantly affecting our patients of color and patients who don't have economic means. Those are big issues. We as a university need to tackle them head on.”

Looking toward the future, the task force’s vision encompasses three overarching themes:

- How can UCSF position itself to be a leader in pandemic response?
- How do we galvanize fundraising around our response?
- How do we facilitate communication and coordination between constituents?

On the first point, the task force is compiling a compendium of the multi-faceted UCSF research response, both clinical and basic, assessing what we’ve done so far and identifying
operational challenges that affect what we can achieve in the short and long term. These efforts cover a huge range of topics: For instance, how do we continue to manage outdoor accelerated care units for COVID-19 patients when the weather turns sour? either with bad air like we experienced last month, or with rain and cold this winter? That will affect our ability to care for patients and to conduct ongoing clinical trials, Kathleen says. In the long term, Kathleen notes, this isn?t the last pandemic we?re going to see. How can we improve our response as a community to such things when they happen again?

Anita addresses fundraising, the second point. The task force is identifying places where a financial contribution either from within the University, a grant, or a donor could have a transformative impact. Kathleen adds: There will be areas where a small amount of philanthropy could go a long way to improve overall what the institution can do. For instance, how do we coordinate access to Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) labs, which are imperative for safe work on the virus that causes COVID-19? UCSF is fortunate to have more than one aerosol BSL3 facility, but retooling BSL3 infrastructure is critical for basic work on the novel coronavirus.

The BSL 3 labs also come into play on the last point, communication and education. Since most of our researchers don?t typically work at BSL3, they may not even know where those labs are, Anita says, asking, How do you get someone who has an interesting idea in touch with the people who have access to the infrastructure that's necessary to execute that idea? The goal is to share that information with everyone who needs it. Everyone will do their best work if they're not siloed, Kathleen says. It?s a big challenge. There?s a lot going on in a lot of different realms.

The UCSF Office of Research is taking an active role in disseminating that kind of information, and may add more webinar town halls, which have proven to be a popular way to spread the word about some of our groundbreaking research. We?ve already seen great collaboration among our researchers, as well as between UCSF and colleagues at other institutions. Because the virus affects every part of the body, there is a wide breadth of research that may be relevant, and Kathleen and Anita point to great work being done by clinicians ranging from infectious disease and internal medicine specialists, women?s health specialists, and ophthalmologists among others, as well as virologists and immunologists? many already breaking important ground on the virus? and the important work of our colleagues who are on the forefront of understanding the impact on underserved communities and ensuring that any response is fully inclusive and equitable.

The task force is actively optimizing the Office of Research COVID-19 website to enhance its functionality for the UCSF community and potential donors. It is a one-stop clearinghouse for all the COVID work going on at UCSF. Please check it out, and let them know if you have something to add. Additionally, stay tuned for a monthly Task Force-sponsored Town Hall in the Office of Research Town Hall series. Presentations will highlight COVID-19 efforts at UCSF in all arenas.

back to top
Your Experiences Matter: Anti-racism, telework, and finances

How have more than six months of working under COVID-19 conditions affected us? Preliminary results from a pair of surveys—one conducted by UCSF administration and the other through a research project—have revealed major priorities and the amount of work yet to be done. The surveys in many ways confirmed what a lot of us have been feeling and hearing anecdotally, and their data can help us move forward in addressing the issues raised.

Your Voice Counts Survey

The Chancellor’s Executive Team commissioned this Pulse survey, which was conducted via the same Gallup platform used for our staff engagement surveys. More than 5,000 people responded. It sought to gauge feelings in three broad areas: UCSF’s response to COVID-19, UCSF’s financial health, and the state of racial injustice at UCSF. Some preliminary results:

- Regarding the pandemic, 69 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that UCSF cares about their well-being, and more than 70 percent agreed or strongly agreed that UCSF has health policies that will keep them safe and has communicated a clear plan of action in response to COVID-19.
- Some 55 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed when asked whether they felt UCSF leaders clearly communicate about the financial challenges and how changes made today will affect our future.? More than half of respondents or 60 percent said they understood their own role in helping address our financial situation, and 50 percent are confident in how leadership is managing the financial challenges. Despite the July 24 financial town hall [14] (fitting since the fiscal year begins July 1) and an August Expresso story, we clearly need to do more to convey the challenges that COVID-19 has had on our financial situation.
- Importantly, the survey revealed that only 60 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ?UCSF is a place where people are treated equitably regardless of race/ethnicity.? It should be noted that this number closely mirrors the number of white and Asian respondents (67 percent) who completed the survey. I was somewhat encouraged that 64 percent agreed that leadership is committed to dismantling racial inequity, and fully 78 percent of respondents agreed that ?I have a role in dismantling racial inequity in our organization.?

Perhaps most revealing: Nancy Duranteau, our chief learning officer, shared a ?word cloud? that analyzed comments respondents made on the survey, and race is at topmost of their minds. The word ?racial? garnered more than 750 mentions, far more than even ?COVID? or ?pandemic.? When it comes to race, people see the messages from leadership about the importance of confronting racism, but they aren?t seeing results throughout the organization. You can be sure that the Chancellor?s Executive Team will be examining and working toward improving this situation. If you didn?t have a chance to tune into the September 25 COVID-19 Response Town Hall at which Nancy presented the survey results, you can view the recording online [15] and hear more about the findings along with a summary of those from the Child and Dependent Care Survey conducted by the Child and Dependent Care Task Force [16].
Faculty and Staff Experiences of Working from Home Survey

This investigator-initiated survey was a project in collaboration with the campus groups Council on Minority Organizations, UCSF Staff Assembly, and UCSF Diversity/Inclusion Certificate Program Alumni. The research team included Teresa Scherzer, academic programs evaluator in the School of Nursing (co-PI), LaMisha Hill, director of the Multicultural Resource Center, Peter Weber, a product manager in the School of Nursing and member of the Future of Telework and Managing Remote Teams Task Force [17], and Janet Shim, chair of the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Nursing (and Teresa’s co-PI). Their survey focused on the lived experience of working from home during the shelter-in-place public health order to limit the transmission of COVID-19. The results will prove particularly useful to the Future of Telework and Managing Remote Teams Task Force [17], one of several bodies empaneled to examine how the pandemic is changing things for UCSF and how we can respond. Both task forces are part UCSF’s Integrated Recovery Committee.

More than 1,200 surveys were returned over about three weeks in July and August. Those responding were a diverse group of staff and faculty. (The Academic Senate has conducted a separate survey of faculty, and other surveys may also help inform the task force’s work.) Some preliminary results:

- While 44 percent of respondents had never worked from home before (and 18 percent did so only rarely), 88 percent would like to keep working from home two to five days per week after the shelter in place lifts.
- The majority of respondents or 70 percent have used their own money to buy equipment, furniture, or internet-related upgrades to work from home.
- People still need items to do their work at home: nearly 31 percent need a sit-stand desk; 28 percent need an adjustable chair; one in five need an external monitor, a printer, and faster or more stable internet service.
- An additional one in five respondents said they are using their own office supplies, like printer ink, paper, and even upgraded cell and internet service.

The survey also delved into employee wellness:

- 55 percent experienced a notable increase in stress, depression, or anxiety. Nearly the same percentage said they have less time for self-care than they did pre-pandemic.
- 27 percent are having difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities.
- 20 percent don’t have adequate space to work from home. People mentioned going into closets, bathrooms, and bedrooms to get work done.
- Many respondents are working longer days: 47 percent start earlier, 63 percent end later, 48 percent manage other responsibilities during typical daytime work hours, and 44 percent work on their days off.

The economy is also weighing on people:

- 49 percent said they worry about getting laid off or having a substantially increased workload.
- 66 percent are concerned that the salary freeze will make it difficult to keep up with the increased cost of living.
These preliminary findings suggest there’s real opportunity for the University to develop new guidelines that address inequitable access and support an engaged remote workforce. We now have more insight into where important adjustments need to be made in regard to work policies, procedures, expectations, and cultural shifts, and how to use that information toward promoting a better work environment for all employees, especially now that UCSF has extended its work-from-home guidance to June 30, 2021. I appreciate everyone who took the time to answer these surveys to inform our actions ahead. For those of you who are working at home, please find Telework Guidelines and Resources posted on the COVID-19 website.

Better Body Language: Tips from the UCSF Ergonomics and Human Factors Program

Did you have an elder in your life who always told you to sit up straight? I’ve been hearing that little voice a lot these days as I’ve been working from home since March.

In the telework story this past July, I mentioned the importance of a good ergonomic setup wherever you’re working. I can’t emphasize that enough, but don’t just take my word for it. Listen to the experts and look into the resources posted on the UCSF coronavirus resource site.

Kristin Amlie is the principal ergonomist and manager of UCSF’s Ergonomics and Human Factors Program, and Kaytlin Ingman is the program’s support specialist. They can’t make individual house calls to check on everyone’s work configuration, but they have an extensive ergonomics website that offers tips and guidance on making sure you are safe and well-equipped. Sign up for one of their webinars or request one for your department. You can also watch the archived version along with completing a free self-evaluation. If nothing else, look at their streamlined, two-page tip sheet and use it to evaluate your own habits, work situation, and work space as well as do-it-yourself solutions to address work-from-home ergonomic configurations. It will take you less than a minute to at least see whether you’re taking care of yourself ergonomically.

Aside from the physical aspects of correct ergonomics—like good posture and the right desk—Kaytlin says, “There are emerging psychosocial risk factors and cognitive ergonomic concerns trending more and more. If you go from one Zoom meeting to another after another, that’s more of a cognitive load. In those meetings you probably don’t want to move around a lot, even though that’s good for you, because it would distract others. Instead, you are focused intently on your screen, which begins to affect your health and well-being. One tip they offer to that end, which the ergonomists themselves practice, is ‘video-free Fridays,’ but if setting aside a full day is unfeasible, maybe reserve an hour or two midday in which you’ll stay off of video meetings and just give yourself a break. Every little bit helps.

Of course, office setup is important. One huge piece of advice in this department: Don’t do all your work on a laptop alone! These computers are horribly misnamed. No one should have
one sitting on their lap. Indeed, you need your screen at eye level and your keyboard and mouse at elbow height. You can accomplish this with an external monitor, keyboard, and mouse, or you can get a laptop stand (so you don’t need a separate monitor), or even place it on a stack of books. The laptop is really for convenience and travel, for portability, Kaytlin says. It isn’t designed for safety. When I go to a café, I have a laptop riser, a compact keyboard, and an external mouse, she adds. I might be the only one in there with all of that, but I assure you, I’m a lot more comfortable.

Setting up an actual sit-stand desk is ideal, but there are workarounds like using an ironing board or high countertop. Also, there are best practices to adopt such as sitting for 20 minutes, standing for eight minutes, and moving around for two minutes. (That’s a guideline, Kristin notes; an alternative would be just getting up each hour to walk around.) It’s really important to pay attention to what your body is telling you and act on that. We spend so much time sitting that any movement or standing is good like standing or pacing while on the phone or in a Zoom session (just remember to turn off the video function).

Some folks can bring equipment home from UCSF to improve their setup; just check with your manager first. The ergonomists endorse bringing equipment home, if possible. They recognize that UCSF is trying to be financially efficient, and don’t want us or you to overspend during these challenging economic times. People might be hesitant to ask for necessary items, Kristin says. But the fact is that employees need certain equipment in order to work safely at home, especially for the long haul. And, should you need to purchase something (on the University’s dime or your own), the ergonomics site has a list of recommended equipment, from chairs and desks to keyboards and mice, to lighting and sound.

Finally, the ergonomists are collaborating with both the remote work task force and with the IT department to keep us safe during these unprecedented times. Their hope is that someone in each department, whether supervisor or staff, learn the ergonomic ropes and then spread the word about the resources. Ideally, departments should appoint an ergonomic coordinator who can act as a liaison with the ergonomists. It is a supervisor’s responsibility to provide a safe work environment for their employees, and it’s the employees’ responsibility to work safely, so it’s a partnership, Kristin says.

I hope you will avail yourself of this invaluable resource and connect with the Ergonomics & Human Factors Program to promote a safe and healthy work environment that works for you!

back to top

Dan’s Tip of the Month
I will mark my heart with an X made of ash that says, the power to restore life resides here...

I was struck at my core by these words from a poem at the center of the September 18 special edition of The Daily podcast, An Obituary for the Land, which contains a message of regeneration and hope amidst devastation. Listen in as New York Times audio producer Bianca Giaever and Utah-based writer and poet Terry Tempest Williams talk about the powerful wildfires that have come to shape and define the beautiful western landscape we are privileged to call home. And the parallels between the heat of the flames and the division and uncertainty currently raging throughout our nation aren’t lost on me. But the path is clear. The power to restore life and our belief in what is beautiful and enduring that remains in our hearts is ready to build anew.