



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
OFFICE OF STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES

FSU CoM Students:

During this time of rapid and considerable transitions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we understand and acknowledge the many changes and fast-paced adjustment that have occurred to your academic plans, study techniques, sleep schedule, socialization, and mental health – just to name a few. We have developed the following list of common concerns we are currently hearing in our appointments with you all (Med, Bridge, PA, and BMS PhD students) and provided responses to these common issues. We will be continually updating this document, so please check back frequently. If you have a concern or question that you would like addressed in this FAQ, please email us at psychappt@med.fsu.edu.

We may be social distancing, but we don't have to be distant from each other. Our office is still here for you. Please don't hesitate to make a telepsychology appointment with us, even if it is just to check-in and say hello. Remember, our psychologists offer services for academics, mental health, and well-being. Email us at psychappt@med.fsu.edu to schedule an appointment.

Wishing health and wellness for each of you and your families!

The Office of Student Counseling Services
Dr. Painter, Dr. Porter, Dr. Taylor, and Ms. Keke Bowden

Student Concerns are in bold and Psychologist Responses are in italics:

I am used to being on campus all day for class and studying. It has been very hard being cooped-up in my apartment all of the time. Most of my friends are not in town, and I miss my friends and studying with my study groups. I won't be productive and I'll get too distracted if I go "back home" and live with family. I'm feeling stir crazy and not seeing everyone is impacting my mood. What can I do to deal with feelings of isolation?

This pandemic has altered everyone's typical routine and way-of-life, especially when it comes to socialization. You are not alone to feel so "stir crazy" and isolated. Although you are used to seeing your friends and colleagues in-person, it might be helpful to try having virtual meet-ups or study groups. You can see your friends and colleagues face-to-face virtually via a video platform such as FaceTime or Zoom. Don't stop your study groups! Schedule specific times during the week to meet via FaceTime or Zoom to study as a group. Be sure to have a daily routine to maintain productivity – this goes for academics and leisure. Take care of yourself and be sure to maintain your exercise routine and healthy eating habits. There are many resources for wellness, exercise and fitness at home that you can find on the resources page of our website: <https://med.fsu.edu/studentcounseling/resources>. If you are feeling any symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, or your mood has changed, we can help! Please reach out to our office to schedule an appointment via telepsychology. PA2021 can contact email

pscyhappt@med.fsu.edu for an appointment; PA2020 can contact Dr. Schmidt for an appointment (850-264-2485; more info on our website).

I usually study at the CoM, and I use my apartment/home as a place to relax and unwind. Now that I have to study at home, I am lacking motivation and finding it really hard to study. What can I do to increase my motivation?

Your home has typically been a place for fun and relaxation, so it makes sense that you are finding it difficult to associate your home/apartment with studying and work. Therefore, it is likely there will be a period of transition for you to get used to studying at home. Know that it will get better and easier, once you learn to adjust. It might be helpful to create a specific space in your apartment/home where you only study. Create a comfortable, productive work space where you only go to study, watch lectures, and work on academics. This could be a section of your living room or a corner of your bedroom. Keep the rest of your apartment for the place and space to relax and unwind. Try not to study in places where you typically relax, such as your bed or couch. I also recommend developing a daily/weekly routine and schedule for academics, so you can also protect times of your day to relax and unwind.

I'm finding that my day is much less structured, so I don't really have to go to bed or get up at any particular time. I tend to sleep in, stay up late, and take naps if I have to get up for something, and I'm tired in the afternoon. I find that I have more time but often get less accomplished. Then I'm disappointed in myself and worried I won't be prepared for the exam. I felt much more productive when we were busier and in classes. What can I do to be more productive at home?

Your day and your life as you knew it has been disrupted, and you are probably not used to learning and studying at home. People respond to change in different ways, and you all have been required to make many changes. It's important to understand this and have reasonable expectations for yourself as you adjust. It sounds like you are responding to the ease of being unstructured but realizing that the structure in your life was necessary to accomplish your tasks. It might help to create that missing structure and consistency in your life right now. Consider planning your schedule for a work day (8-5, 9-6), finishing around dinner time, or if you work after dinner, less strenuous study then. Begin by getting up and going to bed at the same time you normally would each day. Get dressed and ready as if you were going to school (t-shirt casual is fine, but no pj's). Designate a study space, preferably not in your bedroom, that is as free of distraction as possible. Leave the TV off and turn off social media except during designated times. Studying for shorter periods of time with more frequent breaks is actually better for motivation and retention of information. For example, try 30 minutes of study then a 5-10 minute break. Check emails, texts, etc. during this time. Vary your tasks throughout the day and consider planning virtual study groups to increase interaction and motivation. You might also have an accountability partner to help and encourage each other. Reward yourself by having free time in the evening then going to bed at a reasonable time to allow for enough sleep (7-8 hours). This may take some consistent practice, but you'll return to your previous level of productivity as you adjust to your new schedule and structure. Our office can also help. Schedule an appointment at: pscyhappt@med.fsu.edu

I'm in my apartment by myself and have been binge watching lots of TV at night after I'm through studying. I've always been somewhat of a night owl anyway, but now my sleep schedule has changed, and I can't fall asleep when I go to bed. I'm worried that I won't be able to change this when we are back in school. How can I return to my normal sleep schedule?

Sleep schedules can often become disrupted when major changes in our lives and daily schedules occur. You have now developed different sleep habits, but habits can be changed. It will take practice, so hang in there. Below are some Do's and Don't's to help you return to your previous sleep schedule:

Do: go to bed and get up at the same time each day, and try to maintain this on the weekends; get regular exercise; get regular exposure to outdoor light (work by a window so you can see sunlight); keep your bedroom temperature cool; keep your bedroom quiet and dark enough to facilitate sleep; use your bed only for sleep, as this will help to associate your bed with sleep (no studying, social media, TV, etc.); establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine (bath or shower, soothing music, etc.); try relaxation exercises or imagery before bedtime; try apps to help with sleep (see our resources on our website) (<https://med.fsu.edu/studentcounseling/resources>).

Don't: exercise just before bedtime; have caffeine in the evening; read, go on your computer or phone, or watch TV in bed; take daytime naps; watch the clock or count minutes while trying to fall asleep; change your daytime routine even if you didn't sleep well; lie in bed for more than 30 minutes. Instead, get up, go to a different room, and quietly read something non-exciting until you feel sleepy. Don't turn on bright lights, the TV, or computer. When you feel sleepy, get back in bed. Repeat this as often as needed.

Changing your daytime routine if you're sleepy, increasing caffeine, napping or staying in bed late, or avoiding activities because you're tired can reinforce insomnia. For more information on good sleep hygiene refer to the resources on our website (<https://med.fsu.edu/studentcounseling/resources> or schedule an appointment at pscyhappt@med.fsu.edu).

I've moved my Step 1 test date multiple times and am struggling with motivation to study for a test that doesn't have a firm date. How can I motivate myself to study with so much ambiguity?

When you started this journey, there was a lot of structure and a lot that seemed to be in your control. You had a test date, a time-limited study period, and a plan. Most of that has changed. It's understandable in the midst of the constant change and increased ambiguity that you are struggling with focus or motivation. In this situation, it might be tempting try to work harder or longer to make up for reduced motivation. Instead, I encourage you to reduce the intensity of your preparation. Rather than working 12-hour study days without a break, consider scheduling an entire day off every week and shortening your study days. While we are waiting for more information from Prometric and local authorities, it's a good idea to conserve energy and mental resources while maintaining your learning and slowly making gains with the content. In the meantime, creating structure in your study day can help with productivity. Begin by creating a "report to work" time and then identify two or three specific, manageable, and active goals for the day. The most common goals right now are: completing a UWorld block, practicing rote memory review (e.g., Anki or flashcards), and doing targeted review based on errors.

Rest assured, as soon as Prometric centers are open, your motivation and focus will return. You'll want to have conserved mental and physical energy to meet that demand when it occurs.

I find that I'm constantly checking social media and news websites to get updates of COVID-19 cases in my area. This is increasing my feelings of stress and anxiety and interfering with my studies. How can I manage the information that I'm seeing without becoming so overwhelmed?

It's a stressful time right now. With all of the information coming to us from email, social media, and news outlets, it is easy to get lost in information overload. While being informed is beneficial and helps us make decisions for ourselves and our loved ones, being bombarded with distressing information is counterproductive and can lead to an increase in negative thoughts and emotions. I'd encourage you to limit the time you spend consuming this information and to be intentional about what information you are seeking and why. Some people benefit from limiting their access to news to once a day, others manage the information by limiting exposure to one or two trusted sources.

It's also important to recognize that sometimes constant information seeking is an anxious response. We can all benefit from setting aside time daily to engage in stress management/anxiety reduction activities. You can find suggested resources for relaxation activities on the Office of Student Counseling Services website (<https://med.fsu.edu/studentcounseling/resources>). If you continue to experience feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed, we want to help. Schedule a telepsychology appointment with us by emailing us at psychappt@med.fsu.edu.