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Title: LANL Fellows: Perspectives on thriving together amid COVID-19

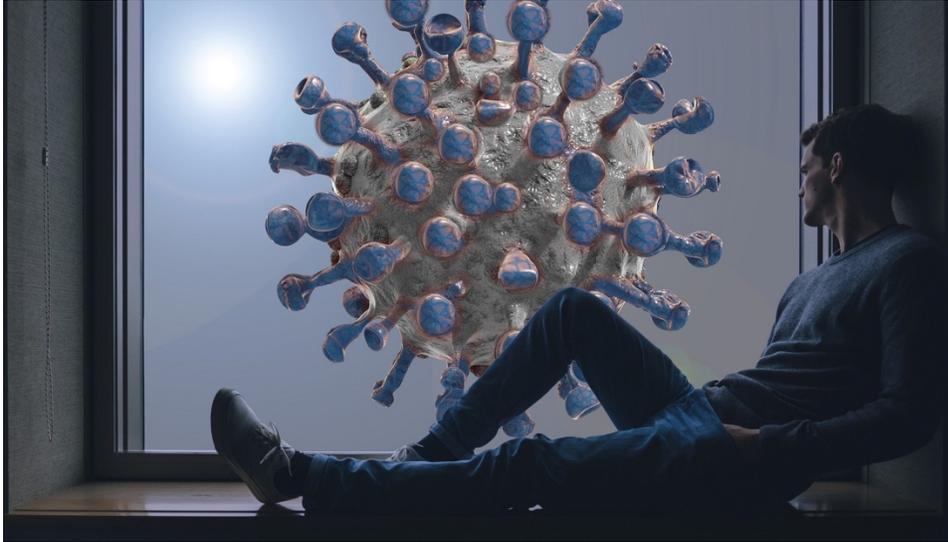
Author(s): Dubey, Manvendra Krishna
Elliott, Steven Ray
Gordon, John Cameron
Guzik, Joyce Ann

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LANL Fellows: Perspectives on thriving together amid COVID-19

Editor's note: The following message from our LANL Fellows offers perspectives on science, telework, health and family.

We, the Laboratory Fellows, are a group of scientists, engineers and other technical staff members who counsel the Director and other Lab leaders on important issues. While some of us are retirees, many of us are active employees.

Like you, we are thankful to be safe and have our jobs as we all ponder what life will be like after we contain COVID-19.

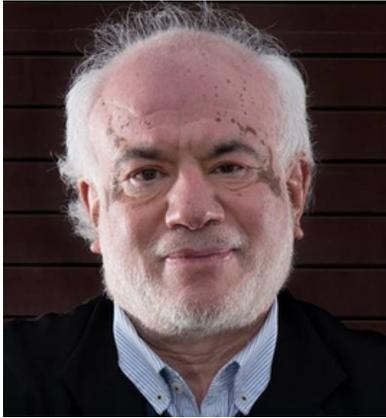
Like you, we are adapting as best we can to manage work and life under COVID-19 constraints.

During a recent videoconference, about 25 Fellows shared how we are dealing with personal and professional challenges as result of this pandemic. Safety for our community and families was clearly at the forefront of everyone's thoughts.

We were updated on

- how LANL is addressing worker safety and national security during this evolving challenge
- LANL's COVID-19 research activities that are part of the coordinated Department of Energy/U.S. government response to the pandemic.

Here are some observations and thoughts we'd like to share with you.



Fellows Coordinator Manvendra Dubey



Fellows Deputy Coordinator Steven Elliott

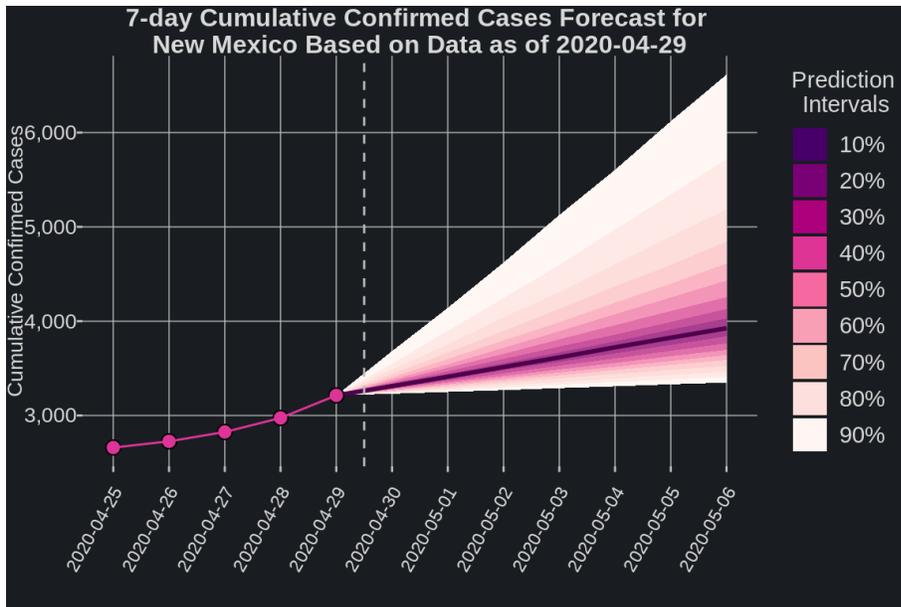


Fellows Secretary John Gordon

Essential actions for everyone

We discussed the continuing need to flatten the curve using social distancing and to prepare for seasonal cycles while the medical community develops [effective therapies and vaccine](#).

We learned that LANL scientists are forecasting the COVID-19 cases in real time and participating in [new programs](#) such as COVID-19 detection, medical therapeutics and respiratory aids.



Crises comparison

We at LANL weathered the Cerro Grande and Las Conchas fires (2000 and 2011) and the security and safety stand-downs in 2000 and 2004. These crises also disrupted our lives, caused anxiety for months and involved threats to life and loss of property, evacuations, and times when we couldn't work.

In the case of COVID-19, information is flowing, communications have improved, and for many teleworking is possible. Many of us can work safely from home while caring for our families.

Unlike these past trials, however, COVID-19 is taking many lives worldwide and threatening national healthcare and economies. Threats to our health are potentially grave, and it is unclear when and how this will end.

Working differently: pros and cons



We discussed how we are dealing with the social isolation and issues related to teleworking. We identified several challenges as well as a few unintended benefits.

Since the Fellows have established careers, some felt that they were more productive. They have uninterrupted blocks of time to focus and spend less time commuting. They are writing up their research results, individually and collectively, with some predicting that short-term scientific output may break records. (Clearly, this is not sustainable in the long term.)

We have learned to use on-line collaboration tools and have participated in conferences remotely. DOE, the National Science Foundation and NASA review panels are proceeding remotely and providing a sense of continuity and community. The teleconferences have opened up access to otherwise closed meetings and allowed us to be part of new, international collaborations, a silver lining that we can build on.

The Laboratory-directed R&D program issued a rapid-response COVID-19 call that resulted in 49 proposals, reviewed in a record five days. The 16 funded projects are expected to deliver findings this year.

Reduced pollution, greenhouse emissions and traffic under COVID-19 public restrictions offer us new data to study.

Many of us have young children and/or older parents whose mental and physical health concern us. We are reaching out more to relatives and friends than in recent years. Cooking,

hikes, games, movies, music, pets and books are keeping families together. Synchronizing kids' school lessons with work sometimes makes time management easier.

Some of us may have additional free time because of cancelled activities. We can give ourselves permission to be "unproductive" for some of that time. We can use our extra time to get enough sleep, to do some (day) dreaming, to pay attention to our thoughts, to gain creative insights into our careers with a collaborative spirit.

Here are some cons:

Fellows noted that early career staff, postdocs and students, who are building their careers, are much more concerned about the negative impacts of stalled research. Support staff, who are central to our mission, also face many professional challenges produced by social isolation and teleworking.

Fellows who are unable to do classified or experimental work also are concerned about reduced productivity. Fellows, staff and technologists with primarily classified projects or experimental tasks can't use their classified network computers or labs. They are engaged in background reading, training, designing experiments, learning unclassified software or writing papers when possible.

While LANL has been flexible by taking a graded approach across programs to support these activities, there's concern that this isn't sustainable. In the coming weeks, LANL management should provide some clarity on safely easing back to work in a phased approach. The Fellows believe that effective collaboration, supportive mentoring and teamwork will help us manage the negative impacts as a community.

Fellows also are struggling to find ways to best mentor students and postdocs. We are especially concerned about new students, postdocs and hires in all job classes as they miss the critical, face-to-face time needed to effectively start their new LANL roles.

Some students and postdocs are nearing the end of their terms. LANL is helping to extend postdoc and student appointments, including those of international students, to deal with these extenuating circumstances.

Many employees face inadequate internet bandwidth and speed within Northern New Mexico to work from home efficiently. Although the Lab's computer support staff are working hard to improve connections, we still have internet bandwidth problems. Here again, communication with supervisors can help and allay fears of missing milestones.

Reflections on resiliency and empathy



We have learned from past local crises how to be resilient. We are cohesive in our community spirit, have formal response teams and work protocols in place, and have established communications methods that have enhanced dramatically with technology.

Many of us are in our homes bonding with our families and working remotely.

We are practicing telemedicine, good hygiene and taking precautions to curtail the virus spread.

Scientific results are being written, experiments are being planned, proposals are being reviewed and funded, and international collaborations are being seeded in new areas.

This gives us a sense of normalcy in the near term. Still try to reflect on our community spirit and collaborative efforts. This is particularly true for our younger colleagues or those unable to work from home and who are concerned about their careers.

Our past experience and the recent progress in containing COVID-19 give us confidence that this crisis will pass. Reach out to your colleagues, those you mentor, supervisors and leaders with issues you may be facing. We should continue to emphasize safety, including mental health. Managers have been supportive of this priority.

In addition, remember to balance your life and work at home — spend quality time with family, be active, eat healthily, establish a routine, help the community, and call friends and family far away.

Our community is strong, resilient, creative and supportive. Together, we have faced the hardest first phase of containing the global pandemic, and are ready to tackle the next phase

with enhanced monitoring, controls and good hygiene, and to eventually develop vaccines and therapies.

Learn more about the Laboratory Fellows:

<https://www.lanl.gov/collaboration/fellows/index.php>

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