

School is Where the Wifi is: How to Balance Work, Life and Social Needs

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Thu, 16 Apr 2020

This episode will focus on finding your work life balance, connecting your social presence and keeping mentally healthy during a time where everything is online! We will learn about the International Peer Coaching Program and some quick tips to practice at home to deal with anxiety.

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Episode 2 - Home Is Where the Wifi is: How to Balance Work, Life & Social Needs

[Intro, Preface]:

[00:00:12] Welcome to another episode of Triton Tools & Tidbits. I'm David Yang.

[00:00:19] This episode will be focused on the inner sphere—the personal life, at wherever you are calling home right now, whether that be at your parent's house, inside an empty campus dorm room, or somewhere abroad. How are you meeting your own essential social needs to keep you happy and more importantly sane! And how are you balancing your life right now when everything is online?

[00:00:48] Let's dive right into it with program coordinator May a first-year graduate student at the School of Global Policy and Strategies, and fellow International student peer coaches Ayushi, a Clinical Psychology major, and recently declared international relations minor, and Vanessa, third-year international relations major over at Student Success Program. And see how they are adjusting to their quarter of online peer coaching.

[Introducing the student problems & peer coaching program]:

[00:01:21] **May:** ultimately the peer coaching program is that we have 10 international undergraduate students and they are peer mentors or peer coaches to first-year international students. So right now we currently serve the whole population, which is around 9,000 or so international first-year students and so we do it through personal one on one peer coaching. But then also, through personalized mail merges, which are like email messages that each of the peer coaches send to their groups of students, that cohort of students, and we're just kind of there as a support system, like a resource center in a way for our international students. So going through anywhere from academic issues all

the way to career services. Anything like that, any kind of service that are offered for first-year students, especially for international lens. We try to give that perspective and that support for them.

[00:03:02] **David:** I actually have a follow-up question regarding that, so since right now we're in this sort of like "online system", so how does that like affected your program? How are you communicating with your students now because you're not able to sit across them to talk to them if that makes sense?

[00:03:17] **Ayushi:** Yeah, that makes sense. I think for me it was a learning curve and I think most professors, TAs, faculty, everyone out there. It's been a steep learning curve for all of us. But I really appreciate all the help that UCSD has provided, and I think being able to view it from a student perspective and then an employee perspective has really helped me not be mad at UCSD for not doing enough cause I know that they're trying to do enough and so... Yeah, it's been a ride.

[00:03:55] **Vanessa:** Yeah I can add on to that. I have hosted several meetings and it's very hard to be the facilitator because you can't read the room. So like you can't even tell if they're even listening to you! Like most of them have their cameras off, have their microphone muted, and I have to learn to be comfortable with the silence sometimes. Yeah it's been tough for sure.

[00:04:22] **Ayushi:** So much of our job was originally online aside from the one on one part of it. So all the communication is done through laptops and you know whatever. So it hasn't been too much of a change well what has changed obviously is been meeting up with them through Zoom now. But, I don't know personally for me I think that's made it a little bit more easy for them to join us, and for us to reach out for them more often. Since there's no like, " oh here's the hour I have to meet up, since everything is so flexible and online now it's easier to meet up with them.

[00:04:58] **David:** So you're saying it is kind of like a little beneficial in some ways.

[00:05:00] **Ayushi:** I think so yea.

[00:05:02] **Vanessa:** Well, I think it's only week 2 of online right now so it's hard to tell. But, from before when I could actually meet my students one on one I can "lure them with candy" you know like, "I'll give you candy and free blue books" so I think that creates some sort of motivation for them to meet me one on one on top of me sending out email and text.

[00:05:31] **Ayushi:** Also like Vanessa said, it's probably easier to read the room when you're there with them in person as opposed to on Zoom.

[00:05:39] **May:** For me I mean this is kind of just like my thought of a possibility coming through is that: now students are in spaces that are, I would say private spaces so we don't know what that situations like for them. And so we're not sure how fluid or how a way I would like say authentic the students can feel like can be depending on their living situation. If they have a private space to still express their concerns and like things like that. Because they could be with family or they could be with other people who they may not feel as comfortable versus when you're at campus you get to just be around like the person you're talking to is who you get to talk to. You might not have to really worry about your surroundings and if it matters. So there could be that. But I also hoping to see that there might be more engagement in the way that students might be very like stressful time and like how having these meetups with their peer coach can be kind of like consistency in a kind of like you know very fast-moving world that we're living in right now. For me with it being virtual is that before you could have these expectations like, " oh they didn't met, answer my message or like whatever, it's like fine I can just see them later", but now it's like if they don't answer your message your just kind of like, " Aw... what's the next step?" you know.

[00:07:08] As the peer coaches describe the benefits and obstacles of online sessions. An idea presented itself: while the education system remains open with the introduction of fully integrated online classes and student programs, it seemed ever more important to understand what sort of

problems have developed due to this migration to online learning, and what sort of anxiety is cooking up abroad?

[00:07:35] **Ayushi:** I think time zones, time zones suck! And I'm only two hours ahead! But a lot of my students are in India so they're 16 hours ahead or in China, they're 18 hours ahead. So that's tough, that's very tough.

[00:07:52] **May:** For us on like for Grad school, at least what we're seeing now. Especially in my program, where we have probably more than 50% international student population. Like we see it now like Ayushi mentioned time zone has been a big issue with our international classmates, and you know some of these classes they know that you're not allowed to have a grade for attendance, but then they still, weave different ways like, "oh, it's for participation like that's what we're doing it for not attendance" but in a way it's like another thinly veiled way to say you're doing attendance and it's nice that they record every session. So then students who are in different time zones can see it. But then you know, you're... it's still pretty tough for them in that sense. And then, Yeah I think like discussion and things like that has been tough for people in different time zones and then with COVID affecting us as well, I think even as being a domestic student and also I feel like America we're not doing a great job at handling this that it's becoming more of a pandemic even more so here that we're getting this anxiety about it. And so then... But we're here in our country, so then imagine those kinds of anxieties for students who aren't in their country?

[00:09:12] **Vanessa:** For those that can't go home like me. Like I'm obviously worried about my family also because they are in Vietnam and being so close to the origin of COVID which is pretty scary and there's nothing I can do for them and there's nothing they can do for me. So that's... There's always a little anxiety going on especially during a pandemic like this. There's nothing much we can do.

[Meet Stefani]

Meet Stefani, a first-year international student majoring in cognitive science. She's recently living with family in the US and has been missing her friends while coping with her stay home life.

[00:09:42] **Stefani:** Yeah, OMG! Like, I've been so sorry Vanessa, I haven't been like... for the last quarter I haven't had a lot of like appointments with her. But, it's just very helpful to read her mail, emails and like keep updating those stuff. I feel like well, there's at least like because all of my friends are like leaving and they already at their home country and they're hanging out with.. Not hanging out, but like they have family stuff, we don't really talk a lot. So it's very nice to read like Vanessa's email every week. Then she also like suggest me some like some kind of like movies and then music playlist which is like I really, I feel really cared. I feel really like someone cared like sending me good stuff so that I'm not getting bored so I really thank her for that. Yeah, it just helped me. I don't know, It just feels like there's someone I can talk to if I really need to talk. Yeah so very heartwarming for me, and I'm also like attending some kinds of other clubs so that.. they also have other Zoom meetings so that I can keep up to date with everything, because like just staying in my room and do all the homework will drive me crazy one day.

[00:11:33] **David:** I'm very curious, since you're stuck at home right now, how are you keeping yourself entertained? Or sane I guess.

[00:11:40] **Stefani:** Well, I'm not sure. So one way I keep myself entertained is that I join a lot of Facebook memes page (laughs) Yeah. Oh My God! So, okay this is so embarrassing but I join a lot of Meme and stuff, and whenever I feel like bored kind of like I don't know bored or bad like paranoid about the Corona cases going up so fast I just go into like some of the memes. Like the Zoom memes page or like the UCSD meme pages, and I it's just like scroll around and like I get some laugh or maybe I just watch some like videos. Funny videos to help me relax a little bit. Then I will... or maybe I will do some exercise, or maybe I just sit, stand up and walk around, and do something

else. And then I'll go back to do the work. Actually I get kind of distracted a lot sometimes. If you had a routine schedule then it's really, it's easier to get back after you been distracted yeah.

[00:13:04] **David:** So you mentioned you were staying with your brother right now correct? So I'm just curious, when it's just like you guys at home and you have to like take an online class for instance like face to face with your professor or something. Does it feel awkward if you like walked around in the room out of nowhere in the background sometimes or does he not do that. How do you separate your personal space with your kind of like educational space that you have that's basically the same place right now?

[00:13:31] **Stefani:** Oh yeah, that's the common problem. If I like stay with my mom and dad then that would be like very distracting because they would always interrupt me, but then, for now, I'm just like shutting the door (laughs) for my room so that no one would enter, I can do whatever I want, and I try to use sometimes I use microphone and headphones so that I can focus more. But, usually, for now, I just shut the door and like let them know that I'm... So they understand that I'm taking classes so they would not enter. And also I try to organize my stuff here, like I try to organize my table like very cleaner and organize my room cleaner so that I feel more motivated to do things and not be.. Cause a messy room makes me feel like, I feel like very tired you know, so I try to clean everything and make it comfortable for me to study.

[00:14:41] Just as Stefani chooses to create a barrier between her family and her school life. We were separated by these barriers not so long ago. But what happens when those spaces are no longer distinguishable? What happens when all our spaces and all our identities must collide into the same space?

[The Dawn of Online Society]

[00:15:04] **Ayushi:** I think since everything gone online, It's harder because there is no work-life balance anymore. Socializing is also online, and school is also online, work is also online. The only thing that isn't online is like eating! And if you're ordering out that's also online! If you're watching Netflix whilst you're eating, that's also online. So i think right now the biggest balance for me to find is online and offline. Trying to figure out when I should stop staring at my screen, cause I kid you not it's gone up! My screen time has gone up, too much! I'm embarrassed how much it's gone up. So, I think that's... I'm using my family as like my socializing and like going out for walks with them or we live in like a gated community, so going out for walks is easier for us or maybe just like playing monopoly with my younger brother things like that. Trying to switch off, switch everything off!

[00:16:04] **May:** I think what Ayushi said is trying to be offline and online. But, that's a bit like, I don't know, I think a little bit hard. Because even when you're offline is what you will usually do that time is like doing homework. But now homework is all online as well. So it's kind of like, "how can you be offline?" In like those instances where I'm gonna go like, "Yeah I'm gonna go for a walk in my backyard" but then even though your backyard, you're probably still like doing homework. So it's kind of like is there an offline right now? So I think just not being able to physically change your environment has been hard to tell your psyche to like " you're doing something else" Because you're like still in the same realm of where you would usually go to work or like where you're going to go to school. It's all the same place.

[00:16:56] Like May said, "It's all the same place" and that has become our way of life for now! The whole essence of society has been stripped from the tangible world and uploaded into the virtual realms where we become profile pictures, voices, usernames, delayed video footage. Will this be a temporary remedy created to buffer the epidemic? Or will it have more longer-lasting effects on the direction of our future society?

[Therapy Time]

[00:17:29] After our interviews with the students, we were left with more questions than answers. This brought us to an interview with Dr. Tiffany O'Meara, in hopes of finding some suggestions to deal with anxiety and our mental state.

[14:35] **Tiffany:** So, well I have a couple of suggestions I suppose. You know, I think that...first of all, I just want to say off the bat that there's a lot of change going on right now and there's a lot of uncertainty and a lot of things that really feel out of control. And that can increase levels of anxiety and increase levels of stress, and so I think...first of all I just want to say that those are really natural feelings to have and it's okay to have those feelings. And I think that the very first step before you do anything is just to have compassion for ourselves. That this is just a hard situation. I mean, nobody alive has ever experienced what we're experiencing right now! It's something that nobody has been through before and nobody has perfect answers for, and so it can...you know those feelings that we're feeling, you know the grief that a lot of people are feeling, the disappointment, the fear, or the anxiety. You know, all of those are really natural feelings, and so I think just having compassion for yourself is a really important first step. So that's something that I think is good--to just name the feeling, to accept the feeling, and just have compassion for yourself. And even naming the feeling takes away some of the discomfort. Just being able to say: hey, this is what I'm experiencing, and this is okay. I know that for a lot of students, and even for myself, a lot of my routines had kinda flown out the window with all of these changes. And so I am hearing a lot from students of: well, you know all of this started during finals and I kinda just got through finals...but then I had spring break. And all of a sudden, I'm not sleeping right, I'm not eating healthy, I'm not exercising or moving anymore. And that they're just not really keeping up the routines that we use to be in. I mean, my first week of work with all of this--I was working all the time! And I'm someone that is a stickler for my routines and my health routines, and I was noticing that I just wasn't prioritizing them. Because the line between work and home is more blurred now, right? And so for students, I think to help manage stress and anxiety, one helpful thing to do can be to establish some routines. So, re-establish some routines. And whenever I work with students who are experiencing an increase in stress or anxiety, before I even do anything, I take a look at three things: their sleep, their eating, and their movement. Because those three things, if they're chronically going wrong, it can be impacting their levels of stress and their mood. So really taking a look at, how late are you staying up? How late are you sleeping in? Not to oversleep--so to get a healthy sleep pattern going where you are getting to bed at a reasonable hour, you're getting about 7, 8 hours of sleep if you can. And not to oversleep--because oversleeping can actually make you more tired, it can make you feel more depressed or more anxious. So try to get a healthy amount of sleep and try to establish some healthy eating habits--you know healthy snacks and meals. Eat regularly. And then also getting some movement in during the day. If you're able to get outside, you know of course keeping your social distancing, but you're able to get out and get outside, you know, that can be...get some fresh air, take a breather. You know, all of those things can be- I call those the basic building blocks of self-care to manage stress. But even routines like, I have had students that just aren't showering. You know, why do I need to? Because I can just roll out of bed and go to class. So, try to keep up routines like getting up, showering, getting yourself dressed--at least the top half maybe the bottom half is still in PJ's, I don't know but [laughter] you know, at least like, fixing your hair, trying to do some of those same routines that you're used to. And maybe coming up with a new normal--creating new rituals for yourself. So maybe you can't go to the same places or do exactly the same things, but maybe move your desk where you're getting some good lighting, create some rituals, tell people about your plans so that you can get some accountability. So that's one thing that I would say. Another suggestion is just maintaining social connections. So social distancing doesn't need to mean social isolation. So, making an effort to connect. Because I think it's just easy, it can be the default not to connect. So you have to be intentional now about connecting. Students are being really creative--you know, having Zoom meetings, I know that a lot of students will play video games together, or queue up a movie to watch and share reactions with each other. With family, being able to schedule some Zoom family appointments. So trying to be creative about still maintaining some social connection at least every day.

[00:23:02] **Tiffany:** ...and then as far as other strategies, you know, I'm a cognitive-behavioral psychologist and so I like to look at what are people thinking, what they're saying to themselves. So watching out for negative thinking patterns. For example, like this is horrible, I have to go through this, this is awful, all of these things that I wanted to do now I can't do, and this is really disappointing...and, you know, all of that is true and that's okay to have those feelings, but just to watch out for that negative train of thought and trying to bring in some different perspective that...hey I get to be safe during this time, I'm keeping other people safe by staying inside. And also just taking things step at a time. So instead of like worrying about all of the what-if's about what might happen, trying to take things step at a time, day at a time, and even though we don't know exactly what the future might lead, if we take one step at a time, we will get there. You know, we will get through this if we just take it step at a time.

[Closing Statment]

[00:24:11]Whether you're stuck at home with your brother, or having a hard time engaging through zoom or maybe you feel anxious about everything around you. Remember to always think positive! The ability of humans to adapt and form new routines will help you maintain social needs and balance of life. Take some time to reorganize your space, to reevaluate how you connect to others, to reinvent learning! At the end of it, it can all be summed by with this:

[00:24:42] **Tiffany:** One of the life lessons that I've learned is to stop trying to predict life and stop trying to plan for life, that was something I did a lot especially in my 20s, you know--I need to married by this time, I need to have the perfect job at this time, I need to have a child at this time--I've learned that if I roll with life, and if I'm a lot more flexible, then I'm a lot happier, so that's one thing that I try to do. I try to be flexible and roll with life rather than fighting it so much.

[Post-Script]

[00:25:23] Thanks for listening to this episode of Triton Tools & Tidbits! *I'd like to give a huge thanks to the students and peer coaches at Student Success Programs, and Dr. Tiffany O' Meara from CAPS for their input.* If you liked it, please consider subscribing. Keep an eye out for Episode 3 launching next week, where we will be talking about civic engagement. *If you have something to say, send us feedback at <https://bit.ly/ucsdpodcast2020>.* Until next time.