



# COMMUNICATIONS

*The Official Newsletter of the Chemistry Student Safety Organization*



## UT graduate students share pandemic coping strategies

by Mary King and Alli Smith

At nearly nine months since our lives (and labs) were upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, UT graduate students have had to adapt, from squeezing in experiments within shift schedules to presenting over Zoom. Many of us are also grappling with anxiety from trying to maintain research productivity, fulfill teaching assignments, and for first years, learn the ropes of a new lab in a new city. We chatted with a few graduate students about their personal experiences and strategies for adapting to these major changes, as well as asked for some tips on improving mental health and work-life balance.

Though the new cohort model adopted by UT has allowed graduate students to safely ease back into lab-based research activities, this has brought about its own set of challenges. Monica Lin, a 3rd year in the Eberlin lab, remarked that a major challenge was accepting the fact that she could no longer accomplish in the lab what she could pre-pandemic. For her, the shift scheduling prompted her to more carefully plan experiments and prioritize tasks and ultimately sharpened her focus. Similarly, Edwin Escobar, a 4th year student in the Brodbelt group, said he has become more methodical when planning and executing experiments, which he has attributed to fewer mistakes and time better spent in the lab. He also noted the importan-

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Editors-in-Chief: Mary King and Alli Smith



## Welcome, First Years!

by Alli Smith and Mary King

Starting graduate school in a new country, state, or town away from friends and family presents its own challenges in a normal semester, which have only been compounded by the current pandemic. COVID-19 has made it difficult to get to know Austin as well as the Chemistry Department at UT. The majority of this semester has been held over Zoom from apartment bedrooms. We at CSSO know that the same four walls can get old, especially when you live in Austin, a city known for its nightlife, music, and BBQ. Here, we have compiled a list of socially distant things to do and see while you're in Austin (look to your right!). Enjoy, and above all, **stay safe!**

## 10 things to do in Austin pandemic edition

1. Get tickets to the 56th Annual Austin Trail of Lights at Zilker Park (drive-thru)
2. Go on a picnic to any of the beautiful parks in Austin: Eastwoods, Shipe, and many more!
3. Meet longhorns Biscuit and Gravy and explore LBJ National Historic Park
4. Explore some nature trails
5. Go to a drive-in movie theater, like Blue Starlite
6. Play scribble with friends and family
7. Watch Yoga with Adrienne (an Austinite!)
8. Check out the sunset at Mt. Bonnell
9. Check out ACL's live streaming series (it's free!)
10. Visit the Blanton Museum of Art (also free!)

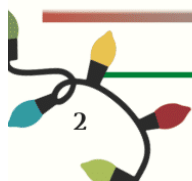
For more things to do in Austin, visit [Do512!](#)

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-ce of achieving a "win a day" to not only keep feelings of burnout at bay, but to provide him with the motivation necessary to chip away at loftier long-term goals. So while it may seem like "write that paper" is a good bullet point for your To-Do list, breaking your major goal into smaller, more manageable items may help you make progress faster and feel better about it simultaneously.

Another challenge lies in establishing boundaries while working from home. Jessica Hellinger, a first year in the Brodbelt group, put it nicely, "it is difficult to achieve a good work-life balance when your desk is only three feet away from your bed." And, as Jessica Wu, a first year from the Krische group, stated, it is increasingly difficult to set aside personal time because going to the library or a coffee shop to work is no longer an option. One suggestion that may help create these boundaries is recreating a morning ritual, or even a commute -- even if it just leads you back to your living room. Edwin, for example, marks the beginning and end of his workday through taking his dog Kai on long walks. Taking up new quarantine-friendly hobbies, or perhaps revisiting old ones, is another way to improve work-life balance and relieve stress. Before the pandemic, you would find Monica bottle-feeding kittens at the Austin Pets Alive shelter in her spare time; now, she volunteers virtually by operating their social media accounts to help felines find new homes. She also described the importance of finding someone to chat with regularly to mitigate feelings of isolation and loneliness. In addition to keeping up with his friends and labmates via the usual suspects, Slack and Zoom, Edwin also plays online games like "Among Us" to mix it up.

This semester has been particularly difficult for first years, who have had to join research groups via Zoom, missed out on getting to know their peers outside of their divisions, and taught undergraduates virtually or 6+ feet apart. Reflecting on this semester, Jessica Wu wished she could have gotten to know more of her fellow first years and that there could have been more opportunities to meet one another. Despite the odd introduction to graduate life, however, Jessica Wu and Jessica Hellinger commented that they have thoroughly enjoyed their first semester at UT-Austin and feel on track in their research. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly led to a lot of changes for UT students this year - some of which will hopefully come to an end soon - but by sharing our experiences, we can stay connected to our community and make it through this difficult time.



## Holiday Bubble Checklist

by Mary King

Traveling home for the holidays? While everyone is craving that connection with loved ones who you may not have seen for a year or longer, it is of utmost importance to do so with careful and disciplined planning. This will not only ensure your personal safety, but also of everyone who you will be interacting with. A physician at Baylor College of Medicine, Dr. James McDeavitt, recently provided a “holiday bubble” checklist, adapted here, to guide those of us traveling long distances and getting together with our family and friends in the coming weeks. To maximize safety and form a proper “bubble”, we advise you to share your plans with your loved ones and encourage them to adhere to the checklist, too. Keep in mind that if those who you will be seeing are high-risk, e.g. elderly and/or immunosuppressed, or your town has a large case load, it is recommended that you celebrate at home.

For more extensive details and advice, check out the original article from Dr. McDeavitt [here](#).

### TODAY

- Schedule your flu shot
- Obtain N95 masks and face shield/goggles
- Check travel restrictions for the state you will be visiting 14 days prior to holiday
- Self-quarantine if possible
- Follow strict viral exposure practices (mask, distance, avoid crowds, wash/sanitize hands)
- Check temperature and symptoms daily

### 5-7 DAYS PRIOR

- Get a PCR diagnostic test
- Stock up on hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes
- Buy travel snacks for the road (if driving)
- Complete purchase of holiday food and beverages, while maintaining quarantine.
- Try curbside pickup or delivery options for groceries and restaurants.

### DAY OF TRAVEL

- If flying: wear a cloth mask or preferably, an N95, and a face shield/goggles
- If driving: limit stops overall, and wear a face shield/goggles in addition to your mask.

## NOW, A SAFETY CAROL

"OH, THE VIRUS OUTSIDE IS FRIGHTFUL.  
BUT THIS HAND SOAP SMELLS SO DELIGHTFUL.  
AND SINCE WE'VE NO PLACE TO GO,  
DON'T LET IT GROW, WASH YOUR HANDS, YES YOU KNOW."

-STAMFORD HEALTH, HEALTHFLASH BLOG, 2020



## Near Miss Reporting

Experiencing near misses in the laboratory are more common than you think. Think back on the years you've done research, and you can probably think of an example – maybe you forgot to inspect gas lines before beginning an experiment, or you didn't dispose of bacteria properly. While these may not have brought disaster, reporting of near misses can provide important insight into holes in safety procedures that can often lead to dangerous accidents in the lab. Remember, these submissions are 100% anonymous, and will help us improve the safety culture here at UT. To submit a report, use the QR code to the left or visit our [website](#). Please join us in keeping UT Austin safe!

# Meet the Officers ❄️



**Juliette Strasser**  
Position: President  
Fun Fact: Juliette has visited Disney world and Disneyland in the same week.



**Adrian Rylski**  
Position: Secretary  
Fun Fact: Adrian is a skilled archer.



**Kanchan Aggarwal**  
Position: Past President  
Fun Fact: As a kid, Kanchan used to hate getting her photo taken, and now, well...



**Calla McCulley**  
Position: Event Coordinator  
Fun Fact: Calla was a 3x state champion in volleyball.



**Jon Thompson**  
Position: Treasurer  
Fun Fact: Jon and his fiance ran a half marathon during quarantine by running one mile every hour for a day.



**Sydney Povilaitis**  
Position: Subcommittee Chair  
Fun Fact: Sydney likes to scuba dive.

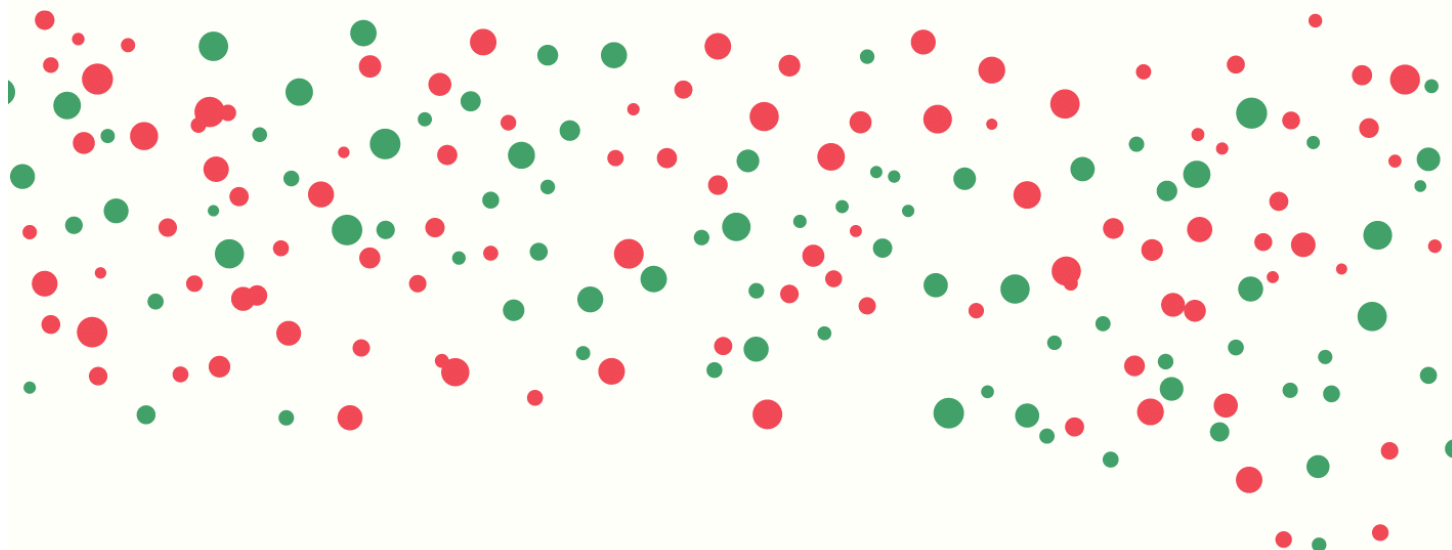


**Mary King**  
Position: Co-editor in Chief  
Fun Fact: Mary auditioned for the role of Mattie in the 2010 True Grit remake.



**Alli Smith**  
Position: Co-editor in Chief  
Fun Fact: Alli made 825 cupcakes in 24 hours for a fundraiser.

**Interested in Becoming an Officer?  
Elections will be held in January!**



1 H Hydrogen	15 $\alpha$ Alpha Particle	15 P Phosphorus	39 P Phosphorus	39 Y Yttrium	
67 Ho Holmium	3 Li Lithium	1 D Deuterium	39 $\alpha$ Alpha Particle	39 Y Yttrium	16 S Sulfur

# From CSSO

