



Dear Alumni and Friends,

We are in the midst of a truly unprecedented period of disruption and change here at UCSC and globally. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to contain it, students have had to vacate their dorms, faculty have altered research plans and teaching strategies, and staff continue to work long hours to

support these changes. It is an extraordinary moment, but social scientists are rallying together and responding with care, compassion, and the knowledge and data we need to address this challenge.

Now, more than ever, we know our expertise is needed to take up the most critical, pressing questions that continue to emerge. This includes building awareness and knowledge about the pandemic itself. We are tackling these concerns in many health-oriented courses, such as Jenny Reardon's newly created spring quarter seminar, [Living and Learning in a Pandemic](#). These types of classes can provide important social context through, for example, investigating disinvestments in public health infrastructure and exclusions from access to testing and care, as well as through close-up studies of the long-term implications of ecological disturbance and climate change.

Economist Kristian López Vargas helped develop a "contract tracing" app for the government of Peru, his home country. [The phone-based app](#), which already has over 1 million users, is designed to help slow the pace of the pandemic by sharing data about exposure and risk of infection.

Our faculty and staff are also working hard to share their expertise with the public. In a recent [op-ed](#) in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Craig Haney comments on what we can learn about social distancing from those who endure solitary confinement. Using this temporary period of social isolation as a teaching moment, Haney provides the reader with two kinds of information

simultaneously: first, the ineffectiveness and egregiousness of solitary confinement for the incarcerated; and second, the courageous strategies some have used to endure it—tips that may prove helpful for everyone in this period of major quarantining.

Similarly, Chris Benner employs the pandemic as a vehicle for educating the public about a wider set of issues, both economic and social. In an essay in [American Prospect](#), he explores the possibilities of solidarity economics, an "ethos of mutual caring and support." He shows that when society takes better care of those at the margins, the entire community benefits. This is true not only during moments of crisis, and not only with respect to health, but in non-exceptional periods and during normal economic cycles as well.

We have heard as well from Rebecca London in the *Wall Street Journal* about [families under quarantine](#), Matt Sparke in *The Counter* on the [inequalities in risk](#) and risk management exposed by the pandemic, and Nirvikar Singh in *Financial Express* about the [economic impacts of the pandemic](#).

We also benefit from the expertise and wisdom of staff, including Orin Martin, who know that to survive and thrive in moments such as these, we need nutrition for the body and soul as well as for the mind. In this vein, Orin offers sage advice here in his [tips for novice gardeners](#).

The Alan Chadwick Garden and the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems are currently running with skeletal crews in order to observe safe hygiene and distancing practices. At the same time as protecting workers, CASFS Director Stacy Philpott is working closely with faculty and staff to address the needs of food production for the campus dining halls, Basic Needs, and other units. Others are using the time to think strategically about the future, knowing that when this pandemic is behind us, the Farm and Garden will return with a flourish.

There are many others in addition to those mentioned here, who have been working hard to keep community ties strong, and to make sure that ideas and expertise continue to flow in beneficial ways for all. Among our many illustrious alumni I want to single out Barbara Ferrer, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. With knowledge and compassion, Ferrer has [talked about the impacts](#) of the coronavirus and urged LA residents to educate and protect themselves, while at the same time caring for the vulnerable and those most at risk.

In highlighting our accomplishments achieved in very difficult circumstances, I don't want to minimize the challenges we have encountered and continue to negotiate. These include the traumatic interruptions caused in class by "zombombing," a disturbing new phenomenon in which instructors and students are targeted for online harassment and abuse by uninvited participants. Central administration and ITS are working to provide the [safeguards necessary](#).

to keep these incidents from happening. But they are an unfortunate reminder of the many difficulties involved in our forced transition to remote learning.

And despite our best efforts it is important to acknowledge that research time and energy has been diminished for many, especially those caring for older relatives, young families, or neighbors. Whether it be the inability to work in the lab, the impossibility of conducting interviews and in-person surveys, or the difficulties involved in accessing field stations, a majority of the faculty are experiencing major obstacles.

But I know that we are all trying hard—very hard—to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on our students, our research, and our community. I want to acknowledge the stress this can create, and to underline that we should all therefore be kind to each other, giving everyone permission to operate at a tempo and in personal ways that are sustainable over the long haul. As I noted in an earlier message, we are not expected to be, nor should we attempt to be heroic, just professional and caring. In the Division of Social Sciences, we will continue to stand together and do the best we can, for ourselves, the university, and the wider public.

—Katharyne

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