

What Will We Carry Forward from This Time?



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We have already been through months of the COVID-19 pandemic, with more yet to come. We have had family, friends, and colleagues get sick. We have had reduced access to our laboratories and have canceled many trips, visits, and conferences. With little global travel, we do not get to see one another in person. As a result, we have found ways to adapt and to connect online. While COVID cases continue to rise rapidly in many parts of the world, there has been promising news from clinical trials of vaccines with eventual access to them seeming likely, as well as increased knowledge on preventing transmission and more effectively treating those infected. The end is not yet in sight, but it will be.

We have asked each other what we have learned during this time, by necessity, in terms of scientific connections and communications. Are there lessons and activities that we can take forward with us when we are no longer forced into relative isolation? We touched on these issues at a panel discussion earlier this month, at the iCANX talks.¹ One lesson that we have learned is that there is a big global audience for science. When conferences go online, many people around the world who cannot normally travel to them are able to attend virtually. Even our departmental seminars often have attendances significantly higher than typical in-person audiences. We are also able to open up these seminars to scientists at other institutions. Interuniversity and international colloquia in materials science, quantum biology, and other areas have opened up and, depending on the platform, audiences can also get to know one another through regular attendance and interactions. The iCANX panel that we ran had over 300,000 live attendees around the world, with more watching later online (it started on a Friday at 4 AM US Pacific time, 8 PM Beijing time). Certainly, when we are able to have live talks at conferences and universities again, we will want to include online components in many cases.

The technologies that we have needed to connect and to broadcast meetings have developed rapidly. As many children (and professors) are using them every day, they have to be straightforward. There has been extra emphasis on making sure that families have access to the Internet and hardware to connect using these tools. Addressing the disparities in access during this time of need and afterward will help increase global opportunities to learn from around the world. It is important that this communication is bidirectional. We have the possibility to connect in ways that simply would not have happened previously.

There is no question that we have missed connecting in person with one another. There is a camaraderie among scientists who get to see each other at conferences or host each other at our home institutions. We would normally be sitting

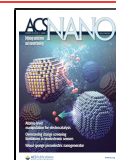
around at conferences outside of the talks to discuss plans and to brainstorm ideas. Likewise, we have missed the opportunity to discover young research groups in our travels and to showcase our up-and-coming colleagues. For this purpose, we have established the *ACS Nano* Rising Star lectures. Beyond these lectures, we publish the speakers' forward-looking Perspectives based on their talks, and we also retain our rising stars on an advisory board to broaden the voices that we hear on how we can improve *ACS Nano*.

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During this time, we have also taken a closer look at how we handle manuscript revisions.² We have added flexibility to the timing of revisions. We consider whether additional experiments requested by referees are expected to affect the conclusions of the manuscript. While our scientist editors often previously advised authors on how, or whether, to address specific referee comments, we anticipate that this current deeper assessment will continue, maintaining the focus in each manuscript and revision on the work and its implications.

One of the most heartening aspects of the pandemic has been the worldwide cooperative effort to fight it. Many academic, corporate, and government laboratories stepped up to see what could be done and how rapidly it could happen. Governments and philanthropies snapped into action. We hope that the spirit of these collaborations will continue long into the future. We hope that recognition of some of the mistakes made will lead to improved future responses to global and local threats to our safety. Science has been front and center in these efforts; it remains important to engage our fellow citizens to show what their support of scientific research has enabled.

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We look forward to hearing your ideas on what we have learned and can continue to do after the pandemic is over. We look forward to seeing you once again in person at conferences, on visits to your and our research institutes, and everywhere in between, as well as through the enhanced modes of online interactions that have developed. We hope that you and yours stay safe and well.



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Notes

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