Tile: Stayin on Track During the Pandemic: Preparing to Defend Your Thesis from Home

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[Garth Fowler] Welcome, my name is Garth Fowler and I'm the associate executive muted of the office of graduate and postgraduate Education and Training. I am your host today for the latest installment of staying on track. The APA is webinar series for graduate students postdoctoral Scholars and early career psychologists to help you stay on track during this covid-19 epidemic.

Today we're going to talk about remote defenses. We're going to give suggestions and advice on how to defend your thesis or different dissertation safely from home. We're going to start with some general advice. And then we're going to hear from our panelists during the webinar you can submit a question using the questions box located the webinar control panel and as times permit at the very end, I'll select some of those questions for our guests If you experience any issues with audio or video I asked you first, Make sure that you've shut down other applications that might be running in the background make sure that you're giving as much as you can to the CPU here if the problems persist then just simply exit the webinar and rejoining using the invitation link that you received. So let's get started and I'm going to start by introducing our two guests today. So our first guest that will be hearing from later is Dr. Alvin Akbar. He's a recent doctoral recipient from the University of North Texas, so thank you so much for joining us. Dr. Akbar.

[Dr. Alvin Akbar] Thank you.

[Garth] And our next guest is a Hideko Sera. She is a Dean at the University of Redlands. And I want to thank you for joining us to thank you so much for having me. No problem. I look forward to hearing from both of you in just a little bit. So let's Jump Right In and start talking about what you need to do. And the first thing I want to say is this is unusual times many institutions and programs realize that that and a lot of them have taken the time to update their policies and procedures to really support remote defenses. So my first piece of advice is check out what is available at your institution go to the Graduate, you know, the graduate school or the dean of the graduate programs. They are see what they have up there in terms of recommendations. What kind of requirements they have and really take more time to plan ahead for the video conference. Then you think you need I think that's my other piece of advice and I think throughout I'll be telling people really the secrets having a game plan and sharing that game plan broadly. And so that's right also, say be sure you understand what options and what requirements are by your school some of the websites that I visited. They actually tell you which platform you're supposed to use. They want things done in a certain way. They may have purchased Zoom or I've heard of things like blue jeans. And so you need to make sure that you have that at some of the places I've seen have also said given that it's a remote defense or changes that they've gotten rid of the public that it's open to the public. It's just a committee members only. So make sure you understand all those options that are all those requirements and options that are available to you by your institution. And then once you do that, then you can start making a game plan on what are the things that you have control over. My other piece of advice and I've seen this happening at many institutions but really a committee member or chair or one of the faculty members should actually be the most meeting host or organizer and there's a number of reasons for this and one is because later on when you're trying to handle some of those parts of the defense where there's the committee deliberations.

Sometimes you just might be easier just to have the candidate step out and if he or she is the host That could end the meeting for everyone. So by having the chair be the meeting host you make sure that that doesn't happen. And again some of the institutions I've seen. This is a requirement. Now most of these platforms do then have the option that it you can add a host or a panelist or whatever they call it or a co-host so then you do have the ability then to hand off say the opportunity to run the slides or be in control so you can have what the chair be the host and make Canada panelists or co-host I really think that's one of your best recommendations right with that in mind. The next thing I think you want to do is you want to schedule a test run you really want to take an opportunity set up with the advisor or your chair or whoever where you just go in for 15-20 minutes and you practice all this handing off when you have control when you don't have control making sure that you have all the visuals slides and everything up to speed up for a lot of us these Technologies whether it's Zoom or or GoToMeeting or gotowebinar. It's new for us. And so just take the time to really be familiar with it. And if you are like me, I would actually as a candidate not only do a practice run with my with my committee member I'd get my friends to all log on and practice with them as if it's the real true thing and one of them pretend to be the your advisor have some people be the other committee members practice going through everything handling it hand It off. I really think that's some of the best the best advice is is this is new. So take the time to really to really practice as much as possible.

One of the things is that there's lots of different components for your exam. And I think what you need to do is really have a game plan. I've read that there's a number of different ways that people are handling things. And so I think really the best thing to do is to figure out what's your game plan. So again, how are you going to handle the confidential committee deliberations aspects some of these platforms have the ability to do what they call breakout rooms or special function rooms, you can definitely use that that does in my opinion add an opportunity, you know, add another layer of unfamiliarity. So you want to make sure you practice with that and that's an opportunity where like the host so the committee chair and everyone can go into a separate room for deliberations and the candidate is kind of just sitting in the room by themselves kind of like the real scenario, but you could also do something very low-tech which is just then when it's all said and done have the candidate log off from the meeting keep his or her cell phone or email and you can invite them back in same thing for how you went to invite and manage guests or an audience section. Are they going to come in? Are they going to be on video? Are they going to be on audio just plan all that out and just make decisions. I think most people who are going to be adaptable. They understand that this is a new scenario. So I think once you make that plan my personal advice is If you do have an open session, I would let the guests come in. I would make them be mute and have them type in their questions through one of the question boxes. But again think about what's going to work best for you. If it's only a small number of people who are coming in then you could have the Public's be you could have them be this is slides don't seem to be working. Sorry about that. I've been moving through my slides. There we are. I'll just back up a little bit to show you what some of the slides were before their eyes talking about making sure you have a committee chair be the organizing host again. These will be available as a PDF so you'll be able to catch back up with those. So I apologize for that.

I think one of the most important things you want to do when you plan ahead is control your local internet, it seems obvious, but I've read some of the on some of the online blogs and stories. I read that people didn't think about this. So, you know, if you're living with roommates or you have family and things like that just let them know ask them not to binge Netflix or don't be playing World of Warcraft. I think as a committee member you kind of want to do the same thing try and control how much the you know, how much bandwidth you are using. Um, you know, this these are new times many many people are online right now. So you try and went to control it as much as possible. And you know, when your audience comes in if you have an audience, I would just tell them the same thing if they can make sure that they are turning off any other applications that are running in the background and things like that. So, I think that's one of the most important things you can do is really try and just be explicit about telling people. Let's control our bandwidth and let's think about these things. The last thing I think you want to do is you know, you've heard all about this the people who are bombing zooming beings and things like that. Just take the time to make sure that you have that set up if you're worried about it again I've seen on some of the web pages and departments and institutions that I've gone to they actually recommend this they've set out it help pages to help candidates understand how to if they're recommending a certain platform here is how you bomb-proof our application or resource if your department or school isn't doing that I've seen For most places that there's an FAQ page for almost every one of these platforms is right now on how to do that how to bomb-proof it. I don't know. You know, I've seen people as should I do passwords and should I lock it my advice is that probably someone's dissertation. Isn't that big of a draw that someone's really going to want to bomb or you know kind of jump into your dissertation defense, so I don't think it's a huge issue if it makes you uncomfortable. You just want to be sure about it then. Then yes, go ahead and do that and adds one more layer to the process. So again, I want to make sure that you test if you're using passwords on how to do all that how to set it all up.

I think the last piece of advice that I can really give is you need to have a plan B, you know, and I think you also want to make it very clear with your committee members or break your chair. At what point do you move to that plan B, you know, what's going to happen? Like for example, I've seen questions say should we have a video on I think it's okay. It makes sense to start with video but video can be very bandwidth heavy.

And so you might want to say hey if things seem really Lower things are really bad. We're going to move and turn video off for everyone. We chose for today's presentation to not use video because of the bandwidth issues and we had so many people coming to sign up that I didn't want that to be an issue. So we made the decision ahead of time, but we could have started with the video and maybe moved away from it. I also recommend that your plan B try and maybe have it be the low-tech solution. Like if things really really fall apart and you and your chair or your committee have decided here.

Where we decide? Hey, we're moving to plan B send Advance copies of the slides to everyone and a lot of these platforms have teleconference options. And so you could get people off the computer audio and just have them move on to using your phone or things like that. And again, I think the best thing to do is to is to think about it and communicate it ahead of time, but I would really have a plan B and I my recommendation but we'll get to hear from our other panelists that I think a low-tech solution. Is probably going to be your best plan B option.

On the day of so it's go time. I think one of the most important things to communicate is that, you know be a little bit over expressive and four votes, you know, don't just wait for people to not or things like that. Take the time to say hey, this is a new platform.

So you want verbal responses, even if you're using video and please keep in mind and I think this is really important especially if you have a large number of people are using video and you have a small set up these these peoples pictures get tiny and it's nonverbal communication can get minimalized a lot. So I think it's okay to be a little over expressive. I wouldn't overdo it.

But you know don't assume what you do in person is going to suffice when you're on video or you're doing one-on-one a lot of these platforms allow the ability for you to do things like thumbs up or raise your hands and stuff like that whether or not you use that I think that's a decision you want to have before with your your committee or your advisor, but then you could just tell everyone hey, it's going to be okay, you know, we think it's great if something's If you think something's good give the thumbs up or things like that. I goes without saying but I just want to reinforce it. You should dress up it is I think that's important. I do that for almost all my webinars and but this is your introduction to the professional world. And I think you should treat it that way. I also think it helps you get in the right mind and mode about doing this and yes, I would say you want to wear pants. I did, you know read online about some people that said, oh my gosh, they had, you know had to stand.

Up to adjust the lighting in the back of the room or something like that. And so, you know, you want to make sure that you look good for the entire scenario.

I think the biggest important thing you want to do is add 15 or 20 minutes to the entire process. So if you usually schedule an hour and a half for your defense when it's in person add an extra 15 or 20 minutes and I think what you're going to do in those beginning times is you really want to make sure that all the technology that you're using is working for everyone. All committee members are able to dial in and hear all the audio is working. All the video is working in things like that.

And I think you want to make sure that as I mentioned before The idea is to really have a game plan make a lot of these decisions ahead of time. And that's when you get to share them with everyone who's there? So you could explain how this is going to be different that you're going to use breakout rooms for the deliberations or that you're going to just have people drop off at the appropriate time. That's what you want to do in the beginning share that with everyone. So everyone's on the same page explains them. What's the same? What's different? I would say you also want to check your technology.

If you need to update a program do it the day before but if you're like me the last thing I want to do is have a new version of PowerPoint or whatever. I'm using for my slides or my presentation on the day of so I would go in and make sure I turn off any auto updates. We all see those experiences and they might not happen very often. But this is one time you really don't want it to happen. Check all your technology. I would go out and put new batteries in your mouth. Make sure your headphones if you're using them or really charged.

Headphones if you have them work really well for audio with your so I do recommend that but you don't have to a lot of people just call in with there's their phone audio so that works off well, and again, I can't overstress the idea that you make sure that you have everything else turned off that you don't need. You don't want to be getting pop-ups or you don't want other applications that are going to be draining the CPU. So take the time to just do all those things ahead of time.

I think one of the most important things to really think about is the setup and so you want to make sure that you take the time to set this space and so I stole this from how to pull off a professional video call from home from The Wire Cutter. It's a little prescient. It was published in 2018, but I was reading through the advice and I think it was really really great. So, you know a lot of us are working from home and makeshift spaces, but I think for your defense make it a very specific.

Fix space so use the living room or use your dining room get at an actual desk put your camera at base level.

So that means if your cameras built into your laptop or into your computer put some books under it if you're using video so that you aren't looking at the bottom of your chin, you're looking straight on at the person so really take the time to test those things out in video setup lighting should come from behind your computer or the camera is should try and be Controlled so maybe having a light I wouldn't rely upon like a window to do that because it could be really bright or you could get shadows and things like that. So think about what your lighting Source could be. It could be coming from the side, but just make sure it's not coming from behind you if you have like a big bright light behind you that really will put you in a dark space. If you're relying on video, of course, if you're not using video, then you don't have to worry about all these things. But if you if you do want to have a video component then I think you want to make sure you have the space set up right, make sure you're sitting against a plain wall a don't do corners and really make sure there's not a window. There's a couple places and we have some resources that if you just Google where people actually like close the blinds and they can show still how bright it is on a sunny day and how it overwhelms your camera. So I really would I really wouldn't do that.

You're going to be using some platform, you know, so whichever one you have whether it's Zoom, GoToMeeting they sometimes allow you to control Troll your background. And so I've seen lots of questions of should I what should I do? I think if the blur out option is there and you want to try it at my opinion. They are sometimes not so great. But it does make sure there's no distractions in the background. So I would test that out first make sure it looks good. If not, then I make sure that the video the thing behind you is just a nice simple space a plain wall. Maybe some books, you know, if there's a bookcase in the background try not.

I have it be too distracting but I think most people are going to understand and really really really focus on you. There is some other great advice in this how to pull off a professional video call from home in The Wire cutter again, there's the link and it will be in our slide. So I really think you take the time to go ahead and do that.

And before I turn it over to questions and hear from our panelists really, I love XKCD, so I thought this would be kind of a funny video joke, but really I think the the best thing here is have a game plan and plan ahead. There's been lots of different advice on whether you should use PowerPoints or not out there. I think you want to decide what works best for you and communicate that clearly with everyone. So there's no surprises for everyone. I think that's really going to be the best way to have a defenses is really making sure that you've communicated what's going to be different about this.

What's going to be the same about this how you're going to handle all these pieces if you That out and communicate it well ahead of time. I think you're going to have the best process as as possible. And I think the other thing before I turn over is that this is worked and we have someone successful here who has done a remote defense and and we're learning because it's new still but most people are understanding and you know, this will work your if you take the time you're going to be okay, you're going to be successful this this will work.

So I'm going to take the time now to turn over to to our guests and the first person I'm going to turn it over to is Alvin to talk a little bit about you know, what was your experience like you recently did this? So what worked for you? What went well and what would you have done differently?

[Dr. Akibar] Yeah, so in terms of my my defense I was the first person in my department to my knowledge to have to do a remote then I think the day after I sent the email to my committee to schedule the milestone the state of Texas declared a state of emergency. So that was not the best way to start things off.

But I just checked on my committee members honestly read a lot of friends posts on just get an idea of what folks were doing and seeing kind of what's out there and what work. So my just depends the same length with folks on Facebook and Twitter just to kind of like get some of my peers and academic Network and some you know, close friends be able to actually watch them walk the public portion and then the rest of it was really just, you know, coming down to the day of and getting my presentation ready and all of that realizing that I had a webcam issue. So my laptop webcam is not working at all, which on a normal defense they would not be that big of a deal. I was just gone out and bought a new webcam.

Most stores were sold out of everything that I needed including both external web cams and the screwdriver that I needed to fix it. So I had to scour the entire County to find a hardware store that had the screwdriver I needed so I can go into my laptop and fix my webcam which apparently just completely lose. So that was some tech support. I had not anticipated having to do myself the day before but it worked out but in terms of the actual Milestone itself, you know, a lot of it was just kind of figuring out what kinds of stuff, meaning I can kind of work within the place to make myself feel better about being bombs potentially and just to kind of keep the presentation and the meeting room manageable. So I did things like new to my participants on entry and by default had their camera or had their cameras off didn't allow them to like do any screen sharing and also just kind of a waiting room so that way if there were any folks might even recognize trying to enter the room there would be that a little bit of like additional buffer to kind of help out with that. In this case. I did serve as the primary host for my meeting just because I'm between myself and my committee. I was probably the most tech-savvy of them. I think they all kind of learned on the Fly kind of getting into it. So I ended up having to kind of manage a lot of the room, but I also did put my advisor to one of my more tech-savvy committee members involved or in charge of co-hosting so that way if anything did go wrong we could sort that out.

So we had a quick sidebar before starting the defense just to kind of go over some things also to kind of like myself up and get they really just gave some encouraging feedback and what not just you know before getting into it and then honestly, it was nice to kind of before even starting the defense just look over really quickly at some of the folks who my friends and with colleagues who were attending remotely and just kind of see all of them for a moment and then immediately narrow my camera window so I can only see my committee members because otherwise I would get very distracted and so it was definitely strange doing my whole defense in my living room. Lots of small minor things became a bit more major since there were no alternative to getting them done that I can think of at the moment but it all worked out pretty well.

So the after getting through the public portion of my defense, I asked all the non Committee Member attendees to leave the room and then gain about a minute before making sure that anyone who welcomes already out what could be booted off had the question answer session with my committee and Since I couldn't figure out the breakout room feature at that point. I just I was using Bluetooth headphones with my laptop and I just took them off and then added them to then told my committee to wave at me from the camera. Once you're ready to hear from me again, so it's definitely more of a low-tech solution for that, but it worked.

[Garth] Perfect. I guess we're getting some comments. That sound is bad again. If you're having sound that's bad on your end. Make sure that you turned off as many applications as possible. It might be helpful. Just you know, try and speak a little slower with our guests. So maybe that's something we can do to but if you seeing a lot of stuff about sound so make sure that you have as many applications on your end as possible. So, I mean, there's a lot of questions that I would like to follow up on but I think we'll get to that.

Later so thank you very much. I think what I'll do now is ask Hideko to give us a little advice or to comment on anything that you know, I've shared already as a dean and a faculty member and her perspective.

[Sera Hideko] Absolutely. So before this before I get into some of the things that I would like to point out, I just want to share that I've been in a higher education for 22 years.

I saw how 911 impacted the whole higher education system back then and what we are going through as growth was talking about. I have never seen anything like it.

So I just want to reiterate the the the importance of how we need to be mindful about the this unusual and very extraordinary circumstance that we are all in so with that I would like to provide for things for specific things that I would like to cover the first thing, Alvin very articulated this very very clearly, but this is where he and I I think overlap and the first thing is that I don't think our University is the only University that where the faculty struggled greatly when we have to switch over to the technological enhanced modules. So what we are looking at in terms of the the situation this is a complete role reversal that is happening in terms of the roles of the experts and novice. So this is a situation where the Faculty members actually other ones who need to oftentimes need to be in the place of receiving guidance in terms of a technological savviness. So one of the advice that I could give here. Is that as a faculty members as well as well as the faculty administrators we have to be humble about this roll reverse that none of us probably is going to enjoy too much about so that's the first thing the second thing that I would like to cover is that back in 2007 [inaudible] came up with the comprehensive study on grit and how is that really a focus of conversation here? Is that out of the eight major traits also that makeup grit there are two components that are very very critical and one is the consistency of Interest or passion. And the other one is the perseverance of effort. So I would ask the faculty members.

Or faculty administrators who are on this webinar to think about how this new element of having grit is actually a new or additional quality or added component to this 2020 cohort as they have gone through their preparation for their defense. This is a new added quality that they all have to go through to enhance so I think faculty need to acknowledge that I need to honor that piece the third piece in and grit your talked about this a little bit in and also Alvin the literature about the reason Zoom bombers that we have seen some of the most prominent cases have been very racially motivated or the Those would be specifically attacking other marginalized populations and from the the beginning of the pandemic. I personally have very much believed and held this notion that what was broken is now simply magnified. So you see this internationally nationally locally state wise even probably at your own institution. So when The misfortune of Bombing or the zoom bombing or some kind of hacking happens and if there are racially or otherwise diversity specific motivations that are happening and if there are things that are done to our candidates we need to make sure the fact that we need to make sure that they are easy actually continued dialogue about that after the defense so we cannot pretend as if nothing ever happened or it was really an unfortunate and then moving on another piece about the diversity is that I think faculty and administrators need to be mindful about the diversity that rests within the digital iniquity.

So not every student has access to the the best of the best bandwidth or any kind of devices or some of our students simply don't have a safe space space to be able to do this defense in the best way that they wish they could and that needs to be acknowledged. And then the last piece that I would offer which is the fourth piece is that I think faculty and administrators have the responsibility to plan Mindful and also respectful celebration and we have to be mindful of the fact that this is a cohort that You know them if not, all of them actually have their commencement canceled. So, you know, there is a very important ritual part to this defense kind of a practice. So there has to be a way a special way to acknowledge what they have done and what they have been able to do.

So my hats are completely off to those students who have defended just as Alvin did and those people who are planning to do so very soon you have already beaten the odds in my view. So that needs to be acknowledged if there has to be a specialized special newsletter or announcement university-wide communication that needs to go out to honor those students and their work that is something I think the institution has to do.

[Garth] Excellent. I want to thank both of you for for your advice and your comments. I think they're they're really very very helpful. We received a lot of questions in the registration and we're also getting a lot here. So I think I'm just going to go through and and what kind of just have a dialogue share some of our thoughts and experiences with these questions. I think one of the first ones that I've seen is this idea about who should actually be the host.

Or managing and and like I said before, I think I think a really good thing is to really assign that to a faculty member but Alvin you talked about how it sounded like you were the one who kind of was managing like you fielded questions. You muted people on and off share a little bit about that your experience, but you know, how did that go for you? Was it overwhelming? Do you wish in hindsight that someone else had done that or was it manageable for you?

[Dr. Akibar] I think on my end it was pretty manageable in large part because my audience was not very very large. I think at at max I had 15 audience members and all of them were people that I knew closely. So it wasn't necessarily an issue of you know, people getting out of hand. So I'll say that was very manageable. But if you have maybe, you know a larger audience if you want an inviting is going to have more people there. It may be good to have, you know, both closer committee members and your advisor as well as maybe a couple of trusted friends or colleagues helping to kind of keep track.

Tabs of what's going on. So that way it's not all on you while you were also trying to feel the presentation because I definitely noted that there were some times that you know, I had to kind of stay in the zone for the presentation and break, you know having to break my train of thought to take care of something. We related to the meeting room. Definitely kind of took me out of it for a moment and I had to kind of catch myself back up.

[Garth] Yeah, I think that's really great. Great advice. I do think kind of spreading the responsibility of managing the technology. It is a it is an overwhelming experience for candidates. I mean for faculty members who are on here remember what it was like for you to do this and as I think Hideko had mentioned before this is unusual time.

So I think if it's possible for someone else to kind of take control of at least, you know for vetting questions or things like That but I also like the points that you made that for some faculty that candidates might be the more skilled or the more competent members with this technology. So it's a balance and I think one of the the answers for is, you know, schedule practice session ahead of time with with your committee members it and see what works best, but it sounds like it was manageable for you.

But yeah, it would have been nice to have to have passed that off it when you could. Hideko any comments about about like the role of who should be host or anything that you would like to add that we didn't mention already about this.

[Hideko] No I agree with what's being said. I really think that it has to be a mutual agreement.

So that students are not being put in a place where they would have to defend and in fact quote-unquote take care of the committee while the Is actually judging on their on their defense. I mean, that's it that that is too many hats to wear. So as long as I think there is a clear understanding of each person's role and responsibility. I think that is better.

[Garth] Excellent. I see people really asking questions about like Zoom or gotowebinar and and my opinion is I think it really depends on what you're trying to accomplish Zoom I think is better if you have an audience participation and in your opening it up to a lot of people whereas gotowebinar really is this format where you know, it's voices over slides Alvin. What did you use?

[Dr. Akibar] I'm so I utilized Zoom. It's what one of the software packages our university has and kind of has tech support set up for but also because I had just over the last couple of years have more and more practice using it for either interviews or even I think within the week. We are the days leading up to my defense using it to have a watch party with friends for one of our favorite shows and that honestly gave me some good practice with learning how to deal with the screen sharing and like managing control for that. So I will say practice is important, but you can also make it fun.

[Garth] Yeah. Yeah, I think I think again what platform you use I would I would first go back to your institution and see if they have recommendations As you move as you noted some of them have purchased access and sometimes with purchase access comes different level of support and and different functions that you want to look into. So taking the time to go ahead with that and see which ones that that your institution is using. I'm like you I use I'm more familiar with GoToMeeting.

And so I would default to that because that's what I'm most comfortable with. So, I think it really depends on what people are really really feeling is is the best approach for what you want to do. I think another another question that we've heard about is the is the open audience should you invite people, you know, there's been some stuff on the web that I've seen where people are excited because usually parents or family members don't get to attend these types of things.

But now that it's online there's an opportunity. So I would love to hear both your thoughts on on you know, what did that how was that? What did you think about that Alvin were you said yours was small did was it just a you know, the regular group of people who did attend your your committee are your defense as part of the audience?

[Dr. Akibar] So my audience was largely friends a couple of colleagues from my department and then one family member so it wasn't anything too crazy on top of my committee. So it wasn't really too bad trying to figure all of that out. But I definitely seen some friends who had invited like their whole network so I can add some range to that.

[Garth] Hideko any comments or thoughts about that on your side?

[Hideko] I think one thing that I would offer is that I think whatever the decision that the students would make in terms of how many people will be joining. They should have think about two things one. Is that for most of us this happens only once in a lifetime. So we need to recognize the magnitude and the symbolism of oh important this is not only for the students but also for for their loved ones and the support system, but at the same time on the same token, however, I would say that in these unusual times students also need to think about what would be best for them to be able to best perform this very demanding, taxing, monumental process.

So if it is Is to just to satisfy some people who may be, you know eager to listen to their their presentations and and and all of that in a way. It's almost like a wedding what's really important for you to be the one the thing that should drive the decision making and that not what other people want from you, but this is your work.

[Garth] Yeah, I think personally I would you know, if I had if I had to think about this, you know there weren't my family members did attend my in-person one, but if you think about an interesting person event most of the audience members sit very quietly throughout the presentation and and there might be a just like in any standard talk. There might be an open question and answer session at the end before they're asked to leave and you can replicate that using using the platform where you know, they can sit. And I think as Alvin mentioned before the audience members were put on mute.

Things like that when I'm trying to communicate to my committee members so I would opt not to and that's my advice my thoughts on it. But I think you have to really like you said think about what's going to work best for you and then figure out how to manage it whatever the decision that you make. So I really really appreciate that.

One of the other things that I've really been thinking about is Alvin you had mentioned practice, but like how much of This did you share like did you have a plan with your chair or were these decisions that you made on your own? You know my advice I think is the more people understand the plan the better, but I was wondering what was your experience you were the first to do it? What are people learning from you in terms of like how better to communicate or how much to have be a shared plan?

[Dr. Akibar] I think also in terms of managing the meeting room for the presentation that was more on my end. I was definitely taking the lead there but I did communicate with my chair ahead of time just to see kind of what her take was on that and really just making sure that we were both on the same page. I I really can't speak to a lot of the there because mine was more cut-and-dry pretty straightforward. I didn't run into too many complications that were systemic.

Thankfully, I didn't have any issues with a green bombing my only Tech issue of the able to get resolved the day before so a big part of it is really going to be talking with your chairs about what you what your response might be. If something does happen it having a plan in place. So they understand what can happen but also being willing to figure out who's going to be responsible for what for what?

[Garth] Yeah, let's talk a little bit about Plan B.

I think I think that's probably the most important thing and what Are your guys thoughts on some Plan B considerations? I put forth the idea and you can challenge me but I put forth the idea that a low-tech solution for Plan B is probably the best because I think most things that are going to go wrong are based upon this new technology, but there are other options. So, you know, what are your thoughts? What was your plan B Alvin or Hideko?

What what are you thinking about or what would you recommend to your faculty and your about their plan B's for this

[Hideko] I think I was jumping I think one of the things that we keep on coming back to in this conversation is to be able to have the planning transparently.

So I think Plan B C D E F and and all of that need to be talked at front when the plan B plan A is actually being worked out between the student and the committee members and one of the things that I think Even during this hour webner people are noticing is that you know, sound quality and those things so what what happens when those things basically deter the quality of the presentation all those things need to talk about so I agree with you Garth.

I would think that anything after plan a that should basically rely on something that is feasible. That is low Tech that is workable for all of people who are involved in the defense.

[Garth] Alvin, what about you? Did you have a plan b or did you just kind of grit your teeth and enforce it through?

[Dr. Akibar] So my plan B was honestly thankfully one that was not too difficult to work with. So basically the idea would have been that if the conference call went down or anything like that has happened. I would send a copy of the slides to my committee and then kind of follow along with them. Let them they would be able to read through and get an idea of when to advance the slides themselves and then kind of continued everything over the phone, but thankfully we did not have to come to that but I also seem kind of in the weeks since my defense and what's interviews and whatnot and have seen various strategies.

For how that work until I've seen a lot of success with kind of giving people the option to review the materials ahead of time. If you're worried about connection issues being ready to come, you know, do most communication over the phone or kind of have that going so that way you're not as Bound by let's say you're dealing with internet restriction or bandwidth restrictions having using the phone functions on a lot of these meetings software's really does work pretty well.

So a lot of the even even with the high tech Solutions the low Tech options, Ian can be a good fallback in case things start to act up.

[Garth] Yeah, I think I like that idea that you know the idea of keeping it low tech and and I see see people asking like should I still use PowerPoint and and I would I would say yeah, whatever your platform for doing your presentation try and make that as common as possible. I did mention earlier when we were saying, you know in video if you know nonverbal communication isn't as expressive.

I would make the same consideration also that possibly slides won't look as good. So when you're doing it in person, you can blow a slide up to you know, the size of that screen that's behind you. But when you're doing in a video, it's only going to be as big as whatever people are looking at. Did you did you have any issues with that where there are issues Alvin when you did your defense that like people couldn't read certain parts of the or you had to really think about how you're going to present some data or anything like that.

[Dr. Akibar] So for the most part I didn't have too many issues with that in part because when I looked at this, you know, I use PowerPoint for mine because it's what I'm most familiar with and I was not going to choose my defense to be the time to reinvent the wheel but I really did try to make it more large font text easier to read as well. As you know, having some imagery to kind of illustrate some of my points to make it easier to follow along not get, you know, the wall of text effect that tends to happen with someone somehow.

I'm like my first my proposal meeting but it was really just a matter of trying to make sure that everything was easily readable and available as well as just you know, kind of looking at my own screen and seeing like okay, I can see this on my laptop screen looking at this all in full screen. What are they going to be able to see from your little from their preview window?

[Garth] So we're kind of rolling up to the end of the hour. I think we went through a lot of the questions the advice that we had had given. I see a lot of people are asking still about did you people and again I think in the beginning of the slide, we really talked about that. That's a decision. I think you really want to think about with your committee having you did talk about how you you didn't you people when they first came in and things like that.

So any last thoughts or anything you want to reinforce before we kind of close up here at the end of the hour?

[Dr. Akibar] So I'll leave the fact that it definitely was strange. It's not how I envisioned things happening. I'm the first wtudent in my lab to matriculate and so it was a little isolating not to be able to share that I know my advisor was just as excited as I was about this and we were definitely ready to go all out with the celebration but then a pandemic hit so it's okay. If you're feeling a little you know, it's okay to feel a little bit strange about how everything is going to have to adjust.

Patient to figure out well what the celebration look like now that we can't really do what we typically would so I know a lot of my friends have been interesting to have wanted to do things like Zoom Hangouts and whatnot after my defense Zoom hang out with the last thing I wanted to do, so I caught up with a couple family members on the phone and then had a nice night in and watch some things and just kind of take a step back from what the new normal looks like for now because it's it's very strange. It's it can be distressing but it's still something worth celebrating

[Garth] Hideko any closing thoughts

[Hideko] I think I would concur with what a living is talking about. But I think the the number one importance I think for faculty and administrators is not to make any assumptions. I think oftentimes we we become idiosyncratic when the crisis happens we go back to the world or the ways and we look at the world as a backup.

It's something that we are familiar with and we shouldn't be making any assumptions about the the predicaments that our students are in what led them to to this point where they are now scheduling to do the defense what what basically took them to get here. We shouldn't be making any assumptions and making a proper celebrations based off of that and one of those assumptions that we shouldn't be making again.

I would like to remind all of us about at the digital iniquity or any kind of a inequities. What is that may happen in one's life that sometimes some of our students being on campus actually gave them more access to resources and now they are forced to be going back home or wherever they ended up going to they may have less resources.

So we shouldn't be making any assumptions that whatever the faculty are able to This is the exact type of resource or the quality of resource that our students are able to access.

[Garth] Excellent. I want to say, you know, we're running out of time. I wanted to really end this about 10 minutes before, you know, kind of staying on the academic clock. But before I do that, I want to really take the time to thank both our guests for being here today. I truly and I think our audience has even said so in the comments a treat appreciate your participation your advice and your taking the time, so I just want to tell both of you. Thank you very much.

[Hideko] Thank you.

[Dr. Akibar] Thank you Garth.

[Garth] So this is one of many webinars that we have been planning at APA in response to the covid-19 epidemic. It's part of what we're calling the staying on track process and you can visit our staying on track landing page to see what other webinars are scheduled and you can register for those webinars. So the the page is right there so you can see it. We are also posting record.

Signs of previous webinars so we will eventually have the recording for this one available and we will also make the slides available as a PDF. So you'll be able to come back later and visit the page and get any of the resources information and kind of revisit what we talked about today. So, please bookmark the page come back on a regular interval and see what else we're able to produce for you at the conclusion of this webinar. We're going to have a short survey for you to take and I'm really going to encourage you to take the time to complete that survey.

It is what we use to develop new webinars We Gather that information to try and improve what we've already done are, you know to improve upon what we've done for the future? So I really really encourage you if you take the opportunity to do that and up until then that's it for today. Please stay safe, and if you're getting ready to plan your defense, I wish you the best of luck. Thank you all and have a good day.