The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the planned summer research experiences of many high school and college students. If you are in this group, the most important thing to do is to sustain the interest in science and research that motivated you to seek out these opportunities in the first place. It is also important to take steps to remind the faculty members, at your intended summer experience and your home institution, of your enthusiasm for research. The program directors and faculty members that would have hosted you for your summer experience remain interested in stimulating and supporting your research interest. Reach out to them directly. While the paid internship program is canceled, maybe there are volunteer opportunities that can be performed remotely. Ask if there are opportunities to work on a project online. Perhaps there are existing datasets that could be analyzed using bioinformatic tools; or genes and proteins of potential interest to the lab for which you could garner more information through literature searches. Many labs might also be willing to have you participate in their lab meeting discussions, which they are likely conducting virtually. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the research topic that you would have explored and a great way to demonstrate your enthusiasm and motivation. You will also be able to discuss these experiences when you apply for PhD or other programs in the future.

If you were conducting research at your home institution prior to pandemic, reach out to your research advisor. As mentioned for the summer programs above, ask if there are opportunities to engage in discussions about your previous research topic. Are there virtual lab meetings that you can participate in? Is the PI, or another senior member in the lab, willing to engage in discussions with you about relevant research papers? Most scientists like to teach. They also value students who show drive and motivation. Most will support and nurture your interest. Also search online for potential open-source research opportunities; perhaps there is one at a nearby university.

If the above approaches don’t pan out, or even if they do, you can also search for additional exposure to research talks online. There are several such resources. For example, iBiology has a great series of research talks. They cover a broad range of topics and there are likely several presentations on that site that will be of interest. They also have a great series of conversations with scientists who have made significant discoveries. It is fun to hear from these scientists what it was like “in the moment”. There are other resources out there as well. Other sites, such as the Institute for Broadening Participation have additional resources for preparing for next steps in STEM education and careers. If possible, try to engage your peers in these activities. It is more fun to do as part of a group. You are also more likely to learn from each other by discussing these talks with each other. Whatever you do, have fun!

Brian Lewis, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice Provost for Outreach and Recruitment
Associate Dean for Diversity and Pre-Matriculation Programs
Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences
Associate Professor, Department of Molecular, Cell and Cancer Biology
University of Massachusetts Medical School
BSCP Student Advisor

Questions/Comments? hollie_desilva@hms.harvard.edu

www.bscp.org