

# ACADEMIC RESILIENCE

*Surviving and Thriving in Academia* provides short, accessible books for navigating the many challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities of academic careers. The series is particularly dedicated to supporting the professional journeys of early and mid-career academics and doctoral students but will present books of use to scholars at all stages in their careers. Books within the series draw on real-life examples from international scholars, offering practical advice and a supportive and encouraging tone throughout.

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An insightful and comforting selection of stories that explore the challenges overcome and the communities built during a time of global crisis. If you are an academic, this book offers ideas, strategies, and the sense that we are not alone in the difficulties of pandemic and post-pandemic academic life.

*–Amber McLeod, Lecturer, Monash University*

In 2020–2021 the global pandemic has challenged us all in different ways. This timely volume on Academic Resilience is underpinned by the strengths-based approach with contributions from academics around the globe and highlights that it is possible for individuals to thrive using strengths to cope with whatever life dishes up. The authors present a conceptual framework, the Academic Resilience Model (ARM), that addresses factors that help us do well despite adversity. The model should be highly useful for both researchers and practicing academics.

*–Erica Frydenberg, PhD AM,  
The University of Melbourne*

This book is an excellent reminder that despite the shockingly high rate of mental health issues among academics, pandemic or not, there are ways to overcome challenges and thrive in academia. These are the stories worth sharing, especially for early-career academics, such as myself, who

feel daunted by the prospect of starting a career in an already competitive field that has been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you and congratulations to the team for providing that sliver of hope for many of us!

*-Dr Ethel Villafranca, Research Fellow,  
The University of Melbourne*

# ACADEMIC RESILIENCE

Personal Stories and Lessons  
Learnt from the COVID-19  
Experience

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# PREFACE

Unlike most of the book's authors, I experienced the pandemic in the last year of a long, academic career. This fact certainly put paid to any earlier fears I might have had that my final year as Provost of Universitas 21 [U21] was going to be just 'more of the same'. However, my own experiences of academic resilience during 2020–2021 had a great deal in common with those contributing to this excellent collection, developing swift and innovative responses to the unprecedented crises created by COVID-19.

As the book's authors demonstrate, academic resilience as a concept is frustratingly difficult to define, as it requires academics to find solutions and successes within often convoluted institutional dynamics, while dealing with their own professional and personal life trajectories. When the seismic impact of COVID-19 was added to this mix, the resulting complexities for academics were prodigious and, for some, touched by considerable personal stress, grief and loss. What the authors in this volume have individually and collectively demonstrated is that academic resilience during the pandemic was largely about surviving a series of complex and emotive challenges and emerging with positive outcomes for academics themselves, their students, colleagues, and communities inside and outside the university.

As with earlier books in the series, this collection shines a focus on the personal and professional experiences of international academics across varying career stages. This includes the many challenges that they face negotiating their way to success through often labyrinthine university systems, governed by standards that can, at times, be somewhat less than transparent. This volume provides an important exploration of the additional effects of the pandemic on these academics. It showcases how different academics seized opportunities and became involved in new initiatives when the pandemic brought significant changes to their own lives and the daily business of their universities. Some made important contributions to all-university crisis planning or were able to draw on their advanced digital skills, advising and guiding more senior colleagues who were moving their teaching online. Others contributed to the creation of new international online conferences as well as establishing new outreach roles for their university and with the local community.

What the different narratives illustrate is that taking on such important new resilient roles was of significant value, in very challenging times, not only for the individuals themselves but also for their institutions. It is to the credit of the joint Presidents of the 27 U21 universities that, early in the pandemic, they encouraged U21 to provide online international leadership training workshops, recognising the need to support an emerging new cohort of innovators and leaders at an international level, many at earlier stages of their careers. However, it will also be important to monitor how well these new roles will be recognised for institutional advancement, in the longer term. Universities will need to ensure that promotional and reward criteria can recognise the very different and resilient academic contributions during COVID-19 in a fair and equitable manner.

Hopefully we are almost at the beginning of the end of COVID-19, and a review of the pandemic's longer-term impact on higher education, both locally and internationally, is needed. The changes wrought by COVID-19 on universities in general, and teaching in particular, have shown that the Academy has a great deal more capacity for swift transformation and flexibility than would ever have been imagined. Retaining and further developing areas where the pandemic revealed successful new systemic approaches for university staff and students will be important for the future of higher education, as will be learning from individual experiences of survival, as typified by the narratives in this book. They offer excellent examples of how strong and resilient academics found ways to go beyond the endurance of a global crisis and created innovative solutions with the capacity to support lasting positive change. The book's editors are to be congratulated for collecting and curating these very important stories.

Walk on air, against your better judgement.

–Seamus Heaney, *The Gravel Walks* [1996]

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As you will explore in this book, being productive during a global pandemic is not easy. Writing a book and running a research project between three countries, with participants from 17 countries, could have been impossible. The fact that this book has been published is a tribute, then, to the many resilient and generous people in academia who supported us and our desire to better understand how the pandemic life was treating academics around the world. Indeed, the bamboo plant on this book's cover represents the strength and resilience of many of our colleagues – flexible, bending with the wind, capable of adapting to any circumstance – even when the pandemic attempts to break our plans.

What began as a question about how we turn the experiences of 2020 into a positive outcome has developed into a network of collegiality and shared stories from around the world. What struck us most was the cohesive narratives of support, a desire for social connections and a willingness to explore new ways of seeing the world. With that in mind, we would like to thank everyone who contributed to the research and, in turn, to this book. Despite this particularly challenging period, we have been able to develop new insights, new ideas and a shared understanding of the academic world. Thank you.

Joanne, Caroline, Jay and Marian

I dedicate this book to my friends Kerry, Jenn and Nina who are the family I was lucky enough to choose and who were my pandemic sisters during the past year. I am equally grateful to my academic friends Caroline, Jay and Marian who kept me sane and on task throughout 2020 and into 2021. You showed me true resilience, modelled ethical excellence in troubling times and connected me to the world as our daily lives kept shrinking.

Joanne

Whilst life during the pandemic has posed significant challenges, unlike many people around the world, I could take access to the internet for granted. This enabled my teaching and research to continue. More importantly, despite being thousands of miles away from our family, being able to video-chat with our son, daughter and granddaughter whenever we wanted was a panacea. In life, everything changes. However, my husband and I have always faced life side by side, and for him I am deeply grateful.

Caroline

To my siblings whom I continue to dream other possible worlds with; to my mother who taught me how to love life despite all the pain it gives; and to my father who introduced me to this wonderful world of reading and writing.

Jay

For my dad, who taught me how to run.

Marian