

Workshop on Healthy & Effective Work Habits And Work/Life Balance

Seth Cable and Joe Pater
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Question to Start the Discussion:

What are some major differences (if any) between your work-life balance in graduate school vs. as an undergrad?

- Quantity, of course, but what else is salient to you?...

Some Grounding / Reassurance:

Grad school is definitely more demanding than undergrad studies, but:

- Nobody does linguistics 24/7!
- We all maintain plenty of outside interests and activities:
 - Friends and family (social life)
 - Non-academic pursuits and hobbies (also often social)
 - Regular exercise **and sleep!**
- Your mental well being is always **top priority!**
 - This can often require that we *scale back* on our professional and intellectual goals & activities

Burnout:

A Big (and Avoidable) Risk With Grad School

- ‘Burnout’ is not just especially acute stress or exhaustion
 - It is ‘a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a **sense of reduced accomplishment** and **loss of personal identity**’ (Mayo Clinic)
- Thus, burnout can result from a combination of acute stress and depression.
- As will come as no surprise, academics are especially at risk for this condition.

Some Major Signs of Burnout Include:

- Feeling cynical / overly critical about your work
- Needing to 'drag yourself' to work
- Persistent lack of energy / difficulty concentrating
- **Disillusionment ('Why am I even doing this?')**
- **Physical Symptoms:**
 - Change in sleep habits
 - Headaches, stomach aches
- Lack of satisfaction in your accomplishments
- Always feeling like 'you have to do more'
- **Difficulty Relaxing**

Factors that Can Contribute to Burnout:

- Lack of control / agency in the work you do
(*e.g.*, Having to TA/TO a class you dislike)
- Unclear expectations regarding your work
(*e.g.*, Not knowing where to 'go next' in your research)
- Extremes of activity / Monotony punctuated by chaos
(*e.g.*, The rush of work as deadlines approach)
- **Work / Life Imbalance**
(*e.g.*, I can't go out with friends tonight because I have to write more...)

For more information on burnout, see:

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/burnout-prevention-and-recovery.htm>

Strategies to Avoid Burnout and Work Productively:

- These are based on suggestions from previous years...
- As always, your own mileage may vary...

1. Make Downtime a Priority, Daily and Weekly

2. Be Flexible in *How* You Work

- a. Match your work/activities to your energy level
(*e.g.*, 'I'm too tired to do this effectively today')
- b. Make a schedule that fits with your daily rhythms
(*e.g.*, 'I write best before noon, so that's when I will write.')

3. Learn to say 'no'.

Keeping a regularly updated 'To Do' list can help you avoid over-committing

4. Set *Process* Goals, Instead of *Productivity* Goals
 - NOT: ‘Today I will write five pages.’
 - But Rather: ‘Today I will write for two hours.’
5. Work early to create a structured plan for large projects
 - Work with your advisor to break the project up into doable subparts
 - Set distinct, multiple deadlines for the different parts of the project
 - Set a relatively *early* deadline for the project as a whole.
6. If you don’t know what the ‘next step’ in your work is,
discuss it with your faculty mentor!
 - Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that you can’t meet with your advisor because ‘you don’t have anything new’

7. If you don't know what the expectations are – or you feel they are too high – **discuss it with your faculty mentor!**
- Miscommunication about this is **common** and can create to a lot of stress for students.
 - Faculty are very happy to work with you to make sure that your workload is manageable and the plan of action is clear!
 - **You can also always bring these concerns to the GPD**

Important Note:

If you're ever having trouble working with a particular faculty member, you can always get confidential advice from the GPD.

Discussion Question:

What are some other things that have helped you to 'make it work'?

Professional Support

- Even when things are 'going great' professionally, this can still be a very difficult period in people's lives...
- Many of us have gotten great support from professional counseling.
- On campus, we have the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health: <https://www.umass.edu/counseling/>
- Students may also be eligible for accommodations through Disability Services: <https://www.umass.edu/disability/>

Additional Resources:

- The **UMass Graduate School** offers a wide variety of workshops for graduate students, on such things as grant writing, teaching, career preparation, and personal development:
 - <https://www.umass.edu/graduate/>
- The **National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity** offers webinars and other 'on-demand access to mentoring, tools, and support you need to be successful in the Academy'.
 - <https://www.facultydiversity.org/>
 - Click on 'Services', then 'Join Online'
 - Select 'University of Massachusetts Amherst' to activate your membership
- More on managing stress and recognizing depression in grad school:
<https://jameshaytonphd.com/quick-tips/phd-stress-dont-ignore-the-warning-signs>

- More on managing the transition from undergrad life to grad life:
<https://sachristopher.wordpress.com/2013/03/10/transitioning-from-undergraduate-to-graduate-school/>
- An interesting blog-post on how 'Knowledge Workers are Bad at Working (and Here's What to Do About It...):
<https://www.calnewport.com/blog/2012/11/21/knowledge-workers-are-bad-at-working-and-heres-what-to-do-about-it/>
- An Inside Higher Ed piece on achieving work/life in grad school:
<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/achieving-work-life-balance>