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

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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
  o 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:
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
   o **NOT**: ‘Today I will write five pages.’
   o **But Rather**: ‘Today I will write for two hours.’

5. Work early to create a structured plan for large projects
   o Work with your advisor to break the project up into doable subparts
   o Set distinct, multiple deadlines for the different parts of the project
   o 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**!
   o 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 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/](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://wwwfacultydiversity.org/](https://wwwfacultydiversity.org/)
  - Click on ‘Services’, then ‘Join Online’
  - Select ‘University of Massachusetts Amherst’ to activate your membership

- 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/