Balance Graduate School & Personal Life

2017 CRA-W Graduate Cohort Workshop
Top 5 Reasons why Personal Life is Essential for Great Research!

People with meaningful lives outside the lab have

- Higher Risk Tolerance (support networks & self-esteem)
- Brain Rejuvenation (required for creative brain work)
- Good citizenship (both outside and in the lab)
- Broad skills (people skills, unexpected idea cross fertilization)
- Perspective (long term thinking, combat narrow-mindedness)
Life in Grad School

Me:
Got married, had a kid! (4th year)
World Travel (Australia, Jamaica, Paris)
Death in the family

My Lab Members:
Kirstin: Robotics; Serious hiking, serious artist, dogs
Melinda: Robotics; Politically active, dance, starwars
Jeff: Robotics/Ocean; Triathlons!, disability tech
Self Reflection

• Is your life in balance?
  – rate your work/life balance on a scale of 1 (imbalanced) to 5 (well-balanced)
• When do you feel most in-balance and out-of-balance?
• List three things that trigger you to go out of balance.
• List three non-academic activities you enjoy the most.
• List five things that are most important to you.
Identify the external sources of imbalance

- Academic demands:
  - Courses: advanced topics, new skills required, ...
  - Research: open-ended questions, creativity, vague definitions of quality, pressure to publish, no obvious finishing line, ...
  - Relationships: (co-)advisor, lab-mates, remote collaborations, ...
  - Work: TA, RA, internship, ...
  - Logistics: focus on course work or start research earlier, choosing/changing advisor, ...
  - ...

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Women
Identify the external sources of imbalance

- Personal life:
  - Many people in our lives: partners, parents, children, friends, …
  - Life commitments, …
  - Health issues: physical, mental, …
  - Finances as a poor graduate student, …
  - Logistics of caring for loved ones, home, pets, vehicles, …
  - Homesick
  - …
Identify the internal sources of imbalance

- Unrealistic goals
- Forced creativity
- Lack of planning
- Procrastination
- Replying on external affirmation
Tip 1: Time management

• Barriers:
  – Unstructured nature of research, and long delayed rewards
  – Enduring bad myth of workaholism being correlated with success
  – Solution: Practical and Philosophical (Reject the Myth!)

• Time management helps a lot! Some potential solutions
  – Find your “best time” in the day, block it. (Find your best work style)
  – Block one day a week research only (no email/social media)
  – Schedule “rejuvenation” (gym, concert tickets, community service)
  – Schedule fixed hours for “stuff”, be ok with that.
  – Reward yourself for input not output.

• Many books, find one that “fits” your nature
  – Deep Work (Newport) is one that I like.
Tip 2: Consider trade-offs

• You can not get it all!!
• Trade-off
  – between goals and expectations
  – between ambitions and reality
  – Between what you want to do and what you can do
  – …
• Saying “NO” is a choice you can make
  – Take time to decide
  – Consider trade-offs
  – Avoid guilt-driven decisions
• Accept imbalance and adjust
Tip 3: Boost self-confidence

• We are human beings, admit that
  – we may succeed and may fail on sth
  – having insecurity is normal
  – we exist in a society that has certain social normal
  – we are being evaluated by others
  – …

• But we can
  – enjoy our successes
  – think positively
  – seek out support
  – exhibit confidence
  – …
Tip 4: Make time for yourself

• Why do we need this?
  • Creative and highly technical work is hard on our minds and bodies
  • Burn-out is a real thing that effects creative and talented people
  • Worse for women because it’s still a patriarchal society

• Brain Rejuvenation!
  • What do you love?
  • Happiness is strongly correlated with “small” things.
  • Schedule “rejuvenation”
    (gym, concert tickets, community service, friends, weekends)
  • Take vacations!
Self Reflection

• Reevaluate your goals.
• Mark the importance of stress triggers.
• List three activities you can do to de-stress.