

# Balance Graduate School & Personal Life

*2017 CRA-W  
Graduate Cohort Workshop*



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# 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)



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# Life in Grad School

## Me:

Got married, had a kid! (4<sup>th</sup> 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



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# 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.



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# 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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# 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
  - ...



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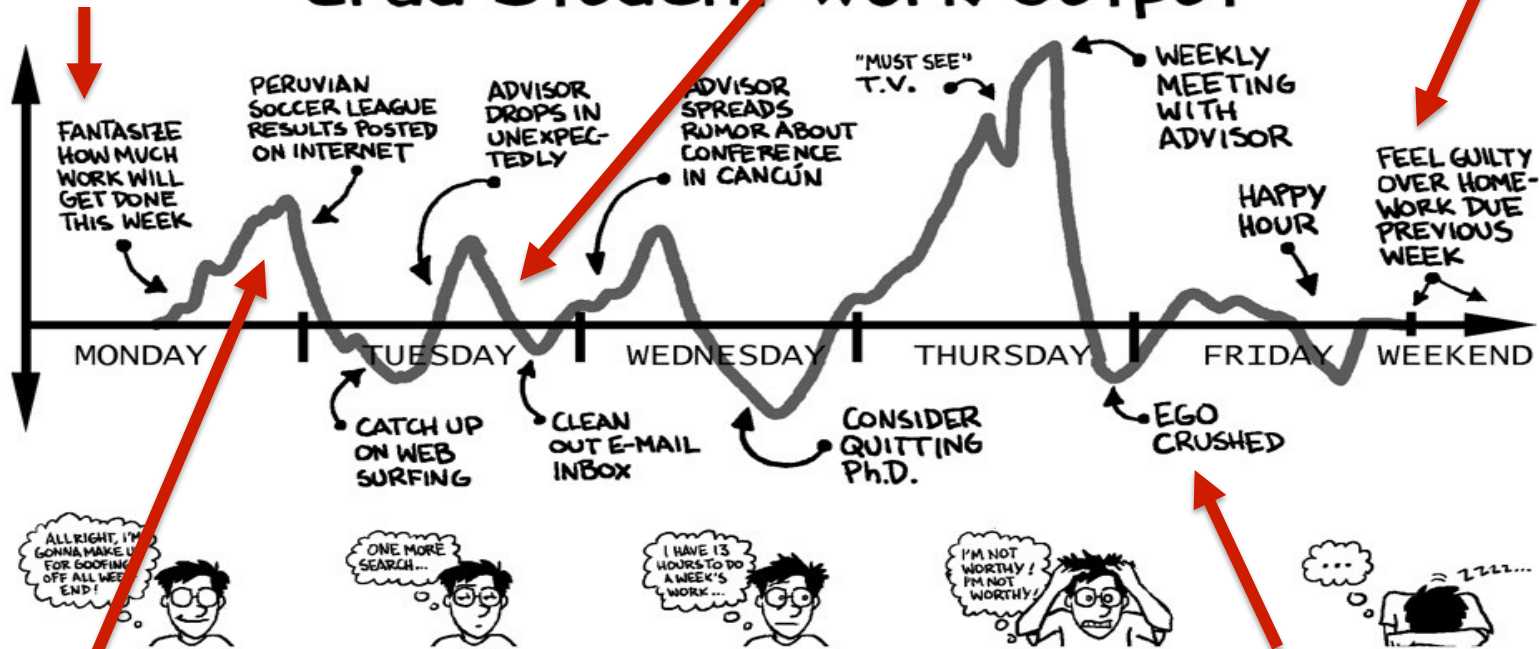
# Identify the internal sources of imbalance

Unrealistic goals

Forced creativity

Lack of planning

## Grad Student Work Output



Procrastination

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Replying on external affirmation



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# 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.



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## 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



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## 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
  - ...



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## 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!



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# Self Reflection

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



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