Balancing Graduate School & Personal Life

2018 CRA-W Graduate Cohort Workshop
Your Panelist – Radhika Nagpal

- **Education**
  - Ph.D, MIT, 2001 (SB also MIT 1994)

- **Career**
  - Assistant Professor (CS) Harvard University 2004 – tenured in 2012
  - Took lots of “gaps” between things (Bell Labs, Postdoc, Fellowship)
  - Research Areas: Bio-inspired Robotics and Swarm Intelligence

- **Family and Fun:**
  - Kids: daughter (17) and son (14). India-AfroCarribean mixed family
  - Hobbies: Painting! And family vacations on beaches.
Your Panelist – A.J. Bernheim Brush

Education

Career
- Microsoft, Microsoft Research for 12 years, 2 years in Cortana product
- Year of leave working in Industry as programmer for personal reasons
- Research Areas: HCI, Tech for the Home (Speech Interaction, Ubicomp, IoT)

Family and Fun:
- Kids: Colin (16) and Ryan (13).
- Hobbies: Exercise, Reading, Travel
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 - Radhika

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
Life in Grad School – A.J.

**Big changes**
- Got married
- Moved across the country for a year
- Changed my research area 3 times
- Long term internship
- Had a kid

**Kept a life outside of research**
- Helped found the UW women’s ultimate frisbee team
- Played A LOT of ultimate frisbee
- Women’s grad school IM basketball team (we were terrible but had a good time)
- Strong circle of friends, worked out together, still close now
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, …
  - …
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 possible internal sources of imbalance

A bunch of options…

Forced creativity
Unrealistic goals
Procrastination
Replying on external affirmation
Lack of planning

…
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 stuff
  – 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
  – ...

CRA-W
Computing Research Association
Women
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.
Thanks.

Questions, please.