Your Panelist: Rebecca Wright

Education
- Ph.D, Yale 1994, Columbia B.A. 1988

Career
- Bell Labs and AT&T Labs, 1994-2002
- Stevens Institute of Technology → Rutgers → Barnard College
- Research Areas: security, privacy, distributed computing

Family and Fun:
- 20-year old son at University of British Columbia
- Hobbies: yoga & handstands, travel, the beach, gardens
Your Panelist – Andrea Danyluk

• Education

• Career
  – Professor at Williams College since 1994
  – Year off from Williams: Academic director of Align M.S. in CS at Northeastern University 2018-19.
  – Research Areas: Machine Learning (but also CS and Data Science Curriculum)

• Family and Fun:
  – Kids: son (26) and daughter (24).
  – Hobbies: Hiking, Travel, Crossword Puzzles.
Your Panelist – Mondira (Mandy) Deb Pant

- Education
- Trajectory

- Family and Fun:
  - Kids: two daughters (17) and (14).
  - Hobbies: Dancing, Yoga, Hiking, Travel
Top 5 Reasons Why Personal Life is Essential

People with meaningful lives outside of work have:

- Higher risk tolerance (support networks & self-esteem)
- Brain rejuvenation (required for creative brain work)
- Good citizenship (both outside and in the lab/office)
- Broad skills (people skills, unexpected idea cross fertilization)
- Perspective (long-term thinking, combat narrow-mindedness)

Note: having a meaningful work life is also important and can also contribute to overall balance!
Life in Grad School – Andrea

Big changes
• Got married 2 weeks before starting
• Changed research area; then lost primary advisor due to tenure denial
• Started job search just a little too early; started full-time research job while ABD
• Very pregnant at graduation

Kept a life outside of research
• Rediscovered exercise and especially hiking
• Went to lots of concerts
• Small but great set of grad school friends; worked on research and spent time at the gym together
• Stayed close with high school and college friends
Life in Grad School – Mandy

Me
• Moved 8500 miles across the seas (from India) leaving my family behind
• Got married after my MS
• Did two internships
• Two body challenge at school

How I kept my sanity
• Hikes, dance, exercise (aerobics)
• Won “free tickets” over the radio to attend many concerts (couldn’t afford as a poor grad student)
• Great support from spouse/advisor/lab mates
• Volunteered at Atlanta Olympics (Gatech was the host village)
Life in Grad School – Rebecca

Me:
Long-distance relationship
Learned to adult (first time in my own apartment)
Got a cat
Several lasting friendships with other students
Spent a lot of time as a TA

Interests and Activities Beyond Academics:
Sang with the Yale Slavic Chorus
Danced with the Yaledancers
Some good vacations with friends, family
Self Reflection

1. Is your life in balance? Rate how the balance of your life feels on a scale of 1 (imbalanced) to 5 (well-balanced)

2. When do you feel most in-balance and out-of-balance?

3. List three things that trigger you to go out of balance.

4. List three non-academic activities you enjoy the most.

5. List five things that are most important to you.
Possible External Sources of Imbalance (1)

- **Academic demands:**
  - **Courses:** advanced topics, new skills required, required courses vs. courses of interest, …
  - **Research:** identifying a topic, not sure where to start, open-ended questions, creativity, vague definitions of quality, pressure to publish, no obvious finishing line, …
  - **Relationships:** (co-)advisor, labmates, remote collaborations, …
  - **Work:** TA, RA, internship, …
  - **Logistics:** decisions whether to focus on course work or start research earlier, choosing/changing advisor, summer internships vs. staying at your institution vs. other, …
  - **Culture:** fallacy of “they who work the most hours accomplish the most,” …
  - …
Possible External Sources of Imbalance (2)

- **Personal life:**
  - Many people in our lives: partners, parents, children, friends, …
  - Life commitments
  - Physical and mental health
  - Finances
  - Logistics of caring for loved ones, home, pets, vehicles, …
  - Homesickness
  - …
Possible Internal Sources of Imbalance

- Forced creativity
- Unrealistic goals
- Procrastination
- Relying on external affirmation
- Lack of planning
- Worrying (vs. productive activity)
- ...
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)
  – Consider blocking one day a week for 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 process not output.

• Many books, find one that “fits” your nature
  – Deep Work (Newport) is written by a computer science professor who has also become a bestselling author.
Tip 2: Consider Tradeoffs

• You cannot have it all. At least, not all at one time.

• Tradeoffs can be made:
  – 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 (but not too long, especially if you plan to say no)
  – Consider trade-offs
  – Avoid guilt-driven decisions

• Sometimes ok to accept some imbalance and adjust temporarily.
  – e.g., to finish thesis this year
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 norms
  – we are being evaluated by others
  – …

• AND 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 affects creative and talented people
  • Often 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” (a walk in the woods, exercise, community service, friends & family, weekends)
  • Take some vacations
  • Don’t neglect sleep, nutrition, and hydration.
Self Reflection

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