

Balancing Graduate School and Personal Life

*2015 CRA-W
Graduate Cohort Workshop*



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It's all about you!

- Your definition of grad school/personal life balance is **yours!**
- Requires continual reflection and reconsideration
- Lack of balance tends to drive stress higher



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(Hopeful) Session take-aways

- What does graduate school and personal life balance mean to you?
- When do you feel in balance versus out of balance?
- What are your professional and life goals?
- What changes should you make (if any!) to achieve your goals?



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The plan

```
func doFacilitate() {  
    topics := [4]string("meaning",  
                        "characteristics",  
                        "goals",  
                        "actions")  
  
    for _, value := range topics {  
        doExercise()  
        seedIdeas()  
        suggestTips()  
    }  
    discussion ()  
}
```



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Q1:

**What does graduate school
and personal life balance mean
to you?**

Exercise #1

- Think of a time when you have felt “in balance”
- Think of a time when you have felt “out of balance”



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**Why we might lose
balance...**

General Academic Stresses

- **The nature of grad school itself**
 - Research: open-ended, exploration of the “unknown”
 - Milestones more vague than course requirements
 - Your solution needs to be the “best” and “only”
 - No obvious finishing date
- **You here because you are a “high achiever”**
 - Goal-oriented perfectionists: always more to do
 - Competition for “who works the hardest”
- **Stress of multi-tasking**
- **Insecurities (we all have them!)**
- **We cannot manage an insane pace forever**



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Specific Academic Stresses

- **Courses**

- Master all the material, want to do well
- Sometimes, “well enough” is ok

Others?

- **Research**

- New experiences and new levels of independence and maturity (paper submissions, rejections...)
- Need to push through times you are just stuck
- Requires multi-tasking (literature survey, idea generation, coding, experiments, writing...) and creativity!
- Requires learning from but also “managing” your advisor

- **Advisor/Thesis Topic**

- Choosing a good thesis topic is a non-trivial task

- **Work as a TA, RA, etc.**

- Work-load, multi-tasking...



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Personal Stresses

- **Many people in our lives (partners, parents, friends, children...)**
 - They make us happy but their stress can become ours
- **Finding a partner, starting a family**
- **Finances on a grad student stipend**
- **Logistics of caring for a home, pets ...**
- **Health issues**
- **Being away from people you care about**



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Q2:

**When do you feel in balance
versus out of balance?**

Exercise #2

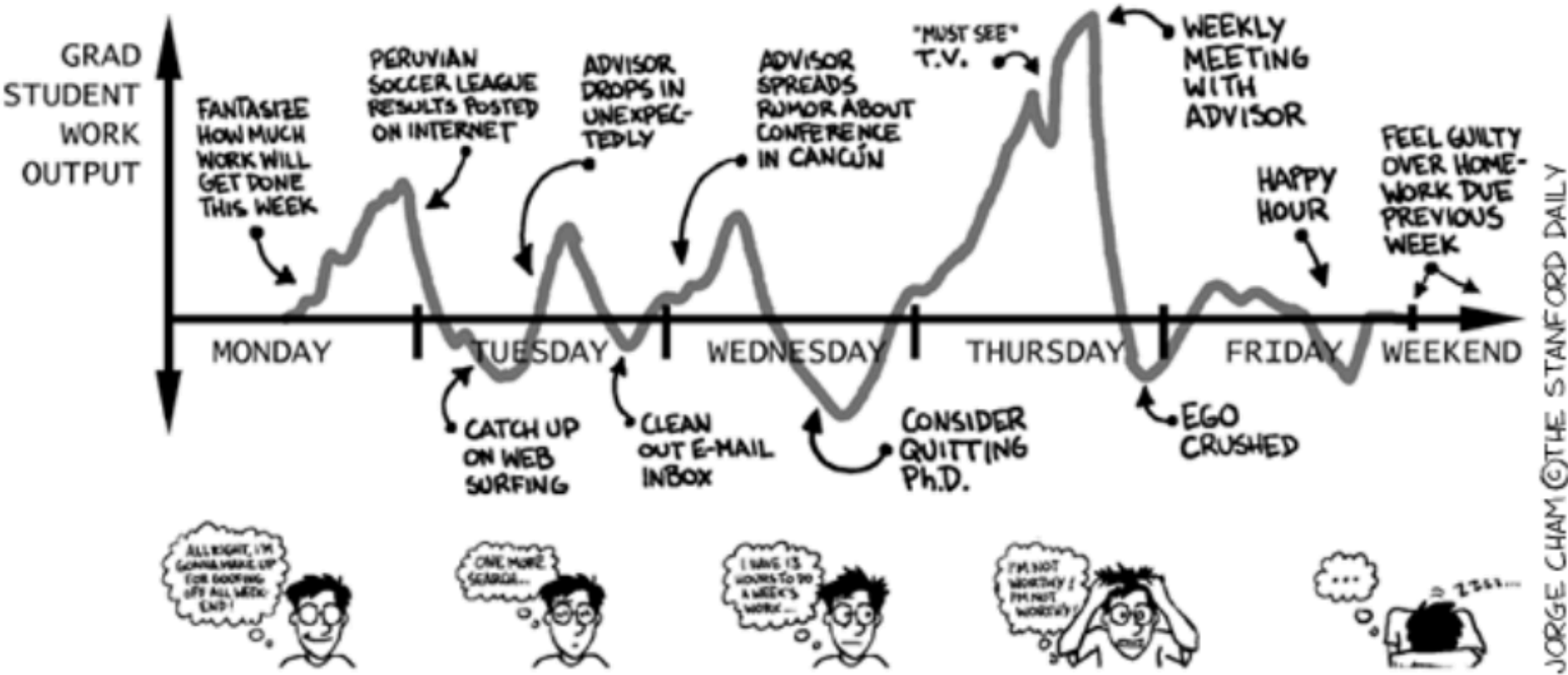
- Write down three points for each of these statements
 - I feel in balance when ...
 - I feel out of balance when...



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Factors affecting balance...



JORGE CHAM ©THE STANFORD DAILY



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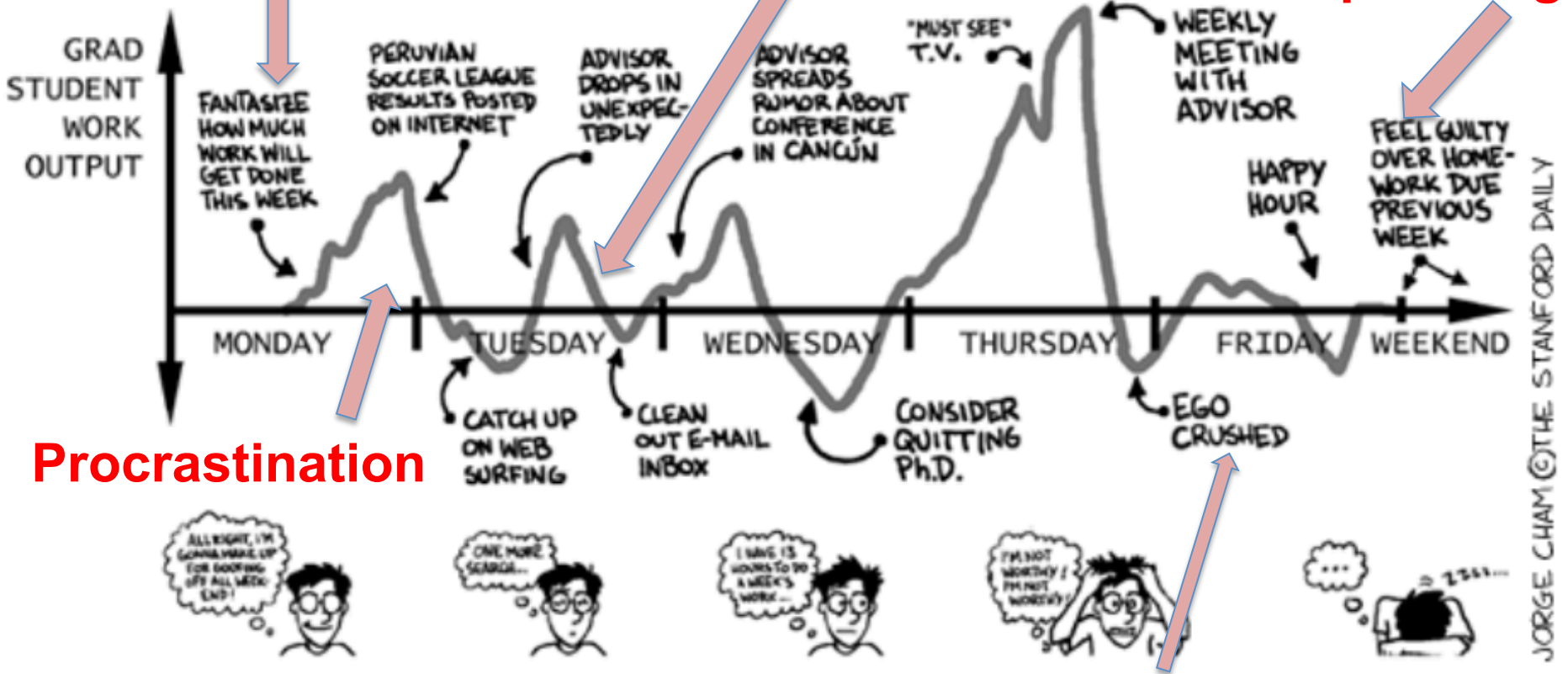
Unrealistic goals

Forced creativity

Lack of planning

Procrastination

Relying on external affirmation



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Factors affecting balance

- Figure out which factors affect your balance
 - Unrealistic goals?
 - Procrastination?
 - Forced creativity?
 - Relying on external affirmation?
 - Lack of planning?
 - Working too close to deadlines?
 - Others???



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Q3:

**What are your professional
and life goals?**

Exercise #3

- My #1 goal for the grad cohort is to ...
- My #1 goal personally for the next three months is to ...
- My #1 goal professionally for the next three months is to ...



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**Setting and managing
goals and expectations...**

Achieving balance with goals and expectations

- **Know your goals!**
 - Make them realistic; Write them down
 - Post them where you can see them
 - Ruthlessly prioritize
- **Understand expectations of others**
 - Which expectations are self-inflicted!
- **Understand what is required to achieve a goal**
 - Why do you want to achieve the goal?
 - Is the goal achievable?
 - How will you evaluate progress?
 - Talk to mentors and others
- **Learn to enjoy the process**
 - Focus on the present
 - Appreciate achievements before moving on



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Q4:

**What changes should you
make (if any) to achieve your
goals?**

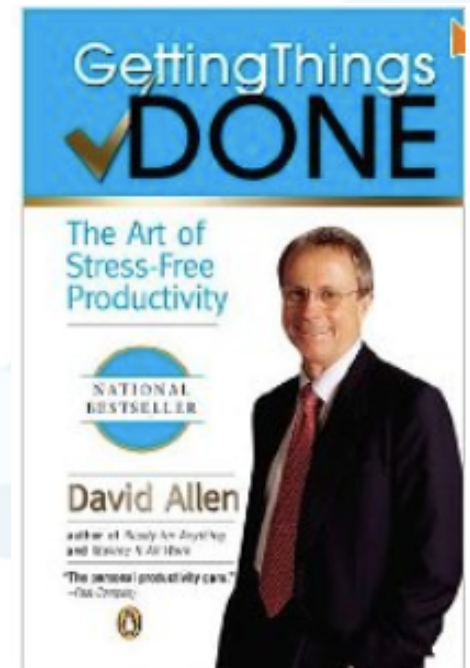
Exercise #4

	Achievable?	Realistic?	1 think you might have to change?
My #1 goal for grad cohort is to...			
My #1 goal personally for next 3 months			
My #1 goal professionally for next 3 months			

**Tips and strategies to help
achieve balance and goals...**

Tip #1: Time management (Productivity != Time spent)

- **Treat graduate school like a job**
 - Doesn't need to be and shouldn't be 24 hrs/7 days a week
- **Know when it's time to stop**
 - Keep the perfectionist under control
 - Break work into 1-2 hours tasks
- **Get organized**
 - To-do lists: next, later, scheduled, someday
 - Keep a calendar
 - Set aside time to review tasks/calendar each day
 - Keep track of progress
- **Avoid distractions**
 - Make a list of bad habits
 - Find where you work productively
 - Set aside time for email
 - Write down stray thoughts, save for later



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Tip #2: Choose activities carefully

- **Saying “yes” to one thing means saying “no” to something else**
 - Or at least it means having less time for what you are already doing
- **Take some time before you decide**
 - “Thanks for the invitation, let me think it over and get back to you by X”
- **Does it fit your goals and priorities?**
- **Do not do anything out of guilt**
 - Say “yes” or “no” to the task not the person



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Tip #3: Manage others

- **If you plan to say “no” to a request to take on a new responsibility**
 - Do it as soon as possible
 - Suggest someone else who might be available, want to do it and be good at it
 - If you really wish you could do it, say so; ask to be invited again
- **Set boundaries and parameters**
 - Explain why you believe it will take longer
 - Communicate the resources you will need
- **What to do about the advisor, student (e.g., if you TA), fellow grad student who needs you *now***
 - I'd be happy to talk/help you/etc. Can we schedule a time (in 5 min, an hour, next week ...) _to do that?



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Tip #4: Cope with insecurities

- **Seek out a support system**
 - Mentors
 - Family and friends
 - Other students
- **Realize we *all* have insecurities**
- **Prepare for tasks/meetings to minimize your chances of failing**
 - But we all fail once in a while . It's a natural consequence of doing something hard
- **Learn to enjoy your successes**
 - Don't belittle your own accomplishments
 - Keep a "good file" of positive feedback



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Tip #5: Make time for yourself

- **Schedule time for yourself**
 - You need to make “free time” sometimes
- **Exercise! Hobbies!**
- **Share responsibilities with friends**
- **Streamline**
- ***Do not apologize for a life outside of graduate school!***



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Tip #6: Learn what motivates you

- **Figure out how you are motivated**
 - “Fear” – e.g., sign up for a half marathon
 - “Big reward” – e.g., trips, clothes, stuff
 - Publicity – e.g., tell all your friends about it
 - ...?
- **Use your motivators to help achieve your goals**



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