

Balancing Graduate School & Personal Life

*2018 CRA-W
Graduate Cohort Workshop*



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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.



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Your Panelist – A.J. Bernheim Brush



Education

- Ph.D, University of Washington 2002, Williams College B.A. 1996

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)



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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



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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



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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 possible internal sources of imbalance

A bunch of options...

Forced creativity

Unrealistic goals

Procrastination

Replying on external affirmation

Lack of planning

...



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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 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
 - ...



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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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Thanks.

Questions, please.



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