My World Is Not My Doctoral Program: Re-imagining Balance During Graduate School

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Introduction

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Learning Outcomes

After attending this webinar, graduate students will be able to:

▪ Reframe what balance is.

▪ Explain why one overarching definition of balance does not exist.

▪ Describe at least 2 activities they can complete to begin creating a sense of school-life blend for themselves.
A Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.

In particular, the University of Florida resides on land of the Timucua people and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Additionally, I acknowledge that Indigenous land was expropriated from over 120+ tribal nations as part of the Morrill Act in order to originally fund the University of Florida.
Graduate students often have time conflicts between school and personal life that add to a sense of stress and a lowered sense of well-being (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Stratton et al., 2006).
Grad students with a support network tend to
- perform better academically,
- experience less emotional and physical distress,
- withdraw less frequently from ambiguous or tension-producing settings, and
- suffer from fewer severe physical and psychiatric illness that socially isolated persons suffer (Goplerud, 1980).

What We Know
What We Found: No Universal Definition

- There is *no one perfect way* to balance the multiple roles doctoral students have and *no universal standard* to which all doctoral students should strive.

- Determining the proper balance is a *personal choice* and is influenced by how *YOU* prioritize *YOUR* academic roles, family roles, and personal roles at any given moment (Haynes et al., 2012).
Instead of School-Life Balance…

“Balance assumes that there is a zero-sum game and that you are keeping score on either side.”

- Kathy Hobgood, Assistant Vice President for Student Auxiliary Services, Clemson University
…Consider School-Life Blend

- Fit your work into your life and your life into your work.
What We Found: Coping Strategies Matter

- There will be fluctuations in internal motivation; thus, students need to develop effective coping strategies.
- These include:
  - Learning to be flexible and adaptable to unforeseen challenges
  - Seeing the program as a challenge she can overcome
  - Using spirituality as a way to maintain balance (Haynes et al., 2012).
Strategy: Reflection

- Spend 15-30 minutes and reflect on the following questions:
  - How and why did I apply to graduate school in the ______ program?
  - Do I really want to do this?
    - Why? What do I need in order to meet my goals that I described in the first question?
    - Why not? What would it take to get a yes?

Reflection adapted from the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity.
Graduate students have high standards that can lead to perfectionism.

High standards is what led them to grad school, but it started to affect their personal lives too.

This created added stress and affect their ability to do well in any aspect of their life (Prikhidko & Haynes, 2018).

What We Found: Perfectionism Hurts
Strategy: Vary Your Standards

1. Identify 1 myth or unwritten norm.
2. Vary or lower the standard around that norm.
3. You cannot choose: attending class, writing your thesis/dissertation, or self-care (sleep, eating, exercise, etc.).

- Myth: Every class presentation must have amazing graphics and images to be successful.
- Lower Standard: This week, my classes will have a simple white background and black letters. I will save time and not search for images.

Activity adapted from the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity.
Goal-setting should be adjusted each semester for realistic social, economic, and personal expectations (Haynes et al., 2012).

Short-term “mini-goals” or milestones can include items like:
- conference presentations
- manuscript submissions
- professional association involvement
- other academic-related activities
A great place to start includes the "Chart Your Course: A Strategic Roadmap for Graduate Student Success at UF" available on the OGDP website under the Planning Resources tab.

- Different roadmaps for doctoral students and masters students

The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a tool to assess your skills, map your goals, and plan your strategy for successfully completing your graduate program of study.
Building a support network of friends, family, and other doctoral students can help avoid unnecessary stress or friction and provide ways for students to blend school and life (Haynes et al., 2012).

- Strategy: families and friends can attend departmental social functions (if allowed) and attend public events held on-campus with their students.
Questions/Discussion
References


References (continued)


Additional Resources

