

Core Competency 4: Understanding the University Context

CIRTL Cast "Thriving as a Faculty Member" Seminar Series

March 3, 2015: Achieving a Healthy Work-Life Balance

March 10, 2015: Effective Mentoring of Graduate Students

March 24, 2015: Women in STEM, navigating academic careers



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Advice and Strategies from Seminars

- Expectations for anyone with a graduate degree are high, going to have to sacrifice personal things or professional things whether you are in academia or alternative career path
- Personal and professional life blend together
 - Need to be passionate about your career but don't let it consume you
 - Need to be productive, but also maintain your mental and physical health
 - There is no one right way to have balance, if you feel good then you have found your balance
 - You need to be strong, if you fall apart and don't take care of yourself then everything else will suffer
 - Use a flexible schedule
 - Measure yourself on your productivity rather than hours spent working, focus on completing tasks not on timelines
 - Flexible in where and when work gets done
 - Prioritize the things that are most important but that no one holds you accountable for, like your own health or writing

The blending of personal and professional is something that I have fought against during graduate school. I always craved the separation between work and home that many get, and the fact that I couldn't make this division while in graduate school was a source of stress. However, I now see this blending as a benefit. As an academic, I have a certain amount of flexibility as to when and where I complete my work, and instead of craving division between work and home, I can use this blending to my advantage. Hearing how faculty members use this blending to be more productive and maintain a good work/life balance only strengthened what I had already learned from graduate school- that priorities shift and it is ok to do work with family around, and ok to push off work for family sometimes.

- General Work Strategies
 - Determine your priorities: health, family, career and what balance works best for you
 - Find a sustainable model of productivity
 - Be flexible: balance changes as job and responsibilities change, different stages have different needs
 - Interest based approach: when conflicts arise, reflect on the common interest that you have, good way to think about options to deal with the current issues

- Write every day at least 30 minutes
- Don't over prepare for teaching
- Know your expectations, responsibilities and criteria for Tenure/Promotion
- Do the hard stuff first in the period when you are most productive
- Set aside dedicated time for big projects, block off calendar and protect time
- Review email 1-2 times a day
- Select service opportunities that are beneficial, be selective

This advice emphasized that my inability to not work on a 9-5 schedule isn't a problem, but rather a challenge that I need to work on. I know I am highly productive from 7-11, and 1-3, so I need to use those times for the hardest work, and save the emails and other easy work for times when I'm not as productive. An academic lifestyle does allow for some flexibility, and it also requires some flexibility- so it is important that I use my time wisely. Two of the things that graduate school has really prepared me for are determining expectations and responsibilities, and writing every day. These were two issues I dealt with when I first started graduate school, however, I am much better at making sure to clarify with my advisor or boss, what I am expected to do and what responsibilities I have, and I began a blog as a way to write frequently and make sure to keep my writing skills active. One thing I need to work on is saying no to opportunities that don't necessarily have a benefit for me, and being more selective about those I accept. I've never quite gotten the hang of turning opportunities down, especially if it is an honor to be asked. With my remaining time in graduate school, this is a skill I need to develop to be able to be a more productive and effective faculty member.

- Mentoring Advice
 - One mentoring model doesn't work for everyone, need to determine what works for you
 - Adapt mentoring to fit with other responsibilities
 - Scaffolding: for a large project, break it up into small bits and have them work on it, strong deadlines and expectations, then move onto the next bit, over time able to complete the project
 - Remember what your graduate student life was like, empathize
 - You are the leader and you need to make tough decisions
 - Set expectations with students, share your style with them so that they don't feel slighted, talk with other professors about potential problems with students

I've been lucky enough to have a few opportunities to mentor undergraduate students as a graduate student, which in some ways has helped prepared me for mentoring as a faculty member, and I've been lucky enough to have some really great mentors throughout my education. I learned best from my mentors when they provided me with scaffolds to help me learn on my own. This is the style that I most often take- however, I

have noticed that it isn't always effective. Some students need more hands on help and mentoring than I preferred as a student. I can see now how being explicit about one's mentoring style can be helpful when building that type of relationship, and that one style of mentoring doesn't work for every student. I also see the importance of empathy, and giving students a break sometimes. I hope to maintain my empathy for my students.

- Balance with Family and Health
 - Make conferences into vacations
 - Schedule and guard your personal time, spend free time with family and maximize alone time
 - Find different ways to exercise and activities the whole family enjoys
 - Get yourself a village: find family members who can help, friends that help, can pay for daycare
 - Accept that it's ok to prioritize personal life
 - Knowing when to have children and how it changes your career trajectory- there is never a perfect time, just what is right for you
- Being Female in Academia
 - Resources to support underrepresented faculty, don't be scared to use them
 - Find allies and identify several outlets for help
 - Don't feel that you have to do it alone, find mentors and role models
 - Stay true to yourself

Maintaining a family and being female are two things that have worried me the most about this next stage in life. Having only been married for a year, it is only recently that I've begun to worry about having a family and who will be the primary caretaker of the children. Hearing from female faculty members about how they maintain a work/life balance, have children, and still get tenure is inspiring, but it is also nice to see that it wasn't easy and that compromises are made. I know that having a family will make my academia life more difficult and can alter my career trajectory and I still have fears about this, but it is helpful to know that others did too and they survived. I now see the importance of having allies and a strong support network when one becomes a faculty member, especially as a female.