Working Smarter, Not Harder
Time Management for Graduate Students

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Goals of Program:

• Focus on clarifying goals and rewarding accomplishments
• PRIORITIZE
• Balance multiple responsibilities to self and others
• Schedule and Complete Tasks
• Cope with Perfectionism
• Avoid Obstacles to Success
Accomplishments and Goals

“Excellence is not an act but a habit.”-Aristotle

In order to focus on your future goals, it is important to consider past successes and values.

• Describe an academic or career success that is/was significant to you.
• Describe a personal success that is/was significant to you (athletics, musical talent, volunteer work, etc.).
• Describe a relational success that is/was significant to you (family, friends, romantic, mentor, etc.).
Clarify the Ultimate Goal

- **Create a Master Plan:** This should include exactly what you hope to accomplish in this graduate program and expand this to what you would like to accomplish in the next 3-5 years. Provide a full description and be specific about your desired outcome.

**Identify Program Goals**

- **Program Goals:** This should include specific classes, work experiences, publications, teaching experiences, internships or research that you will need to complete in the next year to be successful in your program/field.

**Identify Personal Goals**

- **Personal Goals:** This should include social, spiritual, emotional, health/exercise/sleep, and financial goals for the next year. Attaining these goals now will lead to balance in the future.

**Identify Relational Goals**

- **Relational Goals:** This should include spouse/partner, family of origin, friends and children. It is important to be clear about how you will nurture these relationships and how you will set appropriate boundaries.
PRIORITIZE

“Time management skills boil down to awareness, organization and commitment.” - Dr. Tara Kuther

It is important to remember that the key is balance.

- We have fixed time commitments
- We have activities essential for daily living
- We have study time and class prep
- We have leisure and social time:

It is easiest to prioritize by considering:

- **Productive Time:**
  - As a Western Society we learn quickly that our productive time is most valued. It is the measure of how much we can do or produce. These include fixed time commitments and study time/class prep. Productive time often lacks flexibility.

- **Restorative Time:**
  - The challenge for us is to learn to value the other activities as well. These include the activities essential for daily living and the leisure and social time activities. Restorative time is often more flexible, but may need to become more scheduled to achieve true balance.
Important Tips to Consider

• Learn to self-monitor your commitments and how much time you spend on them.
• Learn to set personal deadlines.
• Devise a strategy to approach every day.
• Use lists and organizational tools as needed.
• Solicit feedback from faculty and staff regularly. Learn to use your resources.
• Say “NO”!!
• Make use of wasted time.
• Don’t ignore personal relationships.
• Allow for flexibility and spontaneity.
Wheel of Balance

Academic

Spiritual

Social

Emotional
Changing Perfectionist Thoughts
Fear of Failure, Fear of Making Mistakes, Fear of Disapproval, All or Nothing Thinking, “Shoulding”, Others are Easily Successful

- Identify Perfectionist Thought:
- List Possible Alternative Thoughts:
- Pros and Cons of Original and Alternative Thoughts:
- Examine the Evidence (Best-Friend Theory):
- Educate Yourself:
- Get Some Perspective:
- Test your Theory:
- Evaluate the Outcome:
- Use Coping Cards:
- Learn to Tolerate Uncertainty:
Changing Perfectionist Behaviors

Overcompensating, Excessive Checking, Reassurance Seeking, Repeating, Correcting, Excessive Organizing/List Making, Difficulty Making Decisions, Procrastination, “Can’t Quit”, Give up too Soon, Slow, Failure to Delegate, Avoidance, Trying to Change Others

- Identify a Perfectionist Behavior:
- List Possible Alternative Behaviors:
- Exposure Based-Strategies:
- Response Prevention:
- Communication Training:
- Prioritizing:
- Overcoming Procrastination:

***It is important to know when it is more than a personality type!***
CONTROL YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- Set aside a fixed place for studying and only studying.
- Before you begin an assignment, write down on a sheet of paper the time you expect to finish.
- Strengthen your ability to concentrate by selecting a social symbol that is related to studying.
- If your mind wanders, stand up and face away from your books.
- Stop at the end of each page, and count to 10 slowly when you are reading.
- Don't start any unfinished business just before the time to start studying.
- Set small, short-range goals for yourself.
- Keep a reminder pad.
- Relax completely before you start to study.
Nutrition

The relationship between diet, stress, and mood has been well documented. It’s known that certain foods and substances tend to create additional stress and anxiety, while others promote a calmer and steadier mood. Stress can also be aggravated by the way you eat. The following suggestions may help reduce your symptoms of stress:

- Reduce your consumption of caffeine, nicotine, and over-the-counter stimulants.
- Eliminate refined and processed foods from your diet as much as possible.
- Increase your intake of dietary fiber by eating foods such as whole grains, brans, and raw vegetables.
- Drink the equivalent of at least six 8-oz. glasses of water every day.
- Reduce your intake of animal fat and high cholesterol foods.
- Give yourself adequate time to eat.
- Chew your food thoroughly (at least 15 times per mouthful).
- Avoid eating to the point of feeling “stuffed” or bloated.
- Consume only as much energy (calories) as you expend.
Exercise

Taking frequent effective exercise is one of the best physical stress-reduction techniques available. Exercise not only improves your health and reduces stress caused by unfitness, it also relaxes tense muscles and helps you to sleep.

- It improves blood flow to your brain, increasing alertness and concentration.
- By exercising, you speed the flow of blood through your brain, moving these waste products faster.
- Exercise can cause release of chemicals called endorphins into your blood stream. These give you a feeling of happiness and positively affect your overall sense of well-being.
- There is also good evidence that physically fit people have less extreme physiological responses when under pressure than those who are not.

Avoid exercising only once per week. Engaging in infrequent spurts of exercise is stressful to your body and generally does more harm than good (walking is an exception).

- Ideally, exercise should be aerobic.
- Optimal frequency is 4 to 5 times a week.
- Optimal duration is at least 30 minutes per session.
- Optimal intensity for aerobic exercise is a heart rate of \([220 - \text{your age}] \times 0.75\) for at least 10 minutes.
Sleep

A night of seven to nine hours of restful, uninterrupted sleep is particularly important during times of high stress and anxiety. If we are regularly short of sleep, then our concentration and our effectiveness suffer, and our energy levels decline, which ultimately increases stress.

- Set your body’s clock. Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day.
- Don’t expect to fall asleep immediately after hearing or watching disturbing news or programs.
- Engage in a relaxing activity at bedtime such as reading or listening to music.
- Do not eat or drink too much before bedtime. Alcohol is not a sleep aid; don’t use it to try to help you sleep.
- Only get into bed when you’re tired. If you don’t fall asleep within 15 minutes, get out of bed.
- Create a sleep-promoting environment that is quiet, dark, cool and comfortable.
- Consume less or no caffeine during the day. If you feel tired, substitute a short nap of 15-20 minutes for caffeine, but for people suffering from insomnia, daytime naps should be avoided.
- Avoid alcohol and nicotine, especially close to bedtime.
- Do not exercise within three hours of bedtime.
- Remember that sleeplessness associated with an acute stressful situation usually improves on its own. Be patient.