

Balancing Research, Teaching and Service

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When you're a grad student, you think you've never worked harder in your life; you are working all hours of the day and night, your family and friends barely see you and an entire weekend of sleep is your fantasy. And you day-dream about the day that you can be like your advisor: coming into work late, swanning off to long lunches with interesting colleagues, inspiring students on a daily basis, giving talks around the world to grateful audiences and making someone else collect the data and write the first draft of a paper. In short, you can't imagine anyone else who has it so good.

For me, that was only reinforced on my PostDoc. I had my own funding, my own research program, a salary and a research budget that let me travel around and figure out how I wanted to set up my lab. It was exactly how I imagined my life would be. I knew that one day I'd need to fit teaching and service into my schedule, but I figured I was organized—to a fault—I had no reason to worry. Other people complained but I'd be the exception to the rule.

But then I got my first job.

I figured my plans for my work week were solid. I anticipated spending 80% of my time on Research, 15% on Teaching and 5% on Service. It seemed reasonable and well-thought out. After all, my department had already told me that they would protect me from administrative tasks for at least the first semester and my teaching load would be reduced for several years. However, I quickly learned that those protections don't last—they expire or deals are forgotten—and loads increase. Unfortunately, the time we have does not. And since the only “flexible” time is that which you've assigned for research, it's our research that suffers and the problem with that is we never ever lose a task or gain time. Our responsibilities just get more and more important; and our research program diversifies.

Moreover, every single thing in our work week would expand to the amount of time we are willing to give it. And, if you actually want to do research, that's not OK. Nobody is going to care about your research program as much as you do. So, these are the things I have learned about how to balance my research, teaching and service.

1. *Protect your research time as if it were a meeting with the President of the university.*
 - a. Block out that time in your calendar; close your door; don't answer the phone.
2. *Protect your collaborative relationships.*
 - a. Under promise, over deliver.
 - b. Your research program will not last if your collaborators do not get your best efforts.
3. *Set limits on teaching preparation (and administrative emails for that matter).*

- a. Accept that your teaching only has to be “good enough” ... that it will still be better than most of your colleagues (if you care just a little) and it can improve year to year. Put limits on how long you’ll spend perfecting a single lecture that half your undergraduates will either sleep through, be hungover for, or be more occupied with updating their facebook status.
 - b. Don’t respond to administrative emails during your best work hours of the day.
4. *Say “yes” to your Chair only some times.*
- a. It turns out saying “no” is really hard—and women tend to find it harder than men—and all a Chair really wants is *someone* to say “yes” and make their job easier. So, practice saying the word until your heart doesn’t beat faster every time you do!
5. *Don’t take on every student who shows an interest in your work.*
- a. A bad student can take more time out of your day, week, month and year than a terrible service assignment. Do your homework on them ... read their work.