Finding Balance

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A Bit About Me

• Prior to becoming a professor
  ▪ Midwest born/raised; moved to California in 1990
  ▪ MS/PhD at **UC San Diego** (finished May 2001)
    ▸ Advisor: work-a-holic
    ▸ Computer industry (technical support, database/inventory control, operating systems)

• Currently: Assistant professor at **UC Santa Barbara**
  ▪ Started July 2001
  ▪ Up for tenure this summer
  ▪ Work-a-holic
A Bit About Me

- Married to an associate professor
  - Also in computer science
  - Work-a-holic
  - No kids (under discussion)
- Research
  - **Adaptive** compiler and runtime systems
  - 10-12 amazing students
Grad Student Stress

• Different each year
  ■ Y1: getting comfortable, class/tests, TA'ing
    ‣ *What about you?*
  ■ Y2-4: In the thick of it
    ‣ Finding an advisor
    ‣ Comprehensive exams
    ‣ Paper deadlines
    ‣ Encountering rejection
  ■ Y5+: last mile
    ‣ Paper deadlines
    ‣ Identifying letter writers
    ‣ Writing the thesis
    ‣ Applying for jobs
    ‣ Going to conferences
    ‣ Internships
    ‣ Finding a thesis topic
    ‣ Figuring out what comes next
Post-PhD (Pre-Tenure) Stress - Academic

- Different each year
  - Y1: getting comfortable, teaching real classes
  - Y2-3: attracting students, seeking funding

- Every year
  - Paper/proposal deadlines + acceptances/rejections
  - Departmental and research community service
  - Identifying viable research projects
  - Attracting / working with students
  - Travel
  - Improving teaching quality
  - Multi-tasking / effective context switching

- Y5: last mile before tenure
  - Identifying letter writers, giving talks
Post-PhD Stress - Industrial Research

• Different each year
  ■ Y1: getting comfortable, working as part of a group
  ■ Y2-3: attracting students, seeking funding
  ■ Every year
    ▸ Paper/proposal deadlines + acceptances/rejections
    ▸ Departmental and research community service
    ▸ Identifying viable research projects
    ▸ Attracting / working with students
    ▸ Travel
  ■ Y3+: advancing in company/lab
Observations

- Demands come in waves
  - Too many at once causes stress
- Many of us are commonly very goal-oriented
- We all have some insecurities
- We humans cannot maintain an insane pace continuously
  - Not sustainable
  - Leads to burnout / poor productivity
  - Will wear you out
- There is always more to do
Finding Balance

- A continuous, incremental process
  - That you must work at -- there is no free lunch
  - Make changes incrementally

- **Waves of demands**
  - Work hard during high-demand periods
  - Take a break, re-energize during low-demand
  - Recognize/work on the transition between the two
Finding Balance

• A continuous, incremental process

• **Goal oriented, managing insecurities and high expectations** (set by yourself / others)
  - Seek out a good mentor (may/may not be your advisor)
  - Make sure that your goals are achievable
    - Don't set yourself up to fail
  - Understand completely what is required given a goal
    - Understand why you want to achieve it
    - Evaluate your progress
    - Talk about it with your advisor and others
  - Learn how to enjoy the process
    - Focus on the present
    - Appreciate your achievements before moving on
Finding Balance

• A continuous, incremental process

• There's always more to do

  □ Learn how to estimate accurately the time required
    ▪ Don't take on too much or feel pressured to say yes
      ◆ Worse to take on something and only contribute minimally or do an average/poor/late job at it than to say no

  □ Be organized

    ▪ Keep a calendar that you always have with you
      ◆ Electronic (back it up) or paper
      ◆ Keep it up to date
        – Meetings as well as work things (email, paper reading, writing, coding, seminars, etc)
      ◆ Schedule in both work and play (more on this in a bit)
    ▪ Keep a research/idea book (or a few for easy access)
Finding Balance

• A continuous, incremental process

• Most importantly -- take care of you!
  ■ Figure out what makes you happy/unhappy

• Things that worked for me:
  ■ Keeping a separate (non-work) email account
  ■ Scheduling in fun/relaxing/silly things in my calendar
    ▸ Also blocking out time for only research
  ■ Set realistic goals toward achieving balance
  ■ Combine work and play
    ▸ Trying to keep them completely separate is frustrating
  ■ Other things . . .
Things that I've found to be helpful

- Seeking out colleagues
  - Just say hello, talk about what's going on
    - As a grad student -- go visit another lab
  - Go to coffee hours
  - Help others that may be going thru a rough period
  - Seek out support / help when you do
- Volunteer work
  - Tutoring ((pre) high school, college)
  - Poor/homeless support on holidays not in your tradition
  - The elderly
  - Animals (more on this in a bit...)

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Things that I've found to be helpful

• Applying $$ to the problem
  ■ Cleaning, gardening, house/car repairs…
  ■ Easier travel (air, hotel, transport, wireless)
  ■ Computer / devices / high-speed connection
• Family
• Social groups
  ■ Don't isolate yourself
  ■ Girls night out
  ■ Family fun center
  ■ Sports events
  ■ Cooking / just going out to eat
  ■ Once in awhile
Finding Balance . . . What Worked For Me:

- Being healthy
  - Exercise
  - Eating well
  - Sleep
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- Being healthy
  - Exercise
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Finding Balance . . . What Worked For Me:

- Travel
  - Fun on work trips
  - Time off / away
    - Near by (road trip!)
    - Far away (You earn the airline miles!)
Finding Balance . . . What Worked For Me:

- Rediscovering what I loved when I was younger (and had more time and energy)
  - Music
    - Get those old tunes that you know by heart
    - Listen AT work
    - Listen while on travel
    - Check out what’s new
  - Being creative
    - Painting, dancing, drawing, plays, musicals
- Projects very different from our day-to-day work
  - Building things, gardening, auto mechanics, . . .
  - Animals/Pets . . .
Finding Balance . . . What Worked For Me:

- Rediscovering what I loved when I was younger
  - Pets (and in particular, dogs)
    - Walking dogs (DAWG!)
    - Being with animals
    - Have one of your own if possible
Finding Balance . . . What Worked For Me:

• Rediscovering what I loved when I was younger
  ■ Pets (and in particular, dogs)

What about You?
Ideas for Questions

• Balance as a graduate student
• Balance and the tenure process or high-tech industry
• Dual-career couple
  ■ Dual - academic or CS/Engineering couple (finding jobs)
  ■ Managing an academic/non-academic relationship
• The question of when/if to have children
  ■ In an academic environment or industry environment
  ■ During the PhD process
  ■ Pre-tenure; post-tenure
• Deciding on your future and considering balance
• Finding an advisor