

Work Life Balance for Doctoral Students

Lorna Holtman
Director: Postgraduate Studies

South African PhD Project Conference 2009
08 May 2009



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

You need to enter the postgraduate programme well prepared: mentally, emotionally, physically and financially.

The programme has its ups and down. One day you fully confident with what you doing, the next day you very confused and not motivated at all. You need to be a strong character and know what you want.



Share your ideas with people

If you feel confused about something in your work, tell your supervisor. Ask if you don't understand.

Be organised. Prioritise your workload as much as you can. Get assistance if you can

Clarify your goals, e.g. if you don't have somebody whose helping you in your house, leave it –no one is perfect; concentrate in your work.



Make sure that you do understand or know what you want to study.

*Strive to understand your research. For this you need to make time to **read as much** as you can to understand your research topic. Research has many elements that are really hard to understand sometimes. You need to understand the research content, writing and reading skills and know how to relate these elements to your topic.*



To embark on a PhD you need to have the study skills that will help you to identify and isolate useful information from all the reading materials that you get access to. It is advisable for one to have adequate preparation on how to conduct research before one embarks on a PhD.



As a parent, you need to organise your time. Make sure that you do spend quality time with your child/children.

Sometimes, you need to invite or take your child to parties, go to movies or go to the library to help them in doing their assignments/ school work, attend sports and other extramural activities that your child is involved in.

If you are a mother and you have young children you need to develop strict routines, including sleeping routines so that you will have sufficient time to work on your studies without disturbance.



If you are married and employed you must ensure that you have an adequate plan that will accommodate the needs of your family before embarking on doctoral studies, especially when you intend to study outside your home country and you are self-funded.

Enjoy close relationships with the people around you and in your life.

- *Prevent yourself from feeling isolated. Make time for friends and family. In between your studies have fun with friends, and attend family gatherings. Go to church and share your time with your family members.*
- *PhD support groups can be a vital tool to cope with isolation and social pressure.*



Communicate your plans, including the timeline of the completion of your intended studies, to your supervisor.

Do this at the beginning of your programme so that he/she operates at the same wavelength as you, even in the way the supervisor plans the feedback that he/she gives you and its timing.



Communicate and share your workplan for the PhD with your family and boss

If you have to work while studying, make sure that the nature of work that you choose will not overwhelm you and deplete your energy and leave you with nothing for your studies.



Be prepared for emergencies and curve balls – this is life!

Always be ready to receive unpleasant news from home regarding difficult situations such as the loss of a relative or a close friend (bereavement) so that you can better adjust and cope with such news. You need to keep money aside which you can use for emergency purposes and inadvertent events of this nature.



Roles and expectations- be clear about these upfront

It is always necessary to fully understand one's supervisor and the environment in which he/she is operating in order to know what to expect from their supervisor. The PhD student needs to be appropriately matched to their supervisor, both in terms of personality and intellectual disposition.



Keep focused and on task

*...during the course of your doctoral studies you may get involved in faculty activities such as extended fieldwork, teaching of undergraduates and even get to supervise other students ...
When this happens one must not get carried away but keep focused on your studies.*



Be disciplined

...the PhD student needs to understand that going to work or studying is as much a personal experience as well as a professional one. To perform better under such circumstances one needs to be disciplined.



You need to create time for your studies, ensuring that you balance your studies with work and your social life while giving sufficient attention to those who depend on you.

Do make time for yourself.

It is a balancing act which will see you juggling various roles when the situation demands.

It is all worth it in the end!

