

Strategies for Professional Success



These strategies are adapted from the documents "Strategies for Better Time Management Suggested by Participants in Geography Faculty Development Alliance Workshops, 2002-2006" and "Time Savers: Teaching" from the University Center for Innovation in Teaching and Education at Case Western Reserve University.

Teaching:

- Stagger your due dates. Collect major tests/papers from different classes on different weeks so that there's only one major task to complete per weekend.
- Keep a log. Reflect on class activities and events in a log or journal so that revising the syllabus for the next time you teach the course will be a snap
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Use the textbook architecture to your advantage. Emulate past syllabi (or related syllabi online or in the program review) for the course you're preparing. Consult with veterans and senior faculty about the history of the course.
- Let the objectives be your guide. Don't try to take on too much – if an activity or lesson doesn't meet a course objective, save it for another class
- Use templates. Create a "master" syllabus with the boilerplate text and calendar dates. Save it. Then add the original material to it and "save as" a different file. Create or save sample rubrics and adjust the criteria and points values.
- Pace yourself when grading. Dedicate only X amount of time per paper/exam. Use technology like Canvas to assist with commenting on papers. Grade in small chunks (such as X number of papers per sitting or questions 1 and 2) and take breaks.
- Spread course preparation through semester rather than trying to have everything ready at start of semester.

Writing and research:

- Keep several research projects going at once so that one is always starting, one is in middle, and one is finishing at about the same time.
- Stop trying to write at night when tired; it only increases frustration.
- Schedule 15-60 minutes each day for reading and writing on research topics.
- Set aside 45 minutes each day for writing, but stop early if 2 paragraphs are drafted before the time is up.
- Leave gaps in manuscripts; don't allow them to interrupt flow of ideas.
- Don't submit conference abstracts for work that hasn't yet been done. If the research isn't near completion when the abstract is written, the pressure of completing it will only grow. Finishing the paper will involve dropping every other project, cause stress, and throw off other deadlines.
- Use free writing to get started on new projects.
- Don't try to write final manuscript in first draft.
- Be less judgmental of own writing.

Working with Family, Students, and Colleagues:

- Talk with my spouse/partner and family about how I am trying to organize my time.
- Form a support group to work on writing.
- Set aside regular times to spend with students and colleagues rather than having these happen by chance-- perhaps 1-2 lunches per week; 1 office hour in computer lab helping students.
- Before committing to a request, always say "Let me think about it" or "Can I check my schedule?"
- Arrange schedule so that all work is finished before weekend; don't let work creep into family and relaxation time.
- Take one day off per week.
- Take time off when sick otherwise stress increases and illness usually gets worse.

Exercising, Health, and Diet:

- Exercise regularly 2-3 times per week, at lunch or after work.
- Take up one new hobby or extramural activity this year to relax and meet people outside my department.
- Monitor diet to make sure you are eating well.
- Schedule short exercise periods throughout day.
- Setting and keeping regular eating and sleep schedule.

Getting organized and keeping to schedules:

- Get a daily organizer or PDA for scheduling and logging time use.
- Carry a small notebook, pack of post-its, or voice recorder to make quick notes before ideas are forgotten.
- Make sure daily to-do list always includes at least 2 small items relating to long-term goals that can be completed during the day.
- Start the day by reviewing recent accomplishments.
- Make sure daily and weekly schedule includes some variety so that it doesn't become stale or oppressive.
- Keep and analyze a time log for 3-5 days each semester.
- Read newspapers and books as reward for other work.

Organizing the Workplace:

- Reorganize my work area so that a pile of long-term projects isn't always sitting in front of me, but rather some projects I can finish in week
- Consolidate all of my work materials in one place rather than in several offices
- Find a new work space that offers some privacy
- Get office and files organized so that I can find them when I need them.

Dealing with phone, mail, email and routine work:

- Answer email during down time in afternoon rather than during productive time in morning.
- Limit email time; schedule it between other work; and answer only during low-energy periods.
- Reduce news and web surfing and move it to times when I have less energy. Handle routine work in batches once a week or month.