Balancing Teaching & Research

UW Linguistics TA Training Workshop
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September 23, 2016
Why is it hard?

- Teaching is:
  - Hard, time-consuming, interesting, rewarding
    - Many people make a career of doing just that

- Research is:
  - Hard, time-consuming, interesting, rewarding
    - Many people make a career of doing just that

- Naturally it’s hard to do both, do them well, and maintain a good balance
Why does teaching tend to take over?

- Teaching is like a gas...
  - It fills all available space

- Teaching has:
  - Clear, strict schedule and deadlines; well-defined tasks
    - Classes, grading, exams, etc

- Direct responsibilities to others
  - Students, colleagues, supervisors

- Desire for perfectionism:
  - Perfect presentations, perfect exercises, perfect evals 😊
  - Perfect knowledge

- Fortunately, like a gas, it’s also compressible.
Compressing Teaching

- Efficiency in teaching:
  - Make scheduling work: set boundaries:
    - Set available times/latencies for responses
    - E.g. answer course email 3-5pm, weekdays (!), in one day
    - Reliability is more important than speed

- Build and use resources:
  - Everyone in the class shares resources, responsibility
    - Students: discussion boards, pair/share, groups
    - Other staff: slides, teaching tools, advice, rubrics
    - Online materials: course notes/slides/hw; guides
Teaching Efficiently

- Managing perfectionism:
  - Allocate fixed time for material prep
    - E.g. morning before class

- Build and use rubrics
  - Grade from (likely) best to worst

- Be willing to say “I don’t know”
  - No one can know everything
  - Be Socratic:
    - Turn the question back: discuss, research
Bounds on Teaching

- Should average 20/hrs week

- If it’s systematically over that, talk to someone
  - Instructor, lead TA, Sharon,...
  - Can provide ideas, assistance
Why is Research Set Aside?

- Research seems to have:
  - Less structure and fewer deadlines
  - Fewer responsibilities, at least to others
  - Need for perfectionism
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Why is Research Set Aside?

Research seems to have:

- Less structure and fewer deadlines
  - Give structure, schedule, deadlines to research
- Fewer responsibilities, at least to others
  - Key activity for you, your advisor, the department
- Need for perfectionism
  - “The perfect is the enemy of the good”

Not really – Treat your research more like teaching
Structure and Deadlines

- Give your research structure
  - Explicitly schedule time for research activities
    - Meetings, experiments/analysis, writing
    - Change is good
      - But context switches are expensive

- Lay out short, medium, long-term goals
  - Research questions, tasks, papers, GPs, prospectus, etc
Strategies

- Schedule research time:
  - Ideally, multi-hour blocks or longer
    - Match tasks to available time
  - Find your best times

- Making progress:
  - Populate – and check things off – a to-do list
  - Timeboxing and avoiding ratholes
  - “Good enough” drafts
Final Notes

- Balance is not just between teaching & research, but also between academic and personal life
- What you do now is preparation for your future
- Set boundaries and don’t be afraid to say ‘no’
- Take breaks:
  - Clear your mind, get new ideas
  - Exercise, relax, (try to) have fun!