

Work-Life Balance for STEM Faculty, is it even possible?

Cynthia J. Jameson
University of Illinois at Chicago

Special issues in work-life “balance” for scientists and engineers

Individuals in all fields face choices and tradeoffs related to balancing work and personal lives. Researchers and academicians in scientific endeavors, however, are challenged with

- **particularly demanding expectations around scheduling and time commitments:** the expectation that one can only contribute to research on a full-time (i.e. 60-80 hour/week) basis
- **rapid and ongoing changes in their areas of specialization**
- **timing involved in conducting scientific experiments; lab sciences can be 24/7**

"No such thing as work-life balance"

Jack Welch, June 2009

"There are work-life choices, and you make them, and they have consequences."

Decide what you have to get done and list the things you can and cannot give up.

Resources

- [Women in Science at the NIH. 2007-2008.](#) Profiles of successful women in NIH; each profile includes the woman's thoughts on achieving work-life balance
- [The Athena Project.](#) Emily Monosson (Editor), *Motherhood, The Elephant in the Laboratory: Women Scientists Speak Out*, Cornell University Press, 2008

More resources

AAAS ScienceCareers

- 2010-06-04 [Time to Hire a Housekeeper?](#)
- 2010-08-06 [Scientist Dads Step Up](#)
- 2010-04-30 [Mind Matters: Back to Work After Baby, Part 2](#)
- 2010-03-19 [Mind Matters: Back to Work After a Baby](#)

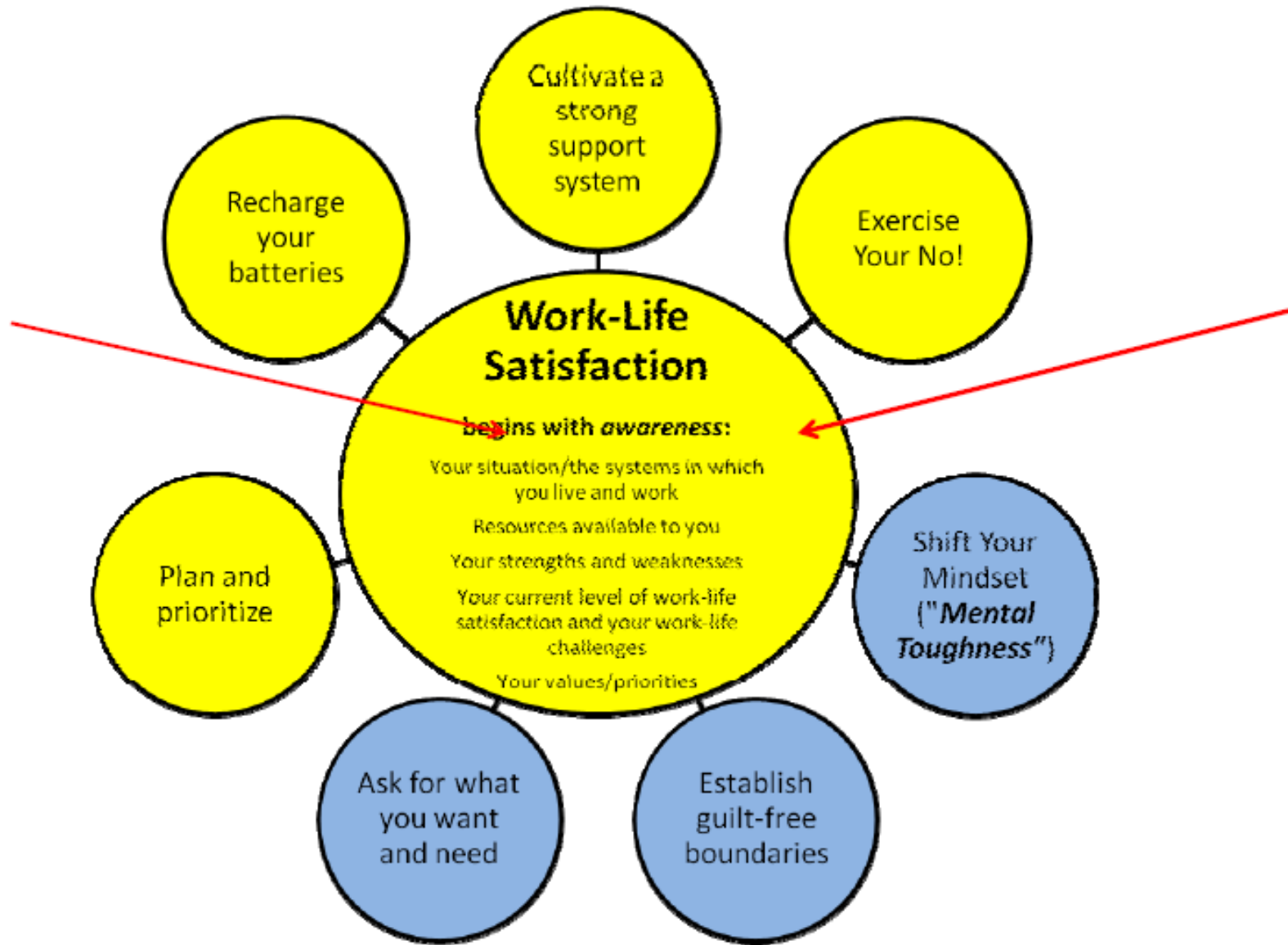
other sources

- *Balancing Faculty Careers and Family Work*, Academe, Nov-Dec 2004, Vol. 90, No. 6 (entire issue), AAUP, on-line at <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2004/ND/>
- *Mothers on the Fast Track: How a New Generation Can Balance Family and Careers*, Mary Ann Mason and Eve Mason Ekman, Oxford University Press, 2007, ISBN 9780195373691.
- *Juggling Job and Family: Balancing Home Life and Careers*, Susan Steinberg, MD, Columbia University: <http://www.the-aps.org/careers/careers1/mentor/workshop/2006/Steinberg%20talk.ppt>
- *Making Choices: Finding Your Balance*, from On the Cutting Edge, Professional Resources for Geoscience Faculty <http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/earlycareer/balance/>

some general suggestions

- Get over the idea that commitment means long hours. Find ways to get the work done in less time.
- Finding trustworthy child care is vital to peace of mind.
- Logistics really matter. If you're thinking about starting a family, think about your commute when arranging housing, day care, and employment.
- Don't try to do it on your own unless you REALLY want to.
- Seriously consider engaging a paid housekeeper to buy yourself extra work, sleep, or family time.

Elsevier Foundation grant "Improving Work-Life Satisfaction for Women Program"
Work-Life Balance Satisfaction Begins with AWARENESS



Janet Bandows Koster

AWIS

ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE

AWIS

begin with awareness

- your situation, the systems in which you live and work
- resources available to you
- your strengths and weaknesses
- your current level of work-life satisfaction and work-life challenges
- your values and priorities

These are the bases for the choices you make

AWIS

key strategies

- Plan & prioritize
- Cultivate a strong support system
- Establish guilt-free boundaries
- Exercise your no!
- Ask for what you want & need
- Recharge your batteries
- Shift your mindset: mental toughness
(perseverance in the face of obstacles)

Tips from *Inside Higher Ed**

by Kerry Ann Roquemore
formerly at UIC

*online source for news, opinion and jobs for all of higher education, information and career services for professionals in academe.

1. You need a plan

- Strategically create the space in your calendar each week for the activities that contribute to your long term success
- Be absolutely clear about what work needs to get done to move your research agenda forward and be ruthless about making time for the one thing that matters most to your promotion, tenure, and mobility: **WRITING**

2. Proactively align your time with your priorities each week

- Categorize your To-Do list by research, teaching, and service
- Align the time in your calendar with your promotion criteria
- Map your To-Do tasks onto specific time blocks in your calendar
- Create a semester plan: block out time each day for the most important activities related to your long term success

3. Balance is a myth

- The more you have going on in your life off campus, the sharper your focus must be during the time you spend on-campus
- Identify ONE problem area this week that you need to resolve in order to be more productive.
- Take one concrete step forward to make a change.

4. Investing in long-term institutional change at the expense of your research is a Mistake

- Re-think your attitude toward institutional change
- Plan now for your post-tenure contribution to change
- Limit current commitments and say "no" to any additional requests this semester
- Block out inviolate writing time EVERY DAY for 60 minutes first thing in the morning (or your best time of the day)

5. Move from a reactive to a proactive stance in your professional relationships

- You may not like your colleagues, but you should be pro-active in developing positive & healthy professional relationships with them
- Ask someone to lunch or coffee
- Ask people for advice; what can I learn from this person?
- Talk about your research

6. Shift your reference group from the faculty at your institution to the broader national arena of your discipline

- Make a list of the top 10 people in your research area and then make it your business to connect with them during your five years on the tenure track
- Publications are the currency in the academic market; maintaining research productivity will fulfill you as a scholar, increase your marketability, give you some measure of power over your own future, and provide you with the opportunity to make choices

7. Track how you actually spend your time

- Is how you are spending your time in line with how you will be evaluated for tenure and promotion? Does it reflect your personal values, priorities, and long-term goals?
- Reapportion your time: Successful new faculty
 - Spend 60 minutes a day on scholarly writing
 - Integrate their research into their teaching
 - Manage course preparation time and avoid over-preparing for classes
 - Spend time each week discussing research and teaching with colleagues

8. Create feedback loops that you can rely on in tough times

- Seek honest assessment about your performance and advice from those around you:
 - Am I on track?
 - What is holding me back?
 - How can I make a positive change?

9. *Avoid the teaching trap*

- The trap is when new tenure-track faculty spend the vast majority of their time on teaching **at the expense of** their research and writing and then find that their limited research productivity endangers their ability to be promoted at their current institution, or move to another one.
- “Why am I over-preparing and over-functioning in this one aspect of my job?”
- Take the long view of your career
- Align your teaching standards with your department
- Ask your local CETL (or other) experts for help
- Create accountability for your research and writing

Tip #9 Kerry Ann Roquemore, *Inside Higher Ed*

10. Assess your stress level

- Assess your personal needs (physical health, emotional, rest).
- Ask for help for a specific need. [My students are driving me crazy! Will you guest lecture in my class next week? I feel so demoralized by my colleagues. Will you call me tomorrow and affirm what's good about my work (and about me as a human being) for 10 minutes? I haven't cleaned all semester and my apartment is a disgusting mess. Will you help me find someone to clean it? I have a new idea and I've written 10 pages, but I need someone else to look at it and give me brief feedback. Can you read it and tell me if it makes logical sense? I have finished this proposal and tomorrow is the deadline, can you read it for final edits before I submit?]

11. Responding to rejection

- Academic life is full of rejection and negative experiences, the cumulative effect can lead to exhaustion, depression
- Objectively examine:
 - Does it matter?
 - If it matters, identify the heart of the problem
 - Consider the negative input as data
 - When overwhelmed, reach out for support
 - Pity the haters
- Celebrate positive feedback
- Develop an internal system of affirmation

12. Learn to delegate

- It is a common mistake to believe you must do everything yourself. You have only a finite number of hours in each workday and they need to be aligned with your promotion and tenure criteria in order for you to be successful. Doing everything yourself can lower your overall productivity on the things that matter to your long-term success.
- Examine your workload. Every aspect of your job is comprised of a series of tasks, which tasks can be done by someone else?
- Delegate those tasks that do not specifically need you

13. Conflict is inevitable, but pick your battles

- Cannot avoid conflict altogether, pushing anger inward leads to stress, but showing anger is not acceptable in women (interpreted in gender frame: “emotional”, “bitch”, “out of control”)
- When conflicts arise, ask yourself
 - in this situation do I push back or pull back
 - what will I gain and what will I lose
 - if I decide to push back, what's the most effective way to do so?
- Formula from *M. Rosenberg, Non-violent Communication*:
 - State your observation of the problematic behavior.**
 - Describe how it makes you feel.**
 - Make your needs explicit.**
 - Clearly request what you want.**

14. Not just one mentor but a support system

- A broad array of mentors and sponsors that are located within and beyond your current institution
- A local and extended network of friends who you can rely on for social support and stress relief
- A group of scholars in your field with whom you can share drafts and ideas
- A supportive community that meets your unique accountability needs and celebrates your successes
- On- and off-campus professional development activities

Tip #14 Kerry Ann Roquemore, *Inside Higher Ed*

15. Find concrete ways to deal with “crunch time”

- Clearly communicate to others that it is crunch time
- Lower your standards in non-essential areas of life
- Ruthlessly assess what grading ACTUALLY needs to get done
- Say NO to EVERY SERVICE REQUEST from now until the end of the semester
- Every day needs a plan (write your to-do list)
- Do not give up your block of writing time
- Only check e-mail one time per day (max)
- Eliminate unnecessary electronic distractions
- Take care of your body (dance, exercise, whatever works for you)
- End every day with gratitude and a treat (a relaxing cup of tea, whatever)

Tip #15 Kerry Ann Roquemore, *Inside Higher Ed*

16. Develop a plan

- Start with your goals
- Outline the tasks that are required to achieve your goals
- Map your tasks onto time
- Execute the plan on a daily basis
- Create support and accountability