



Your First Year:
The Balancing Act

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“Balancing Act” is an apt title

Any appearance of
balance will probably be
an act.



7 Tips,
in no particular order

Tip 1: use money to
solve problems

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- Be your own “fairy godmother”
- Graphic design for slides, flyers, websites
 - If you have a startup package or other funds, see if you can expense this
- Convenience purchases that might feel like an indulgence--just go for it
 - e.g., pre-cut veggies at the supermarket or meal prep subscriptions
 - Can be a big mental adjustment from grad school and/or childhood financial insecurity
- Childcare/enrichment
- Housecleaning



Tip 1: use money to solve problems

- “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” -- Arthur C. Clarke
- “Sufficient quantities of money can also seem like magic sometimes.” -- me



Tip 2: changing
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- Just know that you'll be surprised by things you didn't know could be done differently
 - Much like moving in with a new partner or roommate
- Factor in significant overhead when deciding how much you can take on
 - A new prep is always more work
 - New prep at a new school is more on top of that
- Lemon into lemonade: you have this in common with your students!
 - Feeling overwhelmed by adjusting
 - Imposter syndrome
 - I found myself giving *myself* pep talks out loud to students who were feeling same things

Tip 3: be
intentional about
connecting with
students

Tip 3: be intentional about connecting with and understanding students

- Especially if at a new school or student audience, you'll need to build up a mental model of who it is you're speaking to
 - Why might they be in your class?
 - What's on their mind when they're not in your class?
 - What interests and talents do they have unrelated to your class?
 - Where are they going after they finish your class?
 - What might have they heard about this course through the grapevine?



Tip 3: be intentional about connecting with and understanding students

- Make a low-maintenance/automatic but regular structure for reconnaissance
 - Send a beginning-of-quarter get to know you survey on Canvas or Google Forms, etc
 - Set aside one lunch every other week to casually eat with 5 randomly selected students
 - If lab usually staffed by TAs, drop in sometimes
- Also a good way to combat burnout/disillusionment over time
 - In large classes, our time is disproportionately spent on “problem” cases--but in fact, most students are earnest, engaged, gracious, curious, humble, funny, and generally delightful!
- Makes me efficient: I've found no better cure for writer's block in teaching!!



Tip 4: watch
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- For teaching-focused faculty, worrisome symptoms include:
 - Cynicism about students' motives
 - Making course policy and design decisions from a place of us-vs-them
 - "Kids these days"
 - Procrastination and avoidance related to accumulation of email/messages
 - Whether you consciously feel the physical impact or not, a recent record of inadequate sleep or exercise
- Cures:
 - See if you and a colleague can trade responding to the 3 emails you're most dreading
 - Spend time outside
 - Spend time with students face-to-face, 1:1
 - Build a win-win break for you and the students into the course (e.g., cancel class after exam)



Tip 5: it's ok to
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Alexander Lowe McAdams

@mcadams_at_rice



Women academic friends with children: I spoke to a prospective graduate student today who was told by a male professor in her department that if she wanted children, she might as well not even shoot for a PhD. Share your stories in this thread to prove he's wrong.

9:39 AM · Mar 7, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

Tip 5: it's ok to have family/kids if that's what you want!

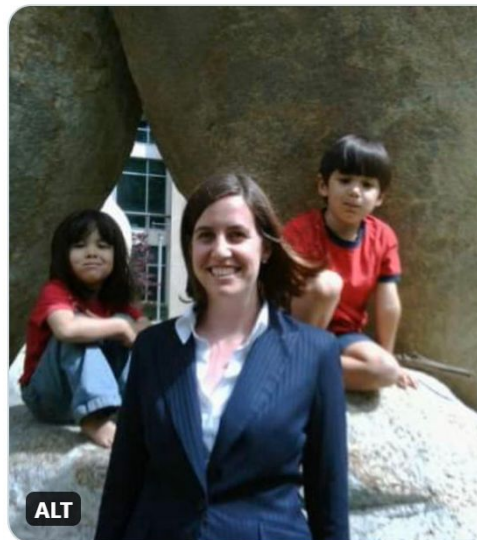
Yeah, it's tricky, but `~_(\ツ)_/~` you have to just do it anyway.



Cynthia Lee
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Replying to @mcadams_at_rice

I had twins halfway through PhD in computer science @UCSDJacobs. I'm now in my dream job as faculty in the computer science department @Stanford. Here's me with the twins minutes after I defended, and a year later at graduation.



8:44 PM · Mar 8, 2020 from Palo Alto, CA · Twitter for iPhone

Tip 6: there are
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- Pros:
 - Sense of mission, purpose, calling
 - Passion motivates excellence
 - Contributes to a distinctive brand
- Cons:
 - Poor boundaries between self and job
 - Fewer “brakes” to prevent overworking
 - Often what we love does not contribute much to tenure, etc.

Tip 6: there are pros and cons to doing what you love

- Example:
 - Diversity work is important, but often uncompensated (neither \$ nor credit/tenure)
 - For the “service” part of your tenure strategy, it might make sense to volunteer for a diversity-related committee, or it might make more sense to volunteer for something you see as drudgery. why?...
 - I was never tempted to spend 1 more minute than absolutely necessary for my [redacted important but unpleasant] committee assignment! :-D
 - As a result, that committee assignment never threatened to sap too much time from teaching and research

Tip 7: don't allow
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Tip 7: don't allow yourself to be pulled *too far* off course of the life you want to live

- Of course many worthy goals in all areas of life typically have a pattern where you have to do the hard work of sowing to reap the reward later
- But I just want to put it out there that making yourself look like someone you don't want to be just makes you attractive to more people and opportunities who will want you to continue being that, on and on
- Maybe take the foot off the pedal of straining outside your desired ratio of work, family, play, sleep, etc a little bit, and just let the chips fall where they may