
The Challenges of Academic and Home Life: *Current Reality and Future Hopes*

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agenda

this presentation focuses on **faculty** academic/home life
and our commitments to each other

academia + home life complexities

intersecting considerations for our home lives

core problems

at the root of many symptoms

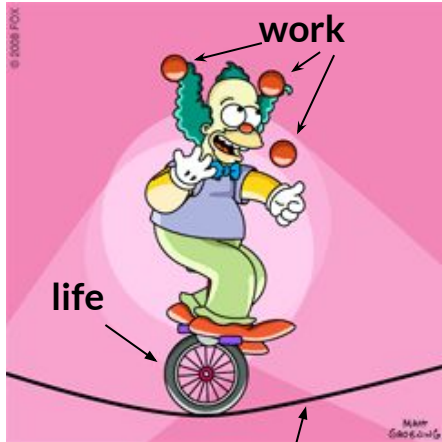
hopes

short term ideas, long term dreams

discussion

where are we now and where do we go?

academic life: the circus act



research!

teaching!

service!

...and: a mental health crisis with overwhelming urgency and importance to respond to student needs with emotional labor...

...and: emails forever, meeting culture, "I'll just zoom in", changing and multiplying tech platforms, grant writing and administration, stressful and expansive tenure and promotion guidelines, pressure to seek new collaborations and bring more revenue, seeking out new opportunities, creating "value", workday, supporting a growing student body, event planning, growing interdisciplinary programs without balance or reward...

—

...and...

home life: chronic illness



navigating

multiple specialist visits ~ unpredictable day-to-day
invisible illness ~ exacerbating factors at work
inability to put in long hours ~ flare-ups near deadlines
misperceptions by students, colleagues ~ casual ableism

pandemic impact

delayed healthcare ~ overlapping symptoms
increased stress ~ high-risk groups

home life: raising children



navigating

childcare schedules ~ pediatrician visits ~ school closures
vacation week ~ evening social events ~ morning meetings
weekend info sessions ~ grandparent visits ~ distant family
early dismissal ~ homework help ~ IEP meetings

pandemic impact

removed a strained safety net ~ covid restrictions
kids' mental health ~ explaining the news ~ vaccines
isolation ~ “flexible” work ~ teaching with the kids home



home life: long-distance partners

navigating

travel schedules ~ competing commitments
friends and family in two (or more) different places
complexities rise when adding in caregiving
dual career concerns and support from institutions

pandemic impact

negative and positive

we dropped the community ball

we need actions, policies, and support to:

slow down and work less

reduce both self- and external expectations

prioritize our (and our colleagues') home lives

support home life as the norm, not an accommodation

shift away from transactional communication models

mitigate disproportionate impact on vulnerable faculty

model the behavior we hope to see in our students



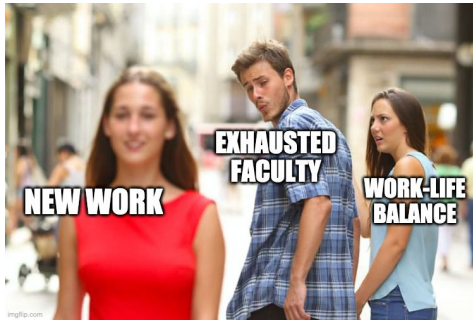
but instead we just add more balls

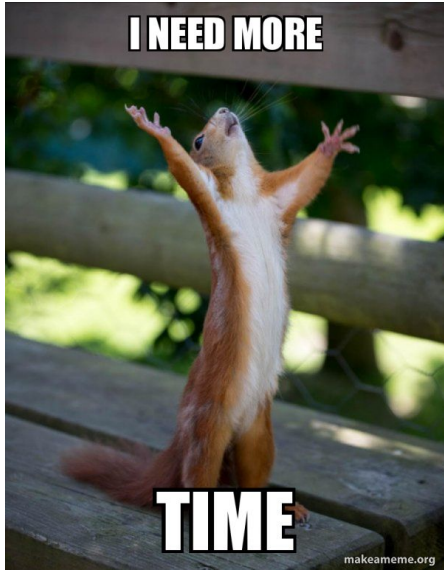
incentive structures reward *more* work

competition under resource scarcity and growth

the work never ends, but new work always begins

“flexibility” does not reduce our workload





core problem: time

time to be present at home

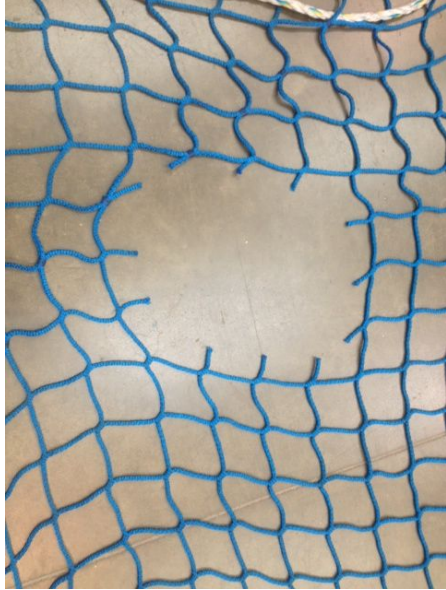
time to connect

time to work

time to think

time to hold in reserve for when things go wrong

core problem: no safety net



no built-in coverage; faculty emergencies lands on other faculty

pressure to support others without support for ourselves

pivoting in a crisis required (and still requires) overloading

core problem: the great resignation

not just about literally leaving the job

morale concerns, identifying shared values

sense of self-efficacy



what can we build on?



positive lessons from pandemic: connecting virtually & in person

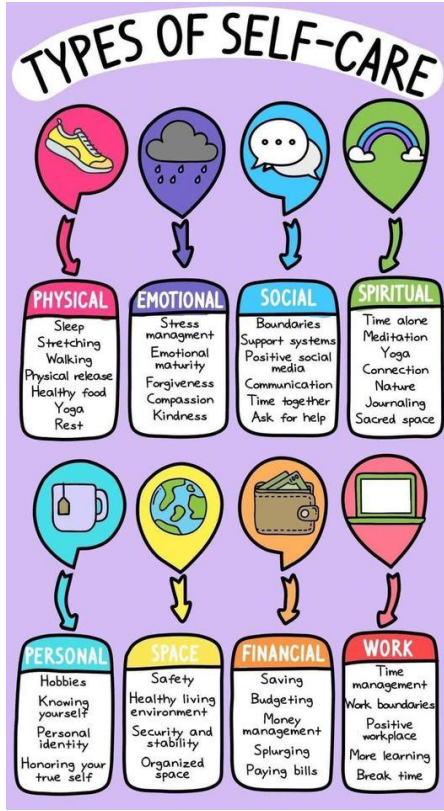
momentum to normalize several pathways to tenure, promotion

culture of experimentation and innovation / “try it on”

established governance structure

events and space to breathe (e.g. mental health day, etc.)

historically small community feel, caring and concern



future hopes: a culture of care

campus family days

celebrate our children, our extended families, and our chosen families

build local support networks

get to know faculty in your town and community

default to understanding without assumptions

embrace and trust faculty autonomy

future hopes: faculty community

keep lunch time open

eat together, play sports or games, go for walks, solve puzzles

prioritize informal interactions

end email and meeting culture, normalize and support social time

convert meetings to collaborative work time

don't talk about the work, do the work



future hopes: rebalancing

build professional development into load

critically important opportunities shouldn't be overload, even paid

proactively support personal and family time

course releases for family needs; backstop for financial support to graduate students; tenure should respect faculty as humans by default

align faculty culture change to current work

do what we can with the power we have; all of governance has a role



Thank you!

to many unnamed faculty, for commiseration and hope
to our families, who deserve better

open discussion time

next steps?
