

WISEST INITIATIVES / *POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAM* / *Post-doc Institute*

Time management tips for faculty

This guide and the planning for tenure timeline guide together are intended to help you spend time more wisely rather than spending more time

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Overview:

Control your life by controlling your time. Control your time by controlling events and their sequence.

- Rid yourself of “time robbers”. Identify your own personal “time robbers” (see below) and create your own strategies to defeat them
- Set long-term goals and objectives (See [Planning for tenure timeline.pdf](#).)
- Establish PRIORITIES among these goals & objectives. Adopt the “importance paradigm” of “doing what’s important rather than simply responding to what’s urgent.”
- Create a plan for each day—WRITE IT DOWN. Daily planning is imperative, because it keeps you focused. Use your high-energy periods for the important work, low-energy periods for routine tasks. Engage compulsively in the planning process, on an on-going basis.
- Learn to say NO!

Identify your own personal time robbers:

Alec Mackenzie, in his book *The Time Trap: The Classic Book on Time Management*, [Paperback 3rd edition AMACOM 1997, 282 pp] presented a list of the twenty most common “time-robbers”, based on survey data:

- Management by crisis
- Leaving tasks unfinished
- Inadequate staff
- Socializing
- Confused responsibility or authority
- Poor communication
- Inadequate controls and progress reports
- Incomplete information
- Travel
- Paperwork
- Telephone interruptions
- Inadequate planning
- Attempting too much
- Drop-in visitors
- Ineffective delegation
- Personal disorganization
- Lack of self-discipline
- Inability to say “No”
- Procrastination
- Meetings

Which ones are yours?

Keep your eye on the Big Picture

Your Weekly and Daily plans should be made up while looking at your career planning timeline (for example, [see Planning for tenure timeline.pdf](#)) so that the most important blocks of time are set aside first. Assign weekly blocks of time to work on your own research activities. Do not give them up under any circumstances. It is a disastrous mistake to let teaching take over your schedule during the academic year and assume that you can make up for it by doing research full time in the summer or between semesters! It would be a serious mistake, to imagine that the quality of your teaching does not count at all, however. The more productive approach, and an essential aspect of your preparation for tenure, is to organize your year around your own research and scholarly accomplishments, while delivering a good teaching product. Keep a set number of hours open for students, but do not deviate from your research schedule. Make sure you earmark sufficient high-quality time for your own scholarly activities. Some people work best in whole-day blocks of time. Schedule classes, meetings and appointments with these considerations in mind.

Weekly plan

Have a template with **reserved blocks of time for the week** [for example, (i) Research and scholarly activities, (ii) teaching, (iii) service, (iv) personal time, (v) e-mail and paperwork]. Use the high-energy periods of your day for research and scholarly activities. If mornings are high-energy periods for you, put research blocks first thing in the morning every day. Assign tasks to each week day. Assign these tasks into the reserved blocks of time rather than merely working off a to-do list. For example, revising a manuscript, submitting an abstract for a conference talk, etc. goes into the research block. Reviewing a proposal or manuscript goes into service, as does making a phone call to set up an educational policy committee meeting. Set aside a specific time of day (at your low-energy biological periods) for e-mail. Similarly, relegate paperwork to a specific time of day. Do not let these spill outside the 'e-mail and paperwork' blocks of time! Within the teaching blocks, set aside specific time for office hours, preparing for classroom lectures, holding group meetings, and one-on-one appointments with Ph.D. students. Your research accomplishments will be the primary basis for your evaluation for promotion and tenure. *A common mistake is to let teaching functions organize your daily life and to fit in research and scholarly activities on the side.* Having blocked out research time in your weekly plan, do not let classroom teaching activities spill over into those blocks. Do not let unfinished work spill over into the time allotted for your own research. Guard your research times as if they were actual appointments that cannot be broken. Do not use these precious blocks of time to read your mail, write a letter of recommendation, answer correspondence, or finish other work. By setting up blocks of time and adhering to them, you control the distribution of your time according to the priorities dictated by your career goals.

At the end of the week, review the current weekly plan for uncompleted tasks, check your career planning timeline for important deadlines, and make up your plan for next week accordingly. Understand why you are unable to complete a task in the allotted time. Did you underestimate how much time was required to finish it, or did you accord it greater importance than necessary for your career plan? Make note of any spill-overs into time blocks that occurred, and think about how to adjust for or avoid such spill-overs.

Finding More Time Each Day

Open your daily plan first thing in the morning and start working on the major tasks on the list. Turn off your computer's audible e-mail notification. Open e-mail only during the time block you set aside for e-mail; resist looking at other times.

Paperwork expands to fill all available time. Classify the papers that come across your desk as A job, or C job, or trash. Anything that is optional and not essential to your career advancement is probably trash; throw out immediately. C jobs are those that have to be done, but do not give you career advancement. Spend as little time as possible on C jobs, either get them done in short order or reclassify as trash.

Keep to your schedule. Handle drop-ins accordingly: If you have other times set aside for their business (office hours for students, for example) tell them so. Giving this drop-in person 5 minutes means I have 5 minutes less to devote to preparing my lecture; can I afford that? You'll be amazed how well this type of thinking works to keep you on schedule. Have a timer handy on your desk. Set the timer for the amount of time you are consciously going to carve out of your scheduled tasks for a drop-in. If the timer goes off and they are still in your office, tell them nicely that you now have to attend to other business.

Have a place for everything and return things to their places. Keep your work space clean so you can work more effectively. Put things away unless you are going to use them within the next two hours.

Learning to Say No

No is a very useful little word; learn to use it well.

If you are inclined to say yes to a request that will eat into your time, say you will think about it first. Develop an accurate assessment of the size and scope of the proposed project. If it is a major project, consult your trusted mentors. Consider how working on the project will affect all of your work, not to mention your personal life. Assess the tangible benefits of success in the project. Would it lead to publications that will boost your tenure case? What effect will the request have on your current workload? When will it be practical for you to start to act on this request? That is, when will you have time for it? Is it something you have a special interest in or commitment to? If not, say no! It is perfectly okay to say "I'm sorry, but I've just got too many other commitments right now."

Often, others expect you to do those tasks for which you have skills or expertise. Don't let them dump those jobs on you every time. Say NO! Let others do their share even when they do it less well or less efficiently than you.

Women and members of underrepresented groups are constantly asked to be a participant in some committee or other, for "balance". Say NO unless being on the committee advances your own career. *Your highest duty is to be a productive member of the faculty. Spending too much time providing balance on committees is a sure way to become less productive and not achieve tenure.* Compare your service load to your male contemporaries; avoid doing more. Tell them, if they want balance on their committees they should hire more women.

Conserving Time While Teaching (adapted from Prof. Sarah L. Keller, Univ. of Washington)

Hide!

For uninterrupted time, work away from your office.

Office Hours

- Encourage students to use office hours (or those of your TA); fewer students will stop by your office just to chat.
- Schedule one office hour directly before or after your class. Your head will already be in the material. Your day will be less fragmented. Hold office hours somewhere other than your office (some institutions have learning centers with small cubicles for tutoring; these are ideal for office hours).
- Encourage drop-ins to make an appointment. Undergraduates have little understanding on the requirements on professors outside of class contact hours. They respond well if you cast the task you are doing (e.g. preparing for another class, writing a grant, working on research, performing university service) in terms of something that will improve the quality of their education.

- Hold weekly optional study sessions in a classroom as your office hour. Provide a set of questions and ask students to bring a list of their own questions. Let students know you will arrive by as much as 1/2 hour late to the study session and that they should use the time to work together. Students will answer each other's easy questions first and not passively wait to be fed answers as much.

Student e-mails:

Forward responses to all students or post on the class website; even the students who did not ask will benefit from the answers. Forward appropriate student questions to your TA. Some teachers of large classes simply say, do not send me e-mail, instead send them to a class e-mail address (chem101@...) and answers will be posted on the class website every Friday.

Letters of Recommendation:

Decide beforehand what your policy will be. Do not write a letter for every student who asks. If the student is in your lecture class and has TAs for lab or discussion, tell the student to ask the TA to write the recommendation and you will co-sign after adding comments of your own.

Use electronic letters only. If hard copy is required, print out your electronic copy.

Retain electronic copies of letters of recommendation (for easy modification when students ask for future letters) in folders according to class-semester.

If hard copy forms are required, make students fill out all their info in the forms, tell you which term they took your class, etc. to give you addressed stamped envelopes. Send them a form letter stating all these.

Enlist aid from TAs, staff and faculty:

TAs: If you have TAs, have them keep track of hours spent. Ask your TAs if there is something simple you can do to help them (for example, make comments on a research presentation they are preparing). In return, they can spend more time debugging your exams, writing out solutions to exam questions, giving review sessions, or covering office hours.

Staff: If it will take just as long to do it yourself as to explain it to staff, then you should have them do it. Give a specific estimate of deadline required on the job. "I need this on ...," or "in X days/weeks"

Faculty: Ask to share notes, syllabi, and exam questions, especially when teaching a required course for the first time.

Use Blackboard or a class web-site:

All hand-outs, homework assignments, answers to homework, instructions for labs, etc. can be posted at the proper time, even though you have uploaded all at the beginning of the semester. This avoids dealing with the web site from week-to-week. Tell the students on the first day that you will provide information only on the site, rather than answering e-mails or making announcements in class. Tell them you do this so that all students can have access to exactly the same information at exactly the same time.

Post a clear, comprehensive syllabus and all other information on the first day of class. Rules for the course, your office hours, TA office hours, schedule of examinations (including final exam), point-system or other grading scheme, what students should do when they miss class or quiz, deadlines for homework, detailed day-by-day course outline and reading assignments, etc. should be provided on the first day of class, especially for the lower-level courses. Using Blackboard or a class web site is superior to distributing hard copies; students always have access. Late registrants need not bother you to find out what you announced or handed out earlier.