



Work, Rest and Play

It's a juggle, but it's worth keeping all the balls in the air!

We are encouraging people to be active in caring for themselves and their mental health. This idea encapsulates our hope that students can improve their mental health by considering how they juggle the vital ingredients of work, rest and play.

University is full of very talented students. With that talent often comes a very strong work ethic and more than their fair share of perfectionism. Perfectionism often means that people find it very hard to pull back from a direct attack on the task; the only hours that count are the ones spent actually studying and for some there will never be enough. An intense engagement with the task can result in a lost opportunity to see a task with fresh eyes.

Studying (especially the production of essays) is a creative process. Any creative process has an ebb and flow, which you will need to harness rather than force. Moving away from the task can be very scary because you fear that you won't get it done or it won't be good enough. However, often going into a different zone (rest or play) allows a completely new idea to emerge. Often ideas come into your head when you are doing something completely unrelated. It is though your unconscious, rather than conscious mind, has been given a "go". Perhaps that is why we say, "sleep on it". Haven't famous discoveries been made in the shower, or was that the bath?

Study is a solitary, cerebral and active task. We can make our study experience more sustainable and healthy by balancing solitary, cerebral, active endeavors against their polar opposites. That balance requires that we create opportunities where we engage with other people, are physically active and are sometimes totally passive.

Mental health, like physical health requires that you 'use it or lose it'. Identity is a lived experience, so to keep parts of our "self" alive we need to be active in making a place for them. We can't just get them out of cold storage at the end of the course.

Work, Rest and Play (cont.)

One of the features of the academic lifestyle is that everything is in the service of the goal (the Enter score, getting into honours...). All acts are utilitarian, contributing to the task. It can be very liberating to find an experience which doesn't fit this mould, which you don't need to be good at and you don't need to progress in. This promotes a focus on joy and experience in the moment, rather than always being in the service of the future. Full engagement in the moment is like a form of active meditation. It provides an escape from the unrelenting mental activity, which often plagues students ("I just can't stop thinking").

A hiatus in that diatribe of mental experience can be achieved in activity or in passivity, through meditation techniques. However you make it happen, it is a very peaceful experience and allows us to the student experience (as opposed to "work") is the lack of boundaries around the task. You can and should study anywhere and anytime. This means that you have to work harder at creating boundaries and other zones, where you really do escape.

So think about how you juggle.

