

Time Management for Academics

The number and variety of tasks that faculty members must handle on a daily basis can be overwhelming, which is why it is essential to develop strategies for prioritizing and improving efficiency, says Mary McKinney, a clinical psychologist and professional coach who specializes in working with faculty, post-docs, and doctoral students. McKinney recently offered her insights on the issue of time management in an interview with *Academic Leader*. She will address this topic in greater detail during the live, interactive online seminar “Time Management for Academics” on February 21.

AL: What are the most pressing time management challenges faced by academics today?

McKinney: The most difficult task is to work on long term, larger projects rather than getting lost in daily demands, looming deadlines and sudden crises.

AL: How are time management demands different over the course of an academic's career?

McKinney: The most difficult task for most junior faculty is to carve out time for research and writing. Many new faculty find that teaching takes up so much time that writing for publication falls by the wayside.

Tenured faculty, chairs, and deans often find that daily demands from multiple sources are overwhelming. This leads to difficulty making time for long-term planning and larger projects. The number and variety of tasks which must be juggled can be staggering.

AL: How can an academic manage these issues?

McKinney: The first step is to consistently make time for long-term projects without looming deadlines, such as writing journal articles. When I work with faculty, the majority find that the most effective habit to develop is writing for at least a half hour every workday morning before checking their email.

Studies of productive versus non-productive academics show that learning to conduct scholarly tasks in short, frequent time periods is much more effective than working in sporadic marathons.

AL: Why is it so important to learn to manage time more effectively?

McKinney: Most of us have more to do than is possible. Constantly feeling too busy can lead to chronic stress that impairs our ability to enjoy our careers and our lives—and can even harm our health. We rush through things, feeling overwhelmed, and it becomes difficult to enjoy connecting with students, feel interested by scholarly question, and experience satisfaction when a project is complete.

Feeling chronically overwhelmed also makes it difficult to leave our career concerns at the end of the workday and so that we can be fully engaged with our friends and family and truly relax when we have down time.

AL: How can academics deal with the chronic stress of having too much to do?

McKinney: One of the first steps is to realize that we'll *never* get *everything* done and that we must continually set priorities. We must learn to aim for 80 percent rather than 100 percent effort on many projects and learn to pass up some attractive opportunities so that we're not spread too thin. We also need to carve out time for relaxation, exercise and social activities as rigorously as we make time for career demands. If we don't learn to step off the treadmill on a regular basis, burn out is inevitable.