Tips for Balancing Work, Life, and Graduate School

January 30, 2025



Going to graduate school often represents a substantial investment of time and

money. However, many people choose to go because it can help them enhance their skills, elevate their career prospects, and boost their earning potential. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), master's degree holders earn nearly $10,000 more per year than bachelor's degree holders. Doctoral degree holders can earn roughly three times that amount.

Additionally, a recent CareerBuilder survey revealed that roughly a third of employers now prefer candidates with master's degrees for roles that had been primarily held by those with undergraduate degrees.

Many people who enroll in graduate school continue to work while pursuing their degree. Some do it as a means to finance their education as well as their basic needs. Others may continue working to build a professional network or simply hone their skills. One of the biggest challenges these students face is finding a way to balance work, school, and life.
For graduate students, figuring out how to maintain balance in their personal, professional, and academic lives is essential — leading to reduced stress and greater success.

What Is Work-School-Life Balance, and Why Is It Important?

About 19 million students attended colleges and universities in the fall of 2022, including more than 3 million who attended graduate school, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Many of those students maintained jobs while pursuing their education.

People have various reasons for working while they earn a degree, including the following:

- Paying for Education: Holding down a job while going to school can help students cover the cost of a postsecondary education, including tuition and other expenses, such as textbooks or laptops. Students can receive financial aid for working while they attend college through the federal work-study program.
- Supporting a Family: Some students may need to financially support family members while pursuing a degree, including parents with children.

- Gaining Experience: For those employed in their chosen field, working while enrolled in school can represent an opportunity to gain valuable experience and hone practical skills.

However, the number of students who continue to work while in school varies greatly based on their enrollment status. A 2023 BLS report showed that approximately 42 percent of full-time students worked while they were enrolled in college, compared with 81 percent of part-time students.

These figures illustrate the challenge that many students face in finding work-school-life balance: the ability to effectively prioritize the demands of their jobs, education, and personal lives. Achieving this balance can lead to all sorts of positive returns, including the following:

- Reduced stress
- Improved physical health
- Better grades
- Greater productivity at work

How to Balance Work, Life, and Grad School

Figuring out how to balance work, life, and school can be challenging for students due to the greater time commitment and more intensive coursework involved in their programs. However, following a few relatively simple tips can help students achieve optimum work-school-life balance, leading to greater success in all three areas.

Get Organized

Juggling the demands of a job and school, while also trying to maintain a social life, requires a great deal of organization. Students can use online or physical calendars and planners to keep track of classes, meetings, work shifts, and social commitments. These tools can help them better manage their time and prioritize their various responsibilities.

They can also help them schedule breaks, which have been shown to boost productivity rather than detract from it.

Have a Designated Working and Learning Space

Establishing a designated space for studying and working (for those with remote jobs) is crucial. Ideally, this space should be separate from potential distractions, such as television or social activities, allowing students to set important boundaries and focus properly. A home office, coffee shop, or the library are all viable options.

Prioritize Health

For students trying to balance work, school, and life, focusing on physical and mental health is vital. This not only improves wellbeing but also helps enhance performance. This means eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep. Additionally, setting aside time for recreational pursuits, such as reading a book or going for a walk, and engaging in self-care practices, such as meditation, can help students alleviate stress and be more productive.

Ask for Support

Students should not be afraid to seek out help when they need it. If they are having trouble with a particular subject or assignment, they can get a tutor or work with a classmate. This may help them reduce the amount of time they spend on schoolwork, giving them more time for work and personal pursuits. Also, they can reach out to their professors if they are struggling academically because of other responsibilities.

Explore Alternative Learning Formats

More flexible learning formats, such as online or part-time programs, can facilitate better work-school-life balance. Some institutions also offer hybrid degree programs in which some of the coursework is taken online or evening classes to provide students with greater flexibility.

Work-School-Life Balance at Tulane

College students have busy lives, especially those who hold down jobs while they earn their degrees. Mindful of this, Freeman’s graduate programs were designed with the flexibility to accommodate working professionals.

The Freeman School of Business at Tulane offers multiple graduate programs including several Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs and several specialized master's programs. MBA programs include a fully Online MBA, which can be completed in as little as two years, and a Professional MBA, which has a part-time schedule and can be completed in under three years, a two-year full-time MBA program that provides a cohort experience and an Executive MBA program that spans 17 months. Freeman also offers master's degrees in specialized areas of business including accounting, business analytics, energy management, and finance. Time to completion for specialized master's degrees can range from as little as 12 month or extended over the course of two years.

For prospective students who are considering pursuing a graduate degree at Tulane's New Orleans campus, the advantages of maintaining proper work-school-life balance are even more pronounced. The city's rich cultural offerings and reasonable cost of living are among the many reasons that college students make up nearly a quarter of its population.

Food and Culture

New Orleans is known for its diverse and vibrant food scene. The city is the top domestic food-focused destination on the 2024 Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice Awards list. According to Forbes, New Orleans has the third-highest number of food establishments per 100,000 residents, giving students plenty of exciting dining options. The city is also known for its many cultural attractions and events, from Mardi Gras and the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival to the historic Garden District and lively French Quarter.

Housing

Forbes recently named New Orleans the best U.S. city for college students and graduates, based on rankings of 35 cities by several factors, including housing costs. The publication noted that the city has the second-highest rental vacancy rate and ranks in the lowest 25 percent in rental costs.

Transportation

Transportation costs are also relatively modest in New Orleans, another area where it ranks near the lowest 25 percent, according to Forbes. The city also scores highly

in walkability and bikeability. AllClear Travel Insurance recently ranked New Orleans as the most walkable city in the U.S. and fourth in the world.

Become a Business Leader With Tulane

Effectively balancing school, work, and life can be challenging, but it often leads to meaningful rewards for graduate students. The skills that students build in mastering this equilibrium — organization, time management, self-care — can benefit both their personal and professional growth.

At the Freeman School of Business, our graduate school programs are designed to support professionals who want to enhance their skills through education while they continue to work. Our flexible programming includes online and part-time options, making it easier for you to elevate your professional standing without pausing your career.

Discover how we can help you take the next step in your career.

Sources:

- AllClear Travel Insurance, “The World’s Most Walkable Cities”
- Business News Daily, “How to Improve Your Work-Life Balance Today”
- CareerBuilder, Not Enough Educated Workers — Why This Matters to You
- *Forbes*, “Best Cities for College Students and Graduates 2024”
- *Harvard Business Review*, “How to Take Better Breaks at Work, According to Research”
- Indeed, “How to Balance Work While Going to School (Specific Tips)”
- Indeed, “12 Tips for Balancing Working Full Time and Going to School”
- Mental Health America, Balancing Work and School
- National Center for Education Statistics, Back-to-School Statistics
- *PLOS Computational Biology*, “Ten Simple Rules to Improve Academic Work–Life Balance”
- The Brookings Institution, “Connecting College Students With Enriching Work Experiences”
- Tripadvisor, Travelers’ Choice Awards: Best of the Best Destinations
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Education Pays, 2022
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Participation Rates of College Students Differ by Enrollment Status and Type of College