By Cynthia Zocca

We all know the life of a graduate student is hard. Some of the difficulties fairly straightforward to identify: financial difficulties, hours dedicated to studying and teaching, living away from home, etc. Yet, there is another kind of hardship that afflicts graduate students that is not easy to pinpoint, but can have serious consequences for a person’s life and work alike. I’m talking about negative feelings that can be so overwhelming that they can ultimately lead a potentially successful student to give up the pursuit of their degree altogether.

Unfortunately, in an environment that only values rationality, talking about feelings is not always welcome. This stigma prevents people from discussing, or even admitting to, feelings of inadequacy. Nevertheless, ignoring a problem will not make it go away. On the contrary, problems pile up and can one day lead to a breakdown.

In what follows, I will discuss some of the most common thoughts that go through a graduate student’s life while working on their degree. Does any of them sound familiar to you?

“So I somehow got into the program, but everyone will soon realize that I’m not good enough to be here and I’ll be kicked out.”

“How can everyone else manage everything, when I can’t?”

“I’m disappointing everyone that trusted me.”

“My advisor must think I’m the dumbest person he’s ever worked with.”

“If I talk about how I feel everyone will think I’m silly.”

When these kinds of thoughts take over, it’s hard to look at things objectively. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

1. Accept your feelings. They’re there, whether you want them or not. It’s the only way you can start doing something to feel better.

2. Keep a good record of your positive accomplishments, including the time before you started were in your current program. When we feel bad, we tend to overlook our successes and dwell on our failures. Having concrete evidence of success handy is important when you’re feeling like a complete failure.

3. Find out more clearly what is being expected of you. Graduate students tend to set very high standards for themselves, regardless of what the actual requirements of their program is. Before saying you are disappointing people or that you are not good enough, make sure your own expectations are realistic.

4. Talk, talk, talk. Talk to other students and you will probably find out they have very similar feelings and perceptions as you. Talk to professors and you can find more about what is expected of you and get help on how to get there. Talk to your advisor so he or she can help you assess your situation more objectively. Talk to your family and friends and you will remember you have a support system. It doesn’t matter who you talk to, just make sure you are not isolating yourself.

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You are not alone! continued from page 1

5. Remember you are not silly, you’re just human. Because other people are not talking about their negative feelings, this doesn’t mean they don’t have them. It takes courage to admit we have a problem and look for help on how to address it.

6. Practice dissociating your work from yourself. We cannot let our identities and sense of worth be defined by other people’s perceived opinions of our work. Negative feedback on your work is not negative feedback on you. This separation is extremely hard to achieve. Even when our rational mind knows it exists, our feelings don’t always reflect that. That’s why it needs to be an everyday exercise!

7. Don’t be afraid to look for professional help. Many of the situations we face in graduate school are versions of other situations we’ve had to face in life. Besides, your rational mind doesn’t always have access to your emotional mind, making it extremely hard for us to figure out the reasons for our unhappiness. The university’s Counselling and Mental Health professionals have experience in dealing with students’ emotional issues and they can give you a head start on how to deal with them.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to take care of our emotional side as much as we exercise our intellectual mind. Getting a PhD involves a lot more than intelligence and hard work. We need to learn how to deal with feelings and emotions that can be overwhelming. Academic life is full of challenges, denials, and frustrations, so learning how to react to all that is a skill as essential as any other. Above all, remember: you are not alone!

Meeting Chomsky

By Miloje Despic

This picture was taken in an elevator after the lunch just before his talk, and by a pure coincidence. So John Bailyn and I were running back to grab a seat for Chomsky’s talk thinking that it might be crowded and we run into him alone right in front of the elevator (he was probably leaving the lunch earlier to get prepared). There we introduced ourselves to him and chatted a little-bit while waiting for the elevator. Then it occurred to me that I might as well take a picture with him while we are waiting, since opportunities like this don’t come very often (John took the picture in the elevator).

The recursion workshop @ UMass
**Student Accomplishment**

By Whoever Submitted

**PUBLICATIONS**


**PUBLICATIONS TO APPEAR**


Fitzgibbons, Natalia V. To appear. The Interpretation of Plural Superlatives. *UConn Working Papers in Linguistics*


CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


DEPARTMENTAL PRESENTATIONS


Tieu, Lyn Shan. 2009. There isn't any until there's not any. Presented at the UConn, UMass, Smith College Language Acquisition Workshop (UUSLAW), University of Connecticut, May 2.

Diane received the honor as a distinguished professor at the Graduation Ceremony.

AWARDS & GRANTS


Despić, Miloje. Fellow, Outstanding Scholar Program Fellowship, Uconn (2008-2009)


SERVICE


Despić, Miloje. The organizer/representative for ECO5 from the University of Connecticut Department.

Vaxman, Alexandre L. Student Organization of Linguistics in Europe. Online at http://www.sole.leidenuniv.nl

Villa-García, Julio. 2009. Syntax session chair at the 39th Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages (LSRL-39), University of Arizona, Tucson. 28 March 2009.

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