

June & July 2023 Newsletter

I love summer during grad school. Although I enjoy teaching, grading, and the other commitments that come with the school year, the summer (when classes aren't being held) is a time when I feel like I can finally focus on the things that matters most to me. Sometimes that means doing my "deep work" of writing papers or, as is the case this year, finishing a dissertation, and other times it means attending to the restoration of my mental health. Last summer, it meant uprooting my life and moving across the globe, but then finding community and support in a foreign place. Either way, during the summer, I often feel more like myself than I do at any other time of the year.

Unfortunately, this isn't the case for everyone. One of our aims at PhD Balance is to lift up the voices of the many diverse graduate students to advocate for and support their place in academia. During June and July, as we honor Pride Month and Disability Pride Month, we continue to hold space for graduate students in all their identities. We have recently relaunched our podcasts, Grad Chat and Grad School Life, and the first episode of this "season" (featured below) is about being disabled in grad school. But these conversations about how to be inclusive, uplifting, and supportive must be continued all year round.

If you are interested in connecting with others that have similar interests and identities, I encourage you to visit our Discord channels. There are ongoing conversations about academic support for individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, first-generation, neurodiverse, international, BIPOC, disabled, in recovery, and more. We want to create a platform where differences in identity can be celebrated and also discussed in terms of how we can enact change in systemic ways.

I hope these next months bring you peace, whether it is your academic off-season or not, and please connect with us to share your story. If you want to share your personal story on our podcast platform, reach out to us for more information about how to be a guest. We'd love to hear from you.

Take care,

Courtney Applewhite
PhD Balance President



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Story Showcase: Spotlight on Identity *by Jennifer Ngolab*
- The Founder's Corner *with Susanna L Harris*
- Coworking is back! Join us each week this summer.

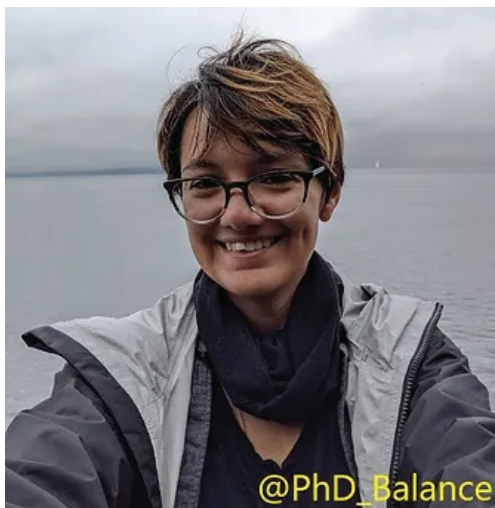
Spotlight on Identity

For this edition of the PhD Balance Newsletter, we are recognizing the importance of identity. This is especially important, as June celebrated Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) identities, and July celebrates those who identify as having a disability. According to a [poll](#) done July 2021, 38% of PhD Balance's volunteer pool identified as LGBTQ+. We have curated several stories from the GradChat podcast that highlight the importance of identifying either as LGBTQ+ and/or Disabled during their graduate studies as well as advice on how to build resilience by embracing your identity.



Guest Schuyler Borges discusses how they navigated [academia as a Queer & Trans Person](#). Their graduate experience left them feeling alone due to their identities and values. To respond to the isolation, Schuyler dedicated time to volunteer with organizations that center around marginalized identities in STEM.

Abby Nissenbaum served on the American Psychological Association Grad Students' Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity as the LGBTQ Mentorship Program Coordinator. In the podcast, she talks about [her experience](#) and provides advice for mentors who do have LGBTQ+ mentees.

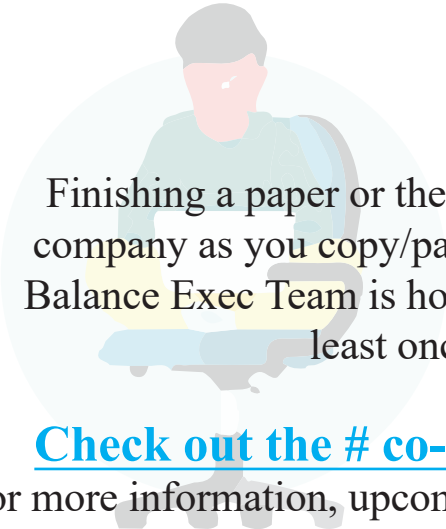


Krystal Vasquez recounts her experience becoming disabled during her graduate studies as well as provides suggestions on accommodations to ease the long days in lab on [this GradChat podcast episode](#).



Dr. Roo Steinberg of Dragonfly Mental Health [discusses her experiences](#) with dealing with disability during her graduate school. She provides actionable items to create an accessible academic work environment for everyone.

Coworking with PhD Balance!



Finishing a paper or thesis? Need to do focused reading or revising? Want company as you copy/paste data into charts? Come to coworking! The PhD Balance Exec Team is hosting co-working sessions via Discord and Zoom at least once a week throughout the summer.

[Check out the # co-working-from-home channel on Discord](#)
for more information, upcoming coworking dates, and spontaneous work sessions!



The Founder's Corner

with Susanna Harris

Hello, I am a [person]

“And what do you do?”

This question from a friend of a friend at a party a few months ago was neither threatening nor unexpected. It's what we're trained to ask as small talk in the US. But, for the first time in my life, my answer couldn't fit neatly into the form of “I am a [title] at [place].”

I considered saying I was “in between jobs” or “on the market,” but neither felt true - I was unemployed specifically to decide what I wanted my answer to be. More than just exploring my career, I felt like I was trying to discover my purpose. And now someone was asking for the summary!?! I shoved an entire cookie into my mouth to buy time.

Like so many people, my identity has centered around my vocational position and the entity that bestows it upon me. Since the age of 14, I hadn't gone more than two weeks without being an employee or student or both (read into this what you will). I'd never had to tell someone who I was without the safety of a default answer. The closest I'd come to this was during the last year of my PhD, whenever someone asked what I was going to do after graduating if not pursue research.

Chewing far too slowly, I remembered the lessons I'd been given back then about how we are more than our current occupation. We are our passions, our behaviors, and our character. We are the things we do on Mondays at 11am and on Saturdays at 11pm. We are the goals we strive for, the interests we develop, and the hobbies we've only gotten halfway through. Our identity and worth are not tied to anything that can fit into a set of brackets, anyway, so we don't need to stress ourselves out by trying.

“I'm really into communication - mostly science and biotech,” I answered. “Also, these cookies are excellent.”

