

We have a birthday coming up! This year marks the fifth anniversary of the creation of PhD Balance, and with that milestone, we are returning to our roots. As President, I am working with our team to continue to cultivate a space for academics to learn from shared experiences with a focus on our word of the year: storytelling.

Academics are storytellers. We develop narrative arcs for teaching our students. We compel granting agencies to believe and invest in our ideas. And we present our research in written, visual, and audio forms. Our goal at PhD Balance is to create a place for academics to share their personal stories and to develop the skills and confidence to become better storytellers. In doing so, we are growing a network of sharing for both commiseration—for the path of the academic is rarely an easy one—and personal growth.

My story weaves together these two threads as well. I am now a PhD Candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in the department of religious studies, aiming to finish my dissertation this year. When I arrived at my program, I was lucky to have support and mentorship from faculty and fellow students. But the trials of graduate school are wearing, and I made the decision to go to therapy for the first time during my second year. By using those therapeutic tools, I've become a more well-rounded and satisfied person, and certainly a better scholar. The mission of PhD Balance to allow space for us to talk about the ups and downs of our career has proved so important for my own development. And I now host our Grad School Life podcast to get a sense of how other students' daily lives are in graduate school.

In the coming months, we can look forward to sharing new personal stories in the form of blog-style essays, Instagram posts and takeovers, podcast episodes, and speaking engagements. We will also be launching workshops, providing editorial support, and holding co-working sessions on our active Discord channel. I hope that you will join us in growing and building up our community of graduate students as we carry with us the knowledge that we all have a story to tell.

Take care,

Courtney Applewhite
PhD Balance President

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- Featuring PhD Pets - submit yours for our next issue!

A Look at 2022 Grad Chat

Throughout the year, we shared with you stories from diverse perspectives on how to navigate the Ph.D. journey: before enrolling, during the journey, and after it! Here are some of the highlights!

The year 2022 started with our guest, **Zoe Ayres**, tackling mental health in academia. How to better dive into the year than by setting yourself up as best as possible for this journey by becoming aware of the options available to tackle mental health challenges that are typically encountered in academia?

Then, with our guest **Courtney Applewhite**, we discussed going back to academia after working, and – the cherry on the cake - we learned about her extraordinary PhD topic in the humanities. With our guests, we explore the importance of listening to yourself when choosing your path, how to choose your supervisor, the unique way of navigating the grad school after-work experience, and a lot more.

With **Erin Berlew**, we talked about setting your goals and how to define success during the Ph.D. journey. During this discussion, we learn about the way of framing your goals and finding the balance between personal achievement as well as meeting your supervisor's expectations. Further, we explored the way of defining success and progress in your work when you are constantly thinking of everything that could go wrong.

We also discuss some aspects such as finding a balance between the Ph.D. and other life commitments with **Bennett Collins**, as well as how to manage your finances during your Ph.D. with **Dr. Emily Roberts**. Furthermore, on a panel discussion on pregnancy in grad school, including **Javi Rudolph, Ph.D.**, **Alexa M.Quinn, Ph.D.**, **Iben Rickett Sullivan, Ph.D., MPH**, and **Pamela Fullerton**, we discuss how to navigate this journey while your personal life keeps moving on as well.

PhD Pets



Kitty the Dog

Donuts and dissertations go hand in hand. Kitty helped her person get through the PhD by stepping on her laptop when she worked too long and always having snacks nearby. - Ellen

Finally, with our guest **Eleni Routoula**, we discuss life after completing the Ph.D. journey, including how to set yourself up on the road to becoming employable, considering all the skills learned and fine-tuned along the journey. If you want to learn more about how to identify your transferable skills for your next career step and how to optimize your CV, go check out this episode!

Overall, the above are just some highlights of valuable experiences we had the privilege to share with you via our podcast. Go check our podcast and feel free to share your favorite episodes as well as your thoughts with us!

~ *by Didi Bedou*
PhD Balance Content & Editing Team

The Founder's Corner

with Susanna L Harris

Five Years of Growth

A lot can happen in five years. Since beginning as a social media experiment in March 2018, PhD Balance has: shared hundreds of stories, hosted dozens of workshops, trained international teams of volunteers, and created countless opportunities for grad students to connect and support one another. In less time than the average duration of a doctoral program, we've seen global shifts in how leaders and society discuss taboo subjects like mental illness and loneliness. This progress has been inspiring and has helped to underscore why I started building this community in the first place.

A half-decade of challenges and triumphs has enabled our team to continuously improve, and I have had the good fortune to have grown along with it. Encouraging students to find and believe in their voices gave me the confidence to finish my degree just as the pandemic began. Building out this organization has helped me construct my own support system of friends and champions to lean on over the several years of finding my footing outside of academia's ivory tower. Talking about my mental health and guiding others to do the same has shown me the value of self-care and self-compassion, especially when we aren't sure whether we deserve it.

Our guiding principle for PhD Balance has always been to empower academics to share their experiences so our community can learn and grow together. Sharing my story helped me accept myself and lean on others when needed; I believe we can reach a future where every academic has this opportunity and support.

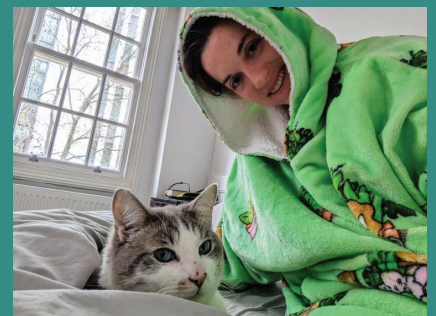
Thank you for a fantastic five years of growth, and cheers to the future. ~ Susanna Harris, PhD

PS - Since it's easier to track the passage of time visually, here's a comparison of my PhD Pets in 2018 vs 2023.

**Athena &
Hermes**



PhD Pets



Oats

Oats is the snuggly-er of Courtney's two cats. He is most attentive when she's wearing her favorite succulent covered Oodie!

In our newsletter you'll always find the newest info about PhD Balance activities! Also, you can expect to find curated content, putting past stories and resources from our website into a spotlight. The topic of this newsletter is: **A Fresh Start**.

Now, even towards the end of January, the year feels still new to many of us. Thus, we dove into our archive of our (now retired) Stronger Together program to find what might support you in this phase.

SMART Goal Setting
For more info: #PhDStrongerTogether
PHD Balance

SMART goals are based on **your own** unique values, goals, abilities, and priorities!

S specific
M measurable
A attainable
R realistic
T time-bound

tips

- Write your goals down!
- Assess these goals often. No shame in modifying along the way!
- Create weekly and monthly goals as needed

Grade assignment 2 lab reports before the **end of the week**, and return to students on **Friday by 3 pm**.

*Write a **15-page first-draft** dissertation chapter in **1 month** (send for review to PI **May 7, 2021**).

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Do you usually set goals for the new year?
And do you keep your resolutions?

One way to increase your chances to actually fulfill your goals is to formulate them in a specific way that makes reaching them easier.

Find how and see examples in [this post here!](#)

navigating a new environment
#PhDStrongerTogether
PHD Balance

Stronger Together wants to help you prepare for your new environment as we enter a new school year!

- moving costs
- international student transition
- find your community & build relationships
- advice for new graduate students

swipe!

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Starting a new year might come with a similar feel and similar challenges as starting out in a new academic environment. So, you might find these tips about moving costs and finding friends and a community helpful. Or bookmark it and keep it handy for future use!

[See the post here!](#)

PhD Pets - Submit your cozy friends today!

We want to see your pets, plants, rocks, and all things cozy that helped you get through grad school! Use our Google Form to submit yours today! Pets will then be shared in our newsletter, just like Oats and Kitty in this issue!

[Click here to access the form!](#)