

April & May 2023 Newsletter

Application decision season is upon us. Every graduate student can recall the angst and worry that these couple of months bring—will I get in? Will I get funding? It's enough to teeter anyone's mental health. I remember frantically checking GradCafe hourly, looking to see if others had heard back from the programs that I had applied to. I thought: if I just knew whether or not I'm accepted, then I can relax. Well...here we are, six years later, and I haven't mastered that sense of relaxation.

Graduate school, from beginning to end, challenges our mental health. One of the goals of PhD Balance is to show that mental health challenges are not signs of weakness that should be hidden away; rather, they are normal and should be examined with care. Instead of pushing through burn out and intense stress, we hope to normalize the ideas of taking your time, taking a few breaks, and sometimes taking meds in consultation with a healthcare provider. I attended therapy for the first time while in graduate school. I started taking medications for anxiety and depression during graduate school. Working with mental health providers, finding community, and using tools for time management and mood regulation have made the last couple of years those of growth from the tense months hovering over the “refresh” button on my application page.

As we observe Mental Health Awareness Month, I hope you'll take the time you need to be well: physically, mentally, and emotionally. To help, PhD Balance offers several opportunities to find your community during this time. Feel free to share your story, commiserate or celebrate with fellow graduate students on our Discord channel. If social media is more comfortable, engage with PhD Balance on our Instagram page. If you feel compelled, join our ever growing community, either as a member or volunteer. Let us know how we can support you!

Take care,

Courtney Applewhite
PhD Balance President



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Story Showcase: Mental Health Awareness Month *by Jennifer Ngolab*
- The Founder's Corner *with Susanna L Harris*
- Featuring PhD Pets - submit yours for our next issue!

Spotlight on Mental Health

May is Mental Awareness Month and dedicated to raising awareness of topics dealing with mental health. The academic career path comes with its own trials and tribulations that take a toll on one's mental health. [Several studies](#) have highlighted the need for concern with graduate students, even before the pandemic. A [2020 study](#) that surveyed graduate students enrolled in two major US-based research universities reported that up to 39% screened positive for anxiety and 32% for depression. While these studies indicate the prevalence of depression and anxiety in higher education, it is vital to acknowledge there are methods available to address these issues. Our goal at PhD Balance is to provide tools, resources, and inspiration to navigate any rough patch you are experiencing. Here is a sample of resources you can find on our website:

GRAD CHAT
by PhD Balance

Tackling Academic Mental Health

with Zoë Ayres



In [this episode](#) of Grad Chat, PhD Balance's podcast, Academic Mental Health Advocate Zoë Ayres, PhD, talks about her bouts with her mental health during her PhD research, which inspired her to advocate for improving the mental well-being for people in academia.



Asia R. Randolph (@blackgraduate on Instagram) [recalls her journey](#) through her PhD studies and provides advice for any graduate student struggling currently.

From the PhD Balance Editors:
Resources To Use To Get Help



On the blog, members from the PhD Balance community have chimed in on where to seek help from a [United States](#) and a [European](#) perspective.

PhD Balance

Lizbeth Dávila-Santiago writes about how a support group helped her combat feelings of [Imposter Syndrome](#). She attributes her success to having support from a community of like-minded people.

The Founder's Corner

with Susanna Harris

Mental Health Self-Awareness

When we discuss mental health awareness, we usually mean encouraging our society to notice and understand when someone needs help. But how often do we turn this approach inwards?

If detecting when others are in need is difficult, doing the same for ourselves can feel impossible.

I've found it helpful to use the times of smooth sailing to reflect back on which signs have previously indicated that a storm was brewing for me*. I've categorized these signs as:

- Blue Skies (all clear) ● Dark Clouds (uh oh) ● Big Waves (uh oh, but different).

	Blue Skies	Dark Clouds	Big Waves
Hobbies	Range of interests	Nothing is fun	New hobby each day
Energy	Daily movement	Hard to get moving	Can't wind down
Appetite	Enjoying nourishment	Comfort snacks only	Forgetting meals
Socializing	Looking forward to seeing friends	Avoiding people and crowds	Can't stand solitude
Music Choice	Indie / Pop	Emo / Punk	Club / Electronic

**Note: everyone's behaviors are different; mine should not be considered "baseline."*

It's often more comfortable to turn our backs on a storm that might be brewing and hope that the clouds will roll out. And sometimes they do. But when we know our warning signs, we can batten down the hatches or call out for help.

My challenge to you this month: write down some signs that indicate turbulence in your mental health. If you feel comfortable, share these with the people who care about you, as they will appreciate the opportunity to keep you floating along.

Use this blank table to try identifying and filling in your own signs!

	Blue Skies	Dark Clouds	Big Waves
Hobbies			
Energy			
Appetite			
Socializing			
Music Choice			