ASA ECR Mentoring workshop
31st May 1st June 2012
Time Management Panel Discussion

The "Time Management" panel included: Brian Boyle (CSIRO), Kate Brooks (CSIRO, ASA), Warrick Couch (Swinburne), Bryan Gaensler (CAASTRO), Karl Glazebrook (Swinburne), Geraint Lewis (University of Sydney), Sarah Maddison (Swinburne), Helen Sim (CSIRO), Rachel Webster (Melbourne University). Different people obviously had different opinions and different methods on the topic at hand. Thus, the advice given below is somewhere on a continuum between the consensus of the panel and ideas that worked for certain individuals.

Email

- Email is the scourge of time management! Especially as you become more senior.
- Only check your email twice a day. Don't let it notify you outside those times.
- Use filters. Colour code your emails - e.g. students are red, family blue etc.
- Automatically delete (or archive) any email older than three months.
- If an email must be replied to, hit "reply" and save a blank reply.
- Go to bed with an empty inbox. Alternatively, the only emails in your inbox at any time should be emails that you must do something about e.g. that need a reply or are reminders of something you must do. All other emails go in an appropriate folder.
- Remember the telephone! It can be much quicker than many back-and-forth emails, and more nuanced.

Scheduling and Deadlines

- Your long-term goals and personal vision will dictate what your priorities are. Keep them in mind.
- Make a daily to-do list. Be specific. Go get a coffee, and then come back and prioritise it.

- Do the important things before the urgent things. Don't put off that big, guilty burden that won't go away. If you find yourself doing the easy things, stop!
- Know how long a task will take — guess before and review after to hone this ability.
- Schedule your time in blocks of one hour, even if the thing doesn't take an hour. Don't schedule things back to back. Don't be afraid to just stop and think. Schedule gaps and empty time. Use them to talk to people.
- Keep personal and work events on the same calendar, so that your don't double book yourself.
- Proposals tend to spend as much time as you have. Know how much time you have to spend on it. Don't let it expand to use all your time.
- Leaving a task to the last minute can work in your favour, as it stops the task eating too much of your time. Be careful, however, as last minute complications are also likely.
- Even a tenth of a secretary's week can be enormously time-saving, especially for things like booking conference flights and accommodation.
- Above all, enjoy the freedom you have in academia to decide how you will spend your time.

Working Hours

- There are some people who work so much that they become unproductive. Have a routine and be careful with your time.
- Know what times of the day you are more productive. If you are more effective at writing in the morning, then block that time out and don't let yourself be distracted.
- Don't get into a rut. Don't sit at your desk counting off the hours to home time if you are not working effectively. Just take a break or go home and start working again when you can work effectively.
- Don't take your laptop charger home in the evenings to limit your time. (Requires an older laptop!)
- Part time: two days a week is too few, because your admin overhead doesn't shrink in proportion. Four days is possibly too many, because its so close to full-time that people won't expect your output to be less than for a full time worker. Three days is about right.
- Astroph: Skim quickly. Read the interesting ones on the train. Make sure that journal clubs are saving you time by summarising papers of interest.

Managing Time in a Team

- Learn to delegate. Know what training they need, and what responsibility you must give them, and what accountability they take on.

- As you get more senior, you will spend more time on metaresearch - the next generation of researchers and the infrastructure that they will need. Focus on your team, your students, your collaborators, your postdocs.

- As a team member, don't be a 'yes' person. Think about how a task you have been asked to do aligns with your priorities and be prepared to say no.

Teaching

- Learn to delegate. Know what training they need, and what responsibility you must give them, and what accountability they take on. This especially true of first year PhD students — be prepared for them to be a net time sink.

- Preparing lectures from scratch: about 3-5 to 1 preparation time to lecture time ratio for a first course. A long lecture course, given for the first time, can wipe out research for a semester.

- You will learn a lot in teaching a course, so look to teach courses that you want to learn about.

Resources

- Randy Pausch Lecture: Time Management (http://youtu.be/oTugjssqOT0)
- Online + app syncable to-do list: www.toodledo.com/
- Task Management (Mac): www.omnigroup.com/products/omnifocus/
- Google calendar
- Book: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, by Stephen R. Covey
- arxivsorter.org/