A typical day of a PhD in Business student at VCU

By Andrew Bennett

Here’s a brief sketch of my “typical” day as a 2nd year PhD student – keeping in mind that there is no such thing as a typical day or a typical PhD student. The great part of the PhD program at VCU is that I have a lot of flexibility with my time (which of course is a problem if I don’t manage it well enough to get everything done). So, here it goes…

I’m a morning person, meaning I start my day around 6am. I try to exercise in the morning, so I run, swim, or go to the gym early in the day. After a shower, breakfast, and a quick e-mail check, I walk to the Starbucks near my apartment. By now it’s around 7:45am, so I grab a drink and settle into a table for a few hours of reading – usually something for class or my own research. (In case you’re wondering, we typically read between 8 and 12 journal articles each week for each of the three courses, so roughly 200-400 pages per class).

Around 10:30am I leave Starbucks and drive to VCU. I live close to campus, so I’m in my office by 10:45am and start preparing for the course that I teach this semester, Management 319: Organizational Behavior. I review my slides (which I created during the summer), make notes of my own work experiences to share, write down a few questions to ask the class and hopefully spark a discussion, and also review the activity I have planned for that day about goal setting. My section of MGMT 319 is 50 minutes long, 3 days a week, with 48 students. Today’s class goes well, with students really enjoying the demonstration of how their fellow students perform to the different goals that I set for them. I make a note to keep this activity for future semesters, chat with a few students after class, and am back in my office around 1pm.

I spend the next hour eating lunch, responding to school e-mails, responding to personal e-mails (and checking Facebook, espn.com, and a few news websites), and reviewing my notes before class at 2pm. The next three hours are spent in a PhD seminar, where we discuss as a class (there’s 4 of us) the key topics as well as what we liked and what we would improve in the research going forward. Typically one student is the discussion leader for each class, meaning they’ll organize the readings and write a list of questions to keep the discussion flowing.

At 5pm I have a research meeting with a faculty member to discuss our ongoing project that we plan to submit as either an article or conference paper in the next two months (the topic deals with how individuals handle work stress and the impact it has on their work the next day). The meeting lasts for a little over an hour, so afterwards I drive to a restaurant and meet my girlfriend for dinner. I’m home by about 8:30pm, so I usually take about an hour or so to catch up on e-mails, course readings, or some other work that I feel I should have finished. Following that, I watch TV or read something for fun (usually fiction), and go to bed.

In a nutshell, that’s a normal day. Of course there are multiple weeks each semester when you work much more than 40-50 hours, such as putting in 80-100 hours to finish your eleventh version of a paper before submitting it to a scientific journal. Even though some weeks are grueling, it’s an enjoyable process for me because I believe what I’m working on is important from both a practical and academic standpoint. I’m also passionate about my interest areas, so a longer week is still enjoyable because I’m spending time with other PhD students who are interested in similar topics and all going through the program together.