

BALANCING WORK AND PLAY

Daniel J. Jacob (how did I get snookered into this?)

This talk is based on two flawed assumptions:

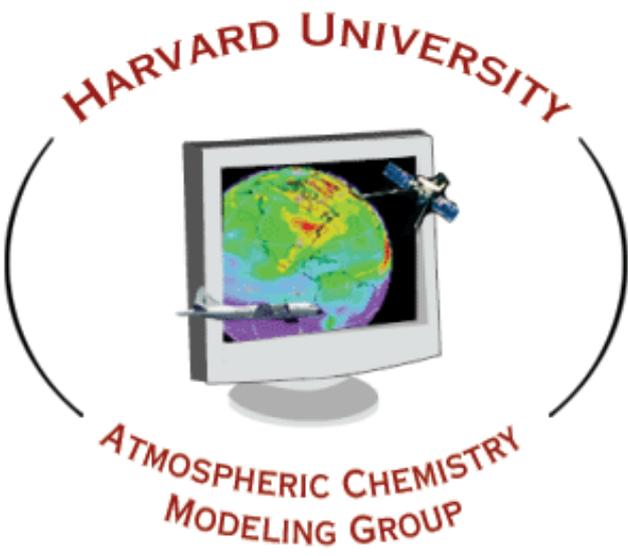
- That I am an expert on balancing work and play;
- That general advice can be dispensed on such a personal matter

Yet balance of work and play is critical to pursuit of



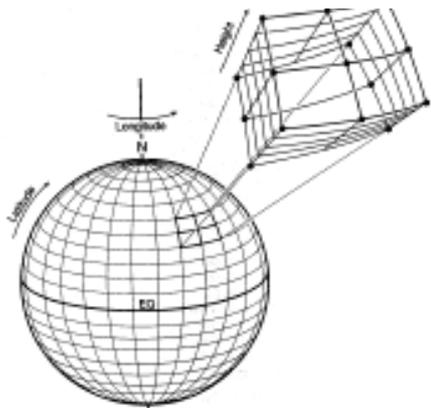
...so it's well worth discussing!

MY TIME AT WORK



We work to understand the chemical composition of the atmosphere, the effect of human activity, and the implications for climate change and life on Earth

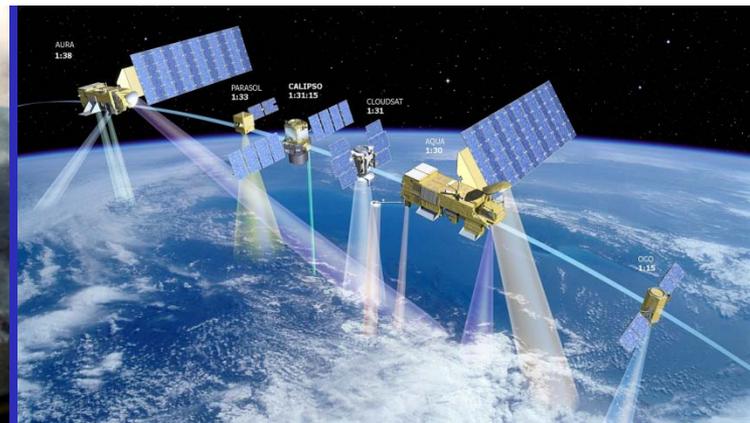
Global 3-D modeling (GEOS-Chem)



Aircraft missions (fires in N. Saskatchewan)

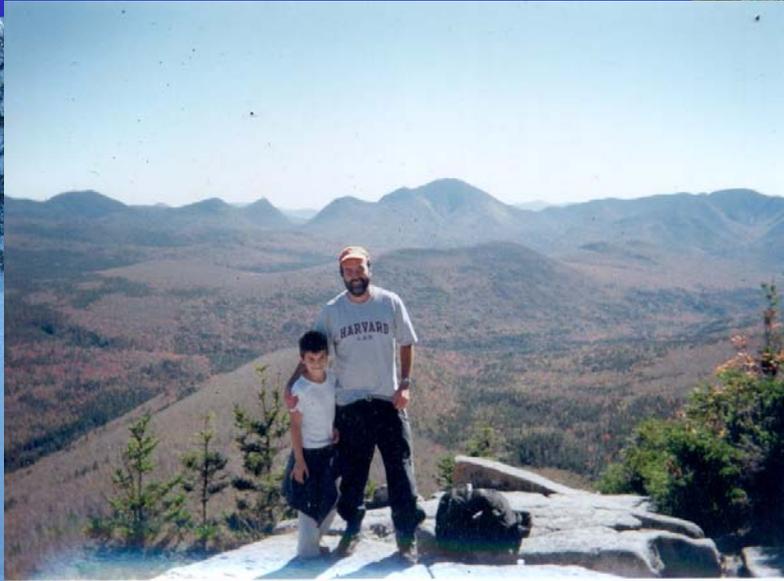


Satellite observations (NASA A-Train)



MY TIME AT PLAY

Outdoors in the White Mountains



Parents' week-end at American U.

Family clan in France



A RESEARCH CAREER SHOULD BE FUN – OR AT LEAST SATISFYING

Research scientists rank very high in job satisfaction:

- Exert your creativity- contribute to human knowledge, search for truth
- Science is fun; euphoria of understanding something new
- Achieve success by objective measures of merit, not social skills or public approval
- Don't deal with human suffering or with stupid or mean people
- Enjoy mutual respect with your peers in a relatively non-competitive atmosphere
- See the world and get to know the people who live there
- Enjoy a guaranteed upper-middle-class income, little financial pressure
- Gain professional and social acceptance as a nerd
- Enjoy independence, stay a kid your whole life

...but a research career doesn't have to be for you. There are other options.

Good reasons not to choose a career in research:

- “My work as grad student or postdoc isn't satisfying” (it doesn't get much better)
- “Research is too narrow– I want more big-picture, more variety, more obvious impact”
- “Rewards of research are too long-term – I need short-term return”
- “I want to become filthy rich”

Bad reasons not to choose a career in research:

- “I'm not creative enough” – you don't know this, and the creativity bar is not high
- “I don't want to have to publish or perish” – some jobs don't require much publishing
- “It's too hard to get a good job” – it really isn't, there are tons of jobs out there
- “I want to have a personal life” – you can (and should!)

HOW TO MAKE YOUR RESEARCH WORK MORE FUN/SATISFYING

- **"Find out what it is in life that you do not do well, and then don't do that thing."**
(The Dos Equis guy)
 - Are you better at lab, field, modeling, theoretical work?
 - Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?
 - Do you like to write papers or not?
 - Don't panic if your Ph.D. work does not meet your expectations – view this as a learning experience for what you will do post-Ph.D.
- **Focus your time on what's important to you**
 - Don't let others create 'make-work' for you – it has to feel important to you
 - Do service/admin/teaching work only to the extent that you enjoy it
 - Avoid unnecessary meetings
 - Avoid getting caught by deadlines
- **Don't take yourself seriously**
 - What we're doing in science is not *that* important
 - Professional stakes are not very high
 - Be open with your ideas/data – don't be afraid of theft
 - Be competitive but in a friendly way, avoid one-upmanship
- **Work with good people who inspire and challenge you – it's contagious!**

DO YOU WANT SCIENTIFIC GLORY – OR JUST A GOOD JOB?

- **As a Harvard Ph.D. you are guaranteed at minimum a good job – and there's nothing wrong if that's all you want**
 - Most scientists are nothing like Harvard professors; they may work in universities with reasonable expectations, in research labs as part of a big team, in industry, as program managers...there are plenty of opportunities with great job satisfaction, low stress, plenty of time for play!
 - Unlike other professions, there is not a big spread in pay between scientists – a good job pays very well and scientific glory pays little more
 - Harvard *is* a stressful place – but take this as an opportunity to build credentials that will put you in position to get the “good job” that you want
 - Harvard is also a stimulating place – how about giving it a chance and rising to the challenge? you may find your satisfaction and ambitions rising!
- **Professional glory as a Ph.D. scientist doesn't have to be through research**
 - There are many opportunities for brilliant careers in organization, administration, management of science; also in consulting, business, communications...

SO YOU WANT SCIENTIFIC GLORY – DOES THAT MEAN NO PLAY?

- **You do have to bust your butt when you're young – no way around it**
 - There's not much room at the top
 - Your later scientific reputation will be built on the work you did when you were young
 - You're at a time in your life when you have lots of energy and little external distractions from family, property, or service – take advantage of it to work!
 - It will be stressful, but it has to be fun – otherwise it's not worth it
 - Leave yourself quality time for play and relationships – avoid burnout + there are only so many hours/day when you can work productively. Have a life plan, not just a work plan!
- **It gets much easier as you get older**
 - Even if you still work a lot, the stress eases
 - You become better at time management
 - You learn to say “no” to things you don't want to do
 - You can mold your mode of operation in a way that suits you best
 - You reap the rewards of the investment from your younger years:
“To those who have had, more will be given” (David Lodge, Small World)

SO – HOW TO BALANCE WORK AND PLAY?

- **Know what you want out of life and what makes you happy – what's the right balance for you?**
- **Get to know your work capacity and when/how you work most efficiently**
 - There's generally a time of day, working environment, etc. conducive to your productivity
 - Figure out if you need a disciplined work schedule, or instead a loose schedule mixing work and play
 - Learn to say no! Acid test for saying yes is whether it's important to you (but do appreciate value of service)
- **Make quality time for play, family and friends – it's part of the long-term investment in your life!**

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- How to write a successful proposal
- Advising and mentoring
- Life after the Ph.D.
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