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Gender Equity Project Colloquia and Workshops

Capitalizing Gains and Maximizing Progress During the Summer Topic Discussion and Activities

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Research is arguably the most exciting and satisfying component of an academic career. The opportunity to develop our understanding of an issue, while simultaneously contributing to a field of knowledge, is what attracted many of us to academia. The pleasure of discovery, the pleasure of creating a new method, the pleasure of insight, the pleasure of reconciling two apparently contradictory phenomena, the pleasure of synthesizing a large body of material, the pleasure of abstract thinking - these are among the joys of intellectual work. Why, then, aren't those joys enough to keep everyone productive in research and writing? Some of the reasons are external - e.g., teaching and committee responsibilities. Some are internal - e.g., fears about how our work will be received.

Summer offers a special opportunity. It reduces the external impediments to productivity: we are not teaching and we are not attending committee meetings. (If we are, we didn't plan properly!) That means we can design our summer so that we can maximize time for writing and maximize time for pleasure. Summer also offers some dangers. Exactly because so much time is available, it can seem that planning is unnecessary. But planning is always necessary. The internal blocks to writing remain. They may even loom larger, because the distractions of external problems are gone. A realistic schedule helps us by obviating the need to think, each day, when will I work? Summer also offers other activities - vacation, visits from or to friends or relatives, a different set of household responsibilities - that compete with and can usurp research and writing time.

The summer, then, requires careful and realistic planning in order to maximize productivity and pleasure. It requires time management and what we might call psyche management. The activities listed below are intended to help with both. For time management, you will need to a) think constructively and realistically about the time available and the tasks you wish to accomplish and b) plan a schedule to achieve those tasks in the time available. For the latter, you will need to a) think about where the likely threats to your identity as a researcher will come from and b) develop relationships and mechanisms to neutralize those threats. An ally is especially helpful during the summer.

We recommend completing each activity with at least one partner. The immediate goal of each activity is to help you develop ideas and suggestions for how to design the summer that is best for you. Some people may provide you with suggestions to adopt; others may provide you with suggestions to avoid. You will not be getting prescriptions from people, but descriptions of what they do or would like to do.

We strongly advise having an ally or set of people to call on for different needs. With one person, you may arrange for weekly discussions about your schedules and progress. In that way, you will hold each other accountable for a certain amount of progress. You will also be able to help each other analyze what is going right and what is going wrong. With someone else, you may arrange for a regular discussion about the content of your work.

The goal is to think about what you will need and design your summer so that your needs will be met.

Activity 1 (complete before the workshop): Part A. Talk with at least one person whose work habits and productivity you admire. Ask them how they structure their summer. Your goal here is not necessarily to find someone you can emulate. It is to learn what strategies people use to have

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a happy and productive summer so that you can devise your own strategies. When you talk with them, keep the following questions in mind.

- How do they structure their day?
 - Do they write in the morning and leave afternoons and evenings free for other activities?
 - Do they devote certain days or weeks to work while leave others for free time?
- Where do they work?
 - Do they work at home?
 - What do they find challenging about working at home?
 - What do they find helpful about working at home?
 - Do they work at Hunter?
 - Do they work at a summer place?
- Do they take work with them when they travel?
 - How do they schedule time for work and travel activities?
- How do they balance work with their other activities and responsibilities (e.g., visiting relatives)?
- With whom do they talk about their work during the summer?
 - Research assistants in their lab?
 - Colleagues at their home institution or another institution?
- Did they develop any strategies that were unsuccessful?

Part B. "Interview" yourself. Think about a period when you were more productive than usual.

- What contributed to your productivity?
 - Would you like to duplicate those conditions? (Perhaps not; perhaps you were working to a deadline and never want to relive that situation.)
- If you imagine the ideal summer, how do you balance work and pleasure?

Gather a short list of useful ideas from your conversations with others or from your "interviews" with yourself. E-mail them to the GEP (gender.equity@hunter.cuny.edu OR gep2003_04@hotmail.com). Come prepared to discuss them at the workshop.

Activity 2: Identify the major projects you want to accomplish by the end of the summer (e.g., complete data analysis, finish a book chapter). Do not compile more than 4 projects. For each project, consider a set of questions.

- What roadblocks to completing these projects might you face?
 - Are they internal? If so, what are they? (The roadblocks could be anything from feeling stale on the project to thinking that it is beyond one.) Think back to previous summers to see what you might be omitting.
 - Are they external? If so, what are they? (The roadblocks could be anything from household responsibilities to lack of resources.) Think back to previous summers to see what you might be omitting.
- What solutions to the roadblocks can you come up with?
 - For internal roadblocks, would it help to have an ally? Would it help to be in email correspondence with someone working on a similar topic?
 - For external roadblocks, would it help to reduce them by, for example, spending less time on a trip or visit with relatives?

Activity 3: The better you define the projects you want to accomplish, the more likely it is that you will complete them. This activity is designed to help you think in depth about what time and

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resources your projects will require; that will help you design your summer schedule. Identify one major project from your list of summer projects.

- Divide the project into 4 to 5 smaller subtasks. Use the subtasks as a guideline to determine the time and resources you need to complete the entire project.
 - What resources will each subtask require?
 - Does the task require materials or facilities that are only available in a specific place?
 - Are there subtasks that you can work on while you travel? For example, while it is feasible to take a large chunk of writing with you to visit relatives, it may not be practical to complete a complex data analysis while you are away from critical materials (e.g., the necessary computer program).
 - How much time will each subtask require?
 - Anticipate here what could go wrong and thus require more time than you initially anticipated.