



Graduate College Podcast: Mental Health, Vincent Carlson Tra...

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

poem, exercise, grad school, eat, people, friends, social interaction, give, pandemic, food, work, phd student, quarantine, find, productivity, ice cream, vincent, sleep, productive, goal

SPEAKERS

Shelby, Vincent, Sebastian, Abby, Cat



Abby 00:19
I'm Abby.



Cat 00:21
I'm Cat.



Sebastian 00:22
I'm Sebastian.



Shelby 00:24
And I'm Shelby and you're listening to the Graduate College Podcast.



Abby 00:28
Where we take a deep dive into topics regarding graduate students at Illinois one conversation at a time.



Sebastian 00:34

We get a mini performance from theater PhD candidate Vincent Carlson who wrote and performed a poem called, "You and your work", and we shortly discuss that with him afterwards.



Vincent 00:50

You and your work, your productivity is not only the hours you work, the progress you make, it is not only the project you complete your productivity is not the only measure of your worth, or your value, your quality is not just how much you do, but rather how you do it, it is not always how quickly you're able to finish a task but ultimate quality working on the task itself, the ways in which you do the thing are as important, perhaps more as what you actually do. You and your work. It is your thought that develops, the idea that sparks and marinates over time rolling with experience and encounter, your thoughts needs time and material, give yourself the grace of time, and the gift of experience. Time. It is the time you take to be in the world, not just be working in the world to enjoy the world but also at times critique the world. Experience, the experiences you have between the due dates, and the moments you share before and after the deadlines, you and your work. The space, you take physically but also mentally and emotionally, will give you room to create over time, curate a room in the apartment. Find a print a picture of your paramour. Find a favorite reading nook, or a morning walk, or a watering hole, move things to make your corner of the world, the way you like them, perhaps it's a clean space that matches the order of your mind. Perhaps it's a pile of clutter under which your chaos reigns, your space is yours and a reflection of your inspiration and motivation, you must make space and take space in the world, and also in your life, you must be able to turn off when you feel the need for only then are you able to be on when you are called to be. Learn how to say no; to projects and sometimes to people, hard work requires setting priorities and making sacrifices, there will be thousands and thousands of things vying for your attention. Decide what takes up space in your life. You and your work. The event. The occasion is the ritual of the day or at the end of week reward. It could be a monthly car trip to a nearby spot for a change of scenery, or a bike ride across town for the familiar scenery. It might be the goal at the end of the season that gives you drive, or the song in the morning that gets you moving; the events of the occasions, the landmarks, you and your work, the place where you are in this present, it requires your presence, your past has harkened your arrival and your future will hail your returns, but this present is this moment where you are, place yourself fully in the moment and meaning of here, and invest in now. This place, this geography this latitude and longitude is the location of your developing origin story, for we are always already in the process of originating what is to come, but we can only do so from this place in this present, it is here. Find out what here is, and then be here. Be fully here. You and your work. The people you meet and with whom you connect your interests

and theirs which intersect the conversations over coffee or maybe a beer before a movie or during the board game, social interaction is imperative to expanding our minds, our experiences, relationships, friends advisors mentees families loves, They contain connections of impact, and they work both ways. People send and receive meaning through interaction. And maybe the people you need to spend time with are characters in a novel, podcast or comic book, binging a TV show on a Saturday and not feeling guilty about it can be time well spent. But also, call your family, find your friends, and interact without agenda. You do not need to have everything you do or say be about your work. You must give yourself time. You must give yourself experience you must give yourself space, you must give yourself event, you must give yourself place you must give yourself people and practicalities. Yes, sometimes you'll have to work harder than you want to, you'll have to read faster than you think you can, you'll have to stay up late or get up early to write and write and write and write and write, but you can be prepared for and also recover from those times with food and exercise and rest. In food and sport and life preserving rest; food, food young ravens must have food. Your system, your engine will only run as well as the fuel you put in. Fast food will break down your body, delivery will eat at your budget, prepare meals and snacks, get groceries when you can and be mindful of what and when you eat, but also sometimes your favorite fast food is a good end of week goal, and we all have an indulgence, of choice. My is ice cream, but it's the consistent patterns you make and habits you create with food that will assist your body in the work and your mind as well. Food is tricky. It has to be a balance. Don't beat yourself up about what or how you eat, enjoy food, love it and relish the act of eating. Take time to eat and refuel. And also be aware of what you eat, how much and how often. Sometimes it's too much. Sometimes it's too little, create a pattern and strike a balance and veer off that path when you need to for treats rewards, and comfort. Exercise Exercise, flowing and swelling over with arts and exercise. At times your mind won't work. So your body must take over. Breathe. Move, rinse, repeat. But if you stretch for five minutes and take a shower, acknowledge some days that will be a victory revel in that success, and look for more, stack your successes and they will become routines, your body is the house in which you live, you must maintain it, set a goal for three sweaty T shirts, a week, or maybe it's just one. Or maybe it's six, but set physical exercise as a non negotiable. It is as important as a page count, point in fact, that will actually help you get to that page count, go for a 10 minute walk, you'll be able to work another hour if you do do 10 Push ups, you'll be able to read 10 more pages if you do, stand and stretch or sit and breathe. Your body needs moments of change and movement in order to operate efficiently. It also needs to reset and rest. Unplug and recharge. Sleep, sleep that season of all nature's, sleep. You should schedule sleep or take it when it comes, you may find yourself lacking it frequently, so it must become an agenda and objective, put to sleep, the target hours on a to do list. All this to say, you and your work, your productivity and your words can be mined in the process of the work, as well as in the celebration of the product, you will find success when

you acknowledge that what you have to do is not in the way it is the way you can measure success but the path you take, struggles and failures included. It's not just the end that will pull up the value, but the journey along the way, the time, experience, and space, the event and place and people...

S

Sebastian 08:45

To start our Q&A, your poem is a great reminder to give yourself a break as a graduate student, could you explain the importance of giving yourself a break?

V

Vincent 08:57

It's, it's necessary to be able to be productive. When you have all that you have to do in grad school is so hard, because like we feel like we have to be on. And if we feel like we have like two or three hours at the end of the night. You know, it feels like sometimes like, "Oh we can read, you know, two or three more articles, or we could write you know like two or three more pages", but sometimes like those two to three hours at the end of the night, need to be like, hey, just like, chill out and watch a TV show or go to bed early, or, you know, connect with friends or go to a movie or something. The idea is, I mean like I'm training right now for half marathon, and the idea, like grad school is so parallel to me, you know, with like running training, because like if I feel like, "oh I could, I could run, I could run another mile today or I could run another two miles today". That's great, but then like your miles tomorrow, will be affected by that choice today and your total miles for the week will be compromised in a way, by the choices you make today right so you sort of have like grad school is a marathon, and you have to pace yourself right? So you have to say well I can only put in this amount of time and I can only put in this hour, and then I need, I need to rest my body needs to rest my mind needs to rest, I need to shower, I need to stretch, I need to eat, all these things, which actually help the machine run, actually help you better attack the next day, in terms of like your agenda and your to do list right? So it's like we just smash, smash, smash the whole time until like we're dead at the end of the day, we won't be able to go farther or longer, or harder the next day we have to give ourselves that recovery time with our muscles with our mind with our body, the same way in grad school as if we're training you know for any sort of like, you know, physical, you know mark or exercise or marathon or anything like that, right, that's what I think.

A

Abby 11:04

This poem has so much advice that can be great for a lot of people, what inspired you to write the poem. And where did these ideas come from?



Vincent 11:12

Getting the courage to draw a boundary with an advisor, sort of confronting my father on what it meant to have work ethic and how we work, and then me, sort of like taking the necessary steps to sort of like feed myself and feed my personal life, in order to be productive and return to the work, and now that opportunity then for you to sort of like, "hey articulate what it means to be a grad student", I was like well "I've got some, I got some things to say right?" And so this, this sort of like this sort of like poem, this sort of like thought that sort of idea was, was sort of a culmination, and a coalescence of you know sort of these three things coming together at the right at the right time so that was the opportunity, you know, and thank you for that opportunity to sort of articulate my thoughts right?



Shelby 12:05

Vincent COVID has impacted everyone it's been such a factor and will continue to be on our mental health for years to come. Do these tips change because of COVID Or do these principles still hold true during the pandemic?



Vincent 12:18

Yeah, yeah, that's, that's a good question. I mean like, so I had, I had one semester, and a half of getting a PhD, before COVID sort of took us to, a new way of, learning and engaging, but sort of that that end of that spring semester in 2020. You know when we went on sort of quarantine and lockdown and, and we sort of like you know, we're learning how to do that; for me personally this is my experience right. It was like, Oh, I'm a little, I'm a little more, I'm a little more attentive, I'm a little more productive, I'm a little more intentional now because of like the world requirements I didn't have to worry about the noise of, seeing people or getting dressed shaving and showering and everything else to go to a place in order to have a conversation I mean like, I still showered still put on clothes I still did all that stuff, you know for Zoom classes but like the extra time it takes to put yourself into the world, you know you just sort of trim the fat there right. That being said, I'm still learning like right now, how to be a good PhD, and I'm still learning how to be a person in in the pandemic right and I don't think they're unrelated, I think, what makes me sort of an isolated, lonely, rigorous PhD student is also what it means to be sort of like an isolated, lonely, you know, quarantine person right so all the things about getting a PhD: get outside, eat right, find your friends, exercise, give yourself time off, close the computer, put the book down, curate your room, in a way that you want to change it, move it like do things like being a good PhD student is also being a good person in the pandemic, the social interaction, the mental, the mental breaks the physical exercise the attention to food and sleep, all these things are sort of part and parcel in what it means

for me to be a PhD student, and in some ways that's not dissimilar from sort of living in a pandemic right and the mental health. I mean that's the goal like I'm not worth anything as a person. I'm not worth anything as a PhD student, if my health, physical, emotional and mental is not is not running well, and the university has resources and your friends and your family and your partners, like these have to be resources for you in order to be, "productive" but hopefully as I've illustrated right. Productivity. Productivity is not just you know, the product you put out, it's not the it's not the project it's not the dissertation, it's not the whatever, it's the process of how we get there, the productivity is the process of how we're living.

S

Sebastian 15:36

Vincent these pieces of advice and reminders are great to always remember, are there any ones that are in the poem that resonate the most with you, and maybe that you used in the past to help you on your journey as a graduate student?

V

Vincent 15:50

So specifically with the practicalities right, um, the food, the food, exercise and sleep. Like, I mean like I tried to set a routine and there's non negotiables right like I have to I have to work out I have to exercise and for me it's a little bit of yoga in the morning it's a little bit of calisthenics and then it's running, and every once in a while like I'm on the weekends I'll run a 5k or a 10k, and I'm actually working towards, you know, a half marathon sometime in July. Right, so like these sort of like non negotiables have to work out. Also I have a non negotiable of once every Friday, I have a quarantine bubble with, with two friends of mine, and we get together and we watch, we watch a show and we have pizza calzones, and we play board games, right, and that's a non negotiable. Um, and we've been working through you know Disney plus, Marvel, and Star Wars shows and that's what we do right? And then like once once a month, a non negotiable is, you know, going to see going to see my partner or having her come up here right, and that relationship that personal reset is important for me. So entering into, you know like what I'm doing and how I'm doing it with these non negotiables, and then everything else, like has to sort of like puzzle fit into this like I have a lot of work to do and so I'm going to work really hard, but also I'm not giving up my Friday nights with my friends. I'm not giving up that hour or two in the morning, it takes to exercise. I'm not giving up, the long weekend every month to, you know, to see my partner, and those, those are things that like I think I've done really well.

C

Cat 17:40

Super important question, what's your favorite ice cream flavor?



Vincent 17:44

Oh man, ice cream. I'll do you know like cookie dough or Oreos, or like you know like the Carmel and Chunk stuff, the Reese's whatever else. So like when I go over that, my friends, they do the calzones, and then I bring over, you know, the ice cream usually and so and so I'll stop by, you know, a grocery store and get like Moose tracks or the or the cookie dough or whatever. So I like stuff in my ice cream. So, yeah, I'm a fan of that. And I'm going to enjoy that and not feel guilty about it because I've worked hard, and I need, you know, I need some ice cream man, like we all we all need something right?



Abby 18:32

Our goal in this podcast today is to say that these tips and pieces of advice, are not necessarily going to fix everything for you, but they have helped us on our journey as grad students, can you explain the importance of trying things out for yourself, in terms of different practices and mental health?



Vincent 18:49

Yeah absolutely, I mean like, We're all we're all individuals right so like my, my poem speaks to me because that's what I think right, and you may find things you may find things in this little, like, little advice poem this little like, you know, this little rah rah boost that you can take things from right and, but you can also say, No, I can't work like that right or I can't do that so it's like cool: You have to find out what your grad advice, tone poem is right? And for me, you may be similar to me you may be very very different for me. Some people need to you know, sort of like, write continuously as they're working, fantastic, do that. Some people need to like, shut themselves away and not have any social interaction for a month. Fantastic do that. Some people need to you know, exercise more or less, or not use food as a motivator, or a reward. Sure, all these things right, but like the individualization of grad school is as is as varied and diverse as who you are as a person from anyone else right so like I actually I have sort of a standing study date with, a cohort of mine, you know 10 AM's most weekdays. And she and I, we work really, really differently, right, and she, she prepares a lot and she, needs to work in a certain way and she enjoys, I think, sort of interacting and talking things out. We have another cohort, you know, who works, you know in or in a really different way and just needs, like almost like constant and immediate social interaction, and sometimes that can be exhausting right but like that's I think how he works. I'm somewhere where like, I can work pretty hard, and I'm internally motivated for a while, but setting sort of like study dates, and, social interactions works really well for me I work by a plan I work by a routine, and that works for me. But like, you know, the three of us are really different, and we're only three, in the grad school in the history of grad students, right, and so like we're very different and we

require different things. So, if I say something that resonates, great, awesome if, if I say something that like absolutely is a abhorrent also fantastic, because now you know what you want in contradiction to what I think, Right. And, just like I took an opportunity to articulate something based on like a prompt, the act of synthesizing your thoughts, is important to articulate what you actually want and need, and how you go about saying it and doing it I think right?



Sebastian 21:54

So I think we've hit our checkmarks for now, thank you so much for performing and answering our questions Vincent. We hope these tips pieces of advice and resources have been helpful to listen to and we hope you give some a try.



Abby 22:10

Until next time, I'm Abby.



Shelby 22:13

I'm Shelby.



Cat 22:14

I'm Cat.



Sebastian 22:16

And I'm Sebastian and you just listened to the Illinois Graduate College Podcast.