

mentor memo

MAY 2007

This memo, the first in a series that will appear about once a month, comes in response to graduate students' requests for information and advice about careers, professional development, mentorship, and related matters.

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Attend departmental colloquia.

There are several reasons to attend:

Learn about the discipline. Even if the topic is not directly related to your work, you may find it useful to know more about your field and the type of work others in the field do. You may work with people, later in your career, who do similar work.

Learn about the research methods used by others. At some point, you might be glad you had a broad exposure to the research being discussed. For instance, during a job interview, you might be able to talk intelligently about the work done by people interviewing you...

Learn about presenting your ideas in public. See how people present their work; observe what works well and not-so-well in a presentation. This knowledge will serve you well when you present your own work, and may be very useful when you present a conference paper, or more importantly, when you interview for a job.

Network with your department's guest. You might want to call upon this guest for help, or you may interview at his/her institution, etc. The academic world is really fairly small; there's a very good chance you'll see this person again - and you might greatly benefit from having established even the most limited level of rapport when s/he visited your department.

Be an active member of your own department's intellectual community. The first step to being an active member of your own department's intellectual community is simply to show up. That matters. Be engaged with your colleagues, ask questions (either in a Q&A session, or if you are shy, on your own after the talk).

Show support for your department. Always think: If it is an official department colloquium, you should be there. As a graduate student today, and as a new faculty member a few years from now, attend! Show you are a good departmental citizen. Your colleagues today - and the chair of the department you join - will notice your absence or presence.



Students and faculty chat after Barbie Zelizer's Spring 2005 colloquium.

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Present your research at academic conferences.

Academic conferences allow you to:

Start developing your research agenda

Get useful feedback on your research as you convert conference papers into journal articles

Gain visibility (with future colleagues/employers, future collaborators)

Start networking and meet people (other graduate students, future colleagues and mentors, researchers you admire)

Interview for jobs

Which conferences?

The Department of Communication is well-represented at key national communication conferences, including **the National Communication Association, International Communication Association, and Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication**. These professional associations have divisions that reflect the department's areas of expertise (e.g., political communication, gender, ethnicity/race, nonverbal communication, technology, etc.). Some organizations have regional conferences (e.g., **Western States Communication Association**).

Graduate students also find it useful to present their research at topic-specific conferences, including **the Association of Internet Researchers, American Association for Public Opinion Research, Rhetoric Society of America, International Association of Mass Communication Research, American Journalism Historians Association, and others**. Check with faculty.

When and how?

Deadlines for each conference are noted on the association's website. When considering submitting your research, be sure to check submission requirements. Some conferences require full papers, while others will consider only abstracts. Be sure to adhere to these deadlines, and be sure to submit your work to a relevant division! (What constitutes "relevant"? Check abstracts and programs from previous years' conferences.)

 There's more...

At the conference...

The Department of Communication funds you to travel to conferences ostensibly to present your research, but take advantage of being at the conference to learn about the field, meet other people, and partake of the conference.

Presenting your research

You will be judged first and foremost on your research, which means that you should strive for a great presentation. In other words:

Know what attendees at this particular conference expect - e.g., reading your paper vs. summarizing your paper? PowerPoint slides?

Know your research and what it contributes to the larger body of research.

Never, ever, go over the allotted time. Think of your presentation as a headline service. You cannot cover all points, so select the ones you believe are most important.

Outside of your presentation

A few tips to help you navigate the conference:

Read the conference program; attend the sessions that interest you, but don't plan every hour.

Be ready with an "elevator talk" of your research. Conferences are very busy times, and people will not have time to hear a full explication of all your research projects.

Identify the individuals you would like to meet and ask your mentor/adviser to introduce you.

Introduce yourself to people. Many graduate students feel as if they know no one, so you're not alone. If you are interested in meeting faculty and Big Names, walk up to them when they appear to have a spare moment, and talk about how you are using their research in your own work. Chances are they will want to learn more about you and your work.

Socialize at receptions held by various departments/schools. Attend graduate forums and receptions.

Regardless of the sessions you attend and the people you meet, always remain professional. You want to be remembered for your research and professional demeanor, not anything else!

Seattle will host the 2008 Rhetoric Society of America conference at this time next year.



The screenshot shows the website for the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA). The header includes the RSA logo and the text "RHETORIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA". Below the header is a navigation menu with links for "About Us", "Membership", "Conferences", "Institutes", "Rhetoric Society/Charterly", and "Awards & Honors". The main content area is titled "Conferences" and features a sub-section for "RSA Conferences". It lists the "13th Biennial Conference" at "The Westin - Seattle, Washington" from "23-26 May 2008". A paragraph below states: "The next biennial conference of the Rhetoric Society of America will conference planner is President-Elect Jack Selzer, Penn State Univer submissions will be posted during Spring 2007." A "Back to top" link is visible at the bottom of the content area. On the left side, there is a sidebar menu with links for "RSA Conferences", "Registration", "Program", "Department Ads", "Hotel", "Exhibitors and Sponsors", "Calendar", "Updates", "Proceedings", and "Past Proceedings".

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OCTOBER 2007

This memo, the third in a series that will appear about once a month, comes in response to graduate students' requests for information and advice about careers, professional development, mentorship, and related matters.

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Your Temporary Adviser

Adviser (*ād-vī'zər*), **temporary** (**noun**): A faculty member who has agreed to help incoming students navigate their initial months in graduate school.

Students often worry about how to talk to faculty outside the classroom, but talking – even informally – can help facilitate transitioning to life in the department. Below are some topics of conversation you definitely want to cover with your temporary adviser.

who?

Who does research in my area? Who should I be reading? Who's this person coming to speak at the department colloquium?

what?

What classes should I be taking? What requirements are necessary for the MA/PhD program? What other departments should I consider for classes outside the department or external committee members?

when?

When do I need to register? When do I need to submit my program of study? When do I need to start thinking about my thesis or dissertation topic?

where?

Where's McMahon Hall? Where can I go to find help with my writing? Where can I go on campus for cheap eats?

why?

Why do I need to take this methods course? Why should I consider courses in this other department? Why are my students behaving the way they do?

how?

How do I make the most of my graduate career at the UW? How do I manage my time? How can I achieve a balance between school and my personal life?

The bottom line: First-year students have many, many questions that range from issues of scheduling to longer-term concerns. Feel free to ask these questions! Temporary advisers may have different interests from their graduate students, but they generally know who on the faculty is doing what, and what is happening in the department. Temporary advisers also serve as “permanent” advisers so will know the answers to these questions regardless of your research interests. If your temporary adviser doesn't know the answer, he or she can point you to someone who can. Faculty members are happy to share their views and advice with graduate students. Remember that they once were in your shoes!

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Time Management

Like many of you, I find it challenging to be a good teacher, researcher, and colleague while also living up to my expectations in my personal life (in my case, as a spouse, father, friend, and chocolate-chip cookie-eater). When I sense my life getting out of balance, I remember one of the suggestions made by Stephen Covey in his international bestseller, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Covey suggested that we might evaluate our daily responsibilities according to their **importance and urgency**. In this memo I'd like to apply these two criteria to the academic world in which we all reside.

Things high in importance, high in urgency.

These are the opportunities and responsibilities that consume most of our time and energy, because we care about what's going on and we encounter quick deadlines. For graduate students, these tend to be work we do as an instructor and as a student. We all place high value on being good teachers and students, and there is a time-frame within which we need to prepare for teaching and attending classes. Class starts at a certain time on certain days, right?

Because teaching and attending classes are so important and so urgent, these responsibilities consume us on a daily basis. The only professional problem with this – and it's a big one -- is that the UW is a major research university, and **undertaking original research is a crucial part of why you're here**. The challenge, then, is to make sure that teaching and attending class do not dominate all of our time. To be clear, I love the creativity and dynamism of teaching. But I cannot and will not allow it to crowd out my research activities, because then I get grumpy and out of professional balance.

By Professor David Domke

This memo, the fourth in a series that will appear about once a month, comes in response to graduate students' requests for information and advice about careers, professional development, mentorship, and related matters.

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 There's more...

Things high in importance, low in urgency

For faculty and graduate students, things that are highly important but less urgent tend to include our **original research and our personal relationships**. Both are obviously important, and we know that. But the reality is that both of these tend not to feel as urgent as our responsibilities for a class.

For example, figuring out how to research the communication dynamics that propelled a nation to go to war is undeniably important, yet it just doesn't carry the same sense of immediacy as prepping for a class that occurs tomorrow, and then again two days later, for the next 8 weeks. Similarly, going out to dinner with a close friend can always be put off until another day, right? And that's exactly what happens with things that are important but not (as) urgent – **we tend to push them to the side**. As a result, for many of us we get the teaching and student work done first and only then turn to a focus on original research or personal time that nurtures us. If such time does not materialize, and it often doesn't, then so be it.

And that's the rub of the matter. We must make certain that we devote time to things that are highly important, but low in urgency. If we do not, the nature of the academy is that highly important, highly urgent tasks will crowd everything else out. When that occurs, burnout ensues.

Here are a few steps that we can take to make sure we give adequate priority to things high in importance and low in urgency:

Schedule them. If you don't schedule them, they don't happen. As a faculty member, I schedule my research time and personal activities, to make sure they happen. Otherwise they won't.

Do different things on different days of the week. I have found that I am best when focusing on one primary type of work task a day. That is, if I teach on Tuesday then I probably won't be much good as a researcher that day. For me, Mondays and Fridays tend to be days that I spend doing primarily research and committee work.

Believe that you will actually be a better teacher and student when you do take time to immerse yourself in what is highly important, but not (as) urgent. I'm entirely convinced that when I prioritize occasional pockets of personal time I enrich my teaching and research because my mind and energy are renewed.

If we make sure that we spend quality time focused on important matters that seem less urgent, we all benefit.

Succeeding in a Graduate Seminar

Some of your most important and impression-forming interactions with your classmates and professors occur in graduate seminars. Your stellar performance in graduate seminars is paramount to your success in the graduate program. Grad seminars are the building blocks for your knowledge in the field and in graduate school.

What should I do to succeed in a graduate seminar?

To prepare for class:

Do the reading. All of it. But don't stop there. Annotate your reading. Ask questions of the text in the margins. Maybe even type up your notes. Always consider what's at stake in the reading, how the reading informs your understanding of the class themes, other course materials, the methods, the content. How does the reading relate to your own burgeoning research questions?

Come to class with questions and discussion points.

If you are reticent about speaking in class, **recruit a friend** to chat about your ideas for five minutes the day before class. Do not, however, memorize one point in the reading so that you make your one perfunctory comment in class. Everyone is on to that game!

By Professor Ralina Joseph

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 [There's more...](#)

In class:

Do your part to help foster community. This means: listen. Participate fully. Be respectful.

Showcase your intellectual curiosity by engaging with all types of ideas, not just the ones in your designated area of study.

When you speak, **remember to look at your classmates**, not exclusively at the professor.

Use your breadth of knowledge - connect the readings to other readings in your class and other out-of-class readings. Feel free to apply the readings or theme of the day to your project, but don't be so focused on utilitarian knowledge that you fail to engage fully with all of the issues at hand.

Do not fall into the trap of wholesale skewering the reading of the week. This is intellectually lazy. The work must have some redeeming value if the professor has chosen to assign it. Even if you want to make a serious critique of the reading **you should attempt to articulate its contributions / interventions as well as limitations.**

Writing:

Turn in all writing assignments on time.

Do not save your seminar papers for the last week of class. Begin generating ideas the first week of class. Talk about your ideas with your classmates and your professor. If the professor has not given you a series of deadlines, create deadlines for yourself (i.e., identify paper topic in the third week of class, generate working bibliography in the fourth week of class, create abstract in the fifth week, write your first draft in the sixth week, etc.).

Graduate seminars are your first practice attempts at being a scholar. It should be fun to engage with ideas. Be prepared to spar respectfully. And always be prepared!

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NOVEMBER 2007

By Professor Nancy Rivenburgh

This memo, the sixth in a series that will appear about once a month, comes in response to graduate students' requests for information and advice about careers, professional development, mentorship, and related matters.

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The Literature Review

From seminar paper to MA thesis to dissertation, the literature review provides both the foundation and the frame for your own research. Its preparation requires careful planning and a well-crafted presentation.

The Purpose of the Literature Review

A literature review tells us what is **known** by sharing the results of prior studies related to your own.

A literature review **places** your study within a larger body of work. It shows how your study seeks to fill a gap in, or extend, our knowledge in this area.

A literature review offers a **benchmark** for assessing your own results. In the conclusion to your study you will revisit the literature review armed with your new findings.

Organizing the Literature Review

A good literature review is a **synthesis** of prior research presented in a way that **adds value** to our understanding of that work. So, it's important to organize your review in a way that is coherent, relevant to your own study, and useful to other researchers. For example, you might cluster prior research by media type, communication situation, similar findings, key themes, respondent type, or other useful distinction.

Whatever organizing scheme you choose, it is typical to present the most important, relevant, or strongest collection of existing research first, and go from there. If not, there should be a **narrative logic** to the review presentation.

Another way to add value is to **identify conceptual linkages** among ideas and authors. Researchers often talk about the same processes – just in somewhat different ways.

It's tempting to want to include every study that appeared in the key word search of your topic. Don't. The challenge is to **find the right balance** between giving the reader confidence in your familiarity with literature and focusing on what's most relevant for the study at hand.

 There's more...

Writing the Literature Review

Your synthesis of prior research should **focus on key findings or conclusions** with just enough information for the reader to discern the question and approach: “In her ethnographic study of Muslim immigrants’ perception of mainstream British media, Gillespie concluded...” The exception being if the study cited is significant because of its methodology – only then would you offer more methodological detail.

Not all of the ideas contained in the literature review are used to construct your study’s conceptual framework. So, at the end of each section, tell readers what key concept, finding, definition, or theme is **most critical to ‘carry forward’** into their reading of your study.

Don’t over-quote. It slows down your narrative. Direct quotations should only appear if the author said something in a unique, powerful, or precise (e.g., a definition) way that demands repeating in its exact form. Otherwise, use your own words.

Since a good review is a coherent, value-added organization of the literature, **provide the reader with clear ‘signposts’** through the instructive use of headings, introductions, transition phrases, and summary statements.

Finally, because people reading your paper or dissertation may not be familiar with your area of research, be careful not to weigh down your literature review in field-specific jargon. It is important that you write in **clear and active prose**.

By Professor Philip N. Howard

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Collaborating and Co-Authoring

Finding Opportunities to Collaborate and Publish

Many scholars enjoy co-authoring because doing so affords an opportunity to develop new ideas, extend our methodological toolkit, and share the workload. The first step in finding opportunities to co-publish is to let your faculty mentors know that you are available to help if they ever get such invitations. Faculty sometimes receive unsolicited invitations to write an article or contribute a book chapter. Since faculty often plan long-term writing agendas, they may decline an unexpected invitation. They may be more likely to accept such an invitation if they know they can share the research and writing tasks with a co-author.

If you hear of such an opportunity, or see a call for papers that you would like to answer, you may also pitch a co-authorship opportunity to other students or faculty. Whether or not they accept your invitation will depend on how thoroughly you've considered the workload, authorship credits, and of course, the intellectual fit.

Many Forms of Collaboration

Collaborative work with faculty can take many forms: payment in the form of a stipend, without additional acknowledgement; a thank-you in the acknowledgments of a book or article; a footnote in the relevant section of the published work; gradations of co-authorship; or independent access to the data or field notes.

Across the humanities and social sciences, an author is someone who makes a substantive creative contribution to a project. A research assistant makes a minor creative contribution, or a mechanical contribution such as collecting data or organizing archives.

For the most part, being paid as a research assistant does not eliminate the obligation to acknowledge the contribution of a minor or mechanical contribution. The benefit of collaborating is that all parties acquire new experience and skills, and have the creative opportunity to generate and test new ideas.

 There's more...

Discussing the Workload

There are several good tools that facilitate co-authorship (Endnote, Word's track changes tool, e-mail), and your discussion of workload should not only include the details of which parts of an article you will author, but the process of editing drafts, for backing up drafts and data, for keeping notes on major edits, and for resolving intellectual differences. But co-authoring doesn't stop there—you should also talk through the likely division of labor for submitting to journals, corresponding with editors, handling revisions and resubmissions, and reviewing page proofs.

Even though many of these tasks seem far in the future and hypothetical—contingent on acceptance—they are a significant part of the work of publishing and it is best to talk through the hypothetical scenarios. The more you clarify the workload and timeline before the writing starts, the more likely you are likely to have a successful collaboration. Moreover, writing may not even be the most difficult task for authors: conceptualizing the problem, designing the research project, and collecting data are major tasks that need to be made even before writing begins.

Negotiating Authorship Credit

We are in an unusual profession in that faculty actively work to make students into colleagues. So many project leaders will err on the side of generosity in negotiating an authorship credit, and there are several possible permutations:

Listing authors in alphabetical order, which in the social sciences and humanities can indicate equal contributions (if specified in the footnotes);

Listing authors in the order of substantive contributions made;

Randomizing the order of authors across multiple papers based on the same project;

In increasingly rare cases, subdividing authorship, which takes the form of “A with B” or “A and B”

Journals may also have their own guidelines for how to acknowledge each other's contribution in a footnote, endnote, or other front matter.

It is best to establish early on—as part of the workload conversation—what the duties and obligations for these credits will be for your particular piece. However, the initially agreed-upon authorship order can change based on the actual contributions realized at the end of the paper.

Personal Negotiations

It is best to have face-to-face conversations about the terms of this important relationship, so avoid using email. Unlike writing a paper for a class, collaborating and co-authoring is a long-term personal commitment to being available and amenable to an extended process. This longer-term working relationship means meeting deadlines (and being flexible with them), deferring to your collaborators in the areas in which they have more expertise, and picking up responsibilities when necessary. Ultimately, it can mean celebrating and sharing the reward of successfully publishing and contributing to the advancement of knowledge.

mentor memo

NOVEMBER 2007

By Professor Gina Neff

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Preparing for Your Career

Planning for the Right Type of Job

Start Early. Finding time to devote to your career planning is not easy. But early exploration and preparation are crucial for later success. The department's proseminar on careers can help.

Think Broadly. Explore different ways to use your graduate degree. In addition to teaching and research inside and outside of the academy, consider jobs in government, the non-profit sector, and industry. Informational interviews with people in different jobs and working in different kinds of institutions can help you make the career decisions that are best for you. Following the business press (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal*) or specific trade publications (e.g., *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Advertising Age*, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*) can help you understand how communication issues are relevant to your chosen field and what trends are shaping that field.

Understand What You Want. The best job is one that is right for you. Know what you want out of your career—in academia or elsewhere. Have a career vision and link your goals to the preparation that you will need for being a standout candidate. Having a career plan will help you think about which publications, presentations, and activities you can do to show that you are right for the type of job that you want.

Position Yourself for the Market. Focus on cultivating professional relationships with your committee members, demonstrating professionalism to them, and doing quality work—regardless of the type of job you want to secure. After all, your committee members and references are asked to comment on multiple facets of you as an applicant, not just your writing, research, teaching, or organizational skills.

Planning for an Academic Job

The above principles apply especially to academic jobs, the preparation for which involves very long cycles. Decisions about research presentations and publications need to be made years before you go on the market. For example, in order to give a presentation on your dissertation research at ICA before you go on the market, you will need to have a paper ready for submission by October, a full year before job application deadlines. To have an article listed on your vita for the academic job market as "in press," it should be under review by the January before you go on the market at the very latest. Cultivating a professional reputation in the field in advance will help you significantly when you go on the market.

 There's more...

Successful Academic Searches

Match Skills & Interests to the Position. Early planning will help you get your ideal job. Interested in research-oriented positions? Having a publication record of your own and collaborating with faculty will help you here. Interested in liberal arts colleges? Demonstrate distinction in teaching as well as research on your vita. Want to stay open to industry? Working on consulting projects during graduate school will help you build a portfolio of projects and skills that translate easily outside of the academy.

Communicate Clearly and Effectively. Each advertised academic job can yield over a hundred applications. Help the search committee understand what you might bring to their department, what makes your work interesting, and how you fit the advertised position—don't make busy people hunt for buried information. Compelling cover letters are crucial! Work with your advisors on the best way to communicate your skills, achievements, and interests in your application materials. Pay particular attention to grammar, style, and formatting in all materials as your attention to details reflects upon your ability to be a professional scholar.

Help Your Letter Writers Help You. By communicating your interests clearly, providing copies of materials, and allowing ample time, you can help your letter writers write better, more detailed recommendations for you. Remember, we're all busy—make sure you help your letter writers understand your deadlines and give them ample time to do a good job. Be sure to ask your chair for personal introductions to people at the schools where you are applying, too.

Remember: It's About the Fit

Hopefully your job search will be successful the first time out. If it isn't—don't despair! Use the time to push yourself back into your work and into the preparation for the next cycle of applications. Remember, this is a process that matches your skills and interests with the needs of an organization or department—it might take a while to find the perfect job match for you.

By Professor John Gastil

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How to manage large writing projects

Large projects—MA thesis, dissertation, book, or just a long paper—can be daunting. For some of us, myself included, project management can be a challenge for any article written from scratch. The purpose of this memo is to help you break down your writing project into smaller, less intimidating parts. I will focus on the writing of a thesis or dissertation, but the same basic logic applies to even smaller writing tasks.

Getting Started: Clarify Purpose, Argument, Audience

Purpose

A thesis or dissertation should yield a **high quality document that adds to the body of scholarly knowledge** and is worthy, eventually, of publication in a peer reviewed journal.

Or your writing may **address a public controversy or develop a creative insight** that could change how people view a phenomenon of interest.

Argument: With your purpose clarified, think about your argument.

Create a main argument that carries you through your thesis or dissertation. (There may be many other points along the way, but a core message will help you stay focused from beginning to end).

Audience: Keep a particular audience in mind.

For academic work, **identify a target journal**.

Think about **who would want to read your work**; this will motivate you to write and clarify your message.

 **There's more...**

Outlining, Setting Deadlines

One of the causes of vertigo with large writing projects is the sense that the work lying before you is too big, too much for you to handle given all your existing responsibilities and pressures. So break the project into manageable parts, and make the immediate task a 2 or 3 page mini-paper.

How to start: Outline your project carefully. Start with a one-page handwritten outline that is simply the main sections or chapter titles.

Then **move to a more thorough outline**, with detail under each of the points in the first version. At this point, each part of the outline is no more than a few pages.

Refine your outline to indicate how many pages and what kind of work each part will require. For instance, I might have a line in my outline that reads, "Introduce self-perception theory (2 pages; brief lit. review)." Your daunting, massive thesis or dissertation has now been reduced to a series of very manageable, do-able tasks.

Set a schedule for completing each piece of the outline. Make sure that each chunk is small enough to be do-able in just a week or two, or even just a day or two.

Procrastination

First time procrastination problems? You may just be tired, so relax and don't be hard on yourself.

Persistent procrastination? Break your task into even smaller pieces.

One option: Identify a one-hour block of time. Work on your next writing task for just 15 minutes, followed by a 5 minute stretching/social break. Repeat two more times, and in one hour you will have done 45 minutes of work. If that works, then schedule your next writing period for 80 minutes, and so on, until you can set aside three hours at a time for writing. You may find that taking the break after 15 minutes is hard to do because you get a rhythm and can't stop working. That's a good thing.

Another option: Schedule writing appointments with fellow students or faculty. Or form a 3-5 person study group that meets every 1-2 weeks to help keep each other on track.

Other options: See your adviser, commit to a scholarly conference (to create an external deadline), or set up some other writing-related appointment.

It's OK to ask for help

If your large writing project becomes so emotionally upsetting that you find yourself unable to do any of the above successfully, consider making an appointment for student counseling (<http://depts.washington.edu/counsels>). It is easy for the different parts of our lives to get entangled, and the fear or stress you experience regarding your writing may have nothing to do with the quality of your ideas or your skill as a writer, but instead be symptomatic of other things upsetting you at home or at work.