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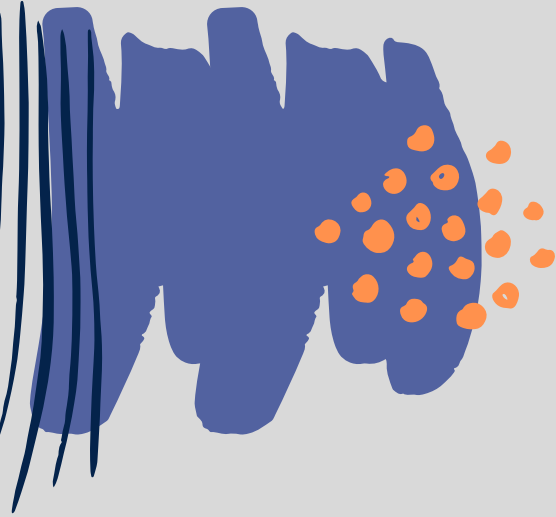
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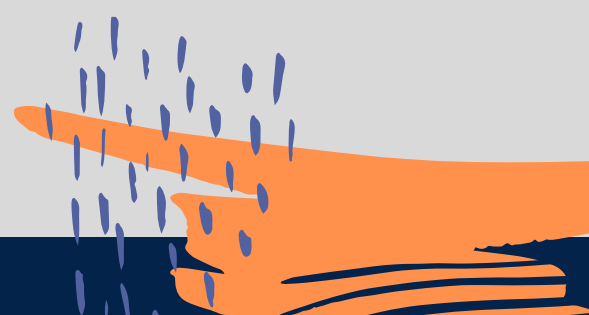
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The Meaning Behind the Ampersand

GSIG's PF&R Chair Matt Blomberg discusses a new outlook on PF&R and the importance of not only academic freedom, but also responsibility.

Undoubtedly, at the start of 2021, goals for the new year begin to fill our to-do lists. We plan to work-out more, eat healthier, spend more time with family and friends (albeit virtually), and concerning our academic profession as graduate students, to write and publish more and to be the best student and instructor possible. These are worthy endeavors to pursue, yet the latter, especially, may be best served by a greater discussion of PF&R.

Professional freedom and responsibility, as outlined by AEJMC, endeavors that "free expression should be nurtured and protected at all levels, ethical behavior should be supported and promoted, media criticism and accountability should be fostered, racial, gender and cultural inclusiveness should be encouraged and recognized, public service contributions should be expected, and AEJMC programs and faculty should make every effort to insure equal opportunity for students to enter student contests" (AEJMC, 2011). This to-do list of ethics may seem overwhelming or even unobtainable, yet, upon closer examination fits well into the two overarching categories of PF&R, freedom and responsibility.

As graduate students we should have the right and platform to speak, write and produce academic works freely, yet, as the latter post ampersand term alludes to, we are also duty-bound to a responsibility for ethical behavior, of criticism and self-examination of media, and of racial and gender inclusiveness, to name a few from the preceding list. Thus, we experience academic freedom on one side and responsibility on the other. This is the pendulum that we will encounter daily as graduate students, a pendulum that our journalism students will also face in their professional careers.

Yet, we would be ill served to conceptualize these two as separate, mutually exclusive entities, bouncing up and down on the see-saw of our academic lives.

Rather, as Wilkins (2011) writes, "Far from being dichotomous, these ideals should be viewed as connected to each other" (p. 813).
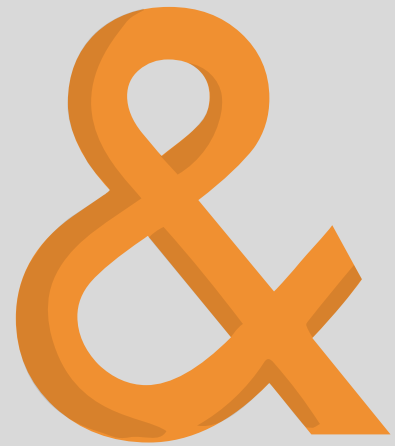
The question is, how do we accomplish one along with the other? How do we focus on academic freedom but also our responsibility to others and what links them together? Wilkins recommends, one having empathy for others while remembering the norms of the discipline of journalism, such as "truthfulness, dignity and non-violence" in order, he states, to successfully "honor both the freedom to act and accept the responsibility of doing so as a central component of ethical professional work" (p. 811). This, I posit, is also a good prescription for those of us who study, research and teach areas connected to journalism, and a worthy accomplishment for us in the new year.

Wilkins, L. (2011). JOURNALISM'S MORAL SENTIMENTS: Negotiating between freedom and responsibility. Journalism Studies (London, England),12(6),804–815. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2011.614820

Reassessing Your Teaching Strategies for the New Semester

Written by GSIG's Teaching Chairs Eve Heffron and Lisa Lenoir

We have completed one of the most challenging semesters for college instructors to navigate to date. With spring semester beginning, instructors across the nation will face new obstacles with teaching hybrid classes where instructors will have to manage both a live Zoom class while simultaneously teaching students face-to-face, transitioning more courses online that have traditionally been taught in a face-to-face setting, and making adjustments to courses that were already moved online. Instructors must stick together during these times of change and uncertainty by providing recommendations for resources, books, classroom teaching tips, assignment and rubric design, and general support to help us overcome another semester in the pandemic. For this month, we will be discussing pedagogy strategies and recommendations for resources to help you get a jumpstart on developing or improving your courses each semester.

Every college is approaching classes during the pandemic differently. That said, now might be the best time to apply some of those pedagogy principles that could be the difference between success and failure in a virtual world. Engaging students with any virtual component is tricky business, so exploring and applying new resources, assignments, and strategies can increase student engagement to learn. The most important thing to keep in mind is that a successful face-to-face course does not automatically translate to a successful online or hybrid course. It is crucial for instructors to be clear and concise with language in an online setting and to communicate more frequently with students than you may have in a face-to-face class. Next, we will dive into more specific recommendations that may be useful for instructors.

1 Develop or revisit your teaching philosophy.

Whether you're a new teaching assistant in a doctoral program or coming from industry (journalism or strategic communication) into the teaching environment, a teaching philosophy serves as the foundational blueprint for your practice. The document, which should be about 500 words, needs to be clear and concise and artfully weave together your professional practice and research and how they inform your teaching. Consider this a working document and revisit it often to capture new insights from the semester. Think of ways the philosophy describes both online and classroom instruction, describing ways you create a multimodal and enriching experience.

2 Review course syllabi for clarity.

The syllabus does not need to be a mundane document but can be developed to set the tone for an engaging online or classroom experience. Use visual devices (boldface, boxes, etc.) and use design software or online templates to cue students to important content. Offer a syllabus quiz to ensure they read the document.

3 Create a meaningful online experience.

Following your institution's social distancing protocols, organize safe activities to engage students. Create small groups using phone technology polling apps to pose questions and administer fun, content-related quizzes. Be creative and read teaching blogs to learn about the flipped classroom or other innovative best practices shared from others during the pandemic.

Think usability when designing your course within the learning management system. Different learning management systems (LMS) have blogs and tutorial videos to help elevate the site. Create a usability test with key prompts or tasks on the site. Engage a colleague or former student to walk through the site to see how they interact with content.

4 Develop multimodal assignments.

Technology allows students to be creative and for the artists they can use cut-outs. Offering different modes to approach a concept or theory gives students an opportunity to combine critical thinking and creative skills. Even if they don't have artistic ability, working out a problem using different competencies helps to break up the monotony.

5 Vary course resources.

A mix of content helps to enhance course content. Documentaries, podcasts, scholarly and news articles, and video lectures help to create different channels of communication to reinforce and complement course concepts and theories. Strong piece contains sharp visuals and strong storytelling devices. Look for pieces that have audio and text versions to accommodate different types of learner. Choose videos where close captioning is available.

6 Assess the semester at mid-term.

Taking a pulse of the course remains a good practice for future evaluations. These informal assessments can aid in making adjustments without sacrificing the course's integrity. A good measure: What should we start? What should we stop? What should we continue? This measurement check-in helps to further build a culture of community and guide course wins.

Speaking of assessment, revisit your rubrics. During the pandemic, grading should be a tool to help students to know where to improve their work. Take time to discuss in your team the rubrics used and clarify any ambiguous language. This earlier attention to detail will make grading assignments easier during these unpredictable times. Import them into the LMS to your assessment through a few clicks and comments.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT
DR. AARON ATKINS

Dr. Aaron Atkins is an Assistant Professor of Digital Media, Broadcast News Production, Multi-Camera Production & Performance, Audio Production & Performance at Weber State University in Odgen, Utah. Dr. Atkins is also a former chair of GSIG.

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way instructors teach in higher education. In this interview conducted by GSIG's Annalise Baines, Dr. Atkins shares his teaching experience and advice with early career scholars on how to improve teaching online classes, particularly classes that include a practical component.

WEBER STATE
UNIVERSITY
Lindquist College
of Arts & Humanities

AB: What advice would you share with young scholars teaching online, especially if the class is more focused on practical concepts?

AA: Before COVID-19, I had never taken or been an instructor of an online class. So when everything shut down in March, I didn't quite know how to approach teaching in an online environment. I started by teaching all of my classes synchronously and carrying on with the same assignments that I had done in-person as well as I could. But I noticed that many class assignments I had previously given weren't as effective and I had to adapt my strategy. One of the major points I think that myself and every instructor had to tackle was how to engage their students through a computer screen. How do you even keep your students, who didn't sign up for an online class but were being forced into it, engaged and meeting the class requirements?

There is still no short answer to that question but what helped me overcome this challenge was to learn from my peers and try out new assignments through trial and error. Each week I adjusted my strategy based on how I saw my students responding to the materials, assignments, and class discussions. A lot of what I ended up doing was creating interactive discussion boards, the use of breakout rooms, and whenever possible, meet in person.

> "How do you even keep your students, who didn't sign up for an online class but were being forced into it, engaged and meeting the class requirements?"

AB: How have you navigated teaching several classes online and what advice do you have for scholars?

AA: To be honest, it's been very stressful. As a new faculty member, I've been lucky to have supportive colleagues whom I can turn to and ask questions regarding the school system and the student population. This semester required a lot more preparation work outside and within class and I've been trying to implement a series of class readings and interactive discussions to keep students engaged. At first trying out these new tactics was more about trial and error to see which were effective with students and which were not. In terms of navigating several classes online, I would say time management is important. I found a helpful feature in the course management system, which allowed me to provide verbal rather than written feedback to the students which saved me a lot of time grading assignments.
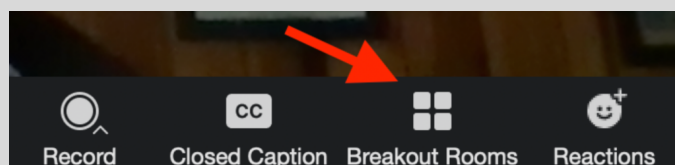
AB: What are some strategies to keep students motivated in an online environment?

AA: I try to be entertaining. I mean not like becoming a stand-up comedian but trying to keep students entertained with humor and jokes and other ways to capture their attention. One strategy I would advise young scholars to do is to strictly avoid PowerPoint slides. Try to have conversations with your students and avoid just reading and regurgitating information from a slide. That's an easy way to lose students' attention. It's also ineffective because you won't see students' facial expressions and gestures in those small window boxes on Zoom. I am luckily teaching a relatively small class of 16 students which is an excellent number for holding a class in an online environment because I can still see most of the student's faces on the screen. It would be a lot more difficult in a class of 30 or 40 students to regularly check if they are engaged and build a meaningful interaction with them. Another tip is to drop an odd interjection every so often during class to see if students are still engaged or dozing off. I found that this helps them actively listen and pay attention to what you're saying.

AB: What are some ways you've approached practical courses?

AA: Teaching practical courses has been tough this semester. At the beginning of production-based course, I mainly teach the historical aspects of production and talk through the theoretical components. However, I've been training my students to get out and away from the screen to capture sounds and pictures in real time. My university luckily allows me to use a flex format, which means that in-person can take place with smaller classes. So, for lab sessions, I can work and teach students the practical components of production in-person. That is more difficult to do online. Of course, we follow the rules and regulations of the university by sanitizing all work stations, wearing masks, and socially distancing.

# Zoom Etiquette
How to Ace Virtual Interactions

Alexis Fitzsimmons, GSIG's PR Chair, compiled a list of tips for making the most out of your Zoom experiences.

These pandemic times have turned most of our everyday interactions virtual. If you wake up each morning and begin your day by opening your laptop and hopping on a virtual meeting, you are probably used to Zoom (or whichever platform you use) by now. You can ensure your virtual meetings and classes go smoothly and make a positive virtual impression on others by implementing the following suggestions into your virtual interactions.
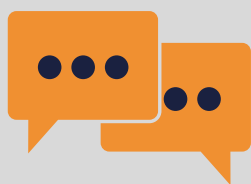
Show up on time.
Just as you would in a face-to-face meeting, virtual punctuality shows you are prepared and can help you feel relaxed.
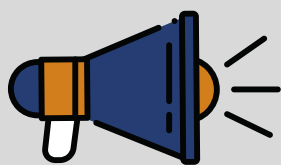
Speak up when you arrive.
When entering a meeting, say hello! When people can see you, it is polite to greet them as you would in person.

Don't underestimate small talk.
Zoom makes it easy to join a meeting and keep yourself muted, but consider making small talk with other attendees to make both you and them feel comfortable and start the meeting off on the right foot. If you struggle with small talk, you can ask others questions about their weekend, family, holidays, or other lighthearted world happenings.

Look into the camera.

Though it may feel awkward, eye contact in virtual interactions can make a difference just as it can in face-to-face conversations.Show your colleagues you are engaged in conversation by making eye contact. If you struggle to look directly into the camera, try focusing your gaze on the top third of your computer screen.

Limit background noise if possible.

Background noise can be annoying for both you and your colleagues. Try to set your laptop up in a quiet space when possible and close the door.

Eat during breaks if possible.

Try to eat between meetings to be more polite, avoid chewing noises, or simply grossing people out.

Try not to interrupt others.

Interrupting happens, especially on Zoom when it is difficult to tell when another person is going to speak or when Internet connection is poor. Try your best to not interrupt others who are talking and, if you do, apologize and give the other person a chance to speak before you do. You can also make use of the chat or hand raising features in Zoom.

Use non-verbal cues.

When listening to others speak, you can occasionally nod your head or smile as you would in person to show that you are respectfully listening, understanding, and engaged.

Use the mute button.

Especially in large meetings, if you are not the person speaking, mute your microphone to avoid background noise. You can also make use of the mute button when you feel a cough or sneeze coming on to avoid being distracting.

Try not to multi-task.

It is easy to want to check emails or other notifications during virtual meetings, but your colleagues will take notice. Unless you are looking for something that pertains to the virtual conversation, try to pay attention and be fully present during your virtual interactions.

Practice before presenting.

If you haven't shared your screen, facilitated breakout rooms, or played a video over Zoom before, try it out with a friend beforehand. This practice will ensure that you look prepared, and you will avoid wasting your attendees' time when they join your real virtual meeting.

Listen when others comment on your poor audio/video.

If someone says they cannot hear or see you well, do not get defensive or blame them. Try to calmly troubleshoot or ask others on the call if they can hear/see you well to get to the root of the problem professionally.

Wave or say goodbye before signing off.

You wouldn't simply walk out the door at the end of a face-to-face meeting. A quick wave or "Thank you!" is a polite gesture.

Tips for virtual meeting hosts:

➡️ Introduce those who may not know each other.

➡️ Let people know if they are being recorded.

➡️ Monitor the chat function.

➡️ Pause to ask for questions.

➡️ Read the room and adjust accordingly.

➡️ Address attendees by name.

➡️ Avoid an abrupt ending, and leave the meeting last.

If you are the meeting host, start by introducing everyone or with an upbeat icebreaker, and let your attendees know if they are being recorded.

During the meeting, pay attention to the chat function (or assign someone else to) to make sure you are answering questions your attendees have. It is also helpful to pause at times to ask if anyone has any questions or comments they would like to share verbally.

When possible, address your attendees by name. If you are the main person speaking during the entire meeting, pay attention to your attendees' nonverbal cues.

If they look bored or confused, this may be a good time to pause and give them an opportunity to engage. Just as you might if you are hosting a face-to-face meeting, wait until all your attendees have left the meeting before you do. They may have questions they have been waiting until the end to ask you.

Reviewing Research Manuscripts as a Graduate Student

You received a request to review a research manuscript, now what? Dr. Hong Vu and Dr. Peter Bobkowski, faculty members in the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Kansas shared their thoughts on reviewing manuscripts as graduate students in an interview with Olushola Aromona, one of GSIG's Research Chairs.

Graduate students get invited to review research manuscripts and considering their graduate workload, should they be participating in the peer-review process? What are the benefits for graduate students to engage in the process?

HV: Being invited to participate in the peer-review process means that you are considered as an expert in an area, and so, it is a good thing for a graduate student to engage in the process. The peer-review process is beneficial as it provides graduate students the opportunity to sharpen their skills and build a reputation as a scholar. You also learn about the work of publishing, learn how to critique others professionally, and you get an opportunity to reflect on the knowledge that you have acquired in your research work.

PB: Yes, graduate students should engage in the process. It is beneficial as you learn about writing and become a better writer. Also, you learn about literature you may not have read, and learn new research ideas.

Are there detriments?

HV: The major detriment is the time it takes.

PB: It takes time. If you cannot meet your core requirements as graduate students in teaching and research, you should not take on extra obligations.

What factors should inform a graduate student's acceptance or decline to review a manuscript?

HV: You should accept the request if it is your area of expertise and you are learning to become an independent researcher in that area. There are few instances when graduate students should decline requests. One, if the manuscript is not in their area of expertise and their review will not help the author's work or contribute to the knowledge in that field. Two, because reviews take time, graduate students should decline review requests if they cannot make the time commitments required for the process. And you should decline the invite and advise the journal promptly.

PB: You should accept the request if you can do the review on time and are interested in the topic, and if you're knowledgeable about some element of the study, including the subject matter, theory, or method. You should decline the request if there are ethical concerns. For instance, if there is a conflict of interest which could be because you know the authors or recognize the work from a conference. Also, you should decline the request if you feel competitive with the authors. Inability to commit to completing the review on time is another factor that should make you decline a review request.

What makes a good review?

HV: A good review is spot-on on the issues in the manuscript, civil in tone, and uses clear language. Also, a good review makes helpful suggestions on how to improve the manuscript and connects authors to literature. As a reviewer, strive to be helpful and nudge authors to think of ideas that may better their work which they may be missing in the manuscript's current form.

PB: A good review engages with the study and tries to make it better by offering suggestions for improvement. A good review is professional and encouraging in tone. A good review is not sarcastic or condescending.

What should they look for in a manuscript? What strategies should they use to structure their reviews?

HV: It is important that the research manuscript is methodologically and theoretically sound. As a reviewer, you should be looking that each section is well written and that the arguments are well laid out with thorough engagements with the literature in that field. For example, you should check that the introduction clearly states the research problem and explains the manuscript's contribution to that field. Also, check that the literature review section engages with relevant literature and reviews all the variables in the study, and that the method section includes all the methodological technicalities.

PB: You should check that each section does what it should do and is well aligned. For example, check that the literature is complete, the research questions follow directly from the literature review, the method makes sense and matches the research questions, and that the results align with the method. You could organize your review by sections, such as introduction, literature review, theory, method, discussion, or by the importance of the concerns , from the most to least important. You should write clearly and provide examples from the paper. A key question you need to answer is whether the study can be revised without starting from scratch, or if addressing the study's shortcomings will require a brand-new study.

Any closing thoughts?

HV: I strongly encourage graduate students to leverage the opportunities to review manuscripts when they get them, especially if it is in their research area, as this is a way to be a better writer, thinker, and to build a reputation as a scholar.

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly Reviewer Trainee Program

Graduate students can apply to be selected to train as a reviewer for top journals in the communication field. For more information, interested students can email the journal's editor, Daniela Dimitrova at: danielad@iastate.edu.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT
BOBBIE FOSTER

Bobbie is a Ph.D. candidate at Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland. In an interview with one of GSIG's research chairs, Sai Datta Mikkilineni, Bobbie shares her background and experiences as a Ph.D. student and gives insight about her research agenda.

PHILIP MERRILL
COLLEGE of JOURNALISM

Tell us a little about your professional background/your experiences and how that led to pursuing a PhD.

I did my master's degree in journalism at the University of Arkansas and shortly after I finished that, I started as the Assistant Director for the Center for Ethics and Journalism there. I was working as an instructor and doing research with the center, and that pushed me to think about doing a Ph.D. because I was already doing research and teaching. Then, my boss there, Ray McCaffrey, encouraged me to go ahead and just pull the trigger, telling me a Ph.D. would put me in a better position to do exactly what I've already been doing and have an interest in.

What did you do before grad school and what made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

Before grad school, I studied journalism. I finished my undergraduate degree right as a lot of newspapers were folding, closing-up, and reducing their staffs, so my master's was kind of a temporary move. I thought I would just do a master's degree for two years and wait for the job market to get better... But while I was doing the master's degree, I really fell in love with doing research and pursuing some of these deeper questions that you don't really get to pursue as a reporter.

Please describe your research interests.

When I was doing my master's degree, I decided that it would be interesting to look into internet memes. The 2012 election was happening at that time, and I noticed a lot of my friends shared pretty much everything through memes. At the time, though, I wasn't really reading a lot of research about memes. There was research being done, but not at the scale

that it is now. So, that's what kind of got me interested in internet memes, memes related to politics and news media, how people frame news stories through memes or react to new stories through memes... I came to the cultural heritage bit because Maryland has a part of their program called "cognate classes" or classes that are outside of the field of journalism. And because internet memes are kind of based in a cultural theory, I thought it would be good to go to cultural anthropology.

Now, for my dissertation, I'm focusing on what queer cultural heritage means because I'm bisexual, and I'm interested in looking at how LGBT communities engage online with their own history and cultural heritage through memes and how they react to news or framing news stories within their own sort of cultural story. Hopefully, after I finish my dissertation and graduate, I'll be able to expand what I'm doing to other communities and other spaces on the internet.

Talk about your some of the projects that you've done and what you are planning to do next.

I'm really lucky because at Merrill, the environment is very collaborative. And I think that's something that really sets the school apart from other schools. During my first semester, I had opportunities to work with professors who were looking at Russian narratives and propaganda. I've done some work on the Facebook ads from the 2016 election. And this last summer, I worked with Sohana and a couple of other people who put together a survey about COVID-19 – a media-use survey right as quarantine was starting so we could get an idea of how students across the world used media during the pandemic. We launched it globally. I think it is interesting that we are all interacting with media at a time where, you know, normally we're begging students to get off the phone and stay out of the screens for a little while and, now, we're being told to spend our time on online classes. It's the opposite... So we were interested in measuring whether or not there was a change in young people's relationship with media at that point. Interestingly, people reported using media roughly the same but reported using media that they hadn't reported before like watching local news. For example, a lot of young students in surveys prior to the pandemic had said that they don't really watch local news, but when the pandemic first started, more and more of them were tuning into local TV broadcasts for reports about what was going on in their areas.

What are you most excited about as you pursue a Ph.D.?

I think research is really exciting, getting a chance to experiment with different kinds of research... I've really had a chance to expand what I've done. But I also like teaching. I'm growing as a teacher at Merrill, and it has been really rewarding.

What tips or advice do you have for incoming grad students?

Graduate school is about time management, ultimately. It's not really about anything else. If you can figure out how to manage your time well, you'll be successful in graduate school. Or at least you'll be successful and happy in graduate school. I guess I should say, I know a lot of people who don't manage their time, who are still going to graduate, but they're also miserable. So, I would say it's an exercise of time management, figuring out how to balance the workload of teaching, as well as doing research and classes. It's also important to find good allies when you're in a graduate program. So, figuring out who those supportive faculty members who will listen to you are. And they may not always be the big name that you came there to study with, you know, it might surprise you. I would say: be open to working with professors that maybe you thought you didn't have anything in common with or you thought were not going align with your research interests.They may still be your biggest supporters. So, I would say those two things, finding good, supportive faculty and time management.

Finally, something fun about yourself or something that others would not know?

My go-to fact that most people are surprised to find is that I used to play roller derby. I used to escape for a roller derby team in northwest Arkansas. It was a very short-lived roller derby career, and I've not played since I started the Ph.D. I thought I would be able to do both, but I haven't been able to. It's been too time consuming to do the degree, but maybe after I graduate, I can join a derby team again.

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