

Chairs Update December 2017

Message from Chair Fellow

“Self-compassion is simply giving the same kindness to ourselves that we would give to others.”

Christopher Germer

It’s that time of year. I have **that** look in my eyes. The look that says, “*I have a million things to accomplish and I don’t have time to breathe.*” It’s the look that keeps my students from asking a third question about their upcoming exam; the look that elicits “just a moment for a break” requests during committee meetings; the look that means another late night and missed appointment/dinner/bedtime. I have papers, exams, meetings, deadlines, and revisions. And that’s just the work responsibilities – it doesn’t touch the holiday plans, family get-togethers, or shopping!

You probably know the **look** I’m talking about. My guess is that you recognize the look because you wear it, too. The combination of the semester end, family responsibilities, and holiday plans can give the most peaceful human a large headache. As Chairs, your headaches and “looks” can be super-sized. Year-end responsibilities can be burdensome; pressures mount and deadlines loom as the university closing date draws near.

The Mayo Clinic [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>] offers these suggestions for reducing stress during the holidays. As Chairs, these tips can improve our “academic health” this time of year:

- *Acknowledge your feelings.* It’s ok to take some time to feel mad, sad, bad when you need. Release yourself from the pressure to feel happy all the time. Final exams (and the week after) are busy and stressful for all faculty. Acknowledge and admit you’re feeling the pressure – take a deep breath – and plow onward.
- *Reach out.* Seek out a friendly face; invite another Chair to coffee and enjoy the comradery of someone who understands your unique pressures.
- *Be realistic.* As Chairs, your to-do list is often longer than the number of hours in your day. Take a moment to prioritize your responsibilities; consider which duties need immediate attention (and which could wait – even if someone else disagrees!).
- *Plan ahead.* Give yourself permission to take some time away from your job responsibilities. Consider scheduling some times where you are work-free (or at least email-free) in order to enjoy the activities that nurture your whole self.

Our November Chair Forum event, hosted by Drs. Karen Markel and Jo Reger, generated a wonderful discussion on the benefits of mentoring at any stage. Sharing various models and best practices of academic mentoring relationships, Drs. Reger and Markel emphasized the support that mentoring can provide faculty – particularly during rough moments in the classroom, scholarship, or navigating academic culture. As Department Chairs and Program Directors, developing supportive mentor relationships can assist in weathering those “looks” and tough patches in our own academic careers regardless of our seniority.

As 2017 draws to a close, my wish for you includes a chance to relax, supportive relationships, and a generous dose of self-kindness. Here’s to a peaceful end of semester – and the people who make Oakland University a wonderful place.

Chair Events and Resources:

1. [Chair Forums](#) will continue in the winter semester. Please look for registration information and dates in the January update. Upcoming topics will include:
 - **Difficult conversations; difficult people:** How to talk when you don’t want to!
 - **Looking back; looking ahead:** Conversations about life after Chairperson service (and lessons learned from new Chairs)
 - **Diversity mindset:** Encouraging diversity in our classrooms, departments, and academic communities
2. Did you know that all the materials distributed at Chair Forums and referenced in Chair Updates are available online? You can locate terrific articles on topics such as mentoring, student retention, and work-life balance through the [Chair’s Corner](#) on the CETL website.

Sending you warm wishes for a successful new year.
Respectfully,

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