

# FINDING BALANCE

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**Winter  
2020**



# FINDING BALANCE

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College life is faster than ever. Technology allows us to always be doing something, and it can feel like there's always something that needs our attention.

While taking a break from being "on" all day can lead to a sense of "wasting" time, it's important for our individual growth and well-being to find moments to pause and reflect.

Filling every moment of our days with studying or work or exercise or spending time with friends or calling home (and on and on), helps us to feel productive, but no matter how hard you try, you can't do everything.

And that's okay.

That's where this guide comes in. It's designed to:

- help you identify and focus on the things that matter to you
- introduce you to the benefits and techniques of self-affirmation
- reinforce the necessity of taking breaks
- help you cultivate healthy habits when faced with a stressful situation



# START AT THE BEGINNING

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Let's first take a moment to reflect on this past semester.

What went well this semester? What successes did you have? What strengths did you use to achieve them?

How was a "hybrid semester" different from fully online classes in the spring or fully in-person classes?

Which experience was most meaningful to you this semester?

Was there an opportunity you had that you didn't take? Why not?

Which work strategies were effective, which weren't?

Is there something you could have let go of to make time and/or space for that opportunity?

# START AT THE BEGINNING

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Let's first take a moment to reflect on this past semester.

Who or what supported you this semester? What did they do to help?

Overall, what would you do differently if you could? What would you need to do so?

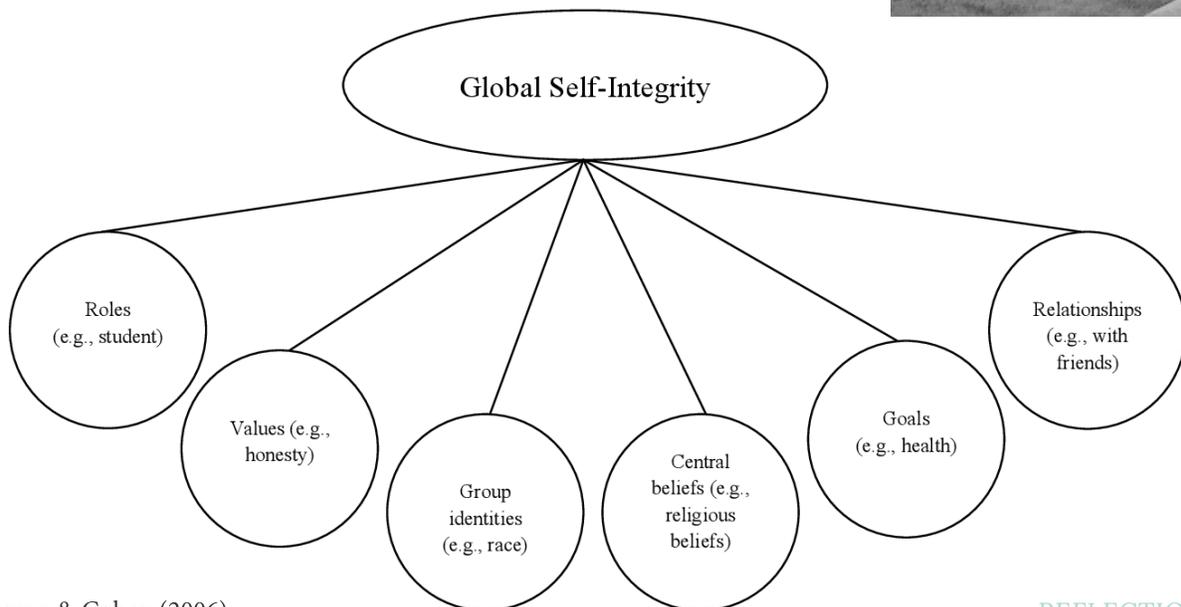
# VALUES & AFFIRMATION

Self-affirmation: an act that manifests one's adequacy and thus affirms one's sense of global self-integrity

When faced with stress and challenges, we may become self-critical or believe that things are predetermined to go poorly. In times like these, one strategy you can use to counteract and alleviate stress is to engage in self-affirmations.

A self-affirmation is an act that manifests one's adequacy and thus affirms one's sense of global self-integrity.

The idea behind the term "global self-integrity" is that we think "I am a good person" rather than specific roles in our lives such as "I am a good student" or "I am a good worker".



# VALUES & AFFIRMATION

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Self-affirmation: an act that manifests one's adequacy and thus affirms one's sense of global self-integrity

Psychologists Geoffrey Cohen and David Sherman explain that “Spending time with friends, participating in a volunteer group, or attending religious services anchor a sense of adequacy in a higher purpose. Activities that can seem like distractions can also function as self-affirmations.” These activities include shopping, posting on social media, or putting on a uniform or particular clothing. Cohen and Sherman examined the effects of self-affirmations and found that people in high-stress or threatening environments who performed self-affirmations had more successful outcomes both in the short term overcoming the stressful situation and in the long term when faced with similar scenarios.

How then, can we affirm ourselves in this way? One way to cut past our particular roles into global self-integrity is to engage in value affirmation. In studies, value affirmation interventions are the most commonly used method of producing self-affirmations. In these studies, respondents were given a list of values and qualities and asked to choose ones that are important to them and to describe why. On the next page, we've included one such exercise.



# VALUE AFFIRMATION

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Rank the following values in order of most to least important to you.

- artistic skills
- sense of humor
- friendship
- family
- living life in the moment
- athletics
- musical ability/appreciation
- aesthetic appreciation
- creativity
- career development
- romance
- religion
- nature/sustainability
- \_\_\_\_\_

Consider one of your top values. Why is it important to you?

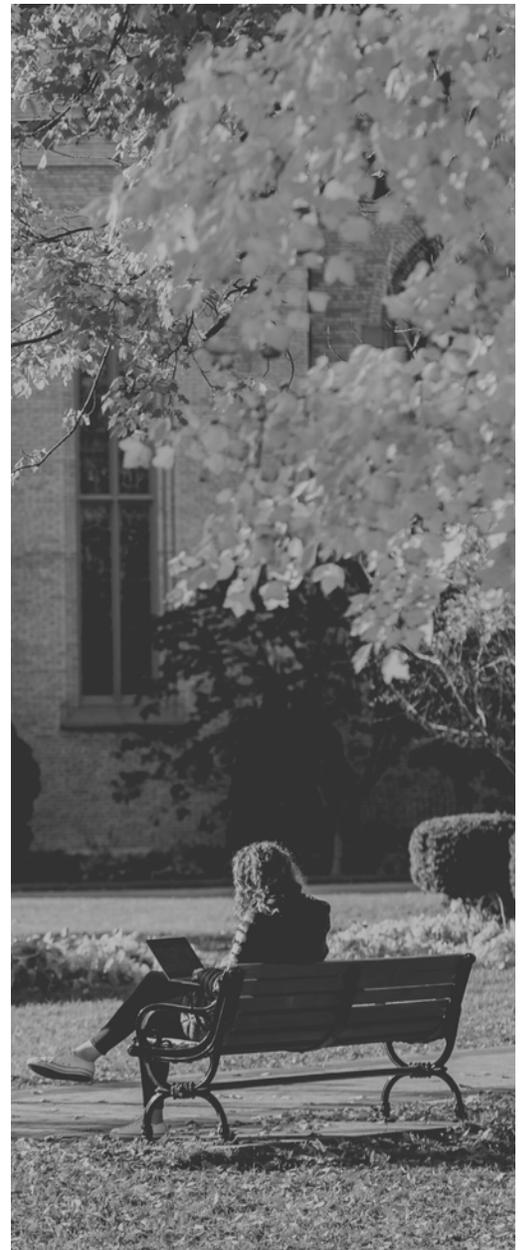
Describe a time when that value was at the core of a decision made or situation you were in.

# ELIMINATING THE "SHOULD"

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Identifying important values not only allows us to self-affirm, but it can aid in prioritizing what we do. There is often a sense that there is more to be done: more credit hours to take, more studying for an exam, more opportunities to add to your resume, more networking events to attend, more clubs to join. We can't do them all, but there is a pressure that we "should" do them.

This pressure could come externally from other people: friends, family, or advisors, telling us what to do. It could also come internally from our beliefs about how other people perceive us or expect us to do. It's important to remember that we can't do everything. We can eliminate some unnecessary "shoulds" by prioritizing those that align with our values and deprioritizing those that don't.



# ELIMINATING THE "SHOULD"

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List some things you feel you "should" do:

 Circle the "shoulds" that align with your values. Note which values next to each "should" that was circled.

 Mark the "shoulds" that others value.

Underline the "shoulds" that have been given to you by others.

 Star the "shoulds" that are fueled by internal pressure or anxiety.

What do you notice?

# ELIMINATING THE "SHOULD"

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## **For career-related "shoulds":**

*Write a list of your values, things you would want from a job or work environment. Compare opportunities against this list. Is it a good fit?*

## **For social situation "shoulds":**

*Reflect on how you felt before, during and after an event. Did you want to go? Did you enjoy it? Were you present or was your mind elsewhere? Do you feel better or worse than before the event?*

# TAKING GOOD BREAKS

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Even if we understand our values and work to prioritize them in our lives, we can still easily fill our day with our to-do list. It is essential to take breaks amidst the hustle and bustle of work. Often, however, we feel too pressured to take a break, or when we take a break our mind continues to focus on our tasks or being productive. Then the million-dollar question to ask is “Is my break really a break?”

## **Deliberate Practice**

Psychologist Dr. K. Anders Ericsson developed the theory of deliberate practice. That is, to push yourself in specific areas where you may be lacking when you practice, work, or study. Dr. Ericsson found that world-class violinists, rather than practicing all day, practiced intensely for approximately 90 minute periods a few times a day. This consistent, quality practice separated by breaks yielded the best results.

## **Basic Rest-Activity Cycle**

Dr. Ericsson’s findings fall in line with the theory of Nathaniel Kleitman, a physiologist who first discovered REM sleep, that our body also engages in a “basic rest-activity cycle”, or BRAC, during waking hours. This BRAC period is analogous to the sleep cycle and lasts approximately 90 minutes.



# TAKING GOOD BREAKS

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## Is my break really a break?

*What am I thinking about? Am I thinking about the things I still have to do?*

*Do I spend my break talking about or complaining about work?*

*Does my break look like my work?*

*Do I “take a break” by moving from one screen to another?*

# TAKING GOOD BREAKS

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If you're wondering how you can make your breaks better, here are some suggestions from researchers:

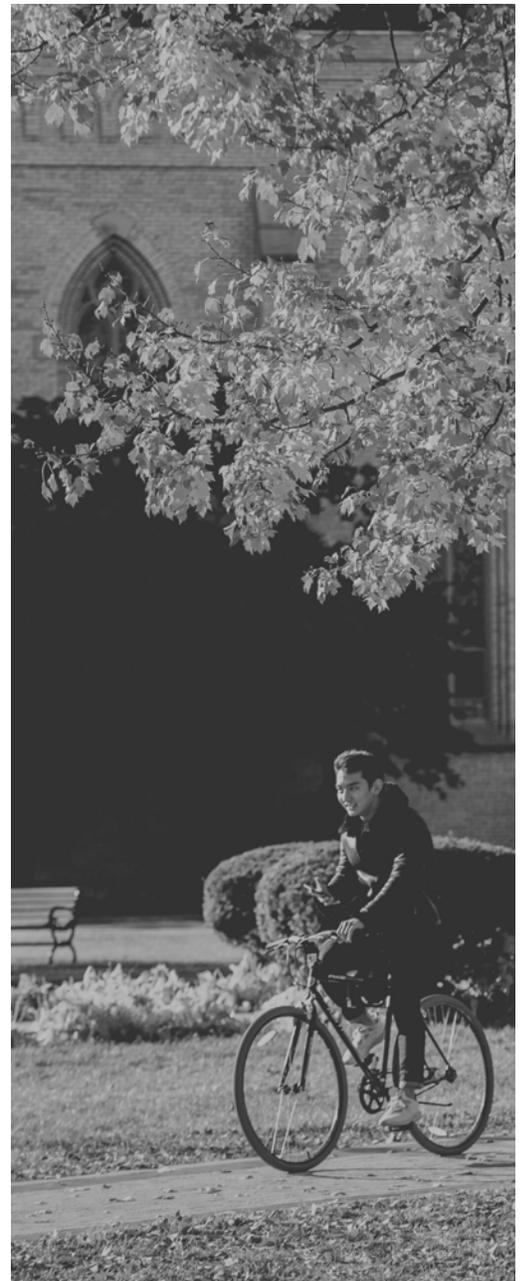
**Go for a walk.** Walking increases blood flow to the brain. Research shows that in particular, walking through green spaces causes decreased frustration and increased meditation.

**Change what you're doing.** If you're with others, spend some time alone. If you're alone, reach out and spend a little time with someone else. If you've been looking at a screen, perhaps close your eyes and meditate.

**Take breaks early and often.** Researchers found that taking a break early in the workday leads to greater recovery after the break.

**Take a mini break.** If you feel you're "in the zone", microbreaks for a minute or less can cause increased performance in tasks when compared to taking no break.

**Make time for meals.** Try to set aside a dedicated 30-60 minutes for lunch and dinner. Try to find someone to eat with. Avoid having a "working-lunch".



# TAKING GOOD BREAKS

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## When is the right time to take a break?

*Have I made any progress in the last 10-15 minutes?*

*How long have I been working? Is it around 90 minutes?*

**Try setting an intentional schedule with built in breaks. Here's an example.**

*breakfast*

**8 - 9:30 am**

**TASK:**

**10-11:30 am**

**TASK:**

*lunch*

**1-2:30 pm**

**TASK:**

**3-4:30 pm**

**TASK:**

**5-6:30 pm**

**TASK:**

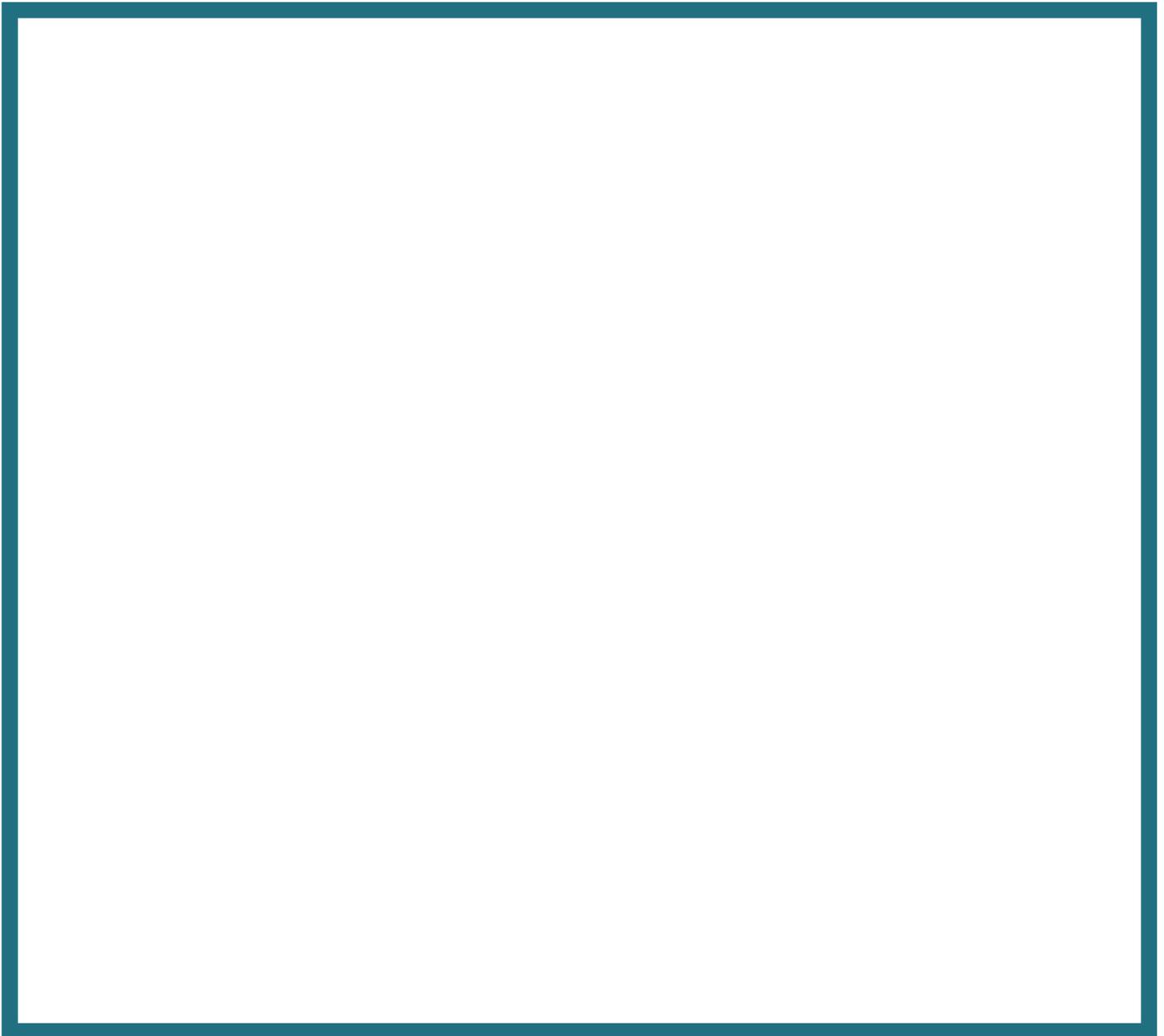
*dinner*

**8-9:30 pm**

**TASK:**

# ADDITIONAL NOTES

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