Experts

More than just academics

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In the ongoing discourse about reforming our education system, one crucial aspect often overlooked is the promotion of a healthy work-life balance among academics. It's easy to overlook the multifaceted identities that define us beyond the confines of our professional identities: professors, researchers, scholars, and teachers. We are not just academics, we are so much more. We are husbands, wives, sons, daughters, parents, friends, siblings, neighbours, caregivers, and parts of other meaningful communities. Our lives are a delicate balance of professional aspirations and personal responsibilities, each demanding its share of time and attention.

Institutional expectations exacerbate the challenge of achieving work-life balance. High teaching loads, research obligations, administrative duties, and community engagements leave little room for personal time and reflection. While passion drives many academics, the quantification of scholarly success and demands for constant productivity create an unhealthy atmosphere that prioritises quantity over quality. The academic journey is often portrayed as a solitary pursuit, a relentless quest for knowledge and achievement. However, the reality is far more complex.

Behind the facade of academic success lies a network of support and sacrifice, often provided by loved ones who bear the burden of household responsibilities and emotional support. For many early-career academics, the prospect of balancing academic responsibilities with family commitments is daunting. Concerns about parenting, caregiving, and maintaining personal relationships often weigh heavily on their minds. The pressure to excel professionally while nurturing personal connections can be overwhelming, leading some to question the feasibility of expanding their families or fully embracing their roles as parents and partners.

As academics, we pour our hearts and souls into our teaching, research, and service to the academic community. It's a calling that fuels our creativity, intellect, and sense of purpose. Yet, amidst the pursuit of scholarly excellence, we must not lose sight of our humanity. Our relationships with loved ones, our health, and our overall well-being are equally vital aspects of who we are. Finding work-life balance is not just a matter of personal convenience; it's essential for our professional success and fulfillment. When we neglect our personal lives, we risk burnout, diminished productivity, and strained relationships. Conversely, when we prioritise self-care, we become better equipped to excel in our academic roles.

Consider the role of a parent in academia. Parenthood brings immense joy, but it also comes with its own set of challenges and responsibilities. Balancing the demands of teaching and parenting requires careful planning and support. Yet, many academic institutions still lack adequate family-friendly policies and resources, making it difficult for parents to thrive professionally while raising children. Similarly, being a caregiver for aging parents requires time and energy. These roles often require us to make sacrifices and trade-offs, but they also enrich our lives and provide valuable perspectives that enhance our academic work

Ultimately, recognizing the multifaceted nature of our identities as academics is the first step towards

achieving a healthy work-life balance. Academic institutions must prioritise the well-being of their academic staff by implementing policies that support flexibility, parental leave, and work-from-home options. More importantly, fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and mutual support within academic communities can create an environment where individuals feel empowered to prioritise their personal lives without fear of judgment. By embracing the richness of our experiences, we can become not only better academics but also happier, more fulfilled individuals. In doing so, we set an example for future generations of scholars, demonstrating that success in academia is not measured solely by publications and accolades but by the richness of our lives as human beings.

On this Teacher's Day, I extend my heartfelt greetings to all academics at UMPSA. Your unwavering dedication and achievements are truly commendable. A special shout-out to our language teachers from the Centre for Modern Languages, whose work not only imparts essential communication skills but also bridges cultures and fosters understanding in our diverse world. May you all continue to thrive in both your professional and personal lives, finding balance, fulfillment, and joy in all that you do. May Allah SWT bless you with strength, patience, and wisdom in your noble endeavours and may He grant you the highest of ranks in Jannah for your dedication and sacrifices in the name of knowledge.

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