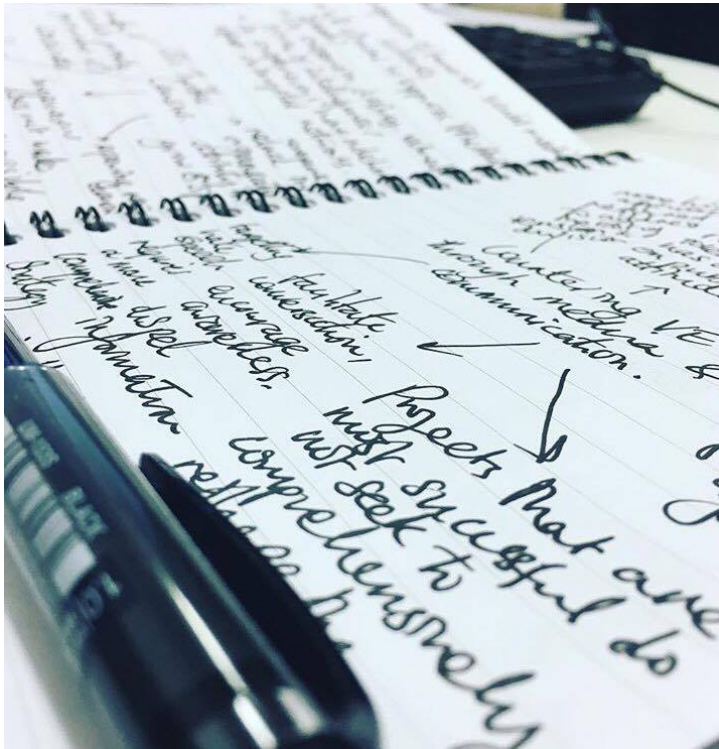


Juggling studying, work and volunteering – is it possible?

By **Rabia Nasimi** (@*RabiaNasimi*)

Soon-to-graduate master's student, Rabia, reflects on her experiences balancing studying with working and volunteering whilst at LSE.



The 14th November was one of those days you count down towards, with great tension; sometimes wishing it would come quickly, and other times wanting time to drag its feet. Yes, unsurprisingly – it's results day. For me, it was master's results. Following my dissertation submission at the end of August, my last piece of formal work, I had to wait, like many other students, for approximately two months to be informed of my final results.

The way I studied for my master's wasn't particularly conventional; I not only studied full time, attending university at least 3 days a week, but also worked as a finance officer (and no, I don't have a finance degree) for 1.5 days a week at the Volunteer Centre Lewisham, a local charity, and also did some volunteering.

The way I came to volunteer wasn't the usual pathway either, as I was supporting my father in running a charity that he founded in 2003 (Afghanistan and Central Asian Association), sometimes working around the clock, and almost all weekends. Arriving in the UK as refugees, the linguistic and cultural barriers created a significant obstacle for my family, and so through the charity my father aimed to smooth the transition for others. There was no specific role description that I followed, as tasks ranged from administration duties to monitoring and evaluation. Some tasks took minutes to complete, whilst others took extended periods of time. Seeing the irrevocably life-changing difference made to the refugees who we supported provided me with further energy and buoyancy to continue.

While perhaps unconventional, for me it was entirely clear what I was doing: studying was my passion, working earned me some pocket-money, and volunteering provided me with enthusiasm. Many of you may question how this was humanly possible; I've had questions about how much sleep I got, how much time I had to socialise, and, more tediously, how much time I actually had to write essays which totalled 15,000 words, write a dissertation of 10,000 words, and take three exams – two of which were statistical maths. Oh, and I wrote 10 blogs on top of all that as well. Sometimes, I wonder, too.

On reflection, I think the main reason it was possible for me to achieve this balance was because I am extremely organised; my life is made of notes and reminders – whether that is notes on the computer, notes on my phone, or in my beloved moleskin diary (if you're in my position, make sure to get one!). Of course, this is not exhaustive, and there are many other reasons why it was possible; some of which include a very restrained social life (I did try my best to fit in social time too, I wasn't a complete hermit), patience, and the ability to work within time-constrained and

pressured environment. Saying that, none of my essays, or dissertation for that matter, were written last minute!

Like everything in life, working and volunteering whilst studying has its advantages and disadvantages. When things go right and you're full of energy, it is an amazing experience. Not to forget you leave education with skills and extra qualities that not all graduates have. At other times, it can be stressful and sometimes depressing. To achieve satisfying results, diligence, passion and attention are key.

So, if you're feeling tied up with essays and reading, you should realise that you're quite fortunate to have the time to simply focus on your education; make sure you use it well. And for those of you who are in my situation, persevere and be resilient – you can do it. Oh yes, I didn't mention that I am really pleased with my results and that it was the happy culmination of all that sheer hard work. It's important to keep your eye on the endgame; the motivation to achieve will keep your focus and determination alive, despite the odd day of flagging and wondering if it's all worth it. Believe me, it is.

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