Activity Sheet:

**Important Rather Than Urgent**

While much of our training is associated with learning and practicing new teaching skills, as a graduate student you are also required to continue doing your research during this period since most of you have 50% appointments. So we have designed an activity for development of skills and identification of strategies that will help you be more productive and relaxed while balancing teaching with your other responsibilities.

1. List five tasks you are likely to have for your TAship in any “normal” week.

2. List five tasks you are likely to have for your research during a “normal” week.

3. List five tasks you are likely to have as part of your home/family/personal life during a “normal week.

On the next page there is a large figure that looks like this: For our purposes, “urgent” is an activity which has a looming deadline that is externally imposed. “Important” is an activity that when completed will move you towards your life or work goals. You will need to determine whether each of your tasks listed above is urgent or not, and important or not.

4. Plot each task into the figure on the next page.
Time management gurus like to discuss these four quadrants as follows. Quadrant I, important and urgent, is the “crisis” quadrant. Here are pressing problems, emergencies, and deadline-driven projects not finished earlier. Having many activities in this quadrant is exhausting and indicates an inability to deal with issues before the deadline looms.

Quadrant II is the “planning” quadrant. This should hold tasks of planning and preparation, and be the source of activities that are being done ahead of their deadline. Having tasks in II keeps you productive and confident rather than stressed.

Quadrant III is the “deception” quadrant. It is here that the needs of others press strongly against you, and try to convince you that their deadline should be important to you as well. Some of these tasks are necessary for you to do immediately (requests from your advisor), while others are not as truly urgent as the presenter would have you believe (emails from your students).

Lastly, Quadrant IV is the “escape” quadrant. This consists of pointless meetings, watching YouTube videos, or rearranging glassware in the lab. You usually do them instead of a Quadrant II task because they are easier. Unfortunately, these activities end up making you more stressed by pushing tasks that should have been in Quadrant II (important but not urgent) into Quadrant I (important and urgent).

When you look at all you have to do this term, develop ways to meet these goals:

1. Stop doing tasks that fall into Quadrant IV.
2. Tasks that are currently in Quadrant I because of procrastination should be scheduled and done earlier and with more deliberation, reducing your stress level.
3. Tasks that are currently in Quadrant III need to be evaluated. If they are truly not important to you, can they be delegated? If they are necessary for you to do (someone has to clean the bathroom), can they be scheduled so that they don’t reach the “urgent” state?

5. What three concrete steps can you take to make the shift from I to II, and from III to II?