Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

I'm Studying, I'm Working, and Apparently These Are Supposed to Be the Best Years of My Life

How to Balance University Demands with Earning a Living, Plan for Exam Season, and Find Available Support Without Paying for Your Education Entirely with Lost Sleep



We've got a problem. But relax.
It can be solved—and we'll even have something to laugh about.

I'm Studying, I'm Working, and Apparently These Are Supposed to Be the Best Years of My Life

How to Balance University Demands with Earning a Living, Plan for Exam Season, and Find Available Support Without Paying for Your Education Entirely with Lost Sleep

Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

ISBN: 9788384838860

ALL-IN Rafał Płonkowski



CONTENTS

INTRO 5

Chapter 1 - Two Full-Time Lives and Only One of You 10

Chapter 2 - Everyone Else Has Their Life Together. Apparently You Missed the Meeting 18

Chapter 3 - Your Calendar Is Lying to You, and It Has the Evidence to Prove It 27

Chapter 4 - I'll Start Tomorrow, the Official Motto of Academic Disaster 35

Chapter 5 - Your Work Schedule Is Not a Court Sentence, So Stop Treating It Like One 43

Chapter 6 - The University Cannot Read Your Mind, Especially Through a Form Submitted to the Wrong Department 52

Chapter 7 - I Have a Job, So Why Is My Bank Account Still Starving? 62

Chapter 8 - Asking for Help Is Not Cheating, Even If Your Pride Objects 71

Chapter 9 - Exam Season Is Not a Natural Disaster, Even If the Group Chat Says Otherwise 81

Chapter 10 - I've Read It Five Times, So Why Does My Brain Know Absolutely Nothing? 90

Chapter 11 - Scholarships Don't Apply for Themselves, Unfortunately 100

Chapter 12 - A Job for Your CV or a Job That Pays the Rent? Choosing Experience That Actually Counts 109

Chapter 13 - Group Projects, or How to Work with People Who Exist Mainly as Profile Pictures 118

Chapter 14 - Sleep Is Not a Student Loan, So Stop Borrowing From It..... 127

Chapter 15 - I Failed an Exam, Not My Entire Future..... 137

Chapter 16 - When Working Harder Stops Working, Change the Arrangement..... 146

Chapter 17 - When Life Ignores the Syllabus and Everything Goes Wrong at Once..... 156

Chapter 18 - You Finally Got Your Life Together. Please Don't Fill Every Free Hour Again..... 165

Chapter 19 - Your Dissertation Won't Write Itself, No Matter How Often You Open the File..... 175

Chapter 20 - The Best Years of Your Life? How About Making Them Yours?..... 184

INTRO

The university has sent you an email with the subject line "Make the Most of Your Student Experience!" It includes photographs of smiling people sitting on immaculate lawns, attending inspiring events, and apparently having enough free time to form meaningful friendships with strangers holding reusable coffee cups. There is an invitation to a networking workshop on Thursday afternoon, a reminder about an upcoming assessment, and a cheerful suggestion that you should participate in extracurricular activities to develop your professional potential. Unfortunately, Thursday afternoon is when you're working. The assessment is on Friday. Your rent is due on Monday. And the only extracurricular activity you've managed lately is calculating whether you can afford groceries without making your bank account file a formal complaint.

Welcome to the wonderful world of studying while earning a living, where everyone insists these are supposed to be the best years of your life, although nobody seems entirely sure when you're expected to experience them. University promises intellectual discovery, personal development, independence, friendships, and exciting opportunities. Employment promises experience, financial security, and the satisfaction of becoming a responsible adult. Both sound perfectly reasonable until you discover that they expect access to the same twenty-four hours. Meanwhile, ordinary life continues demanding food, clean clothes, transportation, human interaction, and the occasional opportunity to sleep somewhere other than a lecture theatre.

The trouble isn't necessarily that you're doing something wrong. Sometimes you're trying to satisfy several sets of expectations that were never designed to coexist comfortably. Your university establishes deadlines according to academic requirements. Your employer schedules work according to operational needs. Your

landlord expects payment according to the rental agreement, displaying remarkably little enthusiasm for your educational journey. Each institution operates within its own perfectly understandable logic. Unfortunately, you're the person responsible for negotiating between them, usually without additional funding, administrative support, or the ability to create a second version of yourself who attends compulsory seminars.

You've probably already encountered the standard advice. Wake up earlier. Plan your week. Eliminate distractions. Work smarter. Stop procrastinating. Adopt a morning routine involving exercise, meditation, journaling, and a breakfast prepared with the precision of a Michelin-starred chef. These suggestions aren't all useless. Planning and concentration genuinely matter. But advice becomes ridiculous when it assumes that every student possesses identical resources. Someone whose living expenses are covered by family has different options from someone who must work enough hours to pay for accommodation. Someone with predictable shifts faces different challenges from someone whose schedule changes weekly. Telling both people to purchase the same productivity planner is an admirably efficient way of selling stationery, not necessarily solving their problems.

And then there's the uncomfortable matter of exhaustion. A free hour isn't automatically an hour of effective studying. You might technically have ninety minutes between finishing work and going to bed, but that doesn't mean your brain is ready to analyze complicated material after spending the day dealing with customers, deadlines, or physically demanding tasks. You may sit at your desk, open the textbook, and read the same paragraph repeatedly until the words begin looking like decorative wallpaper. Eventually, you blame yourself for lacking discipline, despite the possibility that you're simply demanding concentration from a mind that has already spent most of its available energy.

Money makes everything more complicated. If you need your wages to cover essential expenses, reducing working hours isn't necessarily a realistic solution. You cannot negotiate with the electricity bill by explaining that your academic ambitions deserve greater financial flexibility. Nor should you be expected to survive indefinitely on instant noodles and optimism. The real question is how to understand your financial requirements, assess the consequences of different working arrangements, and investigate what legitimate support might be available. Scholarships, emergency assistance, student accommodation, institutional services, and other opportunities can sometimes help, but eligibility and availability depend on the relevant rules and circumstances. Nobody should promise you money before those conditions have been checked.

Another pressure comes from the extraordinary people apparently surrounding you. One classmate has outstanding grades and a prestigious internship. Another runs a small business while completing two qualifications. Someone online claims to study full-time, work thirty hours a week, maintain an impressive social life, and wake up every morning feeling refreshed. Perhaps they're telling the truth. Perhaps they have financial support, unusually flexible arrangements, or a very selective relationship with reality. Whatever their situation, their achievements don't establish what should be possible in yours. Comparing your entire life with the highlights of somebody else's is an excellent method of feeling inadequate while learning almost nothing useful.

This book takes a different approach. Instead of asking how you can squeeze an unlimited number of obligations into a limited life, we'll examine how to make better decisions about the obligations themselves. That means understanding what your courses genuinely require, preparing for exam periods before panic becomes the dominant study technique, discussing availability with employers, and finding out which academic arrangements are

actually possible. It also means recognizing when an attractive opportunity costs more than it offers, when asking for help is sensible, and when a difficult situation needs a change in circumstances rather than another inspirational speech about perseverance.

We'll pay attention to the details that polished advice tends to overlook. A deadline may depend on information another person hasn't supplied. A better-paid job may introduce additional travel costs or disrupt essential classes. An ambitious study schedule may collapse because it leaves no room for unpredictable events. These problems need different responses. Some can be improved through clearer communication or more effective preparation. Others involve financial, institutional, or personal restrictions that cannot simply be wished away. Recognizing the distinction is an important part of becoming more capable, not an admission that you've somehow failed adulthood.

You can begin with one useful question: which part of your current routine creates the greatest recurring conflict? Perhaps it's the evening shift before an early class, the unpredictable assignment deadlines, or the difficulty of maintaining enough income during exam periods. Identify the specific collision rather than declaring your entire life disorganized. Then consider what information you need before choosing a response. A university rule might need checking. A work arrangement might require discussion. A financial concern might call for a proper calculation. You don't need to solve the entire situation this evening. Understanding its actual structure is already more useful than promising yourself that tomorrow you'll suddenly become a flawless human scheduling machine.

There will also be times when the appropriate response is to seek qualified help. Persistent health difficulties, serious financial problems, uncertainty about legal entitlements, and significant emotional distress deserve more than generic advice from a book.

Knowing when to consult the right professional or institution is part of responsible decision-making. And no academic result, however important, automatically justifies repeatedly putting your health or safety at risk. Your degree is supposed to expand your future opportunities, not require you to sacrifice the basic conditions needed to enjoy them.

Most importantly, university should still leave some room for being a person. You may want friendships, relationships, hobbies, occasional adventures, or simply an evening when nobody expects you to produce anything useful. Those things aren't distractions from an otherwise legitimate existence composed entirely of assignments and wages. They're part of the life you're supposedly preparing to build. You may not be able to have everything at once, and some periods will demand difficult compromises. But there's a difference between making a conscious sacrifice for an important goal and gradually surrendering every enjoyable part of your existence because you never stopped to question the arrangement.

So forget the obligation to experience the greatest years of your life on somebody else's schedule. You don't have to become the most productive student in recorded history, graduate with a collection of perfect grades, or turn every spare afternoon into a professional development opportunity. You need a workable way to learn, earn, make decisions, and remain sufficiently human to appreciate what you're accomplishing.

And if, at some point, you manage to attend your classes, pay your bills, prepare for your exams, and enjoy a Saturday without feeling guilty about it, that's worth celebrating. No university may award you a special distinction for achieving such a revolutionary balance. But unlike a certificate that disappears into a drawer, the ability to build a life that actually works could remain useful long after graduation.

After all, these may turn out to be some wonderful years. It would just be nice to be awake enough to remember them.

Chapter 1 - Two Full-Time Lives and Only One of You

Your university expects you to be a committed student. Your employer expects you to be a committed employee. Both institutions emphasize responsibility, punctuality, enthusiasm, and the importance of giving your best. Individually, these expectations seem perfectly reasonable. Unfortunately, neither institution has provided instructions for what happens when both want your best at precisely the same moment. Apparently, you're supposed to divide yourself into two highly motivated professionals, each equipped with a functioning brain, a reliable alarm clock, and an excellent attitude. The only administrative oversight is that you possess one body, one bank account, and a distinctly limited supply of patience.

This is the first thing to understand about studying while working: you're not simply doing two activities. You're operating inside two systems, each with its own deadlines, authority figures, performance standards, and consequences. University assignments don't automatically become easier because you've been working all afternoon. Workplace responsibilities don't disappear because you have an important examination approaching. Both systems can make legitimate demands without considering their combined effect on you. That doesn't necessarily make either institution unreasonable. It means you're responsible for managing an overlap that neither institution was designed to manage on your behalf.

And that's where the trouble begins. People frequently describe your situation using reassuring phrases such as "balancing your commitments" or "managing competing priorities." These expressions make everything sound like an interesting organizational challenge. In reality, the experience can involve arriving at a laboratory session while mentally rehearsing a

workplace conversation, then attending that workplace conversation while worrying about the assignment you haven't completed. Even when you're physically present in the correct location, part of your attention may be somewhere else. Eventually, you become very skilled at looking attentive while privately calculating how much of your evening remains available for everything you've promised to do.

The conventional solution is to work harder, but greater effort cannot resolve every type of conflict. Suppose your degree requires attendance at a compulsory workshop on Wednesday afternoon, while your employment arrangement requires you to work at exactly the same time. These aren't two tasks competing for your motivation. They're two commitments competing for your physical presence. You could be the most disciplined person in the university and still lack the ability to occupy both buildings simultaneously. Before blaming yourself for failing to manage your responsibilities, you need to identify whether you're facing an efficiency problem, an information problem, or a genuine incompatibility between obligations.

The workload nobody includes in the brochure

University workload is often described in terms of scheduled teaching hours. Employment is usually described in terms of paid hours. Both measurements leave out activities that consume time without appearing in the headline figures. University may involve independent reading, practical preparation, meetings, assessment submissions, and administrative requirements. Employment can include commuting, changing clothes, preparing equipment, and dealing with scheduling arrangements. Then there's the entirely unreasonable human expectation that you should occasionally purchase food, wash your clothes, and remember where you live. Once these additional requirements are included, the apparently manageable combination of studying and working becomes much less straightforward.

Consider an imaginary student called Evelyn, who is completing a degree in environmental science while working at a hotel reception desk. Her contract provides eighteen hours of work most weeks, which sounds modest compared with full-time employment. Her university timetable contains a mixture of lectures, practical sessions, and independent assignments. Some days are relatively quiet, while others require travel between different teaching locations. Evelyn also shares accommodation with two other students and needs to manage ordinary household responsibilities. When someone asks why she seems so busy despite working only eighteen hours, she struggles to explain the problem without producing a presentation entitled "An Introduction to Everything Else I Have to Do."

The difficulty becomes clearer when you examine a single Thursday. Evelyn attends a morning practical session, travels across town for an afternoon shift, and returns home in the evening. Technically, she still has time before bed. However, she needs dinner, a shower, and a reasonable opportunity to recover from the day. The unfinished assignment hasn't disappeared, but the available evening is smaller than it looked when she planned it on Sunday. If she repeatedly assumes that every remaining hour can be used for demanding academic work, she'll regularly fall short of expectations that weren't realistic in the first place.

This is why the number of free hours tells you surprisingly little about your actual capacity. A three-hour block on a quiet morning isn't necessarily equivalent to three separate hours scattered between commuting, employment, and classes. The total duration may be identical, but the conditions for concentrating are different. Some tasks can be completed in short intervals; others require uninterrupted attention, access to particular equipment, or the opportunity to consult someone. When planning ignores these differences, a week can appear spacious while remaining almost impossible to use effectively.

A second hidden cost comes from switching between roles. University might require careful analysis of unfamiliar concepts, while your job demands rapid responses to immediate problems. Moving between these activities takes adjustment, especially when either has been stressful. You may leave work still thinking about an unresolved customer complaint, or sit in a lecture anticipating a difficult shift later that day. This doesn't mean your brain has stopped functioning. It means attention isn't an unlimited resource that becomes instantly available whenever you open the appropriate notebook. Treating every hour as interchangeable overlooks the actual conditions in which learning and work happen.

Busy is not a diagnosis

When students experience persistent overload, they often describe themselves as disorganized. Sometimes that's accurate. You might regularly forget deadlines, underestimate tasks, or accept responsibilities without checking your availability. These habits can be improved. But sometimes your schedule contains more obligations than your circumstances reasonably allow, and no arrangement of those obligations will eliminate the conflict. The distinction matters because the solutions are fundamentally different. Better organization helps when necessary time exists but is poorly allocated. It cannot manufacture time that has already been committed to something else.

One practical way to make this distinction is to examine a representative period rather than relying on impressions. Start with the obligations whose times cannot readily be changed, such as compulsory classes and agreed working shifts. Add the activities necessary to support them, including travel and preparation. Then identify academic work that must happen outside scheduled teaching. Finally, account for ordinary living requirements. You don't need to record every movement or convert your life into an elaborate spreadsheet. The purpose is to discover whether the

commitments you've accepted have enough space to exist without systematically consuming essential rest or other basic needs.

When examining your schedule, distinguish between a fixed requirement and an expectation that may allow some negotiation. A laboratory session with a compulsory attendance rule might have very limited flexibility. A proposed extra shift may be optional, depending on your employment arrangements. A group meeting could potentially happen through a shared document rather than requiring everybody to attend in person. These distinctions should be verified rather than assumed. Employment obligations, academic rules, and individual agreements vary, so don't treat a suggestion as legally optional or a university requirement as negotiable simply because doing so would make your timetable more convenient.

For Evelyn, this examination reveals that the main pressure doesn't occur evenly throughout the week. Two days combine lengthy practical sessions with later shifts, leaving very little realistic opportunity for substantial independent study. Another day contains a larger uninterrupted period suitable for demanding work. Her immediate improvement doesn't require creating an entirely new personality. She can stop expecting equally demanding academic results from every evening and allocate appropriate work to the periods when concentration is realistically available. She can also identify specific recurring clashes that need discussion rather than attempting to absorb every inconvenience herself.

There is a limit to how much such adjustment can achieve. Suppose Evelyn discovers that the university has added compulsory practical sessions during hours already covered by her employment agreement. She may need to contact the relevant academic staff and her employer, establish what each arrangement permits, and investigate possible alternatives. Neither side is automatically obliged to approve her preferred solution. However,

describing the exact conflict creates a clearer conversation than simply explaining that she's overwhelmed. Instead of asking somebody to fix her entire life, she can identify the particular requirement preventing two otherwise manageable commitments from coexisting.

Money complicates these decisions. If employment pays for essential living expenses, reducing hours may create a financial problem as serious as the academic one you're trying to solve. A student with savings or reliable family assistance has different options from someone who needs every scheduled shift. That difference is not a reflection of character. It's a difference in circumstances. Before deciding that fewer working hours are the answer, consider the effect on basic expenses and any realistic alternatives. Likewise, additional employment shouldn't automatically be treated as beneficial if its associated costs and academic consequences are substantial.

The difference between being reliable and being permanently available

Another recurring difficulty comes from the desire to demonstrate commitment to everybody. You don't want your employer to think university makes you unreliable, so you accept extra responsibilities. You don't want lecturers to think employment is distracting you from your degree, so you promise exceptional academic performance. You don't want classmates to see you as an inconvenient group member, so you volunteer for tasks despite an already crowded schedule. Each promise seems small and understandable. Together, they create a workload that nobody explicitly requested as a complete package, but you're somehow expected to deliver.

Reliability is better measured by how consistently you meet clear, realistic commitments than by your willingness to accept unlimited new ones. If you're genuinely unavailable on certain mornings, communicating that limitation accurately is more useful

than repeatedly agreeing and then urgently requesting changes. If you can complete a project section by Friday but not Wednesday, it's better to establish that before the group depends on an impossible deadline. Clear commitments help other people plan, too. They may be disappointed by your limits, but disappointment doesn't automatically mean you've behaved irresponsibly.

It also helps to recognize the difference between a short difficult period and a permanently unsustainable arrangement. A demanding assessment week might require temporary compromises, provided they're manageable and don't endanger your health or safety. A semester in which you repeatedly miss essential teaching, cannot complete academic work, and remain exhausted is a different matter. If the basic structure continually fails, it's worth investigating changes to employment arrangements, academic organization, or the overall pace of your commitments. Those decisions can involve significant financial and institutional consequences, so they deserve proper information rather than an impulsive reaction after an unpleasant evening.

There's another consideration that doesn't appear on either your academic transcript or your payslip: the rest of your life. Family, friendships, ordinary recreation, and personal interests aren't simply leftovers to be squeezed into whatever time remains. They may require flexibility during demanding periods, but treating them as permanently optional can make your entire existence revolve around meeting institutional expectations. You might become impressively capable of producing assignments and attending shifts while having remarkably little opportunity to enjoy anything those efforts are supposed to support.

The useful question is therefore not whether you're working hard enough. It's whether your present commitments are compatible with your actual resources and whether the sacrifices involved are ones you've consciously chosen. Sometimes the answer will be uncomfortable. An opportunity might be attractive

but unsuitable. A job might be financially necessary even though its schedule creates complications. A degree might require more independent work than you initially expected. Recognizing those realities allows you to make informed decisions instead of continually interpreting predictable conflicts as personal failures.

Being both a student and an employee can build confidence, independence, and practical skills. It can also place you under substantial pressure. Neither outcome should be romanticized. The aim is to make the combination workable for your particular circumstances, not to win an imaginary competition for the greatest number of simultaneous responsibilities. Two institutions may have entirely reasonable expectations. That doesn't mean you have to pretend their combined demands are automatically reasonable for one human being.

After all, universities teach critical thinking, and workplaces frequently praise problem-solving. Applying those skills to the arrangement between them seems perfectly appropriate. If someone objects, you can always explain that you're demonstrating interdisciplinary learning. It might be the most practical assignment you complete all semester.

Chapter 2 - Everyone Else Has Their Life Together. Apparently You Missed the Meeting

There's a peculiar conversation that happens on university campuses. You ask somebody how they're managing their assignments, their job, and everything else. They shrug and reply, "Oh, you know. Just keeping busy." A few minutes later, you discover that they've completed their coursework, secured a competitive internship, joined an academic society, and somehow found time to learn another language. You, meanwhile, spent yesterday evening searching for a missing document that turned out to be attached to an email you'd already opened four times. You smile politely, congratulate them, and leave with the uncomfortable suspicion that everybody else received a secret instruction manual during orientation.

The temptation is to treat another student's visible achievements as proof of your own shortcomings. If someone is accomplishing more, perhaps they're better organized, more intelligent, or simply more determined. Occasionally, another person really has developed useful habits you could learn from. But achievement alone tells you surprisingly little about the conditions behind it. You may know somebody's grades without knowing how much time they have available. You may admire their internship without knowing whether their living expenses are covered. You may see an impressive professional profile without discovering the opportunities they declined, the difficulties they encountered, or the support they received along the way.

Comparison becomes particularly misleading when you assemble an imaginary perfect student from several different people. You admire one person's academic results, another's

earnings, a third person's social life, and somebody else's professional experience. Then you combine all four into a single standard against which you evaluate yourself. Naturally, you fall short. Your imaginary competitor possesses the strongest qualities of multiple people while conveniently inheriting none of their limitations. It's rather like entering a swimming competition against a creature assembled from several Olympic champions, then criticizing yourself for not having enough arms.

The hidden conditions behind visible success

Consider two fictional students, Theo and Nadia, who are completing the same business degree. Theo works evenings in a distribution centre and contributes most of the money needed for his accommodation. Nadia has an internship at a respected consulting company, participates in an academic competition, and achieves excellent results. Theo admires her achievements and wonders why he seems unable to develop professionally at the same pace. What he doesn't initially know is that Nadia lives with relatives, has no regular rent payments, and can afford to accept opportunities offering limited immediate income. Her achievements are genuine, but so are the advantages created by her circumstances.

This doesn't make Nadia less hardworking or Theo less ambitious. It means their decisions operate under different constraints. Nadia might reasonably prioritize industry experience because her immediate financial needs are covered. Theo might reasonably prioritize predictable earnings because losing income would threaten his ability to continue studying. Neither choice automatically determines who will have the better career. But if Theo judges himself entirely by Nadia's achievements, he's ignoring the responsibilities that shape his own choices. He's effectively comparing two budgets while pretending both students began with the same balance.

Of course, visible advantages aren't the whole story either. Someone receiving financial assistance may have family responsibilities or difficulties you know nothing about. A student with excellent grades might be struggling with aspects of life that never appear in conversation. The point isn't to investigate everybody else's private circumstances until you can produce a comprehensive explanation of their success. That would turn comparison into an extremely intrusive research project. The useful lesson is simpler: you rarely possess enough information to treat someone else's achievements as a fair measure of what you should be accomplishing.

There is also a difference between receiving inspiration from somebody and accepting their priorities as your own. You might discover that a classmate has developed an effective approach to preparing for assessments. Asking how they work could provide useful ideas. You might hear about an internship you hadn't previously considered and decide to investigate it. Those are productive responses because you're extracting relevant information. Feeling inadequate because somebody has achieved something different doesn't tell you what to do next. It simply adds another unpleasant emotion to an already demanding week.

The pressure becomes stronger when other people begin offering unsolicited predictions about your future. A relative insists that employers care only about grades. A colleague claims academic results are irrelevant compared with work experience. An enthusiastic careers speaker announces that extracurricular involvement is essential. Each person may be speaking from a limited but sincere perspective. Unfortunately, their recommendations can conflict. If you try to satisfy every opinion simultaneously, you'll need excellent grades, extensive work experience, leadership activities, outstanding technical skills, and enough spare time to cultivate a personality suitable for