

1-1-2010

Nair's advice to students: Find balance in your lives

Jim Stewart
Furman University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jim (2010) "Nair's advice to students: Find balance in your lives," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 52 : Iss. 4 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol52/iss4/15>

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.

Nair's advice to students: Find balance in your lives

Marian Strobel, chair of Furman's history department, sums up her colleague Savita Nair's talents as an advisor in just a few short sentences:

"It is not unusual for students to request her services, even if they have never taken a course with her. Savita's reputation precedes her. As an advisor, she is compassionate, conscientious, and someone whose door is always open. Students feel safe in her care, yet at the same time, they are challenged by her to make the most of their academic careers and their futures."

To compassion and conscientiousness, Nair's students and colleagues add other qualities, ranging from patience and encouragement to a calming presence and commitment to helping students become not just better scholars, but better human beings.

No wonder, then, that Nair was named the recipient of the 2009 Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising.

For Nair, who has taught in the history and Asian Studies departments since 2003, building a strong rapport with students begins at their first meeting where, she says, she typically commends them for being accepted to a school like Furman — and then reminds them not to push themselves too hard.

"Students are often overwhelmed by being away from home for the first time and encountering all the new experiences that college brings," she says. "They're in danger of burning out too quickly. They tend to try to do too much, and sometimes the result is that they find themselves unable to function."

Her advice: Make sure you take time to decompress. Turn off your laptop and iPod and close your textbooks. Relax. Sit under a tree. Escape from the daily grind. "You don't have to drive yourself all the time," she says.

Her philosophy, she points out, comes in large part from her Indian heritage. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was 5, and she spent her formative years in Albany, N.Y. She still has relatives in India and frequently returns, both to visit and to accompany Furman students on study abroad trips — as she did during fall semester.

"In India people are not so scheduled," she says. "They're not obsessed with their date books and where they have to be. They take time to stop and visit. It's very liberating."

Nair also credits her advisor in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania with being an excellent role model. David Ludden, she says, treated her like a peer from the start of their relationship. "He looked at me as a whole person, not just an academic being," she says. He helped her come to terms with what she calls graduate school's "sub-culture of intensity" and was supportive of her choices — such as having three children while pursuing her degrees. Indeed, she defended her doctoral dissertation just two weeks after the birth of her third child.

What Ludden understood, Nair says — and what she tries to pass on to her students — was the importance of balance. And as Travis Sago '09 has testified, it's a message worth heeding.

In his letter nominating Nair for the advising award, Sago recalled sending her a lengthy e-mail in which he laid out his struggles with an assortment of academic and personal frustrations. Her response, he said, demonstrated a kind of compassion that he described as "second to none." He then proceeded to quote one comment that, he said, he would never forget. Nair wrote:

"Enjoying time with family and resting are vital. It is what sustains us, centers us. It is mental rejuvenation and indeed it is the stuff



JEREMY FLEMING

of life. While we thrive on our academic forays, they become meaningless without the base of family and friends."

Said Sago, "It is this message that I remind myself of when life seems to become too much, too fast. Furman students, in general, could benefit greatly from these words."

As more students come to know Savita Nair, they will.

— JIM STEWART