# Economics Ph.D. Student Time Diary

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Sunday 2nd November, 2025

**Abstract**

I present descriptive facts and patterns about the hours worked by an economics Ph.D. student at Yale University.

# 1 Background

I am a Ph.D. student studying economics at Yale University's School of the Environment (YSE). I follow the typical path of a Ph.D. student in the Department of Economics. The first year involves taking general theory courses. In summer 2024, I attended "Math Camp". In Fall 2024, I attended Micro Theory I, Macro Theory I, Econometric Theory I, and a YSE doctoral seminar. In Spring 2025, I took Micro Theory II, Macro Theory II, Econometric Theory II, and Applied Empirical Methods.

The second year involves field courses. In Fall 2025, I took Industrial Organization I (IO), International Trade I, and Public Finance I. I was also a Teaching Fellow (TF) for "Microeconomic Foundations for Environmental Managers", an introductory microeconomic theory course for YSE master's students taught by Matt Kotchen.

As a general note, I attend fewer seminars than many of my peers. I attend the YSE economics seminar and the student YSE economics seminar every week, and YEEHAW, a seminar for YSE students, post-docs, and alums, once a month. IO and Trade host student lunch talks and invited speaker seminars that I attend about once a month, each. My attendance is heavily influenced by the topic in question. It is unclear to me whether attending relatively fewer seminars than my peers is a good or bad (investment) decision.

# 2 Data

Every day, I record my hours worked, split by activity. I use this data to track my time management goals. The data are self-reported but as truthful as possible; I have no hypothesis as to my bias in reporting behavior. On one hand, over-estimation may lead to being perceived as working very hard and "suffering" (often a rite of passage), but shows a lack of time management skills. On the other, under-estimation can display a healthy work-life balance but could indicate a lack of drive or effort. My strategy is to focus on "actual work" — if I am in the office but socializing with office members or getting lunch with friends, I do not record myself as working.

I started this diary in mid-February 2025. 6 months have passed, and I show descriptives of my hours worked below.

# 3 Results

Figure 1 displays descriptive facts about the hours worked by an economics Ph.D. student. Panel A describes the number of complete days not worked. Scheduled academic breaks, including spring break (March 2025) and the summer recess (mid-May to mid-August 2025), are clearly visible. It should be noted that I took two week-long vacations in June 2025. During the school year, I take very few days off: in a typical Spring 2025 month, I took 4 days off; in Fall 2025, I took 1 day off.

Panel B compares my hours worked to the standard 40-hour work week. I use this benchmark because it is the most straightforward assumption of hours worked by the average worker with a similar education to mine. Office jobs typically require 8 hours per day, though the amount of productive work is lower due to breaks and non-work activities during work hours. Salaried positions I view as my outside option may have longer and more intensive workweeks even when accounting for nonproductive time. During Year 1 and Summer 2025, I worked fewer hours than the benchmark. Year 2 sees an increase — I am currently working about 30 hours more than the typical workweek.

Panel C breaks down hours worked by activity. Classes dominate my time during the academic year. Research replaced some class time in the summer, but not all. Research stayed at a higher level in Year 2 despite the return of classes. My time spent reading and attending seminars outside of class is noisy. New teaching responsibilities took up a little time in Year 2.

Panel D breaks down time spent on research by project. My work on Greenhill, Walker and Shapiro (2025) dominated my research time throughout the last 6 months. After submission, work on other projects gained priority. 3 of the 5 projects listed are coauthored; solo projects have received attention since Spring 2025 due to other research commitments and limited progress.

Panel E displays hours worked per day of the week, conditional on working (see Panel A). During weekends, I work about 5 hours per day during the school year. I currently work 8.5 hours Monday through Thursday, with a slight drop on Fridays. Year 1 shows slightly lower hours worked but qualitatively similar patterns.

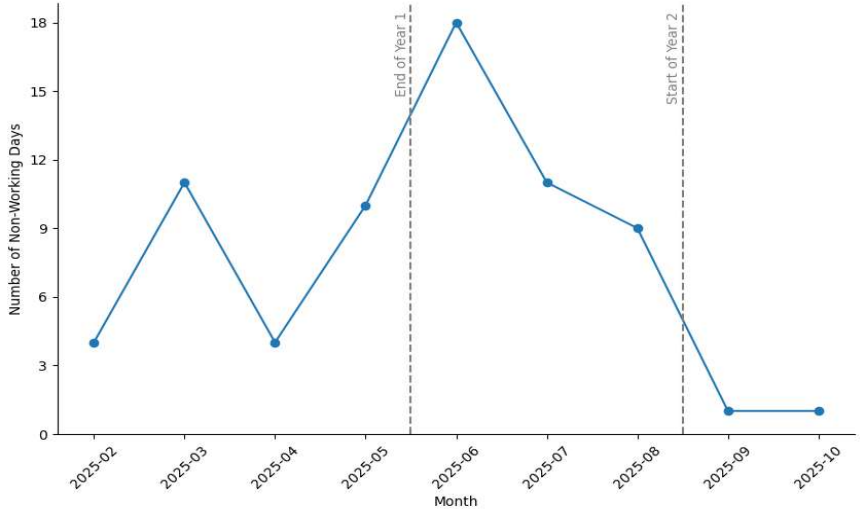
Panel F reports hours spent in meetings. Meetings with collaborators are valuable for research updates and generating new ideas. However, they are sometimes less productive than desired, and I am working to keep them shorter and more focused.

# References

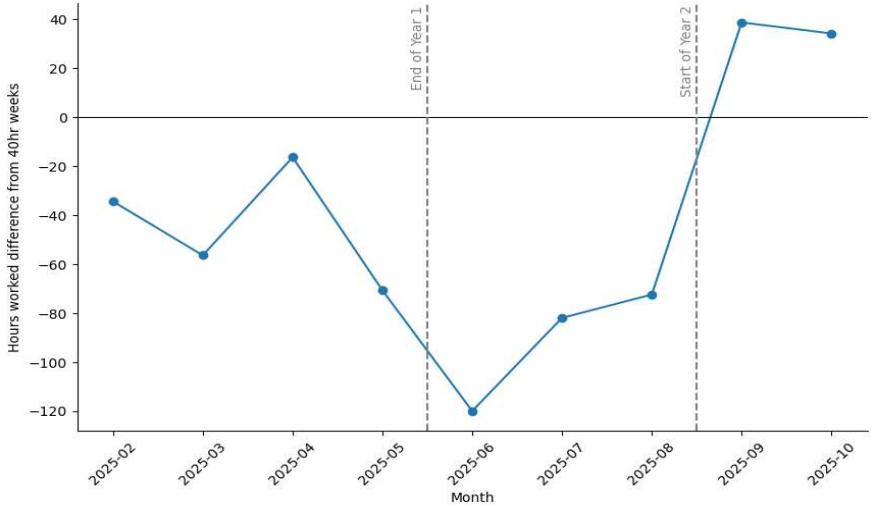
**Greenhill, Simon, Brant J. Walker, and Joseph S. Shapiro.** 2025. "Deep Learning Projects New and Proposed Clean Water Act Regulation." *Submitted*.

**Figure 1**

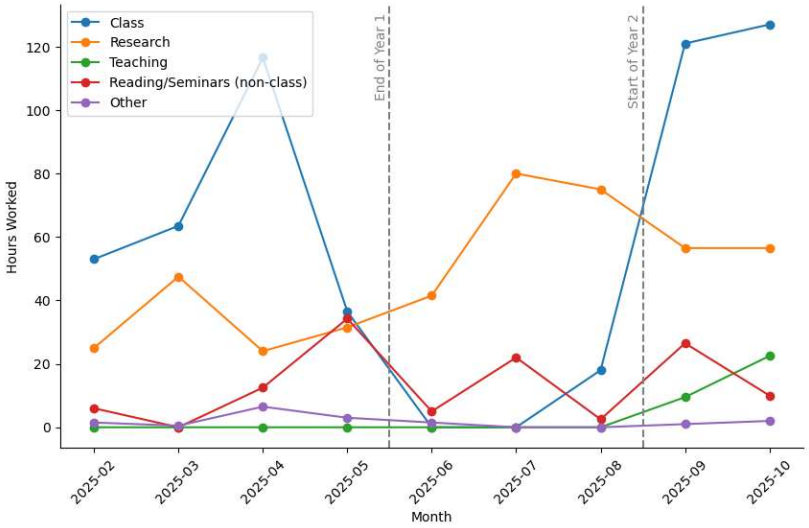
**A. Number of non-working days**



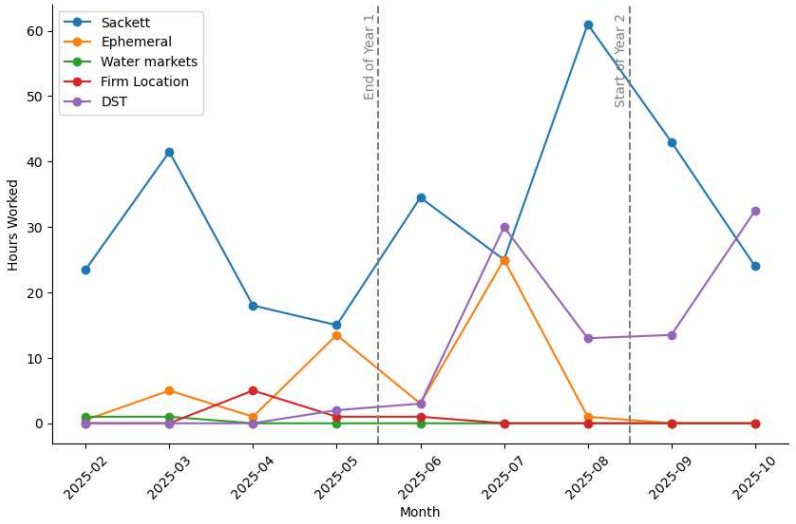

**B. Hours worked, relative to 40hr weeks**




**C. Hours worked by activity**



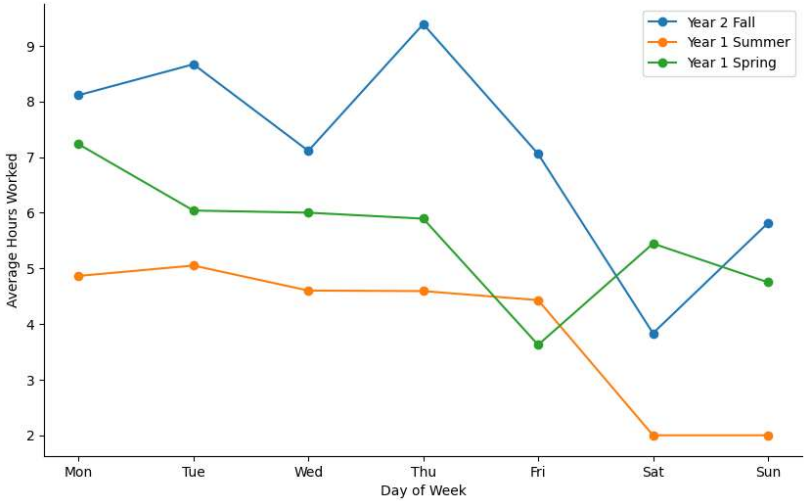

**D. Research hours worked by project**



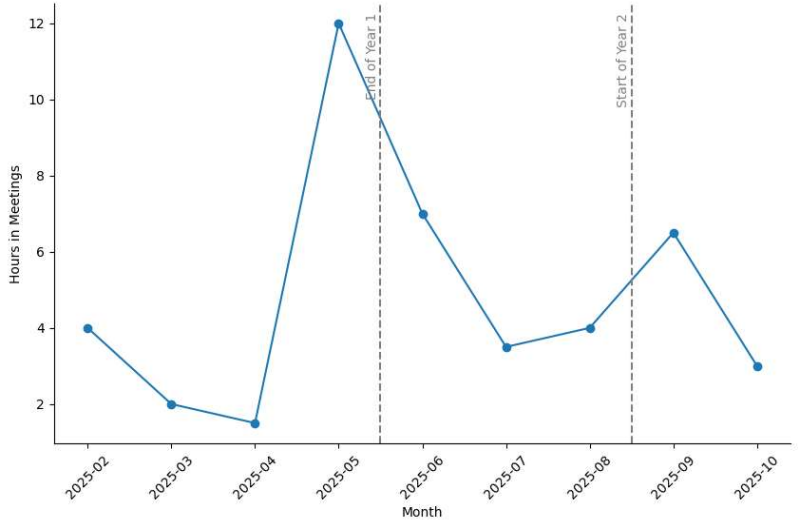

Notes: Figure displays trends in BJW's hours worked as an Economics Ph.D. Student at Yale University. **A** displays the number of days BJW took completely off each month. **B** comprares BJW's hours worked to the typical 40 hour workweek. **C** displays BJW's hours worked split by activity. **D** displays BJW's research hours worked split by project. **E** displays BJW's hours worked on each day of the week, split by semester. **F** displays BJW's hours spent in meetings.

**Figure 1**

**E. Hours worked by day of week, semester**




**F. Hours spent in meetings**

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