



Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

November 1, 2017

Message from the Director



Surveys regularly report that students spend a median of approximately 15 hours per week on coursework outside of class time. This is discouraging to most instructors in that it means that the typical student taking 5 courses a semester is devoting a mere 3 hours per week to each course. Even more disconcerting is that these figures include all aspects of extra classroom work, including reading, studying, homework, and research; furthermore, the median number means that half of our students spend less than 15 hours in these tasks. Such time is probably far less than most faculty members expect is necessary to be successful. What are students doing in the remaining waking hours? Many, including a large percentage at UTD, have full- or part-time jobs. Others have family responsibilities or student activities that limit the time that they can devote to school work. This newsletter provides some perspective on “timing” issues and some approaches that faculty can use to enhance student learning within these constraints.

Upcoming Events

- 11/2 Workshop on *Academic Integrity and Student Misconduct*, with Megan Schaedel, Office of Community Standards and Conduct
- 11/8 “*Transforming Students into Learners: Helping Students Learn on Their Own*” with Dr. Linda Hodges, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Director of the Faculty Development Center at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and former Director of the Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Center for Teaching and Learning at Princeton University
- 11/17 Workshop on *Motivation is not enough: Removing obstacles and supporting students in developing the skills for success*, with Gloria Shenoy and Karen Huxtable, 11:30-12:30 in JO 3.516
- 11/29 Faculty workshop on *Developing your Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Portfolio*
- 2/1-2 4th Annual *Excellence in Teaching* Lecture and Workshop with Dr. Jay R. Howard, sociologist and Dean of Liberal Arts at Butler University, author of “Discussion in the college classroom: Getting your students engaged and participating in person and online.”

Teaching Tip

How do you decide how much work students should be able to complete for your course each week? How long does it take to read a chapter, write a paper, or complete a problem set? How will this change with levels of complexity and student proficiency? Remarkably little research is available to

answer questions of such obvious importance, but a new tool has recently become available, cte.rice.edu/workload. Researchers at Rice University created this open-source web application to assist instructors in estimating how much time it will take students to complete academic work. Consider using this tool to estimate how much time students need to complete your course requirements, and ask your students how long they need. How much difference is there in time needed for higher-achieving and lower-achieving students? Even though what the tool provides is only an estimate, it can help you consider what you are asking students to do, and how much time they may need to do it.

Research into Practice

We all know that the more time students spend on academic work, and the higher the quality of effort they put in, the more they will learn. We also know that how students spend their time clearly is more important than how many hours they spend. Students who use poor quality or ineffective study methods are not going to learn no matter how hard or long they try. But how much time should students spend, and how much time do they spend, on academic work? Researchers have noted, with some alarm, that the number of hours per week that students say they study has declined dramatically from about 24 hours per week in 1961 to 14 hours per week in 2003. A number of factors could account for this decline, including advances in technology that have made many academic tasks more efficient, changes in the student population, changes in the institutions assessed across different studies over time, or changes in the numbers of students enrolled in different college majors. Changes in technology certainly have occurred, but the decline in reported study hours was well documented by 1981, before the relevant advances in technology came along. Changes in the college-going population, however, may account for the decline. The average student is now much older than in the 1960s and 1970s, and more likely to have multiple competing family and financial responsibilities. Accordingly, students are far more likely to have jobs, and those jobs require more hours, than has been true of students in the past. What we are decidedly not seeing is an increase in student leisure time. What can faculty do with this information? Creating assignments that require students to put in more time is unlikely to result in students finding enough additional time to make up the difference. The answer here may well be that we need to think not about how much time students should spend, but rather about what we want students to be able to know and do, and how they will need to spend their time in order to achieve these learning goals. Be sure that students know how to use available resources and how to employ appropriate learning methods to develop the knowledge and skills for success.

For more on this topic, see: <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/its-about-time-what-make-reported-declines-how-much-college>.

What the Students Say

It is perhaps not surprising that most students consider themselves to be hard-working. Nevertheless, like all novices they report that they frequently fall victim to two false assumptions that plague many people. First, they underestimate the time it will take to complete assignments, whether it is studying for exams or writing a paper. Second, in their planning, they tend to believe that everything will go perfectly and therefore don't build in extra time for possible illnesses, family emergencies, computer failures, and other unanticipated events. Accordingly, they might miss deadlines or turn in substandard work. Faculty members often interpret these outcomes as failures of effort rather than poor planning

by students. It is impossible for instructors to eliminate all these problems, but some can be mitigated by requiring students to turn in draft assignments, breaking assignments into smaller pieces, and indicating a willingness to assist in preparation through accommodations such as extended office hours prior to deadlines.

CTL Staff

Dr. Paul F. Diehl, Director

Dr. Karen Huxtable, Associate Director

Beverly Reed, Administrative Assistant II

Teaching Leaders

Prof. Shelby Hibbs A&H

Dr. Kristin Drogos ATEC

Dr. Noah Sasson BBS

Dr. Galia Cohen EPPS

Dr. Randy Lehmann ECS

Dr. Rebekah Nix IS

Dr. McClain Watson JSOM

Dr. Gregg Dieckmann NSM

The University of Texas at Dallas

Center for Teaching and Learning
800 W. Campbell Road, Richardson, Texas 75080-3021
CTL@utdallas.edu