



Episode 19: Managing Your Time: How You Can Use a Teaching Calendar and Eliminate Time-Stealers

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Brian Udermann, Robert Talbert, Jean Mandernach

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Time. There's just never enough of it. You've got a million and one things to do when it comes to teaching and your list is always growing. Intermix that with your personal life, and it becomes a matter of how do you balance it all? In today's episode, we'll touch on how you can use a teaching calendar, how you can better manage your class time in a flipped learning environment, so you're not only utilizing your own time effectively, but also your class time effectively, and finally, we'll cover tips for managing your workload in an online environment. Although we can't cross everything off the list for you, we may be able to offer some helpers that can alleviate some of the stress that comes with an instructor's workload. Here, Jean Mandernach helps explain how you can use a teaching calendar to help you become more effective and efficient with your time

Jean Mandernach 01:07

When I talk to faculty, they overwhelmingly tell me one of the biggest challenges to teaching online is figuring out how to do it all. They are simply overwhelmed with the amount of workload. And unfortunately, this isn't actually unique to online teaching. Faculty across the board express challenges with work-life balance and managing the workload. But the online classroom is different. Unlike a face-to-face classroom, where there's a specific clock on the wall that tells you when teaching starts and teaching stops, the online classroom is ubiquitous. It's there 24/7. So we need to create some boundaries. And that's what we're going to talk about today. How can you create really kind of a teaching calendar, a budget, to help guide? When should you start? What should you be focusing on? Where should you even invest that time? And how much time should you spend doing it? And so let's dive right into this. What a teaching calendar is, is it's really kind of an overview that says, here's what I need to do; here's the order in which I need to do it; and here's how much time I should spend on it, knowing how much time I have available. And people always ask me, well, how much time does it take to teach online? There is no answer to that question. So it's almost irrelevant to say, How much time does it take? It takes as much time as you're willing to give it. And for our example, we're going to use a 10-hour workweek, because that's right about the average between campus based and online and adjunct and full time, so we'll just use that as a baseline. Again, I'm not saying it takes 10 hours, but if

you have 10 hours available, it's about distributing your time. So now you want to start to create your teaching calendar by going backwards and saying, "Okay, I know that I need to spend about 40 to 45% of my time on grading and feedback. So if I have 10 hours available, that's going to be about four hours worth, I need to spend about 30% of my time on discussion facilitation. So that's going to be about three hours." You're going to go through each of those tasks, thinking about how does that match the distribution of time to really prioritize spending my time on the things that matter. But it's not enough just to say I'm going to spend four hours on grading and feedback, or to say, you know, I'm going to spend an hour a week on my email. The next step of creating your teaching calendar is to actually map it out. You don't just want to say, well, I'll spend an hour Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. You want to actually go into your calendar, pull up that calendar, whatever program you use, whether it's Outlook, or Google, or whatever it might be, and you're going to go into that calendar, and you're going to start to actually block off times.

Tierney King 03:56

In addition to looking at your overall schedule, you also have to look at and prioritize small tasks - it's the small tasks that can end up taking more time than you want. Mandernach says it's important to keep track of these small tasks, and be conscious of the time you're spending on them.

Jean Mandernach 04:13

The key is not simply to say, I'm going to spend five minutes on email. It's to put it on the calendar. And if you don't have the self control to stop after five minutes, use a timer. I actually turn timers on. My favorite, it's just called Egg Timer. I can go right up into the browser window and Egg Timer right in there. And what it will do is it will tell me my five minutes is up. Because the reality is almost any given task in the online classroom, once we dive into it, we could be in there forever. When I go into my email if I don't have some artificially created boundaries on how much time I'm going to invest. I can hop in to check something and I can still be there an hour later.

Tierney King 04:56

But what if you didn't have an hour to check email? What if you only had 10 minutes to spare? And you had to respond to an email within those 10 minutes? Could you do it? Parkinson's Law tells us any given task will take however much time we have available for that task. This seems simple, right? Here Mandernach goes into more detail on how we can utilize Parkinson's Law.

Jean Mandernach 05:19

What Parkinson's Law tells us is, when there is a deadline, we figure it out. We focus more, we become more intense, and we get it done. And if you've ever questioned the validity of Parkinson's Law, I want you to think about cleaning your house. On Saturday morning, it takes my family about three to four hours to clean our house. Unless company calls and says, "I'll be there in 20 minutes." And magically, we can get our house pretty darn clean in 20 minutes, because that's all the time we have available to do it. So we get busy and we get frantic, and we get focused and we prioritize what has to be done and we get it done. Apply Parkinson's Law to your grading. If you know you only have 10 minutes, you're going to focus, you're going to pick up the pace and you're going to be able to get it done. Now this isn't to say magically, you can just set random time limits. We actually found in our research study, we couldn't go any lower than 20 minutes, people just couldn't get it done or the quality did start to drop off.

But it does mean as a faculty member, you can start playing around with how fast can I get it done? How long does it really take me if I can focus and if I can be attentive, and now go backwards to your teaching calendar and start to reevaluate it.

Tierney King 06:34

In addition to managing your own time, it can be just as difficult to manage your time during class while you're teaching. Here, Robert Talbert provides tips on how to manage your time in a flipped class, and techniques and overall time management when designing class tasks and assignments.

Robert Talbert 06:52

I want to talk about these time management issues that involve the actual instructional process of a flipped course. So I want to suggest that when we're thinking about flipped learning courses, and keeping in mind that when we say time management, there's a sense in which we cannot manage time, we only manage ourselves and the things that are going on around us things that have our attention. I just want to suggest that a lot of these time management issues are really more like planning issues or maybe insufficient attention issues. I'll use myself as an example, one where I got involved in my lecture and I was so enraptured with the sound of my own voice apparently, that I forgot where I was. And I didn't make it two-thirds of the way through the class, but one-eighth of the way through the lecture. I just wasn't paying attention to what was going on, especially my students, my goodness sakes. So a lot of these things can be fixed, or headed off at the past by simply building classes based on a simple predictable structure and then sticking to the structure. A lot of times we think that structure on our courses is going to somehow kill the the the learning experience or the creativity of the course. But I would suggest the opposite, that creativity and the really kinds of transformative learning experiences we all know, thrive under structure. Marissa Mayer, who is a CEO of Google, has a talk called Creativity Loves Constraint. And I love that phrase. And so I'm going to suggest that if we can build a structure on top of the way that we plan classes, and stick to that structure, it can make a lot of these issues go away.

Tierney King 08:22

In response to structuring and planning your class, Talbert recommends using Bloom's Taxonomy to help structure your classes and activities. By using this you can plan class time and activities more effectively, so that your students get the most out of your class

Robert Talbert 08:37

Diagrammatically, we can invoke a thing called Bloom's Taxonomy to help here. Bloom's Taxonomy is a simple division of labor, the nomenclature system that just sort of put the name on different types of learning activities. It's arranged as a pyramid, we don't learn in a linear order, but generally speaking, tasks that ask the student to remember and recall things are simpler and more basic than tasks that asks us to understand things or than apply them or analyze and evaluate or create. The Bloom's Taxonomy is a handy way to think about this hierarchy. Now, the way I think about flipped learning is that the in-class part of flipped learning classes, what you're actually doing when you need, to target the middle one-third of Bloom's taxonomy, applying and analyzing basic ideas. The bottom one-third is what's to be done in the pre-class activities. This includes things like learning definitions, or doing basic computations or things like that. At the very top of Bloom's taxonomy, or what you might call creative

tasks, they take a lot of headspace and a lot of time a lot of collaboration, and that maybe is most appropriately done in post-class. So some overlap of these things is possibly okay. But that division of labor I think will really help keep time running on task. Because when you focus in on things, yes, your time issues and so many of the time management all result from losing focus. And putting attention on the wrong things at the wrong time, for example, giving students in class paths that are so basic that they bore them to death or not learning anything necessarily, but it still takes up time, it eats up time that could be better spent on other things, or giving students a pre class assignment that is so advanced that they can't understand it. And they have to do a lot of heavy lifting to get to the point where they can even understand what you're asking them to do, and that's too much work. And the students won't do the work because it's too advanced. So giving low-level tasks can steal time from the middle third of the proper purpose of class time. So I think it's important to try to keep the upper two thirds of the Bloom's Taxonomy out of the pre-class activities, and focus like a laser on that bottom. And also keep the bottom and the top most thirds out of the in-class experience as much as you can and focus like a laser only on those two middle slices that you see on analyzing and applying. This isn't a hard and fast rule. It's just a rule of thumb. But I think increasing focus on here really helps. I will say I would also if you want to know a little bit more about time management, something that you can pass along to the students, I highly recommend looking into the concept of time boxing, and something called the Pomodoro Technique. I will just let you Google those, and you can thank me later, I think. For a whole lot more on getting things done as a philosophy, I want to just encourage you or invite you to read a multi-part series I've done. I can tell you to add to the series on getting things done for academics at my website, oktober.org slash GTD. So that's a depth deep dive that could really revolutionize the way you approach your work. And I pass these along my students as well.

Tierney King 11:44

As you start to think more about your time management, whether it's when you're designing class, or when you're actually teaching a class, you can start to take in all these tips and techniques and utilize the ones that work best for you. Next, Brian Udermann offers practical solutions for managing your online teaching workload.

Brian Udermann 12:03

One idea that has really helped me over the years is in regards to online teaching and my workload is I try to stagger major assignments in when they're due. So you know, in my courses, I have students write papers, I have students do large video projects, and other what I would consider heavy or meaty assignments or assessments, and I try very hard to not have two or three or four of those in different classes due during the same week. So in one of my classes, you know, something big and meaty might be due week four, and then another one, week five. So I'm not spending hours and hours and hours grading and providing students feedback. So think about that. Try and stagger major assignments and when they're due in your courses that can potentially help with your workload. Another idea I'd love for you to consider is to eliminate time stealer things. And these things are different for everyone, maybe if they think about this a little bit on your own. But what are some things that might be stealing your time? So some examples: How your classes are set up? Like the navigation? Is it clear? Is it laid out? Do students know what they're supposed to be doing? Is that easy to follow? If that's not the case, you're gonna get lots of questions. And that's a little time stealer right there. I think providing checklists to students can be super helpful at the beginning of unit or beginning of a module. So students know that

during this module, I need to read this, I need to participate in this discussion, I need to watch this video and I need to do this reflective activity. Providing checklists, again, can eliminate some questions that you would receive detailed directions for activities and you know, assignments. If students question what they're supposed to be doing, you're going to get emails and then that again, that's going to be another time stealer. And you just, it's so helpful to eliminate as many of these time stealers as possible. And then finally, I would say figure out how you work best. Some instructors like to do things and grade things right as they come in. Other instructors will set aside time. And you know, they'll do things all at once. Maybe set aside a block of an hour or two hours. So figure out how it is that you work best.

Tierney King 14:24

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