Online Time Management for Faculty

Online teaching can be a time-consuming enterprise fraught with endless emails, discussions, and grading. Faculty, especially those who are new to online teaching, often underestimate the amount of time needed to facilitate meaningful discussions, generate student feedback, and respond to student inquiries. Although online courses offer 24/7 access to education from the perspective of students, they create unique challenges for faculty who may be teaching multiple courses in multiple formats. Below are strategies to help manage and balance your online course(s) in your broader teaching load:

- **Set a schedule and routine**. Create a communication policy that blocks off specific times and days you plan on being online and specifies turnover rates for graded assignments (e.g., one week) and email replies (e.g., 24-48 hours). In addition, setting a routine by facilitating discussions on Mondays, grading on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and posting a mid-week announcement on Thursdays helps establish presence and conveys your expectations concerning regular student participation and engagement. If you only log-in once or twice a week, you are conditioning your students to do the same, which is not conducive for them establishing quality time management skills either.

- **Develop a comment repository.** Having a bank of general comments, such as "I really appreciate the connection you make to the readings…" or "your point reminds me of what [student _____] comments…," can help streamline the feedback you provide to your students. Developing a list of guided questions or additional resources is also helpful when designing instruction prompts, grading, or encouraging students to reflect further on key material. Aim to leave these comments broad enough (e.g., no dates, course-specific information, student names) so you can personalize them for future use when providing tailored feedback.

- **Create discussion initiators and wrappers.** It is not necessary to comment on every student discussion post. This practice may actually stifle participation and collaborative thinking by encouraging students to only respond to your questions rather than commenting on the work of their peers or working collaboratively toward a group consensus or solution (Palloff and Pratt, 2013; De Noyelles et al., 2014). Instead of responding to all student posts, provide discussion **initiators**, which pose critical and reflective questions, and **wrappers**, which synthesize major talking points and make connections between student posts (OLC, 2014). Of course, this does not mean you should never reply to individual student posts; doing so at the beginning of your course in an introductory forum, for example, helps build a sense of community and you will inevitably need to intervene in specific posts when discussions go adrift. The irony is

that discussion initiators and wrappers enable you to expend less time, yet facilitate more meaningful and engaging discussions.

- **Utilize rubrics.** One of the simplest and most effective ways to manage your time online is to develop rubrics for discussion boards, papers, blogs, Wikis, or group projects. Rubrics not only streamline the grading process by providing you with a tool you can use for each individual student's work, they help you avoid arbitrary and inconsistent grading. Embed rubrics in your instruction prompts so students know your expectations and the specific standards they will be graded on up-front.

- **Pool student questions.** Dedicated discussion forums and shared documents can help cut down on the volume of student emails you receive and encourage student-student collaboration by giving a venue for students to respond to common questions or concerns. This may be as simple as creating a dedicated discussion board labeled "Ask Your Instructor" in your course menu or directing students to a FAQ Google doc that anyone can edit.

Resources

De Noyelles, A., Zydney, J.M., & Chen, B. (2014). Strategies for creating a community of inquiry through online asynchronous discussions. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 10, 153-165.

Palloff, R.M., and Pratt, K. (2013). *Lessons from the virtual classroom: The realities of online teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The OLC Blog. (2014). Online discussion boards: Strategies to ease instructor burden and promote student learning. LINK: https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/online-discussion-boards-strategies-ease-instructor-burden-promote-student-learning/

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your course, underline email the Reinert Center to schedule a consultation.