Managing Your Time in the Online Classroom

Acknowledgements

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Some material presented in this resource has been adapted from:


Resources consulted:


For an instructor new to teaching online, the experience can be a time-consuming one as you figure out how the course technologies work and how to facilitate interaction in the virtual classroom. Here are some tips and good practices gleaned from a number of sources and endorsed by our Continuing Studies instructors that will help you stay on top of your course delivery schedule.

Set up a schedule for yourself

*I probably spend not any more than an hour everyday on reading and responding to email and postings ... If I had let them pile up, however, for three or four days, then I think I would have quite a lot of work to do to catch up and so on, so I prefer to keep with it every day.*

Mary Kennedy, instructor, Adult and Continuing Education Certificate

To keep all aspects of your online course going smoothly, set up and maintain a solid and regular schedule. Set aside regular times during the day/week to:

- post informational “check-in” or “moving-on” messages
facilitate online discussion including the processes of reviewing and commenting on students’ postings
▪ review and grade student assignments
▪ handle communications with individual students

“Stash away” a little extra time in your weekly schedule

I know if an assignment is due on Sunday I have to reserve some time to mark them but I also know that the week before I’m probably going to get more inquiries. So I schedule it...

Julie Williams, instructor, Restoration of Natural Systems Diploma/Certificate

Sull (2008) recommends “stashing away” one or two hours per week of unscheduled time in your teaching schedule to deal with unexpected calls on your time or what he calls the “thises and thats of teaching online” (2008). These “thises and thats” might take the form of working with students who need additional help or having to wait until a technical glitch with a course technology is fixed.

Let your students know when you will be available

I certainly try to get on the course at least twice a day...usually midmorning so that the early posters (and there are quite a few people that fall into that category) will have already made their postings and then again in the late evening for another hour and a half.... and try to strictly keep myself to that schedule.

Murray Cornish, instructor, Business Administration Certificate

Boettcher (2011) advises that, in a classroom environment which is open 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, you need to set clear expectations about when you’ll be “present” and when you will not. Our Continuing Studies instructors suggest:
▪ communicating the schedule you will follow for Moodle forum postings and responding to individual student email in your first or second posting to the class
▪ including your regular response schedule for Moodle forum postings and individual student email in the course content pages
▪ announcing, as far in advance as possible, when you will be suspending your regular response schedule or if you plan to be more accessible to your students, for example, just prior to deadlines, etc.

Be efficient in your responses to students

... If a student contacts me individually by e-mail or phone with a question because they’re concerned about something confusing or perhaps they’re pointing out the wording to a question that is isn’t entirely clear then I’ll post the answer to that question to everybody so they all get the benefit of it.

Julie Williams, instructor, Restoration of Natural Systems Diploma/Certificate
[After grading an assignment], I take all of the suggestions for improvement that I make and I will compile those in a separate post. I’ll post this publicly on Moodle in the course ... I think this helps me get more mileage from my grading time because then everybody benefits from the time that I’ve put into other people’s assessment pieces.

Anna Marie White, instructor, Public Relations Diploma

The examples above illustrate how two Continuing Studies instructors use their time efficiently to respond to student queries and provide commentaries on assignments. Here are some additional suggestions:

- if a student asks a question which has already been answered in a general note to the entire class or in other ways on the course site, direct the student to that spot to read the answer. Answering it again by email encourages the student to use email when he/she should review the course site for answers as step one in problem solving (Lehmann and Chamberlin, 2012)
- if more than one student has a question, there may be an issue with unclear directions or explanations in your messages and announcements or in the course materials. Consider revising these communications or the assignment directions to resolve the problem for next term (Lehmann and Chamberlin, 2012)