The Catalyst for Learning

Putting Ideas into Practice

Reality Check

You’ve seen these students—the ones who hang around after class to talk to you after everyone is gone, or come to your office, looking worried, sad, anxious, or defeated. The conversation goes something like this:

“Professor, I don’t know what to do. I’m failing this class. I really want to do well. I try to do the homework, but I just don’t have the time. I go to work right after class, and I don’t get home until.....If I take a day off, I won’t get paid, and I can’t afford that.”

“I’m sorry you’re having such a tough time. How many courses are you taking?’

"Besides yours, there’s Comp 1, Government, and Humanities. And I work 30 hours a week.”

We’ve all seen them—students who have the ability and desire to do the required work, learn the concepts, and succeed in your class. They just do not have the time. They have “overbooked” themselves. Many are students with families and jobs who are returning to school, while others are just poor managers of their time. What can we, as teachers, do to prevent or alleviate this problem facing many of our students?

Marie McClendon, math professor on the Winter Park Campus, administers the following “reality check” to all her prep math students during the first class meeting:

1ST DAY - REALITY CHECK

1. How many credit hours are you taking this semester?____________
2. Multiply the number of credit hours you are taking by 3.___________
3. How many hours do you work a week? __________
4. How many hours (on the average) do you sleep per day? Multiply this number by 7. __________
5. How many hours do you spend eating, cleaning up, driving to the fast food restaurant? (Normally students average 20 hours per week.) ________________
6. How many hours do you spend getting up, picking out what to wear, getting ready? (Normally students average five hours per week.) ______________
7. How many hours a week do you spend on outside responsibilities, such as children, parents, organizations, volunteering, etc? ______________
8. How many hours a week do you spend on playtime or downtime? ______________
9. How many hours a week do you spend on personal responsibilities, such as house cleaning, laundry, etc.? ______________
10. Total up your results from questions 1 - 9._____________

There are 24 hours in each day, and 7 days a week for a total of 168 hours per week. How many hours are you trying to force in your week?

According to Professor McClendon, “After ‘doing the math,’ a lot of students realize they don’t have time to be successful students. They learn they must prioritize their individual necessities of life, including studying. I like to have this discussion with my students at the beginning of the term, before they become overwhelmed.”
Kim Long, West Campus Student Success and Speech Professor, uses a Time Management Activity to help her students become cognizant of the discrepancies between actual time spent and intended time spent in key areas of their lives. Professor Long has each student list the areas of work, school, phone/online, social/spiritual, and travel (car) in order of importance, indicating which areas get highest priority for the student’s time. Each student then constructs a color-coded bar graph, illustrating how that student allocates the 168 hours in each week to each of the areas. Professor Long next engages students in discussing where their time is going, whether they are using time wisely, and how to make better use of their time. “The biggest thing,” says Professor Long, “is to have students think about what they may have to give up in order to help them reach their goals. Many realize that they don’t want to take away from family, work, or school, and the time on the phone or online is where that extra time may come from.” After this discussion, each student then writes responses to the following questions in his or her Time Management Journal:

(1) After creating this visual picture of how you spend your time, what have you discovered the graph says about your use of time as it relates to your priorities in life?

(2) What changes do you intend to make so that you can “control your time,” rather than letting time control you? Use some specific examples that you have learned from the reading and class discussion.

Further classroom discussion focuses on strategies that students may implement to balance the demands of college, work, friends and families.

For a reality check activity from a Michigan community college instructor that will appeal to your kinesthetic learners, go to the online article found at http://oncourseworkshop.com/Management014.htm. The activity described there focuses on the roles students fill and the time spent on each role each week. Students are led to the conclusion that finding enough time for the role of student may require adjusting their time commitments. Tossing a paper ball into a trash can is used as a metaphor for allotting enough time to being a successful student. At the end of this article is a link to the ON COURSE NEWSLETTER by noted Student Success educator, Skip Downing. You may subscribe to the newsletter at that link, or at http://oncourseworkshop.com/ . After you subscribe, you will receive weekly e-mails with active learning strategies to help students learn more effectively.

Because our students have such busy lives and so many obligations in today’s multi-tasking world, a part of our success as teachers will be measured by the extent to which we help them face the reality of the demands on their time—using as many strategies as we can devise.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions for future newsletters, please contact Elizabeth Morrison, extension 1427.