Learning Communities Research and Practice

Volume 3 | Issue 2 Article 4

11-30-2015

When the Due Date is not the "Do" Date!

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Abstract
Our students consistently hand in assignments late, or complete them at the last minute. Why is it that they know about assignments all term long yet only begin them the night before the assignment is due? Based on a career-focused learning community at Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York, this article looks at ways to help our "millennial" students develop better time management skills. It shows how time management and prioritizing can be introduced as a tool for success in college and life and offers suggestions to better engage students in getting assignments done in a timely manner.

Keywords
Time management, learning communities, millennial students

Cover Page Footnote
The career program outlined here was developed at Kingsborough Community College under the Guidance of Rachelle Singer, Marissa Schlesinger and Janine Graziano King, faculty coordinator of the Integrative Studies Learning Community Program at Kingsborough Community College. The teachers and classes are: Fundamentals of Business - Prof. Margaret Irizarry, Introduction to Computers - Dr. Edward Martin, Integrative Seminar - Prof. Theresa Mastrianni, Prof. Steve Janowski - supplemental English teacher, Gayle Becker - Counselor Student Development, Professor Elizabeth Tompkins - Business Librarian, and Tasheka Sutton Young- Director of Student Life.

Introduction

My community college offers a learning community in which a cohort of business students takes three courses together: Fundamentals of Business, Introduction to Computer Concepts, and an Integrative Seminar, which I teach. The topics covered in the class are: developing research skills, behaving professionally in a business environment, profiling trends in today's business world, researching a transfer college, and investigating a company they are interested in working for in the future. To integrate course content, my colleagues and I meet regularly, allowing us to track students' progress together. Now, with ten semesters of experience in linking these courses, we see the consistent problem of procrastination. Students are aware of assignments because assignments appear on the syllabus and are posted on Blackboard, yet the students typically wait until the last minute to do assignments—the "due" date becomes the "do" date. Procrastination is particularly problematic given that, as business majors, these students are preparing for work in a world where time management is a key component of success.

Learning how to prioritize, how to utilize time as it presents itself, and how to plan ahead are crucial: "The key to succeeding at college is effort and good planning. If you plan your time well, you can have it all" (Nathan, 2005, p.111). As a group, we have identified three factors that we believe may contribute to this problem: lack of college readiness, procrastination, and the impact of technology.

In what follows, we describe how our learning community has addressed the problem of time management by providing students with integrated models for balancing their approach to school and work. We try different approaches every semester (Graziano & Kahn, 2013; Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004) as we continue to shape our work according to the idea that learning communities represent "an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community, enhance learning, and foster connections among students and their teachers, and among disciplines" (Smith, 2004, p. 20). While block programming restructures students' time and credit, it is up to faculty to restructure students' learning experiences through such collaborative activities as aligning course curricula and designing what Lardner and Malnarich (2008) describe as purposeful integrative assignments.

College Readiness

> Many of our students confront the reality that Conley (2007) describes: College is different from high school in many important ways, some obvious, some not so obvious. . . . . Almost all of the rules of the game change and the skills that students may have so carefully learned and

> mastered over the preceding 13 years of schooling are either discarded or modified drastically. (p. 6)

Further, the student population we serve is very diverse and not universally college ready. The composition of our student body is 35% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic, 33% African American, and 15% Pacific Islander/Asian, representing 142 countries and 73 different languages. Over 70% of our students come from families with annual household incomes under $40,000 per year and over 60% from families with household incomes of $30,000 or less. In terms of age, 73% are age 24 or younger, 55% are women, and 45% are men.

No matter their background, college students are expected to become more independent, which they achieve through study skills, time management, and self-management (Conley, 2007, p. 21). As a team, we have learned to focus on the transition into college and on behaviors that reinforce or sabotage student success. For instance, students not only postpone doing assignments, they also do not realize how much time they need to complete the work. Knowing this has helped us provide students with concrete guidance. They are told to expect to spend three hours studying for every hour spent in the classroom, the standard published by The National Survey of Student Engagement. NSSE (2007) further notes that "[t]he number of hours full-time students spend studying per week has remained constant since 2001 at about 13-14 hours, which is only about half the time many faculty recommended." We have responded to this gap between ideal and actual by integrating time management into the content of our teaching and learning and by coaching students to develop habits that contribute to forward planning, such as calendaring in both digital and analog forms.

Procrastination

Procrastination is especially problematic for students who are trying to complete myriad assignments in short periods of time (i.e., semesters). Here, we treat procrastination as the purposeful postponement or delaying of the performance of a task or the making of a decision (Owens, Bowman, & Dill, 2008; Ferrari, 2001; Milgram, Mey-Tal, & Levinson, 1998), which includes waiting until the last minute to start papers, study for tests, sign up for classes, or hand in assignments (Ferrari, 2001). Procrastination can result in poor performance in the classroom—on class assignments and final exams—and generally lowers overall grades (Owens, Bowman, & Dill, 2008; Steel, Brothen, & Wambach, 2001).

Anywhere between 50% and 95% of college students procrastinate (Owens, Bowman, & Dill, 2008; Day, Mensink, & O'Sullivan, 2000; Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Knaus, 2000; Potts, 1987; Pychyl, Lee, Thibodeau, & Blunt, 2000; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). This behavior constitutes a pervasive problem for which few remedies have been proposed:

> Though the amount of literature regarding procrastination has increased over the past decade, most of this literature is devoted to finding the causes or predictors of procrastination, and not to finding strategies to overcome it. The sources that do focus on preventing procrastination are mostly linked to self-help literature. (Owens, Bowman, & Dill, 2008)

Owens, Bowman, and Dill (2008) and Ferrari (2001) outline several strategies, including learning organizational skills, creating reminder notes, and breaking complex goals into smaller more manageable pieces—strategies that have become central in our approach to addressing time management.

Impact of Technology

Technology can be distracting. In his report for the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Jones (2002) states:

> This reliance on technology and social interaction carries over into student study habits. Nearly two thirds (62%) of students surveyed by the Pew Research project reported studying for classes no more than 12 hours per week. Students focus more on updating their Facebook status than downloading their homework assignments, which profoundly impacts their collegiate experience.

The majority of our students would be typified as "millennials [who] were born in the eighties and nineties and have come of age with the internet and the War on terrorism. They live in a world filled with more electronic devices for entertainment function in the same '24-7' week" (Bush & Walsh, 2007). A West Texas A&M University study of students' time diaries concluded that students spend significantly more time on personal communication and related technologies than on academic-related work. As Hason, Drumheller, Mallard, McKee, and Schlegel (2011) explain, "While face-to-face communication clearly consumes the largest amount of personal time (M=33.84 hours per week, SD=32.33), texting involves more time during the week (m=14.35 hours per week, SD=26.84) than does actual talking on the phone."

Students are highly focused on being connected and socially interactive with friends, family, and colleagues and prefer group-based approaches to social activities and studying. In fact, social activities appear more important than academics to the millennial student (Nathan, 2005, p.140). Today, these students are looking for even faster and easier ways to learn—with texting replacing E-mail and tweeting surpassing Instant Messaging. The idea that everything is available at the touch of a button creates the illusion that everything is immediately accessible. This misconception presents challenges in teaching concepts of planning, time management, and getting students to follow through.

In my course, students examine how they use their time and are often surprised by the dominant role of technology and video games. In small groups, students provide mutual support as they brainstorm ways to limit their engagment with social media and gaming. When students adopt strategies to control their use of technology, they are more likely to follow through with their plans. The payoff is finding more time to accomplish both academic and personal goals. As students become more aware of themselves, they also begin to develop habits that support success.

In our learning community, we adapt technology to assist students in mastering time management. For instance, we post everything on Blackboard, including the course outline, weekly assignments, the instructor's contact information, and class notes. In this way, Blackboard serves as a 24/7 resource. In particular, we post deadlines so that students are always aware of an assignment's due date. Students actively use Blackboard and express their appreciation for having course materials readily available online. But the convenience of Blackboard must be complemented with habits that promote awareness of the syllabus. For this reason, I offer students a paper datebook and also instruct them in how to use a digital datebook to set up reminders and make lists of what needs to be done. Some students who are visual learners find that developing a pictorial mind map may organize their thoughts (Dembo & Seli, 2013, p. 157).

We also introduce students to the technologies that are available on campus so that they can put into immediate practice the skills they have learned. At the beginning of the term, for example, the students have a session with the business librarian who shows them the best ways to research industries, specific companies, and transfer colleges. In the assignment, "Research-a-Transfer College," students are invited to think about their future education in a field where information and planning hold sway (see Appendix A).

Time management is the solution

Time management is about prioritizing. Given the competing demands on students' time and attention, we decided to make the skill of time management a term-long assignment by addressing it consistently in the seminar and by integrating it into a scaffolded, shared assignment. Starting in the Fall 2013 semester, I began to work with students on time management skills, using a "Time Management" assignment over the course of an entire semester (See Appendix B).

By keeping a time diary in which they record how they spend their time over seven days, students are able to identify patterns and examine how well they use their time over the course of one week. To start the process, I ask them to document how they spend a typical day, how they would describe their utilization of time (eg., productively or on non-essential tasks such as checking Facebook

messages, etc.), and whether they feel that they had have enough time to do everything they need to do.

Throughout the semester, I require students to keep a date book in which they record the due dates of all three classes. We develop an Integrative Calendar (Apprendix C), which shows them what they need to do for each course in the learning community. They then add pertinent dates from their other classes and their extracurricular activities and appointments. This information allows them to prepare a daily schedule, for which they regularly carry forward incomplete work. At first, this exhaustive approach strikes students as excessive, but the process gradually takes hold and develops into habit. By chronicling upcoming assignments and test dates, they are able to think ahead to the end of the semester. When a student doesn’t seem prepared to do this kind of detailed planning, I walk them through the steps. As a way to reinforce their attention on planning and time management, I end each class with updates and reminders. At the end of the semester, many of the students shift to electronic calendars on phones and tablets, which begins the process of integrating scheduling and communication technology into their academic lives.

We have many concrete examples of how time management has helped to shape students’ lives at home and school. One student realized that she was better off going to bed and waking up early to study, which paid off in improved test grades. A young man who often did his assignments after midnight when he arrived home from work decided his approach was unsuccessful. Instead, he began staying at the college after classes ended, found a quiet place to study, and went directly from there to work, avoiding the need to stop at home. By renegotiating his schedule, he found time to do his work when he wasn’t exhausted, reduced his travel time, and carved out a period at the end of the day for relaxing. The key to this approach is to emphasize individual needs and preferences.

Although students didn’t necessarily expect to encounter planning ahead as an integrated part of their course curriulum, they found it fit well with their academic goals. One student said that by planning ahead, she did not have to stay up all night the evening before a test. She felt less anxious and better prepared. She incorporated planning into her daily tasks, making small changes, such as bringing her lunch to school. Skipping the lunchroom meant she no longer spent time choosing something to eat and standing in line waiting for the cashier. As a result, she not only saved money, she had an extra twenty minutes each day to focus on school work. In fact, a key element in teaching time management is to encourage students to utilize even a few minutes when they find unexpected breaks in their schedules. For example, many students use public transportation, which can be used in optimal ways to study or get organized, resulting in

discretionary time. As Dembo and Seli (2013) point out, "A few short intervals quickly add up to an hour or more of study during the day" (p.154).

We have found two additional ways to help students with time management. One is to break assignments into smaller pieces and another is to build time into our classes for students to work on the assignments. My class is especially conducive to this because I teach the course in a computer lab where the first hour is spent on instruction and the second hour is spent doing assignments on the computer. College freshmen greatly benefit from this kind of individual attention and reinforcement.

In our final project as a co-teaching team, we have students create an integrative project that incorporates skills taught in the linked courses. Students must combine research from their Introduction to Business class with Word and Excel assignments done during the semester in their computer course (part of the scaffolding process) and with presentation skills acquired in the Integrative Seminar. For the final PowerPoint presentation, students are encouraged to dress in casual business attire and to treat the occasion as a professional experience. Their success in the culminating project reveals much about their mastery of time management and their growing ability to organize and prioritize tasks, both personal and academic.

Conclusion

As we have integrated time management into the course content and devoted formal time to the development of prioritizing and organizational skills, students have learned to take seriously its role in education and in the development of habits that benefit all aspects of their lives. Instead of merely competing with technology for our students' attention, we have incorporated technologies and technological skills into the coursework and made those an essential focus of communication and planning within the curriculum. The ideas about time management and prioritization presented here work well in our career-focused learning community at Kingsborough Community College, but they can easily be applied to stand-alone classes as well. The Rolling Stones well-known song "Time is On My Side" is nothing more than wishful thinking for most students. Instead, we have pursued the goal of teaching our students to employ present day methodologies and technology and to apply efforts to change patterns and foster habits that promote academic achievement. The earlier in their college career students are taught time management skills, the more successful they will be, now and in the future. Hopefully, our students will no longer confuse the "do" date with the "due" date.

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Appendix A

Research-a-Transfer College

Here is a list of colleges that Accounting and Business Administration students often attend after Kingsborough.

1. CUNY

a. Bernard Baruch College

b. Brooklyn College

c. College of Staten Island

2. Private Colleges

a. Pace University

b. Adelphi

c. The Berkeley College

Prepare a report to answer the following questions, as appropriate:

1. Do the requirements to complete Accounting majors look interesting to you? Does anything put you off?

2. What majors do they offer aside from Accounting that might be of interest to you?

3. What are their admissions requirements for transfer students, sometimes referred to as "Advanced Standing Students?"

4. How many credits do they require for a Bachelor's degree? How many transfer credits will they accept?

5. Do you know anyone who attends/attended this college? Did they have a good experience?

5. Where are they located? How will it be for you to commute to this college?

6. What are the costs?

7. Do they offer financial aid for community college transfers?

Appendix B

Time Management Assignment

For the first week of class please record how you spend your days for you from the time you get up in the morning until when you go to bed at night. You can fill this out on a calendar that goes from morning till night. During the second week of the week prior to the third class please answer the following questions:

1. Did or do your days often flow smoothly for you?

2. Do you keep a calendar or date book do you use it or refer to it? Does it help you stay organized?

3. Are you organized or does life just happen to you?

4. What could you do to make yourself better organized? Might this help you in your schoolwork and on the job?

5. Do you have a time period plan for yourself?

6. What are your goals? Graduating from KCC? Transferring to a four-year college? Getting an advanced degree?

7. Do you see how getting organized in school can help prepare you for success in the future?

8. What do you plan to change about how you organize your schedule this semester to make positive changes in you?

Appendix C

The Integrative Calendar

DUE DATES FOR BA11 - BA60 - BEH82 Projects – Fall 2013
M-T-Th T-Th M

Sep			Oct			Nov			Dec		
M	**T**	**Th**	**M**	**T**	**Th**	**M**	**T**	**Th**	**M**	**T**	**Th**
				1	3 BA11: Draft 1 BA60: Word 6-9 & Linked Proj.	4 BA11: Draft 2 BEH Research a transfer College	5	7	2 BA11: Draft 4 . BEH: PwrPt Presentation		5 BA11: Opt'l Draft 5 BA60: PwrPt 7 or 8 or 9
9	10	12	7	8	9	11	12	14			
16	**17**	19		15	17	18 BEH Research a Company	19	21 BA60 PwrPt Linked Project	FINALS DEC 8 - 14		
23 BEH Prof. Assig.	24	26	21 BEH Profile of Buss. world	22 BA60: Midterm	24	25 BA11: Draft 3	26				
30			28 BA11: Midterm	29	31 BA60: Excel 1-5 & Linked Project						