

responsible for the class's content. Students do need to be prepared for the class period, attend and be actively engaged.

The remaining items in the grid are the student's outside-of-class engagement. For James, the first homework assignment is video editing. James can't edit and care for his younger siblings, so he has to schedule this task for a day when at least one parent is home.

The grid also lists that students take three hours to review the readings from the prerequisite course. James determines that he wants to complete this task over several mornings when he is most alert and his siblings are otherwise occupied. He can review the chapters in 30-minute sessions, totaling 3.5 hours over the course of seven days. He even scheduled some additional time in case it takes him longer.

The grid works jointly with the course schedule. James finds all the items listed in the grid in the course schedule. While the grid lists the hours students should schedule and the details of a task, the course schedule lists when a task is assigned and due. For James, the editing task was assigned on Jan. 16 and due on Jan. 23. During the same week, James also had to review the book chapters from the course.

To create a weekly schedule, James needs to speak with his parents about his study plans, so they can see what work needs to be completed and the support he needs from them. James self-regulates his learning by taking the time to preview homework tasks and schedule them for the week. At the end of each week, he can evaluate how manageable his timetable was and use the knowledge for future scheduling.

How to Create Such a Grid

The first step is that faculty create a list of all outside-of-class tasks a given course requires. This list should be in chronological order, with hours assigned to each task. This enables students to build their

weekly schedules. Additionally, instructors can ensure that work hours are distributed to support student learning and success, spreading them out evenly as opposed to having weeks with very high workloads and some with low workloads. Especially in the current pandemic context, students have less flexibility with adding many hours of homework in a week, given their many other obligations.

The grid helps faculty map out their course to ensure that workloads are distributed as evenly as possible throughout the semester.

To determine the anticipated length of each assignment, I took three approaches. I have taught the video production course two to three times per year for 10 years and reflected on my own observations. I spoke to my current and former students about their time investments. Lastly, I had some of our work-study students time themselves on comparable tasks. Rice University's "Course Workload Estimator" (2020) is also a useful tool for instructors to determine reading, writing, exam and other assignment times.

Introducing the Grid to the Students

At the beginning of the first class session, I introduce students to the engagement grid in the syllabus. While it may be abstract to them, I return to it at the end of the class. Students have been introduced to the editing software and just spent approximately two hours editing. Returning to the grid makes the time estimates for the homework task more concrete.

Alternatively, faculty can create a syllabus scavenger hunt or other

such activity to draw attention to the grid. For an asynchronous class, the grid can be introduced in a video posted together with the syllabus.

The grid helps faculty map out their course to ensure that workloads are distributed as evenly as possible throughout the semester to enable students to have a manageable workload that they fit into their respective weekly plan. Providing students with an engagement grid can help them learn to manage time, an important aspect of the learning process. ❖

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ASSESSMENT

Letting Go of Rigor Anxiety During a Pandemic

By Katie Rose Guest Pryal

As I prepared my course for the fall, a professional writing course for law students that I usually teach in person but now teach remotely, I took special care to consider the mental health of all of my students. As I planned, the first thing I did was write "Scale Back" at the top of the page of my plans for the semester.

Under the conditions of this pandemic, we have to change how we think about our students'



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learning. Of course we do. But in the discussions I've had with professors, I've heard a lot of this: "We must preserve rigor in this new remote environment."

As though by not being in the physical classroom, our students are basically going to party all of the time.

Now, I teach law students, a group of students particularly prone to not partying all of the time. (I was one; I remember.) Instead, law students are prone to worrying all of the time. In fact, law students have one of the highest rates of anxiety and depression of all student groups in the United States, hovering around one-third.

But undergraduates and graduate students in other fields also suffer from depression and anxiety with increasing rates during this pandemic. Rigor is a red herring. We need to worry about our students surviving with their spirits intact. We need to worry about them surviving.

'Deficit Mentality'

This talk of "preserving rigor" has to do with what Dr. Lee Skallerup Bessette, a learning design specialist at Georgetown University, calls a "deficit mentality" about online teaching. A deficit mentality means that a person always thinks about online teaching as a poor substitute for in-person teaching.

In The Chronicle of Higher Education, Skallerup Bessette instead argues, "As you prepare for the fall, it is your responsibility to resist defeatist narratives and approach online teaching, not from a deficit mentality, but from an openness to its potential." Online education has its own benefits to offer our students, different benefits from traditional in-person learning. As administrators and professors, we need to adjust our mindsets and be willing to figure out what those benefits are.

It's All Rigorous

When I wrote "Scale Back" at the top of my course plans, I did so because I knew one thing to be true: Every single thing my students are going to do for my course this fall is going to be twice as hard as it usually will be. Getting textbooks? There's no bookstore, and shipping is slow. I know from my own publisher that book production itself is slow—literally printing and gluing books together is taking longer than usual. I can't imagine starting law school without my books, but many students will be doing just that. I hear from colleagues and publishers: "But they can just use online versions for now. They're used to digital stuff."

No—that's completely unfair. Asking students to embrace an entirely different mode of reading, note taking and engaging with their learning materials means asking them to work more slowly. However, they will learn from the experience. Learning to engage with digital materials will be rigorous, just in a different way than you were expecting.

Think about it: Is it faster for you to open your classroom door or to open your Zoom classroom? (Note: Learning to use Zoom and other cloud meeting software is also a useful skill—it is also rigorous.)

Everything that is harder for you right now is also harder for them, though there is one big difference: You aren't being graded based on your technological competence. You might think you aren't grading your students based on theirs. But you are, especially if you are expecting them to do the

exact same work this semester as they would have done last year.

You also aren't being graded when your dishwasher breaks, your toilet overflows or you get a flat tire. Just like you, your students are experiencing these everyday disasters. Remember that it's so much harder to fix these problems right now, because everything, literally everything, is harder.

Go Deeper, Not Wider

You need to redesign your course from the ground up, and administrators need to encourage their professors to do so. You can't take an in-person class and put it online. Online teaching is a different type of teaching. Clinging to your old syllabus might seem like less work for you—and it truly might be—but it is more work for your students. And there will definitely be less learning.

We need to worry about our students surviving with their spirits intact.

This fall, I cut my writing assignments in half for my third-year writing seminar. First, rather than having them write pages and pages of new writing, I'm having them write fewer pages and revise more of them. Second, I'm having them work in cohorts and read and comment on one another's work every week. By doing so, they're going to learn how to give and receive feedback. (I will teach them how to do so.) They will also be in small groups, groups who will keep an eye on one another. I'm also giving more individual feedback as a way of maintaining contact with each student.

By writing fewer new things and revising the work they've written



after working closely with their cohort members and with me, I'm having my students go deeper, not wider, with their material. After I revised the syllabus to create this new model, I had an epiphany. I should have been doing it this way all along, remote or not. They are learning more about writing. The course is *more* rigorous—even as it works better as a remote course.

And that's the most incredible part of this entire experience of transitioning to remote teaching for me. My teaching, *all* of my teaching, is getting better.

I've also gained even more empathy for my students. After all, my dishwasher just broke. It's been two weeks, and our new one still hasn't been delivered yet. I am fresh out of child care for my elementary school-aged children. Everything is twice as hard as it should be.

And yet, during this time of duress, I've improved my course for the better, and not just better for now, but for the future too. ❖

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THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Doing the Best We Can

By Kelly J. Baker

The printer is not working again. We're weeks into virtual school for a first grader and a sixth grader, and they both have things to print: cut-and-paste worksheets, letter practice pages, a 221-page PDF for

math about dividing and multiplying fractions, and endless slides from long PowerPoints that are easier to read than click through.

"Mom, I can't get my slides to print," my sixth grader says.

"Again?" I say, annoyed not at her *but at life*.

"Again," she says, equally frustrated.

I fight with the printer for five minutes, which becomes 10 and 15 and then 20. I can't print the PDF she needs *right now*. When I realize I'm about to unhook the printer, take it outside and smash it with a hammer, I finally ask my partner to assist me. On the first try, the printer works for him.

"I must be cursed," I mutter as I try not to cry.

Nothing Goes as Planned

Tech problems are a daily occurrence with virtual school. There's always something that is malfunctioning, always something to troubleshoot and always something that hasn't gone as planned.

Videos refuse to load because Canvas is getting hammered by all of K-12 and college students trying to use it simultaneously. The Wi-Fi goes out. Slideshows freeze. The wrong PDFs get uploaded to the wrong assignments. The attendance surveys my kids take for every single course every single day are often unpublished. They can't actually click a button to say they are "here." The district sends out threatening emails about truancy. The problem lies not with students but the arbitrary system the district created.

If it's not tech problems, it's the confusing learning management system (LMS) all of my kids' eight teachers use differently. One teacher only puts assignments on the calendar. A couple use the to-do list, well, on some days. Others rely on the Modules tab and lay out all the assignments for one week. The assignments, however, might not be published or they might not actually be graded assignments. Sometimes, it is impossible to tell. Each Monday, I sit down with the kids and try to plan their week.