TA Connections

Time (Content) Management

The following article focuses on a dilemma faced by many faculty and teaching assistants alike, the management of course content within a given time frame. When placed in the context of the time management issues that TAs must address, this becomes a crucial lesson for achieving teaching effectiveness in the classroom.

If there's one complaint that seasoned faculty hear over and over again from peers, it's the statement "I have too much content to cover!" Insisting on covering the entire content in class may inadvertently communicate to the students that it is only what occurs during class time that is worthwhile. Is it any wonder that students complain that something on the exam "was never covered in class?"

One way to approach this problem is by making it an exercise in time management. Time management procedures may be divided into two categories: making the amount of work manageable and transforming the process of working. Used interchangeably, these same two categories may be adapted to instructional needs as: making the amount of content manageable and transforming the learning process.

In time management one of the first things to do is set realistic goals and priorities. This seems like an obvious first step in content management as well. If we want to see positive results, then we must also do some priority setting. We must decide which concepts are top priorities, which are worth moving to a secondary level and, which are worth sacrificing altogether in the interest of initial understanding.

A second content management technique might be thought of as "cut to the chase." It is possible that for each concept or skill we are trying to relate to students there is a chunk of information or a portion of the skill that is critical. For example, when problem solving in mathematics, science or engineering, the critical skill is setting up the problem; what remains is mechanics. After the mechanics are identified as being important, they no longer need to be a component of every assignment or discussion because they have been mastered. One method of condensing content is to concentrate primarily on that critical skill or problem, with only occasional review of the support mechanics. Not every problem needs to be worked to completion.

Time (Content) Management Steps
- ❑ Set realistic goals and priorities for the course, and focus on the priorities
- ❑ "Cut to the chase" with the content, and avoid repetitive mechanics
- ❑ Encourage students to use external resources to learn outside the classroom
- ❑ Help students organize information for learning using tools such as planners

A third content management suggestion involves the management of resources. Effective time managers seek internal as well as external resources to help them solve their time problems. Similarly instruction would require looking beyond the boundaries of the classroom and the single course for a possible solution to our problem of content crunch. For example, content could be covered outside the classroom through instructional videos or online resources and students should be encouraged to learn from such external resources.

A final technique for time management is to encourage students to use a planner to organize information. Students can nowadays use a paper-based planner or electronic planners such as PDA or web-based course management systems. For many students this could often be the first step toward organized learning.

Use the concepts of time management as a prototype for problem solving. It is not a simple procedure nor is it painless, but we must try to solve the problem before it overtakes us and our students. The following references on time management might offer the busy TAs more ideas about improving time and content management.

Bliss, Edwin C. *Getting Things Done: The ABCs of Time Management.* Bantam Books, 1976 (reissued 1993).

Lakein, Alan. *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life.* Peter H. Weyden, Inc., 1973 (reissued, Signet Books 1996).

Adapted from "So Much Content, So Little Time," by Marilla Svinicki published in the website of the Center for Teaching and Learning Services, University of Minnesota. URL: http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/guides/somuch.html

Video/Pizza/Discussion with Teaching Assistants from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m.
"Effective Lecturing: Getting Students' Attention," Friday, August 27, 2004
"Sharing Learning Expectations," Friday, September 3, 2004
"Problem-Based Learning," Friday, October 1, 2004
"Thinking Together: Collaborative Learning," Friday, November 5, 2004

This video discussion series will be presented each month on Fridays at noon during the Fall Semester. Participants will watch a selected video and engage in a moderated discussion on aspects of the video topic that might enhance their classroom teaching and learning practices. Pizza and beverages will be provided. Advanced registration is required.

Blackboard Overview
Friday, September 10, 2004 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

In this hands-on workshop, learn the basics of creating and developing a course in Blackboard, NIU's web course management system. Participants will be provided with an overview of course layout, navigation and an opportunity to place materials in a sample course. Knowledge of web browsing is necessary. Advanced registration is required.

Finding Funding for Graduate Teaching Assistants
Monday, September 20, 2004 from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

Join Kristian M. Veit from NIU's Graduate Student Grants and Fellowships Office for a hands-on demonstration of how to search the Illinois Researcher Information Service (IRIS), a user-friendly online database of over 8,000 external grant and fellowship opportunities. Participants will receive training on keyword searches of this extensive database, including how to set up their own email funding "alert" system through IRIS. Advanced registration is required.

Mastering the Control Panel in Blackboard
Friday, October 8, 2004 from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.

This hands-on session provides an overview of the various Control Panel features and offers participants an opportunity to work within their own courses. The Control Panel in Blackboard is the key to adding course content, managing discussion, setting up groups and many other course management functions. Blackboard Overview or equivalent is required. Advanced registration is required.

Learning Styles: Know Your Students' Strengths and Diversify Your Teaching
Monday, October 11, 2004 from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

We all have different learning styles, and prefer learning in different classroom formats. In this workshop, you will learn more about your own learning skills and preferences, and how to accommodate different learning styles in your classroom. Advanced registration is required.

Blackboard: Communication Tools
Friday, November 12, 2004 from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.

The hands-on session covers the features of asynchronous and synchronous discussion, groups and electronic file exchange, including the digital drop box. Participants should have an understanding of basic computing skills and have taken a basic Blackboard workshop or have previous experience with Blackboard. Advanced registration is required.

Presidential Teaching Professor Seminar by Dr. William Goldenberg
The Playful Touch: Developing the Whole Human Being Harmoniously in Community
Tuesday, November 16, 2004 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Music is a marvelous way for faculty and students alike to develop and realize all of their human potential. Together, we will explore the multiple perspectives involved in music pedagogy, research, and artistry, as well as implications and applications to many diverse fields represented throughout the university. After a brief lecture-discussion, Dr. Goldenberg will demonstrate (at the piano) the type of work musicians do and will give a brief performance as synopsis. We will all work together to develop a short musical interpretation in conclusion. Refreshments served. No Registration necessary.

Developing Your Teaching Portfolio
Friday, November 19, 2004 from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

This workshop is designed to help participants begin planning a teaching portfolio by thinking about its purpose and audience. Participants will learn how to showcase their accomplishments, and how to select and organize work samples that demonstrate an understanding of a prospective employer's priorities. Advanced registration is required.

Registration Information: These programs are open to all graduate teaching assistants at NIU. To pre-register for a program please contact Chigozie Achebe at the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center at 815-753-0614 or email at tadev@niu.edu and provide your full name, department, email address, phone number, and the title of the program you wish to register. Program locations will be made available when you register. If you register for a program, please make every effort to attend. If you are unable to attend, please notify the Center at least two working days in advance so that others on the waiting list can be accommodated.

More than 170 enthusiastic graduate teaching assistants attended the Fall 2004 Teaching Assistant Orientation coordinated by the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center on August 19, 2004. Morning sessions included a welcome by Dr. Rathindra Bose, Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School and the following presentations:

- "Who's the NIU Student?" by Dan House, Institutional Research
- "Managing Classroom Dynamics," by Tim Griffin, University Ombudsman
- "Balancing Teaching Styles," by Jenny Parker, Kinesiology and Physical Education
- "Preventing and Handling Academic Dishonesty," by Larry Bolles, NIU Judicial Office

The afternoon concurrent sessions covered the following topics:

Tim Griffin presents on Managing Classroom Dynamics at the Orientation

- "Surviving the First Day," by Christopher Jones, Department of Political Science
- "Effective Grading" by Paula Brown, Department of Management, School of Business
- "The International TA Experience," by Sherry Fang, School of Family, Consumer and Nutrition Sciences
- "Teaching Laboratories," by David Ballantine, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
- "Cross-Cultural Communication in Higher Education," by Phinette Maszka, Affirmative Action and Diversity Resources
- "Learning Styles and Accommodating Needs," by Nancy Kasinski, Center for Access-Ability Resources (CAAR)
- "Stress Management and Time Management" by Sarah Adkins, Counseling and Student Development

The orientation could not have been possible without the support of all the presenters who volunteered their time to share their expertise and experience with graduate teaching assistants at the orientation. All participants received a copy of Faculty Development's 271-page Instructional Guide for University Faculty, presentation materials, and lunch and refreshments. Certificates of Participation were also sent by campus mail to all the attendees.

The following participants were winners in the door prize drawings conducted between each morning session:

Winners of a package of CD ROMs:	Winners of a USB Flash Drive:
Samuel Gillet, Department of Geology and Environmental Geosciences	*Ryan Breneisen,* School of Theatre and Dance
Naw May Pearl, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry	*Christie Huff,* Department of Sociology

The following participants received $25 gift certificates from the NIU Bookstore in a separate drawing conducted after the TA Orientation:

Mike Holmes, School of Theatre and Dance	*Ji Youn Maeng*, School of Theatre and Dance
Carmela Corona, Communicative Disorders	*Kristin McIntryre*, Kinesiology and Physical Education

For those who could not attend the TA orientation can download a copy of the "Instructional Guide for University Faculty" from http://www3.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/guideintro.htm. This newly revised guide has a complete section on Graduate Teaching Assistants. A few copies of the TA Orientation presentation materials are also still available, and these can be obtained by contacting Chigozie Achebe at (815) 753 0614 or tadev@niu.edu.

2004 Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award Winners

In spring 2004, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center established the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Awards to recognize the contributions of teaching assistants to the teaching mission of NIU. The Faculty Development Advisory Committee which reviewed the nominations had a difficult time selecting three recipients from the impressive nominations submitted by a number of academic departments at NIU. The following three graduate teaching assistants were presented their awards by Provost Ivan Legg at a formal reception held on April 29, 2004.

William Auld, School of Theatre and Dance
Adriana Maria Crocker, Political Science
Leah Allegra Kind, English

Congratulations to award winners and thanks to their nominators!

Chigozie Achebe with Auld, Kind, and Crocker with their awards

- *Blackboard login procedure* - Responses collected from the Fall 2004 TA Orientation Pre-Survey indicated that some graduate assistants were not clear about the Blackboard login procedure. As a GTA, your Z number is your Novell Login ID. No other staff or faculty login I.D. is necessary. To use Blackboard as a teaching assistant, users must first be approved by the chair of the employing department. It is recommended that faculty do not give their login IDs to their GTAs but rather add them as a secondary user. Check http://www.its.niu.edu/its/CSupport/logonid.shtml for more information on your student login ID (Z-ID).

- *Library Web Site Orientation* Classes are one-hour sessions for those who want to learn about the electronic access research tools and sources available from the University Libraries. All classes, by appointment only, are held in Founders Library Room 294. For more information please contact Wally Grant at 815-753-1992 or wgrant@niu.edu.

- *Research and Reference Help* at University Libraries provides library instruction and other services for persons with disabilities through discussion of paper topics, library assignments, and more. Individual or group orientation/tours designed for specific needs are also available. Contact Marcia Dick at 815-753-9853 or mdick@niu.edu to make advance arrangements.

- *Smart Classroom Equipment Training* can be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Contact Lincoln Fox (East Campus) at 815-753-6681, Keith Bisplinghoff (West Campus) at 815-753-1070, or Max Johnston (Select Auditoriums) at 815-753-0174 to make arrangements.

- *Faculty Development's Teaching Resource Room* at 218 Gilbert Hall has a specialized collection of books, videos, and other publications, and is equipped with a TV, VCR and DVD player. The collection includes a number of TA Handbooks and Guides from other universities. The books are categorized under various subjects such as Active learning, Evaluation of teaching, Instructional design, etc. Check http://www3.niu.edu/facdev/resources/videos.htm for the list of instructional videos available for viewing at the Teaching Resource Room.

- *Graduate Teaching Certificate* acknowledges the participation of NIU's graduate teaching assistants in the development programs offered by the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center. To qualify for this recognition, a graduate teaching assistant must have attended both a full day of TA Orientation and at least five TA programs of shorter duration offered by the Center. After participating in the required number of programs, graduate teaching assistants must complete the certificate application form at http://www3.niu.edu/facdev/ta/tasupport.htm and submit it to the Center to receive the certificate.

- *Instructional Technology Teaching Laboratory* – This new, state-of-the-art technology training facility at Altgeld Hall 100 will allow Faculty Development to schedule more technology workshops for faculty, staff, and graduate teaching assistants. This facility has 48 workstations, two video projection systems, and a smart podium with DVD, VCR, and touch-panel controls. Watch for announcements on more Blackboard and other technology workshops in the near future, as the facility is made fully available for training purposes!

Instructional Technology Teaching Lab

More Programs

"What is Responsible Conduct of Research and Why Should it be Taught?" - A few seats are available for graduate assistants to attend this by Dr. Mike Kalichman, Director, Research Ethics Program at University of California, San Diego. The workshop will be held on Thursday, October 21, 2004 from 1 pm till 4 pm. The purpose of this workshop is to provide an overview of topics that fall under responsible conduct of research (RCR) and why they should be taught. Faculty, research staff, and graduate students from all disciplines will find this workshop useful to learn about the key areas of RCR and how to convey them to others. RCR covers much of what researchers normally must do, such as collecting data, collaborating with other scientists, writing papers, writing grants, and working with animal or human subjects. Advance registration is required by October 14, 2004. Contact facdev@niu.edu to register.

Spring 2005 Teaching Assistant Orientation – Plan to attend the spring 2005 TA Orientation on Friday, January 14, 2005. Details of the orientation will be sent to all graduate assistants at the beginning of November 2004.