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Become An Effective Teacher & Save Your Valuable Teaching Time and Energy

Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

Avoiding Burnout: Self-Care Strategies for Faculty

By: Camille Freeman and Bevin Clare

NOW THAT YOU'VE finished assessing your students, it's time to turn the assessment process around by looking in the mirror. If you limped across the finish line last semester, it may be time to identify some new strategies for self-care. In our "Tending the Teacher" session at the recent Teaching Professor Conference in Washington, D.C., we presented a menu of ideas to help faculty design a balanced and productive work life. Here are our top tips:

1. Examine how you spend your time and energy: Which work-related tasks or activities leave you feeling energized or excited? Which feel like unnecessary chores rather than positive contributions? Next year, prioritize the aspects of your job that build you up or represent an important contribution to the field. Minimize tasks that drain or deplete your energy without commensurate benefit. Cultivate the art of saying "no" in order to focus on what's important to you.
2. Check your rhythm: Circadian rhythms allow us to anticipate and respond efficiently to environmental changes. Creating a degree of predictability in your schedule can help align your internal clock. While it's rare for an academic to have a "normal" day, you can control some aspects of your schedule. Waking up and going to bed at about the same time each day will help to synchronize your body clock. Similarly, eating and exercising at predictable times both support this process. Many people feel more energetic and productive when they follow these basic guidelines.
3. Rethink course design: While we all strive to have engaging and interactive courses, doing so can be quite time consuming. Use creative course design strategies and tools to provide engaging experiences for students without taking up a disproportionate amount of your

time. For example, use a simple audio recording tool to provide feedback instead of typing your comments. If your school's LMS doesn't provide an audio feedback tool, Vocaroo and VoiceThread make great options. Students appreciate the personal approach, and providing verbal feedback takes far less time than generating written comments. Also, consider using peer-to-peer review with select activities to allow students to get supplemental feedback without adding to your workload.

4. Refine your daily workflow: Are you getting bogged down with e-mails? Watching deadlines zoom by? Putting your own health on the back burner? The start of a new semester is the perfect time to change your default pattern. We suggest making one or more of the following small changes next semester. Consider using a service that delivers e-mails a few times per day rather than trying to work through the persistent interruptions of new emails arriving in your inbox. Some apps will also turn off notifications on weekends or after hours. Use an electronic "to do" list like Todoist or Wunderlist to organize reminders and deadlines. Many of our nutrition clients find that using Google or Outlook calendar scheduling and reminders is a good way to prioritize a daily walk, meditation, or a quick stretch.
5. Evaluate your food and fuel: Food can drag you down or prop you up. Step away from your desk periodically for a snack, and be sure to choose one that is nourishing as well as invigorating. Good choices include a piece of dark chocolate; nuts and seeds (especially walnuts); berries; or foods with spicy, sour, or tangy flavors. Preliminary evidence even suggests that chocolate may be associated with cognitive enhancement (Scholey & Owen, 2013). (You can thank us later.) As nutritionists,

one of the most common things we see is unhealthy or mindless snacking. Avoid snacking at your desk while you're doing other things. Use your snack break to get outdoors or connect with your colleagues while you nourish yourself.

Self-care isn't an all-or-nothing approach. Starting small is ideal. Pick one or two practices to implement tomorrow, and you'll be on the road to a more sustainable work-life balance.

References

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Camille Freeman and Bevin Clare are licensed nutritionists and associate professors at the Maryland University of Integrative Health.

Camille Freeman and Bevin Clare; Avoiding Burnout: Self-Care Strategies for Faculty; Faculty Focus; July 20, 2016; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-careers/avoiding-burnout-self-care-strategies-faculty/>] July 28, 2016

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An Old-School Approach to Getting Students to Read

By: Jacqueline S. Hodes EdD

DURING SEMESTER breaks, I prepare my courses for the upcoming semester, a regular ritual for most academics. My process begins with reflecting on my formal and informal teaching evaluations and considering ways to improve the course. I add new topics and delete others. I review assignments and change them as needed. And I spend a lot of my preparation time choosing timely, thought-provoking articles to assist students in learning the course content.

For many years, I had great hope that students would embrace the readings. The dialogue that occurs in class as students debate a current news item, explore the findings in journal articles, or challenge the information in a textbook is exhilarating and reminds me of why I chose the profession of teaching. Synergy and energy are created in the classroom as students reflect on the discussion and leave with new perspectives and new questions. Like many instructors, despite my high hopes for these outcomes, I was often left disappointed.

As a faculty member in a graduate program, I expected that students would be eager to read the material. I would come to class having reread the information myself only to find a few raised hands and many more blank faces as we began to discuss the week's readings. Those who had done the readings were willing to interact, but I could sense that they too were disappointed that their peers did not participate. I was at a loss for what to do.

I know I am not alone in my concerns about the lack of assigned reading done by college students. In his blog for Inside Higher Ed, John Warner (2016) asked, "Is there a more common lament among college instructors than, 'Why won't students just do the reading?'" According to Lei, Bartlett, Gorney, and Herschbach (2010), the resistance to reading may be due to "lack of reading comprehension skills, lack of confidence, disinterest in the course material, and an underestimation of reading importance."

Index card reflections

I researched strategies to persuade students to read for class and began trying them out with my students. Initially, I had students respond to the readings on an electronic discussion board. Most complied, but something was missing for them and for me. After much contemplation, I adopted the index card reaction assignment. It is simple and very old school but has proven to be highly effective. Each week, as indicated on the syllabus, students are required to write a reaction to at least one reading. They are asked to react to the readings by writing what they thought or felt as they read it. They react in their own handwriting on a 5" × 8" lined index card. They bring the card to class, reference it during discussion, and then it in at the end of class. In doing so, students receive points toward their participation grade.

There are three features of this assignment that contribute to its success.

1. The power of handwriting. Students write their thoughts in their own handwriting. Handwriting is becoming obsolete (Grossman, 2009, p. 52), and there is something very personal about writing down one's thoughts in one's own hand. Students have the option of emailing their thoughts, typing and printing their responses, or posting their thoughts on a course management site. But most often students turn in the card with their written reflections. When students are unable to attend class, they typically send a screenshot of their handwritten index card.
2. Individual responses. I like to write something in each student's index card. There is no need to write a lot; some short remarks are enough. If you have a longer response, there is more room on the back of the card. You may also wish to invite students to discuss their thoughts in class, after class, or during office hours. One way to adapt this exercise to a larger class is to have

students exchange cards and comment on each other's cards. The instructor can randomly collect a certain number of cards each week.

3. Timely responses. It's important to respond in a timely fashion. My classes meet once per week, which allows for time between classes for reading and responding. Designate dates when index cards are due and when they will be returned. The portability of the index card allows for reading and responding to occur anywhere—on the train, waiting for an appointment, or during those 15 minutes in between meetings.

As I hand out index cards on the first day of class, there are initially collective groans. Students question whether they can send me an email with their thoughts (yes) or post their thoughts on our course management site (yes again). Then, as we have our first class discussion, they invariably pull out their cards and join the conversation. At the end of the semester, when I ask them to evaluate the assignment, most if not all claim they actually enjoyed the assignment, confess they might not have done the reading if the assignment had not existed, and say they enjoyed having a more personal conversation with me.

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Warner, J. (2016, January 18). When students won't do the reading [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/when-students-wont-do-reading>.

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Dr. Jacqueline S. Hodes; An Old-School Approach to Getting Students to Read; Faculty Focus; July 22, 2016 [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/old-school-approach-getting-students-read/>] July 28, 2016.