The Educator's RESOURCE

Chair's Message

Hello NEHP,

This is our final newsletter for FY2015-2016 as we wrap up another year of sharing key themes and ideas related to what we do everyday educating future and current health professionals on nutrition and dietary practice.

Our spring issue of The Educator's Resource features three articles that we hope will offer you helpful and applicable information. NEHP's communications coordinator Lynn Janas, PhD of the Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Nutrition and has written an insightful article on how their online MS program is exploring ways to incorporate interprofessional competencies into their graduate curriculum. This is a timely topic as the value of interprofessional collaboration in nutrition and dietetics is gaining momentum. It is now more relevant than ever, as the U.S. health care system grows more complex, for nutrition and dietetics programs to pursue innovative educational approaches that involve multiple disciplines.

As the online learning environment continues to expand, we thought this was a good time to offer a former student perspective. We have an engaging piece written by Rachel Meltzer Warren, MS, RDN, a New York-area based private practice registered dietitian nutritionist and

author, on her personal experiences with navigating a dietetic internship while completing her distance education program at Utah State University. Speaking of distance education, our NEHP newsletter co-editor Elizabeth Eilender has researched and gathered time-saving tips and strategies for managing online classes that we hope you will find useful. Finally, we have a member spotlight on former NEHP chair and our current social media coordinator Teresa Johnson, DCN, RDN, LD. Teresa is a professor in the College of Health and Human Services at Troy University, has written many articles and webinars for NEHP, and has been an educator for 25 years.

Previous issues and webinar recordings are available in our archives with your continued NEHP membership. The topics we covered include:

- Using Evidence Based Decision Making to Document Student Learning Assessment
- Overcoming Barriers: Encouraging Student Engagement in Online Classrooms
- "Oops! Should I Do That?" Ethics in Dietetics: What You Need to Know

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Inside this issue:

Incorporating Interprofessional Competencies into an Online Graduate Nutrition Curriculum: First Steps

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The call for improved quality and safety in healthcare is a driving force in healthcare education, with noticeable movement towards developing training for collaborative practice[1]. Avoidance of preventable medical errors, associated pain, suffering and loss of life, discouragement of healthcare providers, high costs, and loss of trust in the healthcare system all underscore a profound need for effective teamwork among healthcare professionals[2]. Interprofessional education (IPE) prepares students to work together in healthcare teams to provide safe, high quality, accessible and patient-centered healthcare for the individual, family and community.

This is the vision of healthcare that inspired the report of the Interprofessional Education Collaborative expert panel (IPEC), "Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice."[1] IPEC calls for continuous development of core competencies in values/ethics in interprofessional (IP) practice, roles/responsibilities, IP communication, and teams and teamwork as part of healthcare training. Elliot and Kolasa[3] recently summarized the need to advance IPE in dietetics, and noted that examples of IPE integration in dietetics are limited.

At Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, interprofessionalism is a strategic priority of the University, College and Department of Nutrition. In this paper we describe early efforts of the Department to meet the College of Health Professions strategic goal of incorporating IPEC competencies into our online curriculum.

Support for Incorporation of IP Competencies

The IP mission of our University has guided a growing culture of interprofessionalism , affording a variety of supportive faculty development opportunities. University activities that have been particularly helpful to our department efforts include presentations by guest speakers knowledgeable in IP education and practice.

For example:
- Formal presentations
- Mentoring by more experienced faculty
- Scheduled informal discussions at the college level where faculty shared efforts to integrate IP competencies in their programs
- Regular efforts by library staff to communicate the latest literature on interprofessionalism by email
- Development of an IP doctorate program with associated discussions and student presentations that faculty attended

Online MS in Clinical Nutrition and MS in Nutrition Education Programs

The graduate program was initially designed to provide an opportunity for registered dietitian nutritionists to earn a master of science degree. The original Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics program was expanded by adding a Nutrition Education program track for dietitians and other professionals interested in furthering their knowledge and skills in educating individuals, families and communities about nutrition. For the most part, our program has attracted employed nutrition professionals, who bring to our program their own diverse personal experiences, education and training backgrounds. Many students also bring extensive professional healthcare experiences. This provides us with a rich learning environment for students to learn from each other, as well as from course facilitators, resulting in engaging online discussion and learning activities.

Repeated exposures to a variety of IP learning experiences along the learning continuum allow students to interact with essential content on multiple occasions with a goal of deeper learning. Formative assessment of knowledge and

skills using content and learning activities of increasing complexity and requiring critical thinking and reflection are used to build competency in core IP competency areas. A final portfolio evaluation process provides opportunities for summative assessment. As well, required interaction and collaboration with healthcare providers from other professions as part of assignments and projects allows students to interact and learn from others in the IP team. Through this experience, students have expressed the value of learning from each other.

In facilitated online discussion assignments designed to meet specific learning objectives, student-student interactions with appropriately timed instructor input can be used to elucidate the application of content to IP practice and, ultimately, bring benefits to patients. Group projects and other activities requiring teamwork between and among students can be leveraged to advance the adoption of collaborative skills. Relevance of the teamwork experience to IP practice can be thoughtfully considered in a wide variety of activities including carefully crafted online discussions,

written reflection assignments, case studies and vignettes. Students with minimal IP experience can learn from knowledge and experience shared in online discussions by students with clinical training and IP practice experiences. A modified assignment may be needed for students with no IP healthcare experience.

With these approaches we have moved toward our goal of enhancing our online nutrition curriculum through the incorporation of IP learning opportunities for our part-time student population dominated by nutrition professionals, with some, albeit minimal, representation from other professions such as dentistry, physical therapy, podiatry and pharmacy.

Incorporation of the IPEC Competencies into Our Nutrition Curriculum

As part of ongoing strategic planning, the Department of Nutrition adopted the College of Health Professions strategic priority to "… promote learning with, from and about each other in order to champion team-based healthcare delivery." With our adult students studying at a distance, and a majority

having already completed clinical training, we identified opportunities in curriculum planning and course design to incorporate IP learning activities into our online courses.

Two challenges we faced were the largely uni-professional learning environment rather than having representation from more than one profession, and the absence of a clinical training environment in our online programs. Because our program differs from other programs at the University in these ways, we understood that we would need our own unique approach to integrating the IPEC competencies, and that it would need to be primarily didactic, and not clinical. We began by reviewing our curriculum as part of annual faculty strategic planning and conducted an audit to identify specific courses and learning activities that either addressed IPEC competencies or provided an opportunity to do so.

We also explored opportunities for incorporation of competencies into new courses and innovative learning activities as part of a concurrent curriculum revision. With an understanding the gaps in our curriculum relative to the IPEC competencies, illuminated by the exercise of curriculum mapping, department faculty developed a plan to address our IP priority.

We chose to begin with a focus on communication and teamwork for both leaders and team members, and our goals included the following:

- Incorporate IPEC competencies into our curriculum opportunistically with annual course revisions using learning activities/

Over the past few months, our NEHP Facebook page has seen a lot of activity with many members posting questions about teaching techniques and strategies, and getting terrific feedback from their peers. Thank you to all those who offered their advice. We now have 118 Facebook members. If you haven't already, please sign on and connect with your colleagues by visiting our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/groups/423581444394785/.

It's been a pleasure serving as chair and I'm looking forward to an exciting new year with NEHP. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our incoming chair, Jamie Pope, MS, RD, LDN, Assistant Professor of Nutritional Sciences, Vanderbilt School of Nursing, and wish her much luck in the coming months.

Gina Pazzaglia

artifacts that facilitate learning IP behaviors in the online environment
- Adopt suitable College of Health Professions assessment tools
- Incorporate TeamSTEPPS (Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety) core curriculum training into the Leadership Course taught as part of our MS in Clinical Nutrition and MS in Nutrition Education[4]
- Adapt TeamSTEPPS core curriculum training to an online format based on the on-campus IP course taken by all first year students at the University
- Complete TeamSTEPPS training of faculty

Progress Notes

Curriculum mapping of IPEC competencies for curriculum core and electives courses was a useful means of conducting a gap analysis and tracking progress on our goal of integrating IPEC competencies into our curricula. With the addition of new courses in Leadership, Health Coaching, and Prevention, Health Promotion and Wellness, our analysis showed at least one exposure to 34 of 38 IPEC competencies in program core and elective courses.

Adding online TeamSTEPPS training to our Leadership course brought new exposure to 8 additional competencies and all on-campus faculty have completed TeamSTEPPS training. A total of 9 competencies showed multiple exposures in 3 or more courses consistent with greater penetration into the curriculum. A total of 6 IPEC competencies were associated with

an elective course, taken by many, but not all students, such that all students had at least an introductory exposure to 28 of 38 IPEC competencies. Assigned readings and videos with accompanying discussion assignments, written assignments and case studies, and course projects provide opportunities for introduction and immersion level competency acquisition.

Portfolio projects are used for either entry-level or professional level competency acquisition for practicing RDNs. Primary competency themes that we currently emphasize as evidenced by repeated exposure include culture, communication, interests and relationships with patients, and use of evidence-basis in healthcare.

At this time, we do not have assessment tools to determine application of IPEC competency knowledge and skills in the clinical setting. However, we are encouraged by written student reflection statements and portfolio program conclusion reflection statements that show evidence of application of leadership and team skills to

self and professional activities. In 2015, we began to collect data as part of our annual survey of alumni to assess graduates' definition of interprofessionalism and recollection of IP experiences in their online courses. These data reflect graduates who completed the program before our strategic initiative to incorporate IPEC competencies was initiated.

Summary of Alumni Survey Data on Interprofessionalism

Data collected in 2015 includes responses from 13 graduates of our Clinical Nutrition program (9 graduated 1-3 years ago; 4 graduated 4-6 years ago) and 11 graduates of the Nutrition Education program (9 graduated 1-3 years ago; 2 graduated 4-6 years ago). The first question asked respondents to define interprofessionalism. Graduates of the Clinical Nutrition program track, being registered dietitian nutritionists, were better able to identify key aspects of interprofessionalism related to different professions working collaboratively for improved patient

Table 1: Graduate Survey Responses of Students in the Clinical Nutrition and Nutrition Education Program Tracks to the Question, "Which of the Following IP Experiences Have Been Included in Your Online Studies?"

IP Learning Experience	Clinical Nutrition	Nutrition Education
	% of respondents indicating the IP experience was included	
Group Discussions	91	100
Group Exercises	91	71
Teamwork	82	71
Quality Improvement	27	0
Discussion of Professional Roles	64	43
Healthcare Policy Discussions	45	29

care compared to graduates of the Nutrition Education program, who are not necessarily registered dietitians.

Based on their definition of interprofessionalism, respondents were next asked if they had any IP experiences in their online classes. For Clinical Nutrition graduates, 83% responded, yes, and 17% responded, no. For Nutrition Education graduates, 78% responded, yes, and 22% responded, no. Table 1 summarizes responses to the third question that asked respondents to identify from a given list of six IP experiences that were included in their online studies. Responses were highest for group discussions, group exercises and teamwork. Lowest responses were noted for quality improvement and healthcare policy discussions.

The lower responses may reflect the fact that the IP experiences listed in the survey were adopted as included in a similar survey administered to graduates of our MS in Health Administration program. That graduates of the Clinical Nutrition program were best able to define interprofessionalism likely reflects their professional training and professional experience as RDNs. We will follow these survey data in coming years as a soft index of change in response to integration of IPEC competencies into our curriculum.

Continued Curricular Development: Next Steps

Future efforts to incorporate IPEC competencies into our curriculum include the following:

- Continued curricular review to identify opportunities to include more exposure to IP learning experiences for our online students
- Enhancing IP learning experiences for students who come from a non-clinical background
- Use findings from student surveys, informal observations and course evaluations to optimize IP learning outcomes in our graduates

Summary

To begin meeting the strategic planning goals of our University, College and Department, we developed and implemented a plan to incorporate IP competencies into our nutrition curriculum. The University has provided learning opportunities and support for faculty that have aided our efforts (recently guest and faculty presentations included: Experimental Design in Interprofessional Practice & Education (IPE) Research: The Nexus Project; Using Gaming in Interprofessional Education: Interactive Multiplayer Learning Solutions; and Designing Toolkits to Enhance IP Collaboration and Family Member Involvement in Intensive Care Settings).

Our plan was developed by our faculty team with consideration of our online curriculum and concurrent curriculum revision, adult student population, and the IP role of the nutrition professional. Due to the nature of our online program, we do not have sufficient representation from other professions to be able to create healthcare teams in our online classrooms. However, we are able to provide authentic online learning experiences targeting IPEC competencies through a wide variety of activities including the use of guest lecturers, learning activities involving consultation with a healthcare professional from a different profession, case studies, vignettes, online discussions, assignments and course projects, and development of communication, leadership, and teamwork skills using an online TeamSTEPPS curriculum.

All of these activities can be structured for application to IP interactions. Graduate survey data have provided a means of informing some aspects of IP learning in our degree program. This report describes our first steps in incorporating the IPEC competencies into our curriculum. While early data shows promise for report of IP behaviors in our graduates, future plans include further curricular development and enhanced IP learning experiences.

References:

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Distance Dietetics Education: A Student's Experience

Rachel Meltzer Warren, MS, RDN

"So, when were you in Utah?" is a question that comes up on job interviews more often than you'd expect for a person who has spent a total of six days of her life in the lovely Beehive State. While my family, education, and work have always kept me on the east coast, my resume clearly states that I completed a dietetic internship through Utah State University—not to mention, a DPD through Kansas State University. Both are true, which leaves me with a bit of explaining to do.

My path to becoming a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) was anything but a conventional one—as I now know so many are. I was an undergraduate journalism major at the University of Maryland when I elected to take a basic nutrition course to fulfill my non-lab science credit requirement. While I'd long been interested in food and health, it was in that class that my curiosity grew—and started to wonder if my

a writer," I said, doubting myself as I earned A's and became more enamored with the subject.

Weeks before I graduated with that journalism degree, I discovered the Nutrition Communication program at Tufts University and said, "Aha! I've found my perfect match." Except with only a handful of nutrition courses and no RDN or science degree under my belt, the director wasn't as convinced as I was. She expected me to take a laundry list of prerequisites before she would consider my entry into her program. Me, the "not science person," took a deep breath and spent two years bonding with my soon-to-be good friends Organic Chemistry, Biochemistry, Anatomy and Physiology as I worked my first full-time job as a fact-checker at a national business magazine. Finally, I was in.

Fast-forward two more years. I am fresh out of Tufts with my master's in hand, challenging courses and eye opening internships and experience under my belt, and ready to take on

on to change my life. "Why aren't you an RDN?" she asks. "Oh, I'm not really a clinical person," I answer her. She looks at me blankly. "I'm not interested in working in a hospital," I go on. "I was ready to be done with school already," I stammer. "Um…I'm more of a writer than a science person," I defeat myself one again. She says the words I need to hear. "People like to see those 'RDN' letters. They don't really know what they mean."

I go home and think about what she said. And I take it a step further. Sure, the RD (now the RDN) credential would look nice. But maybe the hard work that would go into obtaining those letters would help me become a better writer. Perhaps learning the different facets of the nutrition field—even the ones I don't think I want to work in—would help expand my understanding and make me more proficient as a communicator. I've worked and taken classes before; what if I just sign up for a couple of courses to finish out the DPD I'd mostly completed during my master's? And so begins my love affair with distance dietetics education.

My first distance education relationship was completely practical. Working at a magazine meant busy days, late nights, and lots of deadlines. I knew that realistically, I could not sneak out of the office to get to a class, even ones that met later in the evening. A grad school friend who had attended Kansas State University (KSU) as an undergrad told me about KSU's

> ## *Distance learning fit my independent nature and my out-of-the-box journey to becoming a registered dietitian.*

long-time desire to become a writer could be just one part of what I was meant to do with my life. Of course, some people take longer to catch on than others. I signed up for another course. And another. And another. "I'm not a science person," I thought, as I immersed myself in nutrition courses. "I love nutrition, but I'm

the world. Months pass without a job offer. Eventually, I get and accept a new job—and I'm basically back where I started: as a fact checker at a national magazine, this time focused on health. It's a little closer to where I want to be…but not quite right.

One day, my boss at the magazine asks me the question that would go

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online didactic program. The next thing I knew, there I was at my desk in New York City, taking classes in the "Little Apple" (Manhattan, KS). For the most part, courses involved pre-recorded lectures that I would watch on my own time (evenings, weekends, or down times at work), coupled with weekly chat sessions that I would participate in at a defined time. I tried to get home for the live classes, but some weeks I would log in quietly from my desk as I stayed late at the magazine to move copy or sign off on proofs (hey, it was more productive than Facebook!).

From the start, I was grateful that distance education was giving me the opportunity to be places I didn't think I could be, because I physically didn't have the time to get there. But the great surprise for me was the quality of the education I was getting. The courses were taught by on-campus professors who were terrific. Having gone to a big state school, watching lectures felt no less personal than attending a huge lecture hall session—except attending on my own time and choosing to watch a Financial Management in Dietetics talk instead of American Idol nudged me to really

care about Financial Management in Dietetics (how many students can say that?!). Every minute I was in class was an active decision, and that empowered me. The real shocker to me was how much I interacted with professors and other students. I'm typically a pretty quiet student who takes a while to work up the nerve to say something in class. I pay attention, nod along as the professor speaks, and take notes—perfectly pleasant to have on board, but not one to call out answers or share my thoughts on the assignment. Being in a virtual class, however, made me a more active participant. The teacher couldn't see me scribbling notes, or laughing knowingly along at one of her jokes you'd only get if you'd done the assigned reading. Knowing I was just a screen name, I suddenly had to make myself visible to a professor who couldn't physically see me—and so I found myself typing away to respond during chat sessions, and emailing questions during the week. Finally, being a writer was something giving me an advantage in nutrition courses, and not holding me back!

Fast-forward another few years. I've finished out my DPD courses through K-State (even cheering on

the Wildcats during March Madness from afar—why not?!), and while I've never visited the state of Kansas, I'm grateful to its people and education system. It's time for me to apply for a dietetic internship and while there are plenty of conventional programs in my area, I apply to two distance programs and am accepted to my first pick, Utah State University.

I was drawn to distance internship programs for a number of reasons. First was my overwhelmingly positive experience in a distance didactic program. I knew that attending classes in person was not a prerequisite for learning or engagement. Second, I loved the fact that I would orchestrate where I did my rotations, and do my best to tailor them to my interests (within the confines of the supervised practice requirements that every internship follows). Third, I appreciated that I got to do the scheduling so I could, say, get clinical out of the way since I was anxious about it (now might be a good time to mention that in the end I loved clinical, and am quite a bit more of a science geek than I'd ever imagined back in my

undergrad days). Distance learning fit my independent nature and my out-of-the-box journey to becoming a registered dietitian.

Distance Internships, however, are less "do it yourself" than many people assume. The requirements are the same as any other program, meaning you spend the same number of hours in clinical, community, and food service rotations. At the outset of my internship program, I spent five days in Utah at an orientation with my peers from around the country, getting to know each other and becoming familiar with the program and the deep three-ring binder full of assignments that came with it. With each rotation we were to experience came a list of tasks to accomplish and competencies to achieve, under the supervision of each preceptor (all preceptors had to be pre-approved by the program).

I returned home to Jersey City, NJ and spent nine months working full time, checking off those boxes in my binder at an urban hospital, a private practice focused on weight management, at a local school district's food service operation, and in the New York City health department, learning and growing. And I passed the exam on my first try, as did nearly all of my long-distance peers.

Without a doubt, the biggest drawback of applying to a distance program was the fact that I had to set up my own rotations. It's a decent amount of legwork up front, which could be a turnoff to some students. In order to apply to the two programs I chose, I had to submit not just an application and essay, but a proposal outlining where I would do my clinical, food service, and community rotations, with potential preceptors unofficially signed on. The rotations I found were through a combination of personal and professional

Three Distance DI Surprises

I thought I knew what I was getting myself into when I signed on to be a distance intern. But three of the best qualities of a distance DI were ones I never would have expected up front.

1. Constant Communication

The ongoing support I received from my Utah State University DI advisor, Ann Martin Mildenhall, who has since retired, made my internship experience different from that of many friends who completed traditional internships. One of our assignments as distance interns was to send our advisor a report every week, detailing our experiences and learning. As a writing-inclined student, it was fun and useful for me to process my weeks as they passed and I grew as a dietitian. But more valuable was the insightful, astute, and always good-humored responses Ann would send back, and our email conversations would often continue through to the next weekly report.

2. Positive Preceptor Experiences

As a distance student, I could only work with preceptors who had personally agreed to take me on—no supervisor or organizational policy was mandating this from above. As a result, my preceptors were all happy to be working with an intern. For many, I was their first intern, and they were downright excited. That helped my internship to be an overwhelmingly pleasant and productive one.

3. Long-Distance Camaraderie

I admit that when I started looking at internship programs, making friends was not at the top of my must-do list. I was busy with work and life, and I already had a crew of nutrition friends from my master's program. But getting to know the group of—yep, all women—from across the country that were pursuing the same path but in totally different settings was fascinating and cool. In the six years since we've cheered each other on via social media as we passed our registration exams, made strides in our careers, and had personal milestones. Our field is vast, yet small at the same time—and with geography meaning less, connections and learning across those miles can mean so much more.

contacts, and cold calling! At the time, I felt like a bit of a pioneer—the RDNs at hospitals and clinics that I spoke with generally hadn't worked with distance interns before. Since I completed the Utah State University program, however, a number of local distance interns have taken my lead with rotations at the same sites. I'm happy that my positive experiences kept that door open for those who came after me; the process of setting up rotations for a distance internship

gets infinitely easier if you have someone's footsteps to follow in!

With only 50% of those who apply actually getting admitted to a dietetic internship program according to the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, both the RDN-to-be crowd and dietetics educators need to be aware of all of the options available, including the many distance internships that exist.

NEHP Member Spotlight

Teresa W. Johnson, DCN, RDN, LD
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Dr. Johnson completed her BS in Dietetics at the University of Montevallo in 1984, her MA in Nutrition at Auburn University in 1987, and her Doctor of Clinical Nutrition (DCN) at Rutgers University in 2010. She has been an educator for 25 years.

What do you like best about being an educator?

Student interaction is high on my list but I think finding new ways to teach course content is the most rewarding. When I started teaching in the late 1980's, students were awed by acetate overheads and reel-to-reel movies. Finding a good research article required a visit to a physical library and a lot of dimes for the copier. Students wrote copious notes as we lectured with chalk dust in the air – then along came Power Point. Later we moved nutrition to the online format. In those early days, there were no learning management systems so we had to build our own web pages.

Today all my courses – live and online – are designed to provide students with a number of electronic activities to engage them in the course content and all use an LMS. I use Camtasia to prepare YouTube lectures and we make virtual field trip videos to spark class discussions and demonstrations. My classes include publisher content material and those I prepare or find on the web. In a single module I might find myself grading discussion board entries, student-prepared Slideshares or YouTube videos, research article

reviews, or completion of an online certificate program.

What is your favorite class to teach?

Tough question! I suppose nutrition assessment because it requires a lot of creativity to teach it online. I also like teaching statistics.

What do you consider to be the biggest challenge to educators today?

Keeping up with the latest nutrition research AND advances in technology. Both are required to be an effective teacher and champion the value of nutrition science to other professions.

How did you become involved in NEHP?

I was approached by a colleague several years ago to become a part of the leadership of NEHP. I've made wonderful friends across the country because of the DPG. Our group members are very supportive of each other – exchanging teaching ideas and answering questions.

What leadership positions have you held within NEHP?

Chair (plus Chair-Elect and Past-Chair), Social Media Coordinator and I've helped with the NEHP newsletter.

Student's Experience Continued from page 8

Educators can help on two important levels:

1. Make sure the students you teach and mentor are aware of distance internship programs. They can make an internship possible for students who live in a region with few traditional options and are unable to relocate, those who live in an area with a high concentration of dietetics undergrads but not a lot of DI programs to go around, or open up the possibilities for a student who is a self-starter and prefers to work independently.

2. Precept Distance internship students need RDNs, often who need to sign off on their willingness to be preceptors before the student even applies to the program. This can be a daunting process for intern-hopefuls, so remember the professionals who helped you along the way and be willing to give back.

Rachel Meltzer Warren is a New York area-based nutrition writer, educator, and counselor, and author of The Smart Girl's Guide to Going Vegetarian and the upcoming A Teen's Guide to Gut Health.

Time-saving Tips for Managing Online Classes

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Whether you are new to teaching online or have several courses to your credit, managing online classes, especially those with 25 students or more, can be a daunting task, even for those instructors who have significant experience. The workload for a roster of 25-30 students can easily become a 15- to 20-hour per week commitment. If the course calls upon each student to submit two weekly discussion board posts with two reply posts, those requirements add up to 60 posts and 60 responses for the instructor to look over each week. These tasks are on top of all the other weekly assignments that require grading, not to mention the detailed feedback needed for an end-of-term research paper or project. Occasionally, some instructors are fortunate enough to have a teaching assistant on board to help with certain elements of a course, such as responses to student queries or scoring simpler assignments. But, more often than not, an instructor is on their own and must figure out how to manage their time effectively.

In addition to supporting student engagement and active learning in the online classroom, the time-crunch instructors face is further compounded depending on how many people are enrolled and how much familiarity these students have with online learning. According to national survey data conducted by the Babson Survey Research Group, more than one in four students (28%) in the United States now take at least one distance education course (a total of 5,828,826 students, a year-to-year increase of 217,275). The Survey also found that the number of higher education students taking at least one distance education course in 2015 is up 3.9% over the previous year. Growth for private non-profit institutions grew by 11.3% , while private for-profit institutions experienced a decline in enrollment by 2.8%. As the demand for online courses continues to increase, so too does student expectations of receiving academic instruction that is comparable to what they would get in a face-to-face setting.

Over the years, as online teaching has become more pervasive, from community colleges to university Ph.D. programs, much has been written on what the best practices are for skillfully handling a virtual classroom that contains a large number of students. Taken together, these tips and strategies continue to be an evolving work-in-progress as both faculty members and instructional designers communicate with one another and the academic community on the problems and strengths they encounter with course design and online classroom management. The following is a compendium of strategies for saving time and managing communications for large online classes that do not provide teaching assistants, culled from various sources, including webinars, Power Point presentations, and blog posts.

Creating a Feedback Bank

One common suggestion across sources that involves a significant time-saving technique is to build a feedback bank or what is sometimes called an instructor's toolbox. This method is intended to reduce the time spent on common feedback statements and allow for more opportunity to provide individualized and substantive comments. For instructors who teach the same course from one term to the next, building a feedback bank or toolbox is especially helpful for addressing the issue of repeating similar phrases for common errors found in student work, a task that takes up valuable typing time that could be used for something else...perhaps a more high-stakes assignment.

While it requires an upfront time commitment to put together, a feedback bank eventually proves useful for providing constructive comments efficiently, and carving out opportunities to supplement those remarks with more individualized observations.

One way to create a feedback bank is to use a rubric as the basis for an Excel spreadsheet, with the information organized in chart form that includes a column for critical grading elements, i.e. comprehension, timeliness, engagement, and writing mechanics, and a row for evaluative descriptors i.e. exemplary, proficient, needs improvement, and poor.

The table to the right is a simplified example of what a feedback bank might look like, with each of the criteria and descriptors occupying one cell, and individual feedback statements inserted where needed. When grading an assignment, an instructor can open both the student's work and the feedback bank to be kept on the screen side-by-side; then they can copy and paste comments as applicable into the learning management system using the chart as a guide for determining what category of performance the student's work falls under and the appropriate comment to use.

Feedback Bank

Exemplary	Proficient	Needs Improvement	Poor
Critical Thinking			
Terrific overview of a complex problem in which you presented excellent examples that lend support to both sides.	You provided good examples that demonstrate a balanced view of the issue.	You offered some good points, but need to work on providing examples from each side of the issue. Please take a look at the article I posted last week that covers some of the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, and explains why the problem is so complex.	To adequately answer this question, you need to present ideas that address each side of the issue based on the reading. The problem is complex, and there are many important points that you did not cover.
Timeliness			
Thank you for submitting your work on time.		Please check my announcement from Week 1 about the University's lateness policy. There is a 10% lateness penalty.	
Engagement			
	Your response posts were well-written, engaging, and helped move the conversation forward.		Your response posts need to say more than just whether you "agree" or "disagree". Rather, they need to add something new to the discussion that helps move the conversation forward.
Writing Mechanics			
		Grammar: "It's" means "it is" while "its" is a possessive. Punctuation: Please remember to capitalize where appropriate. Spelling: Please pay attention to this common error. It's "lose weight" not "loose weight." Style: Your paragraphs are very long. Please break up your content into smaller sections, and indent all paragraphs.	Your work offers good points, but contains an excessive number of spelling errors and typos . Please consider typing your posts in a Word document and using the spell check feature.

The advantage of using an Excel spreadsheet is that the instructor can house multiple feedback statements in one cell and choose among the comments necessary for that particular assignment (see Writing Mechanics/Needs Improvement in the chart).

Other Tips and Strategies

Create structure for yourself and communication parameters for your students. Schedule uninterrupted blocks of time for your online tasks, and convey to your students that you will respond to their requests and questions within 24 hours during the week. In addition, specify what your availability will be to communicate during weekends, so they have realistic expectations.

Do not feel obligated to respond to every student query. Instead, craft one response to similar questions for posting on the Announcements board. Additionally, use an Ask the Instructor discussion forum, which encourages students to post their questions about course material and activities that everyone can read. This way, if a student asks a question you've already answered, you can direct them to the discussion.

Provide a Frequently Asked Questions section with a list of questions that students may have about the course, which will help streamline communications.

Set limitations in communication length to reduce the amount of time both you and your students must read online. Encourage your students to be clear but brief, especially in discussions, by reminding them of minimum and maximum word counts, and enforcing these parameters through a grading rubric.

Define a late policy and enforce it. Encourage students to submit their work on-time, otherwise late work will trickle into your grading box the entire term. Having clear guidelines and carrying through lateness penalties will discourage too many requests for extensions and prevent a bottleneck of assignments to grade.

Set up a system for keeping track of student files by specifying how the students should name their files (i.e. full name, date, module number) to help you organize your work and manage communication.

Simplify feedback where appropriate by using a rubric to indicate whether the requirements of the assignment were met, and supplement these statements with individualized comments. Consider using a feedback bank for common errors (see earlier content).

For certain assignments, consider using a general feedback document that summarizes the common mistakes you found, and anonymously provide examples from student work that presents right and wrong answers. Offer individualized feedback to those students who submit poor work.

Devote more time to grading discussion board posts from the first couple of weeks, which will set the stage for improved student work quality in subsequent posts. Content that is better written and conforms to rubric guidelines is easier and quicker to grade.

Allow your role to change throughout the term. During the first two weeks of the term, focus on facilitation and guidance to help your students get oriented and establish a routine. These efforts will save you time later on in the course as your students gain confidence and are able to be more self-directed.

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