Practices used by quick starters can help all faculty use time well

According to a University of Pennsylvania sociology professor, Dan Bernstein’s illustration that is based on a faculty member working 50 hours a week (see page 2) is almost on target. Jerry A. Jacobs found that, regardless of faculty rank, the average full-time faculty member works more than 50 hours a week. About 35 percent of faculty members reported working over 60 hours a week. Jacob’s analysis was based on a U.S. Department of Education survey of more than 10,000 faculty members at four-year institutions (Wilson).

This issue of Teaching Matters focuses on how faculty members can best use the hours they devote to teaching. Many recommendations mirror those offered by Robert Boice, who has studied new faculty members for 20 years and identified key practices used by those who are most successful (whom he calls quick starters). Boice suggests that new faculty “look for simple, effective strategies that allow [them] to work efficiently amid a seemingly overload of demands for their time and energy” (p. 15).

One particular approach to shun is what Boice calls the graduate seminar method of teaching. This is characterized by “extensive, painstaking preparation with a focus on understanding and covering everything—especially on avoiding criticism about a lack of comprehensiveness” (p. 12–13). Boice notes that this approach is not only time consuming but also includes too little concern about how students learn. It creates too much material to cover, too fast a pace of presentation, and exhaustion for both students and teachers. If you extend this pattern to classes that meet repeatedly, you can see “possibilities for inefficiency at a world-class level” (p. 13).

Boice’s book, Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus, contains specific ideas useful to teachers of any rank. Like much information about teaching, he has found that discovering and implementing effective strategies “takes less time and energy than expected and they soon save more of both than they cost” (p. 16).

Taking time now to be planful and purposeful in teaching can save many hours later and result in deeper understanding and more effectual learning for students.

—JE

References:
For better or worse, there is a new reality about most academic jobs. Expectations of colleagues and leaders of what can be accomplished have risen steadily in the last several decades. While it is expected that research and teaching should be done to higher quality standards and in greater amounts than ever before, the number of hours in each week has not risen proportionally. This state of affairs raises a very practical concern for KU faculty members: Is there an efficient way to become a better teacher that I can manage within the very real limits of the time available to me? The good news is that the answer is “yes;” the bad news is that you will see growth in quality at a slow if steady pace.

The first thing to do is identify your goals as a teacher. Determine the number of hours you have for teaching. Name the components of your teaching work and divide the number of hours you have for each component into a weekly average. Evaluate how your goals and time match up. (See page 8 for a detailed description.)

Consider the following sample product of such an analysis by someone five years into a career:

Total work hours: 50/week
Distribution: 20 teaching, 10 research, 10 other

Teaching components:
- Class/lab time: 8
- Office hours: 2
- Class prep: 8
- Read/Grade: 1
- Reflect on learning: 1

This person has 10 hours per week for preparing for class, reading and grading, designing materials and activities, and reflecting on student learning. Since student opinion is based on impressions of lecture, it is a priority to appear prepared in class. Accordingly, teaching time is heavily distributed to class preparation. Assignments are created to minimize time reading or grading, leaving more time for preparation. This choice leaves little time for innovation, but it supports having students rate classroom performance highly. For this point in a career, it might be the most efficient use of hours available for teaching, but there is only a little room for creative development of teaching. If the goals are getting tenure and being described positively by students, this strategy might work in the short term. As goals shift toward richer student learning or recognition for excellence, then the distribution would shift toward reading more complex student work and reflecting on student understanding.

A variation on this analysis focuses on recapturing some of the time spent on class preparation. A long-standing practice among experienced teachers is to re-use lecture notes and visual aids from previous courses; one gets the same class time performance without new investment of preparation. Less experienced teachers could get the same reduction by rethinking the use of class time. It can be much quicker to design a series of interactive in-class activities for students than to prepare from scratch enough notes and visuals to fill 50 minutes. One variable time activity can be cut in half, making room for something else that may be more satisfying. There is also evidence that students learn more and remember more from interactive experiences in class than they do from information-heavy lectures that provide a first exposure to material. It is a wise practice to save lecture time for summaries after material is first processed interactively. This cuts preparation time and serves other goals related to enhanced student learning. Lecture material can be developed over many offerings of a course.

The strategy here is simple enough. Be concrete about how much time you have for teaching, and then decide which aspect of teaching will get that time.

Be concrete about how much time you have for teaching, and then decide which aspect of teaching will get that time.
CTE announces fall line-up of events

This fall, CTE will host ten workshops and discussion forums for faculty, staff and GTAs. All sessions will be held at CTE in 135 Budig Hall. Advance registration not required. For more information, contact CTE at 864.4100 or cte@ku.edu.

**Essential Teaching Practices workshops: 12 to 1 PM**

- September 9: “Designing Writing Assignments That Ask Students To Go Beyond ‘The Answer’” with RuthAnn Atchley, psychology, and Michele Eodice, KU Writing Center.
- September 30: “How to Write Test Items That Accurately Evaluate Student Learning” with Bruce Frey, psychology and research in education.
- November 4: “Managing a Lab” with Alice Bean and Judy Wu, physics and astronomy.

**Lunch & Conversation sessions: 12 to 1 PM**

- September 28: “Grade Inflation” with Deb Smith, ecology and evolutionary biology, and Dan Bernstein, CTE/psychology.
- October 5: “Managing TAs as a Team” with Monica Biernat, psychology.

**Teaching Teas: 3 to 4 PM**

- September 16: “Measuring Downstream Student Performance” with Richard Hale, aerospace engineering.
- October 3: “Identifying and Measuring Student Performance” with Holly Storkel, SPLH.
- October 25: “Preparedness for Graduate Study” with Eve Levin, history.
- November 7: “Using Wikis and Other Technologies to Facilitate Student Collaboration” with Sonya Lancaster, English, and Susan Zvacek, IDS.

On September 23 David Schoem, director of the University of Michigan Community Scholars Program, will present a workshop on integrating service-learning, diversity, and learning communities. The workshop will be held in 130 Budig Hall from 2 to 3:30 PM. A reception will follow at the Center for Teaching Excellence, 135 Budig Hall.

In his presentation, Schoem will focus on these issues: ways that service-learning, diversity and learning communities are important for the teaching and learning experience; the affect these activities have on faculty members; and the links among service learning, diversity and social justice.

Schoem has been noted for his book, *Engaging the Whole of Service-Learning, Diversity, and Learning Communities* (2004). He is a PEW National Learning Communities Fellow and has led numerous faculty institutes on diversity issues. He teaches in Michigan’s sociology department and has served as assistant dean for undergraduate education and assistant vice president for academic and student affairs.

To register for the workshop, contact CTE at 785.864.4199 or cte@ku.edu by September 21.
Applying Aristotle’s golden mean to the classroom: Balancing underteaching and overteaching


In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle argues that moral virtue and the right course of action is a “golden” mean (aurea mediocritas) between two extremes, one involving excess and the other deficiency. The method Aristotle used to pinpoint the mean, or the virtue, was to first identify the two extremes. “Courage is a mean between cowardice and recklessness, generosity is a mean between wastefulness and stinginess.” Aristotle added that decisions of moral virtue are situational and are made within a specific context. For example, under one set of conditions running into enemy fire may be considered courageous, whereas in a different situation it may be considered reckless.

This Aristotelian perspective was brought to my attention by a colleague from our philosophy department in a conversation where I felt that I was more invested in my student’s achievement than they were. There seemed to be no limit to what I would do to help my students—I provided handouts that encapsulated the readings, test preparation hints, learning strategies and lesson objectives. It seemed the pendulum had swung all the way in my teacher-centered classroom—all the way to an extreme of overteaching. From that point on I realized that I needed a framework to make teaching decisions and determine the right course of action for my teaching practice. What follows outlines my quest to find the golden mean where I strike the right balance between doing too little for my students, or underteaching, and doing too much for them, or overteaching.

How do I strike a balance? How do I decide the best course of action that promotes student learning as well as reinforces desirable student behaviors? How do I find the golden mean in a given teaching situation? Using an Aristotelian approach, I identify both extremes and then use the following question to determine the context: Am I giving the right student the right amount of assistance, at the right time, for the right reason, in the right manner?

Let’s examine this five-part question. Because they’re ready at hand as it were, I’ll use examples from my own time in the classroom and the insights that time has brought me.

1. The right student

Knowing your responsibilities and those of your students in the teaching-learning process is the gateway criterion. If you don’t know your students and the efforts they truly bring to the process, you cannot determine the right type, amount, time or reason to give assistance. (How to get to know who your students are is a whole different matter, but you have to know them. They can’t be generic students to you or you cannot make wise—that is to say, contextually informed—teaching decisions about them.)

Underteaching is characterized by making students responsible for almost all of the learning process. The teacher’s investment in learning outcomes is low and may communicate to students that the course is a “weed out” course and students are on their own.

Overtaching occurs when instructors shoulder too large a share of the teaching-learning process; that is, overteachers take on numerous responsibilities for learning that properly belong with the student. It is important for instructors to know who’s responsible for what in the classroom. Depending on context, overteaching may take the form of a last minute review session or providing many pre-exam questions.

2. The right amount

Teachers, by nature, are generous and giving of their time, their expertise and their emotions in an effort to help students. This fact makes many outstanding instructors prone to doing too much, rather than doing too little. We all know that our students may be at different developmental stages in terms of maturity, readiness to learn, expectations and intellectual capabilities. Thus, the appropriate amount of assistance you provide will differ among your students. This fact makes many outstanding instructors prone to doing too much, rather than doing too little. We all know that our students may be at different developmental stages in terms of maturity, readiness to learn, expectations and intellectual capabilities. Thus, the appropriate amount of assistance you provide will differ among your students.

Extremes here are marked by not understanding or assessing students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes. Large, heterogeneous classes are the most challenging.

The amount of support you provide also depends on the degree of struggle you want stu-
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It is important to teach and value persistence because not all learning comes easily; a lot requires working hard.

Underteaching is characterized by not giving students enough guidance so they can solve a problem or complete an assignment on their own. In terms of challenge and support, underteaching emphasizes the “challenge” without the appropriate amount of “support.” The result is frustrated students who may give up.

Overteaching emphasizes the “support” over the “challenge.” In several cases, I have eliminated or reduced meaningful learning activities because in my context they represented overteaching. For example, in upper level courses I have sometimes given my students complete sets of notes and PowerPoint slides because I thought they would learn more and achieve better grades if I gave them this level of support and encouragement. But by doing too much, I created dependent students who relied on me to provide the “right answer.”

3. At the right time
This part of the question refers to the timing of assistance and communication. Do students seek help the night before an exam or paper deadline? How do we promote planning ahead as a student behavior and discourage cramming for exams? How do we teach students to organize their time to optimize their performance?

Underteaching occurs when I have not given enough guidance on project planning and have left it all to the student—I’ve minimized my role in the process.

Overteaching occurs when I have front-loaded information when students don’t need to know it and then kept reminding them along the way. This created students who depended on me to constantly remind them of a pending deadline.

4. For the right reason
An instructor’s motivation for providing students with an amount and type of assistance at a particular time is an important consideration because it makes teaching decisions purposeful and intentional. The reason is linked to the goal. What is the motivation for reviewing for an exam? Is it to boost the exam average to meet the expectations of the class, or is it to be more efficient in giving extra help to a large class? What motivates an instructor to post notes and PowerPoint slides?

Underteaching is characterized when I have not had a stake in students’ learning success. To be charitable, underteaching can occur when one places so much value on process that (to students) the product just doesn’t matter. Underteaching is characterized when I have not had a stake in students’ learning success. To be charitable, underteaching can occur when one places so much value on process that (to students) the product just doesn’t matter.

Overteaching occurs when I closely link my teaching success to my students’ achievement. In many courses, students measure their success by the grade they earn instead of the amount they have learned or the progress they have made. When I have linked my success to class grade averages, I have been rewarded for doing more for students and overteaching in other areas of the classroom. Their inflated grades gave me an ego boost, but it wasn’t clear they actually learned more.

5. In the right manner
This criterion refers to the process of instructional delivery, whether lecture, multimedia, group learning or computer-based systems. The tools you use depend on the students’ learning styles and preferences and contribute to the developmental appropriateness of the teaching behavior.

Underteaching occurs when one uses techniques that don’t properly support students’ learning styles. For example, I’ve lectured exclusively in a verbal style when students needed more support through diagrams and visual depictions of concepts. In terms of lecture, I underteach when I’ve talked over the heads of students, leaving them inattentive and unengaged in the material.

I have eliminated or reduced meaningful learning activities because in my context they represented overteaching.

In short, I robbed them of something they needed to know about the geography of learning.
Applying Aristotle’s golden mean continued

Overteaching occurs when I emphasize the “novice” in the expert-novice continuum. I elaborate novice concepts, unaware that the concepts are intuitive and familiar to students. Another example: giving students lower-level recall questions that they can easily handle, keeping the course “light-weight,” or when I tell them the complete story, fill in all the gaps, weaving a highly knit fabric, and therefore leave little for their imaginations. I have learned that an important device in telling a good story is to leave something for the audience to figure out and not explicitly tell them everything. This way they stay involved with the storyline and plot.

This round robin of questioning with a set of contextual perspectives in mind, this looking for a golden mean between doing too much and doing too little has helped me adjust my teaching to the students enrolled in my classes; but, to return to the beginning, you have to have a good idea who those students are before this dialectic becomes very useful. As the renowned educator David Ausubel once said, “a person’s existing cognitive structure is the most important factor governing whether new material will be meaningful and how well it can be acquired and retained.” Thus, I’m a great believer in pre-testing and in using things like the knowledge inventory questionnaire.

An Aristotelian approach can be applied to making teaching decisions. The right course of action does lie along a continuum, whether it is in the expert-novice, process-product, or challenge-support realms. The right decision depends on the specific teaching-learning situation. For me, teaching is a constant attempt to determine the right course of action within this spectrum, to find the golden mean that promotes, rather than inhibits, the learning and personal growth of my students into independent, confident adults who meet our educational outcomes.


Sliding along the continuum
Sharon Bass, Journalism

Robert Noyd’s article, “Applying Aristotle’s golden mean to the classroom: Balancing underteaching and overteaching,” addressed the tricky nature we all face in our teaching: finding the right balance. He used the language and rhetorical vision of Aristotle to arrive at finding the golden mean and described navigating the geography of learning based on five criteria: knowing the students, determining the right amount of support, timing the help, having the right reason, and using the right delivery.

After reading his article, it struck me that as teachers we always live somewhere on the continuum Noyd describes, bounded on one end by underteaching and on the other by overteaching. In thinking about my life on this continuum, I began to see myself more as a slide, like one of those electrical devices controlling a rheostat. It strikes me as a good place to be: just sliding along the continuum, sometimes putting more light on a subject and sometimes less. It all depends on the student, the needed amount of light or information or help, the time and the purpose.

Classroom conditions change and are fraught with variables. As a beginning teacher I was painfully aware of the variables and my answer was to gain as much control as possible. With more experience I see that control is neither possible nor desirable for the kind of learning I want for myself and for my students.
Teaching efficiently with technology

Susan Zvacek, IDS

The word “efficiency” may conjure images of industry or a return-on-investment, bottom line focus that can seem antithetical to the life of the mind. However, when we look at efficiency from an instructional point of view, there are several reasons to consider becoming more efficient and a variety of technological tools to help you get there.

One way to think about efficiency is as a way to save time on routine tasks, and here technology can make a significant difference. Some examples include using an e-mail list or online discussion forum to answer student questions only once (so that everyone benefits from the answer), or providing the syllabus or other materials online. Another way to become more efficient is to create teaching materials in re-usable formats, so that only occasional updates are necessary once the initial work is done. An example of this would be to use PowerPoint or similar presentation software instead of acetate transparencies. PowerPoint enables the instructor to make changes right up to the time class begins, unlike transparencies that must be totally re-created each time a change is desired.

Saving time can also be accomplished by delegating non-instructional teaching tasks. A simple division of labor (like in an industrial model) allows you to concentrate on teaching, instead of such tasks as establishing an authentication scheme for students to gain access to your online materials, or building mailing lists one student e-mail address at a time. Delegating tasks to a machine reduces the labor-intensity of these activities, and many can be done better by a computer than a human. For example, by setting up online quizzes based on assigned readings, students can determine their readiness for in-class discussions and are motivated to keep up with reading. The online testing feature is available wherever and whenever a student has Internet access, and it never gets tired of presenting questions and providing feedback.

Another task that can be delegated to technology is transmitting information. Books, graphs, computers, video clips, audio recordings, and numerous other delivery systems can store and present information when and where the student is ready to receive it, not only during class. This way, when students arrive at class they can be actively engaged in doing something with the content, rather than simply listening to it. As the instructor, you can then use your teaching skills to guide discussions, identify misconceptions, or offer other viewpoints, as just a few examples.

Research suggests that students who use technology-based instructional materials learn concepts more quickly, so even students become more efficient in these cases. (Why this occurs is not clear; evidence suggests that content organization and clear outcomes may be significant factors.) In any case, using technology can, over the long term, save time and enable instructors to use their time more productively.

Faculty receive support from four CTE programs

CTE’s advisory board has selected 39 faculty members for the following Fall 2005 programs.


Faculty Fellow: Kristin Swain.

Faculty Seminar: Glenn Adams, Kathryn Conrad, Heide Crawford, Megan Greene, Donita Massengill, Linda Olaßen, Judy Postmus, Sean Smith, Catherine Weaver, and Bryan Young.

Teaching Grants: Amy Devitt, Manuela Gonzalez-Bueno, Joann Keyton, and Brian Rock.
Three steps to teaching efficiently

A key aspect of efficiency is obtaining a high ratio of output to input. If we apply this to teaching, we need to make the most of the time we have for it (see page 2). Here are three steps toward teaching efficiently:

1. Identify your goals as a teacher.
   – Your goals might include one or more of the following: maximize the amount of information students learn, maximize students’ perception that they are well taught, increase the depth of students’ understanding of your field, enhance students’ interest in your field, have your colleagues recognize you as an excellent teacher, be recognized outside your department or outside KU for excellent teaching, qualify for promotion or tenure, or transform teaching into an intellectually stimulating, challenging activity.
   – Determine which goals are short term and which are long term.
   – Identify which are easier and which are harder to achieve.
   – Start with a relatively easy short-term goal.

2. Count your hours and plan their use.
   – Look at your work week and identify the number of hours you plan to devote to your job.
   – Be flexible and be realistic.
   – Do not list what you want your chair to think you work, but week in and week out the number of hours do you typically have to give to this part of your life. This is a private document; realism is a plus.
   – Divide up that total number into a number of hours for three categories: research, teaching, and other.
   – For most KU faculty members, research and teaching together will be somewhere near 80%. This is your chance to be planful and intentional about your career, so pick the distribution of effort that will achieve your individual professional goals.

3. Identify the components of your teaching and distribute your time.
   – Write down components of your teaching work: being in class, holding office hours, planning and designing course materials and assignments, preparing for class, reading and grading student work, any other activity that’s a regular part of your teaching.
   – Place components in a list. Start with most fixed/required components and end with most flexible/optional. Being in class would lead the list; designing new elements for a class might be the optional end.
   – Now list the number of hours that you engage in the required components; this is your fixed overhead.
   – Subtract the total of your fixed hours from the total you allocated to teaching, and then distribute the remainder among the variable or optional activities. Obviously the numbers of some components are not constant every week; try to divide the semester total for variable activities into a weekly average.

As you determine your goals and how to reach them, remember to work on only one aspect of one course at a time; do not try to re-invent an entire course in a single semester. Different parts of a course may be uneven. What’s important is that your teaching and students’ learning is moving in a positive direction.