

Teaching To-Do List: November 2019

Find out how it's going.

If you've never done a mid-semester feedback exercise, now is the time to try it! Not only will you get feedback that you can use immediately in your courses, but you'll have a baseline to compare your end of semester student evaluations with.

Check out our old posts about the Stop-Start-Continue technique.



Clear the decks!

If you have a backlog of student work to grade, try to tackle it now and get back on track. Get student feedback out of your office and back to your students in enough time for them to use it effectively. If you don't already use it, you might want to try the video and audio features in Canvas's speedgrader that make getting through the feedback not only quick, but much more personal.

Reiterate your goals + priorities for your students.

You went over the syllabus. You talked about expectations...two months ago. It's a good idea to remind students of what is important as you go into this busy time of year. This will help you quell fears and help avoid confusion about final projects well before the deadline. Try doing this via a Canvas announcement, as well as in-person and in class.

Reinforce the values of office hours.

Haven't had many students stop by your office so far? Getting the same questions over and over again from individual students after class?

Office hours are not always well understood by students, and for some, the idea of sitting alone with you in your office is intimidating. Now is a good time to think about how to entice students to use that time to their (and your!) advantage. Perhaps a name change is in order. You can call them "one-on-one chats," or "mid-semester conferences," or even "Open Hours." Whatever you choose to call them, remind students the value of getting one-on-one feedback and support before the end of the semester. Encourage students to speak to you *after* their exams, ask them to carefully review your feedback or the questions that they got wrong and come ready to present new solutions.

Do you have a very large class?

Consider creating group office hours sign-ups where 8-10 students can come together and ask questions on a common theme in the course.

Make (or revise) a time management plan

Before things get too busy, figure out where you can reframe your time devoted to teaching so that you have ample space to deal with grading, student conferences, and exam prep. If you made a plan earlier in the semester, take a few minutes to review it and see where you can make some more time available.

If you didn't make a plan, try tracking how much time you spend on teaching-related tasks for a few days and assess where you can readjust.



Check in with your TAs, if you have them.

If you don't have a regular meeting scheduled with your teaching assistants, then you will want to be sure you have a meeting before and after midterms. TAs can provide you with valuable insights about how students are doing in your course, and can help you reinforce priorities with your students.



Commit to taking a break.

It seems counterintuitive to take a break when you've got a million things going on, but now is a great time to figure out what you'll do during the Thanksgiving break that makes you feel centered, focused, and ready to take on finals. Everyone has different resources, interests, and priorities in managing stress. It doesn't matter what your plan is, but it does matter that you make taking a break part of your plan to deal with the end of the semester. Build accountability into keeping this commitment in whatever ways work for you: tell your friends, post an inspirational image in your work area, encourage friends to join you, etc.

If you feel comfortable doing so, you may want to share your plans with your students. This is a good way to model balance and good mental health habits for them.