

Teaching and Learning @ RBC

Pedagogical Tips, Tricks, and Lessons Learned -
A Newsletter by Faculty for Faculty



Welcome to Teaching and Learning at RBC

WHAT'S NEW

*TAMING THE LION
(WORKLOAD)*

MAKING ZOOM MAGIC

*RESOURCES FOR
BUILDING YOUR
RINGMASTER SKILLS*

Welcome to the 4th (and final edition) of the 2021-22 academic year!

I don't know about you, but the end of the semester always reminds me of the circus. I feel like I'm juggling multiple demands on my time, trying to keep the lion tamed, and just generally trying not to end up feeling like a clown. In that spirit, I bring you the May T&L Newsletter with a circus theme!

Do you have something you'd like to share? What about something that you'd like to learn more about? Just email Jena Zarling at jzarling@rbc.edu!

Taming the Lion (Workload) - Self-Care at the End of the Semester

By Jena D. Zarling

According to the latest poll in March by the American Psychological Association, 87% of respondents feel like the last two years have just been a non-stop stream of crises and 73% report feeling overwhelmed by the number of crises going on in the world today (APA, 2022). For certain professions like the healthcare field and teaching, we're not only dealing with the general stresses of the world around us but also having to provide support to those entrusted in our care.

The running joke in meditation circles is that if you're not stressed, you should meditate 20 minutes a day. And, if you don't have time to meditate, you should meditate for an hour. I've always hated that saying, but I understand the point – when self-care is needed the most, it should be the highest priority. Sadly, that's not usually how we do things, especially in academe. This is especially true during this time of the semester when final exams, projects, and grades are due.

We have a tendency to prioritize work and our to-do lists over our own physical and mental health. And with so much underlying stress from the last two years and the events of the world today, that can leave us on constant edge, with empathy fatigue, and neglecting those things that we find the most fulfilling.



So, how do we tame the workload and integrate some self-care at a time when we have the least amount of time?

First all, it may not be possible to get everything done. It is possible to simply have too much on your plate. If that's the case, it's time to prioritize. Take your to-do list and put it into 3 piles: Must do, Should do, Would like to do. And, then proceed accordingly. Get rid of everything that isn't a high priority. And, say "No" to adding anything else to your plate that isn't a Must do.

Second, find a way to make things a bit more bearable. Crank up the music and sing while you work. Listen to podcasts while you're working out or grading. Take your laptop outside to work if it's a beautiful day. Reward yourself with something fun. Anything you can do to lighten your mood will make the work go by faster.

Prioritize your physical and mental health. Often we want to push through the work to get things done, following the old adage of "work first, play later". In reality, that may be detrimental to both your health and your to do list. While it sounds counter-intuitive, placing priority on the things in life that you find fulfilling, fun, and that simply make you happy can refill your energy levels and help you get through your to do list more efficiently. By taking time to breathe and play, you can clear your cognitive load which will help with improving your memory, focus, and decision-making skills. So, a little bit of rest can actually pay off a lot later.

So, take a deep breath, and hang in there. Summer is coming....

References:

American Psychological Association. (2022, March). Stress in America. American Psychological Association. Retrieved April 28, 2022, from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2022/infographics-march>

Making Zoom Magic

By Bob Stowers

During the pandemic, Zoom classes and meetings with students and other faculty became routine. Most important, using Zoom was essential during lockdowns for virtual learning arrangements when regular classes were not a possibility.

Now that in-person classes have resumed, Zoom is not going away as it has been shown to be a valuable teaching and learning alternative for fully remote or for blended classes. Educators have learned that Zoom virtual contact overcomes many obstacles to conducting teaching and learning activities including saving on expenses, conquering time and availability differences, and handling distances among students living at various locations. It also has been shown to be a good choice for faculty meetings when faculty cannot attend due to personal conflicts. Simply put, Zoom has provided an effective alternative to traditional in-person learning occasions as well as for meetings.

Some colleges and universities have provided training for their faculty and staff to use Zoom.

Most haven't.

So, I would like to provide some tips for looking your best when participating in Zoom sessions. I believe that it is important for instructors to be aware of.

- First, be concerned with the camera angle. The least flattering camera angle is from below. The camera needs to be at your eye level or even higher. If the camera is in your laptop, use a box or a stack of books to elevate it.
- Second, be aware if you are sitting too close to the camera or if you are too far from it. If you are too close, it will appear as if you are crowding the screen. If you are too far, you will seem too small on someone else's screen. Your viewers should see your face, your neck, and a little of your body — but not too much.
- Third, consider the background. You have some choices here. Select a good spot in your home that complements you. No clutter or sensitive objects should be visible. Zoom offers choices of backgrounds that either are stock images or download options for favorite photos. One faculty member I know uses a photo of his office as background. It gives the viewer the impression that is where the person is using Zoom. My choice is to use the option to make the background out of focus so only my image is clearly presented removing any possible distractions as to what is behind me.



Making Zoom Magic (con't)

By Bob Stowers

- Fourth, lighting behind you will make you look like a silhouette. Lighting from the side may cast shadows. Backlight will create shadows. Lighting from overhead may make you look like a good candidate for a horror film. Use lighting from in front of you such as a window that is directly in front of you or lamps positioned to illuminate your face.
- Fifth, pay attention to sound quality. The best way to do is to choose a spot that is as free as possible from outside noise. Make sure your cellphone is muted so it doesn't ring or chirp. This eliminates an unwanted distraction during the Zoom call. Speak up. Don't shout but don't whisper either. When conducting a Zoom class, I also suggest that students mute their microphones unless they have something to say or would like to answer a question. This eliminates any background noise that could be very bothersome.
- Sixth, what are you wearing? Most Zoom participants don't realize that your Zoom appearance is as important as in-person engagements. It is true that you could be wearing pajama bottoms but give attention to what others can see. Don't wear wrinkled clothes or clothes with stains on them. Bright colors work well on Zoom.

And remember to smile. Exude confidence. Instructors need to be aware of the little things to put their students at ease and to appear friendly to encourage learning. Also, treat all Zoom occasions with professionalism. You may never know who may be watching.

Or recording.



Reminders

It's time to make sure that you have your textbook selections for the Summer and Fall semesters in the B&N portal. Use this link to make your selections, and reach out to Preston Boseman with any questions you have about the portal:

<https://aip.bncollege.com/app/>

Also, don't forget - Assessments are due by the end of the semester for multiple disciplines. Check in with your Chair to see if you need to submit assessments for your classes this semester.

Assessments can be submitted at:

<https://tools.rbc.edu/collector/>

Resources for Building Your Ringmaster Skills

By Jena D. Zarling

Summer always gives us a chance to rest and recharge. It also gives us an opportunity to build our pedagogical skills. For those looking to take their Ringmaster skills to another level over the Summer, here are some great resources to take a look at:



Don't forget to take advantage of what the RBC Library has to offer as you plan for the Fall and work on your own research! Check out everything the RBC Library can do for you at: <https://www.rbc.edu/library/library-services/>

Research Help

- Allow librarians to help you with your own research! Walk-ins and appointments are welcome.

Course Reserves

- Contact the library to put a textbook or other learning objects on course reserve for your students to check out and use during the semester. Learning objects may include: DVDs, equipment, or books from the library collection. Contact library@rbc.edu to put an item on reserve.



Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning – Virginia Tech

<https://teaching.vt.edu/index.html>

- Attendance and Engagement Strategies
- Course Design Resources
- Teaching and Learning Virtually
- Annual Conference on Pedagogy

Center for Advancement of Teaching & Learning – Elon University

<https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/catl/sotl/teaching-learning-conferences/>

- List of 50+ conferences throughout the year on pedagogy
- Resources for Teaching & Learning (ie. Course & Program Design, Assessing T&L, Supporting Student Wellness, Fostering Student Resilience in Courses, etc.)

Resources for Building Your Ringmaster Skills (con't)

By Jena D. Zarling

Friday 5 Live: Higher Education Podcast

<https://www.innovativeeducators.org/pages/friday-5-live>

- A weekly podcast that provides practical information on timely topics to educators around the country. (Available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts)
- Topics include "Failing Students: Providing the Support Students Need NOW!", "Supporting Black Male Students", "Get Thee to Tutoring! How to Increase Student Usage of Tutoring & Learning Support Resources", etc.



Norton Learning Blog

<https://nortonlearningblog.com>

- Articles from faculty on wide range of topics including "Lessons Learned During a Pandemic – Supporting Students Who are in Distress", "Setting Up First Generation Students for Success", "Teaching and Learning When We're Tired", etc.

QEP Quad

Critical Thinking and the Mastery of Content

"Academic "content" is best understood as a system of interconnected ideas defining a subject field. This system is used by professionals in a field to ask questions gather data or information, make inferences about the data, trace implications and transform the way we see and think about the dimension of the world that the subject represents.[...] Each idea is explained in terms of other ideas. To understand one part of some content requires figuring out its relation to other parts of that content. [...] Moreover, to learn content, students must learn to ask questions – both general and specific – that open up the discipline, that help them take command of it, that help them see the complexities in it, that unify it. They must learn a systematic way of questioning. All disciplines are ultimately defined by the questions asked by experts within the discipline and how answers to those questions are pursued. Thus all ideas within any subject are intimately connected with the kinds of questions asked in it."

- *Critical Thinking Competency Standards, Richard Paul and Linda Elder*