

**Faculty Matter Tip #28:
Revisiting the plan for the last few weeks of the term:
What to do if we've fallen a bit behind.**

As we get closer to the end of the semester, many of us realize that **we have fallen a bit behind, and the “something will have to give” if we are to get through everything we'd planned to cover.** Clearly, there is no single “right answer” to the question of what we should do. Strategies we entertain will need to:

- consider how critical remaining topics are to achieving the learning objectives of the course and to preparing students for courses that build on its content; and
- maintain the coherent threads that have lent coherence and structure to the course.

In a recent study of students' perceptions of the “ideal” professor, the authors report that their respondents placed the greatest value on instructor clarity. Ability to communicate the relevance of the material, command of the subject matter and responsiveness to students and their needs and a sense of humor were next in importance.¹ Findings such as these caution us to **be careful that we not sacrifice those elements of our teaching that permit students to find what we are saying and doing clear and easy to follow, as we speed up or omit treatment of our course content.**

Speeding up and spending less time on remaining material than we had initially intended may, indeed, enable us to at least touch on everything. And **omitting topics or time-intensive instructional activities** may enable us to make up time. However, such solutions **often result in fewer opportunities for discussion and student-centered in-class activities, and less time spent on pre-view and re-view of material.** In so doing, we may be cutting out precisely those elements of our teaching that permit students

- to **reflect** on what we are teaching,
- to **monitor** their understanding (or points of confusion), and
- to **engage** with the material in ways that are meaningful and effective for them.

So what should we do? First, **reassess** our plan for the course **intentionally**, weighing the likely impact of the changes we are about to implement, and create a **revised course plan**. Second, be sure to **follow through with students** – making sure class notes, study guides and other learning supports we may have already shared with students reflect the revised agenda. And third, make a **note for ourselves** about why our initial time estimates were off, and whether circumstances were special this semester, or whether we should bear this in mind as we plan for the next time we teach the course.

Please add your own strategies using the comment link on the [Provost's Academic Spotlight blog under the category “Faculty Matter”](#).

¹ Goldman, Z. , Cranmer, G., Sollitto, M., Labelle, S., & Lancaster, A. (2017) What do college students want? A prioritization of instructional behaviors and characteristics. *Communication Education*, 66:3, 280-298.