

# **A Summary of Faculty-contributed Strategies to Optimize the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Coaching**

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The overall goal of optimizing a course is to allocate time to the faculty and student activities that best produce learning, course completion, and progress toward the students' desired credentials. In the optimization, time is a scarce resource. Faculty must allocate the teaching activities in a course to maximize results and to continuously seek to improve the impact and efficiency of the most beneficial practices.

FACDEV 112 teaches faculty the practice of coaching students to improve future learning performance and persistence in their programs. Within FACDEV 112, all faculty create coaching implementation plans that capture intention, actions, and expected obstacles. The plans are based on the successful WOOP approach suggested by Oettingen et al. (2015) and Wittleder et al. (2020). The first cohort of faculty in FACDEV 112 produced 75 plans that suggest 124 non-unique ways to approach the time challenge of producing and delivering welcome and impactful feedback.

This report categorizes and organizes those suggestions into 12 solutions covering 94% of the ideas. Overall, while faculty recognized the potential of time challenges associated with coaching, they also saw the value of coaching, the incremental addition of time to grading they are already doing, and saw the suggestions presented here as ways to overcome these limitations.

## Reduce the Need to Coach Basics

The first approach suggested by multiple faculty is to reduce the number of mistakes made by students on assignments. Methods proposed included predicting the most common mistakes and communicating these in a tip sheet or zoom session.

This approach saves time from coaching more basic problems and thus optimizes overall learning. For individual students, this shifts coaching to more elevation than remediation of learning.

In the analysis, faculty identified other obstacles related to this intervention:

- 13% identified students' mismanagement of time, including procrastination
- 11% said a portion of students are insufficiently prepared for the course
- 11% said other students lack motivation / engagement
- 11% said a number of students don't read feedback
- 7% said a fair number of students may not reach out when having problems

Faculty may address each of these obstacles early in the course through relationship building, connecting the course to real-world outcomes, strengthening communication, and discussing time management skills in the context of the course. These improvements would improve learning and reduce the need to coach basic skills and knowledge. FACDEV 112 emphasizes relationship-building as a critical coaching strategy.

## Prioritize Coaching

When preparing to teach a course, faculty may review the time allocation of all their expected activities for the benefit to learning and persistence. This review would allow them to balance coaching time and other high-value activities in the course.

Faculty new to a course may find it difficult to predict an optimal mix. Experienced faculty may provide a course-wide recommendation. Individual faculty may then analyze their results and make adjustments in the next offering.

Faculty may also consider altering the mix of the different strategies that follow to reduce the total coaching time while holding or limiting any reduction of the learning benefit.

## Targeted Coaching

Coaching need not apply to all assignments and activities within a course nor to all aspects of an assignment. Faculty mentioned the difficulty of coaching individual performance on an exam, for example. By avoiding coaching unproductively, faculty could save time through coaching the specific assignments that show the best return on effort. Within an assignment, faculty may save time by focusing on specific skills within the assignment, such as prioritizing coaching a paper's structure over its grammar and spelling.

It is also possible to refer students to tutoring or library services to handle specific skills and reserve the faculty's coaching to more course specific challenges. Some faculty suggested coaching basic skills more heavily in earlier assignments and emphasize coaching of advanced skills in later assignments.

## Coach Efficiently

Faculty can improve their efficiency while maintaining their quality of coaching. Four methods suggested in their improvement plans stand out.

The first method is to use a quality checklist for the coaching process. This practice aligns with the recommendations in Gawande's *The Checklist Manifesto* (2009) and serves to reduce mistakes while ensuring completeness.

A second method suggests faculty time their coaching per assignment and assess what could reduce the overall time. This report's author has repeatedly reduced coaching time required by 50% to 75% on different assignments using this method.

Another approach that could reduce coaching time even more is to perform group coaching by noticing patterns and making suggestions in student work. Targeted group learning activities such as discussion questions prior to assignment deadlines fall into this category and are also another way to reduce future mistakes.

In the last approach, faculty suggest keeping a clip-file of feedback for each assignment that contains snippets they customize as needed. Some suggested further that text expander applications could be used to make this process even faster.

## Selective Coaching

Some of the suggestions concerned selectively coaching the students who were most behind. This practice helps to make up for a lack of equitable education and would save time by not coaching all students. However, all students benefit from being challenged to stretch relative to their level of competence, and while coaching time need not be equal, it also should not be withheld from a particular group without a strong reason.

Such a reason could be the receptiveness of a student to coaching. Some faculty suggested asking students if they would like to know how to improve their performance, similar to permission-based marketing. Because 11% of faculty suggested that a portion of students do not read nor act on feedback, this approach has the advantage of discovering those who will use the coaching and improving their commitment to do so. It may be more difficult in asynchronous learning, however.

## Reduce Delay

One faculty member made the suggestion to manage the workload by coaching/grading as the assignments arrive instead of waiting for all of them to be submitted. Faculty maintain their energy and mental alertness when using this approach and can find that it reduces the perceived workload as well as making the actual time spent more productive.

## Coaching Support

The final suggestion may result in the most creative and immediate solutions to reducing time while preserving quality: faculty may support each other by sharing problems, opportunities, and improvements to coaching. FACDEV 112 suggests forming coaching circles that could be done through email or zoom. These faculty support teams would comment on demand or through regular meetings and share best practices.

## Conclusion

When writing their plans, faculty expressed a concern for managing the time that coaching could add, but also expressed their belief in being able to address the challenge. They then offered the suggestions summarized in this report as well as many others.

Many faculty commented on the power of coaching in transforming grading into feedback that students would consume and act upon. When considered with the time taken for grading, the coaching discipline formats the feedback into a welcome and impactful form, and thus has the potential, after one adapts to the method, to require only a modest increase in overall time. Time that could be reduced overall through the suggestions made herein.

## References

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