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Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy - Lowering DFW rates for Large Lecture Courses

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I teach History 140 which is a large lecture, general education class of about 150 people. It traditionally has a high DFW rate. In Spring 2019, I made a concerted effort to lower my DFW rate. In the past it was around 27%. This took substantially more work on my part; I spent an extra 22 hours in addition to the regular hours spent teaching History 140 to achieve this result. However, I was able to lower my rate to 19.1%.

Here are just a few things that I did extra this quarter to lower this rate:

1. Had an amazing Supplemental Instructor (SI), gave extra credit for attending SI, and continuously reminded students to go to SI each session.
2. Emailed students prior to the Census date who had not yet done any work for the class to make sure that they would drop before census. Had one student removed from my class roster prior to census date because of absolutely no work completed in the class by that point.
3. Added additional extra credit opportunities.
4. Increased how much extra credit was worth in the class.
5. Reminded students to complete extra credit regularly.
6. Had a final date that extra credit was due, but then extended the deadline another 48 hours until the evening after their final exam, resulting in an extra 28 submissions.
7. Individually emailed 38 students who were destined for Ds and Fs the day before the final and emphasized that they should do the extra credit at the last minute so that it would make a difference in their grades.
8. Regularly emailed individual students throughout the quarter who had missed assignments or who hadn't checked in. This often resulted in 30-40 emails at once. It was a lot of extra "caring" or "hand-holding," but it did get a small portion of them to work just a little harder. They did not feel anonymous.
9. Allowed students to retake their map quiz and emailed about 30 students individually who had only gotten a 0-2 out of 10 points to petition each one to redo the assignment.
10. Tried to meet with all 12 repeaters of History 140 to find out what went wrong the first time and let them know I wanted to help them this time.
11. Individually emailed or met with students whose Tophat grades were low from them not participating or completing the homeworks.
12. Found the students whose Tophat grades were low because they couldn't afford the 28\$ and got Tophat to give them access for free.
13. Watched the submissions for the notetaking assignments and individually emailed students who hadn't submitted yet to remind them to submit by the final, final deadline.

In short, it was a lot of extra, time-consuming effort continuously watching and bugging the lowest level performers and giving them (as well as others) additional opportunities to submit or redo assignments (within reason). They could not anonymously disappear and it got them to work just a bit harder. Plus, I did get substantially more students to submit extra credit than in previous years.

But it did pay off. For example, I “saved” one particular student who will remain anonymous this quarter by sending him multiple emails, meeting with him to find out what the problems were, getting him a free Tophat subscription, and extending the extra credit deadline. And he ended up squeaking out a C-, but he could have been an F without this additional work on my part. He emailed me saying:

“Hello Professor Liszka, here is the extra credit assignment. It was a pleasure attending your class and thank you so much for your concerns about my grade, many professors aren't like that. I truly wish you the best!”

Also of my 12 students repeating the class, 8 of them got a B or C this time, and one passed with a D.

In short, I think it’s worth it for students like the emailer above and the repeaters. But it needs to be recognized within our workload because it is unsustainable otherwise.

--Kate Liszka