ROLLING WITH THE SEMESTER: AN ASSIGNMENT DEADLINE SYSTEM FOR IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES AND REGAINING CONTROL OF THE WORKFLOW

Keri Withington,
Pellissippi State Community College
klwithington@pstcc.edu

Heather Lee Schroeder
Pellissippi State Community College
hlschroeder@pstcc.edu

Abstract

Traditional assignments place the locus of power on the instructors who provide the preparatory instruction, set all of the assignment requirements, dictate the timeline, and assign grades. Frustrated with both the imbalance of power within the classroom and the demands of grading an entire class's worth of assignments at one time, we questioned the efficacy of this traditional approach. Instead, we researched and implemented a student-centered approach that allows students to help determine their own deadlines. In researching and implementing this alternative system for assignments, we discovered that it also increased student engagement and equity within the classroom.

Keywords: Restorative justice, rolling deadlines, variable deadlines, assignment pedagogy, classroom equity, workload management, accommodation plans, respect students, student centered

Instructors, particularly those working with at-risk or underprepared populations, hope for transformation to happen within a classroom setting. College instructors not only look for assignments that meet their expectations, but also hope those assignments will reflect higher order learning skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. In addition, they grapple with how to best invite students to take responsibility for their educational goals and to engage with the material. Instructors turn to technology, innovation, and other methods to meet these goals, but they are often frustrated when these techniques do not address all of their teaching concerns. No matter how well planned a lesson is, or how carefully written an assignment sheet is, many students fail to meet all of the expected learning outcomes and to fully engage with the learning process. We maintain that these breakdowns in the classroom process may not result from simple failure of our students to properly engage with the work they undertake in the classroom (the student-as-lazy model) or from failure on our part to be innovative enough to reach our audience. Instead, we assert that these breakdowns are related to our method of classroom management. For many instructors, department or individual traditions – instead of research – govern classroom procedures, policies, and processes. For example, setting due dates is often a matter of convenience for the instructor, with little thought beyond how to load-balance one's semester and space out assignments. However in using that model, particularly in the composition classroom, we ignore the essential components of student success: personal responsibility for one's coursework; engagement with the process of planning, drafting, and revision; and a sense of the student as a whole person with competing demands upon his or her time.

We have engaged in the process of questioning the efficacy of traditional classroom management. As a result of our qualitative and quantitative research, a systematic reevaluation of our assignment sheets, and several semesters of purposeful assignment adjustments, we have moved from the time-honored tradition of instructor-established due dates to a rolling deadline system that empowers students to manage their own course production. The benefits of such an approach are multifaceted, and our work suggests that rethinking the student not as an object to be managed but as a person to be encouraged and guided is a winning strategy with positive long-term impacts on student success. Moreover, once mastered, rolling deadlines can be more convenient for instructors because they pace the number of incoming assignments and better balance the semester's grading load.

The traditional approach to assignments is familiar to students and instructors alike because it is backed by centuries of largely unquestioned use. Instructors create assignments – including deadlines, word counts, and other requirements – for students, who usually have little control over assigned coursework. This authoritarian method is how we, the authors, were given assignments throughout school, college, and even much of graduate school. Records indicate that this method has been widely accepted throughout Western history. Models of ancient Greek and Roman education reveal that teachers lectured their students, who were responsible for learning from them. For centuries, education in Europe was often associated with churches, where teachers held the double authority of both education and religion. During the German Enlightenment, founders of pedagogy Schleiermacher and Herbart still worked within the framework that education "is

mainly concerned with the intentions the older generation entertains for the younger one" (Kenklies 267). Their work reveals the assumptions regarding education that were handed down to them, namely that education is a top-to-bottom business in which instructors make decisions for their students. It also reveals practices still in use. When sociologists began studying education in the twentieth century, they quickly observed the standard power dynamic. Educational practices were built on the foundational belief that "the teacher must have the power in the classroom" (Waller, Manke 1). The historical classroom contained instructors who dispensed knowledge, assignments, and grades to their students. Upon graduation, students received a certification based on their ability to meet the standards set by their instructors and the institution. This method upholds the standard that all of the power in the classroom resides with the instructor. This unilateral concept of power can be useful in terms of classroom management. However, there is little research to support the efficacy of this authoritarian approach within a community college setting.

Without sound research to support its implementation, the best explanation for the proliferation of assignments created solely by instructors is the simplest: tradition. Instructors in higher education are experts in their fields, but they are usually not required to have any qualifications in teaching. While some graduate school programs do require pedagogy classes or teaching experiences, not all college instructors have benefited from those programs. Without a background in teaching theory, therefore, most instructors draw inspiration from their previous teachers. As Pula and Stitt explain in their research on grading practices, "Teachers often replicate what they experienced as students" (qtd. in

Brein 1). The system propagates itself, and, at least in some ways, it works. Creating traditional assignment sheets allows instructors to easily schedule both their assignments and class activities. These standardized assignment dates are easy to organize and, once created, can be used semester after semester, seemingly reducing the instructor's preparation time. Additionally, these types of assignments are perceived as fair because they are homogenous: all students receive the same assignment and are evaluated using the same criteria. This system of teaching and assignments is so entrenched in our ideas about education that it is often difficult for instructors to imagine other possibilities. Unfortunately, despite the weight of history holding traditional assignment design in place, this authoritarian approach to assignment criteria, notably deadlines, is not supported by current research into pedagogical best practices, nor does it contribute to an equitable learning environment.

As we considered the impact of deadlines on our classroom environments, as well as on our students' learning and success, we found it important to review the existing literature and research relevant to the topic of rolling deadlines. Another key interest is to shift the locus of control to the students; therefore, we also reviewed scholarly literature on the topic of empowering student ownership of their learning. In *How Learning Works,* a variety of classroom approaches are explored, culminating in a discussion of how to create self-directed, empowered learners (Ambrose et al.). Similarly, Aspelmeier et al. illuminated the importance of identifying the locus of control among first-generation college students. European universities have adapted their programs to give students more "targeted freedom" than American institutions, with some universities giving students the freedom to

establish their own research interests, learning approaches, and deadlines (Van Gorp 3, 6). While sources on deadlines within academia are less common than we expected, we also found literature addressing deadlines within the workplace to be useful. Pollock, for example, addressed deadlines in *Supervision* magazine a decade ago. His list of reasons why employees miss deadlines, as well as his admonition that "deadline setters" should ensure that their expectations are realistic, are still relevant. There are many sources within business publications and websites, including *Business Management Daily* and *The Association for Talent Development*, that address the obstacles employees face when trying to meet deadlines, how employees can manage their time in order to meet deadlines, and how managers can better set deadlines (Franko; The HR Specialist). For our students, the classroom is an important workplace where they learn both the hard and soft skills they will need in future careers.

When considering best practices within the classroom, it is important to note that classroom management techniques directly impact students and their choices, and thus shape success and failure. As Ellen Boucher, Assistant Professor at Amherst College, points out, "The problem with a rigid policy…is that it compounds students' stress at a time when they are already overwhelmed. It is tailor-made to produce the sort of behavior that has frustrated professors for generations: shoddy work (submitted just to get something in), panicked cheating, or disappearing students (from the course, or worse, from the university altogether)." These are hardly the outcomes that please a dedicated instructor. In the composition classroom, the problem compounds because the process of learning the rules and expectations of the assignment, planning an essay, and writing it is one that often

overwhelms students and encourages their sense of learned helplessness. Every composition instructor has heard a drowning student wail, “But I just can’t write. I’m not any good at it.” While it is easy to bemoan the shortcomings of college students or the many sociopolitical forces that have weakened academic standards for incoming college freshmen, instructors should not assume that we are without responsibility.

Thus, it was imperative that we – as instructors – carefully examine our classroom policies and procedures to ensure that we generate a space in which the important work of learning can be done. Rather than harshly enforcing deadlines at the expense of the student, we want to create a rigorous environment where the focus is on creating an exemplary finished product that has undergone exacting planning, precise writing, and meticulous rewriting. Reframing our own mindsets on this issue required us to accept that even though we were proud of our work as instructors, we needed to learn to do better. One way that we could improve our instructional methods was to reevaluate our own assignment sheets, even the ones that we thought were successful. Just as we tell students to go through the entire writing process in order to keep improving their drafts, we needed to spend more time on the process of writing our own assignments. We looked at each major assignment sheet for several key elements: an introduction to the assignment, a clear list of requirements, grading standards, a timeline, and implementable instructions, often including an example. The need for thorough assignment sheets also needs to be balanced with practicality. If students are given a twenty-page assignment sheet for a two-page essay, for example, many of them will not finish reading the assignment sheet. On the other

hand, if they are given only a half-page assignment sheet without any details, they will often guess at our expectations.

As well as clarifying our assignment sheets, we reevaluated the assignments themselves. We questioned what skills we really wanted our students to demonstrate with each assignment and if the assignment could better help them to develop those skills. Over the course of several semesters, we evaluated the effectiveness of our assignment sheets, adjusting the layout and content according to student feedback and outcomes. At times, we asked students what could make the assignments better, and they responded insightfully. Students also responded positively to the respect implied by asking for their feedback on a course element. Students repeatedly reported wanting more control over their own workload. Many freshmen also reported that it was important to them that college assignments and classrooms feel different from high school, where they had little control over their education.

One way to achieve a balanced, humane, and student-focused solution to the problem of deadlines is to implement rolling deadlines. In this model, students are given a range of due dates from which to pick. There are a number of ways to implement this deadline system; however all are intended to empower students to evaluate their workload and to choose a time that works best for them. The basic concept provides a clear framework upon which to build a harmonious student-centered classroom environment.

Implementing a rolling deadline system is an opportunity to both increase academic freedom for the instructors and create an environment of learning and success for students. Instructors often work with absolutes; syllabi, college policies, rubrics, and even

assignment sheets are designed to be precise. Yet everyone benefits from adding some flexibility or variance to this system. The key is to find the methodology that works best for each course, instructor style, and student population. While some student populations, especially at private four-year institutions, are able to focus just on their studies, community college students are often balancing myriad demands on their time and energy. Many students are parents: research shows that 26% of undergraduate students are parents with dependent children, with that percentage being even higher at many community colleges (White). Child care is a major concern for these students, as is balancing their children's needs with college work. If they can have more control over their academic schedules, then they can consider deadlines for assignments in relation to parent-teacher meetings, childcare availability, and other parenting concerns. The majority of college students also work, with one in three college students working full-time ("Community College Facts"). Allowing students the flexibility to work with, rather than against, their work schedules can make the difference between a passing and failing grade. Other factors that influence assignment deadline needs include involvement with extracurricular activities or athletics, holidays and religious celebrations, deadlines in other classes, and academic preparedness. The more that we communicated with our students about our assignments, the more we understood that their success was influenced by many factors beyond academic ability. In researching, performing small trials, and fully integrating this approach into our own full-time teaching loads, we have identified multiple ways to successfully incorporate rolling deadlines into our class design.

We began rolling deadline trials in our literature and composition classrooms during the Fall 2016 semester. Neither of us used the method in all of our courses (eight total between both of us), choosing instead to allow the courses with traditional deadlines to act as control subjects. At Pellissippi State Community College, the typical pass rate during the fall semester is approximately 59% in composition courses. The pass rate is lower during spring semester. During the Fall 2016, Spring 2017, and Summer 2017 semesters, we taught a mix of composition and literature classes. Together, we trialed the use of rolling deadlines in multiple sections of English 1010/Composition I, creating a sample of over 100 students. Overall, our English 1010 classes had a 77% pass rate after we introduced rolling deadlines. This is significantly higher than the institutional average pass rate, as well as being higher than the pass rate in our control classes. Between us, we also taught 91 English 1020/Composition II students. When we used rolling deadlines with these English 1020 students, 71% of students passed. We also incorporated rolling deadlines into multiple literature classes. In our sample of 103 literature students, 81% of students passed. While many of the benefits of this approach are qualitative, this quantitative data also reveals the efficacy of this approach. Indeed, we felt that the trials were beneficial to both us and our students, and we were surprised by how much pass rates increased.

While a rolling deadline approach can be incorporated into nearly any assignment, student presentations are a good starting point because time constraints often necessitate using more than one class period. Moreover, courses across a wide range of disciplines require in-class presentations. We began trialing rolling deadlines on a small scale with

presentations. It was initially easier for us, as writing instructors, to give up some control over presentations than over essays, especially as presentations lasted for more than one class period regardless of our instructional approach. Rather than having presentations continue for more than one class period by chance, we decided to allow students to choose their presentation days. We tested this in single classes with both individual and group presentations.

In this scenario, groups are encouraged to sign up on a first-come, first-served basis which places the responsibility of choosing and sticking to the deadline within their control. It is not uncommon in a limited deadline situation to see students negotiating with one another to obtain the date they prefer, thereby cementing valuable inter-peer relationships that will serve them well throughout their education. This can be done using 10-15 minutes of class time for discussion and sign-up. It also can be done online. One of us chose to use a web-based interface for deadline sign-up. When the capacity was reached in a deadline category, the students could no longer register for their preferred date. In this situation, the first draft deadline was linked to an in-person consultation with the instructor, so students were required to choose their date several days after the introduction of the assignment. Students who did not choose a deadline were, by default, slotted into open times at the instructor's discretion. Not surprisingly, most students took responsibility for choosing their deadline since they did not want to take a chance at receiving a date that was incompatible with their schedule. In-person deadline negotiations offer additional opportunities to build classroom cohesion and relationships between

students, but the online sign-up system offers flexibility for instructors limited by time constraints.

Another way to distribute presentation dates is for instructors to ask students to give their several top choices in order. Instructors then assign dates based on preferences. Ideally, students will all receive their preferred due date. However, if too many students selected the same date, instructors can assign students to their second choice. Both of these approaches balance the need of the instructor to effectively schedule class time and the needs of the students. Although our original fear was the students would all opt for the last presentation opportunity, students actually self-assign themselves to a variety of dates. Some students prefer to present first, either because they are nervous or simply want to “get the assignment out of the way.” Other students, of course, pick the latest possible date in hopes of procrastinating. Many students, though, thoughtfully pick the middle dates as well. This approach encourages them to evaluate their own schedules and develop their own time management skills. By considering due dates for major assignments in other classes, work commitments, and other demands on their time, students are able to pick the deadline that works best with their schedule. Because we both use scaffolded assignment structures – requiring students to turn in their proposal, one or more drafts, and a final draft, as well as to attend a mandatory meeting with the instructor – the student must reflect upon and determine which date will allow him or her to successfully complete the assigned work. One indication that the process works is that instructor intervention was rarely needed to encourage or correct students. In comparison to the traditional deadline process, we encountered fewer administrative problems, such as excuses for late work,

missed assignments, or unfinished drafts turned in as rough or final drafts. This self-reflective process on the part of students nurtures their budding executive management skills and engages metacognition activities, skills that are good predictors of future success.

Whether working individually or collaboratively, students and instructors benefit when students choose their own presentation dates, even if choosing from a list of dates provided by the instructor. In group projects, students must work together – improving the collaboration skills they will need in professional settings – to find the dates that work best for the entire group. Students' future employers expect such collaboration skills, particularly collaborative writing, even though they are rarely explicitly taught. In our own work, we expect and even demand flexibility, yet we are often unwilling to provide that same courtesy to our students. In an employment situation, "working professionals – including instructors – learn early on to distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' deadlines" that govern their output (Boucher). In many ways, rolling deadlines instill this skill of discernment that will become an important component of students' success in the working world. In discussions with companies that provide internships and jobs to our graduates, employers from diverse fields state that they want our graduates to have better collaboration and critical thinking skills. We need to do a better job of teaching students how to work together.

As education leader, Phillip Schlechty believed students are more engaged, and therefore demonstrate increased perseverance, when they are given increased opportunities for affiliation (i.e., group work or peer interaction). In this model, learning is not something bestowed by the instructors upon the students. Instructors are crucial to

student learning, but "it is the performance of the student that should be the assumed cause of learning" (Schlechty 3). Allowing students to practice these executive skills by choosing their dates encourages students to create their own learning experiences. The practice also results in students who are better prepared for and more engaged in their presentations. The importance of metacognition skills cannot be underestimated in the development of a student's locus of control. By understanding how an assignment fits into their educational plan and empowering them to complete the assignment in a manner that makes sense for their own creative and intellectual process, we are supporting students in developing the skills employers most value.

Moreover, our teaching colleagues in Europe and Australia are already using deadline flexibility with good results, particularly for nontraditional students (Patton). The University of Leicester, for example, has a standard policy for late work that includes the following clause: "If, however, life has conspired against you to prevent you from meeting an assignment deadline don't despair" ("Late Submission of Coursework"). While major assignment dates are often self-assigned to begin with, they have an institutional policy that goes on to explain how students can receive extra time on assignments when needed. This policy integrates with a larger teaching philosophy in English universities, where individuation and student-conducted research are prioritized. The resounding success of this approach is at least in part responsible for the university's impressive 93% graduation rate ("University of Leicester: Summary"). The average graduation rate at public institutions in the US, by comparison, is only 59% ("Fast Facts"). In fact, research supports a shift in our classroom management practices regarding deadlines. The accompanying

boost in both student attitude and work quality is a welcome improvement to the classroom environment.

Although using rolling deadlines for presentations allows instructors to quickly implement the idea into their classroom, rolling deadlines can be applied to the essay-writing process with some additional planning. The task of doing so can be broken into key steps to help the instructor and students understand the scope of the assignment, and to allow the instructor to work backwards from the last acceptable due date to the first acceptable due date. In other words, instructors will engage with the basics of project management theory. Moreover, when instructors provide an overview of this process to students, the instructor's explanation can help students to understand how one must plan and execute projects within the world of work. In the classic four-stages theory of project management, we break down our process into startup, planning, execution (doing), and close down phases. As managers of an asynchronous project, we determine how long we believe each of these phases will take. Although we do some of this work under a traditional deadline approach, the truth often more closely resembles a guesstimate with time allotments that may or may not match student capabilities. In this way, the first task of retooling assignments to fit the rolling deadline model is to examine our actual expected outcomes and our expectations of time spent. Whenever possible, sharing those underlying expectations with students helps orient them to many of the unspoken rules of college which can lead to greater success and buy-in from them (Payne 1). After exploring these assumptions about our assignments, we have broken down the planning process for

students. Making the planning and writing process transparent to them models good writing practice and helps students learn to manage their own workload.

Guiding the students through the planning process to assignment completion can be accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, we have asked students to turn in a project plan, an outline, a rough draft, and a final draft with extensive revisions. In other situations, asking the students to turn in a project plan, portions of the rough draft (broken into sensible increments), and a final draft with revisions has been a successful strategy. In adopting this method, however, instructors must leave behind the assign-it-and-grade-the-final-draft approach. Rolling deadlines require engagement with students during the implementation phase so that students can receive the full benefit of the process; for us, that consists of a comment/meeting phase between the drafting and final rewriting phase. In practice, we approach it differently in each class, and we both provide some type of feedback (typically written comments and a one-on-one meeting) for each student. An in-class peer review workshop of portions of rough drafts could be another approach to this process. Students can either be placed in groups by deadline, so that they are all at the same stage at the writing process, or they can all be mixed, allowing students to see classmates' work at different stages of the assignment. These in-class peer evaluations were most effective when we provided guidelines for students to follow. Many students mistake peer evaluation for line editing, so they either get frustrated that they are not grammar experts or get caught up correcting every error. Therefore, it is important to frame peer evaluations as a skill-developing exercise that improves both their critical thinking and their editing skills.

To guide our students in this process, our re-written assignment sheets provide a checklist of key elements that each essay must contain. That checklist can be used as a tool for peer evaluation, along with a few guiding questions specific to the depth and development of the essay's topic, use of evidence, and research. By giving students a framework within which to evaluate drafts, we have found that students have enjoyed the process of peer evaluation more, and they have received more helpful feedback on their drafts. Through the process of engaging with other students' work, students develop their critical thinking, organizational, and editing skills. As a result, they are better prepared to revise their own work in the future. This self-reflective aspect of the peer review is important, in particular, for advanced students who find that they give more feedback to their peers than they receive on their own drafts.

It can initially seem unfair to have students completing the same assignment but potentially having different lengths of time to finish their work. There are several ways to address this potential for unfairness. One method that can be used is to vary the word count based on project length. This works particularly well with large long-term projects. We have implemented this by adding 250 words to the required length per due date. Students who choose the earliest deadline will then have the least amount of time in which to work, but they will also have the shortest paper to write. Students who choose later due dates may have more time, sometimes significantly more time, than their classmates, but they are also required to write a longer paper, typically in increments of 250-500 additional words for each later due date. The learning objectives and quality expectations remain the same for all students, but students must consider both workload and time

management when planning their projects. We also experimented with a standard paper length but variations in due dates. In this method, all of the final papers are given a standard, class-wide due date, but the deadlines for the scaffolded draft portions of the assignment were moved closer together. Students have individual timelines for completing the preliminary stages, but all turn in the final paper at the same time. In this case, the focus was on process: idea generation, research, drafting, rewriting/revision, and editing. The final draft essays were read and graded holistically. This approach encouraged students to learn and to practice valuable planning skills that they reported served them well in their remaining assignments in the class. This approach works well in composition classes that require frequent essays and assignment-specific class instruction.

Using a rolling deadline approach also improves the learning environment for students with varying levels of ability and accommodation plans. Moreover, many community college students who would benefit from accommodation plans simply do not have them; IEPs and other accommodation plans do not automatically follow high school students to college, and many college students lack the means to receive official diagnoses and documentation. These students can and should be referred to other campus resources, such as the disability services office, but we are still left with students who struggle in the classroom because they do not currently have legal access to the accommodations that will help them to do their best work. Other students are averse to being labelled or fear the long-term consequences of being considered disabled. For these students, a class that allows them more control over their workload can be life-changing. Giving them the control to choose their own assignment deadline means that they can choose a timeline that will

allow them to showcase their abilities rather than limiting them to a due date that simply may not be achievable for them. It is an empowering experience that can then boost confidence and student skills, creating a cycle of success that can spread to their other classes. While privacy laws make it difficult to know exactly how many students have official accommodation plans, research shows that roughly 2% of current college students have accommodation plans for LD, ADD, and ADHD alone, and this number is growing (Vickers 3).

In our experience, the majority of accommodation plans include a provision for extra time on exams and/or assignments. While accommodation plans are confidential, students who need them often feel exposed because traditional assignments make it obvious when someone is not following the strictly prescribed schedule. This can be demoralizing for students, creating a situation that compounds their disabilities with an environment that can seem as though it is singling them out or shaming them. This situation not only negatively impacts their learning experience, it also creates more stress and work for both the students and instructors. The students and instructors must agree to and manage alternate due dates or time limits that are the exception to the rest of the class. Conversely, using a rolling deadline approach respectfully integrates all students into the learning environment. Accommodations such as extra time are discretely and seamlessly included because students have differing due dates anyway. This empowers a traditionally vulnerable portion of the student population while decreasing the actual work-load on instructors because extending time no longer disrupts a rigid schedule. Students with accommodation plans reported in one-on-one meetings that the flexibility of the rolling

deadline system created an inclusive space, and that unlike in other classes, their accommodation plan did not become a point of subtle tension between the student and the instructor. Although this evidence is anecdotal, it speaks to issues of classroom climate that can impact the perceived accessibility of course materials. Mere compliance with accommodation plans often meets the letter of the law, but not its spirit. Rolling deadlines allow instructors to move beyond rote observance of these plans, which can be vital to the long-term success and wellbeing of students with disabilities.

When adopting rolling deadlines, we recommend identifying a method that is sustainable over the long term and that supports students in their learning goals. The final step of this project management approach, the close down phase, consists of grading the finished draft. We each approach this task in a variety of ways, but one possibility is to use a rubric-based grading method that provides comprehensive comments on key aspects of the paper's finished product, presumably areas that have been addressed in the rewriting process. This allows the instructor to focus the bulk of her energy and supervision of the student in the implementation phase (as is typical in the project management model), where such leadership is key to building long-term and lasting skillsets that will serve students well throughout their educational careers and beyond. To better meet student needs during the implementation phase, instructors can improve their grading speed on the finished assignment by quickly viewing the changes to the final draft. To do this instructors must collect the rough and final drafts in Microsoft Word format and use the Compare Documents function to view how the two documents differ. This allows for a comprehensive examination of the student's revision process and expedites the final

grading process. For some instructors, adopting a business-influenced model will seem counterintuitive, but there is value in shifting one's existing teaching template and challenging oneself to work up to and beyond one's comfort zone, for it is within this zone of proximal development that we as instructors can become a student in our own process.

Wholesale changes to methodology that has, for the most part, served an instructor well can seem not only frightening but not worth the chance of failure. Thus, such shifts in fundamental processes must be grounded in careful planning and sound pedagogical reasoning. As Jessica Townsend, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering and Associate Dean for Curriculum and Academic Programs at Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering, points out, effective change must be based in three key assumptions: the development of students' intrinsic motivation, the use of project-based learning, and a focus on "user-centered design" (Berrett, "A Tiny Engineering"). Rolling deadlines meet all three of these criteria if placed within two educational paradigms: restorative justice in the classroom and student-centered learning environments.

Restorative Justice (RJ) as practiced within an educational environment focuses on ways in which educators can "create educational cultures that emphasize social engagement rather than social control" (Morrison qtd. in Evans and Vaandering 12). Noted RJ researchers Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering explain that RJ in the classroom values "relationships rather than rules, people rather than policies,…capacity rather than…ability, creating meaning rather than imposing knowledge, asking rather than telling, and well-being rather than merit-based success" (12). Lest one mistakenly assume that such an environment does not value rigor or that it invites chaos, it is important to note the

value of chaos as a builder of creativity and engagement. In other words, any chaos that such an approach might invite is to be honored and valued for its transformational capacity. Chaos is almost certainly an expected outcome in the earliest implementation of a new idea, but without it we can never hone our process. Brenda Burmeister points out that "[w]e learn early on that risk in education is unacceptable – both as teachers and students," but that it is "our responsibility as educators to create an environment where they have the luxury to fail and therefore engender discovery and innovation." We argue that such an approach benefits instructors as much as it does students.

The outgrowth of this RJ-influenced approach is the creation of a just and equitable classroom. Justice as used in this context "embraces respect, dignity, and mutual concern as a way to honor the worth of all...[including] examining asymmetrical relationships and finding ways to provide for the needs of everyone in those relationships" (Evans and Vaandering 43-44). Letting students determine their deadlines and manage their workload in a way that makes sense for them is, in some ways, the ultimate act of providing a just classroom environment. Students gain a sense of ownership for their own well-being and are given the dignity of being able to act upon their needs both as a student and a person. Furthermore, RJ allows us to move away from the one-size-fits-all model of equality to an equity model that centers the idea that "everyone gets what they need in order to experience well-being" (Evans and Vaandering 46). Students come to our classrooms with varying experiences, needs, and struggles; it makes sense, particularly in a writing classroom, to meet them where they are and, to the extent possible, customize their educational experience. In this way, rolling deadlines give instructors a tool to do exactly

that. The deadlines are just and equitable because they take into account student needs while providing an equitable and personalized solution to meeting those needs. This, in turn, helps instructors develop healthier relationships with their students and create harmony within the classroom, primarily by shifting the locus of control from the instructor to the student. Now both parties are expected to manage their responsibilities: teachers manage the delivery of lessons and the feedback on assignments, and students manage the act of learning and the creation of essays and homework for the instructor's comments. In the ideal implementation of the rolling deadline model, this feedback loop is transformed from one of punitive enforcement to one of trusting reciprocal interaction. This process centers the student, rather than the instructor, in the classroom because it shifts both decision-making ability and responsibility out of the sole realm of the instructor.

Certainly change of this nature within the classroom is not without risk, both to one's sense of authority and to one's existing lesson plans. It requires not only a paradigm shift for the instructor but a culture shift among the students. To be clear, students chafe under deadlines, but they have been conditioned to expect them and to expect that they, as students, are merely actors in a larger system that is beyond their control. Unfortunately, this perception will ultimately harm them when they enter the white-collar working world and realize that often their day-to-day work is self-directed with very little oversight or input from their supervisors. In this way, the rolling deadline model mimics the nature of the modern work world and helps students develop key skillsets that will serve them well in their careers. This serves, too, to create an additional layer of relevance to the

composition classroom; instructors can talk about why deadlines are organized on a rolling basis and examine the metacognitive tasks associated with managing one's own workflow. A class that students once perceived as "the curricular equivalent of eating their vegetables, the unappetizing fare they must endure before they get to the interesting parts of their educations" may now be viewed as an important cornerstone in a student's future success (Berrett, "At U. of Maryland"). This student-centered approach thus serves the dual function of empowering students within the classroom and preparing them for future success.

This empowerment of students means that students are more invested in their own learning because they have more control over their educational experience. In our classes, we have seen student engagement increase as students come to not only care about their grades, but their entire college experience. The quality of student work has improved, and students are more likely to communicate effectively with us throughout the semester. Moreover, students stressed by deadlines outside of their control are more likely to cheat or plagiarize. With academic dishonesty on the rise nationwide, Laurie L. Hazard, Director of the Academic Center for Excellence at Bryant University, notes that instructors have a vested interest in reinforcing "boundaries [that are] clear and consistent, of educating students about them, of enforcing them" (qtd. in Pérez-Peña). It is easy to abdicate responsibility and blame students, or even students' backgrounds, for plagiarism. Educational commentators Jean M. Twenge (author of *Generation Me*) and Tricia Bertram Gallant (author of *Creating the Ethical Academy*), for example, have blamed student plagiarism on parents who have failed to instill ethics and on students who lack a

firm ethical foundation from which to work. This shifts the issue from an academic skill to a moral shortcoming. We find this approach particularly problematic in its judgment of student backgrounds and families in ways that could easily be misdirected against first generation college students or other students with families judged as "other" or "less than." Additionally, Richard Pérez-Peña argues that this view suggests that students are not to be trusted in their educational process or otherwise empowered with the tools to make their degree-seeking activities meaningful to their needs. If we want to empower our students, we must respect them as autonomous adults capable of contributing to their own educational experience, regardless of their familial or educational background. We also should not belittle our responsibility as educators; if plagiarism is an increasing problem in our classrooms, we must examine our own classroom practices.

We assert that a strong component of the boundary-setting process, particularly within the composition classroom, is to create deadlines that are realistic, that emphasize process over product, and that empower students to manage their own learning process. By breaking the paper planning and drafting process into steps that are controlled by the student, students will be less likely to turn to cheating as an alternative means of finishing the work. In our rolling deadline classes, we both report a lower incidence of plagiarism in our courses. A typical semester yields up a dozen or more incidents for each of us, but that number has been reduced to half or less. During the summer semester when plagiarism often peaks because of the compressed time-frame, we reported only one instance of plagiarism.

What is particularly exciting about rolling deadlines is that it is a simple and modest change to existing processes. Instructors do not need to learn new technology or attend intensive training to successfully implement rolling deadlines. Nor do they need to significantly rewrite their course materials. With little effort beyond the time it takes to provide a spoken and written explanation of the process and to develop a rolling deadline schedule, an instructor can implement the method. The minimal effort involved in implementation yields large benefits for instructors, particularly instructors of grading intensive courses, such as composition. We, like most instructors, have often found ourselves buried under seemingly insurmountable piles of grading. Traditional assignments mean that everyone in the class, and often in multiple sections, submits their assignments at the same time. This places immense pressure on the instructors to grade in bulk, often resulting in prioritizing speed over constructive feedback. Additionally, the inevitable delays associated with large amounts of grading cause students to wait longer – and complain more – before receiving their grades. When we freed ourselves from the constraints of the traditional assignment system and switched to rolling deadlines, we found ourselves far less stressed. Instead of receiving dozens, sometimes hundreds, of assignments at a time, we received submissions from only a portion of the class on each possible deadline, meaning that we are able to respond more quickly and provide better, more individualized feedback. These benefits to us are in addition to the benefits that our students experience, and we have seen students blossom when they are given more ownership over their learning. This approach creates a more equitable classroom that centers on the student and fosters the student's development of a wide range of skills

beyond the course's learning outcomes, including effective collaboration and executive function abilities. The rolling deadline system offers many transformative possibilities for both students and instructors.

Works Cited

Ambrose, Susan, et al. *How Learning Works: 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Aspelmeier, Jeffery. "Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, College Adjustment, and GPA Among First- and Continuing-Generation Students: A Moderator Model of Generational Status." *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 53, no. 7, 2012, pp. 755–781. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41679547.

Berrett, Dan. "At U. of Maryland, an Effort to Make Introductory Courses Extraordinary." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 17 Dec. 2012, www.chronicle.com/article/At-U-of-Maryland-an-Effort/136317. Accessed 30 Mar. 2017.

Berrett, Dan. "A Tiny Engineering College Shakes Up Teaching." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 30 Sept. 2013, www.chronicle.com/article/A-Tiny-Engineering-College/141875. Accessed 30 Mar. 2017.

Brein, Samuel. "Is Fair Grading Futile? Evaluating and Rethinking Assessment." *NISOD Innovation Abstracts*, vol. 38, no. 26, 3 Nov. 2016, pp.1-2.

Boucher, Ellen. "It's Time to Ditch Our Deadlines." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 22 Aug. 2016, www.chronicle.com/article/It-s-Time-to-Ditch-Our/237530. Accessed 30 Mar. 2017.

Burmeister, Brenda. "What We Risk if We Risk Nothing at All." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 Mar. 2014, www.chronicle.com/article/A-Tiny-Engineering-College/141875. Accessed 30 Mar. 2017.

"Community College Facts." *Community College Research Center.* Teacher's College: Columbia University, http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html. Accessed 5 Aug. 2017.

Dochy, Filip. "The Use of Self-, Peer, and Co-Assessment in Higher Education: a Review." *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1999, pp. 331-350.

Evans, Katherine, and Dorothy Vaandering. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education: Fostering Responsibility, Healing, and Hope in Schools*. Good Books, 2016.

"Fast Facts." National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40. Accessed 8 Aug. 2017.

Franko, Amy. "Setting Realistic Deadlines." *Association for Talent Development,* 17 Dec. 2014, https://www.td.org/Publications/Blogs/L-and-D-Blog/2014/12/Setting-Realistic-Deadlines. Accessed 8 Aug. 2017.

Kenklies, Karsten. "Educational Theory as Topological Rhetoric: The Concepts of Pedagogy of Johann Friedrich Herbart and Friedrich Schleiermacher." *Studies in Philosophy & Education,* vol. 31, no.3, May 2012, pp.265-273.

"Late Submissions of Coursework." *Student and Academic Services, University of Leicester*, http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/sas2/assessments/late-submission. Accessed 8 Aug. 2017.

Manke, Mary Phillips. *Classroom Power Relations: Understanding Student-Teacher Interaction*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997.

Patton, Mark Allan. "The Importance of Being Flexible with Assignment Deadlines." *Higher Education in Europe*, vol. 25, no. 3, 14 July 2010, pp. 417–423. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi:10.1080/713669270. Accessed 1 Apr. 2017.

Payne, Ruby K. "Understanding and Working with Students and Adults from Poverty." *Aha! Process*, Aha! Process, Inc., 2003, www.ahaprocess.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Understanding-Poverty-Ruby-Payne-Poverty-Series-I-IV.pdf. Accessed 31 Mar. 2017.

Pérez-Peña, Richard. "Studies Find More Students Cheating, With High Achievers No Exception." *The New York Times*, 7 Sept. 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/09/08/education/studies-show-more-students-cheat-even-high-achievers.html. Accessed 30 Mar. 2017.

Pollock, Ted. "Attitudes That Can Help You Get Ahead." *Supervision*, vol. 59, no. 8, Aug. 1998, pp. 24-26. EBSCO*host*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bft&AN=511072098&scope=site. Accessed 30 Mar. 2017.

Schlechty, Phillip. *Engaging Students: The Next Level of Working on the Work*. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

The HR Specialist. "Setting Deadlines for Employees: 4 Do's and Don'ts." *Business Management Daily*. 15 May 2007. https://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/21590/setting-deadlines-for-employees-4-dos-and-donts. Accessed 8 Aug. 2017.

"University of Leicester: Summary." *The University of Leicester*, *The Complete University Guide*, 2017, https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/leicester/. Accessed 8 Aug. 2017.

Van Gorp, Bouke, et al. "Setting Them Free: Students as Co-Producers of Honors Education." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp.183-195. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eft&AN=84011933&scope=site. Accessed 8 Aug. 2017

Vickers, Melana Zyla. *Accommodating College Students with Learning Disabilities: ADD, ADHD, and Dyslexia.* The John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, 2010.

Waller, Willard. *Sociology of Teaching.* Martino Fine Books, 2014.

White, Gillian. "The Quiet Struggle of College Students with Kids." *The Atlantic,* 11 Dec. 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/12/the-quiet-struggle-of-college-students-with-kids/383636/. Accessed 5 Aug. 2017.