

Consider student workload when making course design decisions

This guide details certain steps professors can take to gauge whether students are receiving too much work from a certain class, to prevent overloading them. Since many of these methods use student feedback to reach conclusions, it is important to involve students in the process ([how do I engage students in online discussions?](#)) and ask for their input regularly.

1. [Resource: Ensuring Appropriate Student Workload in Online Courses: A Guide for Instructors \(ISTEP\)](#)
2. [Workload calculators](#)
3. [Workload assessment tools](#)
4. [Workload moderation strategies](#)
5. [Examples of in person to online workload migration](#)

1. Ensuring Appropriate Student Workload in Online Courses: A Guide for Instructors (ISTEP)

[Ensuring Appropriate Student Workload in Online Courses: A Guide for Instructors](#) -


Learning is hard work. Not all work is equally effective to promoting learning. An excessive workload can actually detract from learning, or simply encourage surface rather than deep learning. Thoughtful and accurate workload planning is central to course design and delivery.

2. Workload calculators

- [Beer 2019 Calculator for online courses](#) - an excel based calendar with a word document to assign numerical figures to common course activities.
- [Rice University workload estimator](#) - a simple, intuitive, and easy-to-use tool for assessing student workload
- [Wake Forest University workload estimator](#) - more detailed than Rice University's workload estimator and less-widely used by other institutions

3. Workload assessment tools

- **Course evaluations** - students can report and give feedback about the course, including having to do too much work
- **Third-party course/professor ratings forums** - many students report their feelings about a particular course or professor as they relate to the difficulty of said courses

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- To get a better grasp of how students feel about the course (including the workload) throughout the semester, consider making an anonymous survey where students can give their feedback as you are teaching the course ([how do I create an anonymous survey?](#)), giving you time during the semester to improve upon your course.

4. Workload moderation strategies

- **Communicate learning outcomes** - knowing what will be taught in a given week or lecture session helps students get a better sense of where they are in the course, where they should be at the end of the week, and how this information fits into the larger course
- **Time estimates on tasks** - giving students a general idea of how long it takes to complete a given task will ease the students' stress levels. This provides an opportunity for feedback from the students, in the form of very early or late-submissions, on whether the given time-range was appropriate or not.
- **Workload from previous offerings of the course** - it may be helpful to review course workloads from previous offerings by different professors and teaching staff to guide workload estimates from a student perspective
- **Scaffolding assignments** - scaffolding assignments is the process of breaking up large assignments into smaller chunks, with deadlines spread over weeks which act as checkpoints. This reduces student stress and workload, but it has the added benefits of reducing the possibility of students falling behind. This strategy allows professors to gain a better insight into the level of understanding of their students have after each checkpoint. Professors can also utilize checkpoints as an opportunity to provide feedback to their students
- **Monitoring weekly workload** - Quercus calendars can be used to plan the course schedule so that too many assessments do not end up in the same week.

5. Examples of in person to online workload migration

Shared with permission from Prof. Fabian Parsch via their "[EdTech Lessons from your colleagues: "Engage!"](#)" webinar.

MAT294 in Fall 2020

MAT294 Calculus and Differential Equations for MSE

50 students – 1 instructor – 2 TAs

Online format: mostly synchronous

mandatory time/week in red

In-person, Fall 2019

Online, Fall 2020

	60+30min Pre-Class Essentials before each class
2h+1h in person classes with active elements but lecture heavy	2h+1h active classes with fixed teams (four reshuffles)
2h tutorial with TA moderating groups working on suggested problems	2h tea time with instructor as an open work space and question hour
2h drop in	
5h contact	3h contact + 1.5h self-study

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MAT292 in Fall 2020

MAT292 Ordinary Differential Equations for EngSci

200 students – 2 instructors – 4 TAs

Online format: mostly asynchronous

mandatory time/week in red

In-person, Fall 2019

Online, Fall 2020

3x1h in person classes with active elements but lecture heavy 2 sections with 100 students each	weekly videos with a total " 3h consumption time" (breaks for exercises), same for all sections 6 "sections" with 33 students each, 1h in-class work on tutorial like worksheets
1h tutorial with TA moderating groups working on worksheets 1h MATLAB lab	1h MATLAB lab
4h drop in	bookable drop-in calendar
5h contact	3h self-study + 2h contact

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MAT187 in Winter 2020

MAT187 Calculus II for Core 8 engineers

850 students – 5 instructors – 34 TAs

Online format: mostly asynchronous

mandatory time/week in red

In-person, Jan-March 2020

Online, March-April 2020

3x30min Pre-Class Essentials before each class

3x30min Pre-Class Essentials before each class

3x1h active in person classes in MY150 with group work, three separate sections

weekly videos with a total "**3h** consumption time" (breaks for exercises), same for all sections

1h tutorial with group worksheets (graded)

worksheets submitted online individually, tutorials cancelled

10h drop-in hours staffed by instructors and piazza

instructors and TAs staffed an online room Mon-Fri 10-6 with "Focus Sessions", also more piazza

4h contact + 1.5h self-study

4.5h self-study

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