

Ep. 49: Endgame

Podcast: <https://ProDev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2019/ep049.shtml>

Dreading all of that grading at the end of the semester? Wish you could snap your fingers and make it all go away? Claire and Jim explore how much feedback your students really need after those final exams and projects are turned in. They discuss ways of putting a final flourish on their learning without burying yourself under a mountain of feedback that, let's face it, they may never see.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there I'm Jim.

CLAIRE: and I'm Claire.

JIM: let's talk teaching welcome to let's talk a podcast from the Center for Teaching learning and technology here at Illinois State University I'm Jim Gee joining me again today our director Claire Lamonica, hi Claire!

CLAIRE: Hi Jim ,

JIM: So we've done a lot in our poky little podcast over the years talking about getting ready to teach for a semester but today we want to actually talk about how to end a semester

CLAIRE: Yeah.

JIM: And specifically, about what giving make sure students get that final feed yeah

CLAIRE: Well, I think when people think about the end of the semester, they tend to think about that end of semester slog through lots of student work alright. You know at the end of semester papers and a semester projects all sorts of things like that so at least that's what I always thought about I always write you know I always in the classroom I might like those portfolios are coming those portfolios are coming with some sense of dread but but of course that's probably good because at least you're thinking about it ahead of time right well yes I mean I've known all semester that those portfolio sort come right and I and I've actually worked for that so I've worked with that in mind so I think one of the things to think about in terms of end of semester feedback is how much time is it really worth putting into those projects and rumors and so on in portfolios right in all actuality I probably didn't spend any more time assessing a final portfolio than I had spent on any one paper or one piece of that portfolio okay so I was kind of looking at work throughout the semester and then at the end I was looking at you know sort of the the portfolio as a whole there was a new piece to it an analysis piece and that's where I sort of focused my attention but I didn't you know I had a rubric or some kind of grading instrument it sort of changed over the years from year to year and I made notes on that but I did not spend a lot of time writing voluminous comments to the students at that point in the semester mm-hm for one thing experience taught me that 97% of the students were never going to come pick up those portfolios they were just going to live on a shelf in my own and

this is really the old days this is like when you actually got paper portfolios and I lived on a shelf rather than just digital portfolios that lived in Reggienet or wherever mm-hm they were going to they were going to sit on my shelf until the time came when I was allowed to get rid of them sure so rather than spending a lot of time writing comments that nobody was ever going to read mm-hmm I quickly filled out the the grading tool whatever assessment instrument I was using and assigned the work of grade puts grade in the grade book shipped it off to the registrar's office whatever and put that portfolio with the grading instrument on my shelf that way if a student got in touch me to the next semester and said hey I'd like to come up pick up my portfolio mm-hmm I could say great let's make a let's make an appointment and then before that student came I would go back pull that portfolio off the shelf and add some helpful comments some comments that might help the student grow as a writer but you know I had been responding to that student as a writer all semester long well I think and that's the key isn't it right yeah I mean that's I mean I think that's really what we want to do we want to front-load that work or at least sort of spread it out over the semester so it's not this overwhelming thing at the end. Right.

JIM: So, so that goes back to something that we actually were talking about before we started recording today which is kind of focusing in on what is the purpose of that feedback at the end of the semester what are you actually trying to accomplish for the students benefit and I'll add you know as opposed to feeling guilty that you didn't give them enough feedback during the semester and so you feel like you need to have that sense of closure or something yeah, yeah.

CLAIRE: I just think you know somehow we kind of get it in our brain that we're not doing our job if we're not like writing all kinds of comments on our student work and then as I said if they never see it again there's that's, that's purposeless that's wasted time that's time out of our lives that we can never get back.

JIM: Right.

CLAIRE: We can certainly if they're students who are interested in that and feel like that's going to help them grow in some way or move forward in some way or if we're going to give it back to them mm-hmm so you know some people you know use part of their final exam time to hand back a final project right or whatever so if you're giving certainly if you're giving it back to the students you want to give them some feedback about it then what Ken Bain would call the nature and quality of their progress right, right there you kind of want to talk about what they've done and the growth that you've seen whatever but and you know sometimes if students are building a skill so like their lab report you know lab reports or lesson plans or something like that then you know is there going to need in their next class and you want to keep giving feedback on that but if they're not going to get them back yeah they're never going to come collect them don't knock yourself out.

JIM: And I have to wonder how often that happens anymore because I know things have changed in my own teaching so much since I taught a class where there was a, a final court call a physical final portfolio and I'm sure I have them in a file cabinet someplace at home no I think I probably do to be honest but you know all of my

end-of-semester assessments now are done electronically right and so I do have the opportunity to give students that that final bit of feedback so what advice would you give me or to give other instructors in that situation about what should that final advice look like I you know that final feedback yeah.

CLAIRE: I mean I think to a certain extent you may want to spend some time kind of explaining the rade.

JIM: mm-hmm

CLAIRE: Such as it is, but also I think sort of let it giving students a chance to look forward you know this is this is what you need to do to continue to grow in our area and of course that's particularly true in major classes where they're going to be moving on in the program right and you may want to note deficiencies things that you didn't you don't seem to have learned yet that you really are going to need to know you know as you progress through the program or whatever but, but also things that they're doing well and sort of how you see them how you see their path forward in a in a positive light and that doesn't take a huge amount of, of text you don't have to write them a wall of text in order to do that it's highlighting a couple a couple things very quickly it's not to say it doesn't take effort but it does take I mean it does take effort but it's not well it's the effort that it takes is attending to that specific student right yeah so, so this you know this is obviously easier to do in smaller class and larger classes but you're probably also in larger classes you're probably not collecting that sort of Judi summary okay yeah project big end of semester project you know you're probably looking more at a cumulative, cumulative, exam or something along those lines because if you've got a hundred and fifty students you probably aren't going to exert a hundred she's your project sure on the last day of class for the on their exam day sure.

JIM: And of course for some students and you know if the expectation is set up this way then you know what they get as a grade on that final exam is, is supposed to be anyway an indication of where they're kind of add in their in their learning we've been helped so we hope so we've done episodes in the past and we can actually link to them in the show notes for this episode with our colleague Julie-Ann McFann talking about the disconnect that sometimes happens between yeah you know being a certification stuff so I think in that regard one of the important things if possible is to give students access to see you know what questions did they miss on that on that exam at least to get a little more learning out of it that becomes more problematic and it's probably a little bit beyond the scope of today's episode because then you're dealing with test security and test banks and, and all that stuff so I, I do remember when I used to give a final exam in a class I used to offer to students if you're curious as to what you missed come in and see me over the summer or come in and see me in the fall when you get back and I'll be happy to show them to you but because of course we also have to remember that at least on our campus here in Illinois State were required to keep all of the materials involving students in students grades for at least a year so which records retention policy there's a record yeah all that all that stuff so, so you have to kind of go with those yes yeah so it's important to have that, but you know I think that I think the key.

CLAIRE: Thing to remember is giving feedback at the point when it's actually helpful to students right and so that may mean giving more substantive feedback earlier you know in in the course of the project over the course of the project and you can do that in a lot of ways you know you can you can collect drafts of the project if you want but you can also have informal meetings with students you can have meetings with groups of students you know that you can we just posted something on Facebook the other day about giving audio.

JIM: Audio feedback if you have a video feedback.

CLAIRE: Yeah that might have even been video feedback so you know you could there's things you can do.

JIM: Well and actually a shameless plug I'm I don't think I even have a title for yet I have to get this done I think I'm doing a workshop along those lines this summer probably late in the summer about communicating with students that I may be partnering with one of our other colleagues here at CTLT but because most people don't know and we've talked about it on our podcast here that you can record audio feedback and Reggient there are all sorts of different ways through office 365 and and now with the new Adobe products that faculty have access to on campus so there's a lot of different ways and a lot of free things that are out there too...

CLAIRE: and you know it's it's it's a it's a process that's been going on for a long time I know you know gosh back in the day we're giving feedback on cassette
CLAIRE: tapes oh really yeah I mean our little you know are sending MP whatever those

JIM: MP3s

CLAIRE: yeah yeah like

JIM: like people listen to right now yes like people you

CLAIRE: know sort of moving that this is what happens when you're around for a really long time because you see the sort of the evolution yeah that kind of feedback
CLAIRE: but it's just getting easier and easier and I think you know I think that's something that students can benefit from well

JIM: and students don't have to go find a cassette player or they don't have to go home to their VCR they have all that stuff in their pocket the ability to play this feedback so I think that's a that's also something to keep in mind so one final question for you looking back on your career as a learner and and, and. No restrictions on age or or, or degree being earned or whatever was there a particular time when you felt like you got good end-of-semester feedback was there a particular time when you felt or even not at the end of the semester but that there was some sort of follow up with a past instructor that really helped stick the landing as it were

CLAIRE: well you know I had a great dissertation director uh-huh I mean I think that was
CLAIRE: and the thing about about her was that her feedback was always

immediate it was CLAIRE: disconcertingly immediate like you know I would
turn in a chapter and I would CLAIRE: think ah

JIM: I had the same thing that my master's thesis

CLAIRE: I wanna breathe a little bit CLAIRE: here and the dang thing would be back in
my mailbox the next day

JIM: for my master's thesis which of course is certainly not as probably as hefty or a job of writing
but still as your dissertation but still Dr. Zompetti here on campus Joe's Zompetti
would turn stuff around within an hour and I would be I'd be emailing him stuff at
like 3:00 in the morning hopefully be getting like some sleep or something before
the feedback came back and he'd be he'd be turning it around Joe get some sleep
so anyway but so you're so you got really good feedback then from your

CLAIRE: yeah I did I mean I had you know I've had good feedback from lots of instructors
over the years and and you know that even in the the courses that led up
to my dissertation because you know into dissertation is something that
kind of you don't just get an idea I mean you get all these different ideas
in these different classes you take and then all of a sudden you realize oh
look you know here's something I'm really interested in so you know just
the feedback that I got from a lot of instructors on the way to that that
idea you know when I was in as an undergraduate I often didn't get
feedback on end of semester projects

JIM: yeah neither did I

CLAIRE: and I and I you know I some of them you know some instructors CLAIRE: would
have you like leave him an envelope right um you know self-addressed
envelope that they would send things back in send you the final paper
back in and I think when I took the trouble to do that I would take the
trouble to do that when I was really interested in a class and I really or I
was really proud of my final project or paper and I I really wanted to know what
the instructor had to say about it I don't think I ever did that because I
was really worried about a final paper right I probably didn't want to know in
those situations but that you know that feedback over the years was was helpful
but most of the good feedback that I got came here in the process of developing
the project right right and yeah that was just you know short no that was
notes on drafts or it was conversations with the instructor in their in their
office or during class whatever

JIM: well and so like we said in this day and age it is a lot easier to get feedback to students at
the end of the semester or after the semester is over they they have access to
reggienet at least for at least for a few weeks after the end of the semester so
putting some feedback up there for them there's a greater chance they're going to
get they're going to get to it I would venture this is a broad generalization
yeah I would venture to guess that they look for feedback more if they're
surprised by the grade that could be

CLAIRE: if the grade they get doesn't match their expectations and then they probably are looking for an explanation you know how come how come I got this or right yeah or how did I get yeah or sometimes it could be a positive surprise yeah yeah oh my goodness

JIM: I actually got a you know at I always have an end-of-semester communication with my students so we always meet for the final exam period even though I don't actually give an exam we have final projects that are being turned in we talked about it would present them during that time but I always send them a final email with okay all your grades are in I have I have sent them to the registrar's office or I will send them on Tuesday morning or whatever part of that is that that I give them a chance to say hey if you think I missed something yeah speak now or forever hold your peace but then again I also put in ant you know and I try to I try to encourage them to go to the assignment tool and ReggieNet or wherever their final projects are and to look over that that feels like that yeah so, so sending them a reminder may, may or may not help what I need to do which I've never done before. And I just had a thought. I'm like I know...

CLAIRE: A light bulb just went on. It's right over Jim's head.

JIM: If only we were very probably we were videotaping actually no I'd have to do like I'd like special effects no is to go back because you can look at the statistics on when students access stuff in red yeah I might actually go back and look at past semesters and see if I can see see if they do that they actually went yeah look at that sort of prompted if I can get that granular on courses to do that all right k

CLAIRE: well anyway I think the bottom line is don't kill yourself doing this right you know but give good feedback do it in a manageable way right and get on to your summer work exactly

JIM: All right Claire, thank you so much.

CLAIRE: thank you

and that's all the time we have for this week's episode of let's talk teaching find out more about our podcast go to our website ctl.illinoisstate.edu for Dr. Claire Lamonica and for all my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology until we talk again happy teaching