



## Great Expectations

Dr. Claire C. Lamonica  
Director, Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology  
Illinois State University

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August invites all but the most jaded of us to dream of stimulating classroom conversations about engaging ideas; student papers that offer glimpses of bright young minds at work; examination results that demonstrate student learning; and individual and group projects that reveal students' ability to apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. We dream of analyzing data, and more. Then we wake up, and we wonder: How much of that do they really do?

That's the question I posed recently to Ryan Smith and his colleagues in University Assessment Services (<https://assessment.illinoisstate.edu/>) (UAS). UAS is the group responsible for administering, at regular intervals, instruments such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (<http://nsse.indiana.edu/>) (NSSE), the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (<http://fsse.indiana.edu/>) (FSSE), and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (<http://bcsse.indiana.edu/>) (BCSSE) ... instruments that can provide answers to questions like these:

- How much time do faculty expect a typical student to spend preparing\* for class?
- How much time do faculty perceive that students actually spend preparing for class?
- How much time do high school seniors expect to spend preparing for class during their first year in college?
- How much time do college freshmen report preparing for class during their first year in college?
- How much time do college seniors report preparing for class?

\* Preparing is defined as "studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities."

The answers to the questions are revealing, both individually and collectively. Let's look at responses to the individual questions first.

### **How much time do faculty expect a typical student to spend preparing for class?**

According to the Spring 2014 FSSE, two-thirds (67%) of ISU's faculty respondents expect that students will spend between 3 and 6 hours/week preparing for class. Expectations among lower division faculty (those teaching freshmen and sophomores) were slightly lower than expectations among upper division faculty (those teaching juniors and seniors). That is,

- Seventy-six percent of lower division faculty expected students to spend between 1 and 6 hours/week preparing for class. Sixteen percent expected that students would spend only 1 or 2 hours/week preparing for class, and only 3% expected that students would spend 10 or more hours/week preparing for a single class.

- On the other hand, only 2% of upper division faculty expected that students would spend fewer than 3 hours/week preparing for a single class, while 68% expected that students would spend between 3 and 6 hours/week preparing for class, and 12% expected that students would spend 10 or more hours/week preparing for a single class.

## **How much time do faculty perceive that students actually spend preparing for class?**

In light of these expectations, it would seem that faculty might be feeling somewhat disappointed as, overall, it appears that we perceive students to be spending less time preparing for class than we expect. While 67% of us expect students to spend between 3 and 6 hours/week preparing for class, only 29% of us perceive that they actually do so. Here, the differences between lower and upper division faculty are somewhat smaller, with 94% of lower division and 90% of upper division faculty perceiving that students spend fewer than 6 hours/week preparing for class. It would seem that almost all of us perceive that students spend less time preparing for class than we would like.

## **How much time do high school seniors expect to spend preparing for class during their first year in college?**

The data we have available on this point comes from the 2012 BCSSE, which tells us that 89% of incoming freshmen expect to spend between 6 and 25 hours/week preparing for class. If we assume that this time will be divided equally among five classes (15 hours, a fairly typical load for first year students), then we might assume that incoming students expect to devote between 1.2 and 5 hours/week preparing for each class they take. This would appear to be in line with the expectations of about 72% of faculty teaching lower division courses. Of course, the proof is in the pudding, as they say, so the real question is not how much time students expect to spend preparing for class, but how much time they actually spend preparing for class.

## **How much time do college freshmen report preparing for class during their first year in college?**

According to the Spring 2013 NSSE, 81% of first year students at Illinois State University report spending between 6 and 25 hours/week preparing for class. That would suggest that most of them are spending about as much time preparing for class as both they and their instructors expected they would. It also suggests that they are spending more time preparing for class than their instructors perceive that they are.

## **How much time do college seniors report preparing for class?**

Also according to the Spring 2013 NSSE, 73% of seniors report spending between 6 and 25 hours/week, or 1.2 to 5 hours per week, preparing for each class, assuming a 5 course load. That's a little less than faculty expect, but about what they perceive.

Perhaps distressingly, 12% of seniors report spending only 1-5 hours/week preparing for class. That's only 12 minutes to one hour per class, assuming a 5 course load. On the other hand 15% report spending more than 26 hours/week preparing for class. That's more than 5 hours/class, if we assume a 5 course load.

## **So what's the moral of this story?**

Based on this evidence, it appears that

- overall, faculty are relatively good judges of how much time students spend preparing for class; though freshmen report spending more time preparing than is evident to their instructors, and
- overall, the amount of time students spend preparing for class is somewhat less than faculty would like.

At this point, I should note that ISU students appear to be spending about the same amount of time preparing for class as do college students, nationally. Still, given the importance of "time on task" to student learning I don't think it would be unreasonable of us to expect more. At the very least, we should expect—even hold students accountable for—devoting a minimum of 3-6 hours/week to course preparation. That's only 1-2 hours of outside-of-class time/week/course.

A good way to begin is by sharing our expectations, both explicitly and implicitly. First, don't hesitate to state in your syllabi or in your class (or, preferably, in both) how much time you expect that students will devote to class preparation each week. Then back that up by assigning work that you anticipate students will need that much time to complete. And, finally, hold students accountable for completing the work before they come to class. Taking these three steps might result in an academic year that feels rather like an August dream come true!

*Clare C. Hanover*



Center for Teaching, Learning,  
and Technology  
Office of Academic Technologies  
Illinois State University  
Campus Box 6370  
Normal, IL 61790-6370  
[Contact Us](#)

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