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Time Management Time Cards

I teach landscape architecture at Texas Tech University. One of the issues that students seem to have trouble with is time management. We've all struggled, I'm sure, with how to convince students to manage their time and avoid the last minute, "pull an all nighter," throw something together just before the deadline scenario. Never mind allowing time for a final review, edits, run test prints or even remember to click the spell check button. Providing interim or preliminary deadlines often times results in two all-nighters. Providing check lists, time lines or other tools seam ineffective to a generation who many would say grew up with their parents (usually the mother) acting as a scheduling secretary. Especially frustrating is backing off and given them more time to produce a quality product, only to see them once again, wait until the last minute.

Time management skills are something that is an important part of all our respective professions and we would love to be able to fit it into our curriculum. I found a tool that, with little instruction or training, seemed to have some impact on a group of students in my third year site design class. The class is a 4 credit design studio that includes two one hour lectures and two three hour design studios per week. Typically, design projects last from two to as many as six weeks. It is their first design class in our five-year professional degree program and it is at this point that we stress professionalism as a part of the studio experience. We also keep attendance for both lecture and studio as a matter of departmental policy. Consequently, I came up with the idea of using a time card. I developed a form the size of a half a sheet of paper, so two could be printed on normal letter-size stock. It listed the project name, a place for the students to write in their name, and a place to note the number of hours they worked on the project (usually the length of the studio).

Most importantly, and what took up most of the space was a box titled "Today's Goals:" with lines to list three to four goals or milestones for the day. When I came to their desk to help them with their project, I asked to see the time card and what they had written for that day. At the end of the studio, they dropped their time card in a box to receive credit for attending the studio that day. In all honesty, I rarely compiled the attendance but I kept the time cards just in case I might need to challenge a student's attendance record. Additionally, I stressed that almost all professional consulting offices have some sort of time reporting system since their clients are billed on an hourly basis. So it was not a menial task like punching a time clock at McDonalds. More importantly, it made time management a part of each and every studio. Whether or not they accomplished their goals for that studio (I did not check) at least they thought about the need to accomplish something that day and to make progress toward the end product. And no, they could not leave early if they reached their goals before the end of studio.

It is paper intensive system, but it seemed to help. You may be able to adapt it to a science lab, an agricultural mechanics shop, or any situation where students are working on a long term project. Good luck, and let me know how it works for you should you decide to try it or a variation on the idea.

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