

Reader's Response

Planner Use by the Surveyed Students

A response to "How Students Use the Course Syllabus" by Sharon Calhoun & Angela Becker, *International Journal on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, Volume 2, Number 1 (January 2008)

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Though not the main subject of the article, one important aspect is the discussion of planner use by the surveyed students. Calhoun and Becker assert that students who transfer test and assignment due dates to their planners but later look them up in the syllabus are behaving inefficiently. An alternative interpretation is that student use of the syllabus versus the planner is context-dependent, leading to the conclusion that the observed recording and lookup behaviors are both efficient.

To maintain awareness of scheduling conflicts arising from multiple event sources, recording all events in a single calendar (e.g., planner) is the most efficient choice -- it is quicker to check the master calendar as new events become known than it is to check multiple calendars (e.g., syllabi). And to find a date relating to a specific course, it is quicker to look at the calendar for that course only versus a calendar that also contains extraneous information.

Efficiency and context-dependency could also explain why students who put syllabus information into their planners are more likely to look up their reading assignments: any planner notation would serve as a reminder, the students may believe that it is quicker to look up the details than to rewrite them, and it is useful to see how a given reading assignment relates to others and to the course material as a whole.

Given the authors' interest in time management skills for students, this correspondent encourages them to continue exploring behaviors relating to planner use, as well as the reasons behind them. Differences found in the use of paper versus electronic planners would be of particular interest, as the latter may offer features such as searching and filtering that can provide faster retrieval and additional context.