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A Time Keeping Exercise for Law Students Using Excel

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Time is our most valuable non-renewable resource, and if we want to treat it with respect, we need to set priorities. - Albert-László Barabási

A Time Keeping Exercise for Law Students Using Excel

Why Do a Time Keeping Exercise?

The goal [of the Time Keeping Exercise] is to engage in personal discovery as to how you spend your time and the activities, which you currently value.

—Gregory Bowman, Fall 2019 Syllabus

What did the students do?

- The students were asked to keep track of their activities for 14 consecutive days. They could choose any 14 day period between the day the assignment was made and the due date.
- The students used an Excel spreadsheet (a.k.a. Time Sheet) to keep track of their activities. Each day was broken down into six minute segments and the students filled in each cell with the time code—from a list of 24 options—that best described their activity.
- Students emailed their completed time sheet to me and I would add their data to a "Master Timesheet" that compiled the totals from the entire class.
- Finally, I would send an alphabetized list of the students who completed the assignment by the due date and should receive full credit to the professor.

Time Codes

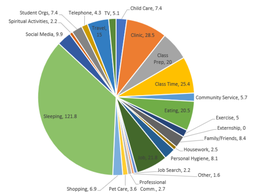
•CC	Child care	•JOS	Job Search
•CLI	Clinic	•O	Other
•CP	Class Prep	•PC	Professional Comm.
•CRT	Classroom time	•PET	Pet Care
•CM	Community Service	•SHO	Shopping
•EAT	Eating	•SL	Sleeping
•EX	Exercise	•SM	Social Media
•ETN	Externship	•SP	Spiritual Activities
•FF	Family and friends	•SOG	Student Orgs.
•HW	Housework	•TEL	Telephone
•HYG	Personal hygiene	•TRA	Travel
•JOB	Paid work	•TV	Television

Creating the Time Sheet

	9/23	9/24	9/25	9/26	9/27	9/28	9/29	9/30	10/1	10/2	10/3	10/4	10/5	10/6	
Midnight	SL	FF	FF	TV	TRA	CP	CLI	SL	SL	CP	FF	EAT	CP	SL	Midnight
12:06	SL	FF	FF	TV	TRA	CP	CLI	SL	SL	CP	FF	EAT	CP	SL	12:06
12:12	SL	FF	FF	TV	TRA	CP	CLI	SL	SL	CP	FF	EAT	CP	SL	12:12
12:18	SL	FF	FF	TV	TRA	CP	CLI	SL	SL	CP	FF	EAT	CP	SL	12:18
12:24	SL	FF	FF	TV	TRA	CP	CLI	SL	SL	CP	FF	EAT	CP	SL	12:24
12:30	SL	FF	FF	TV	TRA	CP	CLI	SL	SL	CP	FF	CP	CP	SL	12:30
12:36	SL	FF	FF	TV	TRA	CP	TRA	SL	SL	CP	FF	CP	CP	SL	12:36
12:42	SL	FF	EAT	HYG	TRA	CP	TRA	SL	SL	CP	FF	CP	CP	SL	12:42
12:48	SL	FF	EAT	HYG	TRA	CP	TRA	SL	SL	TV	FF	CP	CP	SL	12:48
12:54	SL	FF	EAT	HYG	TRA	CP	TV	SL	SL	TV	FF	CP	CP	SL	12:54
1:00	SL	FF	TV	SL	TRA	CP	TV	SL	SL	TV	FF	CP	CP	SL	1:00
1:06	SL	FF	TV	SL	TRA	CP	TV	SL	SL	TV	TRA	CP	CP	SL	1:06
1:12	SL	FF	TV	SL	TRA	HYG	TV	SL	SL	TV	TRA	SL	CP	SL	1:12
1:18	SL	FF	TV	SL	TRA	HYG	TV	SL	SL	TV	HYG	SL	EAT	SL	1:18
1:24	SL	FF	TV	SL	TRA	TV	SL	SL	SL	TV	HYG	SL	EAT	SL	1:24
1:30	SL	FF	TV	SL	TRA	TV	SL	SL	SL	TV	HYG	SL	EAT	SL	1:30
1:36	SL	FF	TV	SL	TRA	TV	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	EAT	SL	1:36
1:42	SL	HYG	TV	SL	TRA	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	HYG	SL	1:42
1:48	SL	HYG	TV	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	SL	HYG	SL	1:48

Excerpt of a Time Sheet — The entire Time Sheet including the tabulation table runs 269 rows in Excel.

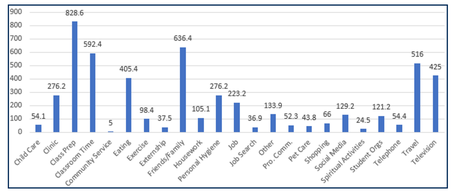
- The time sheet was designed to be both easy to use and provide some useful data to the students.
  - •Cells not designed for data entry were locked and password protected. This eliminated the possibility of accidentally erasing formulas leading to inaccurate totals.
  - •Pie and bar charts were provided on a separate sheet allowing students to analyze their own time.



- Still there are potential for issues.
  - •A student used "PH" instead of "HYG" for personal hygiene, thus the final tallies were both missing time and it appeared the person had not bathed for two weeks! Future classes were told this tale as warning to be extra vigilant in inputting the time codes.
  - •In the first year, a few students did not submit their time by the due date. In future years, the professor made full credit for the assignment contingent on meeting the due date and compliance increased to 100%.
  - •The assignment materials were distributed via TWEN. We discovered that the time sheet when uploaded from a PC would not work as designed when downloaded and opened on a Mac. The best workaround was to borrow a Mac to do the upload.

Data Analysis and Comparisons

I compiled the data from each student into several charts allowing them to see how their classmates spent their time and how their class compared to previous classes.



Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Class Time	7.66%	7.97%	7.37%
Class Prep	12.28%	11.23%	10.31%
Exercise	1.74%	1.38%	1.22%
Friends/Fam	7.03%	9.95%	7.92%
Hygiene	3.01%	3.71%	3.44%
Sleep	34.99%	35.02%	36.00%
Social Media	2.01%	1.37%	1.61%
Travel	3.99%	5.01%	6.42%
Television	8.71%	5.38%	5.29%

Above: Total awake hours of a class per activity.

Left: Comparison of percentage of time spent on popular activities over three years.

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How did the Library get involved?

In 2015 the Lawyers as Leaders—a class on the theory and practice of leadership—professor approached a librarian looking to standardize the format of the Time Keeping Exercise performed by the class to make the assignment easier and allow for data analysis.

We looked at several ready made time sheet and apps and found them all lacking in various ways

- Time slots too long.
- Data not easily analyzable.
- Apps not accessible for everyone.

We determined that custom was the way to go and created our own Excel Spreadsheet that featured:

- The desired 6 minute long time slots.
- Standardized "Time Codes" for identifying activities.
- Options to analyze both the students' own time and the class's time as a whole.

Benefits of Library Involvement

- Students were more likely to be honest in how they spent time because the professor did not see the individual results.
- As a non-teaching member of the library staff, I was able to make additional connections with the students when I did two short "guest speaker" spots in the classroom first to introduce the assignment and then to discuss the final tallies.
- Faculty became more aware of non-traditional library offerings to support their teaching.
- Increased Professional Development Opportunities—as a result of working on this project I have given a presentation, written a book review, and improved my Excel skills!