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There are a few areas in which I “wish I knew then, what I know now” with respect to my first year at Saint Joseph’s:

Office Hours
When I taught classes in grad school, offices hours were chunks of time that seemed to drag on forever since, with few exceptions, students never used them. These hours came to represent a way for me to get work done on my dissertation or catch up with my reading, but there was very little interaction with the students. I have found that this is definitely not the case at Saint Joseph’s University. Students quickly learn when office hours are and stop by often to discuss upcoming tests, their grades, lectures they missed, their grades, current events, and on occasion, their grades. Joking aside, it was very refreshing to see students take such an active role in their academic career. I did have to increase my organization skills and be a little better at time management as I quickly learned that office hours could not be used to catch up on any other work.

Coffee
Try to avoid any of the coffee stations at “ten of” as the lines are pretty severe. I don’t remember when I picked up my dependency on coffee, but apparently most of today’s students arrive at Saint Joseph’s with an ipod and a huge caffeine addiction.

School Services
I wish I had become more familiar with the various services that the University offered sooner. I have even less of an excuse as I taught here once before and yet I admit it took me a while to get up to speed with all of the resources available to teachers. Though space restricts me from going on in detail about all of the various services and you can find all of them on the SJU website, there were several that I found I came to rely on often.

- Tech support – It was good to know whom to call when my own computer or the technology in the classroom experienced problems. I learned that my “go to” people were often dependent on what I taught and where I taught, although Help Desk at (610) 660-2920 was always a good place to start.

- Services for Students with Learning/Physical Disabilities – A number of students had special requirements with respect to note taking and testing environments. All of the people I worked with in this office were great at helping me navigate through the many requirements and options available.

- Counseling Center – I taught a large number of freshman and as such saw several students who had some issues adjusting to college life. SJU’s Counseling Center (and their website) was a resource I really didn’t know much about, but wish I had explored earlier. I have since learned that they offer students a wide assortment of ways in which to cope with the challenging transition to collegial life.
• The Teaching Institute – need I say more…..

Software
The university suggests that students may purchase MS Office Pro 2003 from the select student website http://www.selectstudent.com/aicup/ to receive an educational discount. I learned that you have to really stress that to students this is the exact address (I would suggest putting a link on your class website). Just telling the students about the address led to a series of issues as (1) leaving the “aicup” off makes it much more complicated to get to where you need to be and (2) students who accidentally added an “s” at the end, (or in one case, were accidentally told by tech support that it was selectstudents) found themselves at a pornographic website.

Coffee, again
Dunkin Donuts coffee starts to slowly leak from the bottom of the cup on vital documents within about an hour.

The Network.
Saint Joe’s network was really pretty reliable during the past year, but if you rely heavily on the web/ e-mail as a form of communication with students, I have learned it pays to have a backup plan. During the second semester I started giving my students an alternate non-sju email as a “Plan B” in case the network is ever experiencing problems (at my prior institution of higher learning, the network went down the night before a big test, not once, but twice). I also started using the J drive a lot. This is the space on the network we all posses that any computer on campus can access like it was another hard drive. I have found it is very convenient for putting PowerPoint and other lecture materials. I also found that like with e-mail, it is a good idea to have a backup plan in case the network is down or inaccessible.

Time
My last observation, though hardly earth shattering, is no less true: the first year really flies. I just started, and suddenly it was October, and then Thanksgiving, and then the semester was basically over. Likewise with second semester, once February ended, the semester began to cruise, I blinked, and it was May. I would recommend that you try to manage your time as effectively as possible. As a long time procrastinator, I realize this is easier said than done, but it is the only way I have found to get a handle on how quickly the semesters pass. That, and coffee…..