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The Case of the Latté Drinking Instructors

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The Case of the Latté Drinking Instructors

You're at Starbucks early one morning and can't help overhearing an exchange between two instructors as they talk loudly over cups of lattes. Calvin fervently exclaims, "Can you believe it Kathy? I'm three weeks behind in my grading because I spend so much time writing the same comments on almost every paper. Don't students understand basic academic expectations? And now that I'm almost done I'm concerned I graded the last ones more harshly than the first ones. I'm so frustrated!" His colleague Kathy replies just as heatedly, "You think you've got problems Calvin! I spent hours writing a long narrative description of my final project over Spring Break and now students are e-mailing me in droves asking about my expectations. I've even had to start class late because of students asking questions about the project before class. I know the assignment is complex; it integrates all the ideas we've been discussing this semester. Last semester I was disappointed by the quality of students' projects and that's why I spend so much time revising the assignment requirements. This is a critical project and I don't want to dummy it down because students' complain it's unreasonable. It's not unreasonable; it's the kinds to project they'll be doing routinely once they graduate."

Questions for Discussion

- Can you relate to either Calvin (behind in grading) or Kathy (students don't understand expectations)?
- What issues might be contributing to their situations?
- If you were Calvin's or Kathy's mentor, what suggestions would you make on how to address their concerns?
- What strategies could Calvin and Kathy use to motivate students to meet their expectations?
- How do you plan to address the issues of grading in your courses?

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