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Illustration: Kornel Stadler

100,000 hours

It's a simple calculation: number of credits multiplied by 30 working hours multiplied by the number of students. A first-year introductory course involves somewhere in the region of 100,000 working hours in total. That's an enormous figure! How useful all of these hours are depends on the content of the lectures and exercises.

I often see the students from my introductory course working through our exercises at various times of the day, alone or in small discussion groups. How are they finding the work? Does it make sense? Is it complicated? Challenging? Or even frustrating? I obviously feel responsible for their experience. But considering the total number of working hours made me think about more than just a sense of responsibility: am I doing enough to optimise the quality of these hours?

I have been running this course for over ten years – the key content is set, as are most of the exercise topics. According to the teaching evaluation, the students are very satisfied with the course. But of course there is still potential for improvement: I could coordinate the material more closely with other courses, adapt the explanations more specifically to students' prior knowledge from school, or reconsider the course topics based on developments in my subject – to mention just a few of the improvements listed in the new "Quality in teaching at ETH Zurich" guidelines. But will I be able to find sufficient time and resources for these improvements? The work in my

research group is particularly demanding and exciting at the moment – we want to get papers published in journals with a high impact factor...

Yes, bibliometric indicators. We all know that they don't necessarily correlate with the quality and relevance of the research. But they are undoubtedly powerful steering tools and they influence the priorities in professors' agendas. You could compare it to the students' examinations: good marks don't necessarily correlate with in-depth, lasting knowledge. But the nature of the questions and the exam content will determine what the students spend their time on during their many hours of exam preparation. In other words, how well the 100,000 hours of these extremely receptive minds are invested. And that is determined by us, the lecturers: big responsibility, enormous impact factor. ■

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Edoardo Mazza is Professor for Mechanics and President of the Lecturers' Conference (KdL). The KdL advises the Executive Board on matters regarding the teaching staff and protects their interests. www.kdl.ethz.ch →

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Our international chapters can be found all over the world. They provide a professional and social network to help alumni and ETH lecturers to gain a foothold in a new country, while also raising the profile of ETH Zurich around the globe. Our alumni maintain relationships with local interest groups such as universities, industry and embassies and thereby help to bring talented researchers to ETH.

In order to strengthen this international network and the connection to ETH, visitors from our alma mater are always welcomed at the chapters. ETH Rector Sarah Springman, for example, has visited both the New England Chapter and the Singapore Chapter. ETH Professor Renate Schubert also took the opportunity to visit the Singapore Chapter while staying in Asia.

A strong network thrives on active participation. We therefore warmly invite all ETH lecturers to visit the alumni chapters when travelling abroad. You can find a list of the chapters on our website. We look forward to seeing you!



**Dr Nicole Frick, Director
of the ETH Alumni Association**
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