

THE MOTIVATIONAL AND PERFORMANCE EFFECTS OF EXTRA CREDIT

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ABSTRACT

Extra credit is very common in marketing education today, as it is in disciplines across campus. In fact, a great majority of faculty report using it at one time or another (Hill et al. 1993). Faculty may offer extra credit for a variety of purposes. For instance, extra credit points may serve as a reward to encourage students to put in extra effort or to learn a topic in greater depth. They are also commonly used as an incentive for obtaining student subjects to participate in research (Leak 1981). Extra credit comes in other forms and is offered outside of the classroom curriculum as well. Business schools will many times offer marketing honors courses to students who want the extra challenge. There are also consulting projects with real clients as well as internships that may be parts of culminating projects, all of which can be thought of as a form of 'extra credit' for students if they are not a mandatory part of the curriculum. For such a common part of the marketing educational curriculum, we know surprisingly little about its impact on students.

The literature on extra-credit tends to look at the effect of extra credit on students' final grade. There is scant research on whether extra credit assignments are perceived similarly to or different from regular assignments. In this paper we report on an empirical study that looks at how students react to and perform on an extra-credit assignment as opposed to the same assignment that is part of the required curriculum of a course.

Students are likely to frame extra-credit assignments in a different way than regular assignments that are a part of their grade for the semester. We propose that students will perceive extra credit to be more like a gift than the same assignment that is part of the curriculum and so will value it above and beyond its actual added value to their total grade. This difference in perception may be associated with differences in performance on the quiz as well as differences in students' attributions and perceptions of the quiz and their achievement on it.

We used the assignment of a quiz to assess the effects of extra credit on students' perceptions of classroom assignments. A between-subjects experimental design was used to determine if and

how students would react to extra credit quiz questions differently than to same quiz given as a regular part of the course. We measured respondents' perceptions of the quiz, their performance and time spent on the quiz, as well as attributions for their performance.

The results of this preliminary study clearly suggest that students think about and respond to extra credit assignments in a different way than required class assignments. An extra credit assignment is perceived to be an extra gain for students, a gift. Students like the assignment more and they perform better on it. All of them take part in it. Their attributional processes for success may also differ. The results of this study suggest that making parts of the course extra credit may be beneficial to instruction. Student demands for extra credit may be an excuse for poor performance as some have suggested, but when delegation of it is in the hands of instructors and the opportunity for extra credit is given to all students, extra credit assignments seem to benefit both students and instructors.

Based on our results, students clearly feel as if extra credit assignments are a special gain or loss that is distinct from the coursework in general. More work needs to be done in this area, but our results suggest that instructors may want to use extra credit work not just as a remedial tool. They may wish to use it as a motivator in central parts of the course to encourage students to take ownership of the course material. An extra credit quiz or an extra credit project related to the course material that is not too time consuming may motivate students to engage in that specific project. It may even motivate them to engage more with other material in the course.

REFERENCES

- Hill, William G. IV, Joseph J. Palladino, and James A. Eison. 1993. Blood, sweat and trivia: Faculty ratings of extra-credit opportunities. *Teaching of Psychology* 20(December): 209-13.
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