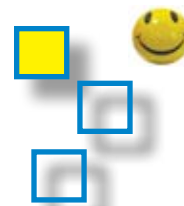


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Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

Extra Credit Assignments: An Innovative Approach

By: Tena Long Golding, PhD

MY STUDENTS ARE ALWAYS asking for opportunities to earn bonus points. I offer a variety of assignments during the semester, but they still want bonus points, which they seem to think are easier to obtain than the required points. Generally, I'm opposed to bonus options because I feel that if students are struggling with the current assignments, they do not need an "extra" assignment for extra credit. In addition, the word "bonus" seems to suggest something for nothing. I want my students to realize that grades are earned, not given. However, I recently tried a bonus activity that benefited my students and also met my expectations for a substantive learning experience.

The end of the spring semester correlates with increased absences and assignment apathy. The weather is beautiful, my classes are in the afternoon, and student attendance drops. In addition, students in my classes are preservice teachers who must do a minimum number of field observations in area schools before the end of the semester. Those who have procrastinated start feeling the crunch and begin to miss class in order to complete the required number of hours. Those attending class often arrive unprepared. Clearly, this is not the easiest time of the year for teaching.

In a mathematics class for prospective elementary teachers, we had been working on a particular section for several class sessions, so students had more time than usual to complete the homework assignment. On the day this homework was to be discussed, I decided to offer a bonus activity. I created a sheet with 11 problems that applied many of the concepts we had covered in previous class sessions.

Students could earn one point for each problem solved correctly. The problems had to be worked out during the allotted class time, and students could not begin working until a trade had occurred—the bonus sheet in exchange for completed homework. This trade made the students accountable for previously assigned work and removed my fear of giving them something for nothing. Students who had not completed the assignment had less time for the bonus

opportunity because they had homework to finish up first.

An interesting classroom dynamic occurred after I explained how this bonus opportunity worked. Many of the students with their homework done began helping students who had not been able to work through all the homework problems. Students who had not even started the homework began to work diligently in order to have even a little bonus time. As I walked around the room, I heard not only the buzz of mathematics but also comments like "I told Julie she shouldn't miss class" and "I knew I should've done my homework!"

I want students to be successful in and out of the classroom. This means learning the mathematics we're covering in the course. But I also want students to realize they are ultimately responsible for their own learning and accountable for their actions. The bonus problems reviewed concepts that the students needed to know and understand. By design, the activity reinforced the responsibility of students to complete assigned homework. Since the only students who received few or no points were the students who missed class or had not completed the homework assignment, the lack of bonus points earned was not the fault of the teacher (e.g., test too hard, too long) but rather the consequence of a personal decision.

The bonus activity was a success and is a practice I'll repeat. My students were delighted with the opportunity, and I was guilt-free. The activity let students know that I am sensitive to their needs and ideas, but it also showed how a missed class is a missed opportunity—and that doing your homework pays off!

Tena Long Golding, is an associate professor of mathematics at Southeastern Louisiana University.

Excerpted from Bonuses of a Bonus Assignment! The Teaching Professor, June-July 2008.

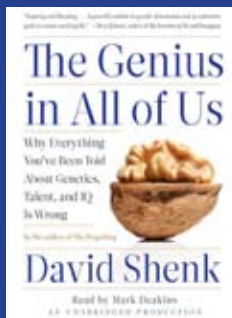
Tena Long Golding, Faculty Focus, Educational Assessment, February 3, 2010, [http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/extra-credit-assignments-an-innovative-approach/?c=FF&t=F100203-FF], February 3, 2010

BOOK ...

THE GENIUS IN ALL OF US

*Why Everything
You've Been Told
About Genetics,
Talent, and IQ
Is Wrong*

- By David Shenk



CALENDAR

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISING SURVEY

(COURSE ID: 201010EUT4)

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

12:40 - 1:40 p.m. Dawson Room

Tom Nelson

*Director of Assessment and
Institutional Effectiveness*

The Student Perceptions of Academic Advising Survey is administered each fall and each spring semester in conjunction with registration.

Participants will learn what information is being sent to their deans and used as a part of their faculty evaluation as well as what information can be used as a component for improving unit advising experiences for students.

FACULTY MEETING

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

12:40-1:40pm, LC200

Spring Exams, April 26-30, 2010

WHITE BOARD

2009-10 Publication Dates

First Monday of the Month

September 7	March 1
October 5	April 5
November 2	May 3
December 7	June 7
January 4	July 5
February 1	August 2

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The Extra Credit Dilemma

LAST SATURDAY AFTER CLASS, three of my students approached me together to ask whether there was anything they could do to receive extra credit. Their request put me into a little bit of a panic. On the one hand, I've never really allowed extra credit opportunities. I believe that it's unfair to give extra credit because it panders to underperforming students, giving them an opportunity to wheedle an unearned grade out of my class. But on the other hand, these three particular students were fairly good candidates for extra credit. They were pretty hard workers, but they happened to be at an unfortunate disadvantage in my class because they spoke English as a second language.

I've been agonizing over my ESL students all semester long. In a class of 20, one third of my students are ESL speakers. I've never had that many in a single course before. It's been a serious challenge for me, to say the least. Every time I've sat down to grade a major paper, I've been plagued with thoughts about how to treat them equitably. Is it fair to hold them to the same standards as the other students who are native English speakers? If I make them the exception and lower my standards as I grade their drafts, am I cheating the native English speakers who have worked equally hard on their papers?

To date, I've been grading them with the same standards I use with all my students. As justification, I've held the image of my freshman roommate from Hungary in my mind. She had a scholarship and a 4.0---and she worked very hard for it. She studied constantly and didn't have much of a social life. When a major paper was due, she started composing it well in advance, regularly visiting the writing lab and inviting my feedback on her papers. (If I had half her motivation and personal dedication, I probably would have done much better in subjects like Math and Science for which I have absolutely no natural talent.) I figured that if anyone could work hard and thrive academically despite some staunch language barriers, so could my ESL students. And yet, the ex-public school teacher and "good liberal" inside of me doesn't totally buy the everyone-can-pull-themselves-up-by-the-bootstraps schtick. The language barrier is a very real impediment to a student's success and cannot be totally ignored.

So, with all those conflicted thoughts bubbling in the background, today I decided to allow them to write an essay for extra credit. I rather liked the assignment I came up with and I might possibly consider using it again if any students approach me about extra credit in the future. Here's the assignment directions:

English 1010 Extra Credit Essay

The purpose of English 1010 is to teach you how to compose effective written arguments. As the Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing (5th ed.) states:

The study of argumentation involves two components: truth seeking and persuasion. By truth-seeking, we mean a diligent, open-minded, and responsible search for the best course of action or solution to a problem, taking into account all the available information and alternative points of view. By persuasion, we mean the art of making a claim on an issue and justifying it convincingly so that the audience's initial resistance to your position is overcome and they are moved toward your position. (377)

With that in mind, your task is to compose an essay in which you try to convince me (your instructor) why I should give you extra credit for this class. In this essay, you should tell me 1) how much extra credit you would like to receive---would you like 20 points, 40 points, more?---and 2) the reasons why you should receive that amount of extra credit. If I find your argument persuasive, I will award you the extra credit points that you request in your essay. If I do not find your argument persuasive, you may possibly receive no extra points for writing this essay.

In order to write an effective essay, it helps to know a little bit about your audience and which rhetorical appeals he or she will find persuasive. You should assume that I am of the same mindset as Dr. Kurt Wiesenfeld (see the essay entitled "Making the Grade" that I gave out the third week of class). That is to say, you should assume that I feel somewhat opposed to the idea of extra credit because it potentially rewards students for unprofessional behavior and erodes our university's academic standards.

So, based on what you know about me as an instructor, should you appeal to logic (logos)? To emotion (pathos)? To your personal character (ethos)? The choice is yours. (For a helpful review of these three persuasive appeals, see <http://www.figarospeech.com/teach-a-kid-to-argue/>.)

There is no minimum length for this essay, but your essay should not be any longer than 3 pages, single-spaced in Times New Roman font. Please submit it to me via email on Thursday or earlier. Please remember this essay is purely optional. You do not have to write the essay if you do not choose to.

I'm interested to see how my students respond to this assignment. I figure if they really are able to persuade me to give them extra credit (especially when I'm so resistant to it), they will have met the objectives of my course and they will have earned the extra points fair and square.

If anything interesting comes as a result of this assignment, I'll let you know. :)

Alyssa Rock. "Extra Credit Dilemma." First Year Writing at Utah Valley University. July 13, 2009 [http://uvwriting.blogspot.com/2009/07/extra-credit-dilemma.html] February 15, 2010.

Much debate goes into the whole "extra credit" mechanism and whether or not it is beneficial for students to have this opportunity. The problem with this debate, as with most debates in education, is that all "extra credit" gets lumped into one category and people automatically make assumptions as to whether or not the topic is good or bad rather than the assignment itself.

There is good extra credit and bad extra credit the same as any other assignments in schools.

Aaron Eyler. "How Extra Credit Can Teach Students Learning Isn't Important." Synthesizing Education Blog. January 17, 2010 [http://synthesizingeducation.com/blog/2010/01/17/how-extra-credit-can-teach-students-learning-isnt-important/], February 15, 2010.



It is important that students bring a certain ragamuffin, barefoot irreverence to their studies; they are not here to worship what is known, but to question it.

~Jacob Bronowski