A Study on the Use of Incentives as a Means to Increase Class Participation and Learning

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A Study on the Use of Incentives as a Means to Increase Participation and Learning

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Law and the Socratic Method
What Can Go Wrong in a Law Class?

- Unpreparedness
- Lack of interest in the material
- Unwillingness to get involved
- Having no “talkers” to prime the pump

...All of the above lead to silence
Participation and the Literature

- Class participation has been studied
  - (Axelson & Flick, 2011, *Change*)

- Attempts to study increased participation have been studied
  - (O’Connor, 2013, *Education*)
  - (Beekes, 2006, *Active Learning in Higher Education*)

- Not much research on the role of incentive in increasing participation, instead of penalizing non-participation

- One professor gave away “meaningless bonus points”
  - (Guinee, 2012, *College Teaching*)
The Need for Participation Improvement

- A sea of silence in Commercial Law II
- Baseline: 1.5 participations per student in 75-minute session
- Goal: Improve participation 100% over a 7-class time frame
Restructuring the Pedagogy

- Announce the change & why it will be valuable
- Announce that there will be less rescuing in class
- Split the class into two groups for case law responsibility
- Use more flip-it techniques for pair-share groups
- Use the three-question-open method
The Incentive for Improve Participation

- 5% bonus on the next exam
- A pizza party
- Reminder: double the average participation rate over the next 7 classes
Initial Survey of Participation Inclination

Natural Comfort Level of Students to Participate in Class

Voluntary Participation in Class Discussion or Activities: 3.9
Being Called on in Class: 2.9
Being Put in Small Groups for In-Class Activities: 3.7
Implementation of Participation Project

- How to keep track of the participation data?
- How to encourage participation in class?
Techniques to Increase Engagement

- Flip-It Learning Activities
- Film Clips and Web links embedded on Blackboard.com
- Share-Pair Discussion Groups
- Encouragement Reminders
From One Red Paperclip to a House
One Red Paperclip

The paperclip below was owned by Canadian blogger Kyle McDonald, who traded it on Craigslist for a pen. After trading for almost a year, Kyle owned a house. After watching the “20/20” segment and looking through his trades below, discuss with your group members which of them would be covered by the UCC and Article 2 on Sales of Goods, and why or why not.

1) On July 14, 2005, he went to Vancouver and traded the paperclip for a fish-shaped pen.
2) He then traded the pen the same day for a hand-sculpted doorknob from Seattle, Washington, which he nicknamed “Knob-T”.
3) On July 25, 2005, he traveled to Amherst, Massachusetts, with a friend to trade the Knob-T for a Coleman camp stove (with fuel).
4) On September 24, 2005, he went to San Clemente, California, and traded the camp stove for a Honda generator.
5) On November 16, 2005, he made a second (and successful) attempt (after having the generator confiscated by the New York City Fire Department) in Maspeth, Queens, to trade the generator for an “instant party”: an empty keg, an IOU for filling the keg with the beer of the holder’s choice, and a neon Budweiser sign.
6) On December 8, 2005, he traded the “instant party” to Quebec comedian and radio personality Michel Barrette for one Ski-doo snowmobile.
7) Within a week of that, he traded the snowmobile for a two-person trip to Yakhl, British Columbia, in February 2006.
8) On or about January 7, 2006, he traded the second spot on the Yakhl trip for a cube van.
9) On or about February 22, 2006, he traded the cube van for a recording contract with Metalworks in Mississauga, Ontario.
10) On or about April 11, 2006, he traded the recording contract to Jody Gant for a year’s rent in Phoenix, Arizona.
11) On or about April 26, 2006, he traded the one year’s rent in Phoenix, Arizona, for one afternoon with Alice Cooper.
12) On or about May 26, 2006, he traded the one afternoon with Alice Cooper for a KISS motorized snow globe.
13) On or about June 2, 2006, he traded the KISS motorized snow globe to Corbin Bernsen for a role in the film Donna on Demand.
14) On or about July 5, 2006, he traded the movie role for a two-story farmhouse in Kipling, Saskatchewan.
How Did Things Turn Out?

- Average participation rate was 4.3 per student per class
  - The goal was 3 per student per class

- The median participation rate was 4.25

- Lowest individual participation rate was 0.9 per class
Second Round of Participation Research

- No incentive this time...
- Data collection for another 7 classes
- Also, less encouragement to keep track of participation
- The results: average participation rate of 2.3 per student per class
  - but still higher than the initial baseline
- 10% reduction in test grade from non-incentivized time frame
How Incentivized Participation Impacted Learning

- When studying participation, the increased participation is the “end,” not the means to the end
  - (Nunn, 1996, *Journal of Higher Education*)
  - (Guinee, 2012, *College Teaching*)
  - (O’Connor, 2013, *Education*)

- Increased participation positively affected the course project

- Second survey: Students thought the incentive project had a positive effect on their learning

- Third survey: Students recommended that the project be used again
Adjustments Made in Later Semesters

- Different participation goals
- Individuated, rather than collectivized, incentive
- Extended incentivized time frame