Incentive-Based Reading Compliance

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Questions to Consider

- How many students complete the assigned reading on time?

- How many students complete the reading, but don’t understand it?

- What can instructors do when students don’t/won’t do the assigned readings?
Project Origins

- Freshman orientation course taught Fall 2008
- Revisions to course for Spring 2009
- Project Fall 2009
College students’ reading compliance has declined substantially over the past 30 years from over 80% to less than 20% (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000).
Background

College students lie about completing the readings: 70% claim to have completed readings they have not (Sappington et al., 2002).
Background

Reading compliance significantly predicts exam scores and final grades (Sappington et al., 2002).
Background

Students are more likely to complete assigned readings if there is an external incentive, such as a graded quiz, than if there is no external incentive (Ruscio, 2001).
Prior research has not quantified the effect of increasing the value of a common incentive on reading compliance. What happens if it “pays” more to do the reading?
Method

- 2 Sections of a discussion-based Freshman Orientation course; approx. 22 students each
- Class met 28 times; 20 times there were assigned readings to inform daily discussion; required attendance
Method

- At the start of each class, there was a 1-question recall quiz over the readings; 2-3 minutes

- Quizzes graded: 0%, 50%, 100%
Method

- Control Section (N=22): quizzes worth 1 point each
- Experimental Section (N=21): quizzes worth 10 points each
- Both: 700 points from other sources in the course
Method

- Students completed a 7-item survey about their reading on the last day
- I recorded: their attendance, their quiz scores, and their non-quiz points
- Also: noted the number in each section who stopped attending at all
Results

Quiz Avg.

Non-Quiz Avg.

Control

Experimental
Results

Days Attended | # of "Drops"

Control | Experimental

Graph showing the comparison between Control and Experimental groups in terms of days attended and the number of "dops".
Results: Self-Report

- Other Course Readings
- Course Readings

Control | Experimental
Results: Self-Report

- Improved Grade*
- Contribute
- Understand
- Timely Completion
- Encourage Attendance*

Control
Experimental
Conclusions

- Students in the Experimental section thought the quizzes increased their attendance and improved their grades more than Control section (it didn’t):
  - Control Avg. Grade: 82.59%
  - Experimental Avg. Grade: 77.09%

- Overall, no significant positive differences were observed between the two sections.
Conclusions

- Average Reading Compliance for both sections:
  - Self report: about 65-75%
  - Assessed Knowledge: 53-58%

- Average Attendance: 24-25 of 28 days.
Conclusions

• Anecdotal observations:
  • Many students were reviewing the readings right before class
  • Students appeared better able to reference the readings in discussion
  • Student stress levels were noticeably higher; class was “less fun” for both student & instructor
  • Course evaluation scores were noticeably lower
Caveats

- Two small sections: limited power
- Didn’t have a “no quiz” group: incentive threshold could be between no incentive and any incentive.
