

Using Extra Credit in an MIS Course to Motivate Student Learning Beyond the Classroom

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As faculty, we often think of extra credit with disdain or as a something provided to students that have not done the work they needed to do. It is extra work for us. Why can't the students do the work that we have designed into the curriculum? Isn't it coddling to give the students extra credit work to make up for their lack of _____. And we fill in the blank with discipline, hard work, structure, studying or other characteristics we imagine a 'good' student possesses.

Of course, students love extra credit. I'm sure you too have seen students eyes light up when they hear those two precious words, "E X T R A C R E D I T." Students view extra credit work as a free bonus, full of potential and opportunity, and best of all it is their choice. There is no penalty if they don't do it or don't perform well. Extra credit can't hurt their grade. It can only help them. And, as a consequence many students will do an amazing amount of learning/work for a little extra credit.

So... what if? What if we as faculty turn extra credit into a positive for us, too? What if we take advantage of the positive image those two words connote? Could we? Should we? Well, I say yes we can, and yes we should...if we want to motivate and encourage students to learn more outside of the classroom and perhaps even outside of our curriculum. Why not give students credit for learning valuable knowledge and skills?

In this workshop, I will show participants how I structured an extra credit component into my IS Project Management course to encourage the students to network, attend professional presentations, develop an individual project plan, and stretch for some of their own personal and professional goals...all outside of class, all for a little extra credit, with little extra work on my part. My goal was to extrinsically motivate students to do things that I knew would be good for them and their careers and maybe, just maybe, result in a little intrinsic motivation, too. The best part is that within the first few weeks of the semester students were expressing deep gratitude for the opportunity to LEARN MORE. Better yet, they were achieving some of their individual goals motivated by a little boost from extra credit. Isn't that a professor's dream come true?

Ideally, participants should bring a course syllabus to the workshop. They will leave the workshop with an action plan for implementing extra credit into their courses, in a way that will motivate their students to work and learn, but require relatively little effort for the instructor. As a result, they can expect greater student learning and maybe even better student evaluations.