

In the Classroom 120

Are You Giving Extra Credit? Should You?

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks ever much for taking time out of your day to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, maybe you are doing other things, but you're still hanging out with me and I really do appreciate it. This week, I want to talk about extra credit in your class. Are you given extra credit? Should you be given extra credit? Well, that's up to discussion. Right now, it's the season. Everybody's getting their final grades in students are coming up, they're asking for extra credit, and a lot of faculty are giving extra credit. I'm personally not a fan of extra credit and I'm going to explain why, but there are other arguments out there saying that we should be doing extra credit. I'm going to include those thoughts in this episode and some of them are-- I can understand where they're coming from. We're going to just take a little deeper look.

As I said, I am not a fan of extra credit and the reason is I'm really focused on the idea of learning rather than the trappings of the education system. What that means is there's a lot of students that are just shooting for the grade. I know these grades mean things at different levels, but it should not be a last-minute thought it they should be thinking about how to perform at the highest level throughout their program, and not just dialing it in every once in a while, and then realizing that they're going to have a poor grade, and they got to do something extra in order to get a better grade, but I try to bake all that into my classes ahead of time.

I try to create courses that one, have ample choice of assignments, they get to choose which assignments they want to complete, which ones they don't want to complete and adding extra credit would just be adding more choice. It'd just be adding another assignment. I already have ample assignments more than they really need to do most of the courses that I put together, I use a lot of gamification. I provide multiple paths through my class, and they still have to attend to the learning objectives that I've set out for the class. I also, because I have all this choice, I tie it to the concept of additive grading, which means from the time they start to course, they will never go back in grade. Everything they do always leads up to the highest grade. They started zero and they are aiming for maximum points in that particular class. I talked about additive grading in episode ITC 74.

I encourage you to go check that out. Basically, this my students, they can continue submitting assignments submitting work having that work graded to get the highest grade they want and it's really a choice of they want. Throughout the class, I emphasize where they're at and what they need to achieve in order to be successful. There's really no place for extra credit in my courses. I also use in many of my courses specification grading, which this is all or nothing grading scenario, I talked about it in ITC 31. Go check out that episode. If an assignment, a submission for an

assignment doesn't meet the mark, I will provide some feedback and I'll send it in for a do-over and they can do this repeatedly until they grasp the concept, they grasp the grade.

A lot of my assignments are worth 25 points or 50 points and it's either zero or 25, or zero or 50. If I'm not happy where they're at, I just kicked it back. Kind of hard for students to accept initially, but once they get into the mode, they do fine. In other classes, for those classes that I have a major writing assignment, I use that assignment throughout the class, and we just keep making it better. The first ones are worthless percentage parts of their grade, they have a lower weight and then at the final submission has the higher weight but they should be polishing and improving that document all the way through class. If nothing else, at the last day of class, they just turned in one that still was a rough draft, they're going to get a score, maybe not as high as they had hoped, but if they didn't make any changes to it, they'll still get a score.

The only time that they will not do well on this type of an assignment is if they don't submit anything. That's usually the biggest challenge is the students are just not submitting their work or they're dialing it in. They're just submitting something that's that just does not meet the standards. They'll certainly get a grade but I give the opportunities for them to keep improving upon that, that they can take it back rework it and then resubmit. I don't have a problem with that.

Throughout my class, I allow students to turn in submissions all the time. The only deadline I have for any submissions is the last day of class. Now, naturally, with discussions, we had discussions closed off at the end of that week, because we're now discussing something entirely different. I don't award points if they didn't discuss with that week. However, with discussions, if we have 15 discussions across the term, at least in my class. If they don't do well on two of them for whatever reason, it could be they're sick, they have a cold or flu, they're down in the bed, they're not going to give me the best work at that moment in time or maybe suddenly, they have unexpected visitors they've got to entertain, or they have to go on a trip because of work, whatever, I don't care, I'll drop the bottom two. That usually helps them out.

If all the students have do-overs, reduce, we're doing additive grading, which is always the capability of continuing to add to their score, and they have ample choice on what assignments that they can turn in, why would they need extra credit? Using all the instructional technology, guru stuff that's out there, I've tried to build the best classes possible that are in the favor of the students, that meet the objectives and the goals of the class but I'm trying to use all those areas. I'm fighting back against the areas that pull a grade down, and how can I have students really focus on the learning rather than just be a game with the education system. Redos are definitely part of that. I'm not the only one who doesn't allow extra credit.

There's some other folks that have come on record saying they don't give extra credit, they're resisting the idea. Some of the reasons that they're sharing is they believe it leads to grade inflation. When you develop your course, you have all that set of points, and everybody is measured against those particular sets of points. When you add extra credit, and only some people are using the extra credit, it throws

those numbers out of whack it. It skews it one direction, because this is not the package that you put in front of your students. What you're doing is you're doing a Frankenstein thing, and you're keeping adding things to it in order for students to get the best grade, where they really just need to do the work that was initially assigned.

Once again, this idea of redos is really important, because if you don't allow someone to improve upon a product, and you're asking them to submit an entirely different product, then I think you're missing a learning opportunity. The redos allow them to take what-- the feedback that you've provided, and make it better, and you should allow them to potentially get to full marks on an assignment. Otherwise, you're really focused on the education system of it. If you did that points, because, well, they didn't get it right the first time. I'm not going to give them full points but the second time they got it correct, what are you really doing? Are you focused on the learning or are you focused on the education system? What's the lesson in what you're doing?

If that lesson is not written in your course objectives, you may want to rethink that. The other reason that other faculty are not in favor of extra credit is because it's just extra work, you have to build the new assignment, then students are doing that new assignment and they're taking energy away from the regular assignments they should have been working on. You're just adding additional work. Now redoing is certainly additional work, but it's focused on the same assignment, it's focused on that same learning objective, the assessment for that.

I see it somewhat as a difference. Depending on what kind of extra credit that you give out, it may also not be in line with your course objectives. Therefore, if that extra credit was not built in, when you were doing your backward design, then you have basically Frankensteined your course. You add something that that is not tied to a learning objective, that's not helping the situation, that's not helping the student master the content of your course. Now, there's other support for extra credit or ideas on how you can do extra credit. Some of this I agree with, but I, once again, I've baked this into my class, I don't see it as extra credit. In the article *Extra, Extra, Read All About It*, Deborah Cohen, she provides extra enrichment opportunities. What she does is she encourages students to participate in lifelong learning opportunities relevant to her class for extra credit. As part of this, she requires a research paper or a reflection paper on the event. Really, that reflection paper should indicate how the content is relevant to the class. These events can be live performances or even recorded performances.

Going back to what I was thinking, my question is why could you include these as regular assignments and add them as part of that choice? Couldn't you require all your students to participate in these type of enrichment activities, or at least make them optional as part of your class, as one of the assignment choices? That way, maybe not everybody can attend the same event because of limitations, external limitations. Maybe, if it's a live event, they don't have off from work and they can't attend it, they shouldn't be penalized for that, but maybe there is another event that they could attend that meets the parameters that you've set forth in your class. Maybe you provide that through the course of the term, that you do reflection on

three to five different events, but that would be just normal assignments. That really is not extra. You can weave that right into your class.

The one that just stands out to me over and over and over again is this idea of revision. Some faculty use extra credit when they're allowing a student to write a paper or rewrite a paper. My thought is since rewrites are essential to writing, why not just make this part of the assignment that a student can resubmit over and over and over again until they eventually get the highest grade for that assignment? I have always allowed for resubmissions, and matter of fact, for specifications grading, it's part of it, that if I don't like something, I kick it back, they get zero points. You can do exactly the same thing. It's like, "No, resubmit," because you want to focus on the learning.

Another reason that faculty may give extra credit is as a stress reducer. Students may want to do extra credit because they realize that they just messed up on a test, they did poor and they want to have an opportunity to get some of those points back. Well, I would rethink those type of assessments. First of all, if your assessment is weighted so heavily, like half the course, and if somebody messes up that part of the assessment, it really destroys their grade. I would rethink that. I would make assessments a lot less part of the grade. I would have multiple opportunities where students could demonstrate their learning instead of having one massive final exam that if they mess that up, it totally drops their grade. I would rethink that whole process.

As a matter of fact, for those type of things, I would get rid of the assessment entirely and go to more authentic activities, things that demonstrate that they really understand what's going on in your class. If you want to use quizzes, then I would aim for mastery quizzes. I talked in depth about this in ITC 40. Go check that out for more on this topic. What you would do is you build large test banks and have students take these exams over and over and over again until they can ace them before you give them credit. This is more productive than a one and done test. It's also really kind of like you're talking about specifications grading. If they don't pass the test, they get zero points. If they ace it, well, then they get the full points. You can build different quizzes there, but I would make them very low stakes, very small percentage points, so in totality, it doesn't crush third grade.

With that, there is also other extra credit ideas out there. Erika Romero, she shared a number of her ideas in *5 Extra Credit Activities That Promote Engaged Learning*, in that article. One of them focus on providing additional scholarly responses to discussion posts. She provides a description of how she does her discussion posts and how they get points. Once again, this is already baked into the discussions that I create. Students have an entire week to maximize the points they need for a discussion. If they do not participate in those discussions, they just don't get the full points. In addition, I also delete the two discussions that have the lowest points. If they got maximum points for all the discussions, if I delete the lowest two, they still have maximum points. For some students, this helps. Some students, it doesn't, but here, Erika, she's allowing for students to go back and provide additional scholarly posts that add to the conversation, that is certainly a way that you can do it.

What I thought was interesting at Southern Methodist University, the ability to give extra credit is at the department level. The department, in this case, a first- and second-year Spanish courses within the Department of World Languages and Literatures decides upon approved extra credit event that can count towards a course. Students can participate in these events and there is a maximum allowable number of extra credit points that they can earn. This is-- faculty don't even have the option. In some cases, the school or the university has said there will be no extra credit. Everything's done based on your regular assignments. There's options there.

Another way that you may want to consider extra credit that also helps to support your course or improve your class, you could give extra credit for a student to help, say, develop OER content for your course. They get credit on the OER content and your course gets better because student helped build out OER content. I talked about test banks and test pools. Students could help by contributing questions to those test pools where they would have to review different chapters or different things that you want them to read or watch and they develop questions based on that. This idea of test pools I talked about in depth in ITC 18. Check that episode out.

One of the challenges I know faculty have is building test questions. It just takes time when you can have students help to do that, plus, they have to dig into that material and get a better understanding of that material. Students can also be challenged to go out and get additional resources for the class, focusing on different topics and aiding you as the instructor to go look for rich resources that could improve the class. That may be a way that you can use extra credit.

As I said, I'm not a fan of extra credit because if they didn't grasp the concepts or do the work for the regular assignments, why should I give them more assignments to do? If I want them really to understand the content that I put forth in front of them, then I'm just going to give them more opportunities to work on that content. I'm definitely a fan of redos and those opportunities are pretty much built into all the courses that I have. I'd love to hear what you guys are thinking about extra credit. Feel free to certainly add to any comments from the different posts that I have, add comments to this one. Let me know what are you doing in terms of extra credit? With that, I'm going to let you get back to your day. Before I go, here's a quick plug for my book.