

Quiz Provides Early Insight into New Homework Policy

By Don Sutherland

Last semester, my BBA 407 Strategic Management class took a quiz that revealed that dramatically less learning had been occurring than during any of my earlier semesters. That short exam showed that realized learning to date (a standardized measure) was just 19.0% vs. 38.6% from the spring 2015 semester.

A post-quiz analysis highlighted a large decline in that class's homework completion rate. Using a simple model that considered homework and attendance, that class's actual realized learning to date fell between a predicted range of 17.3% and 22.0%. By the end of the semester, some, but not all of the realized learning gap was made up.

For the spring 2016 semester, the homework requirement was modified. Whereas in the past, every completed homework assignment contributed points toward a student's final grade, a penalty was incorporated so that every missed homework assignment deducted points from a student's final grade. For example, if each homework assignment contributed 1 point toward a student's final grade, every missed assignment resulted in a deduction of 1 point from a student's final grade. In the past, missed assignments resulted in a contribution of 0 points toward a student's final grade. The penalty raised the "cost" of missing homework assignments and provided a stronger disincentive for students to miss their assignments.

This semester, the homework completion rate has rebounded in response to the penalty for missed assignments. There was also a spillover effect in which student attendance improved. According to the simple model that was used to predict last semester's realized learning to date, the spring 2016 figure was projected to fall somewhere between 37.5% and 47.7%. The actual outcome from the quiz was 42.9%.

On account of evidence indicating a positive student learning impact following implementation of the new approach to grading homework, the penalty for missed assignments will be made permanent. If past semesters are representative, the current class's student learning should exceed the final figure for last semester.