

**Title:** Attendance Incentives

**Project Member(s):** Michele Thoele

**Describe the problem, issue, or area of interest and the context.** *The problem I perceived was that good attendance was not a habit that my students had developed. It seemed that their attitude, in general, was that now that they were finally in college and in control of their education, they would do it “their way.” This seemed to mean to them: missing class, arriving late, and leaving early whenever they felt like it.*

*When I began teaching college, I also took the attitude that my students are adults and are in control of their own education and if they want to miss class or arrive late that was their decision. I refused to police their attendance. However, I began to realize that I could, if I wanted to, try to help them develop good habits and teach them to be good college students. I began to believe that, especially at a Community College, this was part of my role as their teacher.*

*My first attempt to modify their attendance was very traditional. I gave points for attendance. This had no effect on attendance. As a friend of mine put it, “developmental students are used to having points taken away from them. They don’t even hear you anymore when you say ‘that’s 10 points off!’.” I realized that I had to find a currency that they cared about and bargain with them that way.*

*My second attempt to modify their attendance was using re-take privileges on exams. This proved to be wildly successful. I will describe it in more detail below.*

**Define your desired goals, or “outcomes.”** *My main goal was improved attendance in both presence, as well as promptness. I hoped that improved attendance would translate into a more complete understanding of the math as well as increased test scores.*

**Describe your “indicators” of success.** *I looked at attendance records and exam scores to measure success.*

**Describe your project.** *Students could earn an exam re-take opportunity if they had perfect attendance with no more than one tardy. The attendance record started over with each exam, so students had the chance to start again with a perfect attendance goal after each test. The re-take exam was a different test and was to be taken on their own time at our school’s testing center within a week of the original exam being returned to them. I kept a record of their attendance by passing around a sheet for them to sign-in on at the beginning of each class. I found that this put the responsibility on them to sign in rather than on me to take attendance each class.*

**Describe your results and Describe your evaluation methods.** *This policy was very successful in my college-level courses (Pre-Calculus and Math for Teachers) as well as Math 095 (Intermediate Algebra). Students were very motivated to earn the re-take opportunity. They commented many times about how they do not miss my class because they want to earn a re-take. Of course there are always a few students who will not care no matter what you do and students who take their education very seriously even if there aren’t incentives. What I was pleased to notice was that the average student who cares but does not necessarily have the best habits, seemed to be motivated to change their habits.*

*I believe that the fact that the attendance record is wiped clean after each exam is also a strong motivator. Students who didn’t take attendance seriously and didn’t receive a re-take on an exam decided that attendance was, in fact, important and wanted to earn the re-take opportunity the next time. I see the number of students who qualify for the re-take go up as the semester goes on.*

*This policy has the added benefit of getting students to study from their mistakes. They are very anxious to get their exams back, even if they know they did poorly, to learn from their mistakes so that they do better on the re-take. I routinely have students in my office hours going over their exams with me. This rarely happened before I instituted this policy. For me, this has been the most rewarding result. I love to see my students learning from their mistakes. In general, their score on their re-takes are higher than their original exam score. This is not true as often as I would like, but it is the case more often than not.*

*My attendance policy does not, however, appear to be successful in my Math 090 course (Elementary Algebra). For my last exam, only 5 out of 28 students qualified for the re-take. This is the first time I’ve taught this course, so it could be this class in particular, but I have a sense that it’s just the level these students are at. I believe that they are not at a place in their educational careers where an incentive like this is enough to convince them to attend class.*

*The only downside to this attendance policy is that it is considerably more work for me. I have to write twice as many exams as normal. I have to keep track of attendance and arrange for make-ups to be taken at our testing center. And I have to grade the re-takes. So far, the benefits have outweighed the negatives for me. However, I do not feel that way with my Math 090 class and may not continue to use this policy in this course in the future.*