

Does Topic Importance Affect Motivation to Learn?

Abstract

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This project tried to determine whether students' beliefs about the level of importance of a topic affected their motivation to achieve a deep understanding of it. Topics in my Organizational Behavior course such as personality, motivation, leadership, stress, power, and politics are ones that all students will encounter in their careers regardless of their field. If students can get to the point of deeply understanding the truly important topics, then they will be better able to guide, direct, and perhaps even change their futures in the workplace.

Based on Understanding By Design, by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, I determined the level of importance of course topics by surveying colleagues, advisory board members, and alumni. I then shared that information with students and attempted to determine whether this affected their beliefs about what is important and, in turn, affected their motivation and their learning.

First year results included significant improvement in course grades (from exams, homework, in-class exercises, etc.) at the lower end of the grade distribution:

	<u>Spring 2003</u>	<u>Spring 2004</u>
A's	40% of students	40% of students
B's	30%	31%
C's	15%	23%
D's	<u>15%</u>	<u>6%</u>
	100%	100%

Since there was no evidence about whether this shift was directly related to student beliefs about the importance of the topics, I added an additional survey for the students in Spring 2004 about what else affected their motivation.

I continue to use the combined results (opinions of outsiders about topic importance and student beliefs about what motivates them) with my students each semester, and it seems to have a positive effect: exam scores in Spring 2006 were the highest ever.