

Encouraging Students to Read: What Professors Are (and Aren't) Doing About It

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Reasons are examined as to why students are reluctant to complete assigned textbook readings on a timely basis. Prior research suggested that lack of student motivation, lack of student knowledge of effective study habits, competing demands on student time, and lack of congruency between student objectives for the course and professor objectives for students could be the cause. Our empirical research indicated that both the textbook and the professor can impact student willingness to complete assigned readings. Students (n=394) suggested that a good textbook be reasonably priced (\$50 or less), concise (short chapters), loaded with great graphics, and easy to understand. Business faculty (n=77) shared ideas on how they encourage students to prepare for class by completing their assigned textbook reading. The authors divided the responses into one of two general categories: (1) requiring additional student preparation prior to class, or (2) incorporating in-class activities designed to measure the degree of student preparation. These responses were then categorized as reflections of professorial assumptions (Theory X or Theory Y) regarding their students. One author shared his success with the use of Thoughtful Intellectually Engaging Responses (TIERs) and Reading Logs. The authors conclude that an effective approach will require professors to develop course pedagogy that will attack multiple reasons for lack of preparation simultaneously so that we can reach all students who would otherwise remain unprepared. Suggestions on how to continue the dialog on this topic as well as suggestions for future research are provided.

The purpose of this descriptive research study was to identify reasons students do not complete assigned readings for courses and the pedagogical practices that faculty employ to encourage student reading. Assigned readings were defined as course texts, supplemental articles, etc. Pedagogical practices were defined as in- and out-of-class assignments to foster reading and reflection.

Two overarching research questions guided this study:

1. What reasons do students cite for not completing the required readings for courses?
2. What pedagogical methods do faculty employ to encourage student reading?

Related Literature

The literature on student compliance with assigned reading is large and varied. Consistent with the overarching research questions that guided our study, we consider the following issues in reviewing the related literature. First, what is the scope of the problem, or how much reading do students actually complete? Second, why does the problem exist, or what reasons do students offer for not completing their assigned reading? And third, what can be done about it, or what pedagogical methods do faculty employ in remediating the problem?

How Much Reading Do Students Actually Complete?

Many professors would not be surprised to find that student compliance with assigned readings is low.

Clump, Bauer, and Bradley (2004) found that 27.4% of undergraduates complete their assigned reading before class, while 69.98% completed it before a test. Results at the graduate level are little improved, as Clump and Doll (2007) found that only 54.21% of their masters-level students read their assigned reading before class, and 84.21% did so before a test.

The problem is getting worse over time. Burchfield and Sappington (2000) conducted a longitudinal study of student compliance with assigned readings, and they found that the compliance rates “declined dramatically” (p. 59) between 1981 and 1997.

Non-compliance with assigned reading is not limited to any particular discipline or subset of disciplines. Much of the evidence is drawn from psychology courses (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000; Clump, Bauer, & Bradley, 2004; Clump & Doll, 2007; Durwin & Sherman, 2008; Johnson & Kiviniemi, 2009; Van Blerkom, VanBlerkom, & Bertsch, 2006;). However, Artis (2008) writes about students in his business classes; Broost and Bradley (2006) report evidence generated from a class in philosophy; Henderson and Rosenthal (2006), as well as Jensen and Moore (2008), write about science classes; Howard (2004) discusses evidence from his sociology class; Mokhtari and Sheorey (1994) and Chang (2010) report on students enrolled in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes; Peterson (2006) finds evidence in classes in communications; and Carney, Fry, Gabriele, and Ballard (2008), Tomasek (2009), and Barnett (1996) report evidence from education classes.

Compounding the problem, the quality of reading experience that students typically have may be far less

than professors believe is optimal. Wandersee (1988) describes the reading experience necessary to master complex material as a sequential process consisting of: (1) finding the meaning the author presents, (2) deciding upon its significance, (3) learning the meaning, (4) relating the concept to past experience, and (5) continuing to practice and review what was learned. It is this type of experience that many professors have in mind when they suggest a minimum study time of 2 hours outside of class for every one hour in class. By contrast, Sikorski et al. (2002) found that most students report reading their textbooks less than three hours per week.

Why Are Compliance Rates Low?

Reasons suggested for poor student compliance vary widely. A recent study found that the majority of college graduates receiving bachelor's degrees are not proficient at reading (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Employers concur with this assertion, indicating that many graduates lack the reading skills necessary to perform basic job-related tasks. (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Anecdotal evidence is offered by Long (2009) who states

Anyone who has used reading aloud in a college classroom as a learning tool can attest to the fact that many students struggle painfully with reading, stumbling over words. Such readers cannot enjoy reading, not to mention make effective use of the skill. (p. 12)

Artis (2008) reports the following:

I made the mistake of randomly calling on college students during class to read aloud from their textbooks. I intended to show how reading the textbook in advance prepared them for class discussion, but this actually embarrassed and angered many students. It caused students with deficient reading skills to avoid coming to class. (p. 134)

The decline in reading by college students may simply mirror a decline in reading rates of our overall population. A national survey of the reading habits of U.S. adults found that in the past 20 years the percentage of adults participating in literary reading declined from nearly 60% to below 50% (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). The decline in reading was noted over all age groups, but young adults (18-34 years of age) experienced the highest rate of decline, and the 18-24 age group, which earlier had the highest reading participation rate, showed the lowest rate in the most recent study.

Lack of student motivation may also play a role (Rothkopf, 1988). Reading most college texts requires deliberate effort, is time consuming, and is not the most entertaining activity. Students may simply view the cost of studying, in terms of opportunity costs, as too high. A similar finding is offered by Nolen (1996) who concludes that a lack of congruence between professor goals and student goals may contribute to student non-compliance with reading assignments. For example, some students may have a goal of simply passing a particular course, and perhaps they conclude that this goal can be achieved without reading the text.

A different view is offered by Jolliffe and Harl (2008), who found that students do read, but they do not necessarily read their textbooks. They concluded:

The majority of students spend lots of time reading online documents. A substantial majority of them read their *Facebook* sites almost daily, sometimes for extended periods. Most of them read while doing something else: listening to music, checking emails and sending instant messages, watching television, and so on. (p. 605)

Jolliffe and Harl (2008) also found that:

. . . our students were reading, but they were not reading studiously, either in terms of the texts they were engaging with or the manner in which they read them . . . they saw the reading that they had to do for school as uninspiring, dull, and painfully required. (p. 611)

Derryberry and Wininger (2008) offer some insights from their own field of social psychology to explain why some students engage in textbook reading while others do not. Their hypothesis is based on the fundamental principle that motivated learners are also self-regulated in their learning efforts. The authors therefore emphasize linkages between textbook usage and three motivational constructs related to self-regulation: the need for cognition, goal orientation, and self-determination theory.

The need for cognition refers to an individual's tendency to participate in and enjoy effortful thinking. Derryberry and Wininger hypothesize that students with a high need for cognition will seek out opportunities for this type of thinking. Textbook reading can provide just this type of activity, especially if the text is challenging.

Goal orientation has a more complex relationship to textbook usage. The authors cite two types of goals: mastery goals and performance goals. Mastery goals are task-oriented, and they relate to increasing competence, developing new skills, or achieving a sense of mastery. Performance goals, on the other hand, focus on

avoiding the negative judgment of others or attaining the positive judgment of others. Derryberry and Wininger hypothesize that students with a mastery goal orientation will normally have the strongest motivation to read texts, but they note that those with performance orientations may also be regular text users, especially if the text is not perceived as too difficult.

Self-determination theory also offers an explanation of why some students read their text and others do not. Self-determination theory identifies two sources of motivation; self-motivation, which is described as autonomous and innate, and other-motivation, which is described as environmental or reactive. According to the authors, individuals who are self-motivated should be expected to use their texts more and engage in more reflective and deeper information processing.

The authors administered a variety of psychological tests designed to develop motivational profiles of their students, and then they tested the above hypotheses against student responses to their texts. Their hypotheses were confirmed. They concluded, “. . . [E]fforts on the part of instructors to determine the texts that are most congruent with student motivational orientations can increase the probability of a text’s usage” (Derryberry & Wininger, 2008, p. 10). While this finding is not without merit, it would be extremely difficult for professors in most disciplines to replicate Derryberry and Wininger’s methods.

The ideas of Derryberry and Wininger are related to Dweck’s theory of a growth mindset. (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; and Dweck, 1999). Dweck believes there are two ways in which individuals perceive their intelligence. Those with a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is an innate trait. This leads to an avoidance of effort, because if one has the necessary level of intelligence, new information should come easily. Those with a fixed mindset tend not to handle setbacks well, and they withdraw their effort if met with resistance. In contrast, Dweck labels a growth mindset as one in which individuals believe intelligence can be developed over time. Those with a growth mindset welcome challenges as opportunities to grow. They value their effort, and they are adaptive in the face of challenges and failures. Dweck’s work would suggest that students don’t read their texts because they have developed a mindset that tells them that the challenge of reading technical material is too great. Such students might even acknowledge that the text contains information that is important to them in learning course content. (We are grateful for the comments of an anonymous reviewer who pointed this out.) Professors can help develop a growth mindset in their students by emphasizing challenge rather than accomplishment, grading for growth rather than achievement, and emphasizing a sense of progress in student work.

Some studies indicate that professors themselves are at least partially responsible for student non-compliance with reading assignments. Brost and Bradley (2006) refer to the “vicious circle” of the assigned reading process with the following example:

Suppose in order to teach Aquinas’ proofs for the existence of God, we assign the corresponding passages from *Summa Theologica*. How are we to use this reading? Do we expect the students to understand the arguments without further explanation? We recognize that this is probably too much to expect from the students, or worse, we suspect that too many students failed to read the assigned passages. Instead, we are likely to explicate the arguments in class and directly walk them through the text. Students, in turn, may simply not read, waiting for the instructor to cover the reading for them in class. . . . Of course, there should be, and often is, direct discussion of the reading in class; the question is how to do it in such a way that we do not undermine students’ need to critically read on their own. (Brost, & Bradley, 2006, p. 107)

Brost and Bradley admit that students often do not understand the role of assigned reading. However, for the faculty they observed in their study, they also noted that “. . . much of the assigned reading did *not* have an overt pedagogical role; over half the faculty didn’t even use the assigned reading in (any) apparent way within their class time” (p. 106).

Brost and Bradley find that “. . . faculty are clearly a piece of the compliance problem” (p. 108). They believe that college professors are not taught enough about teaching pedagogy, and that more training in this area is necessary.

In their student survey, Maher and Mitchell (2010) found that students have a desire to complete assignments successfully but are uncertain how to balance workloads and are uncertain that they have the necessary skills. Specifically, they found that (1) there was a lack of clarity about expected workloads, (2) students perceived a lack of guidance about the appropriate amounts of reading and strategies to complete their reading, and (3) there were student concerns about correctly identifying the purpose of assignments and whether they possess the necessary skills for completing the assignments. Students found it especially frustrating when there was not a close correlation between reading and lecture themes (p. 142). Finally, students felt that faculty members really don’t expect them to keep up. As one student stated, “Make sure you keep up with the reading” (they say), and everyone nods, and we all know it’s not going to happen” (p. 142).

Similar conclusions are drawn by Ericsson and Lehmann (1996) who conclude that many students do not know how to study. This is particularly applicable to younger students early in their college careers. An increasing proportion of students find a lack of challenge in their secondary education curricula, and thus they come to the university with a lack of study skills.

Barnett (1996) concludes that competing demands on students' time plays a role in lack of reading assignment completion. The author states that more and more students today have part time (or full time) jobs which place demands on their time. They seem overly optimistic with regard to their ability to juggle the demands of these jobs with the demands of their college work. Additionally, Barnett cites family pressures on student time, as well as social events and personal issues, which impinge on their ability to devote the necessary amount of time for study. These factors not only restrict the amount of time, but the amount of available energy left over to devote to study.

Pedagogical Suggestions Designed to Get Students to Read

Instructors frequently respond to student non-compliance by administering quizzes. Johnson and Kiviniemi (2009) require students to complete an online quiz no later than the beginning of the week in which the related material is to be discussed in class. They report that this requirement has raised student comprehension, as measured by their scores on subsequent exams. Howard (2004) reports success with "Just-in-Time" quizzes, which are administered online and are due no later than 2 hours before class meeting time. He then spends the 2 hours prior to class grading the quizzes, which gives him insight into student response to the reading and where potential issues of comprehension lie. Carney et al. (2008) experimented with three different methods of administering reading quizzes. Students were given a list of five generic questions, based on Bloom's Taxonomy, which could be applied to all their reading for that class. These questions served as a study guide for students to help them gain needed perspective on the assigned material. Under a Monte Carlo Quiz method, the issue of whether or not a reading quiz would be administered that day and what question (from the five) was to be asked was decided by a random process (roll of the die) done in front of the class. With the second method, the professor decided in advance whether or not there would be a quiz, and if so, what question would be asked. Students were told to expect a quiz on most days. With the third method, students prepared a learning log outside of class and submitted it for grading. The authors found that all three methods

generated significantly higher rates of student compliance with reading assignments. However, the Monte Carlo method was significantly less popular with students, and the learning log method was significantly more popular (pages 198-199).

Interestingly, Barnett (1996) reports that poor quiz grades do not prompt his students to change their study behavior. He advocates searching for alternative strategies.

Henderson and Rosenthal (2006) advocate reading questions as an alternative to quizzes as a pedagogical device to encourage students to complete assigned reading. Reading questions are questions that the student poses to the instructor after completing the assigned reading. They can be submitted online. The authors state, "In reading quizzes, students rely on the teacher to assess their understanding. We would like students to become better at assessing their own understanding" (p. 47). Smith, Holliday, and Austin (2009) also found that question-based approaches were more effective than re-reading in improving student comprehension of difficult text passages. Van Blerkom et al. (2006) found that students who generate questions on their assigned reading performed better on subsequent exams than students who copied, highlighted, or took notes on the same material.

In a recent study, Tomasek (2009) demonstrates how questions (prompts) can promote critical reading and assist students in synthesizing the big ideas from a reading selection. She identifies six categories of prompts that are closely connected to the development of critical reading: (1) identification of the problem or issue, (2) making connections, (3) interpretation of evidence, (4) challenging assumptions, (5) making applications, and (6) taking a different point of view. Specific examples of prompts from all six areas are identified. She emphasizes the importance of the professor's rationale or objectives for the assignment in the determination of which of the six areas will be selected.

While faculty members often cite poor student skills as a reason for non-compliance with assigned reading (Long, 2009), and students themselves report uncertainty about their ability to complete assignments (Maher & Mitchell, 2010), a relatively small number of studies report on the results of faculty attempts to incorporate training in reading skills into their classes. L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2007) report success with five different strategies designed to improve student reading comprehension. It is interesting to note that their work was done with students enrolled in literacy methods classes designed for education majors.

Artis (2008) found that devoting time to the SQ3R approach to developing reading skills pays off for his business students. SQ3R is a sequential, self-regulated

reading method that asks students to *Survey*, *Question*, *Read*, *Recite*, and *Review*. He describes in depth how he trains students in this approach and the improvement that it generates.

Peterson (2006) suggests that, for especially difficult material, professors should have groups of 2-3 students generate summary sentences of especially difficult passages (2-3 paragraphs). The summary sentences can be written on the board or on the computer with a projector. The summary sentences can then be combined sequentially into summary paragraphs which cover longer passages.

Some professors have found success with altering the type of assigned reading. Howard (2004) uses readers rather than the typical large, comprehensive text often used in introductory survey courses. As rationale, he cites Pugh, Pawan, and Antommarchi (2000) who found that these texts represent the kind of reading least likely to be associated with higher levels of cognitive development. In contrast, Durwin and Sherman (2008) found that the choice of a text in introductory classes makes very little difference in student comprehension. They find that these texts are increasingly homogeneous with respect to organization and approach, and they suggest that this is probably a market-driven phenomena.

Stokes-Eley (2007) discusses how to incorporate Kolb's experimental learning theory into student-led chapter presentations. Kolb's theory describes learning as a series of 4 modes: (1) concrete experience (feeling), (2) reflective observation (watching), (3) abstract conceptualization (thinking), and (4) active experimentation (doing). Specific suggestions are offered for each of the four modes. Unfortunately, this pedagogy insures only that the student(s) making the presentations have actively engaged in the text reading, and this does little to insure that others in the class have engaged at a similar level.

Chang (2010) suggests that a self-monitoring strategy on the part of students will generate improved academic performance and greater student motivation. The recommended self-monitoring activity consists simply of keeping a log outlining the time and place of study, with whom, and a score prediction on the next exam.

Method

In an informal survey of students enrolled in his business classes, one of the authors obtained the results displayed in Table 1. Concerned with the lack of class preparation reflected in the Table 1 results, he followed up with a survey of 394 business undergraduates at five colleges in the Midwest, and he obtained the results in Table 2.

Assuming the 4.5% that do not have textbooks are included in the 10.6% who read less than 10% of their assigned textbook readings, that leaves 6.1% of students who have the textbooks but still only read less than 10% of their assigned textbook readings. There appears to be no significant difference in these results based on gender. However, the data show that students tended to read more in classes that deal with their particular major or concentration. Figure 1 compares the reading compliance rates between beginning students enrolled in Foundations of Business (n=30) and undergraduate survey respondents overall (n=394). Not surprisingly, the compliance rates for beginning students are much lower.

Students were asked to identify reasons why assigned readings were not completed. Reasons were selected from category options predefined on the questionnaire. The categories were developed using findings previously reported in the literature. Table 3 lists the student responses. It is important to note that the proportions sum to greater than 100% because multiple responses were permitted.

By selecting a "good" textbook, the professor may diminish the resistance students have towards required reading assignments. Students were asked to define their own version of a good textbook by selecting from predefined categories based upon those discussed previously in the literature (Broost & Bradley, 2006; Derryberry & Wininger, 2008; and Durwin & Sherman, 2008). Analysis of the 365 responses reveals the data displayed in Table 4. It would appear that students define a good textbook as one that is reasonable priced, concise, loaded with great graphics, and easy to understand. These themes have also been mentioned in the research cited above. But having a great textbook does not guarantee that the book will be read by the students. Hopefully, professors can employ strategies that can improve student reading and preparation. With this in mind, the authors asked business faculty at liberal arts colleges nationwide to respond to the following two open-ended questions/issues:

- "What can I do to encourage students to prepare for class by completing their assigned textbook reading?"
- "I know the use of the "pop quiz" or chapter quiz is one approach. I'm looking for additional ways to encourage students to read their textbooks."

The issue struck a sensitive nerve, and it elicited an immediate outpouring of response from faculty. Some responses were brief, some lengthy; some respondents indicated they felt the problem was hopeless and had no suggestions, while others offered detailed

Table 1
Informal Survey (n=30) Foundations of Business Class

Proportion of Students	% of Assigned Reading Completed
50%	less than 10%
25%	10% – 25%
5%	26% – 50%
15%	51% – 75%
5%	76% – 100%

Table 2
Survey (n=394) Business Undergraduates: % of Assigned Reading Completed

Proportion of Students	% of Assigned Reading Completed
4.5%	Did not own the textbook(s)
10.6%	0 – 10%
11.1%	11 – 25%
13.2%	26 – 50%
17.8%	51 – 75%
42.9%	76% – 100%

Table 3
Survey (n=394) Business Undergraduates: Reasons for Not Completing Assigned Readings

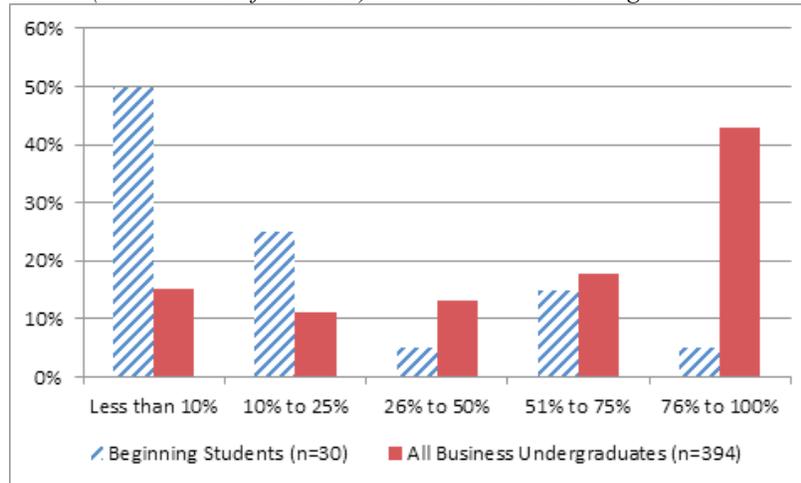
Proportion of Students*	Reason for not completing assigned readings
48.2%	Lack of time
26.8%	Boring
20.2%	Not meaningful
20.2%	Professor rarely refers to the textbook
13.8%	Material to be read is not on the test
9.2%	Difficult to read
9.2%	Just want to get by

Note. *Sums to greater than 100% due to multiple answers

Table 4
Survey (n=365) Business Undergraduates: Defining a Good Textbook

Proportion of Students	A good textbook is...
28%	Cheaper price (\$50 or less)
17%	Essential information stated once—skip all the details; shorter chapters; not redundant and boring; rich, but brief, content; not a lot of fluff
15%	Better graphics for visual learners and good use of color
14%	Well written; easier to understand
8%	Relevant information that is up to date
7%	Use of examples; apply theory with practical examples—relates to real life; stories to keep me from falling asleep
11%	Other

Figure 1
*Percentage of Assigned Reading Completed: Beginning Students
 (Foundations of Business) and All Business Undergraduates*



programs and classroom pedagogy which they were convinced would work in a larger setting. In all, we received 135 different suggestions from 77 faculty (about 15% response rate) from several institutions of higher learning. Obviously, a number of business faculty suggested multiple solutions. We believe this is a good response rate considering that we employed no techniques, either sophisticated or unsophisticated, to enhance the rate of response among the initial recipients of the survey.

Results

Our survey generated several recommendations and suggestions for handling the problem, yet many faculty members commented on their frustration over this issue. Comments like those below were typical.

- “I’m sure you will hear from any number of faculty who will confirm this is a problem . . .”
- “I’m glad to hear that I’m not the only one who struggles to get students to read the assigned material before class.”
- “Great question and probably one that many have asked for years.”
- “I think this is a question we are all struggling with, so I appreciate your bringing it to the full forum.”

Faculty members were asked to provide suggestions on handling the assigned reading problem through an open-ended question. Responses varied quite a bit, but they were not difficult to analyze if handled on a step-by-step basis. First, we

divided the suggestions into one of two basic categories: (1) responses calling for additional student preparation prior to class, and (2) responses that incorporate in-class activities. Although categories as basic as those above did pose a classification for most cases, there were a few miscellaneous responses which did not fit into either of the two categories above. The clustering was done by one of the authors, and it was reviewed by a colleague (not involved with our study) at the same institution.

We categorized faculty responses as follows:

- 9% involved in-class activities designed to measure the degree of student preparation.
- 31% involved additional student work prior to class.
- 20% did not fall clearly into either of the above two categories.

Once the responses were divided into the above groups, they were reviewed once again to identify basic similarities. Using common words and themes, the responses from each major category were grouped into a relatively small number of sub-categories. These responses are discussed below.

Discussion

In-class Activities Designed to Measure Student Preparation

The largest category of respondents recommended various in-class activities to measure the degree of student preparation. Of this group, the most frequently

mentioned activity was a daily or weekly quiz, with the questions coming from the assigned reading (n=22). Most instructors who recommended this tool used multiple choice questions, but a minority (n=6) suggested essay type questions for these quizzes. Many faculty also suggested that the lowest quiz score be dropped at the end of the semester.

A few faculty members (n=6) recommended student presentations covering material in the assigned reading be required. Motivation for incorporating this strategy seemed mixed, as some faculty indicated it was a way to “get out from in front of the class.” Of course, this technique insures that only the presenting group has completed the assigned reading, and its impact on the level of preparation of the rest of the class is questionable.

Another suggestion that received the endorsement of a number of professors (n=5) was incorporation of specific exam questions which were covered in the reading only. This, of course, gives those students desiring a high grade incentive to complete the assigned reading in the text. Unfortunately, these are probably the same students who would read the text anyway, and so its impact on the marginal student is questionable. Recall that previous research from the education literature indicates that students rarely change their study habits in response to receiving poor grades (Barnett, 1997).

A few faculty members (n=4) mentioned oral questions, covering the assigned reading, be directed to students on a random, unannounced basis during class. Some professors using this technique then included a “class participation” component in student grades, but others said this was unnecessary, as the pressure not to look bad in front of their peers would be sufficient to insure adequate student preparation.

Other faculty responses categorized in this group include obtaining signed statements or pledges from students indicating whether they have read the material (n=2), assigning specific questions for group study (n=2), adjusting lectures to make sure that none of the material in the text was repeated in class (n=1), incorporating games into classroom time (n=1), and creating an “activity-based learning environment” (n=1).

Activities Involving Student Preparation Prior to Class

Several respondents recommended a wide variety of activities for students to complete prior to class, designed to insure that they had completed the assigned reading. The responses in this category varied widely. They included requiring chapter summaries (n=7), incorporating various pedagogical aids that can be obtained from publishers or from the Internet (n=6), assigning end-of-chapter questions and other

assignments (n=5), keeping a class journal (n=3), requiring an “interaction paper” (n=2), completing quizzes (on Blackboard) prior to coming to class (n=2), responding to discussion questions (on Blackboard) prior to coming to class (n=2), and one suggestion each for cases, chapter outlines, course notebooks, argumentative essays, research papers, and citations.

Faculty Recommendations That Did Not Fit Neatly into One of the Two Categories Above

A number of faculty made comments and recommendations that were interesting, but difficult to categorize. We identify and discuss these in this section.

A surprising number of professors (n=5) indicated that the solution to the problem was to get rid of the assigned text! Motivations behind this suggestion varied, with some faculty members questioning the wisdom of assigning a text that students won’t read anyway and others saying that current texts are poorly written and are thus of questionable value.

Finally, two faculty members said the problem has “no solution.” This is a response which we had difficulty fitting into one of the previous groups!

Comments

In this section, we offer several of our own reactions to the suggestions offered by faculty, and we offer some additional recommendations in the area of course pedagogy.

Extrinsic (Theory X) vs. Intrinsic (Theory Y) Motivation

The fact that almost 50% of all responses recommended such activities as in-class quizzes, discussion questions based on the reading, and random (forced) participation was a disappointment to us. By their very nature, these activities threaten students with either a poor grade or with embarrassment in front of their peers (if they cannot answer the discussion question in class). In fact, several faculty members mentioned such peer pressure as a significant motivator!

There are two fundamental approaches that can be used to motivate others, and at the risk of oversimplification, these can be represented as the use of “Theory X” style of management vs. the use of “Theory Y.” The use of in-class quizzes and random discussion questions designed to embarrass unprepared students are examples of using extrinsic motivators. This approach is inferior to the use of intrinsic motivators, and it has long-term side effects. Even our original questionnaire mentions a desire to find approaches other than quizzes to motivate students.

In Principles of Management classes taught at business schools nationwide, we discuss the use of a Theory X style of management vs. the use of Theory Y. Survey results indicate that business faculty may be guilty of teaching the drawbacks of Theory X while simultaneously incorporating it in dealing with their own students! MIT professor Douglas McGregor influenced organization development theory with his well known Theory X and Theory Y (McGregor, 1985; Weisbord, 1987). McGregor claimed that management may assume that employees naturally want to take responsibility and perform well on their jobs (Theory Y), or management may assume that employees are lazy and passive, not caring about their job performance (Theory X). Managers who accept Theory X will attempt to control the work environment through external controls. On the other hand, those who accept Theory Y are more likely to build upon the employees' internal need to perform well and help the employees do just that. Professors who lean toward Theory Y are likely to trust students to be self-directed learners who want to do well in their courses. In our context, Theory X professors would more likely provide only extrinsic motivation (e.g., a quiz) to force student to complete their assigned readings.

Most faculty recognize the importance of “life-long learning” for today’s students. With the pace of change in the workplace expected to accelerate in the coming years, we cannot possibly prepare our students for everything they will encounter in their careers. One of the important goals of any modern education is to instill a “love of learning” within our students so that they will be more likely to engage in a lifetime of learning after they graduate. It is difficult to see how threatening students with embarrassment in front of their peers if they don’t answer a discussion question, or forcing them to read the text so that they can pass a quiz consisting of ten multiple choice questions, will instill this love of learning.

Are the various out-of-class activities recommended by faculty effective?

A second category of faculty responses involved using various out-of-class activities as a means to check on student preparation. Recall that these activities consisted of assignments such as the completion of discussion questions and end-of-chapter problems and cases, keeping a journal, writing chapter summaries, etc. At the same time some faculty members were suggesting these activities, other professors were critical of them, indicating that they cannot be expected to produce the intended results. Comments reported by respondents included the following:

1. “Merely assigning problems and questions, answers to which can be figured out if you

have read the text assignment, does not work. Mostly, they just play hunt and paste.”

2. “Books with chapter summaries are a tempting crutch.”
3. “A colleague of mine requires his students to keep a course notebook that includes all their chapter outlines, end-of-chapter quizzes, etc. Students hate this ‘busy work’ . . .”
4. “I thought this year that I would finally solve the problem by signing up for the Aplia course support package. . . . I think I found that Aplia was a substitute for, not a complement to, reading the basic text.”

The “Unclassified” Group of Faculty Suggestions: Is Abandoning Required Reading the Answer?

We question the wisdom of faculty suggestions to abandon required reading. While this may be popular with (some) students, it does not encourage students to foster the level of commitment and dedication that will be required of them in the corporate world. The notion that students don’t have to read texts because they are “boring” or are “poorly written” is one that is difficult to defend. As evidence, we offer the comment of one faculty respondent, who reported the following:

A recent graduate told me he had to read a 500-page computer manual his second week on the job. Some employers expect college grads to be able to read hard stuff and learn it fast.

We believe the world of work is placing more demands on graduates, not fewer. Students trained to succeed in a challenging academic environment while still in school are better prepared for career success than those who are allowed to drift through with little or no effort.

There is no doubt that changes in textbooks could make many of them more appealing to students. We suggest shorter chapters and stronger visual appeal, such as the use of color and graphics. Recently, most publishers have moved in this direction, but the lack of reading is still an issue with students. It is clear that these changes alone do not offer a complete solution.

Case Study

One author tried using Course Preparation Assignments (Yamane, 2006) over a period of three semesters and met with some success. However, the author had created a Course Preparation Assignment (CPA) for every reading across all his four of his classes, and he found that the workload was overwhelming (for him and for his students). As a result, CPAs evolved into TIERs—Thoughtful Intellectually Engaging Responses.

Each TIER asked questions that could only be adequately answered if the student had thoughtfully completed the assigned reading. TIER questions also tended to be very either application oriented or reflective. For example, students would respond to this question after reading an assigned reading on management styles:

Think about the ‘best’ and ‘worst’ managers that you have experienced. List the characteristics of each (best versus worst) that lead you to your conclusion (for example, leadership style). What did you learn from each in regards to how to be a good manager? What did you learn from your assigned reading that would also help you become a good manager?

In addition, students kept a Reading Log throughout the semester, basically writing down what percentage of the assigned reading they had “thoughtfully read” prior to class. This Reading Log was worth approximately 10% of their final grade. For example, if the Reading Log was worth 100 points and the student averaged 80% on completing assigned readings, then he or she would earn 80 points. Although Sappington, Kinsley, and Munsayac (2002) stated that such self-reporting is not a viable method for assessment of reading compliance, student responses (n=72) who were exposed to both the TIERS and the Reading Log (fall of 2009) reveal the following:

- a) The Reading Log by itself encouraged students to read more than they would have without the Reading Log (78.8% Agreed or Strongly Agreed)
- b) The TIERS by themselves encouraged students to read more than they would have without the TIER assignments (70.9% Agreed or Strongly Agreed)
- c) The TIERS by themselves resulted in the students learning more than they would have with the TIER assignments (87.5% Agreed or Strongly Agreed)
- d) Other professors should consider using TIERS in their classes (77.8% Agreed or Strongly Agreed)
- e) Other professors should consider using Reading Logs in their classes (66.7% Agreed or Strongly Agreed)

Conclusions

What should we, as professors, be doing about this problem? We believe the following. First, the problem is significant, and it is contributing to an

increased lack of our effectiveness as educators. Its resolution deserves our best efforts.

Second, to resolve the issue, we should look to the reasons for a lack of student preparation that have been established in the literature of education. These were reviewed early in this paper, but they are reproduced here for continuity’s sake.

1. Lack of student motivation.
2. Lack of student knowledge of effective study habits.
3. Competing demands on student time.
4. Lack of congruency between student objectives for the course and professor objectives for students.
5. Professor behavior.

What this list shows us is that the problem is complex, and, therefore, its resolution will also be complex.

Our empirical research indicated that both the textbook and the professor can impact student willingness to complete assigned readings. Students suggested that a good textbook be reasonably priced (\$50 or less), concise (short chapters), loaded with great graphics, and easy to understand. Business faculty members shared ideas on how they encourage students to prepare for class by completing their assigned textbook reading. The authors divided the responses into one of two general categories: (1) requiring additional student preparation prior to class, or (2) incorporating in-class activities designed to measure the degree of student preparation. One author shared his success with the use of Thoughtful Intellectually Engaging Response (TIERS) and Reading Logs.

However, different students will have different motivations for not reading the assigned text material. Therefore, there is no one solution which we, as professors, can employ that will resolve this issue. Rather, an effective approach will require us to develop course pedagogy that will attack multiple reasons for lack of preparation simultaneously, so that we can reach all students who would otherwise remain unprepared. Until this problem is effectively addressed, we believe professors will continue to experience the frustration they currently feel in motivating their students to complete the assigned reading for class.

As a concluding observation, we would like to express our empathy with the survey respondent who reported the following:

Your question gets to the heart of pedagogy and to the purpose of our industry. To hide from such issues or to ignore them is precisely what we teach our students NOT to do. I hope you get some good ideas from others.

While the concern of this individual is laudatory, the fact that (s)he personally had no “good ideas” to offer is not. Perhaps this paper, and the resulting dialog that may stem from it, will be a first step toward finding a solution. Professional associations and conferences on pedagogy might consider creating Special Interest Groups (SIGs) or roundtables and presentations devoted exclusively to the topic of approaches to engage students in required reading. Since our study was limited to traditional undergraduate students, future research on this topic could involve adult and professional students in a non-traditional setting (both onsite and online).

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