

Using Points to Encourage Student Behavior

We humans like to have a sense that we are progressing toward a goal—even if that goal is a free cup of coffee after purchasing 10 cups. The use of points, sometimes referred to as “gamification,” can be leveraged to encourage the types of learning activities or behaviors you recognize as having a positive effect on student success in your course. Points can be offered for a variety of academic behaviors, including logging into the course at least three times a week, reviewing feedback on assignments, or timely posts in discussion forums. Increasing participation in community-building activities, such as posting profile pictures or responding to more than the minimum number of classmates in a discussion forum, can also be encouraged through the use of points. Points can also provide opportunities to encourage students to engage in professional behaviors, such as setting up a LinkedIn account or connecting with alumni or professionals in their field of interest. In some courses, these may be more formal assignments but if not, these tasks can also be used more informally to help students connect the work they complete in your course with future careers. Finally, using points to increase student participation in anonymous feedback has been found to be effective.

When using this practice, align the ways students can earn points with the goals you have for your students and be sure to consider how students will receive, track, and redeem their points. You will also want to ensure that the total points students can earn by engaging in these behaviors is in line with your grading philosophy.

See the example below for an 8-week class.

Category	Way to earn points	Number of points	Total possible
Academic Behaviors	Log in at least 3 days in a week	5 points per week	40 points
Academic Behaviors	Respond to feedback on an assignment with a note to the instructor	5 points per response	50 points
Academic Behaviors	Attend either individual or group office hours	5 points per meeting up to 15 total points	15 points
Community-Building Behaviors	Post a profile picture (does not have to be a self-portrait)	If at least 85% of the class completes this task, the entire class gets 5 points	5 points
Community-Building Behaviors	Respond to more peers than required in the discussion forums	1 point per response for a maximum of 4 extra points per discussion	40 points
Professional Behaviors	Set up a LinkedIn account	10 points	10 points
Professional Behaviors	Make connections with professionals in your field of interest	2 points per connection up to 10 connections	20 points
Increasing Participation	Provide responses to anonymous feedback	If at least 85% of the class completes this task, the entire class gets 5 points	5 points

To redeem your points	
Recognition	Total points needed
One free “oops token” to be used to turn in an assignment up to 5 days late	50
Opt out of a discussion forum	50
Ability to post to a discussion forum up to 2 days late	25
Add 5 points to a weekly quiz	25
Selecting the music for the opening of the live meeting	25
Your name “up in lights” in the course	15
<i>Talk to me about your ideas</i>	?

Using Incentives to Increase Anonymous Student Feedback

While the feedback students provide about your instruction on end-of-semester course evaluations can be valuable in helping you to make adjustments to your teaching in the future, as Davis (2009) points out, this feedback is too late to help your current students. She notes, "Research shows that soliciting feedback throughout the term allows you to improve even challenging classes, strengthen student learning, enhance student motivation, and positively alter student attitudes toward you and the course" (Davis, 2009, p. 461). In addition, providing the opportunity for students to offer their feedback anonymously can increase the likelihood of your receiving more honest feedback (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). While technology can provide opportunities for students to provide anonymous feedback, the challenge can be in encouraging students to participate when it is not associated with a grade or points.

Debora Herold, PhD, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at IUPUI, offers her entire class extra credit points if the class meets a target percentage in providing feedback:

"I offer students a small number of extra credit points in my class. That tends to be about three extra credit points. And even though it's anonymous, I tell them that if at least 65 or 70 percent of the class participates, everyone will get extra credit points. This way I can keep it anonymous, but I can still encourage participation so that they know how valuable their feedback is to me."

Using Anonymous Surveys

There is a variety of survey tools that allow you to gather anonymous feedback. Surveys work best if some of the questions are simple and direct and offer multiple-choice answer options. Using a Likert-scale can help you judge the degree to which students agree or disagree. Sample questions suggested by Boettcher and Conrad (2016) include the following:

- I understand the course requirements.
- I understand where to find the assignment due dates.
- The instructor responds promptly to student questions and concerns.
- I have a clear idea how to make a substantive contribution to the discussion through my postings.
- I understand how to use the rubrics to create, check, and revise my work.
- The weekly discussion questions posted by the instructor are stimulating and cause me think about the content.
- I feel free to voice an opinion that my instructor may not agree with.

www.acue.org | info@acue.org

Sources

Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Davis, B. G. (2009). *Tools for teaching* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Nilson, L. B. (2016). *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.