

Is “Effort OR Results” Enough in a Christian Business Classroom?

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After teaching undergraduate students for several years at West Point and Messiah College it has become apparent that in many courses the weight being allocated to students "effort" has gradually increased from minimal amounts of 5-10% to a substantial 35-50%. Under traditional grading approaches, where all graded activities are averaged together, this increased percentage tends to create three distinct groups of students. One group tries to do well in both "effort" and "results" activities. A second group focuses almost exclusively on "effort" activities. And the third group focuses almost exclusively on "results" activities. On average the students in the last two groups tend to do much worse than students in the first group. In addition they are developing habits that will not serve them well in business world. This paper presents an alternative grading approach called "Effort AND Results" that may help motivate students to apply themselves in all aspects of a business course and to help students learn the importance of long-term effort as well as short-term results.

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One of the criticisms that non-business faculty members offer about the business community is that business is only concerned with the “bottom line” of making a profit. With massive layoffs by many industries in the late 1980s and early 1990s and now again with the crash of the dot.com world, it certainly seems that the efforts of individual people are not valued as much as the results of the larger workforce. How do business classes provide opportunities for students to learn the importance of long-term effort and short-term results? The primary, albeit oftentimes implicit, model available to all business courses is the course grading structure.

After teaching undergraduate students for several years at West Point and Messiah College it became obvious that the weight being allocated to students "effort" had gradually increased from minimal amounts of 5-10% to a substantial 35-50%. Here "effort" activities are those in which, if the student works hard enough and long enough, the student will usually get as high a score as they want to achieve. The first two activities listed in Figure 1 would be examples of "effort" activities. The three remaining activities listed in Figure 1 would be considered "results" activities. Here “results” activities are defined as those activities where the student is expected to produce a quality product, usually under time constraints.

The "effort" activities are important and sometimes time consuming but are usually not difficult. If the student performs a "good faith effort" and submits it on time he or she typically gets full credit for the activity. Thus, it is basically a “pass/fail” grade for each activity. The sum total of the grades for all the activities then produces the overall grade for the “effort” activities. While most students do very well on the "effort" activities that are submitted, a few students end up getting a poor “effort” grade because they actually fail to do the activities on time. Typically this happens because the student forgets to do the assignment or puts it off until it is too late. Many teachers do in fact place a heavy emphasis on the quality of homework and activities done outside of the classroom and the problems are sufficiently difficult that many students are not be able to achieve the highest grade. In such a case, that type of homework would be considered to be a “results” activity rather than an “effort” activity. The emphasis in "effort" activities, as defined in this paper, is the process rather than the final product.

Figure 1. Traditional Grading Approach

Effort	35%	Homework and Lab Assignments
Effort	10%	Class Participation (attendance, helping others, asking questions, etc)
Results	10%	Teaching/Leading a Subject Area
Results	5%	Business Presentation
Results	40%	Exams (Exam1-10%, Exam2- 15%, Exam3- 15%)
PERCENTAGES NEEDED FOR LETTER GRADE:		
A 95%, A- 90%, B+ 87%, B 83%, B- 80%, C+ 77%, C 73%, C- 70%, D+ 65%, D 60%		

Obviously the activities labeled as "results" require much work on the serious student's part. But sometimes students put in considerable time and work very hard to prepare for these

activities and still their end result is quite poor. The emphasis in these "results" activities is the final product rather than the process.

Some courses, especially those emphasizing definitions and theory, have a weighting scale that puts minimal or no weight on "effort" activities. In other courses where practical hands-on experience is important the weighting scale might allocate most if not all weight to "effort" activities. In both of these extreme situations the professor is telling the students what they should concentrate on. When the weighting is balanced closer to a 50/50 split between "effort" and "result" activities the professor is usually trying to tell the students to concentrate on both. But is that what the students hear?

Students at West Point did not seem to have much difficulty with increased weight allocated to "effort" activities. These students seemed to be engaged in the courses and ended up gaining enough knowledge to do well in the courses. Many students in the Business Information Systems (BIS) courses at Messiah College who applied themselves in both "effort" and "results" activities also did well. However, there were two groups of students in the Business Information Systems (BIS) courses at Messiah College that had serious problems in the courses which had a weight allocation balanced fairly evenly between "effort" and "results" activities.

These two groups of students interpreted the traditional grading approach as "Effort OR Results". However, the BIS courses emphasize both hands-on skills and knowledge requirements. Some students who typically were fairly experienced computer users and good test takers, would only do a minimal amount of work on lab assignments, thinking that their exam scores would compensate for their lack of effort on what they considered to be "busy work". As a result they really were not well prepared for tests that focused on material contained in the homework and labs. While they usually did not fail the tests, they also did not do well enough on the tests to outweigh their very poor homework, lab and attendance scores. Other students who were typically not experienced computer users and normally were not good test takers, would work very hard trying to do all of the homework and labs and regularly attend class, but would spend very little time studying for exams thinking that their very high "effort" grade would compensate for a poor showing on the exams. As a result, some of these students would either withdraw from the course or fail.

Many students did hear what the professor was trying to tell them through the course's grading approach and they worked hard in both areas. However, these two groups of students did not hear what the professor was trying to tell them and instead concentrated on working in the area where they perceived they were strong and ignored the area where they perceived they were weak.

Several tactics were used to try to help these two different groups do better in the courses. One tactic was to ask students on the first day of class to say how much out-of-class time they expected to spend studying and working on the course for every hour they spent in class. The vast majority of students said 30 minutes or less. A second tactic was to include a statement in the syllabus that an expectation for the course was that students would spend two hours working on the course out of class for every hour they were in class. In discussions with the students it was emphasized that two hours was an average number for the average student. Another tactic

was to increase the emphasis on working with and helping their fellow students in the class. They were required to memorize the first and last names, spelled correctly, of all of their classmates by the time the second exam was given about halfway through the semester. While these tactics seemed to help somewhat they did not seem to solve the basic problem of having some students not trying very much on "effort" activities and other students not trying very much on "results" activities.

In May 1999 and May 2000 Dr. Barbara Walvoord from the University of Notre Dame came to Messiah College to share some of her thoughts and ideas about grading (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998). She used the analogy of a basketball game to explain one of her approaches to grading which she called the "definitional grading system". You have to do two things to score a basket. First, you have to put the ball through the hoop. Second, you have to obey the rules of the game and not get called for a violation by the referee. In this paper this is called the "Effort AND Results" grading approach. Figure 2 shows how this grading approach was implemented in our BIS courses. It should be obvious after reviewing the examples at the bottom of the figure that students would not be able to exclusively focus their energy on just "effort" activities or just "results" activities since both can heavily influence their final grade. In other words, a student can fail if they don't put in the "effort" even if they produce wonderful "results". They can also fail if they don't produce the "results" even if they put in considerable "effort".

Figure 2. "Effort AND Results" Grading Approach

GRADING:

There are two parts of the grade: **Class Preparation/Participation** and **Graded Work**.

PART 1. "Effort" - Class Preparation/Participation consists of homework and lab assignments (60%), on-time attendance (20%), participation in the course both in and out of formal class periods (20%). These activities are not difficult and are evaluated from the perspective students receiving full credit if the students have made a "good faith effort".

PART 2. "Results" - Graded Work consists of:

- 20% Teaching/Leading a Subject Area
- 10% Business Presentation
- 70% Exams (Exam1-30%, Exam2- 20%, Exam3- 20%)

The following scale is used to evaluate graded work.

A 95%, A- 90%, B+ 87%, B 83%, B- 80%, C+ 77%, C 73%, C- 70%, D+ 65%, D 60%

REQUIREMENT FOR COURSE GRADE: How do you combine the two parts to get the course grade? Students must meet or exceed both inputs parts to receive the corresponding output.

INPUT PARTS		OUTPUT
Class Preparation/ Participation	Graded Work	Course Grade
95%	A-	A
90%	B+	A-
87%	B	B+
83%	B-	B
80%	C+	B-
77%	C	C+
73%	C-	C
70%	D+	C-
65%	D	D+
60%	D	D

Some examples of implementing the above table are shown below.

A student with a 96% for Class Prep and an A- for Graded Work would earn an A.

A student with a 72% for Class Prep and a B for Graded Work would earn a C-.

A student with a 93% for Class Prep and a C for Graded Work would earn a C+.

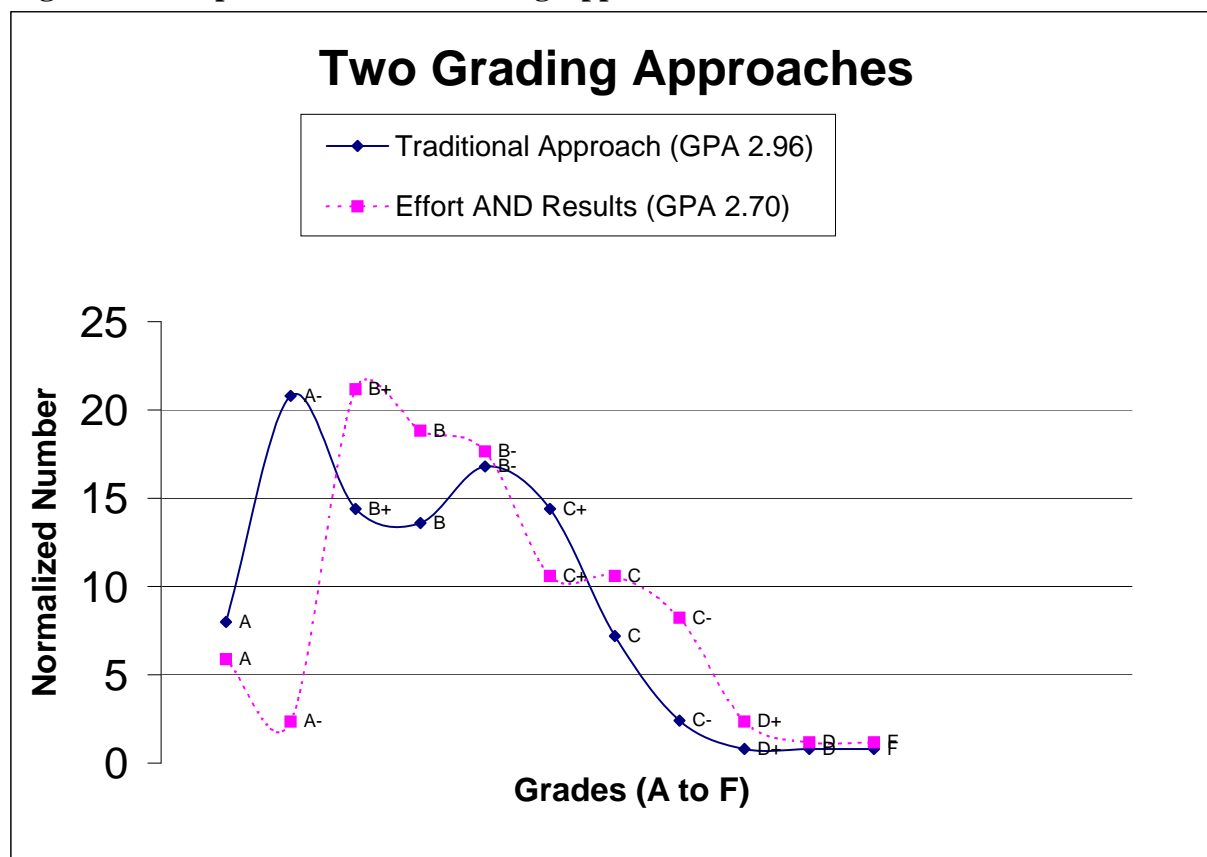
A student with less than 60% for Class Prep and an F for Graded Work would earn an F.

The results of using both approaches in one upper-level Business Information Systems course under the same instructor are shown in Figure 3. A total of 125 students in six sections were evaluated under the traditional approach and 85 students in four sections were evaluated under the "Effort AND Results" approach. As noted in Figure 3, the grade point average under the traditional approach was 2.96 but fell to 2.70 under the "Effort AND Results" approach. The most striking difference between the two

approaches is the drop in the number of students earning the grade of A- under the "Effort AND Results" approach. The decrease in the number of A- grades was accompanied by an increase in the number of B= and D grades. There does not appear to be much difference in the numbers of students earning A, D or F grades. The number of students who withdrew from the course was about the same for each of the two groups.

Since the course is required as a part of the major for approximately one-third of the students but only satisfies a distribution requirement or an elective requirement for the rest of the students it would be natural to see a bimodal distribution of the grades. Anecdotal remarks by fellow faculty members indicate that bimodal distributions occur quite regularly at Messiah College. Under the traditional approach there does appear to be a bimodal distribution of the grades. Under the "Effort AND Results" approach the bimodal distribution is not as apparent. One possible interpretation of this is that the Traditional grading approach motivates one group students more than another and that the Effort AND Results grading approach motivates all students the same.

Figure 3. Comparison of Both Grading Approaches



The numbers of students whose overall grade was lower than their "results" grade was very small. Typically in a section of 20 students, one overall grade was lower, two were the same and the rest were a half a letter grade higher than their "results" grade. This means that the vast majority of students overall grades were helped by the "effort" part of the grade.

The reaction from students to the "Effort AND Results" grading approach has been almost universally to disapprove of it. The following are typical student comments made about the grading approach during informal sessions with the professor and also formal course evaluations. "It's just not fair." "But my Effort grade is so much higher than my Results grade. Why can't it count more? Doesn't it matter that I work very hard in this class?" "I know the material and my test grades reflect that. But my overall grade will only be a C because of class preparation/participation."

The results of an informal email survey conducted at Messiah College showed that only two other faculty members have even attempted to institute Walvoord & Anderson's definitional grading system which we call "Effort AND Results". Neither of these professors teach in the Business department. Both professors experienced student reactions that ranged from strong disapproval to neutral.

Grading Systems As Preparation for Organizational Reward Systems

As educators, we are concerned with student motivation as well as with student learning. Because of this it is important to not rely automatically on a traditional grading system, but rather to explore the benefits of alternative grading systems. Grades and grading systems have several roles, including evaluation, motivation, communication, and organization (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998). The meaning students assign to grades will affect learning; therefore, a particular grading system may not be appropriate for all situations. An additional concern for applied majors such as business is whether the evaluation system mirrors what students will face in the workplace and attempts to develop in student's successful ways of functioning in that environment.

In terms of workplace evaluation and reward systems such as hiring and performance appraisal systems, students will find both scenarios which are analogous to the definitional grading system and situations which are more like the traditional grading system. A traditional grading system is most like a compensatory (multiple regression) hiring system where lack of skills in one area can be compensated for by extensive skills in another area. This method is most appropriate to be used when a trade-off among skill areas does not affect overall job performance. It recognizes that people have multiple talents and that many constellations of talents may produce success on the job (Heneman, Judge, & Heneman, 2000). In contrast, the definitional grading system is most like a multiple-cutoff hiring system in which applicants must meet a minimum requirement on every relevant skill in order to be hired. Both systems are used extensively in human resource management. As mentioned above, today's workers need a variety of skills and the grading system can be used to emphasize this fact.

Once on the job, performance appraisals are more likely to be compensatory approaches. It is assumed that those hired have the minimum job requirements; thus, they are evaluated on the sum of their performance of a series of criteria. This approach has a stronger parallel to a traditional grading system where the students in a course have met the minimum criteria (e.g.,

entrance to college, passing prerequisites) and further evaluation is based on their performance on a variety of tasks (exams, homework, papers, etc.).

Since both types of grading systems can be used to prepare students for future real world experiences, the deeper questions become what set of skills and/or knowledge do we want students to master, how are these skills and knowledge areas related, and how can we best motivate students to achieve mastery of these skills and/or knowledge.

Effort AND Results Grading from a Motivational Perspective

For any students, instructors should take care that their methods are consistent with motivation theory. When teaching business students, it is also important for the way in which we evaluate to be consistent with what students are learning about motivation theory. Procedural justice and expectancy theory are particularly relevant for a definitional grading system such as described by Walvoord and Anderson (1998) and illustrated in this paper as “Effort AND Results”. The idea behind procedural justice (Cropanzano & Folger, 1991) is that for individuals to be motivated, they must perceive that the reward system is fair and fairly instituted. Walvoord and Anderson (1998) warn that a definitional grading system must be very clearly explained to students because it likely will be less familiar to them. It may also be helpful for the instructor to explain the merits of such a system, being clear to state that the graded vs. good faith effort (GFE, i.e., pass-fail) work signify two areas of necessary competence, or that GFE work in the form of preparation for class is necessary for success in later graded assignments (i.e., exams). Finally, it must be explained that the instructor is not merely awarding a grade based on a student’s lowest performance; what happened is that the student failed to meet the definition of the higher grade (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998).

Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) states that in order for individuals to be motivated, certain conditions must exist. First, individuals must perceive that effort will lead to high performance (expectancy), in this case that studying for exams and completing homework assignments will lead to learning the subject matter for the course. Second, individuals must perceive that performance level is linked to the reward (instrumentality), in this case that learning will lead to a certain course grade. Finally, individuals must value the reward (valence): a good grade. Since the value students place on a good grade are probably not linked to the type of grading system used, the performance-to-reward and effort-to-performance linkages are most relevant in terms of the definitional grading system.

As with procedural justice, in order for students to understand the relationship between their mastery of the subject matter and the grade they receive, they must understand how the grading system works. It is incumbent upon the professor to clearly explain the system, as well as the reason for its use. If the reason for the definitional grading system is to encourage students to become competent in a variety of skills, students need to understand and accept that how the different types of assignments (results and effort) lead to different types of performance, both of which are necessary to be considered successful in mastering course material. For business students, this reasoning should be readily justifiable in that in addition

to content they need to establish a variety of work-related skills such as project management, public speaking, conscientious work habits, etc.

If the definitional system is justified because pass/fail assignments are a tool to improve subsequent exam performance, this will enhance the effort-to-performance linkage. Expectancy theory states that this linkage between effort and performance is bolstered by training and ability. If GFE assignments provide the training and enhanced ability required to perform well on subsequent graded assignments, then students will be motivated to expend effort. However, students will probably need help to see this linkage. They may not fully see it until they have experienced the first exam, and if they have done well, they may not understand that it was because they have completed the GFE work. Additionally, if the only reason for GFE work is to contribute to future success on exams, it will be difficult to defend its use to students who would achieve success on exams regardless of completing GFE work. The instructor would probably do best to use the logic that students need to achieve a portfolio of skills.

Even in a traditional grading system in which a variety of assignments are given weights and averaged together, students seem most concerned about their exam grades. This is true even though in the traditional grading system, good scores on one kind of assignment can compensate for poor scores on another. In the definitional grading system, students need to be helped to appreciate either that the GFE assignments are truly relevant activities equal in importance to graded assignments exams OR they need to recognize that completing the GFE assignments will help them to perform better on exams than they otherwise would. Probably only one of these scenarios will be the case for a given course, but it is imperative that the connection between effort and performance and between performance and the reward is made.

After using both systems it has become clear that the traditional grading approach teaches our students that there is only one bottom line in business courses and that poor "effort" can be offset by exceptional "results" and that poor "results" can be compensated for great "effort". Our best and worst students are not troubled by this situation. They either do well in both or they do poorly in both areas. However, we may be doing our average students a disservice by only using the traditional grading approach in our classes.

Both of the "effort" and "results" categories have corresponding activities in the business world. Effort activities in business tend to be those things that do not get noticed such as coming to work and meetings on time, helping team members doing daily work, answering the phone, being courteous with customers, etc. Examples of "results" activities in business are making a successful presentation and winning a contract for the company or completing a job on time for an external customer. In many situations, companies value short-term results more than the sustained long-term effort that will in turn lead to better results in the long term.

However as Christians we should be setting a better example. Faith without works is dead. And works without faith leads to death. Similarly we could say effort without results is dead. And results without effort also leads to death.

Do we want our students to only have one experience in dealing with evaluation and motivation of people in their undergraduate careers? What do many students focus on during their undergraduate careers? Many times it isn't the material they are learning that they care about, but only their grades. They learn in the traditional grading approach how to distinguish between effort-based courses, results-based courses and courses in which they can choose which one they want to emphasize.

Without the alternative grading approach discussed in this paper many students will not be exposed to a model where both effort AND results are essential to success. We should make sure our students are explicitly exposed to this in their undergraduate careers so that they can evaluate their situation in the real business world and know what situation they are in: effort, results, "effort or results", or "effort and results". Knowing their situation can help them avoid misunderstandings with their bosses, co-workers and subordinates in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the concept of the Effort AND Results grading approach, share the results to date in terms of student grades and student feedback, and to solicit ideas and opinions from other business leaders and faculty for answers to the questions posed in this paper. On the basis of one business course at one Christian college, a definitive answer is purposefully not provided to the title question of this paper: Is "Effort OR Results" enough in the Christian business classroom? Hopefully this paper will initiate discussion and generate interest in alternative grading approaches such as "Effort AND Results" grading for a broader collaborative effort aimed at answering this question.

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