The Negative Effect of Skipping Workshop on Academic Performance

Elizabeth Bradley and J. Kate Godzicki
Introduction

Workshops have become an integral part of the University of Rochester course structure. Students who attend these workshops bring to the setting different levels of motivation, productiveness, and emotion. According to Bennett W. Helm, “Emotions are essentially affective modes of response to the ways our circumstances come to matter to us” (2009). If we take the workshop experience as the circumstance in this statement then, according to Helm, student emotion in the workshop setting becomes an effective model of their response to workshop. Thus, positive emotions during workshop give the student positive experience and opinion of the program and negative emotions give the student a negative experience. From this, it is natural to draw the conclusion that reported positive emotion towards workshop should correlate positively with workshop attendance and similarly, reported negative emotion with the skipping of workshop.

The design of workshop program is such that student performance should be positively affected by active participation in the program. Many studies have been done to show that this is true of similar programs throughout academia. At Howard University, two professors studied the effects of adding a weekly lab to an economics course had, “findings (which) suggest that the exam score was affected by absenteeism. We find that these labs give the students the same benefits as lecture attendance in smaller classes” (Adair, 2012). Here the students who attended the lab sessions, which are similar in structure to our workshops, saw a positive effect on their performance in the class.

Furthermore, at UC Davis it was found that “increased workshop attendance is associated with higher final course grades for workshop students.” (Hollister, 1993). Finally, a study done at this university concerning chemistry workshops concluded that “successful students at all grade
levels participated in 80-85% of the available Workshops. In striking contrast, unsuccessful students attended less than 57% of the available Workshops, on average” (Sauer 2005). In this case a successful student was defined as a student who received a grade of C or higher in the course. This study shows that students who regularly attended workshops were significantly more likely to do well in the class.

The two major conclusions of interest that are found above are combined to hypothesize that students that are unhappy in workshop, and by extension with the workshop program are more likely to have low attendance. By skipping, a student directly injures their academic performance. More quantitatively, a student who reports negative feelings during workshop is less likely to attend. When a workshop is skipped that week’s homework grade suffers along with the students midterm performance.

**Methods**

This study focuses on the workshop program for the Introduction to Signals and Circuits course offered by the University of Rochester. The students of this course served as the subjects for this study. Throughout each student’s time in the course academic performance was assessed through homework and exams. Each student also attended weekly workshops throughout the semester where attendance was monitored on a weekly basis. The homework and exam scores along with workshop attendance was thus collected and recorded for use in this study. It should be noted that this study took place over the first seven weeks of the course with added information about the second midterm. This means that seven weeks of attendance and homework scores were recorded and used for this study.
After the performance and attendance information was gathered, the assessment of student reaction to workshops had to be conducted. A survey consisting of questions about student emotion during workshop as well as a using a Likert scale for stress, hunger, and tiredness was given after the second midterm.

The scores from the first seven weeks of homework were compared with the corresponding week’s workshop attendance. From this a comparison between weekly workshop attendance and weekly homework scores is be made. Next, the exam averages of those who skipped one or more workshops over the course of the semester are compared to the class average. Finally, the reported emotions gathered from the survey are broken down into two groups, students who skipped workshop and students who attended all workshops. This is intended to provide insight into the perception of the workshop experience and it’s affect on workshop attendance.

**Results**

In comparing the weekly assignment grades of those who attended a specific week’s workshop to the class’s average, the classes average was found to be higher than the non-attendee’s average grade. The only time this did not hold true was in Week 4 when the class average and non-attendee average was very close but with the class average being slightly lower than the non-attendee average. The average weekly assignment grades can be seen to the right in Figure 1.
Next, midterm exam performance was examined. For each of the two exams the performance of the class was compared to the average of those who had missed at least one workshop. The average grade of those who had missed workshop was also calculated with the lower outliers removed to present a more accurate representation of the data. As shown in Figure 2 to the left, the class average for the first midterm was approximately 88% while the average of those who had missed at least one workshop was 77% and the adjusted average of those who had missed a workshop was 85%. This shows that the class average was between 3.5% and 14.2% higher than the average of those who had skipped workshop. Similarly, for the second midterm the class average was nearly 90%, while the gross average of those who had missed workshop at least once in the preceding weeks was 79% and the adjusted average of that group was approximately 89%. This shows that the class average was between 1.1% and 13.9% higher than the average of the non-attendee group.

Finally, the survey of student emotions was examined. Using a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being least extreme and 5 being most extreme the students who missed workshop averaged a 4.5 in terms of feeling tired while the attendee’s group
averaged only 2.9 in this category. Similarly, the non-attendee’s group averaged a 3 in feeling stressed during workshop while the attendee’s averaged only 2.2. Lastly, the non-attendee’s averaged a 2.5 in their feelings of hunger during workshop while those always attended workshop averaged only a 2. This can be seen in Figure 3 on the previous page.

In the area where students were allowed to choose emotions they felt during workshop the top words chosen by those who attended workshop were calm, productive, efficient, and tired. The top words chosen by those who skipped workshop at least once were hungry, bored, aimless and overwhelmed.

**Conclusion**

The weekly assignment grades showed a very strong trend that those who did not attend at least one workshop had lower average performance than those who always attended workshop. It is unknown whether this correlation is caused by skipping workshop or if there is another cause and effect relationship. For example, the students who skip workshop could be less motivated and this could cause their lower average. The midterm exam grades show a similar trend but less striking. While the non-attendee’s average midterm grade were found to be lower than those who attended workshop, their adjusted average grades with outliers removed were very close to the class average.

Due to the relatively small sample size of the study the results of the survey of emotions are less compelling. One interesting thing to note is that the students who skipped workshop tended not to complete the voluntary survey of emotions while those who always attended workshop essentially uniformly completed the survey. The survey does seem to show that
students who attended workshop regularly reported higher levels of satisfaction than those who skipped.

Before making a concrete judgment on the link between workshop attendance and academic performance more factors such as personality, intelligence, and other life circumstances should be taken into consideration.
References


