

Task Completion Study
Schroon Lake Central School
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8 May 2020

Overview

During the 2020 pandemic when my school building was closed and we switched to online learning, task completion became a problem because students were no longer under our direct supervision. It is our natural inclination to focus on the negative (negativity bias) and I wanted to see whether the perception of large numbers of missing work was accurate. I undertook to compile a snapshot of work completion for ninth and tenth grade Global Studies students over a three year period with a view to seeing how the task completion rate changed during the pandemic remote learning period. I discovered that the task completion rate was just about the same, with the pandemic period completion rate only 0.76% lower than the average completion rate of 2018 and 2019.

Method

To measure the rate of task completion, I multiplied the number of students by the number of assignments during the date range. I selected the same time period for each year, roughly St. Patrick's Day through ~6th May for 2017 through 2020. I then ran a report using our school's grade book software "PowerSchool" to list all missing assignments for the date range.

Tasks marked "optional" or "extra credit" were ignored. In grades nine and ten, I assign one homework per week (with some exceptions, but never more than two), so the vast majority of these tasks took place in class. I did not count the interim examination, a ten week test covering material since the start of the year. My classes are small, so the population size in this study is probably not very generalizable. It does provoke interesting questions to pursue. Finally, since I teach both grade levels, the student populations overlap (that is, 2018's ninth graders were 2019's tenth graders). The 2017 assignment list was much shorter than 2018 or 2019 because they were doing a mock trial activity the grades from which I did not count in this study.

Remote Learning Conditions

The curriculum and assignment length were modified under remote learning. Assignments were decreased in size and duration. I avoided assigning multi-day tasks because many people just wait until the last minute to do it all, to poor effect. Students were also getting graded on "lectures" now, which consisted of 12-15 minute video tutorials embedded with questions. Some of the few multi-session tasks I normally assign in class, I now broke up into smaller assignments. The unit reading task, normally four pages to read and process, was reduced to three¹. In consequence of the setup of remote learning assignments, I did

¹ A student can "process" a text at their grade level in about 35 minutes. "Process" options I accept are: a specific style of summarizing or Cornell style note taking.

not complete the curriculum in grade nine to the point in history that I usually do and I moved some topics to the second part of the course to come in grade ten. I actually had more teaching time for grade ten under remote learning because, with Regents exams cancelled, I now had twelve extra lessons since I did not have to stop teaching and do review. There were on average 45 assignments across grades nine and ten in these courses over the date range. The 15% jump in the number of assignments under remote learning is because the tasks were broken down into more numerous, smaller steps. This cannot be interpreted as an increase in workload.

Resources in my online courses were curated through InnovationAssessments.com. Assignments were organized and posted at Planbook.com. Students were expected to complete one social studies assignment each school day. Courses were mostly asynchronous, save for a 30-minute live streaming lesson once a week which was optional and non-graded (there was a reward system built in for attendees). Video tutorials with multiple-choice questions ran 12-20 minutes, averaging around 14 minutes. Students were invited to attempt these twice for a higher grade. Textbook reading tasks consisted of either three- or four-page reading selection to process or multiple-choice comprehension questions. Each unit has an essay on a primary source where one session was reading and outlining the important points and one session was to compose the essay. There were a number of multiple-choice and matching quizzes which usually take about five minutes exclusive of pre-study time (students can rehearse the questions and answers in advance of some of these, so it's very easy). Other assignment types follow similar patterns. In my opinion, a good estimate of the time commitment for the average student would be about 25 minutes a day on social studies in grades nine and ten under remote learning for the date range. I charge a late fee of ten points per day late just as in regular school and if students contact me with good reason or if students work to catch up a lot of work in a short time span, I always waive these late points. The grade book does look different under remote learning, to be sure. I see more late work overall, but generally students' work habits seem to continue at home much as they were in school.

Results

Global Studies 9 and 10						
Year	Date Range	No. Students	No. assigned to class	Num. students multiplied by num. assignments	No. Missing	Perc. Missing
2017	16 Mar to 5 May	36	38	1368	98	7.16%
2018	19 Mar to 3 May	35	46	1610	183	11.37%
2019	18 Mar to 6 May	35	44	1540	160	10.39%
2020	17 Mar to 04 May	48	53	2544	296	11.64%

Missing assignments is up 2% from the average 2017-2019, but only up .76% since the average of 2018-2019. I note that I last had Academic Intervention Services (AIS) in my schedule in 2017. In AIS, I was able to get struggling students to complete their tasks more often. The jump in missing by 4.21% is

probably in large part due to that. A safe conclusion of this study is also that I can probably increase task completion rates by about 4% if I have more access to my struggling students during the week.

Concluding Considerations

The results of this study were surprising, since I perceived that there was a wholesale dropoff of work completion. My guess is this perception was related to the additional effort and attention placed on students who are missing work. Four students dropped off completely once remote learning started. One of those is in both the ninth and tenth grade course. Given that this handful of students and a few others whose participation is sporadic must account for the bulk of missing work from the cohort, I can only wonder whether some students are actually completing more work than in the past (since 2020's tenth graders were 2019's ninth graders).

At this point, I can only speculate about the reasons for the surprisingly consistent task completion rate under conditions of remote learning. Some possibilities present themselves:

- There was no change in the way class materials were presented. All of my resources and assessments were online in exactly the same manner when we were in school.
- Some students may work better at home because they have fewer distractions, because they have a parent watching over them, and/or because they like it better working on their own schedule.
- Shorter assignments may be more likely completed because some students find it less daunting to keep up and/or to catch up when they fall behind.

Figure 1. List of Assignments

[Not counted: "basic" tasks assigned to only 2-3, extra credit, mock trial]

2017, Global 9 [13]

Lecture activity Eng Civ War	5/5/2017	
HW Reformation and Society	5/3/2017	
HW Reformation in England	4/28/2017	
9.9 Prm Src "St. Bartholew's Day Massacre"	4/26/2017	
9.9 Prm Src: Absolutism	4/26/2017	
HW Spread of Protestantism	4/24/2017	
9.9 Reading task, standard	4/20/2017	
HW Politics in German Reformation	4/19/2017	
9.8 Test	3/30/2017	
9.8 DBQ	3/29/2017	
9.7 Test	3/24/2017	
9.7 Primary Source Essay	3/22/2017	
9.6 Test	3/16/2017	

2017, Global 10 [25]

10.6 capstone	5/4/2017	
10.6.3 informational quiz	5/3/2017	
2010 Regents thematic essay (no notes)	5/3/2017	
10.6.2 Discussion	5/2/2017	
Activity India "Listen-Record"	5/2/2017	
10.6.1 M-C	4/28/2017	
April Regents Review	4/28/2017	Percent pts: 10
10.6 Reading Task (avg. of all timed tests)	4/25/2017	
April regents review (bef. 7 Apr)	4/4/2017	
Extra Credit Primary Source	4/4/2017	
March Regents Review	3/31/2017	
10.5 BASIC multiple-choice (max=71)	3/30/2017	
10.5 BASIC vocabulary quiz	3/30/2017	32.
10.5 capstone	3/30/2017	
10.5.1 Multiple-Choice	3/30/2017	
10.5.2 Multiple-Choice	3/30/2017	
10.5.3 Disc: Grt. Depression and Totalitarianism	3/30/2017	
10.5.4 Disc: Was tech. advance worth it?	3/30/2017	
10.5.5 Inf. Quiz: Causes & Effects World Wars	3/30/2017	
10.5.6 "350 Rsch" HUman Atrocities	3/30/2017	
10.5.7 Constructed-Resp. A. Hitler	3/30/2017	
HW World War II part C	3/28/2017	41.

HW World War II part B 3/23/2017 43.
HW World War II part A 3/20/2017 45.
10.5 Primary Source Essay 3/16/2017
HW Depression and Rise of Totalitarianism 3/16/2017

2018, Global 9 [21]

9.7 primary source analysis 5/3/2018
HW Crusades 3 / 3 5/1/2018
9.7 Reading (3 parts) 4/27/2018
HW Did Marco Polo Exist? 4/26/2018
HW 350 RSCH No. 2 4/24/2018
9.6.5 4/18/2018
9.6 Capstone 4/17/2018
9.6.1 Multiple-Choice 4/17/2018
9.6.2 Matching 4/17/2018
9.6.3 Online Discussion 4/17/2018
9.6.4 Informational Composition 4/17/2018
9.6.6 Constructed-Response Composition 4/17/2018
HW 350 RSCH No. 1 4/17/2018
9.6.1 m-c 4/13/2018
9.6.2 maps 4/13/2018
HW The Byzantine Empire 4/10/2018
9.6 Primary Source Analysis 3/29/2018
HW Islamic Civ II 3/27/2018
9.6 Reading Task (4 parts) 3/21/2018
HW Islamic Civ I 3/20/2018
HW The Medieval Church 3/16/2018

2018, Global 10 [25]

Human Rights M-C test 5/3/2018
DBQ practice - Genocides 5/2/2018
The Wednesday Regents Review 2 May 5/2/2018
HW Mass Graves Discovered... 5/1/2018
10.7 capstone 4/25/2018
10.7 Reading (2 parts) 4/25/2018
10.7.1 multiple-choice 4/25/2018
10.7.2 matching 4/25/2018
10.7.3 Online Discussion 4/25/2018
HW "350 research" Gandhi, Ho Chi Minh 4/25/2018
10.7.4 Constructed- Response 4/24/2018
10.7 Primary Source 4/19/2018

HW Decolonization and Nationalism Triumphant 4/19/2018
 HW Ghana Independence [Video] 4/17/2018
 HW Ho Chi Minh 4/11/2018
 10.6 Capstone 3/30/2018
 10.6.1 Multiple-Choice 3/30/2018
 10.6.2 Matching (maps) 3/30/2018
 10.6.3 Online Discussion: Containment 3/30/2018
 10.6.4 Informational Quiz 3/30/2018
 10.6.5 Constructed Response 3/30/2018
 HW Regents Review M-C (timed) 3/28/2018
 10.6 primary source essay 3/21/2018
 HW Politics After WWII & Cold War Tension 3/21/2018
 10.6 Reading Task (3 parts) 3/19/2018

2019, Global 9 [19]

g9.7 capstone 5/6/2019
 g9.7 CRQ 5/6/2019
 g9.7.1 5/6/2019
 g9.7.2 5/6/2019
 g9.7 reading task 5/1/2019
 HW HW Primary Source Sources: Black Death 5/1/2019
 HW Did Marco Polo Exist? 4/24/2019
 HW An Ancient Case of the Plague Could Rewrite His 4/10/2019
 HW 350 RSCH: spread and evolution of technology 4/8/2019
 HW The Byzantine Empire 3/27/2019
 g9.6 capstone 3/25/2019
 g9.6 CRQ 3/25/2019
 g9.6.1 M-C 3/22/2019
 g9.6.2 matching 3/22/2019
 g9.6.3 discussion 3/22/2019
 g9.6.4 350 research 3/22/2019
 HW M-C Islamic Civ II 3/21/2019
 g9.6 primary source 3/18/2019

2019, Global 10 [25]

g10.8 Capstone 5/6/2019 Percent pts: 10
 g10.8 CRQ 5/6/2019 Percent pts: 10
 g10.8.1 5/6/2019
 g10.8.2 5/6/2019
 HW M-C Online Israelis, Palestinians ... 5/3/2019
 HW Decolonization and Nationalism Triumphant... 5/1/2019
 g10.7.1 4/25/2019
 g10.7.2 4/25/2019

g10.8 reading (all M-C, 1 class) 4/25/2019
 g10.7 capstone 4/24/2019
 HW Ghana Independence 4/24/2019
 b10.7 vocabulary 1 / 2 4/10/2019 25.
 g10.7 primary source 4/10/2019
 HW Politics After WWII and Cold War Tensions 4/9/2019
 g10.7 reading 4/8/2019
 HW The Cold War: Southeast Asia 3/26/2019
 g10.6 CRQ 3/21/2019
 g10.6.1 MC 3/21/2019
 g10.6.2 discussion 3/21/2019
 g10.6.3 composition "causes... effects" 3/21/2019
 g10.6.4 discussion 3/21/2019
 g10.6.5 Depression and WW II 3/21/2019
 g10.6.6 stimulus-based MC [audio] 3/21/2019
 g10.6 capstone 3/20/2019
 HW "Arms and the Man" Obit. of F. Blauchman 3/20/2019

 2020, Global 9 [27]

g9.7 CRQ Crusades 5/4/2020
 g9.7 CRQ Black Death 5/1/2020
 9.7.3 The Merits of Trade Discussion 4/30/2020
 Did Marco Polo Exist? 4/30/2020
 An Ancient Case of the Plague Could Rewrite History 4/28/2020
 g9.7 maps Matching 4/28/2020
 g9.7.1M-C or Outline 4/27/2020
 g9.7 Primary Source Essay Task 4/24/2020
 outline of g9.7 primary source 4/23/2020
 Medieval Travellers 4/22/2020
 The past, present and future of the bubonic plague 4/21/2020
 Video tutorial: The Black Death 4/21/2020
 reading day 3, p. 266-268 4/20/2020
 Overview of The Crusades 4/9/2020
 9.7 reading day 2 263-265 4/8/2020
 g9.7 video Transregional Trade networks 4/7/2020
 Reading Day 1: 241-244 4/2/2020
 9.6 capstone 3/30/2020
 9.6 "350 Research" Spread ... technology 3/27/2020
 g9.6.3 Discussion 3/26/2020
 g9.6.2 Maps Matching 3/24/2020
 HW Islamic Civilization, part II 3/24/2020
 g9.6.1 Multiple-Choice 3/23/2020
 g9.6 primary source essay 3/20/2020

notes on g9.6 primary source 3/19/2020
g9.6 reading task (average of 4) 3/18/2020
Video: Golden Age of Islam 3/18/2020

2020, Global 10 [26]

video: Clash w/Modernity: Turkey 5/4/2020
g10.9 reading 2 pages: 593-595 5/1/2020
China in the 20th Century part 2 4/30/2020
g10.9 Reading session 1 pages: 583 bottom - 585 4/29/2020
g10.8 CRQ Debriefing 4/28/2020
China in the 20th Century part 1 4/27/2020
g10.8 CRQ 4/24/2020
g10.8 capstone 4/22/2020
g10.8 Discussion: State of Israel 4/21/2020
10.8.1 Nation Building 4/9/2020
g10.8 people Matching 4/9/2020
350-wd research: Gandhi & Ho Chi Minh 4/8/2020
G10.8 primary source essay 4/7/2020
Conflict and Challenges in Middle East 4/2/2020
Decolonization and Nat'sm Triumph....3Apr 4/2/2020
Ho Chi Minh due 3 Apr 4/2/2020
Israelis, Palestinians and the Necessary Injustice 4/2/2020
Politics After WWII and Cold War Tensions 4/1/2020
Video MC:GHANA INDEPENDENCE - HISTORY 4/1/2020
MC Reading Indian Independence 3/31/2020
MUN Debate Resolution 3/25/2020
MUN Resolution 3/24/2020
The Cold War: Southeast Asia 3/24/2020
MUN Position paper 3 3/23/2020
MUN Position paper 2 3/20/2020
MUN Position paper 1 3/19/2020