

# Extra Credit is “Old School”—NOT!

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Recently, I was stopped by my pastor who told me that he had “googled” me, looking for my office address. Second on the search page was a link to one of the sites where anonymous evaluations of professors occurs. Evidently, the first line that he read was “This professor is very old school.” After having a few good laughs over the remaining content, the question was raised: What does it mean to be very old school? I took the question to our first year dental class and one of the first responses that I heard was that it means I don’t give extra credit! Pursuing this further with one of our prestigious faculty members in the School of Education, I learned that I may need to go back to school. There are higher education seminars being presented on how to turn extra credit into better learning. This is a practice that seems to be given credence in some circles of academic education departments.

Is giving extra credit an appropriate thing for professional students? I suspect that many of you have recently had children go through collegiate programs where they have been exposed to this widespread activity. I know that I have had multiple of my children provide evidence: receiving more points on an examination than were possible to achieve because they also completed the extra credit. There are varying reasons why a professor may elect to do this at an undergraduate level. But, whatever the reason, more and more students seem to be coming to us conditioned to expect extra credit. They have been trained to believe that their performance

will not be judged “as is” and that they will have an opportunity to make up for their deficiencies.

I don’t need to think long to see how this mindset could impact my clinical practice of dentistry. “I am sorry Mr. Jones, but I was deficient in thinking through how I was going to restore this tooth and now you need to have a root canal.” How do I make up for that deficiency? Obviously, bad outcomes can occur even though one is well trained and prepared for a particular task but this is not the point. The message I want to drive home is that, as a professional providing health care, it is incumbent upon me to be as prepared as possible to minimize those bad outcomes. Furthermore, I must learn how to accept the consequences – be they good or bad - of that preparation.

It may be interesting to think about how extra credit may impact the ethical thought processes that are occurring in our students. For example, has this expectation contributed to the increased number of reported episodes of cheating when suddenly extra credit is not available? But, that is fodder for another day or maybe another writer. For now, I stand by my position that learning to accept the consequences of performance must be a part of training a dental professional. I am encouraged that I have been classified as “old school”. May our patients benefit from our being as prepared as possible - every time we serve them.