

“Why aren’t our students being responsible?”

A Performance Analysis

by C. Michael Pedersen

Introduction:

The Academy of Information Technology (AoIT) is a small learning community at Serra High School. The two major goals of the program are to infuse technology related projects into core academic classes and to partner with local companies to provide students with off campus exposure to technology in action via job shadows, internships, guest speakers and conferences. Linking core class projects with technology electives coupled with providing high school students with exposure to the technology industry has generated significant excitement and participation on campus: the academy has grown over the past three years from 30 to over 100 students.

In order to provide off campus experience to our students we have a substantial amount of paperwork that must be completed in a timely manner. Prior to this year, all students were grouped together in the same English and History class where correspondence and permission slips were distributed and collected. This year the students are not grouped together and the distribution and collection of required paperwork has been complicated. A new e-mail system was developed this year to distribute information to our widely dispersed students however many student are not turning in the paperwork on time. The A.D. has complained “why are so many students not being responsible and helping us to provide these excellent extra-curricular opportunities by turning in the required paperwork in a timely manner?”

Audience Analysis and Sources of Information:

This program has over 100 students who actively sought to enroll in this program, an Academy Director (A.D.) and Employment Outreach Specialist (E.O.S.), and four different assistants to the director who manage the off campus events.

- Academy Director (**A.D.**): Christine Timmins
- Employment Outreach Specialist (**E.O.S.**): Nancy Palmtag
- Lead Teacher (**L.T.**): Michael Pedersen
- A.D. Assistants: Daisy Chung, Leah Cho, Autumn Brooks, Melvin Jones
- High School Seniors: 22
- High School Juniors: 31
- High School Sophomores: 48
- Transportation Secretary (**T.S.**): Yvette Barry
- Vice Principal in Charge of Field Trip Approvals(**V.P.**): Kurt Madden

Sources of Information:

- Interviewed A.D., A.D. Assistants, E.O.S., T.S., and V.P.
- Extensive conversations with five students (2 Water Walkers, 3 Repeat Offenders),
- Reviewed extant data (i.e permission slips, field trip requests, company sign in sheets, school bus roster).
- Distributed a student survey to a random sample of 28 students. Questions included: How often do you check your e-mail? Is your school appropriate e-mail the same as your personal e-mail? How often did you have problems getting the e-mails or downloading the permission slips? How often were you unable to turn the paperwork in on time? Do you have a computer and printer at home? Do you have internet access at home?

Defining the Gap:

Many of our students are not turning in their permission slips on time and are not checking their e-mail on a regular basis. The A.D. is compelled to chase these students down to remind them to turn in paperwork so we don't "lose face" with the companies who have volunteered their time and resources.

Optimals:

Students will check their e-mail a minimum of three times per week. Students will download, print, gather appropriate signatures and turn in permission slips on time. Students will communicate any problems with these requests several days prior to the established deadlines.

Actuals:

The A.D. has voiced concern about the extreme lack of responsibility our academy students' exhibit. Unfortunately she did not track the exact number of students who are not turning in their paperwork on time. To find the actuals, data was compiled for each event by interviewing the E.O.S., the A.D., three of her assistants, surveying a random sampling of students and collecting fieldtrips requests from the transportation secretary. The table below represents the turn in rate of permission slips during the past nine months.

	Kyocera Tour	Cubic Tour	SD Tech Fair	Scripps "Meet"	Day at the Bay	Clear Channel	Qualcomm Job Shadow	NAF Conf.	Totals
Invited	27	32	70	65	97	10	18	55	374
Turned In On Time	17	20	59	52	84	9	14	40	295
Participated	25	28	68	61	89	10	17	51	349
% On Time	63%	63%	84%	80%	87%	90%	78%	73%	77%
% Attended	93%	88%	97%	94%	92%	100%	94%	93%	94%

This analysis of the actuals provided vital insight into the actual number of students who were not meeting the deadline. The most startling number I found was the discrepancy between those who hadn't met the deadline (77%) and the amount of students who were still able to go (94%).

Drivers and Recommendations

From the student surveys, interviews with both students and administrative staff, I found the following potential drivers and developed recommendations for each:

DRIVERS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<i>Skills and Knowledge</i>	
Student problems opening attachments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a central website with multiple versions of attachments: PDF, Word Document, JPG. Also publicize the location where hard copies are available.• Create a job aid to explain the most common ways to deal with attachments

DRIVERS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<i>Motivation</i>	
Student E-mail accounts are not checked often enough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no reward/recognition system for those who meet the deadlines. Establish a recognition program to reward students.
<i>Environment</i>	
No access to computer at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This barrier only affects a small group of students. Hard copies need to be made available to these students.
No access to printer at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a location in the computer lab at school where students can print their forms.
<i>Incentives</i>	
No real consequences. The A.D. calls students at home to remind them to turn in their paperwork and allows them to attend the event even without meeting the deadline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting “false” deadlines reinforces negative behavior (i.e. allows students to go who didn’t meet the deadline, after multiple communication attempts). A new incentive program and strict adherence to deadlines needs to be established in order to eliminate this negative incentive.
Students don’t want to go, or can’t because of testing, sports or other conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a policy explaining the procedure to communicate these issues with the A.D. or the L.T.

The student responses were surprisingly honest. The majority of the students said the biggest barrier to perform was their own laziness. One student said “I’ve got so many other things going on that I don’t check my e-mail often but Ms. Timmins (the A.D.) always calls me to remind me about the fieldtrips and lets me go even if I’m late so I don’t have to remember.”

Potential Job Aids and Policies:

- Central Website with multiple versions of the permission slips.
- Establish an incentive program to reward students who meet the deadlines
- Hard copies available in one location or multiple locations.
- Inform the students of the resources they have available to them
- Establish and publish policies and deadlines and strictly adhere to them.

Conclusion

I approached this problem with the expectation that students were not doing what they “ought to want to do” but discovered that it is not purely a “student responsibility” issue. I was pleased with the honesty of the students and the assistants to the Academy Director. The technology issues can be solved with minor revisions to the paperwork distribution system. The lack of student resources can be addressed by documenting and explain the alternate resources that students can use. The environmental and negative incentive issues created by the false deadlines will take more work to implement however the Academy Director has been receptive to this analysis. I am optimistic that the “responsibility” issues will be properly addressed by the opening of the next school year in.