Professor's Column

Strategies/Tactics For Encouraging Timely LINKS Payment

While LINKS Simulations routinely e-mails multiple payment reminders to students between event initialization and the first scheduled game run, LINKS instructors must also proactively encourage their students to pay for LINKS with a personal credit card.

In this Professor's Column, experienced LINKS instructors describe their strategies/tactics for encouraging their students to pay for LINKS in a timely manner

To avoid payment hassles in LINKS, I would first ensure that all students are made aware of the requirement to pay for LINKS on the very first day of class. Make sure it is clearly indicated in your syllabus (I list it next to other required purchases, like readings). Announce it on your website and on the first day of class. That way, no student is taken by surprise by the need to pay for LINKS later in the semester (especially important from a financial hardship standpoint).

When LINKS is set up to receive payments, e-mail or post- exact instructions on how to pay for LINKS. In my instructions, I strongly encourage students to pay using their university e-mail address. Despite providing instructions, it's amazing how many students claim they can't find the payment link or don't know what to do if they pay with a different e-mail address. One suggestion is to provide a short demonstration in class or, to avoid wasting class time, record a short video that shows how payment is done for LINKS. (I haven't done this yet — it seems a bit like overkill — but I'm considering it for next time as a preventive measure.)

Lisa Bolton
Pennsylvania State U

Even when students follow instructions, I find that a few students will still report having payment problems — which they tend to want to blame on LINKS. With further investigation, I usually find that it's clearly not a LINKS issue (e.g., incorrect data entry on the PayPal website). I think it's important to point that out where possible so students don't go into the simulation with a negative attitude towards LINKS. (Emphasizing that other students experienced no problems with payment is a good way to promote a can-do attitude in these students.) I also always clarify to students when they talk to me about LINKS payment issues that I don't personally have access to their credit card or other information, to reassure them about confidentiality of their personal finances.

Finally, there will be students who procrastinate and who don't read their e-mails. Usually, team pressure at the threat of losing access to the simulation is all that is needed. However, it also points to another problem — getting students to actually read their e-mail, whether from LINKS or from me ... but that's the subject for another column (or a book)!

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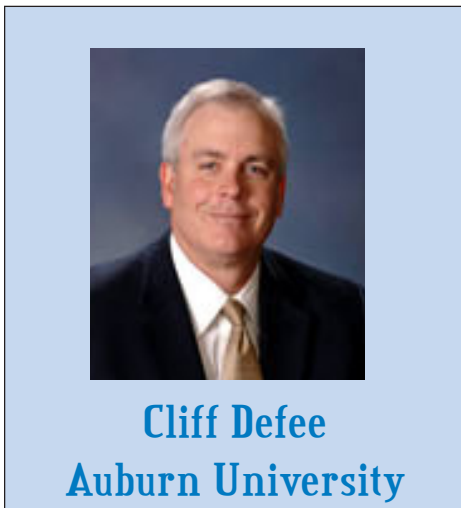
I've tried a variety of approaches over the years to get students to pay on time. Many of us probably started out by downloading the payment report frequently and using that as a tool to follow up directly with students that are not listed as having paid. I never found this to be terribly effective as reminders don't result in action by students in most cases.

The most effective approach has been creating a small bonus opportunity for students who pay by a stated date. By small, I mean something on the order of 5 points (out of 1,000 for the course). It's tangible, and easy to achieve, which has driven wide participation. I prefer using the bonus rather than a penalty for late sign-up. First of all, I think the carrot of the bonus provides a better incentive for most students than the stick of having points taken away. Secondly, LINKS provides a built-in penalty in the form of shutting off the entire team's ability to access results. I simply tell my students this downside will occur without payment and that the consequence will be that their team's performance will suffer, potentially significantly. I allocate 20%-25% of the course grade based on overall LINKS performance, so torpedoing their team's performance as a result of failing to follow through on something that's completely in their own control seems to carry some weight.

Mark Jacobs
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How do we get students to pay in a timely manner? This has been a chronic problem that has plagued my use of LINKS events over the last couple years. However, this year is different. The event is two weeks away and all students have paid. This is a huge plus as I do not need to track down students at a time in the semester where my time becomes scarce.

So, what is different this year? There are three elements that seemed to facilitate timely payment. One was setting expectation of pricing. Specifically, I told the students it would be about $15 more than the actual price. Hence, when told the actual price, they were pleasantly surprised. The second key element was that the payment of the fee was a graded event. This graded event also followed a particularly tough exam and, as such, students were motivated to capture every point possible. The third element was to require payment very early in the term. So when students are still thinking about buying books and other course materials, they also pay for LINKS.

I think these three elements are responsible for creating a sign-up process that was trouble free and minimized my time commitment.

To encourage students to pay for LINKS, I assign this payment as a "ticket to class" for the second class meeting. The first LINKS run is scheduled for the morning after this class meeting.

At the end of the second class meeting, I publicly announce those who have not yet paid, dismiss those who have paid, and require the stragglers to stay and pay before they can go home.

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