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Motivational Techniques For At Risk Students In An Online Secondary Environment

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MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES FOR AT RISK STUDENTS IN AN ONLINE

SECONDARY ENVIRONMENT

by

Adria D. Trembly

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

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MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES FOR AT RISK STUDENTS IN AN ONLINE

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has been approved

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ABSTRACT

Motivational Techniques for At Risk Students in an Online Secondary Environment

This applied project addresses the issues related to at risk youth turning to the

Internet as a means to obtain their high school diplomas. A review of literature examines

the pros and cons of the virtual high schools, motivational theory, how to apply

motivational techniques to the online setting, and methods that can be employed by

online instructors to increase learner motivation and participation. The review results in a

presentation by the author to fellow online instructors at the Fort Washakie Virtual High

School with suggestions on how the teacher can increase the motivation of the student

body who is generally considered at risk.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Instructors of virtual high schools experience problems that are not encountered in the regular classroom, and new teaching and learning styles are required for learners to be successful in the virtual education world. This author examines the strategies that teachers can employ to motivate students to become effective learners in the online environment.

Statement of Problem

The increasing popularity of virtual high schools across the United States indicates a need for school officials to supply alternatives to the traditional classroom. Many students, who struggle in the conventional classroom environment, look to the virtual setting as a vehicle to obtain a high school diploma without the frustrations they might encounter in the traditional classroom. However, the identified problems of this group of students are transferred into any educational environment. Online educators struggle to motivate students, especially those who choose this delivery format due to previous difficulties in the classroom.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project is to evaluate the best methods to improve at risk student motivation and participation in online education courses. This online instructor, who has found it difficult to motivate students to become involved in their online education, will explore the literature for possible solutions. These solutions will be

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presented in an inservice for other online instructors, where they can share possible strategies to increase student motivation in the online environment.

Definitions

The terms, virtual and online, are used synonymously throughout this project. Virtual high school is used to describe an educational setting in which students are enrolled full time in a secondary school which offers all coursework through the use of the Internet as a medium. This distinction is necessary because many students today supplement their traditional high school course offerings with online courses. However, the focus of this project is on at risk students who have moved away from the traditional classroom setting in favor of courses offered online. In addition, online courses may be supplemented with instructional help found on a campus that provides tutorial support and access to the Internet.

The term, at risk, is taken from Jones' (2003) definition, that is, at risk describes a student who is not likely to obtain a high school diploma due to a combination of problems which can be attributed to: (a) cultural or ethnic difficulties, (b) drug or alcohol problems, (c) teen pregnancy, or (d) other factors that may limit the students' ability to physically attend school. These problems may be exhibited in: (a) truancy, (b) low self-esteem, (c) inability to bond with others, and (d) lack of motivation toward school work.

The author of this applied project seeks to find methods in which instructors of online courses may be able to enhance the motivation of at risk students to complete coursework. While globally, many students turn to the Internet as a means to enhance their educational experiences, many at risk students turn to the Internet as a last resort to obtain a high school diploma (Jones, 2003; White, 2004). This trend is likely to continue,

and educators in the online environment must be prepared to gear courses toward this group of students.

Chapter Summary

The increasing enrollment of at risk youth in virtual high schools has left many educators unprepared for the changes to their instructional methods that are necessary to increase student motivation. A review of literature is presented in the following chapter to identify motivational practices and theories that can be applied to at risk students in the online setting. In Chapter 3, the method for the development of this project is presented.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Online education at the secondary level has increased across the United States (Emeagwali, 2004). With this increase, virtual instructors have struggled with the necessary change in teaching techniques. Teachers, who have served in traditional classrooms, find that their teaching methods must be adjusted to the new environment. As of 2003, virtual high schools had been established in approximately 19 states. Debate exists among educational experts as to the appropriateness of the increase, but regardless of the debate, the information cannot be ignored. In order for educators to meet the demands of what surely will impact their careers, they must be prepared for the difference in instructional techniques that will face them as they move into the virtual world. Many at risk students have made the transition from the traditional classroom to the virtual classroom to obtain a high school diploma. The purpose of this applied project is to examine strategies teachers can use to increase learning in the online environment for at risk students. In this review of literature, the author addresses the following topics: (a) why online education has increased and benefits of the medium, (b) problems with this increase, (c) how at risk youth may benefit from the use of an online delivery format, (d) motivational factors related to traditional education and online education, and (e) possible strategies that instructors can use to increase the success of at risk students in online secondary education.

Increased Popularity of Online Education

With the increased use of the Internet and technology across the world, there was little doubt that the world of education would be impacted by this powerful tool (Johnson, 2003). Today, many educators struggle with the use of the Internet in the classroom as students are forced to evaluate the appropriateness of a website prior to its use as a resource, but beyond this aspect of the use of technology and the Internet, many teachers experience a loss of students from the regular classroom as students move toward enrollment in courses through the use of this medium. Pascopella (2003) estimated that, as of 2003, approximately 600,000 students across the U.S. were enrolled in courses online and that, in half of the states, virtual high schools had been established. If one compares those figures to the fact that no virtual high schools existed in 1996, the rate of growth is astounding.

Benefits of Online Education

Why the virtual high school has increased in popularity is another area that must be examined. The benefits of this delivery format must seem to outweigh the shortfalls to the many administrators who choose to establish virtual high schools. A host of benefits has been cited for online education. In light of the new federal educational mandates, some believe that the use of the virtual world can allow school officials to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (Berge & Clark, 2005; No Child Left Behind, 2002; Pascopella, 2003) which requires: (a) schools to have highly qualified teachers, (b) alternatives to be offered to student attending schools with documented high failure rates, and (c) schools to consider the various learning styles of students. The use of virtual education can help school staff to meet all these needs. With the exposure of

failures within the U.S. educational system in the spotlight, members of the public have demanded alternatives to be offered to their students, and many school administrators see the use of virtual classrooms as that answer (Pascopella).

In addition, students can explore career interests through the use of online courses (Trotter, 2002). Students at small schools may not be offered a wide variety of courses but, through access to the Internet, they can enroll in higher level courses that may allow them to earn the necessary credits for admission to a college program of their choice (Berge & Clark, 2005; Donlevy, 2003). The use of "online education helps school administrators find the balance between the optimal learning environment offered by small high schools and the rich and varied school offerings, often found only in larger schools" (Pape, 2005, p. 13). In addition, through the use of online courses and exposure to the Internet, students and teachers can increase their technological skills (Donlevy, 2003), a most important feature in preparation of students for future employment.

School staff, who participate in virtual programs, can realize the benefits of virtual courses because the addition or withdrawal from courses does not require the typical administrative hassles (Donlevy, 2003). The cost to benefit ratio of online courses has been realized, as school administrators struggle to meet the No Child Left Behind (2002) standards with diminishing budgets (Berge & Clark, 2005; Mupinga, 2005). Numerous options are available to school staff who consider the establishment of virtual high schools. This is a new industry in which courses are designed to meet nationally recognized standards of learning; some of the companies include: (a) PLATO, (b) e-College, and (c) Class.com (Clark, 2000). Representatives of these companies

market their ability to reduce costs and time in the establishment of curricula (Clark; Nitkin, 2005).

Individual learning styles can be accommodated by the online environment through the use of video, interactive discussions, and the ability to control the pace of the learning; many students express a higher level of satisfaction with online learning than in the traditional classroom (Robyler, 1999; White, 2004; Wood, 2005). Lack of face-to-face discussion, with which the student is known or singled out, can lead to an increase in communication. Wood stated that "We discuss themes and characters, and in those discussions, students often tell me personal anecdotes. They are comfortable online and confide in me more than they would a teacher they see every day" (p. 36). The freedom to correspond, without being seen or for embarrassment of what might be said, liberates some students who would be unwilling to communicate in the traditional classroom. Also, the faceless communication style can allow students to bond with each other, even though they may be separated by many miles (Nitkin, 2005).

Various groups of students experience circumstances that make them more predisposed to virtual education than others, these groups of students include: (a) students who excel in the regular classroom and require additional challenges, such as advanced placement courses; (b) students with long term illnesses or injuries; (c) students with behavioral problems or who have problems with the regular classroom; (d) students with schedule conflicts; (e) rural students; (f) home schooled students; or (g) traveling families (Mupinga, 2005; Staff, 2001; White, 2004; Wood, 2005). These types of factors face many students across the U.S.

Challenges for Online Education

Although the positive aspects of virtual high schools seem to be sufficient to warrant their establishment, the reality is that the world of online education has almost as many drawbacks as benefits (Aragon, 2003; Berge & Clerk, 2005). One argument against the use of online education is that the format may depersonalize the educational experience for students; this may impede a teacher's ability to truly understand his or her students (Bellon, 2002). Bellon examined the role of the teacher in the online environment and noted that a good teacher in the traditional classroom may not be a quality instructor in the virtual classroom. This finding was supported by several other researchers (Donlevy, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Mupinga, 2005) who cited the very different teaching styles that are required of any instructor who makes the transition from a four walled classroom to the online setting.

Aside from the instructional dilemmas that may occur, other issues such as demographics should be noted. Equity and access issues are of concern to Berge and Clark (2005) and Clark (2000) who have argued that many students and low income schools across the U.S. do not have the necessary resources to provide for access to the Internet. The lack of technology, especially in the home, can lead to a student population with low technological skills and anxiety about the use of technology; potentially the student may experience failure in online courses (Berge & Clark; Romi, Hansenson & Hansenson, 2002).

Not only does the role of the instructor change in the shift from traditional classrooms to the virtual, also, the student role adjusts. Yang and Cornelius (2004) asserted that "Students must move from being a more traditional passive learner into a

more active online inquirer" (p. 850). In addition, students' academic honesty is a concern; the typical monitoring of students and what information they utilize during a test, for example, cannot be done when a student works at home (Yang & Cornelius; Zucker & Kozma, 2003).

Also, Mupinga (2005) was skeptical of the placement of students into the online environment; he worried that the use of this format would become a way to remove troublesome students from the regular classroom and rid teachers of behavioral problems regardless of whether the students can succeed. The intent to do so may diminish opportunities for personal interaction and the building of social skills, a function that school staff typically cite as one of the more important benefits of public education.

Lack of Physical Presence of Instructor

A major concern related to Internet based courses is the concept of a lack of social presence (Aragon, 2003). Several definitions of social presence have been developed and used with online education research; however, the most common understanding of social presence is "the feeling that others are involved in the communication process" (Whiteman, 2002, as cited in Aragon, p. 60). Most educators agree that the social presence aspect contributes to success in the regular classroom, as nonverbal communication becomes just as important as verbal communication to establish a learning environment that encourages a level of comfort for all participants (Aragon). A major problem with online learning is that social presence is not easily established (Donlevy, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Jones, 2003).

Online learning, which takes place at the individual's level and pace, requires a new standard for the development of an environment in which learners feel they can

communicate with the instructor and with each other (Aragon, 2003). Without the feeling of social presence, many students are not motivated to learn.

Motivational Problems with Online Education

Students must be able to adjust to the new setting of online learning and must be able to be self-directed learners in this environment (Yang & Cornelius, 2004). A high level of student motivation is required to complete courses and understand the material. Kim (2004) concluded that "the lack of motivation is the major reason for student drop-outs in online courses" (p. 465).

In Keller's (1991, as cited in Bellon, 2002) ARCS Model of Motivation there are four elements of educational motivation: (a) Attention, (b) Relevance, (c) Confidence, and (d) Satisfaction. Bellon modified this motivational theory, as it applies to the virtual classroom, and identified the four key elements of motivation to demonstrate why motivational problems occur in the online setting. Attention may be difficult for the student at the computer with distractions around him or her at home; also, the information may not be interesting to the student. The relevance of the information and course content may not be communicated clearly to the student; in addition, the individual's personal background will determine whether the information is relevant. Confidence may not be developed in the students because of a lack of familiarity with the technology and the content. Also, the student may not experience satisfaction because the other barriers may prevent the student from an enjoyable online experience.

<div align="center">Motivation</div>

In an examination of motivation as it relates to online learning, one must understand what motivates students in general. Whether these motivational factors can

be transferred to the online setting and how the instructor may do so to increase the success of the students should be considered as well.

<center>*Motivational Theories*</center>

Motivation can be defined as "something (as a need or desire) that causes a person to act" (Webster, 1991, as cited in Bellon, 2002, p. 3). Keller (as cited in Bellon) extended this definition and stated that "Motivation . . . is the degree of the choices people make and the degree of the effort they will exert" (p. 461). In general, motivation is an internal drive that compels a person to complete a task. When applied to education, teachers must ask themselves how to increase this drive to allow students to complete a task that will result in a learning experience (Deci, Vallebrand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

Typically, motivational theorists identify two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. The distinguishing characteristics between these types of motivation can be found in the source of the motivation; intrinsic motivation is when a person completes a task or activity simply because that person receives some personal satisfaction in the task, while extrinsic motivation refers to the completion of a task to attain a desirable outcome other than personal satisfaction (Martens, Gulikers, & Bastiaens, 2004). Most theorists agree that a high level of intrinsic motivation creates the best learner who is able to: (a) initiate the learning process, (b) maintain involvement with the learning, and (c) can internalize the learning experience (Clifford, 1990; Deci et al., 1991; Hansen, 1998; Hess & Trees, 2003; Kawachi, 2003; Kerssen-Griep, Kim, 2004; Lepper & Chabay, 1985; Martens et al., 2004; Schaps & Lewis, 1991; Wiest, Wong, Cervatnes, Crail, & Kriel, 2001). Some theorists argue that the use of extrinsic rewards diminish intrinsic motivation and learning. Examples of extrinsic factors include: (a) surveillance, (b)

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evaluation by others, (c) deadlines, (d) threats, (e) bribes, and (f) rewards (Clifford;

Schaps & Lewis).

Intrinsic motivation was categorized as four self-explanatory groups by Kawachi

(2003): (a) vocational, (b) academic, (c) personal, and (d) social motivations. These are

the motivations that should be considered and encouraged by the instructor. Also, he

identified three subcategories within personal motivation: (a) challenge, (b) fantasy, and

(c) curiosity. These subcategories require the teacher know some personal information

about the student in order to effectively construct personal motivation.

Factors that Influence Motivation

While intrinsic motivation is apparently the best motivation for an instructor to

encourage, especially an online instructor, to encourage, one might ask what factors the

teacher can control. Hansen (1998) suggested four strategies to turn students into

motivated and self-regulated learners:

1. A systematic treatment of typical student misconceptions about the discipline and about research in general;
2. The promotion of personal academic interests;
3. Attention to skill building; and
4. An emphasis on critical reflection and self-assessment. (p. 8)

With the use of these strategies, there is the potential to turn everyday classroom

moments into life long experiences.

Hmelo-Silver (2004) analyzed the use of problem-based learning (PBL) to

increase intrinsic motivation. In PBL, the traditional roles of the teacher and student are

reversed; the teacher does not impart knowledge to the student, but rather guides the

students in the process. The process is fairly simple with students grouped to solve a

problem as a learning experience. The teacher acts as a facilitator throughout the

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following process: (a) students are presented with a problem; (b) students identify

relevant facts to formulate and analyze the problem; (c) students generate possible

solutions; (d) students identify knowledge deficiencies and research the necessary

information, although students may be required to revise the hypothesis after data

collection; and (e) students develop a solution to the problem. The self-directed learning

process enhances a student's intrinsic motivation and has implications for online

instructors who may use problems to enhance learning activities. The teacher's role as a

facilitator was emphasized by Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) who concluded

"teachers' behavior, specifically, the degree to which they are autonomy supportive

versus controlling, has an important effect on students' motivation and self-

determination" (p. 340). The evidence is quite clear that the extent to which teachers

encourage and/or force the students to become independent can result in life long

learning experiences and increases intrinsic motivation.

Motivation and At Risk Youth

Motivational theories and how they can be applied to at risk youth must be

examined. "The at risk student is one who believes that 'school' did not, does not, and

will not serve a purpose in his/her life" (Hawley, 2003, p. 24). Many teachers find

themselves unable to motivate the at risk student. Typically these students are a product

of parents who do not seek to empower their children and have no concept of the future.

Other students have priorities outside of school that may prevent focus of attention on the

learning process such as: (a) pregnancy or young children, (b) physical ailments, or (c)

outside school activities. The cultural aspects of such students should be considered in

the attempt to motivate, according to Ford's (1992, as cited in Clem, 2004) formula of

motivation which is expressed as "Motivation = Goals x Emotions x Personal Agency Beliefs" (p. 188). This theory takes into account the community around the student and how the culture of that community affects goals and the development of personal beliefs (Clem; Lim, 2004). Therefore, motivation of the at risk student requires additional support for autonomy from the teacher in a way that does not threaten the student to move away from education or his or her personal beliefs.

Application of Motivational Theories to Online Environments

Motivation has been identified as the single most important factor for the success of online students (Lim, 2004; Zucker, 2003). An understanding of how to apply previously discussed motivational theories to the virtual classroom is important; in general, the same motivational theories that apply to the traditional classroom can be applied to the online learning environment (Lim). However, the motivational techniques utilized differently. Technology may offer ways in which to motivate students unlike any other learning environment, as many students of the 21st C. are truly addicted to technology (Prensky, 2006). Immediate feedback to the students is a known factor to increase motivation (Clifford, 1990) and, in virtual classrooms, this ability is available to instructors and students. Instructors are aware when students have submitted an assignment, can provide nearly instantaneous feedback to the students, and determine if the student understands the materials. This is a luxury not found in the traditional classroom.

In previous studies (Brandoa, 2002; Richman, 1994, both cited in Jones, 2003) it has been demonstrated that, when at risk students have control over their environments,

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motivation to succeed is increased. Technology used with at-risk students can be beneficial to their educational experience.

<p style="text-align:center">Instructional Factors to Increase Motivation</p>

Several virtual high schools across the nation have been established specifically for students who are considered at risk. The Cincinnati Virtual High School has the following demographic features: (a) 60% of the girls enrolled have children under the age of 4, (b) 40% of the boys have been incarcerated, (c) a 6:4 ratio of African American to Anglo American students, (d) the cumulative GPA of the students enrolled in less than 2.0, (e) 95% of the students are formally identified as at risk, and (f) 60% of the students are employed while they go to school (Hawley, 2003). Jones (2003) reported that the Poudre School District Virtual High School was designed to help students who were not successful in the traditional high school setting. The student enrollment at this school includes a student population in which: (a) 21% did not live with parents, (b) 11% were teen parents, and (c) 20% had a criminal record. Hurley (2002) discussed the Southwest Preparatory Charter School of San Antonio, Texas, which was established in 2001 to serve students who were not able to succeed in the regular classroom. This author is a virtual instructor for the Fort Washakie Charter High School of Ethete, Wyoming and the school was established to allow students, who had dropped out of or struggled in the traditional high school, an opportunity to obtain a diploma from a State accredited high school. The school has a campus located on the Wind River Indian Reservation, and there has been a high drop out rate among the high school students. However, any student in the State of Wyoming is allowed to enroll at the School. Many virtual high schools have been developed for students who have special needs that might prevent

<p style="text-align:center">15</p>

them from success in the traditional high school classroom. With the formation of these schools, the instructors for such schools must be prepared to motivate students who may struggle to find a purpose in education.

Sense of Community

If an instructor can establish a sense of community in the virtual classroom to offset some of the concerns and develop a social presence, motivation may be increased among the students (Kawachi, 2003; Yang, 2004). One way to develop this sense of community is through online discussion; the use of threaded discussions allow the students and the instructor to react to a common theme or question at their own pace (Aragon, 2003). These discussions have the ability to establish an atmosphere in which students can embrace learning (Yang). Brown (2002, as cited in Yang) provided tips for online instructors to improve their threaded discussions: (a) keep the tone informal; (b) relate the discussion to specific topics in the class content; (c) keep the discussion centered on a problem posed by the instructor; (d) define roles for the students, assign one as the leader for the discussion; (e) link the discussion to a grade; (f) ask students to clarify any points that may be of confusion to the instructor or students; and (g) keep the discussion board free and open. The requirement of discussion and interaction among the students is effective, and several researchers (Aragon; Heinich, 1999; Hofmann, 2004) noted that this forced discussion can prevent the often passive nature of students in the course. In fact, students expect the teacher to initiate discussions; for the instructor to assume that students will communicate without the instructor is not a realistic expectation (Lorenzetti, 2005).

Kim (2004) examined student beliefs about what motivates them to complete self-paced online courses. The students reported that communication and interaction with the instructor and other students was critical to their motivation. Ironically, the students expressed that the lack of human face-to-face interaction did not detract from their learning experiences or motivation.

The development of a sense of community allows students to learn from each other as students and instructors serve as mentors to one another (Kawachi, 2003; Yang, 2004). This can be facilitated by the instructor's ability to make a personal connection with the students (Aragon, 2003; Kawachi). Personal connections via the Internet can be made through the use of: (a) humor, (b) personal examples, (c) use of the student's name in the communications, (d) praise, (e) elicit feedback from the students, and (f) the use of emoticons. Emoticons are graphics that are used regularly in emails to express feelings that might otherwise not be easily communicated in writing.

Other suggestions to establish a social presence online include the development of a welcome message on the course home page for all students to see immediately when they log into the course. Student profiles can be used and may include: (a) pictures of the students, (b) student interests, and (c) email addresses to allow students to personalize fellow students in the course. The incorporation of audio into the class content can provide a social presence as the emotions in audio can not be misinterpreted as easily as written dialogue. Finally, class size can be limited to promote the exchange of ideas (Aragon).

Active Learning Opportunities

The use of active learning in the online environment can develop a student who internalizes the materials and is more motivated to participate (Aragon, 2003). The course can be organized around realistic projects, and references to the projects throughout the content to prepare students for the project can keep the students actively engaged in the materials (Fein & Logan, 2003). If pairs of students are assigned to work on a project together, students can organize prior knowledge, brainstorm, or summarize and use new information.

The use of small group discussions and collaboration can effectively encourage student communication and work toward solutions to a problem (Aragon, 2003). Another method to engage students to actively learn is the use of animations and simulations in the course content (Kim, 2004).

These suggestions for the establishment of an active learning environment are supported by Gagne's Nine events of Instruction (Gagne, Briggs & Wager, 1992, as cited in Johnston; Cavanaugh, 2004) which are used in the Florida Virtual High School to develop course content and for instructor guidance. These nine events include:

1. Gain attention of the students by a link to prior knowledge, pose thought provoking questions, cartoons, icons, highlighted text, and animations;
2. Inform the learner of the objective with a list of state standards correlated to activities and provide examples of finished products and scoring rubrics;
3. Stimulate recall of prior learning by the constant recall of prior information before introduction of a new topic;
4. Present the stimulus such as web pages for research, videos, animations, sound files, and notes;
5. Provide learning guidance through the use of diagrams, flow charts, step-by-step instructions, tutorials, constant and immediate feedback, and model assignments for students;

6. Elicit performance through discussion, persuasive arguments by the students, brochures that depict applications, and allow for resubmission of assignments;

7. Provide feedback, through the use of email, explanations on returned assessments, comments, reflections, actions plans, and collaborative synchronous chats;

8. Assess performance with the use of post tests, quizzes, portfolios, reflections, and oral recitations over the telephone; and

9. Enhance retention and transfer with the use of connections, mentoring, and rubrics (p. 126).

Increase Learner Participation

The new role of the instructor in online education requires the virtual teacher to select and filter information for students, provide thought provoking questions, and facilitate discussion (Yang, 2004). Additional factors to consider to increase learner participation are: (a) address individual differences, (b) avoid information overload, (c) create a real life context, (d) provide hands-on activities, and (e) encourage student reflection (Aragon, 2003).

Hall (2002) recommended a course design in which the student can see the big picture. If the students know from the first log in what they are to gain from the course, motivation will be encouraged. According to Johnson (2003) this can be done with: (a) a basic class content that includes tools that are easily accessible to the student, for example, placed off to the left side; (b) a course syllabus that is easy to find and refer to often; (c) provide contact hours for the instructor; (d) an easily accessible and understandable grade book; (e) examination procedures for the students to evaluate prior to the first assessment; (f) provide library services and research tools; and (g) post links about local information as it relates to course content to apply the course student's real life.

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Finally, it should be noted that some education experts (Bellon, 2002; Lorenzetti, 2005; Robyller, 2002; Yang, 2004) agree that online education is not for everyone. In fact, some suggest the use of prescreening devices to determine if enrollment in online courses is advisable for the student (Lorenzetti). Such assessment tools take into account the student's personality type (Bellon), parental support, and other responsibilities outside of school (Robyler). Such devices are not suggested to be used to restrict access to online courses but possibly could be used to help guide the student into a direction that would provide for a successful, educational experience (Bellon; Robyller).

Chapter Summary

In summary, the research related to the motivation of at risk students enrolled in online courses is new, and much more study is needed to help identify which strategies will work best with at risk students enrolled in online courses. This review of literature has provided several strategies that can help guide future research. In Chapter 3, this author presents the proposed method for presenting research based approaches to increase the motivation of at risk students online.

Chapter 3

METHOD

The purpose of this applied project is to educate peer teachers who have experienced similar frustrations of lack of motivation in students enrolled in online coursework. The author examines research based suggestions to improve student motivation to complete and comprehend subject materials.

Target Population

The target population for this project was students enrolled in the Fort Washakie Charter High School. These students vary in age but all are enrolled because they have made the choice to move away from the traditional classroom environment. Also, many of the students are Native American from the Northern Arapahoe and Eastern Shoshone tribes of the Wind River Indian Reservation; however, students across the State of Wyoming are eligible to enroll. The reasons stated for enrolling from current or past students of the Virtual High School have been: (a) pregnancy, (b) physical impairments that prevent them from regular school attendance, (c) early parenthood, and (d) the need to be employed. The format of the school is ideal for students with such circumstances because course progress is at the pace of the student; if a course is not completed by the end of a semester, the student does not lose the work he or she put into the course, this allows a student to continue toward course completion and graduation.

The teachers for Fort Washakie Charter High School virtual courses are certified by the State of Wyoming in the particular content area they teach. Teachers are paired

with a full time staff member of the school for the first semester, they are employed by

the high school, and this full time staff member acts as a mentor to guide the teacher

through the use of the technology and advise on student communication and assignment

development. After the first semester and with the approval of the mentor, the teacher is

allowed to teach a maximum of three courses. Off site teachers are invited to meet on the

campus to discuss issues two times a year.

The Virtual High School contracts with a firm known as e-College (as cited in

Clark, 2000) to provide curriculum and server storage space for the courses offered.

Teachers are allowed to create their own courses for the school with approval of the

administration. Teachers can accent, add to, or change the courses developed by e-

College as they see fit. Typically, these teachers have exposure to regular classrooms and

can adjust to the role changes accompanied with virtual education.

The school has 50 computers located in Fort Washakie, Wyoming on the Wind

River Indian Reservation. Students in the area can come to the campus for access to the

computers and help from the staff. Three certified teachers are available to help students

through their courses as additional support to the regular virtual teacher.

<center>Procedures</center>

An inservice presentation was developed to be presented to the Virtual teachers

and administrators with ideas generated from the review of literature. The inservice

addressed how to deal with the at risk population of students we serve and how the

teachers might be able to motivate them to gain a better understanding of course content

and to complete the coursework. The presentation was made at the Fall, 2006 meeting

and will be emailed to any instructors who do not attend the meeting.

<div align="center">Goals of the Applied Project</div>

The goals of the project are to educate teachers about possible practices to

increase motivation of students enrolled at the Fort Washakie Virtual High School.

Another goal is to educate fellow instructors of motivational theory and how it may be

applied to online situations.

In summary, the presentation gave insight to peers who have experienced similar

circumstances of lack of work from students. This experience can serve to bring the

teaching staff closer and lead to future collaboration.

<div align="center">Chapter Summary</div>

The applied project is based on the information discussed in Chapter 2. A

presentation was delivered to a group of teachers who are employed by the Fort

Washakie Charter High School; this school offers admittance to students who are

considered at risk. The effective motivational techniques that are best used for this type

of student were presented.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Online education at the secondary level has increased across the United States
(Emeagwali, 2004) throughout the past decade. With this increase, virtual instructors
have struggled with the necessary changes in teaching techniques. Teachers who have
served in traditional classrooms find teaching methods must be adjusted to the new
environment, especially when serving at risk students who have removed themselves
from the traditional classroom and enrolled in online courses. As of 2003, virtual high
schools had been established in approximately 19 states and 600,000 students were
estimated to be enrolled in online courses (Pascopella, 2003). Many at risk students have
made the transition from the traditional classroom to the virtual classroom to obtain a
high school diploma. However, motivating the at risk student through online courses
presents new dilemmas to teachers who have experience in the traditional classroom with
face to face interaction.

This project resulted in a presentation to peer teachers employed by the Fort
Washakie Virtual High School in Fort Washakie, Wyoming. This school was founded as
a method to combat the high dropout rates experienced by many Native American youth
inhabiting the Wind River Indian Reservation, however, all students across the State of
Wyoming are eligible for admission into the School. The Charter School is fully
accredited with the State of Wyoming and all students graduating from the school receive
a high school diploma. The school was started in 2000, enrollment has steadily increased

since its inception, however most online instructors are still adjusting to effective online teaching methods.

Presentation
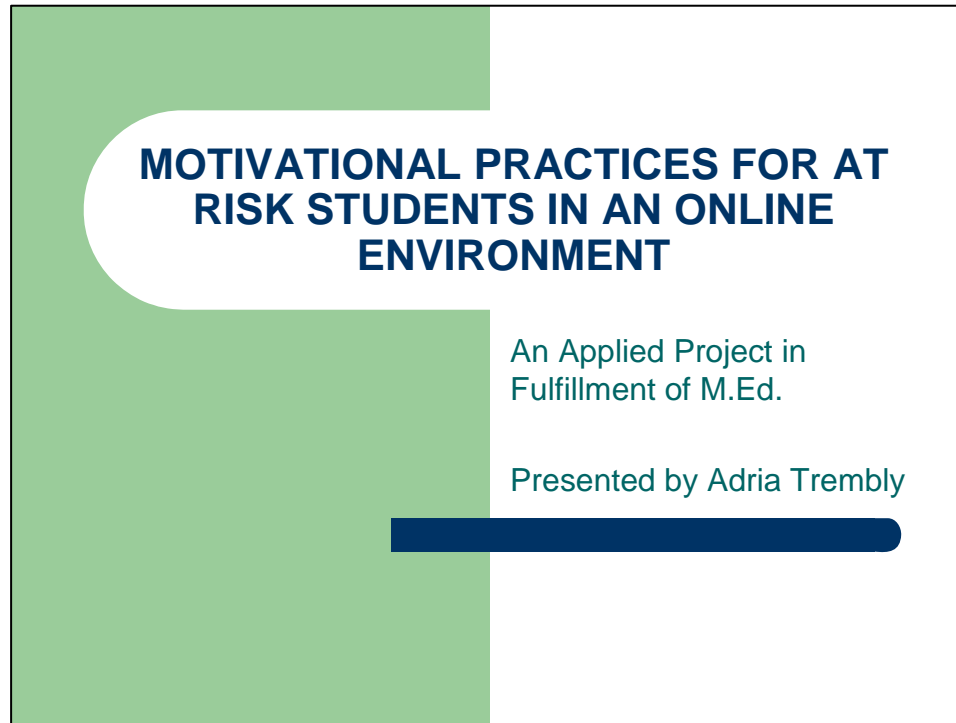
In 1996, no virtual high schools existed in the United States, but by 2003 it was estimated that 19 states had established virtual high schools. With this increase in the use of technology to earn a high school diploma, the teacher and student must redefine their roles to use the technology to develop a positive experience in the online educational setting. The purpose of this presentation will be to: (a) examine why online education has increased in the U.S. over the last decade, (b) discuss problems that online education has presented, (c) motivational factors for at risk students in the online setting, and (d) present strategies for at risk online to increase motivation and success. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Benefits of Online Education

- No Child Left Behind
  - Staff
  - Alternatives
  - Learning Styles
- Tech skills
- Free discussion
- Administration
- Student groups who benefit

One of the major reasons online education is promoted heavily is the ability to use virtual education to meet the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 mandates. NCLB has many requirements among which are: (a) the necessity for every teacher to be highly qualified, (b) schools which experience a high failure rates of students must offer alternatives to students enrolled, and (c) the various learning styles of students must be considered. Online education can help many schools to meet these requisites. Examples include the ability for schools to supplement their course offerings by a highly qualified online teacher in areas in which the school experiences a shortage of teachers. Schools can offer online courses as the alternative to students who are considering dropping out or have dropped from the traditional high school setting; this is the major reason our school was formed. Schools can accommodate varied learning styles through the use of video, sound clips, graphics, text, discussions, and more that is easily integrated into the content of online courses.

Another benefit of utilizing virtual coursework is that technology skills can be developed with the students. The job market today demands employees who are tech savvy. The constant use of word processing programs, using the Internet for research, and the ability to effectively use email can develop skills that enhance a student's ability to gain employment.

While some tout the lack of face to face interaction as a downfall of online education, the opposite has proven to be true for some students and instructors. In the traditional classroom many students, especially those who would be considered at risk, would shy away from raising their hand and speaking in public. However, the anonymity provided with online discussions allows freedom to express views without embarrassment. This environment has been quite liberating for some students. Do you notice this difference in your online classes? (Discussion with audience will ensue).

Administrators have also found that the use of online courses, since they do not require traditional scheduling, has decreased costs in an ever unfunded mandate world. Virtual schools simply offer courses in which instructors can be found, and since the coursework is self-paced, the conventional hassles of adding or dropping courses has been eliminated, this results in efficiency and cost savings for the schools.

Certain student groups that can be found across the United States are taking advantage of the flexibility of online education. Such student groups include: (a) advance placement students, (b) students who have long term illnesses, (c) students with behavioral problems, (d) students with scheduling conflicts, (e) rural or home schooled students, and (f) students with families who travel. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Challenges Facing Online Education

- Depersonalization
- Equity & access
- Student role shift difficult
- May become method to remove problem students from regular classroom
- Diminish social skills
- Social presence problem

Opponents of online education typically cite the depersonalization factor as the single most important reason to eliminate the virtual setting for education. The lack of face to face interaction limits the teacher's ability to truly understand what motivates the students to learn.

Another issue related to heavy technology use with education is equal access to technology for all students. Many students live in homes that cannot afford to purchase expensive technology to allow them to earn a high school diploma from their living room. Fort Washakie has attempted to correct this disparity by offering a campus to which students can frequent for Internet access, however this problem cannot be remedied for the students who may wish to enroll in the school throughout the State of Wyoming and not in close proximity to campus in Fort Washakie.

The necessary shift required of students to become successful in the online environment is not an easy transition for most students, especially those who are

considered at risk and may be lacking adaptability skills. A student must move away from the traditional passive learner mentality to being a self directed learner who is an information seeker. Teachers can help to facilitate this transition to increase motivation to become a successful online learner.

Some critics worry that the use of online education as an alternative to the traditional classroom will become a method to remove behavioral headaches from the classroom, regardless of whether the student may possess the necessary skills to be successful in the online setting. This practice could lead to high dropout rates in the virtual setting as students will be set up to fail.

An additional criticism related to online education is the lack of social interaction may diminish students' social skills. The development of social skills is a major advantage of public education that has been touted since its inception. Online education does allow students to work in nearly total isolation with only text communication. This can lead to a lack of social skill development.

Social presence is defined as "the feeling that others are involved in the communication process". A simpler understanding of social presence includes nonverbal communication to establish a learning environment that encourages a level of comfort for all participants. A major problem with online learning is that social presence is not easily created with the lack of face to face interaction and the inability to communicate outside of text and telephone. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Motivational Barriers

- Lack of motivation #1 reason for dropping online ed courses

- Keller's modified ARCS demonstrates why motivation is difficult to translate in online setting

A 2004 study conducted by Kim concluded that lack of motivation was the major reason for students dropping out of online education courses. This illustrates the need to for instructors to actively promote methods to improve or build a student motivation level that can allow for successful completion of coursework with a true understanding of the materials.

Keller's ARCS model, which was adapted to the online learning environment by Bellon, illustrates why online learning may be prohibitive to the development of motivation. The ARCS model is based on four basic elements that are necessary to attain motivation of a student: (a) attention, (b) relevance, (c) confidence, and (d) satisfaction. Bellon asserted that the nature of the online setting may make it difficult for the student's attention to be focused on the subject matter as many distractions may be in the home or some other environment, also the lack of face to face interaction may lead to the student not focusing energies toward the content without the watchful eye of an instructor. The

relevance of a course may not be clearly communicated to the student in the course content, description, or syllabus; relevance also depends heavily on the student's prior experiences and personal preferences. Confidence may not be developed especially if the student is not familiar with technology, confidence also relies heavily on the student's ability to read the course content well. Satisfaction is also outside of the control of the online instructor as many barriers will prevent the student from feeling satisfied with their online experience such as the speed of their personal computer or Internet connection. This model brings to light the many barriers that may prevent a student from being motivated. The following discussion will present a brief overview of motivational theory. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Motivation Theory

- Intrinsic v. Extrinsic

- Problem Based Learning

- At risk student motivation

Webster defines motivation as "something (as a need or desire) that causes a person to act." Keller extended this definition and stated that "Motivation...is the degree of the choices people make and the degree of the effort they will exert." In general, motivation is an internal drive that compels a person to complete a task. When applied to education, teachers must ask themselves how to increase this drive to allow students to complete a task that will result in learning.

Most motivational theorists differentiate between two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation can be witnessed when a student completes a task because in doing so the student feels a level of personal satisfaction; extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is completing a task because of some outside reward such as a good grade. Intrinsic motivation has been found to be the most important factor to successful online coursework. Without some type of intrinsic motivation, the student will likely fail their online courses.

Problem based learning in the traditional classroom has been found to increase the student's level of intrinsic motivation. This teaching method revolves around a small group of students seeking to solve a problem presented by the instructor. In this type of learning, the student becomes the discoverer of knowledge while the teacher simply guides students, rather than imparting knowledge. The process is as follows: (a) student groups are presented with a problem; (b) students identify relevant facts to formulate and analyze the problem; (c) students generate possible solutions; (d) students identify knowledge deficiencies and research the necessary information, although students may be required to revise the hypothesis after data collection; and (e) students develop a solution to the problem.

Motivation research toward at risk students has discovered that these students require a higher level of autonomy support from the teacher without threatening them to move away from their established culture. Hawley pointed out that "The at risk student is one who believes that 'school' did not, does not, and will not serve a purpose in his/her life." Typically the at risk student is a product of parents who do not seek to empower their children and have no concept of the future, still others have priorities outside of school that may prevent focus of attention on the learning process such as: (a) pregnancy or young children, (b) physical ailments, or (c) outside school activities. The cultural aspects of such students should be considered in the attempt to motivate. If the teacher approaches the student with the attitude to move them away from their current setting, this implies to the student that the teacher believes the student is inferior. This will merely lead to resistance. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Application of Theory to Online Ed

- All can be applied to online

- Advantages of online setting to motivation

- Factors influencing online students

The online setting allows some opportunities to increase motivation that can not be found in the traditional classroom. A major factor that will increase motivation is the faster turn around time in assignment submission to grading and feedback from the instructor. The online environment allows for almost instantaneous notification to the instructor that a student has completed an assignment or assessment. The instructor can then very quickly review the student's work and provide feedback such as areas to review further or encourage the student to attempt the assignment again. This is a luxury not afforded to the traditional classroom teacher. What do you think is the largest advantage to the online setting in relation to traditional classroom? (Discussion with audience will ensue).

Application of motivational theory to the online educational setting to increase student motivation is not complicated. Simple steps can be taken and principles applied to ensure you are providing the most motivational materials to the students. Hansen

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suggested the following principles to guide instructors toward successful online courses: (a) instructors must have a plan to attack common misconceptions related to the course, (b) promote student interests, (c) focus attention on skill building, and (d) emphasize reflection and self assessment to students.

At risk students can also benefit from the use of technology, past research has shown that when at risk students are in charge and feel they have control, they are more likely to succeed. The self paced nature of the online setting allows student more control than they would ever have in the traditional classroom. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Instructor Role: Create Community

- Discussions

- Personal connections

Creating a community among the students and the instructor is essential to combating the social presence problem. One method to establish the sense of community is through threaded or synchronous discussions. Brown suggests the following guidelines to promote successful discussions: (a) keep the tone informal; (b) relate the discussion to specific topics in the class content; (c) keep the discussion centered on a problem posed by the instructor; (d) define roles for the students, assign one as the leader for the discussion; (e) link the discussion to a grade; (f) ask students to clarify any points that may be of confusion to the instructor or students; and (g) keep the discussion board free and open. Although the student must be able to shift his or her role to become a successful online learner, the teacher is still responsible for facilitating development of community.

Personal connections between the student and teacher can be created trough the use of humor, personal examples, using the student's name often, praising, asking for

student feedback, using emoticons to avoid misconceptions on tone, creating student and

teacher profiles, and limiting class sizes. These methods can help to develop social

presence. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Instructor Role: Active Learning

- Projects
- Pairing
- Animations, video, sound files, graphics
- Provide examples
- Link learning to standards
- Oral recitations
- Resubmission of low quality work

Active learning is key to engaging students to connect with the content. In line with the problem based learning discussed previously, the use of realistic projects and students working in pairs or small groups can create active learning opportunities and develop intrinsic motivation in students. Other methods include: (a) use animations, video, and sound files as often as possible; (b) use graphics such as flowcharts to illustrate relationships; (c) provide examples of quality work; (d) tell the learner which standards they are working toward with each assignment; (e) allow student to re-submit low quality work to increase learning; and (f) allow oral recitations over the telephone as a substitute to written submissions at times. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Instructor Role: Learner Participation

- Discover individual motivations

- Real-life connections

- Avoid information overload

- Encourage reflection

- Set up course for easy navigation

Methods to increase student participation include finding out what motivates individual students. This can be accomplished with a simple questionnaire developed by the instructor to ask what the student plans to do with his or her high school diploma, what activities the student participates in, and more. Such a document will help the instructor to provide examples directly related to student interests and connect the content to real life situations. This is in line with the ARCS model of motivation. A sample questionnaire is included with your handouts.

Avoiding information overload to the students can also increase participation. Developing study guides to highlight the necessary portions of content can help students narrow the sometime daunting amount of information to a quantity that seems more manageable to the student can help students focus energy to the appropriate content areas. A sample study guide is included with your handouts.

Encouraging reflection through discussion questions and follow up emails can also support the student to participate in the course. As noted previously, allowing students to feel in control will increase motivation.

How the website is set up can also increase participation; for example, an easy to find syllabus where the student can refer to often is important. Other important features include instructor contact information, exam procedures, links to tools that can help students succeed, and links to current and local issues related to the course content. (The presenter will move to the next slide).

Pre-screening Devices

- Personality type

- Parental support

- Other responsibilities

- Demonstrated self directedness

Some researchers have advocated the use of prescreening devices to help students

know if they are likely to succeed in the online setting. Students logging on to the Fort

Washakie website can take a short survey to know if they are viable candidates for the

educational environment provided. Such pre screening devices might take into account

the student's personality type; ask about the level of parental support and autonomy; ask

the student what other activities they participate in outside of school such as a job or

family care; and possibly ask the student to provide examples that would show they are

self directed. Such devices are not intended to prevent students from enrolling in online

courses, however instruments such as these may help to guide a student in the appropriate

direction and allow them to experience success. (The presenter will move to the next

slide).

Summary

- Time consuming

- You can help to ensure success!

In summary, this presentation has brought to light that online teaching is not any easier than the traditional classroom and is just as time consuming to develop successful students who are motivated to continue learning. More than anything, we should all realize that we can help students, even though we cannot look them in the eye, to become successful members of society.

Chapter Summary

This presentation will be offered in the fall of 2006 to the faculty of the Fort Washakie Virtual High School. The presentation will allow teachers to offer suggestions on how they have seen success in their virtual classrooms and will provide suggestions for improving upon their course presentation and approaches with students.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This applied project has evaluated and suggested real life applications for virtual

instructors on methods that might increase at risk student participation and motivation in

online coursework. The author reflects on the contributions, implications, and

recommendations in this chapter.

Contributions and Solutions to Problem

The world of virtual secondary education has seen a dramatic increase in the

decade. This increase has left many teachers unprepared to face the challenges that the

new delivery method presents. The author has addressed reasons why at risk students

may be drawn to the online delivery format; this understanding of why at risk students

find virtual education better suited to their circumstance is the first step for the instructors

to know how to motivate these students. The culminating presentation will allow for

discussion among instructors related to many factors such as the discussion freedoms that

students seem to find in the online format and methods to utilize to elicit a response to an

instructor email. This presentation brought instructors together to a focused discussion

related to how to better the education for the students served. This is a contribution that

can not be measured.

Various solutions that can be easily integrated into the course content and

instructor communication style was offered to the teachers of the Fort Washakie Virtual

High School. Teachers who have reviewed the presentation communicated that these

methods have reinforced activities that they have already integrated into their courses and that new ideas which they will begin to use were also appreciated. Such responses indicate that the problem was solved to some degree.

Conclusions

The author can conclude from the review of literature and presentation review that a virtual instructor's activities and communication style can increase student motivation and participation in online courses. Traditional motivational theories can be applied to the virtual setting, although using methods that can be used in the regular classroom. Teachers, even without the physical presence found in the traditional educational environment can be effective motivators of students. Virtual school administrators and teachers should seek methods to improve student understanding and motivation.

Limitations

A major limitation of study relates to the fact that virtual high schools are a fairly new mode of education at the secondary level and for at risk students. Therefore, very little formal research has been completed and/or published related to: a) motivation and online students, b) at risk students in the online environment, and c) motivational theory and online learning. However, a broad spectrum of information was gathered with implications drawn by the author as to how the research can be connected to apply to practices that can increase at risk student motivation in the online, secondary setting.

Recommendations for Future Study

As noted above, a need exists for formal qualitative research regarding application of motivational practices with at risk students in the online secondary setting. Other research would include: a) the factors which might influence the success of at risk

students online and b) what factors influence why an at risk student chooses the online format.

Project Summary

This applied research project has provided online instructors methods that they can apply to virtual courses to increase student motivation and participation. These methods can be easily integrated into coursework. The problem addressed of how to increase motivation for at risk high school students who choose to obtain their diploma using the virtual delivery method was solved with real life applications. The project culminated in a presentation to fellow online instructors.

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APPENDIX A
Questionnaire

American Government – Online Learning Strategy

My name is Adria Trembly, I am the instructor for the course. I want to learn a little bit about your strategy for online learning so that I can help you through American Government to the best of my ability. Please answer the following in complete sentences. Successful completion of this questionnaire will result in 50 points for the course.

Name

Class

Tell me why you are interested in online learning.

Do you plan to use your home computer, go to the campus for access, or a combination of both? If you plan to go to the campus, on what schedule?

Explain your plan for successful completion of the course (for example, what schedule have you set for yourself? Do you plan to have a study partner?).

Have you taken online courses in the past?
☐Yes ☐No If "Yes," which courses?

What other responsibilities do you have outside of school (job, family)?

What do you plan to do after you graduate high school (get a job in a certain field, go to college)?

After you complete the form, attach it to an email and send it to me.

Sample Questionnaire, Done using the Forms function of Microsoft Word. This allows students to add their answers to questions without changing the questions posed by the instructor. Answers are free flowing and can take up as much space as necessary.

APPENDIX B
Study Guide

Bureaucracy Unit Exam Review
American Government

7 True/False Questions
18 Multiple Choice Questions
4 points per question (100 points total)

- The Constitution and Cabinet requirements
- How the Cabinet has changed over time
- Spoils system - what was it and what are the pros and cons of it?
- United Nations and foreign policy in the 1990's
- Appropriation bills – what are they and how are they passed?
- How have Federal hiring practices changed and why?
- Federal revenue sources
- Federal government borrowing – from where?
- Can imports be taxed?
- Can exports be taxed?
- Who helps develop foreign policy?
- How did the Cold War impact foreign policy?
- What is isolationism?
- What is imperialism?
- How did the Great Depression impact the economy?
- What is a deficit?
- What does the Federal government consider when developing a budget?
- What is the Office of Management and Budget?
- Why has the Executive branch grown?

Notes are allowed to be used on the exams – make sure the above information can be found in your notes (highlight or underline so they can be found easier).

Sample Study Guide for American Government Unit Exam. Posted in Doc Sharing for students to download.

Appendix C
Emoticon Websites Handout

Check out some of these websites to increase your "emoticon" vocabulary.

http://www.computeruser.com/resources/dictionary/emoticons.html

http://www.pb.org/emoticon.html

http://www.windweaver.com/emoticon.htm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emoticon