

Students' Use and Perceptions of a Due Date Extension Policy Stefanie S. Boswell, University of the Incarnate Word, ssboswel@uiwtx.edu

Abstract. Students may sometimes benefit from due date extensions due to significant extenuating circumstances. These circumstances, though, may not be supported by documentation as required by university policies. Given this, I implemented a flexible due date policy called the Pause Button in a 16-week behavioral sciences research methods course. Students could use the Pause Button to extend two due dates up to seven days each if they did not qualify for other university-approved extensions. Twenty-three students completed a survey about their use of the Pause Button and perceptions of its helpfulness and benefits. Overall, students perceived the Pause Button as very helpful, improving their ability to learn and complete greater quality coursework. Moreover, they perceived that it allowed them to better manage their academic workload, personal responsibilities, and stress. One of the PB's perceived benefits, though, was dependent upon the assessment to which it was applied. This paper also suggests concerns for instructors who are considering implementation of a Pause Button policy as well as recommendations for its use.

Keywords: due date extensions; course policy; student perspectives

Due dates are ubiquitous in university environments, and while they are sometimes bemoaned, they do offer benefits. The presence of due dates, for example, may help students develop important "soft skills" such as time management that are important for success across disciplines (Boisvert et al., 2015). Moreover, they may help motivate students to complete their coursework (Roy, 2021). Bonica et al. (2018), for example, noted that students reported desire for project due dates to help shape their time and energy directed toward task completion. There is also evidence that due dates improve student performance (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002). Setting due dates throughout the semester may help students to remain current on their coursework, helping to ensure that they develop necessary knowledge to meet course objectives (Roy, 2021).

In addition to their benefits for students, due dates also present pedagogical benefits for instructors. Instructors may use due dates to structure the course so students demonstrate mastery of one topic before proceeding to the next; this is especially relevant when assignments are sequenced to help students develop their competencies (Thierauf, 2021). From a practical perspective, due dates also help instructors to efficiently manage their workload so that they may provide students with assessment feedback in a timely manner (Thierauf, 2021). This may be particularly helpful for faculty teaching in universities with strict timelines for which faculty must return assessment feedback to students.

Although there are benefits to due dates, students may postpone their academic work for a multitude of reasons. Faculty may generally attribute difficulty meeting academic due dates to issues related to procrastination such as prioritization of

social over academic activities and poor self-regulation over technological distractions (Mastrianni, 2015; Santelli et al., 2020). Indeed, there is ample evidence that procrastination is related to poor self-regulation (e.g., Grunschel et al., 2018; Kandemir, 2014). Students, however, may need to postpone submission of academic work due to significant extenuating circumstances (Mastrianni, 2015; Santelli et al., 2020). Many students, particularly adult learners, navigate the demands of university coursework at the same time that they must attend to workplace and family responsibilities (Kara et al., 2019). Many students must also contend with illness and disability, both acute and chronic (Womack, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues as well as introduced new ones. Many students felt overwhelmed by the unplanned changes in their educational, social, and occupational patterns and in turn experienced difficulty completing their coursework (Birmingham et al., 2023; Lederer et al., 2021). Students who previously relied upon university technological resources returned to homes with limited to no computer or internet access, making it difficult to attend their pivoted-to-online classes (Lederer et al., 2021). Moreover, student-parents faced the need to invest significantly more time into childcare and homeschooling their children, in turn leaving less time for their own coursework (Lin et al., 2022). In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges to students' progress in their coursework.

Given the aforementioned circumstances, granting due date extension requests may have significant benefits for students. Patton (2000) contended that due date extensions may prevent some students from discontinuing their studies. Indeed, students report that instructor responsiveness to their needs impacts their decision making about leaving university (Lundquist et al., 2003). Patton (2000) also argued that due date extensions may improve the quality of students' work. With due date extensions, students may feel greater control over their work, allowing them to submit greater quality assignments rather than the cursory work they would have submitted on the original assignment timeline. In turn, students have the opportunity to better prepare and learn course material rather than knowing just enough to get by (Patton, 2000). Moreover, this flexibility may enable students to better cope with their academic workload and personal stressors (Thierauf, 2021).

Given the number of reasons that students may experience difficulty meeting due dates, they may find themselves wanting due date extensions on their coursework. When the reasons for students' due date extension requests fall under those designated by university policy (e.g., athletic travel, medical absence, military service), faculty have guidance about how to work with these students, likely minimizing stress. When students' reasons for requesting due date extensions do not meet those delineated in university policy, problems may arise. In the workplace, individuals may delay or avoid requesting due date extensions out of concern that they will appear incompetent to their powerful supervisors (Whillans et al., 2022). Given the power differential that also exists in the classroom (Sidelinger et al., 2012), this reluctance to request a beneficial extension may extend to the student-instructor relationship, creating a barrier to a potentially beneficial due date extension. Moreover, many times when students *do* make due date extension requests, they may lack the necessary supporting documentation required under

some universities' policies. Abery and Gunson (2016), for example, found that many due date extension requests were related to familial or traumatic events that significantly impacted students' well-being but for which documentation did not exist. In these cases, instructors face the difficult task of negotiating between university policy and their desire to support student well-being and academic achievement. Challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic made instructors' desire to support student well-being through course flexibility more salient, but also generated concerns that providing flexibility to one student may be perceived as unfair to the others (Rippé et al., 2021). Contending with dilemmas such as these is a source of instructor occupational stress (Santelli et al., 2020). When they do accept late work, instructors must then make difficult decisions about how to grade that late work and if it should be treated differently than student work that was submitted on time (Santelli et al., 2020).

These are not the only dilemmas of due date extensions. The possible short-term benefits of offering a due date extension may be outweighed by its possible long-term consequence: students may believe that they are exempt from policies and come to expect that they will continue to receive special treatment (Stallman, 2019). It is possible, then, that granting a student one due date extension could lead to additional requests, thus placing additional occupational stress on instructors.

Instructors have developed a number of approaches to contend these issues. Some instructors have a "Draconian" policy of providing no due date extensions while others have no penalty for late work (Boisvert et al., 2015, p. 68). Others provide students with no written policy about late work; while this gives instructors maximum flexibility in dealing with extension requests (Boisvert et al., 2015), the absence of official policies can create confusion for students (Santelli et al., 2020). Students find themselves unsure if they are allowed to ask for an extension and if so, how they should go about requesting it (Schendel, 2022).

A Possible Solution

As an instructor, I contemplated ways to maintain the benefits that due dates provide (e.g., class structure) while also recognizing that students' extenuating circumstances do not always conform to my preferred coursework timeline. Therefore, I implemented a course policy that I dubbed the Pause Button (PB) that provided students with access to a seven-day due date extension for circumstances that did not meet those codified by university policy (e.g., childcare difficulties) or for reasons that students desired to keep private (e.g., court dates). Each student could use two PBs, one for each category of assessment in the course: the PB for formative assessments (i.e., Formative PB) and the PB for summative assessments (i.e., Summative PB). By codifying the policy in the course syllabus, I aimed to reduce student confusion about extensions in my course as well as avoid engendering student belief that extensions indicated they could request additional special treatment.

Description of the Course and Assessments

I implemented the policy in my upper-level undergraduate research methods for the behavioral sciences course. The course's assessments included a quiz over the contents of the syllabus as well as three formative quizzes to help students prepare for the course tests. Quizzes were open book and open notes and administered online, via the learning management system; each quiz was open for at least two weeks. Students had the opportunity to attempt each quiz an unlimited number of times while it was open. The course also included six formative assignments, all submitted via the learning management system. The assignments were sequenced such that feedback from one assignment would be incorporated into the following assignment. Students could apply the Formative PB to the syllabus quiz, a quiz, or an assignment. Students had the option to submit a late assignment for partial credit if they did not wish to apply the Formative PB to a late assignment. Finally, the course included three tests, all administered in-person using a paper-and-pencil format with both multiple choice and essay questions. Students could apply the Summative PB to a test. All quiz open and close dates, assignment due dates, and test dates were provided to students on the first day of the semester.

The Current Study

Some academics contend that flexible due dates allow students to have greater control over their academic work, thus allowing them to learn more and improve the quality of their work (Patton, 2000). Moreover, they contend that flexible due dates allow students to better manage their academic and personal stressors (Theirauf, 2021). Unfortunately, neither Patton (2000) nor Theirauf (2021) collected data from students to determine if they indeed perceived these benefits of due date extensions. Therefore, this paper describes my assessment of students' perceptions and use of the PB policy. Specifically:

- Will students perceive the PB to be helpful?
- Will students perceive that the PB provides them with greater control over their coursework, allowing them to learn more and produce better quality work?
- Will students perceive that the PB allows them to better manage their academic and personal stressors?

In addition to gathering evidence to support Patton's (2000) and Theirauf's (2021) contentions about the benefits of due date extensions, the study was also intended to collect students' feedback about the policy in order to improve it. Specifically:

- Will students' perceptions of the PB vary between formative and summative assessments?
- Will students' perceptions of the formative PB differ between the types of assessment to which it was applied?

Any differences that emerged in students' perceptions of the formative PB and summative PB would inform my refinement of the PB policy for the following semester.

Method

Description of the Course

I recruited participants from my sections of an upper-level undergraduate research methods for the behavioral sciences course at a medium-sized, private, Hispanic-Serving institution in the southwestern United States.

Participants and Procedure

Recruitment occurred both online, via the learning management system, and in class. Two weeks prior to final exam week, I posted an announcement to the learning management system in which I invited students to participate in a survey about the PB policy in our course. I informed students that the survey was anonymous, voluntary, and open to all individuals, regardless of whether they used a PB. The announcement contained a link to launch the survey, administered in Qualtrics (2023). I followed the announcement in the learning management system with a verbal, in-class announcement during the next class meeting.

Twenty-three out of 57 total students enrolled in the sections volunteered to participate in the survey (40.4% response rate). There is no demographic information to report about the sample; given that I recruited from my own courses, I decided against soliciting demographic and identifying information from participants for ethical and practical reasons. Ethically, students may perceive undue pressure to participate in a survey when it is faculty lead (Leentjens & Levenson, 2013); this pressure may be mitigated by collecting data anonymously and in aggregate form (Ferguson et al., 2004; Ferguson et al., 2006). From a practical perspective, there is a greater likelihood that students will participate when they cannot be identified (Barr, 2017). Students were not offered compensation or course credit for survey participation; this was to further mitigate perceived pressure to participate (Leentjens & Levenson, 2013). Moreover, I did not review the survey's results until after the semester ended.

The university's Institutional Review Board reviewed the survey's proposal and declared that it did not meet federal regulatory requirements for human subjects research because its purpose was programmatic assessment and no identifiable information would be collected. Therefore, the Institutional Review Board deemed it non-regulated research and did not require documentation of informed consent.

Participants were first asked if they used the Formative PB. Participants who reported *no* were asked their reason for not using the Formative PB. Participants who reported *yes* were then asked to which assessment they applied it. If they reported that they applied the Formative PB to an assignment, they then reported what they would have done about the assignment had they not had access to the Formative PB. All participants who reported using the Formative PB rated its helpfulness and perceived benefits.

Following this, all participants were asked if they used the Summative PB. Participants who reported *no* were then asked their reason for not using the Summative PB. Participants who reported *yes* then rated its helpfulness and perceived benefits. Following this, all participants were presented with questions soliciting their recommendations for the PB policy.

Measures

PB Use

Formative PB Use. Participants were presented with a multiple-choice question to indicate if they used the Formative PB. Participants who reported using the Formative PB were then presented with a multiple choice question asking to which assessment the Formative PB was applied (syllabus quiz, quiz, assignment).

Alternative to PB Use. Participants who reported that they used the Formative PB for an assignment were presented with a multiple-choice question asking what they would have done about the assignment had they not had access to the Formative PB (submit assignment by original due date, submit the assignment late for reduced credit, not submit the assignment).

Summative PB Use. Participants were also presented with a multiple-choice question to indicate if they used the Summative PB.

PB Nonuse

Participants who reported that they did not use the Formative PB and/or Summative PB were presented with a multiple choice question asking for which reason they did not use it (did not need it, wanted to save it, forgot about it, did not know about it, other).

Rating Scales

Helpfulness. Participants used a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not helpful*) to 5 (*very helpful*) to rate the helpfulness of the a) Formative PB and b) Summative PB.

Perceived Benefits. Participants used 5-point, Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*neither disagree nor agree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) to rate their perceived benefits of the a) Formative PB and b) Summative PB. They rated their agreement with statements that each respective PB allowed them to 1) learn more, 2) better prepare, 3) do better quality coursework, 4) exercise greater control over coursework, and better manage their 5) academic workload, 6) personal responsibilities, and 7) stress.

Recommendations for PB Policy

Participants were presented with open-ended items soliciting their opinion about the 1) ideal duration of a PB (in days) and 2) the ideal number of PBs they believe should be available to each student in the course. They were also presented with a multiple-choice question asking if they wanted access to a PB in other courses (yes, no, not sure).

Results

PB Use and Nonuse

Twelve participants reported that they used the Formative PB, applying it to either a quiz ($n = 2$, 16.67%) or assignment ($n = 9$; 75%); one participant (8.33%) did not report how the Formative PB was applied. Participants who applied the Formative PB to an assignment also reported what they would have done about the assignment had they not had access to the Formative PB. Five participants (55.56%) reported that they would have submitted the assignment late for reduced credit, three (33.34%) reported that they would have submitted it by the original due date, and one (11.11%) reported that they would not have submitted the assignment. Eleven participants reported that they did not use the Formative PB because they did not need it ($n = 5$; 45.45%) or wanted to save it ($n = 5$; 45.45%); one participant (9.09%) reported that they did not use the Formative PB for an "other" reason.

Thirteen participants reported that they used the Summative PB. Ten participants reported that they did not use the Summative PB because they wanted to save it ($n = 6$; 60%), did not need it ($n = 3$; 30%), or forgot about it ($n = 1$; 10%).

Helpfulness and Perceived Benefits

All participants who reported using the Formative PB ($n = 12$) and the Summative PB ($n = 13$) rated the respective PB's helpfulness and perceived benefits. Descriptive statistics for these variables are displayed in Table 1. Averages ranged from 4.17 to 5 on a 5-point scale, indicating that participants perceived the PBs to be helpful. Moreover, participants perceived that the PBs allowed them to learn more, be better prepared, exercise greater control, and do better quality work in the course. Participants also perceived that the PBs allowed them to better manage their academic workload, personal responsibilities, and stress.

A series of paired-samples t -tests investigated if participants who used both PBs ($n = 8$) reported differences in perceived helpfulness and utility between them. The t -tests were Bonferroni-corrected ($p = .006$) to control family-wise Type 1 error rate. The t -test values, as well as their descriptive statistics and effect sizes, are summarized in Table 2. These tests were not significant, indicating that participants did not perceive one PB to be more helpful or offer greater benefits than the other.

A series of independent-samples *t*-tests investigated if individuals who used the Formative PB for an assignment differed in perception of its helpfulness and benefits than those who used it for a quiz. To control the family-wise Type 1 error rate, these *t*-tests were Bonferroni-corrected with $p = .006$; *t*-test values, as well as their descriptive statistics and effect sizes, are summarized in Table 3. When compared to those who used the Formative PB for a quiz, participants who used the Formative PB for an assignment perceived that it allowed them to complete significantly better-quality coursework. There were no differences in perceived helpfulness or other benefits between these two groups.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Rating Scale Variables

Variable	Formative PB			Summative PB		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Helpfulness	5.00	0.00	5	4.77	0.60	3-5
Learn More	4.17	0.94	3-5	4.15	1.14	2-5
Better Prepare for Coursework	4.58	0.67	3-5	4.77	0.60	3-5
Better Quality Coursework	4.50	0.80	3-5	4.54	0.97	2-5
Greater Control over Coursework	4.83	0.39	4-5	4.77	0.44	4-5
Better Manage Academic Workload	5.00	0.00	5	4.85	0.38	4-5
Better Manage Personal Responsibilities	4.83	0.39	4-5	4.85	0.38	4-5
Better Manage Stress	4.67	0.65	3-5	4.69	0.63	3-5

Table 2

Helpfulness and Perceived Benefit Differences Between Formative and Summative PBs

Variable	Formative PB		Summative PB		<i>t</i> (7)	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Helpfulness ^a	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00			
Learn More	3.88	0.99	4.00	1.07	-0.42	.69	0.84
Better Prepare for Coursework	4.38	0.74	5.00	0.00	-2.38	.05	0.74
Greater Control over Coursework	4.88	0.35	4.88	0.35	0.00	1.00	0.54
Better Quality Coursework	4.38	0.92	4.63	0.74	-1.00	.35	0.71
Better Manage Academic Workload	5.00	0.00	4.88	0.35	1.00	.35	0.35
Better Manage Personal Responsibilities ^a	4.88	0.35	4.88	0.35			

Better Manage Stress	4.50	0.76	4.63	0.74	-1.00	.35	0.35
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Note. Bonferroni-corrected $p = .006$

^a t and d cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

Table 3

Helpfulness and Perceived Benefit Differences Between Type of Formative PB Use

Variable	Quiz		Assignment		$t(9)$	p	d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Helpfulness ^a	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00			
Learn More	3.50	0.71	4.22	0.97	-0.98	.35	0.95
Better Prepare for Coursework	4.50	0.71	4.56	0.73	-0.10	.92	0.72
Greater Control over Coursework	4.50	0.71	4.89	0.33	-1.27	.24	0.39
Better Quality Coursework	3.00	0.00	4.78	0.44	-5.47	< .001	0.42
Better Manage Academic Workload ^a	5.00	0.00	5.00	0.00			
Better Manage Personal Responsibilities	4.50	0.71	4.89	0.33	-1.27	.24	0.39
Better Manage Stress	4.00	1.41	4.78	0.44	-1.58	.15	0.63

Note. Bonferroni-corrected $p = .006$

^a t and d cannot be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

Recommendations for PB Policy

Participants recommended the ideal duration of a PB as well as the ideal number of PBs that they believe should be available to each student in the course. Regarding the duration of the PB, 18 (78.3%) stated that 7 days is the ideal duration. Other participants stated that 10 ($n = 2, 8.7\%$), 7.5 ($n = 1, 4.3\%$), and 2.5 ($n = 1, 4.3\%$) days is the ideal duration; one participant ($n = 1, 4.3\%$) did not respond. The majority of participants ($n = 16, 69.6\%$) reported that ideally, the course should contain two PBs. Other participants reported that the course should have three ($n = 4, 17.4\%$), one ($n = 2, 8.7\%$), or 10 ($n = 1, 4.3\%$). Finally, all 23 participants (100%) reported that they would like to have access to a PB in their other courses.

Discussion

Course due dates offer both student and pedagogical benefits. For students, due dates may motivate students to stay abreast of their coursework (Roy, 2021); moreover, they may help students develop important time management skills (Boisvert et al., 2015). Students may necessitate due date extensions, though, to help them cope with extenuating circumstances (Mastrianni, 2015; Santelli et al.,

2020). These due date extensions may provide benefits for students, allowing them to exercise greater control over their coursework in order to produce work of better quality whilst also improving their content knowledge (Patton, 2000). Moreover, extended due dates may allow students to better cope with both personal and academic stressors (Thierauf, 2021). This project assessed behavioral science research methods students' perceptions of the ability of a due date course policy dubbed the PB to help them accomplish these goals. Moreover, it investigated if perceptions of the PBs' helpfulness and perceived benefits differed by target of the PB application. The latter purpose was included to inform refinement of the PB policy for future semesters.

Helpfulness and Perceived Benefits

Users of the Formative PB and Summative PB unanimously perceived them to be very helpful. Moreover, they found that use of a PB provided them with greater control over the coursework, allowing them to do better quality work and learn more from the course. Additionally, they perceived that use of the PB allowed them to better manage their academic workload, personal responsibilities, and stress. These findings support the perceived benefits of due date extensions suggested by Patton (2000) and Thierauf (2021). Overall, students did not differ in their perceptions of the helpfulness and perceived benefits of the PB policy, dependent upon to what they applied it. Users of both the Formative PB and Summative PB did not differ in their perceptions of the PB.

Although there were no differences in perceived benefits between the Formative PB and Summative PB, a difference in perceived benefit did emerge, though, between individuals who used the Formative PB for a quiz and those who used it for an assignment. Individuals who used the Formative PB for an assignment perceived that it offered greater benefit for the quality of their coursework. This is likely because completion of an assignment requires greater time and effort investment than completion of a multiple-choice quiz that students may take an unlimited number of times. Assignments in an upper-level behavioral sciences research methods course demand higher-order thinking skills given that they require students to analyze and evaluate the extant research literature and utilize it to create novel research questions and hypotheses (Darcy, 2001; Nentl, 2008). Indeed, one student reported that the PB made the assignment possible; without the PB, the student would not have submitted the assignment. Quizzes, on the other hand, would require fewer of these skills given that they focused on understanding and application of factual knowledge. This suggests that students may better utilize the PB for assessments that require greater higher-order thinking. This contention is also supported by students' pattern of PB use. The majority of students who reported using a PB stated that they applied it to an assignment or test; these assessments required higher-order thinking. Interestingly, these course assessments also had higher point values; this suggests that students may have wanted to apply their PB use for higher-stakes assessments. Indeed, several students reported that they did not use their PBs because they wanted to "save them" for later; the highest stakes assessments occurred in the latter half of the class.

The perceived PB benefit was not exclusive to students. As the instructor, I perceived reduced stress with implementation of the PB policy. The PB reduced the occupational strain that I previously experienced when approached by students requesting due date extensions that were not consistent with those suggested by university policy. Moreover, it diminished my concern that by granting extensions, I would be fostering students' expectations that they would receive special treatment simply by asking for it. The PB policy is available to all students in the course; using it did not provide or deny a student any advantage over another. Moreover, by codifying it in the course, it minimized a barrier that students may feel for requesting a needed due date extension. It alleviated my concern that I would be unfairly disadvantaging students who did not feel comfortable requesting an extension.

Evolution of the PB Policy

My experience implementing this version of the PB policy informed my decision to modify it for following semesters. I found that dividing the PB into two categories, Formative and Summative, created unnecessary constraint to its use. Some students wished to apply both PBs to formative assignments; this was not possible given the structure of the policy at that point in time. Given this, I revised the PB policy the following semester to remove these restrictions. This provided greater choice to students over their PB use. Given that choice in coursework is associated with greater motivation (Thompson & Beymer, 2015), my hope is that by increasing students' autonomy over the PB, they will feel more invested in their coursework. Currently, only one restriction remains for use of the PB: only one may be applied to a test. Because I modify essay questions for PB tests, I retained this restriction to reduce the instructor burden associated with crafting multiple versions of essay questions. My time and effort may instead be devoted to providing detailed feedback to my students and returning it in a timely manner.

Considerations for PB Implementation

Instructors who are considering a PB policy must first contemplate the characteristics of their course; for example, its duration. A seven-day PB policy may be quite functional in a 16-week course; however, it may be untenable for a course on an accelerated, 4-week timeline. A seven-day extension in a 4-week course is equivalent to a four-week extension in a 16-week course; instructors must determine if this is pedagogically deleterious and would leave students "too far behind." Should they determine that it will have a significant negative effect, instructors must then contend with a source of stress that the PB policy was intended to eliminate; decision making about which students may (e.g., those in a 16-week course) and may not (e.g., those in a 4-week course) have access to an extension.

Instructors may also wish to consider potential impacts of PB implementation in courses with sequenced, scaffolded assignments. This is the nature of my research methods course – assignments are sequenced such that feedback on one guides

execution of the next. Given that assignments are timed with at least two weeks between them, I am able to provide feedback on PB assignments before the next assignment's due date. While students who use the PB on an assignment have less time to use the feedback to work on their next one, they will not be inherently "behind" their classmates through its use. Students in courses with multiple, scaffolded assessments due within the same week (e.g., laboratory courses), though, may fall behind their peers by using a PB. In this case, instructors and students must weigh the relative benefits and drawbacks of student submission of a minimally adequate but timely assignment versus a more thorough but late one.

Finally, instructors who wish to implement a PB policy must determine the PB's ideal number and duration. The majority of participants in the current survey reported that they consider two PBs to be the ideal number and seven days to be the ideal duration. Familiarity with something is sometimes enough to produce liking (e.g., Zajonc, 1968; 2001), though, and given students' exposure to that version of the policy in the course, it is possible that these preferences were due to students' familiarity with them. Instructors may wish to consider the number and timing of assessments when making decisions about the ideal number and duration of a PB. Courses with two to three assessments per week, for example, may benefit from more but shorter PBs.

Recommendations for PB Implementation

Should instructors decide to implement a PB policy, it is important to codify it in the course syllabus. By making their policies explicit, instructors reduce ambiguity for students (Parkes et al., 2003) by providing instructions on how the PB may be utilized. This may also minimize burden for instructors because students have a clear set of procedures about how to request and utilize the policy.

While it is important to include information about their PB policy in the syllabus, instructors may also wish to provide reminders about the policy throughout the semester. Instructors typically review course syllabi on the first day of class and for many students, the day is a hectic one filled with new information about their instructors' policies (Boisvert et al., 2015). Given this, they may not remember the details of the PB policy and therefore, it may be helpful for instructors to remind students about it later in the course.

Limitations

This study reports on students' subjective perceptions of the PB's helpfulness and benefits; as such, students' responses may have been subject to demand characteristics. Given students' awareness of the purpose of the survey, they may have responded in ways to confirm its benefits. Nichols and Maner (2008) refer to participants' attempts to confirm a study's purpose as the "good-subject effect" (p. 151). Despite this potential drawback, self-report data offers the benefit of a way to assess individuals' affective and cognitive processes that may be inaccessible in other ways (Pekrun, 2020). It would be difficult to gather data about students' perceptions of the PB policy without their knowledge of the survey's purpose.

The absence of demographic information about the sample presents a notable limitation. For ethical and practical reasons, I did not collect demographic information from participants. Given this, instructors considering implementation of a PB policy in their own courses are missing important information to determine how well these results may generalize to their students.

Finally, the sample's constituency is another potential limitation to the results' generalizability. Participants were drawn from only one type of class: an upper-level, behavioral science research methods course, typically populated by students in their junior and senior year. Students in upper-level courses must typically cope with greater stress and more complex demands than students in lower-level courses (Beiter et al., 2015). Because of this, they may have perceived the PB to be more helpful and beneficial than their lower-level counterparts would. In the future, I plan to study if the perceived benefits of the PB also extend to my lower-level courses.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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