Title: Examining the Nudge Effect in an Academic Setting

Abstract

According to the American Psychological Association, 85% of students procrastinate when it comes to their coursework. (Novotney, 2010) In a higher education institution, it is common to observe a lack of motivation amongst students to complete assignments, particularly if they are optional - not graded. Thaler and Sunstein’s book, “Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness,” (Thaler and Sunstein 2008) explains that the nudge concept is a mechanism used to alter human behavior to ultimately result in a more optimal outcome. Most policy makers can achieve this result through the construction of choice architecture that gives us a slight push - or nudge - in the right direction. A recent National Geographic show, Crowd Control, uses behavioral science and provides wonderful examples of ways how people can alter human decisions to ultimately make choices, which would payoff better outcomes. (Crowd Control 2014) This research posed the question whether a nudge in the classroom could improve course performance. By creating environments that promote optimal decisions using a nudge, we can motivate students to choose a better decision which would give a better outcome. In this experiment, we placed students into two groups, A (control) and B (nudge), and used homework assignments, quiz scores, and test scores as a determinant for overall course performance. According to a preliminary result, students in the nudge group did better, on average, than students who were in control group. We believe the early assignment of homework acted as a nudge to motivate students to continue completing homework assignments, regardless if they would be graded or not, and this is what resulted in them having a better overall performance in the course. The applicability for this concept is endless, as there exists a large potential to influence individual decisions without the need for an overt approach – 401K investment, recycling, even choosing healthy meal options.
Keywords: Nudge; choice architecture; behavioral economics

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