# Meeting Them Where They Are At: Valuing Active Learning Activities To Motivate Students

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## INTRODUCTION

Using high-stakes testing, where one summative evaluation determines competence, has been shown to create increased anxiety and decrease performance potential (Chimea, T., Kanji, Z., & Schmitz, S.,2020). Traditional nursing teaching theories argue that the rigor of nursing school must be maintained to ensure new nurses are prepared to provide safe and effective evidence-based care and that summative evaluation has always been the test of that rigor. Faculty are often hesitant to change something they feel has been working. Valuing both formative and summative evaluations may be the compromise to ensure rigor, decrease anxiety, and increase confidence in nursing students. The old adage "what gets rewarded gets done" is true in many forums. Nursing students have competing interests with heavy workloads, clinicals, family, and jobs. Research shows that an active learning classroom produces better academic and clinical results but requires more upfront work on the part of the student. Active learning in the classroom requires a commitment of participation from both the professor and the student. Students tend to prioritize what gets rewarded as they have competing priorities.

## METHODS

This pilot looked to determine if rewarding formative active learning activities would improve participation and understanding, thus improving summative exam scores in a baccalaureate nursing obstetrics course. It sought to explore if giving heavily weighted credit to the active learning classroom activities yet maintaining the program's rigor by requiring a college-mandated exam average of 72% would increase the summative scores, formative scores, and student confidence in understanding the material.



## RESULTS

Academic results

A Nationally standardized course exit exam was used to evaluate overall effectiveness in improving academic knowledge. The benchmark for sufficient likelihood of passing the OB section of the NCLEX was 850. The pre-intervention group, which received traditional instruction and homework grades weighted at 10%, had 34 students who scored under the 850 benchmark. The intervention group with an active classroom model with 35% of grades achieved through summative activities had 14 who fell below 850. The overall class average increased from 856 in the pre-pilot group to 901 in the pilot group.

## RESULTS

Student satisfaction

Qualitative data from student end-of-course evaluations changed from dissatisfaction with the amount and type of summative assignments when there was a 10% graded weight to very positive satisfaction with the same work when it was valued at 35%. The same assignments were used in each group. In the pre-pilot group, students stated, "The homework activities did not teach me anything and were a waste of time." In the pilot group, students stated, "I enjoyed the work; it helped me to understand what we were doing in class." The faculty described increased participation in class activities with the pilot group and a greater understanding of the content.

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