

# The Exam is Not the End

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## Background

Drawbacks of typical post-exam review activities:

- The groups didn't always find the correct answer to every exam question. This is troublesome because student would use the exam to study for the comprehensive final.
- Students spent time reviewing the entire exam rather than focus on the questions they missed.
- Students became aware of their performance on the exam while working with the other students in the group. This was an awkward situation for those who did poorly on the exam.

## Methods

This activity is modified from one suggested in the *Instructor's Manual for Principles of Economics by Frank and Bernanke* prepared by Margaret Ray and Mary Lesser. I administered this activity during the spring 2009 semester. For the activity:

- In the class period before, I ask students to bring their books and all of their notes with them for this activity.
- Students complete the activity on their own but are allowed to work with other students.
- They must determine the correct answers to the questions they missed either by using the book, a friend, or asking me for help.
- I leave about 15-20 minutes at the end of a class period for the activity.
- Most students finish the activity during the class period. Some students take the activity home and bring it back the next period.

## Assignment

Review your graded exam and complete each of the following steps. You may attach additional sheets of paper if needed. Turn in this assignment and your exam before you leave class. In order to receive points on this assignment, you must have complete answers for all questions.

1. Review your score on the exam and make sure you understand how it was graded. If you have a question about grading, write your question and indicate the question number. If you do not have any grading question, please write none.
2. Review the exam questions. Identify the correct or "best" answer to each question. In the space below, give the correct or revised answer for each question where you did not receive full credit. Make sure to indicate the question number.
3. Review your answers and identify why you did not give the correct or "best" answer in each case. Summarize your findings in writing for each question and indicate the question number. For example, you misread the question, you didn't study that material or you didn't understand a concept.
4. Describe your study strategy for this exam. For example, did you read all of the chapters in the book? Did you use either the study guide at the library or online? Did you study individually or with a group?
5. Determine (and summarize in writing) what you can do, in general, to improve your performance on future exams.

If you have problems completing any of these steps or would like to go over your exam follow-up assignment, please see me during office hours or schedule an appointment. We can discuss your exam as well as strategies for improving your performance on future exams.

## Results

The biggest difference I found when using this activity was the decrease in complaints about the exam. In previous semester, students thought questions were purposely 'tricky.' By completing this activity, students were able to see how the questions connected to their reading and homework. I did not use a control section to determine whether student exam performance improved.

By asking why the student did not give the correct answer, I am able to determine which questions students thought were particularly difficult. If multiple students indicate they didn't understand what the question was asking, I know that I need to revise that question.

On the first exam, most students respond that they studied individually using mostly the notes with little help from the book and did not use the study guides. By the second exam students have usually tried to augment their individual study with more reading or a study guide. By this time, students are still not reading all of the chapters or studying in groups. On the third exam, almost all students were using some practice activities either with a study guide or re-doing the class activities. When asked after the last exam what they would recommend for my students next semester, most recommended reading the chapters even though they admitted they did not do so.

I get a variety of predictable answers and a few really honest ones:

- "To be very honest, I had another exam the same day which I spent considerably more time on study-wise."
- "I didn't actually read any of the book."
- "Lost as can be."

## Results

Almost all students determined that they should read more of the book to improve their performance. They took responsibility for not reading.

Some common ways they planned to improve their scores were:

- Start studying sooner.
- Do more practice questions.
- Use the study guides.
- Read more of the chapters.
- Don't miss class.
- Read the questions more carefully.
- Start with the short answer questions.

Every student receives feedback on this question. I comment on each of their plans for improvement. Much of the time I simply offer encouragement because they know how to study better but have trouble implementing it.

## Conclusion

From student feedback, they feel the assignment is particularly helpful for the comprehensive final exam. They know they have all of the correct answers to all of the exam questions. In addition, they know how to get the answer.

The biggest benefit for me is that students take ownership of their performance on the exam. By acknowledging how they studied and why they missed the question, students take more responsibility for their exam scores. It encourages them to think critically about their study habits and gives me the opportunity to offer personalized suggestions about how to study. Most of the time, students know how to study better but they have trouble implementing it. When handed back, this assignment offers a reminder about their performance on the last exam and how they planned to improve.

## References

Ray, Margaret and Mary Lesser. *Instructors Manual to accompany Principles of Economics Third Edition* by Robert H. Frank and Ben S. Bernanke. McGraw-Hill Irwin: New York. 2007

## Acknowledgements

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