The Power of Habits: Using Habit Theory to Influence Student Behavior

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Studying Habits

• We all do things without always knowing why
• Habits can be positive and negative
• Affects many areas – study skills, health choices, relationships, time management, etc.
• Easier to identify a habit if you understand WHY you do it
• Habits can be changed!
Habits and Student Behavior

• Today’s session will help you connect habit theory to student behavior within various populations

• Outline
  • How did we get here?
  • Overview of habit theory
  • Teaching habit theory
    • Warning and probation students
    • Freshmen
    • Transfer students
  • Activity: Applying habit theory
How Did We Get Here?

• Amber attended NACADA Presentation on the Power of Habit at annual conference in 2012 - introduction to the book

• ISU’s CELT (Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching) office ran a Teaching and Learning Circle (book club) in Spring 2015 co-led by Amber Kargol

• Each participant was asked to create an activity for a class

• The activities created allowed us to relate it directly to our work with students
Habit Theory
The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do In Life and Business
The Habit Loop

• Author Charles Duhigg explains the habit loop:
  • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1eYrhGeffc
    (presentation clip :50-3:11)
The Habit Loop

• Three major parts:
  • **Cue:** a trigger that tells your brain which habit to use
  • **Routine:** your physical, mental, or emotional response and actions related to the cue
  • **Reward:** the outcome of the routine that encourages you to use it in the future (motivation)
Different Levels in Habit Loops

**Cue:** Notification on your phone about an email or Facebook post

**Routine:** Immediately checking the notification

**Reward:** Feeling connected to your peers/family through phone use
Teaching Habit Theory
Warning and Probation
Students:
Habit Reflection Packet
Habits for Warning and Probation Students

• Developed for students facing academic difficulty

• Focuses on both positive and negative study habits
  • Identifying the cue and recognizing patterns in study behaviors

• Three part reflection
  • Part I – Identifying a positive and a negative study habit
    • Focusing on the cues and recognizing patterns in study behaviors
  • Part II – Setting a goal and identifying a habit to change
    • Using cues from Part I to develop a new routine/behavior
  • Part III – Reflection (three weeks after Part I and II)
    • Guided questions to reflect on the behavior change process
Habits for Warning and Probation Students
Part I

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Study Habit:</th>
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<td><strong>Cue</strong></td>
<td><strong>Routine</strong></td>
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**Cue (Pattern) Identification**

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<th>Negative Study Habit:</th>
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**Cue (Pattern) Identification**
Habits for Warning and Probation Students
Part II

**Cue:**
Use the cues you identified in Part I above. What audible or visual cue will remind you to begin your new routine? (e.g., calendar notification, alarm, a certain time of day, writing something in your planner, etc.)

**Routine:**
Write the actions you want to turn into a habit here.

**Reward:**
What positive things happen when you complete the routine? (e.g., achievement, staying on schedule, earning a good grade, doing well on an exam, etc.)

**Penalty:**
What negative things happen if you don’t complete the routine? (e.g., forget to complete an assignment, have to cram for a test, earn a low grade, etc.)

[Chart adapted from Vaughn Gunnell: https://medium.com/@vaughngunnell/how-to-turn-your-dreams-into-actions-9c70d4590f60be44d4d]
Habits for Warning and Probation Students
Part III

• Reflection questions:
  1) What are some positive changes you were able to make in regards to changing the habit(s) you identified?
  2) What was the easiest part of changing your routine?
  3) What were some areas you struggled with as you have worked on changing your habit(s)?
  4) What have you learned about yourself through this process?
  5) What is one habit you would like to continue to work on throughout the remainder of the semester?
  6) What is one thing you could do before the end of the week to work on that habit?
First Year Orientation
Class:
Habits and Student Success Assignment
The Power of Habit and Academic Success

• Habit theory can be applied to student success
  • Study skills and using academic help
  • Time management
  • Health and wellness
  • Involvement
  • Creating relationships

• Students already have routines that make them “successful”
  • Class session focuses on the different areas of student success
  • Routines already exist, they may need to be changed in college
Bringing Habits into the Classroom

• Kinesiology Learning Community
  • All students are enrolled in first-semester orientation course, KIN 253
  • 4 sections, about 40-60 students in each
  • Students assigned to a peer mentor in class
  • All students were incoming freshmen direct from high school
  • Assignment was graded and counted toward point total for each student

• Focus of Assignment
  • Class session was added as a way to expand the student success class topic
  • Helps students answer an important question:
    “Why is college different than high school, and how can I use my habits to adapt?”
Assignment Development

• 3 Part Assignment
  1. Presentation
  2. Part 1 Worksheet
  3. Part 2 Worksheet

• Timing
  • Week 3
    • Presentation in class, video clips used
    • Part 1 worksheet assigned
    • Compare habits from high school vs. college
    • Identify what should change and how
  • Week 10
    • Part 2 worksheet assigned (Part 1 handed back with comments)
    • Have your habits helped you be a successful college student?
    • What did you change or what needs to change now?
Learning About Habits

• Class outline:
  • Learn about the habit loop
  • Identify your habits
  • Help you understand your habit loop
  • Prepare for the Habits and Student Success assignment:
    • Part 1: Due next week in class
    • Part 2: Due Week 10

• Introducing the Habit loop:
  • Author Charles Duhigg explains the habit loop:
    • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1eYrhGeffc
High School vs. College

The Habit:
How you study for a test and get a good grade. Your typical (high school) study behavior is to spend a limited amount of time studying.

High School Habit Loop

Cue: The day before the test, teacher reminds in class
Routine: Study for an hour the night before
Reward: Getting a good grade on the test
High School vs. College

The Habit:
How you study for a exam and get a good grade. You use the same high school habit you’ve used in the past for studying.

High School Habit Loop

**Cue:** The day before the test, professor might give reminder

**Routine:** Study for an hour the night before

**Reward:** Getting a poor grade on the exam
**Part 1: Creating Habit Loops**

**Instructions:** Describe your current habit loop for each scenario. Your answers should be based on the routine you have used in the past to be successful.

1. How do you study for a test?

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2. What do you do to stay healthy and focus on wellness in your life?
3. How do you spend your free time in between scheduled classes/events?
4. If you need help with classes or your homework, what do you do?
5. How do you complete your homework? (When you start, how much time, process, etc.)
6. Think about what causes you stress. How do you manage stressful times or situations?
7. How do you get involved with activities that interest you?
8. Think about your sleep schedule. How do you decide when to go to bed and how long you sleep?
9. At the end of the school day (all commitments complete), how do you spend your time until you go to bed?
10. How do you keep track of upcoming deadlines, events, and due dates?
Part 1: Reflection Questions

• Reflection Questions (provide responses on a separate piece of paper):
  1. Which of these are “good” habits? Are any of them “bad” habits?
  2. If these habits stay the same for the entire semester, will you be successful academically and personally?
  3. Which habits do you think will change? Will they get better or worse?
**Instructions:** Please refer to your Part 1 worksheet to help you complete this assignment. This assignment is worth a total of 10 points, with 2 points possible on each question.

1. Review your Part 1 worksheet. Which habits have you continued to use at Iowa State? How have they impacted your success (both negatively and positively)?

2. Identify 2 habit loops from your Part 1 worksheet that have changed. Write your original answers in the first row of each box below. Then, create your new habit loop in the second row.

   1. Habit: ____________________________________________

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<th>CUE</th>
<th>ROUTINE</th>
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<td>Original</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habit Loop</td>
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**Part 2: Habit Loops and Questions**
3. List one new habit that you have developed since the semester started and identify the habit loop.

Your new habit:

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Part 2: Habit Loops and Questions

4. How are the new habits you are forming helping you be a more successful student? Are any new habits preventing you from being successful? Why?

5. What habits will you need to focus on to help you be successful for the rest of this semester?
Student Feedback

• Student responses from a class activity survey:
  • Made me really think about my habits that sometimes go unnoticed.
  • It was interesting to see how my habits changed once I got to college.
  • I liked this because it really helped me manage my time better and realize what my distractions were.
  • I liked learning about my habits. I am much more aware of them now than I was before.
  • It was a good reminder of study skills and what I need to do to be successful.
  • It was eye opening to think about your habits and what were good vs. bad.
Coordinator Reflections

• Positive Outcomes
  • Timing of the assignment worked well
  • The use of examples in the class presentation were important
  • Providing access to the PowerPoint after class helped students to understand the concept and complete worksheets successfully

• Possible Improvements
  • Adding another class period dedicated to habits – between week 3 and week 10
  • Use peer mentors even more – provide their own examples, lead discussions, etc.
Adaptations

• Habits can be used with any population and applied to any topic of choice

• This activity can be changed to meet size needs (individual, small group, large class, etc.)

• Topic doesn’t have to be introduced using a large presentation – just video clips or a few examples can be used

• Peer mentors could use this topic or activity in small group activities or individual interactions with mentees

• Instead of a graded assignment, the habit loop topic could be used in a small group discussion

• Parts of the book can make great mini-activities to use in other settings
Transfer Students
Differences in Habits as Transfer Students
Habits Assignment

• Assigned to all students taking a transfer orientation class which is designed for new transfers to ISU (not change of majors)

• Class is offered for 8 weeks

• Developed to help students identify and explain their own habits
  • Group discussions in class to understand how habits affect how to manage student services and academics at ISU

• Assist them in reflecting on their positive and negative habits
Reflecting upon your habits, what is one **POSITIVE** habit that you have incorporated into your life?

<table>
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### Cue (Pattern) Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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Habits Assignment, Part II

Step II: Adjusting Habits

Now that you have identified both a positive and negative habit, you will use this information to choose one habit that you will change for this semester. Use the information below to guide you through the steps of identifying a new habit/goal and creating a plan to achieve it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cue:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What audible or visual cue will remind you to do the routine?</td>
<td>Place the action you want to turn into a habit here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.g. calendar notification, alarm, placing shoes by your bed, etc.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reward:</th>
<th>Penalty:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What good thing happens when you complete the routine?</td>
<td>What bad thing happens if you don’t complete the routine?</td>
</tr>
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<td>E.g. - achievement, stay on schedule, got a good grade, earn a prize</td>
<td>E.g. - forget an assignment, not enough time to study for a test, disappointment, bad grade</td>
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</table>

Due October 1st: Write and submit a one page reflection answering the following questions: (1) What new insights have you gained from being introduced to the Habit Loop (academically or personally)? (2) Discuss your new habit/goal and describe your new habit loop.

**Habits Assignment, Part II**

Work through the tables below as you begin to adjust your habit or achieve your goal.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week One</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What time is it?</td>
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Habits Assignment, Part III

• What are some positive changes you have made in your life based on this assignment?

• What are some challenges you faced in trying to change your habits?

• Describe something that was easy or difficult for you in trying to change your habits?

• What is one habit that you would like to continue to improve?
Activity: Applying Habits
# Applying Habits

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How do you stay healthy and focus on wellness in your life?

Think about what causes you stress. How do you manage stressful times or situations?

How do you prepare for an important work assignment or deadline?