

INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

by Taking Attendance with WebAssign



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PROFESSOR DALE DAWES IS A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE in mathematics education at Teachers College, Columbia University and a full-time lecturer at CUNY-BMCC.

His research focuses on the effective integration of educational technology in the classroom. His technique includes using the real-time analytics of WebAssign® to transform a classroom into an innovative teaching environment where an instructor's pedagogical approach can be tailored to the needs of each class and each student.

In this paper, Professor Dawes discusses how the simple administrative task of taking attendance can be used to improve student engagement and performance. He also provides a step-by-step guide to taking attendance in WebAssign that you can replicate in your own classroom.

THE CHALLENGE

Professor Dawes was looking for ways to empower students to track their own progress in class as well as improve overall class attendance. Ideally he wanted to do this in a way that reduced time spent on the administrative task of recording attendance manually and calculating a final score at the end of the semester.

THE SOLUTION

WebAssign's diverse functionalities enable instructors to use the system for a plethora of tasks that are limited only by the imagination. Taking attendance is a perfect example of one such task because it is a simple idea that could have a significant impact on students.

Professor Dawes began using WebAssign's GradeBook to take student attendance in the Spring 2012 semester. He chose to make their attendance grade worth a small percentage (5%) of their final grade, but high enough to matter to most students. He allowed a 5-minute grace period at the beginning of class to receive full credit and then used a simple process (detailed below) to collect attendance records quickly. Professor Dawes also made the attendance score (along with scores from homework and quizzes) available for the students to check anytime.

He expected this new setup to lessen his workload and make students more accountable.

THE RESULT

Since Professor Dawes started using WebAssign to track his students' attendance records, he has seen an increase in his students accepting personal responsibility for their attendance. He has provided a summary of the results from his experience.

"Taking attendance through WebAssign leads to more students rushing to class—literally out of breath—to make sure they are on time. Students care about their grades and when you allow them to track their grades (including their attendance grade) it serves as a constant progress report. When asked about the useful features of WebAssign, one student stated, 'being able to check your grades at any time is extremely helpful and can be a good wakeup call.'

"After setting up my WebAssign to take attendance, I no longer have to ask my students about their absences or being late and the majority of my students approach me to explain the situation and inquire about the work they missed. They provide a doctor's note and proactively email me if they are delayed or detained by an emergency. Their goal is to ensure they can get as much credit (including partial credit for excused absences) as possible for their attendance."

The result is a more responsible student, acting accountable for his or her actions and recognizing the impact on his or her overall performance. From an instructor's perspective, WebAssign's reporting features can enable instructors to determine the relationship between students' attendance and their performance in each assignment category (e.g., homework or exam). The raw data available to instructors via WebAssign can also be used for future research to inform and improve pedagogy.

How to Use WebAssign to Record Class Attendance

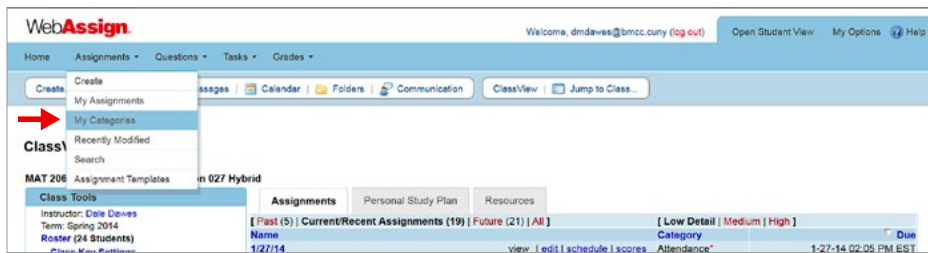
Make sure GradeBook is set up before following these steps. Steps one and two are one-time, set-up steps, while step three is performed every time you want to take attendance.

STEP 1

Create an Attendance Category in GradeBook

- a. Click **Assignments > My Categories**.

After you click on My Categories a new window will appear called Assignment Categories



- b. In the **Create New Category** field, type **Attendance**, click **Save**.

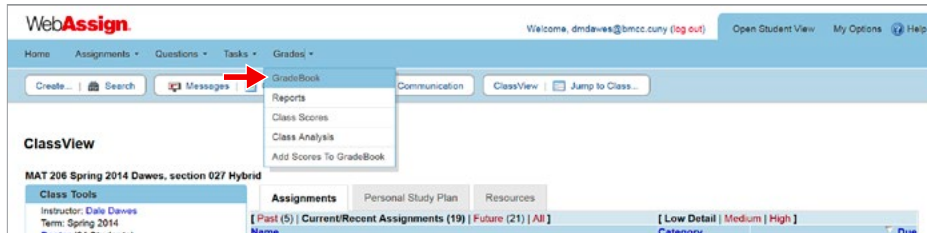


- c. Your screen will refresh automatically and **Attendance** will appear as one of your categories under **My Categories**. Close this window.



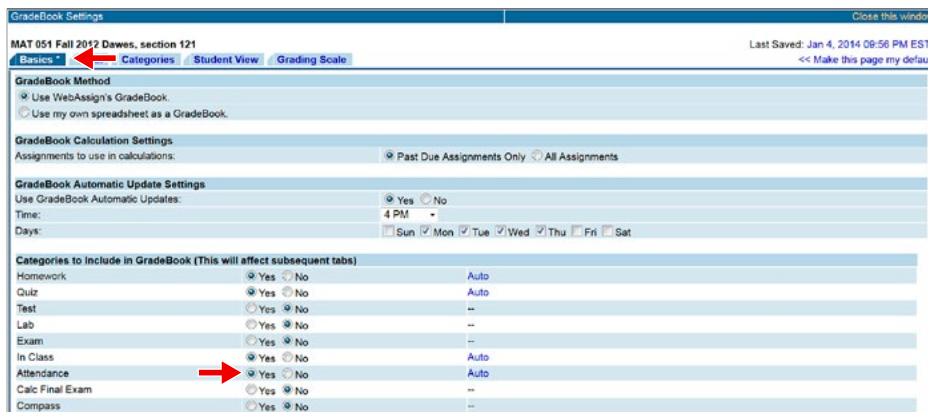
STEP 2 Include the Attendance Category in GradeBook

a. Click **Grades > GradeBook** to open the GradeBook display.



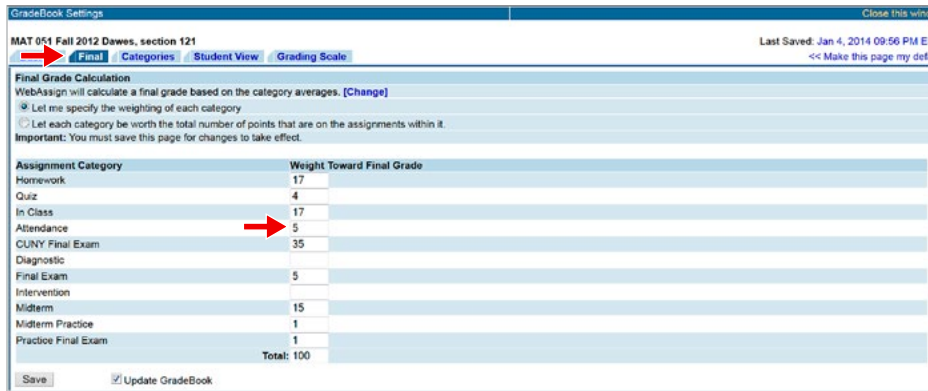
b. In the GradeBook Settings window click on **Basics**.

c. Under **Categories to Include in GradeBook**, select **Yes** for Attendance, and click **Save**.

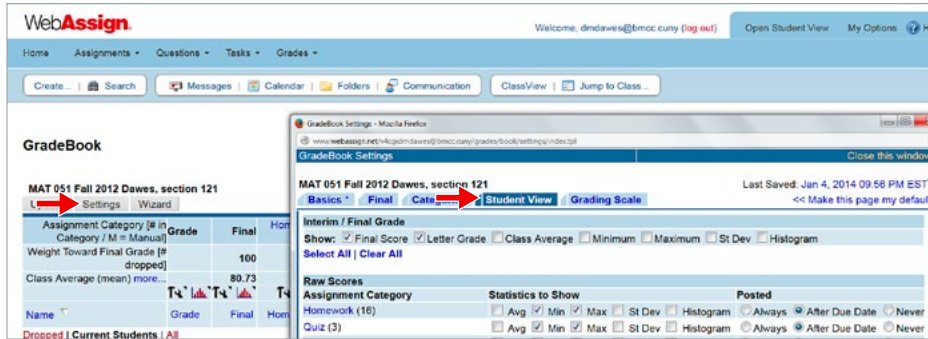


d. In the GradeBook Settings window click on **Final**.

e. Select **Let me specify the weighting of each category**, then click **Save**. Enter a weight for the **Attendance Category**, click **Save**. In GradeBook, click on **Settings**.

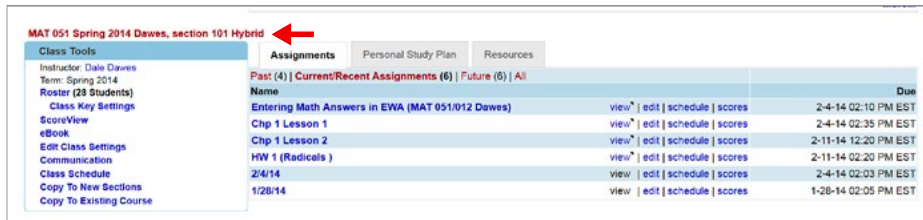


- f. In the GradeBook Settings window click on **Student View**. From this screen, select the check boxes for the statistics you want your students to view and click **Save**.

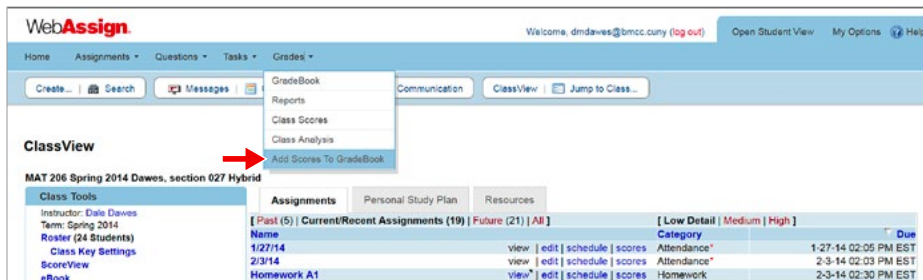


STEP 3 Taking Attendance in Class

- a. Navigate to the course where you want to take attendance, and click on the course name. This will take you to the ClassView of the selected course.



- b. Click **Grades > Add Scores to GradeBook**.



c. Under Upload Method, ensure the **I want to add a single assignment using the assignment editor** option is selected, and click **Next**.

d. Select the **Available to Students** check box. The scores are then available to your students.

e. Under Upload Method use the default selection, **Enter scores for each student by hand**, and click on **Add Scores**.

Recommendations:

- Change the Points from 100 to 1.
- Under Due, use the same date used for the assignment name and specify the time class starts. For example, if your class starts at 2 pm you may wish to give your students a 5-minute grace period and make the Due Date 2:05.

- f. In the Add Scores window, each student's name is displayed. You can do a roll call and mark each score accordingly. You do not have to enter 0 for an absent student because WebAssign will count the missing score as a 0 automatically.
- g. You can then click [Review](#) to ensure everything is correct. When you are finished, click [Save](#).

The left screenshot shows the 'Add Scores' window for 'MAT 051 Fall 2012 Dawes, section 121'. It contains a table with columns 'Fullname' and 'Score'. The 'Score' column has input fields for each student. At the bottom, there is a 'Review >>' button. A red arrow points to this button.

The right screenshot shows the 'Review Scores' window for the same course. It contains a table with columns 'Fullname' and 'Score'. The 'Score' column has numerical values entered for each student. At the bottom, there is a 'Save' button. A red arrow points to this button.

- h. You can easily update the attendance by clicking on [edit](#) in the ClassView and [Modify Scores](#) on the Assignment Info page.

The screenshot shows the WebAssign interface. The 'ClassView' section is active for 'MAT 206 Spring 2014 Dawes, section 027 Hybrid'. The 'Assignments' tab is selected, showing a table of assignments. A red arrow points to the 'edit' link in the 'MAT 206 Diagnostic Exam (Dawes)' row.

Name	Category	Due
1/27/14	Attendance*	1-27-14 02:05 PM EST
2/3/14	Attendance*	2-3-14 02:03 PM EST
Homework A1	Homework	2-3-14 02:30 PM EST
Entering Math Answers in EWA (Pre-Calc & Above)	Homework	2-3-14 02:34 PM EST
MAT 206 Diagnostic Exam (Dawes)	Diagnostic	2-3-14 11:59 PM EST
Homework A2	Homework	2-10-14 02:10 PM EST
In Class A5	In Class	2-10-14 02:15 PM EST
Homework A6	Homework	2-13-14 10:45 AM EST
MAT 206 Quiz 2 (Inequalities)	Quiz	2-13-14 11:21 AM EST