

Incentivized goals and academic performance: a field experiment

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Abstract

We run a pre-registered experiment with 628 university students to study the effects of incentivized goals on academic achievement. We offer half of the students 300€ conditional on attaining a goal GPA. We place the goal in the middle of the GPA distribution and explore the (potentially different) treatment effects for high and low ability students. We complement these data with lab-in-the-field data in which we measure students' WTP for this policy, GPA beliefs, and preferences. We find that incentives are only positive for those students who are on the threshold of attaining the goal. These effects are mainly driven by male students. Furthermore, we find an important heterogeneity in the treatment effect: incentives seem to be positive for students with high intrinsic motivation and negative for students with low intrinsic motivation.