Modern engineering education is slowly realizing the importance of design, manufacturing and teamwork. The importance of these issues in education is being driven by industry. In response to these issues, a client based freshman projects course has been developed. In this paper we will discuss initial assessment results for a freshman design class with client-based projects. The students are provided with a client and then design, build, package and deliver their project. A survey was developed based on observations and reflections written by students in earlier semesters. The client-based aspect of this class appears to have a far-reaching impact on students’ views of engineering. The survey was directed to help us assess the following assumptions that have been made about the outcome of the freshman design course.

1. Having a client allows the student to experience the frustration of communication and to enjoy the satisfaction of having made a contribution.
2. Student motivation remains high during the course because the students have made a commitment to a person, not just a course.
3. Students get a better picture of a design cycle when they must prototype, build, package, deliver, and document their project. They realize the importance of each piece, and that they must pay attention to all aspects to satisfy the client.
4. The projects help motivate the need for learning core material. The projects are often difficult enough that the students realize they have a lot to learn to fully understand their design.
5. This type of course increases retention in engineering. Students begin to realize the societal relevance of their work.

The validity of these assumptions will be discussed and specific student examples will be given to clarify the assumptions.