

Alternative Approaches to Grading

Why Grade?

- Provide feedback
- Provide motivation
- Compare students
- Evaluate student's understanding of knowledge

Do our current grading practices assess what and how students learn?

Alternative Grading Approaches

- Detaches grading from learning
- Invites students to take more ownership over their learning
- Lowers student anxiety
- Redistributes faculty labor and over time reduces it
- Makes expectations more transparent
- Provides more feedback and less evaluation

With these approaches, a more direct connection between learning outcomes and assessment exists

Labor-based grading

“The calculus is simple: the more labor you do, the better your grade in the course will be, with no attention to quality of writing turned in (on the part of the teacher). While the substance of all discussions, feedback, activities, and the like are always about quality, or rather about how readers make meaning of texts, how they see quality, what quality means to each reader, what various expectations different readers have, all those judgments of writing are separated from the calculation of course grades. Thus, how anyone judges writing quality is divorced from how final course grades are determined. In effect, the labor-based grading contract works from a key assumption: **It’s better to separate the course grade from how and what students learn in the course.**”

(Asao Inoue, Labor-Based Grading Contracts)

Final Breakdown in Grading Contract (Inoue, 131)

| | # of non-participate days | # of Late Assignments | # of Missed Assignments |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| A | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| B | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| C | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| D | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| F | 6 | 6 | 4 |

Specifications Grading

Let's admit that, right now, our grades have little connection to outcomes. Students earning an *A* *may* have achieved all the outcomes of a course, but what about those getting a B, a C or a D? Did they achieve some outcomes and not others? If so, which ones? Or did they achieve few or none at an acceptable level? Even so, they passed the course. (Nilson, 2016)

Specifications Grading

- Students are graded pass/fail on individual assignments or bundles.
- Instructors provide clear specs on what constitutes passing work.
- Specs reflect the standards of B-level or better work.
- Bundles and Modules that earn higher course grades require students to demonstrate mastery of more skills and content, more advanced skills and content, or both.
- Bundles and modules are tied to the learning outcomes of the course. Students will not necessarily achieve all possible outcomes, but their course grade will indicate which ones they have or have not achieved.
- Students can receive limited number of tokens to revise an assignment or submit late work.

Contract Grading

“A pedagogy of equality aims to support and inspire the greatest possible student success, creativity, individuality, and achievement, rather than more traditional hierarchies organized around a priori standards of selectivity, credentialing, standardization, ranking, and the status quo... Thus, contract grading is both an idealistic, student-centered way of writing one’s own learning goals—and it is, quite overtly, a workaround, a better alternative to conventional grading and credentialing. By adding the peer review component, contract grading is also an act of community.”

(Cathy Davidson, The Futures Initiative)

Next Steps

- Many alternatives to the traditional approach to grading
- Can begin with one assignment
- Can mix and match between different approaches
- Talk with your students

What are your thoughts on the relationship between grading and learning?

What changes will you make to your approach to grading to better reflect this relationship?