

Using alternative grading to create an inclusive classroom

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Driving questions & outcomes

- What do we really believe about learning?
- How do our grading policies conflict with or reinforce our learning philosophies?
- What does a grade mean?
 - Define product, process, and progress components of grading
 - Describe how grades are a mixture of product, process, and progress
- What are alternatives to traditional grading?
 - Describe equitable grading practices

What do we really believe about learning?

Video: [What Learning Looks Like](#)

Reflect

- What's the first word that comes to mind after watching this video?
- Share out & don't worry if you repeat what someone else says!

What do we really believe about learning?

Video: [What Learning Looks Like](#)

Connect

- How does this video reflect the process of learning?
- Think individually for two minutes, jot down a few ideas
- Share briefly in your small group

Reflect & write

- Reflect on our discussion
- Expand or refine your philosophy of learning

A tale of three students

Category	Weight
Homework	25%
Tests, Projects	25%
Class Activities	25%
Participation	25%
Final Grade	100%

A tale of three students

Category	Weight	Alex
Homework	25%	100
Tests, Projects	25%	60
Class Activities	25%	80
Participation	25%	80
Final Grade	100%	B

A tale of three students

Category	Weight	Alex	Chris
Homework	25%	100	100
Tests, Projects	25%	60	100
Class Activities	25%	80	60
Participation	25%	80	60
Final Grade	100%	B	B

A tale of three students

Category	Weight	Alex	Chris	Pat
Homework	25%	100	100	20
Tests, Projects	25%	60	100	100
Class Activities	25%	80	60	100
Participation	25%	80	60	100
Final Grade	100%	B	B	B

A tale of three students

- All three students are earning a B
 - What does it mean to earn a B?
What does a 'B' mean?
 - Are these students the same in what they know/are able to do? Why or why not?
 - Do you have any concerns about “giving” each student a B?
- In small groups:
 - Discuss these data
 - Identify one or two takeaways to share out

Category	Weight	Alex	Chris	Pat
Homework	25%	100	100	20
Tests, Projects	25%	60	100	100
Class Activities	25%	80	60	100
Participation	25%	80	60	100
Final Grade	100%	B	B	B

Let's explore traditional grading systems

- **Grades are a hodgepodge of process, product, progress** (Lipnevich et al., 2020; Cross and Frary, 1999)
- **Grading practices are subjective and biased** (Matz et al., 2017; Mead et al., 2020)
- **Grading ultimately demotivates learning** (Feldman, 2018, 2019; Schinske & Tanner, 2014)

What do we grade? Why?

Grade elements can include

- Product: what students know and are able to do (e.g., exams, projects, etc)
- Process: how students attained the product of learning (behaviors like formative assessment, homework, participation)
- Progress: how much students have gained/improved (e.g., pre/post assessment)

Guskey, T. R. (2008). Practical solutions for serious problems in standards-based grading: Corwin Press

Guskey, T. R. (2018). [Multiple Grades: The First Step To Improving Grading & Reporting](#). [blog]

A tale of three students (revisited)

Category	Weight	Alex	Chris	Pat
Homework	25%	100	100	20
Tests, Projects	25%	60	100	100
Class Activities	25%	80	60	100
Participation	25%	80	60	100
Final Grade	100%	B (80%)	B (80%)	B (80%)

A tale of three students: **Process** emphasis

Category	Weight	Alex	Chris	Pat
Homework	30%	100	100	20
Tests, Projects	15%	60	100	100
Class Activities	30%	80	60	100
Participation	25%	80	60	100
Final Grade	100%	B (83%)	C (78%)	C (76%)

A tale of three students: **Product** emphasis

Category	Weight	Alex	Chris	Pat
Homework	15%	100	100	20
Tests, Projects	60%	60	100	100
Class Activities	15%	80	60	100
Participation	10%	80	60	100
Final Grade	100%	C (71%)	A (90%)	B (88%)

Grades are a hodgepodge of information

- Process, product, progress all combine to determine a single letter grade
- Instructors weight grade elements differently
- Discuss in small groups
 - What do you place more 'weight' on? Exams (products) or formative assessment, attendance, participation (process) or gains/improvement (progress)?
 - Do you believe there is a right way to weight product, process, and progress? Why or why not?
 - Does the grade accurately reflect a student's knowledge/skills?

Grades are subjective and biased

- Traditional grading practices evaluate students' content knowledge... and behaviors (effort, attendance, lateness, etc)
 - What constitutes good effort?
 - Why might a student miss class?
 - Why do students turn in late assignments?
 - Why is college \neq 'the real world'?

Students are... individuals with lives

Student Profiles

- 74% of undergraduates report at least one nontraditional indicator (NCES 2015)
 - Financially independent
 - Work full-time
 - Has dependents
 - Single parent
 - Delayed enrollment
 - Attending college part time
 - No high school diploma
- HERD student data:
 - In 2019, 32% of Intro Bio students and 36% of Human Anatomy and Physiology students at NDSU reported at least one nontraditional indicator.
- Shadow a student
 - “I was overwhelmed, not just by the amount of things students are doing, but the amount of content they were subjected to in classes.”
 - “I now understand my students when they say, ‘I didn’t have time to do the homework because I was working”
 - “I cannot recall being so tired at the end of the day.”
- Ongoing mental health crisis

Grading demotivates learning

- Grades encourage a performance orientation rather than mastery
 - Did I get an A? Did I do better than everyone else?
 - Did I learn something? Have I improved?
- Grades promote risk avoidance
 - Grading homework tells students you need to be right the first time
- Grading everything equates to constant judging
 - Losing points for being late, being wrong, lacking effort, etc
 - Every teacher grades differently, too!

What can we do instead?

Equitable grading strategies include:

- Ungraded formative assessment
- Retakes
- Flexible deadlines & limited grading of behaviors
- Equitable grading scales

Ungraded Formative Assessment

- Use homework and class activities as learning opportunities
 - Provide practice and feedback (not a means to accrue points)
- Timely, corrective feedback is a highly effective tool to promote student learning
 - When instructor feedback is presented with a grade, students focus their attention on the grade, not instructor feedback (Kuepper-Tetzel & Gardener, 2021; Winstone & Boud, 2020)
- Learning happens through mistakes
 - Ungraded formative assessment gives students space to make mistakes without penalty
- Summative assessments/exams serve as motivation for engaging in formative assessment

“The Problems with Averaging”

Why don't you use only averages for assessing your research data?

Exam	Chris
1	91%
2	92%
3	0
4	94%
5	94%

Average (mean)	74.2	C
Mode	94%	A
Median	92%	A

- Which grade calculation is the most accurate?
- What does a “0” tell you about the students understanding of the content?

Retakes

- More accurate
- More equitable
- Ways to make retakes work in your class:
 - Make them optional - not every student is looking to earn an A
 - Consider whether students can retake just failed topics
 - Help students get the most out of a retake
 - Encourage reflections that make students dig into exam feedback
 - Use Learning Assistants (LAs) to support student learning
 - Develop test skeletons or templates

Flexible deadlines

- Shift emphasis away from compliance and back to learning
- More accurate
 - E.g., A student who demonstrates **A** level understanding but turns in work past the due date and gets a **B** grade
- More equitable
 - Many reasons for why a student may turn work in late, many of which could be out of their control
 - Late work penalties are demotivating and can disproportionately impact the most vulnerable students.
- ‘Best by’ dates
 - Submissions by this date get prompt feedback

Equitable grading scales

Traditional grading scales

- Non-linear: disproportionately weighted towards failure
- What message does this send to students?
- What implications does this have across the span of an entire semester?

Traditional Grading Scale	
90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
50-59	F
40-49	F
30-39	F
20-29	F
10-19	F
0-9	F

Equitable grading scales

Traditional grading scales

- Non-linear: disproportionately weighted towards failure
- What message does this send to students?
- What implications does this have across the span of an entire semester?

Equitable grading scales

- Allocate a greater proportion of gradations to success
- Less prone to error and variance

Equitable Grading Scale	
80-100	A
60-79	B
40-59	C
20-39	D
0-19	F

Equitable Grading Scale	
4	A
3	B
2	C
1	D
0	F

Reflect and discuss

- What do you want a grade to represent in your course?
- Which equitable grading practices resonate with your philosophy of learning?
- Which grading practices might you adopt?
- What challenges do you envision? How can you overcome those challenges?

Resources!

QR Code links to:

- An ever-growing list of resources
- The Grading Conference

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Equitable Grading Strategies

Extra credit

- By offering extra credit, we are emphasizing the importance of points, not learning or meeting course standards
- Extra credit that entails students to attend an event outside the classroom requires students to contribute additional time and/or money (e.g. tickets, transportation costs, etc.) for the purposes of increasing grade > Students with fewer resources are less able to take advantage of these opportunities > Extra credit opportunities can increase achievement gaps