Ungrading:

Pedagogy to Create Equity and a Sense of Belonging in the Classroom

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Higher EDquity Symposium

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Ungrading

- a way of engaging with grades as a system, distinct from "not grading" (Stommel)
- A grading method that focuses on a qualitative assessment of student performance.
- "the shift away from points and toward purpose" (Michelle D. Miller, "Ungrading Light")
- Started by educators (K-12 as well as higher education) who were concerned about inequity created by the traditional grading method.
- "de-grading," "going gradeless," "grade free," *etc.*
- No established method to ungrade

Effects of Grading

- Grades tend to diminish students' interest in whatever they are learning.

- Grades create a preference for the easiest possible task.

- Grades tend to reduce the quality of student thinking.

Alfie Kohn, "The Case Against Grades"

What Grades Do

- Grades incentivize the wrong stuff, *e.g.*, the product over the process. What the teacher thinks over what the student thinks, *etc.*

- Grades are not good feedback.

- Grades are not good markers of learning; they communicate a student's ability to follow instructions.

- Grades encourage competitiveness over collaboration.

- Grades don't reflect idiosyncratic, subjective, often emotional character of learning.

- Grades are not fair.

Jesse Stommel, "How to Ungrade"

Inequity

- The effects of grades are more pronounced and harmful for communities and families who have been historically underserved by schools.

Joe Feldman, *Grading for Equity*

Students' Perceptions of Grades

- "Although It's not like I have ever had a choice before with the grading system, I kind of just had to deal with it and adhere to it, so I would say neutral."

- "I would say that my overall relationship with grading has been neutral. It was like a love and hate relationship at some points. Sometimes grading was good and other times it was not so good."

- "The fact that grades are constantly being thrown at us adds to the concern of the letter seemingly being our biggest priority. While learning should be enjoyable, in today's world it's sad we have to question whether we're learning at all."

POP 205 Introduction to Popular Culture

How is your final grade determined?

- This is an ungrading course. I am sure that most of you never heard of ungrading so let me explain it. It is a grading method that focuses on qualitative assessment of your performance. While you will get a final grade at the end of the term, I will not be grading individual assignments, but asking questions and making comments that engage your work. You will also be reflecting carefully on your own work through a dialogue we will have through mutual feedback. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you're expected to. This method meets the goal of the Foundation of Knowledge general education program better as students expand their knowledge of popular culture through hands-on experience rather than the memorization of information. You are asked to reflect on and assess your performance twice during the course. The final grade will be determined based on student's works, self-reflections, and self-assessment*.

*Instructor reserves the right to change grades as appropriate.

POP 205

- My Learning Plan
- "The Case Against Grades" Discussion Board
- Before You Read (Discussion Board)
- Weekly Scrapbook Entries
- Self-Reflection & Assessment

Comments

Yasue Kuwahara
Jun 21 at 3:33am

Good! You are right in that a selfie reflects a person's socially constructed identity. On the other hand, a selfie is not a social norm because its appeal varies among age groups. While people under 30 are most impacted by selfies, those over 50 do not practice them regularly. We live in a society dominated by images and therefore it is natural and expected to select appropriate images. For instance, the image you present for a job interview and the one when you are on vacation are certainly different, aren't they? Daniel Boorstin said in his book, The Image, that the US was dominated by images and there was nothing real any longer. Your selfie is an image and it is not who you really are. Don't you want people to know your real person? What is your real identity to yourself? Let me know what you think.

Jun 24 at 10:24pm

My real identity I feel is made up of many aspects. I identify myself as a fiance, a respiratory therapist, a daughter, a sister, etc. I have many sides to myself. My true identity is also represented by my personality (kind, funny, easy going, extroverted, etc.) Another aspect of my self identity is my physical attributes such as my blonde hair and blue eyes. Not to mention my beliefs, my goals and my dreams.

Yasue Kuwahara

Yasue Kuwahara
Jun 26 at 1:33pm

Thank you for the response. Do you want others to know who you really are? How would you communicate it?

Jun 29 at 1:56pm

I feel like you can't truly get to know someone unless you're sitting down having a conversation with them face-to-face. We may think we know someone through social media or text messages but they could be putting up a front!

Yasue Kuwahara
Jun 30 at 9:05am

I agree. Selfies don't reflect who people are, do they?

Jun 30 at 9:12am

No. You can easily hide behind a selfie. For example I don't remember how I was feeling that day when I took this selfie but I could have been feeling sad or angry but you would have never known. I've also added filters before to alter with my appearance.

Yasue Kuwahara
Jul 2 at 3:28pm

^_^

Leave a comment

Assignment Names

Search Assignments

7	Welcome and Let's Get to Out of 0	Plagiarism Quiz Out of 0	Syllabus Quiz Out of 0	Discussion: The Case Again Out of 0	Mi
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	0	0	0	1	
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Students' Responses

This is the first class where I have actually gotten feedback on every one of my assignments. As a nursing student, as long as I got a good or even passing grade, I didn't mind if I got feedback or not. But this class proved to me that even if I completed an assignment and got the grade, the feedback is just as important to understand the concepts and even learn a little bit more about what I wrote. At times I got frustrated with myself when I wasn't understanding what I needed to do differently in an assignment to get the grade. But I just kept reading the comments and corrections over and over until I finally understood what I needed to change/improve which was much more rewarding than just getting a grade

This class is very unique and I thoroughly enjoyed learning and doing this kind of work this semester…. I thought I could roll through the class without the book and still do well, as I have in other classes. I soon realized from your feedback that I was missing several key elements of the assignment and I could have done better…. The second experiential learning project was something that I put an abundance of work into. I bought the book and changed how I went about the assignment. I worked hard and read the passage in the book…. The feedback on these assignments was different because you were able to see what I was communicating and I think that you were able to see that I read the book for these papers…. I feel as if I have opened up in this class more than anywhere else. It is refreshing to let my opinions come through in my work.

A challenge that I ran into was learning to communicate my thoughts on something rather than writing about what I learned. In my college experience I have not had a course that has asked for my thoughts but rather my knowledge of something. I really enjoy the idea of a grade free class because I feel like I can be more expressive. I don't feel the pressure on my knowledge of something, but rather my understanding and thoughts of the topic we are learning about.

Ungrading in IST 185/397/497

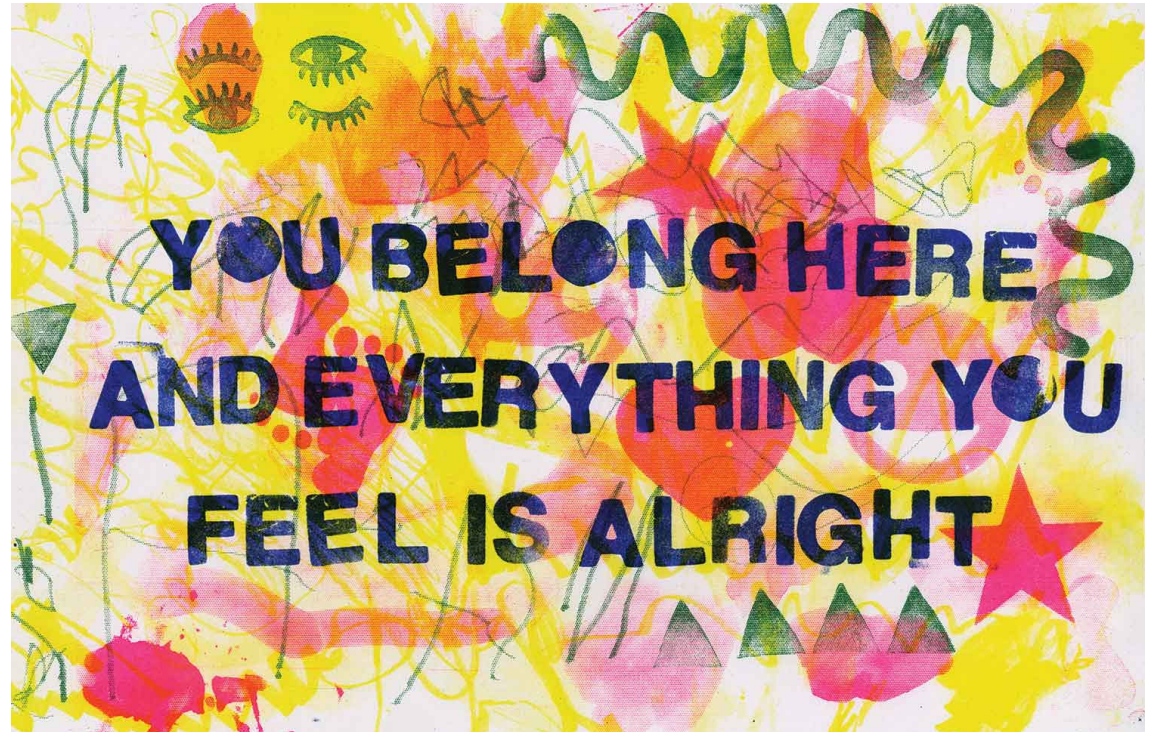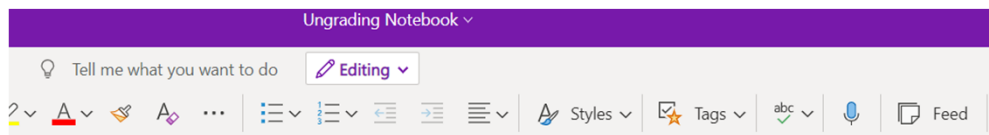[Syllabus language to introduce ungrading](#)

Image by Monica Johnson at justseeds.org

Managing Ungrading in Canvas/OneNote

Ungrading Notebook ∨

Tell me what you want to do | ✏ Editing ∨

Notes on Ungrading in classes

Monday, February 28, 2022   4:56 PM

Students 397-001 Spring 2022	SE #1 at week 5	My assigned mid-term grade	SE #2/My assessment at week 10	SE #3 at week 15	Final grade for course	Feelings about ungrading
Kasey	B+/A-	A	A/A	A-	A	Prefers to see grades to know how she's doing/unpredictable and difficult
Julia	A	A	missing	A-	A-	Enjoys it/late work/t feels a lot less stressful and more self-responsible/more easy-going overall
Haley	A-	A-	A-/A-	A-	A-	Uneasy about the lack of accountability/doesn't Zoom or attend class/Different and Anxiety-inducing
Courtney	B+	A-	B+/A-	A	A	Loves it/getting behind on submitting work/felt much less pressure with the assignment which I instead focused on the quality of my work/flexible, patient, and beneficial
Maddie	B-	A	B+/A-/A	B	A	Loves it/late work/Helpful, less pressure
Cassi	C/B-	B-	B/B+/B	A-	A	Likes it, creates less stress but allows for students to slack off/missing major assignments/This format is very good for people who do not procrastinate /useful, different, and uplifting

Assignment Names

⌄ | 🔍 Search Assignments

Project #1: Intellectual Autobio Out of 0	Project #2: Discipline Essay Out of 0	Project #3: IST Portfolio Out of 0
✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✗
✓	✓	✓
✓	✗	✓

Data from 85 IST Students Spring/Summer 2022

How do you like the 'ungrading' format of this class?
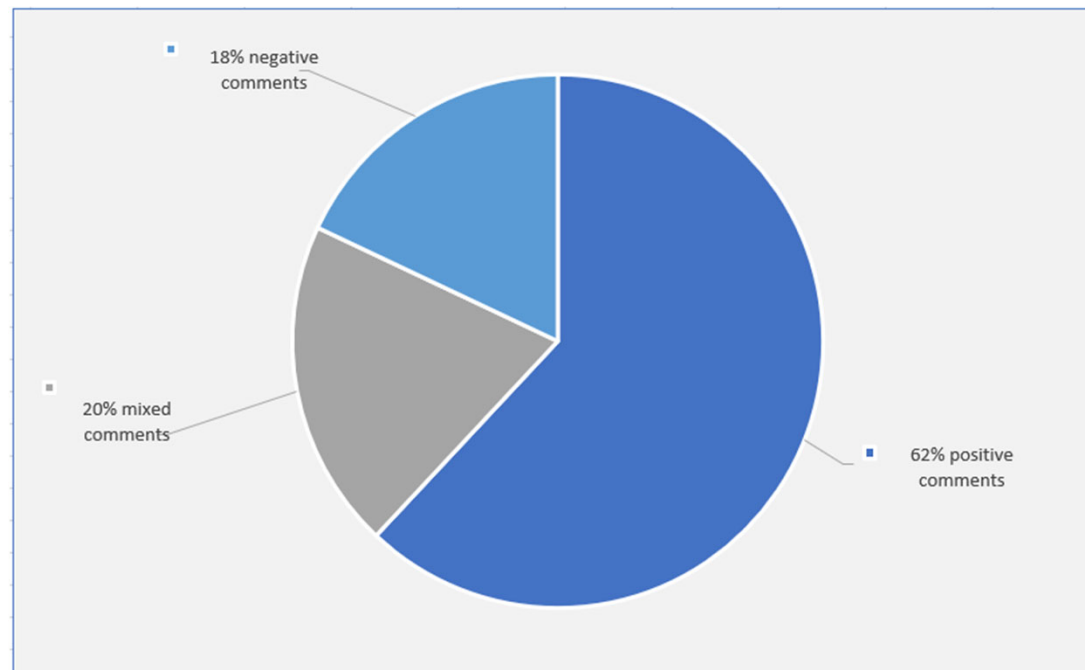
Three-Word Descriptions of Ungrading in IST

- Flexible, patient, beneficial
- Helpful, less pressure
- Clever, considerate, creative
- Let's me breathe
- Productive, helpful, rewarding
- Strange, liberating, invigorating

- Nerve-wrecking, stressful
- Makes me nervous
- You are responsible
- Different, anxiety-inducing
- Lenient, unclear, problematic

Good, Bad & Ugly

Good
- Relief from the pressure of grading for both instructor and students
- Individual relationship with an online student

Bad
- Students want time-consuming reassurances about their performance in class
- Flexibility in ungrading can result in lack of student motivation

Ugly
- Student insecurities
- Gray areas for instructors and students
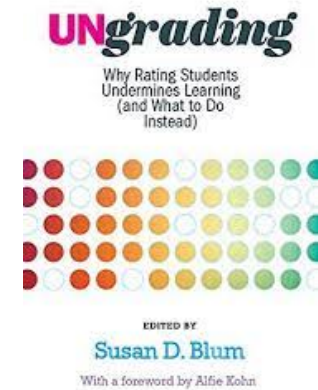- Students don't read comments and feedback

Resources

Join the Ungrading Teams Group
at https://mymailnku.sharepoint.com/:f:/r/sites/Ungrading/Shared%20Documents/General?csf=1&web=1&e=Q2MZ8E

You will find resources, inspiration, and community

Breakout Session Survey