

Talking About Grades

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Expectations

- ▶ Workshop – not presentation
- ▶ False advertising:
 - We will look at “why” and “what” to grade, but not “how” to grade (contra abstract)
- ▶ No answers, but a lot of questions
- ▶ Goals:
 - Explore your own ideas about grades and grading
 - Exchange ideas with others
 - Possibly refine your own position

Overview of Workshop

1. Purpose of grades
2. What can be graded?
3. Grade inflation
4. Do certain teaching styles generate higher grades? Is that a problem?
5. Do answers to above questions fall into coherent philosophies of grading?

Clickers

- ▶ It’s a radio device: don’t point
- ▶ Device flashes green if your answer is registered
- ▶ Pray to the gods of tech demos that everything works.
- ▶ Try not to fuss too much about question wording

Primary purpose of grades for you

7%	1. Provide information for grad schools, employers, external audiences, etc
36%	2. Provide information to students
57%	3. Provide motivation to students to learn material and skills

If I stopped giving grades in my class (and other courses did give grades) my students would:

21%	1. Do very little of the assigned work
29%	2. Do some of the assigned work
50%	3. Do same amount of assigned work
0%	4. Do more of assigned work

If there were no grades at all at my institution, my students would:

- 7% 1. Do very little of the assigned work
- 21% 2. Do some of the assigned work
- 43% 3. Do same amount of assigned work
- 29% 4. Do more of assigned work

Topic 1: Using grades as motivators

- ▶ Should faculty members use grades specifically as motivators?
- ▶ Example:
 - Peter Fernald the *Monte Carlo Quiz*
 - Survival Cards

Arguments against motivational grading

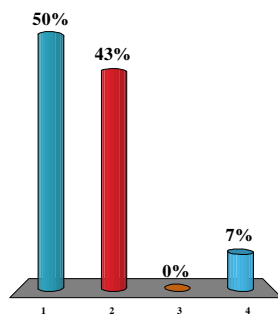
- ▶ Unfair: Daryl Close: "the idea of punishing a student with a low course grade for excellent performance on grade components, but who skipped class frequently, will seem counterintuitive to many teachers" (366). Using grades to motivate good learning practices is like "punishing the innocent for the greater good" (367).
- ▶ Counterproductive: Alfie Kohn: "The more people are rewarded, the more they come to lose interest in whatever had to be done in order to get the reward" (8).

Arguments for Motivational Grading

- ▶ Attacking the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction. Nilson: "Does the fact that you get paid for teaching make it less appealing to you" (52)?
- ▶ Providing accountability in a world of competing responsibilities.
- ▶ Motivating learning centered pedagogy (class participation, group work, blogs, etc).

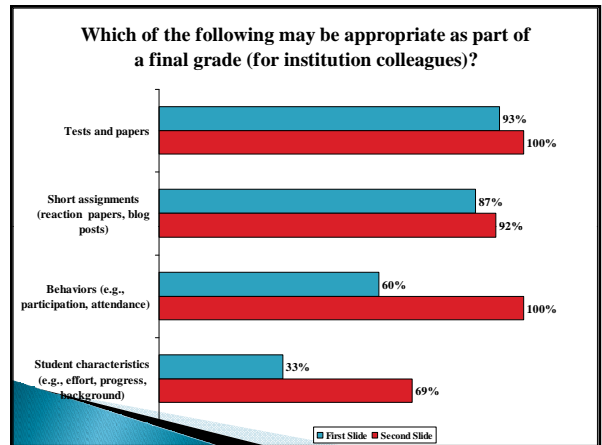
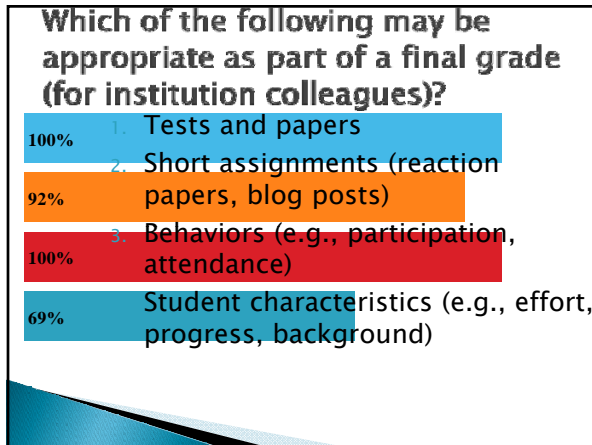
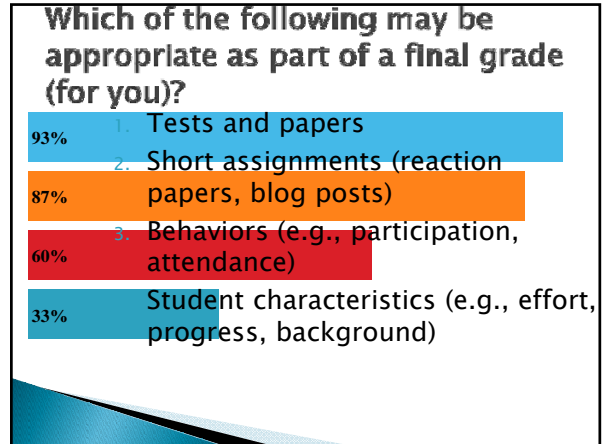
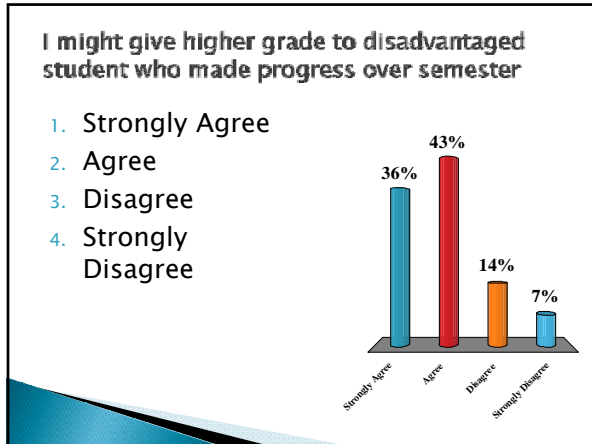
It is appropriate to use grades as motivators:

- 1. Regularly
- 2. Only sometimes
- 3. Seldom
- 4. Never



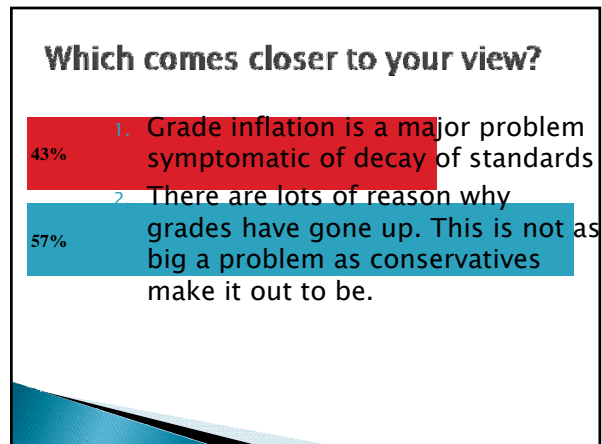
Topic 2: What can be graded?

- ▶ Where to draw the line between grading the work and grading the student?
- ▶ Some professors try to grade all work blind. Others think that context is important?



Topic 3: Grade Inflation

- ▶ Not just increase in grades but an upward shift in grades “without a corresponding increase in student achievement” (Kamber, 46).
- ▶ In other words, a paper that would have gotten a B ten years ago now gets an A.
- ▶ Harvey Mansfield (Harvard) now gives two grades: an inflated grade (for transcript) and a real grade (for student information)



Topic 4: Grades and Learner-Centered teaching

- ▶ Do certain styles of pedagogy impact grades?
- ▶ Is that a problem?"

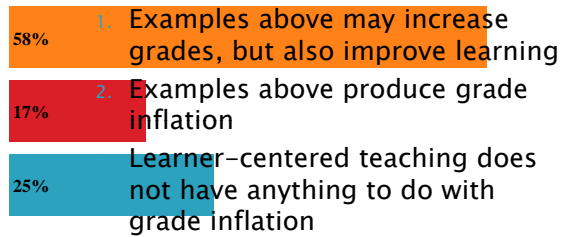
Learner-Centered Teaching (adapted from Blumberg, 2009)

	Instructor -Centered	Learner-C entered
Content	Students absorb specified content	Students reflect on and make meaning of content
Instructor goals	"Course will cover this material . . ."	"Students will be able to . . ."
Responsibility	Instructor has responsibility for what is to be learned	Students have increasing responsibility for their own learning
Assessment	Largely evaluative	Formative and evaluative
Power	Policies created by instructor	Students have input into course design

Does learner-centered teaching produce higher grades

- ▶ Examples:
 - Building intro course around blog, and including frequency of blog posts as part of grade (Long)
 - Bringing in materials from popular culture to illustrate theories (hard to grade, but produces energetic discussions).
 - Using rubrics, giving out questions in advance of test, etc.
 - Allowing students to decide what percentage of their grade is based on what part of course?
- ▶ Do these substitute mechanistic tasks for tasks that can be evaluated?

Which comes closer to your view?

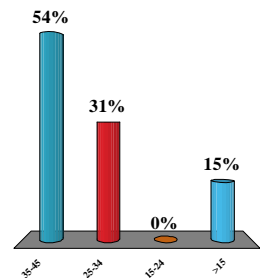


Topic 5: Are there two philosophies of grading?

- ▶ Developing a philosophy of grading.
- ▶ Fill out instrument
- ▶ Add up total score

Total score

1. 35-45
2. 25-34
3. 15-24
4. >15



The two sides:

- ▶ Do they mark out a coherent set of ideas?
- ▶ How would you label each side?
 - Content-driven grading vs. process-driven grading?
 - Achievement-centered vs. learning-learning centered.

More info: Immer@villanova.edu, or
www.teachphilosophy101.org

Home Obstacles and Challenges Planning Your Course Lectures and Discussion Tests, Papers, Assignments Change of pace Exercises Non-traditional Resources Background Reading

TeachPhilosophy101

WELCOME

Welcome to TeachPhilosophy101 (TP101)

This site presents strategies and resources for faculty members and graduate assistants who teach philosophy courses, especially at the introductory level; it also includes material of interest to college faculty generally. The mission of TP101 is to provide free, user-friendly resources to the academic community. All of the materials are provided on an open source license. You may also print as many copies as you wish. I am deeply indebted to Villanova University for all of the support that has made this project possible.

John Immerwahr, Professor of Philosophy, Villanova University, Email

"One of the most comprehensive, well-researched, and accessible guides for teachers that I have ever seen."
 James Lang, *Chronicle of Higher Education*

Overview of the site:

- The random highlights page gives a flavor for some of the topics on TP101.
- The crash course gives you the eight most essential pages. In the order that you might need them.
- Suggested use. Recommended uses for graduate assistants, new faculty, experienced faculty, and for those who are organizing teacher training programs.
- Challenges and obstacles. Many of us who teach philosophy were among those rare students who loved the discipline from the start. Most of our students, however, have different motivations and interests. This section discusses some of the challenges that make teaching both difficult and exciting.
- Preparing your course. Tips on specific issues such as developing a syllabus, choosing

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Preliminary research on attitudes about grading suggests that there is a wide range of opinions about the meaning of grades and grading among our colleagues. But do those differences fall into broader categories? My hypothesis is that there are some underlying philosophical consistencies. To test this hypothesis, please rate yourself (as much as possible) on where you fall between each of the following extremes.

	Type 1	Type 2
Purpose of grades	Primarily purpose of grades: communicate achievement to external audiences.	Primary purpose of grades: communicate to students and provide motivation
1 2 3 4 5		
Grades as motivators	Grades should only be used to evaluate achievement, not to motivate behaviors	Appropriate (esp in intro courses) to use grades to provide accountability for activities that promote learning
1 2 3 4 5		
Basis of grades	Grades should be based on written work (papers and exams) only	Often appropriate to make class participation, reaction papers, and blog posts a component of grades, especially in intro classes
1 2 3 4 5		
Relevance of student characteristics	The ideal would be to grade all student work blind.	It is sometimes appropriate to understand broader context and, if necessary adjust grades upward to reward or compensate for effort, enthusiasm, disadvantage, or progress.
1 2 3 4 5		
Level of course	Approach to grading is independent of level of course	Motivational and contextual grading more appropriate for younger students in intro courses
1 2 3 4 5		
Seriousness of grade inflation	Grade inflation is real and pernicious	There are many reasons why grades have gone up. Higher grades can also reflect the fact that students or teaching have improved.
1 2 3 4 5		
High grades	If every student in the class gets an A, it usually reflects a problem with the teacher or the course	If the course objectives are clearly spelled out and every student has met them, then every student should get an A.
1 2 3 4 5		
Criteria	Criteria for high grades cannot be reduced to mechanistic criteria	Spelling out course objectives clearly helps students learn more, and should lead to higher grades.
1 2 3 4 5		
Effort vs. quality	Giving out exam questions in advance, allowing students to rewrite papers, substitutes effort for quality	Giving students exam questions in advance, allowing students to rewrite papers, encourages greater learning
1 2 3 4 5		

Some articles on grades and grading, including those referenced in the talk. For other material on pedagogy developed by John Immerwahr see: www.teachphilosophy101.org

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