

**Presenters:** Rebecca Reck, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Ken Fischer, University of Kansas, [rreck@illinois.edu](mailto:rreck@illinois.edu)

**Topic:** Alternative Grading

**Resources:**

- [http://zotero.org/groups/4310239/specifications\\_grading\\_uiuc/library](http://zotero.org/groups/4310239/specifications_grading_uiuc/library)
- <http://gradingforgrowth.com>
- <http://thegradingconference.com>
  - Check out the Slack and Discord Channels
- Book: Grading for Equity by Joe Feldman
- Book: Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time by Linda B Nilson
- If-At Exam Cards for Scratch Off Multiple Choice Exams: <http://www.if-at.com/home/about/default.aspx>

**Presentation Overview:**

- Traditional Grading: Grade with weights, depending on how you play with weights and chart for points, we can make two different students get the same grade or vastly different grades, so we're just playing with numbers and it doesn't reflect the type of students
- Alternative Grading: reduce emphasis on score, and increase emphasis on achievement and feedback because they have to hand it back in again
- Techniques:
  - Specification Grading: assignments have a clear set of specifications describing how to pass (e.g. how to review a conference paper or grant/ things are reported appropriately for FDA)
  - Standards Grading: align assignments with clearly defined standards or course objectives
  - Ungrading: final grade determine through student self-reflections and other qualitative assessments
- Challenges:
  - Resistance from students who have already figured out how to game the current system
  - Students have 12+ years of traditional grading so are familiar with the game and want the numerical grade
  - Takes more time for the instructor
  - They don't know how the progress relates to the final grade
  - Pass/fail feels like higher stakes
- Benefits:
  - Students read feedback more closely when it's not graded
  - Transition from the focus being the score/grade instead of the learning
  - More flexibility for learners at different speeds given revise and resubmit time
  - Canvas has standards based grading built in
- How to Get Started:
  - Reviewed tools and books, created specifications for each assignment, trained TAs
  - Pitch for grading system is important and needs to be revisit several times
  - Pass/fail creates a lot of anxiety if there was not a chance to revise and submit
  - Provide a way for students to track/calculate their grade that is not just details in the syllabus (e.g. google spreadsheet)
- Ken Fischer: Journey in Alternative Grading
  - Used Group Midterm Exams combined with Individual Exams
  - Pros: gave students opportunity to learn from each other during exam, can improve grade via group grade

- Con: reduced student time for individual work, complicated for instructor to setup and execute on the day of the exam
- Final exam was optional individual exam to improve grade on specific topics
- Standard based or Competency Based Grading
  - Basic Biomechanics course
  - Pros: gives students more time and opportunity to demonstrate learning, helps marginal or slow students to improve learning and grade
  - Con: some students still working on early topics which can delay recent topics, lots of exams for students and professors (can be seen as a threat by students to “lose” points)
- Scoring Technique:
  - Use total points where each point(s) are spread out across exams to get score for each learning objective
  - S-score for each learning objective is then converted to course grade using geometric average
  - In class activities are incorporated into final score
- Tips to Get Started
  - Modify one assignment to a specifications rubric
  - Add revise and resubmit for some assignments
  - Use Canvas or GradeScope to track objectives over time
  - Still grade as long as exams are touching each objective over time
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### Discussion:

- Nicole Ramo: how do we get student buy-in?
  - Rebecca: There’s no partial credit when submitting a grant or document in industry, you revise it until it’s right, increase transparency of why students fail or have to resubmit/revise the lab
  - Kevin: for competency based grading, not much resistance since it’s used in physics already and is preferred
- Celinda Kofron: advice for open-ended projects courses?
  - Rebecca: has project in lab that’s open-ended that has specifications graded on it
  - Grade on if you are communicating, standards seen in scientific report, communicating what you did appropriately
  - If on pass/fail, need to allow for revise and resubmit
  - Arizona State tried it on capstone course but had pushback because didn’t have it in other courses and on seniors
- Celinda Kofron: how do you motivate and incentivize students?
  - Rebecca: hard to do for those who try and it didn’t work the first time
- Nicole Ramo: which types of classes work best or worst with alternative grading?
  - Rebecca: mostly seen in math classes, MOOCs and online courses where you do it depending on the module type that you need to complete to get A, B, C, etc.
- James Long: for revise/resubmit, do you have a hard cap on the number and time of resubmission?
  - Rebecca: only allowed to do once and get a week, hard to get those who show up week late to do it, so may have to add a second reflection for them to understand why to resubmit
- Christine King: can you provide the name of the scratch off exams?
  - Ken Fischer: if-at cards, need to be careful when setting up the exam as answers have to be in the right place
  - Issues associated if got roped into changing answer in group exams, so did not penalize them on individual score if this happened
- Can you update the technology e.g. through a poll everywhere/iclicker?
  - Quizlet may work as it allows you to ‘scratch off’ and try again for same question

- How many items do you need to include in the rubric?
  - Rebecca: some are only a few where is it did it work or did you document that you followed the procedures, found that some didn't read procedures in detail and have to come back and demonstrate they can do parts of the lab, need to demonstrate understanding of each part and that is a section/item in the rubric (a specification)
  - If 10 rows in a specifications rubric, anything they do if it's less than 10 points it won't affect grade much if points, if specifications – you have to hit all 10 rows to pass otherwise
- Nicole Ramo – how do you communicate the line between pass and fail?
  - Has base grade for all pass/fail and a modifier grade for lab practical/exams/absences do differentiate A to A- etc.
- Linsey Moyer: do students turn in reports alone or in groups?
  - Revisions are done in partners, practicals done on their own with track changes