Ungrading Unleashed:

Encouraging Alternative Assessment through Faculty Development

2024 Assessment Institute

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What one word best captures your teaching philosophy?

"My philosophy of teaching comes down to just one word: Freedom."

Laura Gibbs, "Let's Talk about Grading," *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*
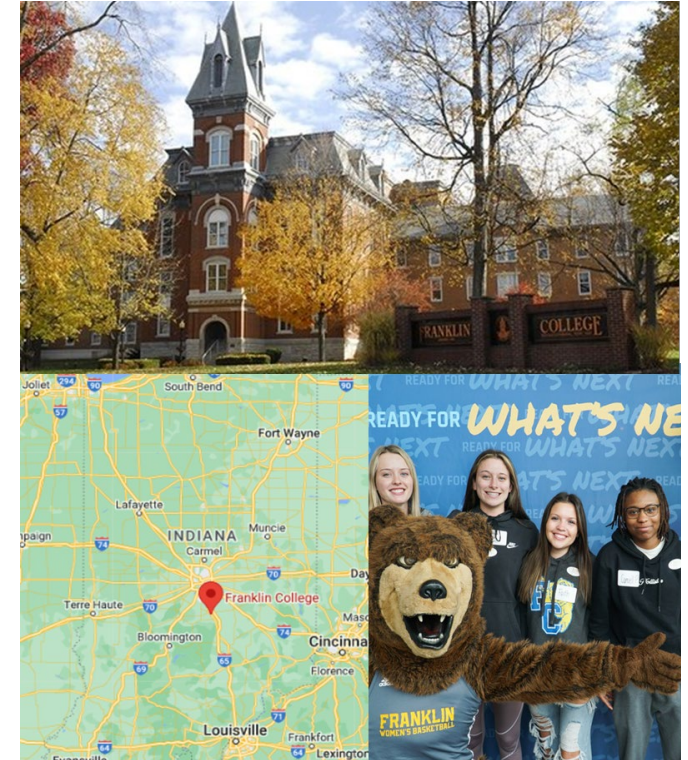
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Franklin College

Institutional Profile

- Carnegie Classification: Baccalaureate College, Arts & Science Focused
- Size & Setting: Four-Year, Very Small, Highly Residential
- NCAA Division III (HCAC Athletic Conference)
- Accredited by Higher Learning Commission

Student Body Profile

- 911 undergraduate students
- 55 graduate students
- 91% from Indiana
- 40% DIII athletes
- 46% Pell eligible
- 18% non-white

Session Objectives

As a result of this session, participants will be able to:

- Reflect on their own classroom assessment strategies as they relate to inclusion and equity

- Identify a range of ungrading practices, their potential strengths and weaknesses, and their impact on student learning

- Adapt faculty development strategies around ungrading and assessment to their own institutions

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Ungrading: a focus on assessment, not grades

"Though grading seems natural, inevitable, a part of the very fabric of school, it isn't. It was created at a certain moment...and then became embedded in the structures of schools for most students.

But because we invented it, we can uninvent it. We can remove it."

Susan Blum, "Introduction: Why Ungrade? Why Grade?" *Ungrading: Why Rating Undermines Student Learning (and What to Do Instead)*
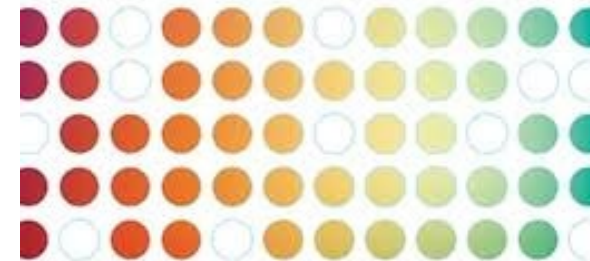
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Year-long Faculty Development

Fall 2023: Book Club

- 3 sessions (Sept. – Nov.)

- 16 faculty participants from 10 disciplines

- Led by Associate Dean and funded through Faculty Development budget

Year-long Faculty Development

Spring 2024: Community of Practice

- February and May meetings

- Semester-long project

- $75 stipend

- 8 participants from 5 disciplines

- Coordinated by Associate Dean and funded through Faculty Development budget

Feedback   **Portfolios**   **Specifications**   **Rubrics**

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From Grades to Growth:
Transforming Learning with Feedback-Driven Assessment

Andrea Mescall, MBA, CMA
Assistant Professor of Accounting

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Before Feedback Grading

Homework (Assessed Online)	270
Skills Tests/Quizzes (In Class)	100
In Class Activities	20
Peer Reviews: Group Work (7 @ 10 points)	70
Group Cases (7 @ 40 points)	280
In-class short labs (8 @ ~10 points each)	80
Presentation (Group)	25
Chapter 8 Memo (Group)	20
Final exam**	200
Total	**1,065**

- Traditional grading approach
- Students would ignore feedback and continue to make the same mistakes
- Did not foster growth

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Mindset Shift

Grades Vocabulary	No-Grades Vocabulary
• Grading • Score • "What did I get?" • "This is wrong." • Problem • Judgment or criticism • Get good grades	• Assessing • Assess • "What did I learn?" • "Try another way." • Challenge, opportunity • Feedback • Achieve proficiency or mastery

Source: Sackstein 2015b (from Ungrading by Blum)

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Feedback over Grades

1. **Feedback over Grades:** Instead of receiving a traditional grade for each assignment, you will receive detailed feedback that is meant to guide your understanding and provoke reflection. This feedback will focus on your strengths, areas for improvement, and suggestions for growth.

   In an effort to draw your attention to assignments that need additional review or work I will be using the following feedback scale.

   0 = you did not turn in and you need to do this by the end of the semester

   1 = turned in but needs substantial work to make a satisfactorily assignment, please refer to feedback provided.

   2-3 = please review my feedback to see if you would like to resubmit and get additional feedback

   4 = great work, you can feel confident in your understanding of the assignment

Source: Spring 2024 ACC 235: Data Management and Analysis Syllabus (Mescall)

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Outcomes

- Students **READ** feedback and applied it to future assignments

- Growth mindset in students was noticeable

- ***Student Feedback:***

The feedback that I received from Professor Mescall was very insightful and helpful!

The grading structure motivated you to work at your own pace.

This class allows students to grow individually and learn the material in a hands-on way.

This class allows students to grow individually and learn the material in a hands-on way.

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Portfolio Grading

Dr. Anna James

Assistant Professor of English

Portfolio Grading: Context & Definition

- Problems to be addressed:
  1. How can assessment be more meaningful?
  2. How can assessment be more equitable?
  3. How can assessment encourage more *imaginative* and more *engaged* student work?

- My response to these challenges was to adopt a modified form of **portfolio grading** that drew on 'ungrading' pedagogies as well as labor-based grading practices.
  - Key element: *Grades are awarded to the portfolio as a whole, not to individual assignments or exams*

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Portfolio Grading in Practice

Freshman Composition (Req.)

- Writing portfolio (75%)
  - Each essay received a tentative grade along with an abundance of written feedback
  - Final grade assessed holistically, i.e., in terms of responsiveness to feedback and progress toward student-defined goals

- Creative portfolio (25%)
  - 3 projects + self-evaluation 'cover letter'
  - *Example: podcasts*
  - Graded as complete or incomplete

World Literature (100-level survey)

- Midterm & final exam (40%)
  - Each exam consisted of content questions and self-reflection questions
  - Students were given study guide with all possible questions in advance

- Creative portfolio & participation (60%)
  - 3 creative assignments and 3 reflections
  - *Example: short film, art projects*
  - Graded as exceeded expectations (A), met expectations (B), or completion (C)

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Portfolio Grading: Outcomes & Conclusions

- In composition classes:
  - Increased participation in class discussion
  - Increased attention + time given to writing improvement
  - Decreased anxiety about writing performance
  - More nuanced + creative thinking

- In literature classes:
  - Greater participation + interest from non-majors
  - Creative projects were reported as students' favorite part of class (and my own)
  - Greater quantitative + qualitative engagement with course materials

- **Takeaway**: *Portfolio grading successfully encouraged students to take creative risks, to engage with course subjects in a variety of different forms, and to focus on improvement over time*

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Specifications Grading

Dr. Dan Alsop

Associate Professor of Spanish

Spanish Specs: Exceeds Expectations (A)

- Text Program Components
  - o Minimum 85% cumulative daily homework (VHL activities)
  - o Completes all vocab quizzes (4); minimum 90% on 3
  - o Completes all exams (5); minimum 90% on 4

- Online conversations with first-language speakers
  - o Completes 4/4 to standard (check individual assignment descriptors)

- Engagement (In & Outside of Class)
  - o Prepared to contribute, uses mostly SPA (@ 90%)*, fully focused (no distractions!)
  - o No more than 4 absences
  - o Participate in & Reflect on 2 Outside-Class Interactions (Language/Culture Events/Activities)
  - o Attends at least 2 office hour appointments

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Student Survey Responses

- 81% of students stated they focused more on learning material and less on grade

- 65% said they felt more in control of their course grade

- 57% said they felt less stressed about their grade (1/4 disagreed)

- 70% said specs approach was clear and understandable (1/4 undecided)

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Teacher Perspective

- No significant variation in final course grades
- Students' organizational capacity??? (Tokens/Grade Tracking)
- Office hours benefitted!
- Assessment types and differentiation between specs levels?
- Best approach for language skills course?
- Institutional/Programmatic influence
- Time consuming

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Rubric Based Grading for Creative Writing Workshops: Poetry I and II

Dr. Emily Banks
Assistant Professor of English

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Grading Method and Context

- Students received a rubric with expectations for each letter grade range in each assignment category (see handout).

- I assessed final grades based on where students landed for each category. For example, if all their grades fell into the A range except one in the B range, they received an A-.

- I provided thorough written feedback on all assignments.

- We checked in formally around midterms, and I encouraged students to discuss their grades with me whenever they wanted to.

- These were small (8-10 student) workshop classes of creative writing majors and minors with a high level of self-motivation. They were almost all students I had taught before.

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Rationale

- I never grade poems because I want students to feel comfortable experimenting with style and voice.

- Grading other assignments when I don't grade poems makes it seem like the poems are less important, which is not the case.

- A rubric emphasizes the importance of excelling in every aspect of the class. It discourages students from calculating how much effort they need to put into a particular assignment based on their current grade.

- Being an A student vs. "getting" an A

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Student Responses

- A mixed bag! ~60% of my students said they preferred this method, while the other ~40% said they preferred standard grading.

- The students who preferred this method reported that it made them feel less stressed and anxious not to have a number over their heads.

- The students who preferred standard grading disliked not knowing their grade throughout the semester. These were high achieving students who clearly (from my perspective) had As.

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Results

- I was very happy with the impact this grading method had on student performance!

- The biggest improvement I noticed was in the final presentations for my Poetry I class. In previous iterations of the class, students sometimes slacked off a bit with those if they already felt secure in their final grade.

- Daily participation in workshop also improved – especially constructive feedback.

- I enjoyed giving feedback more; it felt more genuine and less like a transaction.

- The atmosphere of the classes felt comfortable and supportive. Students were encouraged to see themselves and each other as writers, and developed a genuinely supportive, constructive community.

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Discussion and Q&A

What might work well in your classroom?

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SPA 111 Specs Grading Tiers

Exceeds Expectations (A tier)

- *Panorama/VHL* Program Components

  o Minimum 85% cumulative daily homework (VHL activities)
  o Completes all vocab quizzes (4); minimum 90% on 3
  o Completes all exams (5); minimum 90% on 4

- TalkAbroad Conversations

  o Completes 4/4 to standard (check individual assignment descriptors)

- Engagement

  o In-Class:

    ▪ On-time, prepared to contribute meaningfully, uses mostly SPA (@ 90%) during relevant in-class activities and sometimes beyond, fully focused (no distractions!)
    ▪ No more than 4 absences (NOTE: after 2 late arrivals to class, each additional 2 tardies equals 1 absence)

  o Outside Class

    ▪ Participate in & Reflect on 2 Outside-Class Interactions
    ▪ Schedules and attends at least 2 office hour appointments

Meets Expectations (B tier)

- *Panorama/VHL* Program Components

  o Minimum 80% cumulative daily homework (VHL activities)
  o Completes all vocab quizzes (4); minimum 80% on 3
  o Completes all exams (5); minimum 80% on 4

- TalkAbroad Conversations

  o Completes all (4), minimum 3 to standard (check individual assignment descriptors)

- Engagement

  o In-Class:

    ▪ On-time, prepared to contribute meaningfully, uses mostly SPA (@ 90%) during relevant in-class activities and sometimes beyond, fully focused (no distractions!)
    ▪ No more than 4 absences (NOTE: after 2 late arrivals to class, each additional 2 tardies equals 1 absence)

  o Outside Class

    ▪ Participate in & Reflect in 2 Outside-Class Interactions
    ▪ Schedules & Attends at least 2 office hour appointments

Working Towards Expectations (C tier)

- *Panorama/VHL* Program Components
    - Minimum 75% cumulative daily homework (VHL activities)
    - Completes all vocab quizzes (5); minimum 75% on 4
    - Completes all exams (5); minimum 70% on 3
- TalkAbroad Conversations
    - Completes all 4, 2 to standard (check individual assignment descriptors)
- Engagement
    - In-Class:
        - On-time, sometimes prepared to contribute meaningfully, uses some SPA (@ 75%) during relevant in-class activities, usually fully focused (no distractions!)
        - No more than 6 absences (NOTE: after 2 late arrivals to class, each additional 2 tardies equals 1 absence)
    - Outside Class
        - Participate in & Reflect on 1 Outside-Class Interaction
        - Schedules and attends at least 1 office hour appointment

Fails to Demonstrate Sufficient Progress Towards Expectations (D-tier)

- *Panorama/VHL* Components
    - Minimum 60% cumulative daily homework (VHL activities)
    - Completes at least 4 vocab quizzes at 65%
    - Completes at least 3 tests at minimum 65%
- TalkAbroad Conversations
    - Completes at least 2 to standard
- In-Class Engagement
    - On-time, often unprepared to contribute meaningfully, uses little SPA (>60%) during relevant in-class activities, not consistently fully focused (no distractions!)
    - No more than 8 absences (NOTE: after 2 late arrivals to class, each additional 2 tardies equals 1 absence)

IMPORTANT NOTES/CAVEATS

- ***Failure to achieve at least the "Fails to demonstrate progress" tier will earn a grade of F for the course!***
- ***Use of +/- with letter grades***
    - *I will use to distinguish in cases where there is minor differentiation in meeting expectations*

- *Example: A student targeting "Meets Expectations" who completes only 3 TA conversations or only completes 2 to standard while meeting all other tier criteria would earn a B-.*

*<u>Tokens</u>: You can choose to use any and all of these optional tokens. They provide you with flexibility and hopefully will help you manage stress that we all understand is inevitable in our academic and personal lives throughout the semester. Should you wish to pursue the last option and use it towards erasing absences, we will apply that token at the end of the semester.

- Re-take a vocab quiz (x2)
- Submit corrections and explanations to re-coup points on a Lesson test (x1)
- Turn in a TalkAbroad conversation up to 48 hours late (x2)
- Convert a late daily homework turn-ins to on time (x2)
- Your Choice Interactions: Participate in course-related Interactions above standard for any learning tier and either erase an absence or earn another token (can be same as one from this list or you can propose one to the professor for negotiation) (x2)

Final Grade Rubric

	A range	B range	C range	D range	F
Poetry Submissions	All nine poems submitted and following the prompt; one poem may be submitted late (within one week)	All nine poems submitted and following the prompt; up to three may be submitted late (within one week)	At least seven poems submitted; four or fewer late (within one week)	At least six poems submitted; five or fewer late (within one week)	Fewer than six poems submitted or/and more than five poems late
Participation	♦ Participating during every workshop, offering both positive and constructive feedback for all or most poems discussed ♦ Participating during every discussion of course materials; sharing ideas and questions, engaged listening, active in small groups, not distracted by technology or other work ♦ Attending all Carlson-Stauffer Visiting Writers' Series events	♦ Participating during most workshops, frequently offering both positive and constructive feedback ♦ Participating during most discussions of course materials; sharing ideas and questions, engaged listening, active in small groups, not distracted by technology or other work ♦ Attending one Carlson-Stauffer Visiting Writers' Series event	♦ Engaged listening during workshops, sharing feedback at least once a week ♦ Engaged listening during discussions of course materials, sharing ideas at least once a week, active in small group work, infrequently distracted by technology	♦ Engaged listening during most workshops, occasionally sharing feedback, sometimes distracted ♦ Engaged listening during most discussions of course materials, occasionally sharing ideas, sometimes active in small groups, sometimes distracted by technology or other work	♦ Not engaged during workshops, distracted by technology or other work, never or very rarely sharing feedback for peers ♦ Not engaged during discussions of course materials, distracted by technology or other work, inactive or reluctant to participate with small groups

Peer Feedback	Thoughtful in-text and end comments on each of your peers' poems, including both praise and revision advice	Thoughtful in-text and end comments on each of your peers' poems, including both praise and revision advice	Adequate in-text and end comments on most of your peers' poems; may be unprepared for workshop several times	Adequate in-text and end comments on most of your peers' poems; occasionally unprepared for workshop	Minimal comments on peers' poems; frequently unprepared for workshop
Literary Journal Review Presentation	Literary Journal Review is well-written and meets all criteria; presentation is polished and informative	Literary Journal Review meets all criteria, presentation demonstrates preparation and effort	Literary Journal Review meets most criteria; adequate preparation for presentation	Literary Journal Review meets some criteria; presentation may reflect minimal preparation	Literary Journal Review does not meet criteria; presentation reflects a lack of preparation
Group Presentation	Group presentation meets all criteria, reflects excellent collaboration and preparation, and engages the class in a thought-provoking discussion	Group presentation meets all criteria, reflects strong collaboration and preparation, makes an effort to engage the class in discussion	Group presentation meets most criteria, reflects adequate collaboration and preparation	Group presentation meets most criteria, may reflect minimal preparation or collaboration	Group presentation does not meet criteria, reflects a lack of preparation and collaboration
Final Portfolio	Final Portfolio meets all criteria; reflects strong attention to revisions and order; insightful reflection	Final Portfolio meets all criteria, reflects thoughtful attention to revisions, order, and reflection	Final Portfolio meets most criteria, reflects adequate attention to revisions and reflection	Final Portfolio meets some criteria, reflects minimal attention to revisions and some reflection	Final Portfolio does not meet criteria, inadequate attention to revision, missing or minimal reflection
Absences	Three or fewer unexcused absences	Five or fewer unexcused absences	Six or fewer unexcused absences	Eight or fewer unexcused absences	More than eight unexcused absences

	A range	B range	C range	D range	F
Poetry Submissions	All ten poems submitted, including one imitation poem and one poem in a received form; one poem may be submitted late (within one week)	8-10 poems submitted, including one imitation poem and one poem in a received form; up to three may be submitted late (within one week)	At least seven poems submitted including one imitation poem or/and one poem in a received form; four or fewer late (within one week)	At least six poems submitted; four or fewer late (within one week)	Fewer than six poems submitted or/and more than five poems late
Participation	♦ Participating during every workshop, offering both positive and constructive feedback for all or most poems discussed ♦ Participating during every discussion of poetry collections; sharing ideas and questions, engaged listening, not distracted by technology or other work ♦ Attending all Carlson-Stauffer Visiting Writers' Series events	♦ Participating during most workshops, frequently offering both positive and constructive feedback ♦ Participating during most discussions of poetry collections, sharing ideas and questions, engaged listening, not distracted by technology or other work ♦ Attending one Carlson-Stauffer Visiting Writers' Series event	♦ Engaged listening during workshops, sharing feedback at least once a week ♦ Engaged listening during discussions of poetry collections, sharing ideas at least once a week, infrequently distracted by technology	♦ Engaged listening during most workshops, occasionally sharing feedback, sometimes distracted ♦ Engaged listening during most discussions of poetry collections, occasionally sharing ideas, sometimes distracted by technology or other work	♦ Not engaged during workshops, distracted by technology or other work, never or very rarely sharing feedback for peers ♦ Not engaged during discussions of poetry collections, distracted by technology or other work

Peer Feedback	Thoughtful in-text and end comments on each of your peers' poems, including both praise and revision advice	Thoughtful in-text and end comments on each of your peers' poems, including both praise and revision advice	Adequate in-text and end comments on most of your peers' poems; may be unprepared for workshop several times	Adequate in-text and end comments on most of your peers' poems; occasionally unprepared for workshop	Minimal comments on peers' poems; frequently unprepared for workshop
Presentation	Presentation meets all criteria, reflects excellent preparation, and stimulates a robust class discussion	Presentation meets all or most criteria, reflects preparation, and stimulates class discussion	Presentation meets most criteria, reflects adequate preparation, and attempts to stimulate class discussion	Presentation meets some criteria; presentation and discussion questions may reflect minimal preparation	Presentation does not meet criteria and reflects a lack of preparation
Book Review	Book Review meets all criteria, reflects an understanding of the book review genre, and provides an insightful perspective on the collection reviewed	Book Review meets all or most criteria, reflects an understanding of the book review genre, and provides a thoughtful perspective on the collection reviewed	Book Review meets most criteria, reflects adequate understanding of the book review genre, and offers some thoughts on the collection reviewed	Book Review meets some criteria, may reflect minimal effort and/or understanding of book review genre, thoughts on the collection may be unclear	Book Review does not meet criteria, reflects minimal effort and understanding of book review genre, thoughts on the collection unclear or non-existent
Final Portfolio	Final Portfolio meets all criteria; reflects strong attention to revisions and order; insightful and polished artist statement or MFA cover letter	Final Portfolio meets all or most criteria, reflects thoughtful attention to revisions and order, insightful artist statement or MFA cover letter; may have some errors or organization issues	Final Portfolio meets most criteria, reflects adequate attention to revisions, order, and artist statement or MFA cover letter; some errors and organizational issues	Final Portfolio meets some criteria, reflects minimal attention to revisions, order, and artist statement or MFA cover letter; frequent errors and organizational issues	Final Portfolio does not meet criteria, inadequate attention to revisions, order, and artist statement or MFA cover letter; distracting errors and organizational issues

Absences	Three or fewer unexcused absences	Five or fewer unexcused absences	Six or fewer unexcused absences	Eight or fewer unexcused absences	More than eight unexcused absences