

FINAL REPORT (12/06/2021)

Project Title: Gradeless Assessment- New Ways to Support and Challenge

Faculty: James Lipovac, Foundation

Initial Goals/

This Gradeless Assessment project was developed to address issues of access, inclusion, and a diversity of student learning within the Foundation studio classroom. Recent changes to the landscape of the Foundation student body highlighted a need for modify the department's traditional methods of evaluation and grading. A primary goal was to eliminate the harmful effects that traditional grades and critical evaluation has on students' mental health. An expanded student population and the introduction of Film, Fashion, Game Design majors has created an environment where the base skills of the students entering the classroom is incredibly diverse. For example, in years past, every student entering a drawing course was required to submit drawings in their entrance portfolio. This is no longer the case. Additionally, entering students' access to technology and resources is varied, as are students' awareness of what was previously viewed as traditional methods of making such as painting and hand building. This Gradeless Assessment Fellowship sought to level the playing field in this new environment to facilitate a successful learning experience for every student.

Project accomplishments/

Tackling these goals began with research into other gradeless models and the development of methods in the classroom that could go beyond the limitations of traditional grades, specifically with regard to helping all students achieve success with the course and department outcomes through written assessments. Exploration focused on alternative methods of assessment that encouraged dialogue, empathy, and growth rather than punitive language. This involved a focus on student writing exercises that emphasized critical inquiry and self analysis as well as the proper use of technical terminology.

Following up this exploratory research and small classroom assessment activities, the project expanded in Spring 2021 into a gradeless pilot semester involving 3 faculty and 12 students. In the Fall of 2021, using knowledge and data gained in the spring, the pilot was expanded to 11 faculty and 70 students. Structured around self, peer, and faculty assessments, students were given the opportunity to model for themselves the type of assessments that best aided their learning and progress. A key component of the process has been facilitating individual dialogue between student and faculty to determine what personal success looks like when addressing the course and department outcomes. The process also highlighted questions about when course outcomes may not serve the students.

Additional accomplishments included community outreach at both the first year level and the Institute at large. This outreach includes a gradeless presentation the *Fall Forum: Pedagogies of Reparation and Rebuilding*, and a CTL Interactive Conversation for Institute faculty in the Spring of

2021. Outreach also took place through individual interviews with faculty and students which served as opportunities to collect data and insights into shifting attitudes towards traditional grades. These meetings saw both positive and negative reactions. Questions were raised about when a gradeless system did not address issues of student engagement and rigor.

Summary of Actions/

- I. Fall 2020/ Creation a framework for Gradeless Assessment
 - A. Basic Gradeless Model
 - a. Three forms of interconnected assessment- Peer, Self, and Faculty
 - b. no grades or point systems for projects
 - c. criteria for projects is generated through discussion, but faculty led.
 - B. Creation of an Assessment Archive
 1. Milanote
 - a. each project contains its own assessment archive of peer, self, and faculty feedback
 - b. image archive which details the creative process (ideation, r&d, iterations, etc.)
 - C. Weekly Assessment Models
 1. Peer led Assessments students write about and discuss each other's work based on a set of questions and criteria
 - a. Small Groups
 - b. Silent critiques
 - c. Partner meetings
 - D. Midterm and Final Assessment Models
 1. Outcomes based Self Assessments and portfolio submission
 - a. using assessment archives, students analyze their progress within individual projects
 - b. students are asked to evaluate their overall success with the course outcomes, citing evidence from their completed projects.
 - c. faculty and student meet one on one to discuss student's written assessments and portfolio of work
 - d. In the Final Assessment, the student proposes a final grade*, and discusses it with the instructor, who then confirms or amends as they see fit. (*other formats for issuing a final grade, if any, are being explored, but currently limitations prevent the removal of grades altogether.)
- II. Spring 2021/ Piloting of Gradeless Assessment in the Classroom
 - A. Participating faculty members- James Lipovac, Deborah Johnson, and Elise Kaufman
 - B. 12 participating students
 - C. Faculty meetings

1. 3 formal meetings were held to evaluate the gradeless framework
 2. weekly email check-ins served as a way to keep in dialogue about individual students
- D. Synchronized Approach
1. Each faculty agreed on syllabus language that included no grades or point systems or other forms of evaluation for individual projects
 2. Assessment focused on course and department outcomes, as well as individual assignment goals
 - a. Individuals are given agency to define what success looks like to them with regard to these goals and outcomes
 - b. Peers and faculty agree to assist individuals in achieving success through a positive dialogue.

III. Spring 2021/ Community Engagement

- A. CTL Interactive Conversation
1. One hour dialogue with faculty
 - a. 15 minute presentation
 - b. 45 minute discussion
 2. 20 attendees
 3. Individual faculty shared their experiences with grades, and exploration with grading alternatives including
- B. Individual interview with faculty outside of Foundation about Gradeless Assessment
1. Bethany Ides
 2. Ane Gonzalez Lara

VI. Fall 2021/ Piloting of Gradeless Assessment in the Classroom/ Expanded

- A. Participating faculty members- James Lipovac, Leslie Mutchler, Juan Jofre, Andrew Prayzner, Amelia Carley, Natalie Moore, Kim Sloane, Kyle Williams, Johannah Herr, Gloria Duan, Elisa Jensen
- B. 70 participating students
- C. Faculty meetings
1. 3 formal meetings were held to evaluate the gradeless framework
 2. email check-ins served as a way to keep in dialogue about individual students
- D. Synchronized Approach
1. Starting with a template carried over from the Spring pilot, each cohort rewrote their syllabus language together to account for individual professor needs.

2. For the Fall Pilot, faculty also agreed upon and synchronized their attendance language.
3. Assessment focused on course and department outcomes, as well as individual assignment goals
 - a. Individuals are given agency to define what success looks like to them with regard to these goals and outcomes
 - b. Peers and faculty agree to assist individuals in achieving success through a positive dialogue.

E. Data Collection

1. Faculty gave students an initial survey and exit survey
2. Faculty were given an exit survey to answer for themselves

V. Fall 2021/ Community Engagement

A. *Fall Forum: Pedagogies of Reparation and Rebuilding*

1. 45 minute presentation and discussion with Institute faculty and staff
 - a. Co-panelist Leslie Mutchler, Foundation Chair, discussed gradeless and how it supports the department mission.
 - b. 15 minute breakout session focused on words we associate with traditional grades vs words we associate with learning.
2. 20+ attendees

B. Presentation to ADE 622 College Teaching: Teaching, Learning and Research in Art and Design

1. 1 hour presentation to Professor Micki Spiller class

C. Outreach to first year faculty to find new leaders to continue gradeless work.

1. Coordinator of Time and Movement, Deborah Johnson, has agreed to help support gradeless efforts through faculty training in the late spring
2. ACAD Fellow, Gloria Duan, has also agreed to help support gradeless efforts through faculty training in the late spring

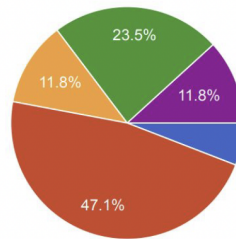
Data and analysis/

Students were given intake surveys and exit surveys. Both provided a wealth of information about perceptions about grades and how those perceptions changed over the course of their gradeless semester.

During the term, data and narrative statements were gathered from students.

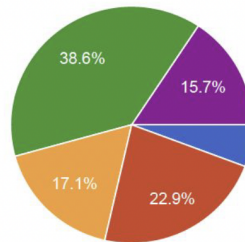
I. Initial Student Survey - gaining student perspective on attitudes towards grades.

Which response most closely reflects how you feel about grades?



- I love them, and can't live without them.
- I like them, but I don't get hung up on them.
- I don't have much of an opinion.
- I don't like them, but I am fine with them.
- I hate them, and I wish there was another way.

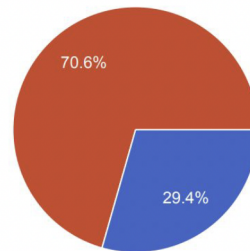
AY 20-21



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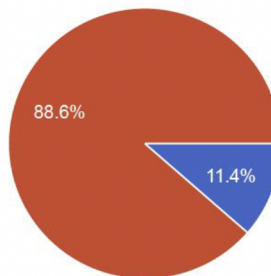
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Is it more important to receive a good grade or to gain proficiency in course outcomes?



- Get a good grade
- Gain proficiency

AY 20-21



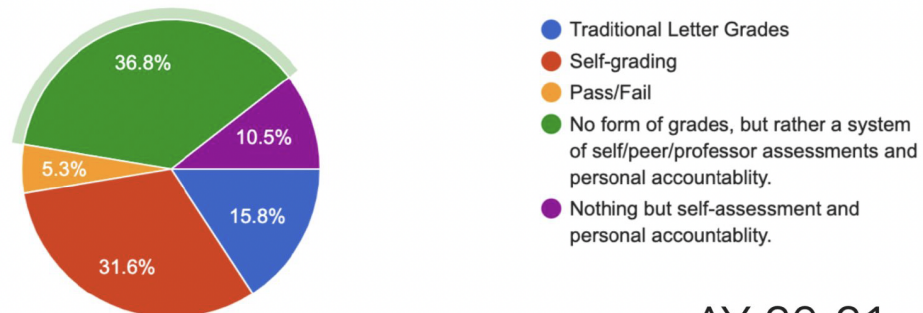
- Get a good grade
- Gain proficiency

AY 21-22

II. Student Exit Survey - Anonymous survey sent to all students

Having finished your first gradeless semester what form of assessment listed below would you prefer moving forward?

19 responses



AY 20-21

III. Faculty Exit Survey - Anonymous survey sent to all students

Excerpts from students' narrative statements in the Exit Survey/

"I have a better understanding of how to move my work forward and find improvements. Self assessment has also made me more able to understand the missteps in my process and change them."

"I experimented different types of art forms that I don't normally do, it was a very valuable experience for me."

"I have a better understanding of how to move my work forward and find improvements. Self assessment has also made me more able to understand the missteps in my process and change them."

"I believe that when you have traditional grading systems you are not working for self-improvement because you are constantly thinking about the grade you might get."

"The use of grading meant that most students would be hyper focused with creating works which appealed to the teacher's criteria instead of what was learned. I can't see why we can't trust students when they have invested in this school to learn."

Suggestions for next steps/

- Apply for FDF grant, due Jan 3rd
- Recruit other FT faculty members to assist in Gradeless training and other leadership tasks.
- Ask for the support of the Provost for financial support for gradeless programming.
- Workshop ways to run a Fall 2022 test of gradeless for a select group of cohorts that spans their entire First Year Experience coursework. This test pilot would use a more resolved system of gradeless approved by the Provost and Registrar, and would assist us in determining the long term feasibility of gradeless.
- Organize a late spring gradeless 'deep dive community' for professors to come together and explore tactical ways to implement gradeless assessment (or "ungrading practices") in their classes. This would be through a proposed 3 part (stipended for PTers) series with the aim of:
 - developing cross disciplinary practices
 - examining existing scholarship
 - sharing prior experiences or pitfalls
 - walking away with an actionable 'plan' or pitch for depts to consider next steps (budgeting, support, equity considerations, etc)

Reflection/

At the onset of the Gradeless Fellowship, a primary concern was that the initiative would lack support from faculty, the administration, and the students. There was a robust attempt during the Fellowship to foster a dialogue outside the classroom with all parties. Some of this work was done through formal engagement like meetings and surveys, but the bulk of the work came in the form of small individual interactions- discussing gradeless by the proverbial water cooler, as it were. After many such conversations, it became clear that students, teachers, and administration alike were feeling an urgent need for change, and welcomed the dialogue. These conversations often end with more questions than they started with, a fact that underscores, for me at least, that gradeless is on the right track.

Grades provide a punctuated ending to the student/teacher conversation with the person with the power declaring success or failure. Unlike traditional grades, gradeless functions as a mechanism to ask questions, to learn from each other, to grow together. Unlike grades, gradeless functions better under scrutiny as it allows for an honest dialogue, rather than the truncated shorthand of a letter grade. The further into exploring what a gradeless first year experience might look like, the more viable it seems. Gradeless is the best way to help our students all meet success in the classroom.