



# CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS THROUGH GRADING CONTRACTS AND UN- GRADING

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# FIRST, DO NO HARM

- Today's agenda:
  - Why do grades cause harm?/Why should I consider non-traditional grading?
    - Diversity and Inclusion
    - Trauma-Informed Teaching
  - Benefits of using alternative grading
  - What are grading contracts?
  - What does a grading contract look like?
  - What is un-grading?
  - What would my Canvas grade book look like
  - Questions

# A FEW QUOTES ABOUT GRADING

- “Research shows three reliable effects when students are graded: They tend to think less deeply, avoid taking risks, and lose interest in learning itself” – Jesse Stommel
- Grading “rarely communicates anything of value to students” – Mitchell R. James
- “A growing body of research illustrates the pervasive and insidious ways in which teachers resort to grades to maintain control of students while simultaneously fostering and undermining egalitarian ideals.” – Nathan D. Brubaker

- “Like a sliver under the skin, my grading and assessment of student writing has always bothered me. Often I’d leave a student conference or the grading of a paper feeling unsatisfied with my strategies, knowing that the student will not hear the good in my comments, only see the disappointing grade. And that grade will overdetermine not only how that student understands her writing in my class, but our relationship and her ability to grow as a writer.” – Asao Inoue
- “Institutional pressure from grades and traditional teacher evaluations on student writing negatively affect the classroom practices I want to encourage.” – Asao Inoue

# STUDENT' RIGHTS TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE

- We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

# ASAO INOUE: 2019 4CS CHAIR'S ADDRESSES

- “If you use a single standard to grade your students’ languaging, you engage in racism. You actively promote white language supremacy, which is the handmaiden to white bias in the world.” – Asao Inoue
- “People of color have never controlled the standards in schools or disciplines. Standards have never come from us.”
- “We must stop justifying white standards of writing as a necessary evil. Evil in any form is never necessary. We need to stop saying that we need to teach this dominating English because it’s what students need to succeed tomorrow. They only need it because we keep teaching it.”

# VERSHAWN ASHANTI YOUNG: 2021 4CS CHAIR'S ADDRESS

- “Instructors must cease to ask students to separate their community and cultural lives from academic concerns and lives, particularly in communication and literacy and writing instruction.”
- He argues against “the exclusion of Black discursive practices and the prominence of code switching ideology where Black students in particular are padded on the head like puppies and praised for their verbal virtuosity, but then told to keep that linguistic genius in the dog house, because it ain’t allowed in the big house.”
- “Black people’s language is not the problem.”
- We “must abandon the cultural and imperialist impulse and move quickly – that is TODAY – in developing the bastion of multicultural and multi-racial performance rhetorics that students bring to their performance compositions.”

# TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING

- Safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment
- Educational Trauma
- “Certain kinds of trauma create a significant educational deficit.” – Kellie Jean Sharp
- We need “radical accommodations, ones that upend the very logic of the university,” for example “the abolition of grading as we know it.” – Kellie Jean Sharp
- Candace Skibba also argues for making assignments credit/no credit



# WHAT ARE GRADING CONTRACTS?

- Task or labor-based, with less emphasis on the final product
- Checklist: Do X, Y, and Z to receive a B in the course; also to A, B, and C to receive an A in the course.
- Often negotiated with students

# WHAT IS UN-GRADING

- Everyone begins with an A
- All assignments are credit/no credit (although partial credit can be given)
- As long as students are engaged with the course and do all the work, they get full points and keep their A.

# BENEFITS OF USING A GRADING CONTRACT AND UN-GRADING

- Reduces anxiety
- Causes students to focus on learning rather than just focusing on what grade they're going to get
- Creates a more equitable learning environment
- Students of color or linguistically diverse students are not at a disadvantage
- Potential for more respect for student language identity
- Reduces faculty anxiety
- Saves time
- Reduces grade complaints

## SURVEY DATA

- 92% stated that the grading contract reduced their anxiety
- 100% stated that they thought the grading contract was a fairer way of grading
- 92% stated that I should continue to use the grading contract in the future

# REPRESENTATIVE FOCUS GROUP AND REFLECTION COMMENTS

- “I like the fact it makes the class less stressful”
- “It makes it easier to just focus on learning and not focused on your grade”
- “They keep things fair for students and are very straight forward on what you expect from a student to get the grade they want.”
- “I like that you know what to do in order to get the grade that you want for the class.”
- “I liked the idea of the grading contract because it was based off of effort rather than based on how well something is written, or based on how well we can spell or make sense.”

- “I think it’s a more fair way to grade because its based on effort ... If you try in class your grade reflects it.”
- “I think this is more equitable and fair because when I needed to know the requirements for the assignment it was easy to look back at the contract ... You are helping us succeed with this contract.”
- “I really like the contract and I wish other teachers used this because it helped out a lot.”
- “I think it is a more equitable way to grade ... You know what you have to do to get an A in the class and you can set up a plan for yourself at the very beginning.”
- “I do think you should use the grading contract in future classes because it helps out people who struggle with writing and having the grading contract helps them keep track of what they have to do to get an A.”



Questions?