Navigating the World of Grading
Course Syllabus

Course Description

The history and purposes of academic grading have led academia to conflicting expectations and approaches both on the part of teacher and student. In many cases, grades have come to represent something other than accomplishment of course objectives, often resulting in a discouraging experience for those who grade. Different perspectives will be provided against the backdrop of current practices so that teachers and institutions can consider potential improvements to said current practices.

This course enhances classroom teaching effectiveness and supports improved student outcomes by introducing new knowledge in the historical context, evolving purposes, and modern alternatives to traditional grading practices that aim to more accurately reflect student achievement and improve the meaning and impact of grades in educational settings.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course you should be able to:

1. Recognize the relationships among objectives and outcomes at the institutional, course, and assignment levels.
2. Identify the impact of grading practices—such as norm- vs. criterion-referenced outcomes, assignment stakes, and the role of formative assessments—on student motivation, assessment validity, and the accurate communication of learning.
3. Understand traditional grading systems—including their historical origins, perceived strengths and limitations, and the impact of practices like extra credit and grade inflation—to inform consideration of alternative approaches.
4. Recognize the potential benefits and challenges of gradeless grading in relation to student motivation, teacher workload, assessment-related anxiety, and the alignment between objectives and outcomes.
5. Identify the effects of specifications grading on student motivation, teacher workload, and assessment-related anxiety, while evaluating its impact on the alignment between learning objectives and outcomes.
6. Reflect on the alignment, clarity, and measurability of institutional, course, and assignment objectives, and evaluate the extent to which current outcomes accurately represent student proficiency and support meaningful grading practices.

Modules

- Module 1: Objectives and Outcomes, Quiz 1
- Module 2: Grading Considerations and Technicalities, Quiz 2
- Module 3: Compensatory Grading, Quiz 3
- Module 4: Gradeless Grading, Quiz 4
- Module 5: Specifications Grading, Quiz 5

- Module 6: Improving the Meaning of Grades, Quiz 6

Grading

Each quiz must be passed at an 80% or higher (three attempts allowed).

Format

This is a self-paced, asynchronous (no required live meetings) course. Throughout the PD course, you will find it helpful to take notes along the way to assist with the quizzes. Within each module, you will find reflection assessments that are not graded but will help in your journey through the course. There is an interactive forum in the course to help you connect with peers and instructors, share ideas, and collaborate on best practices throughout your learning journey.