



**Empowered Teaching and Learning
through “Ungrading”:
The Community College Experience**

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CUNY SOTL Conference

Faculty Introductions

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Agenda

- Community college context
- What is ungrading?
- Examples of ungrading in the classroom
- Reflections & next steps
- Q&A

CUNY community college context [\(Fall 2019\)](#)

	Senior colleges	Community colleges
Female	57%	57%
Race	24% Asian; 24% Black; 28% Hispanic; 24% White	17% Asian; 29% Black; 38% Hispanic; 15% White
25 years and older	25%	27%
Part time	28%	40%
Native language other than English	37%	42%
Pell grant	58%	66%
First gen	58%	65%

CUNY community college context

Fall 2016 cohort:

- Associates
 - 1 year retention rate: 63%
 - 3 year graduation rate: 24%
- Baccalaureate
 - 1 year retention rate: 82%
 - 5 year graduation rate: 49%

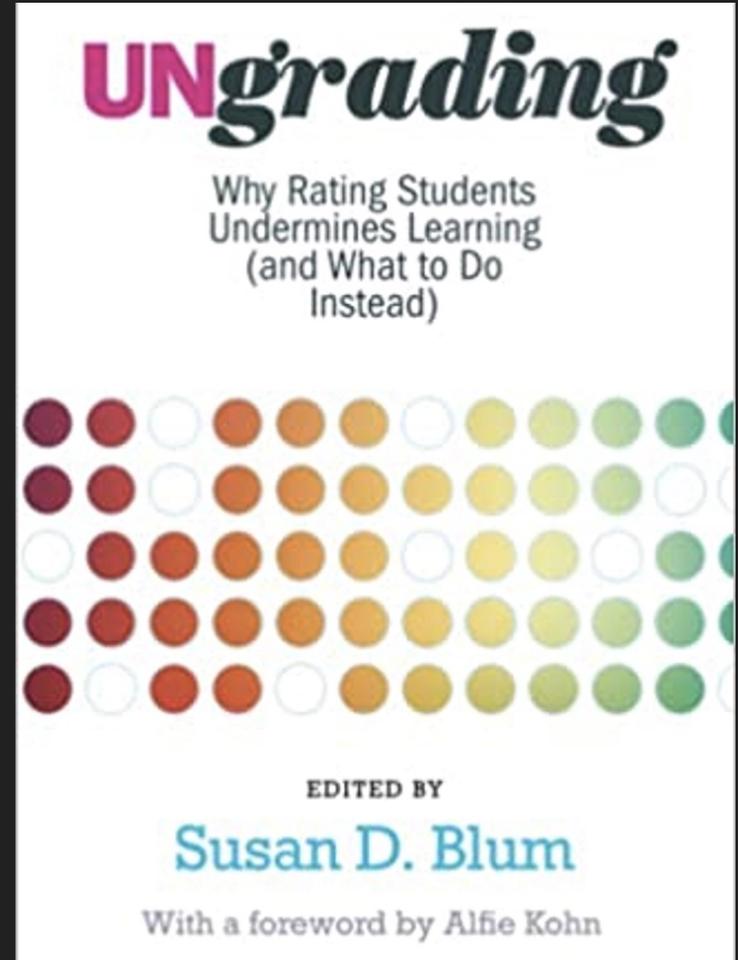
Challenges in teaching and learning in community colleges

- Emphasis on vocational skills and workforce development
- Demanding life circumstances (*e.g. work, caregiving, marginalized communities, diverse educational backgrounds*)
- Students considered to be less capable of active learning, critical-thinking and reflection
- Faculty conditions (*e.g. workload, limited support for scholarship*)

What is “ungrading”?

(Blum, 2020)

- Questioning the centrality of grades
- Uninventing the construct of grades as a way of looking at students’ learning
- Also called *de-grading*, *going gradeless*, ***empowered teaching and learning***



What is “ungrading”? (cont.)

Emphasizes:

- Learning process over outcome
- Student-driven
- Intrinsic instead of extrinsic motivation
- Two-way formative feedback + reflection
- Challenging commonly used practices like (Stommel, 2020)
 - learning outcomes
 - rubrics
 - grading on a curve
 - participation or attendance grades
 - mastery or standards-based learning

Shifting the grading mindset and language (Sackstein, 2015)

Grades vocabulary	No-grades vocabulary
grading	assessing
score	assess
“What did I get?”	“What did I learn?”
“This is wrong.”	“Try another way.”
problem	Challenge, opportunity
Judgment or criticism	feedback

Why ungrade?

- Promotes **active learning** and increases student engagement
- Reframes learning as a **collaborative process of knowledge construction**
- Puts the focus on **feedback** and **learning as a process**

Why Ungrading?

In short, the act of grading does harm to students and causes teachers unnecessary stress. Research shows grades don't help learning and actually distract from other feedback/assessment. Alfie Kohn writes, "Grades tend to diminish students' interest in whatever they're learning [...]; Grades create a preference for the easiest possible task [...]; Grades tend to reduce the quality of students' thinking [...]."

- Jesse Stommel



Research Questions

(1) How do students understand and experience ungrading?

(2) How does ungrading make students approach the assignment differently than traditional forms of assessment?

(3) How does ungrading help or hinder students' learning processes and outcomes?

Examples of Implementing “Ungrading”

ART2400: Global Contemporary Art

UnHomeless NYC

Land ownership is an essential feature of capitalism, which brings unequal situation to the denizens of NYC. Instead of focusing on a large art history survey, in this semester, I linked ART 24 with an exhibition focused on the art dealing with housing insecurity, which took place at the Kingsborough Art Museum entitled, UnHomeless NYC (March 7-April 14, 2022).

The exhibition featured 15 artists, whose practice centers on socially engaging art. The show thus consisted of a series of thirteen events that shed light on housing insecurities in New York City. It not only taught the essential problems with housing market using art, but also connected CUNY students with local activists, urban planners, artists, and homeless. By attending the asynchronous events and writing reflection papers, students gained in-depth understandings of New York's housing crisis. Their mid-term and final projects get shaped in dialogue with the instructor and the peers in their study group. Exemplified by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Hope Sandrow's Shelter News, the events offered students simultaneously the research materials. Unlike a regular art history paper based on a broad survey and knowledge, ART 24 offered the opportunities to reflect on the community and the issue we face in our society. The show was partially curated and organized by the former ART 24 students.

Weekly Assignments

Week 1-5

Students attended 8 asynchronous events (if they were available on the day of the event, they could attend live)

Students were put in group, discussed the event they attended and wrote one reflection per group

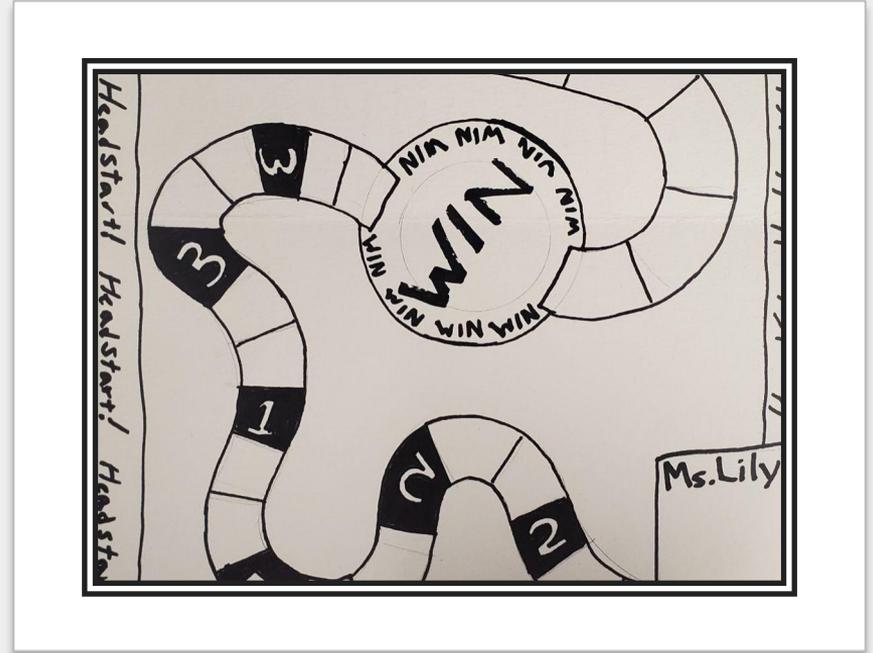
Through the peer discussions and consultation with the instructor, each student formed their mid-semester report.

Students will expand these works into their final paper.



AMST203: Civic Engagement in a Global Society

- Student created rubric
- Student choice of assignment
- Peer and self assessment
- Learning journal
- End of semester grade conferences



Clarity

- organized
- easily understood
- playable
- accessible

30



Creativity

- educational
- connected to the issue

30



Effort

- thoughtful
- meaningful conc
- teamwork
- constructive opi
- problem solving

20

Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized ✓ • Easily understood ✓ • Playable ✓ • Accessible ✓ 	20	/20 points
Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational ✓ • Connected to the issue ✓ 	30	/30 points
Effort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful • Meaningful concept • Teamwork • Constructive opinions • Problem solving 	30	/20 points
BONUS: Embedded math into the game			/10 points
TOTAL:		100	/100 points

AMST203: Civic Engagement in a Global Society (cont.)

HSVC 201: Fieldwork and Integrative Seminar



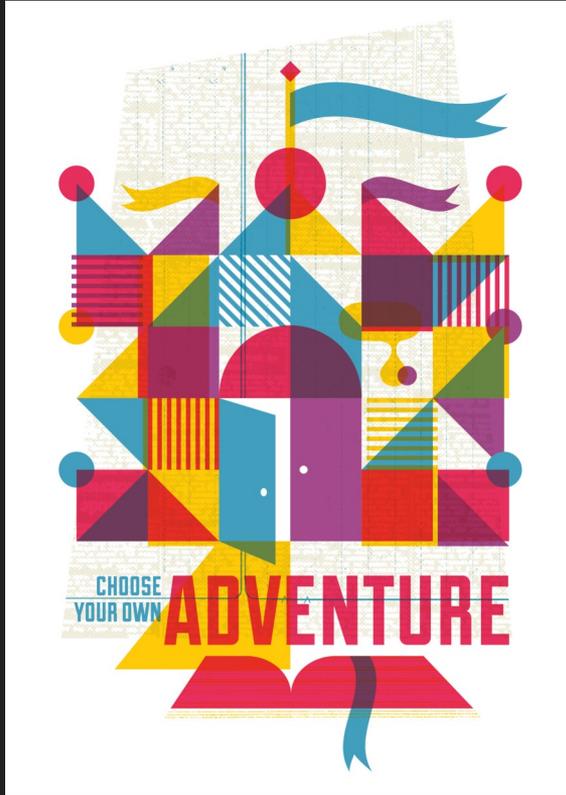
10 Weekly Reflections (Professionalism, Cultural Diversity, Supervision, Challenging Client Interactions, Goal Setting)

For this first reflection, I want you to reflect on how you define who you are and how this may influence your work with clients. How are you feeling as you begin your internship? What are you thinking about? What questions do you have?

Your reflection can be written (one full page, double-spaced, 12-point font, one-inch margins, and include a heading), in video or audio format, or a created piece of art.

Points	Criteria
10-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-depth reflection• All prompts and assignment requirements• Not one-word answers• No grammar or spelling errors• Cohesive assignment
7-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not answering all prompts• Some grammar/spelling errors• Assignment is not elaborate and details are not given
4-0	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not enough details• Assignment is rushed• Not meeting assignment requirements• Assignment not handed in

POL5100: Introduction to U.S. Government & Politics



- Students are given a list of activities they can complete along with a point value per activity.
- At the beginning of the semester, students select activities totalling 100 points and post their academic plan for the semester.
- After submitting an activity, students submit a self-assessment determining how many points they receive.

POL5100: Introduction to U.S. Government & Politics (cont.)

The Adventures

- Weekly Annotations (mandatory)
- Weekly Blog posts (mandatory)
- [Introduction Slide](#)
- Film Review
- Rewrite a Textbook Chapter
- 10 Minute Class
- Political Meme
- Book Review
- Design Your Own Assignment
- What's Your Problem?
- Weekly Quizzes
- Open Book Midterm & Final
- Final review Slide

SSY 250: Social Psychology

Capstone course for Psychology major

Critical Social Psychology: commitment to social justice



Project: The Socially Constructed Self

Goal of the project: to explore the self as *a fluid, multiple process embedded in social practices*

Assignment	Assessment
Weekly Reading Responses	Excellent/ Satisfactory/ Unsatisfactory + instructor's feedback Opportunity of revision and resubmission
Staged Research Paper: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Part 1 - Personal Narrative● In-class collaborative workshop● Oral presentation - Work in progress● Final paper	Submitted/Not submitted + instructor's feedback Participated/Did not participate Presented/Did not present + feedback from the whole class Numeric grade 100-0

Assessment results

Survey results (n=52)

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Ungrading has motivated me to engage more deeply in the course assignment/activity.



Ungrading has helped me to reflect on my learning process and grow as a learner.



I feel more empowered and responsible for my own learning with and an ungraded approach.



100%

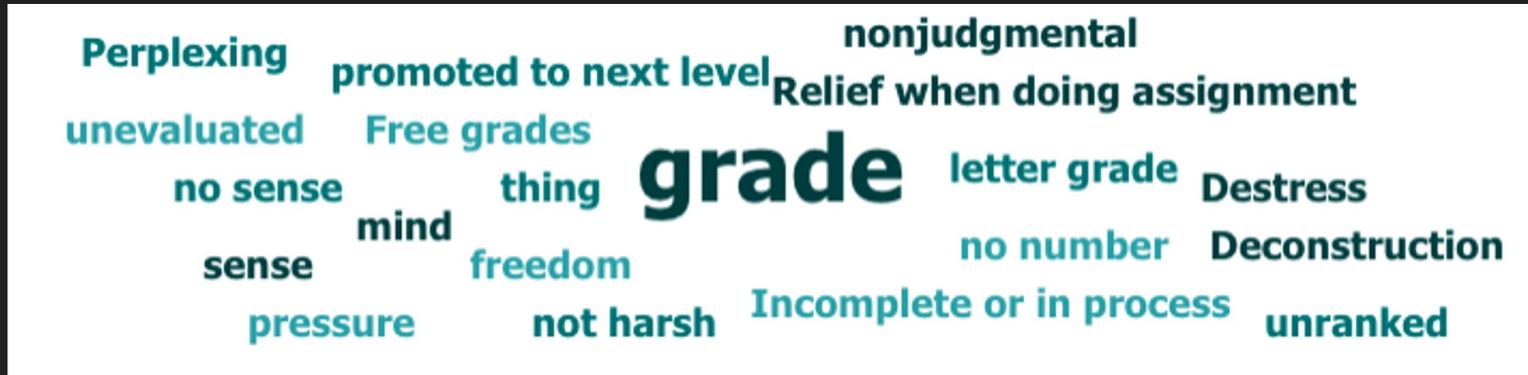
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100%

How do students experience Ungrading?

Ungrading promotes:

- Metacognition/reflection
- Motivation
- Less stress and anxiety
- Responsibility and accountability
- Freedom, creativity and joy
- Agency and empowerment
- Learning as a process



How do students experience Ungrading?

Challenges to Ungrading:

- Uncertainty
- Too different/ New
- Confusion
- Grading is teachers' responsibility

In students' own words

“Being ungraded makes me feel interested, it peaks my interest. It also keeps me motivated, I also feel no pressure. It allows me to go back and reflect on my work, it holds me accountable.”

“In my class we are self graded. It drives me to work harder and earn my grades. We also get to choose which assignments we will complete to earn 100 points. I was nervous at first, but I have grown to enjoy it. I am doing more than I would if we were graded traditionally. It is helping my learning process being ungraded. I have to get creative and think outside of the box, which I enjoy.”

Next steps

1. Deeper coding and analysis of data
2. Address challenges and student misconceptions in future iterations of implementing ungrading
3. Continuous action research: Continue to revise our instruction based on our findings + assess results
4. Continue to develop ungrading as a tool for transformative teaching and learning

Q&A