

Teaching Tips/Notes



Anonymous Grading: A Win/Win for Faculty and Students

An anonymous grading policy is one most law schools have strategically employed for decades. This Paper will briefly address the major advantages of employing such a policy as well as some of the criticism; ultimately I will argue that anonymous grading is beneficial, even desirable, at the collegiate level in a variety of disciplines as it has been of significant pedagogical benefit in my undergraduate and graduate courses over the past twenty-five years.

At the core of the anonymous grading system is the elimination of bias. In academics, the potential for biased grading is at the heart of student assessment reliability.¹ Bias in essay grading may come in the form of a “conscious decision to boost the grades of students to whom instructors are favorably disposed, whether because of past academic performance, effort, or personality.”² For students who do not have the past performance to enhance their credibility, bias may deny those students the “benefit of the doubt” when on the borderline between grades.³ Bias may also be more generally placed on a group of students defined by immutable characteristics like race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and religion.⁴ Thus, “if an instructor knows the identity of the student whose essay he or she are grading, that instructor may use past performance as a ‘shortcut’ to assigning an easy grade.”⁵ Clearly, anonymous grading benefits students in a variety of ways, and as educators, our role is to provide to the student an assurance of objectivity. In addition to guarding against bias by withholding the student’s identity until after grading is complete, anonymous grading also “[p]rotect[s] teachers from accusations of bias” and “gives teachers (and students) more credibility when teachers want to endorse or support students who have done well in a class for admission to higher levels of education or for jobs.”⁶ Some criticism to anonymous grading include “making it harder for a teacher to reward classroom participation,” inapplicability in settings where student projects are unique, and chilling student-faculty interaction;⁷ however, a teacher can simply adjust the overall grade in light of classroom participation after anonymous grading is complete and, as such, students can still effectively interact with faculty.

Beyond those assertions, there are no major drawbacks to anonymous grading. A study at the United States Military Academy at West Point found that bias did exist in the context of non-anonymous grading.⁸ Given the clear benefits, it makes sense for undergraduate and graduate instructors to continue with anonymous grading policies and for a variety of academic disciplines to adopt such policies. As a win/win, I have found that it provides for more open class discussions as students feel free to openly express their opinions and it instills in the instructor a sense of objectivity which is clearly understood and appreciated by the students.

Notes

¹Robert Person, *Blind Truth: An Examination of Grading Bias*, United States Military Academy, 1, 1 (2013), http://www.usma.edu/cfe/Literature/Person_13.pdf.

²*Id.* at 2.

³*Id.*

⁴Vikram David Amar, *Why “Blind” Grading Makes Good Sense, and Should Be Used More Extensively Outside of the Context of Law School Exams*, Verdict, Jan. 17, 2014, <https://verdict.justia.com/2014/01/17/blind-grading-makes-good-sense-used-extensively-outside-context-law-school-exams>.

⁵Person, *supra* note 1, at 2.

⁶Amar, *supra* note 4.

⁷*Id.*

⁸Person, *supra* note 1, at 10.

Submitted by:

Michael T. Olexa

Food and Resource Economics Department

University of Florida, Gainesville