

## **Transcript for FLO Friday: A Story of Ungrading: Reflections from an Ungraded Classroom (October 20, 2023)**

**BCcampus event hosted October 20, 2023**

**Host: Gwen Nguyen**

**Facilitator: Claire Hay**

GWEN NGUYEN:

Welcome to our Facilitating Learning Online FLO Friday on A Story of Ungrading: Reflections of an Ungraded Classroom. Thank you very much for choosing to be with us today. My name is Gwen and I'm a learning and teaching advisor with BCcampus. A few housekeeping items that I would like to go over. First thing, the session will be recorded and you're welcome to keep your camera off. And feel free to rename yourself to Participant. Live captioning has also been enabled for this session. I'd like to express my special thank you to my coworker, Paula Gaube, who has provided very wonderful support behind the scenes for this learning event. Before we dive into the session, I would like to begin with the territorial acknowledgment. This photo captures a very cheerful girl jumping in the vibrant fall of Victoria, Canada. This cheerful girl is my daughter. The moment was taken in our neighborhood. Today I'm joining you from my home office in Gordon Head, situated in the traditional territories of the Lekwungen speaking people including the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ people whose historical relations with the land continue to this day. It started out a very grey and cloudy day today, but then the sun came out. I'm very glad because I come from Vietnam, a country with tropical weather, hot weather all year round, so my family, and I really appreciate the opportunity to see the beautiful fall with all colours every year.

Now typically we share the survey link as well as some upcoming events at the very end of the session. But we recognize that some of you might have a tight schedule and need to check out before the end of the session. I'd like to mention this upfront. We invite you to participate in the short anonymous survey and the link is in the chat. We hope that you will offer feedback that will help us with planning more future events that can support professional development in higher education. Additionally, we are excited to announce that we have an in-person conference Studio23 coming soon in Vancouver on November 1 and November 2. This is designed to inspire the educator, allowing them to reflect, enhance the skills, as well as engage in playful experimentation. Please join us. The register link is right there as well as in the chat. We also have the FLO Friday in November. Not "Just," But Just. It is a conversation on diversity, social justice, as well as culturally responsive teaching by the facilitator Dr. Carmen. Please join us if possible. Returning to our main topic today: A Story of Ungrading. We know that ungrading or a gradeless approach are methods of shifting the focus from traditional grading systems to more student-focused and learning-centred ways of thinking about the student performance. However, there's not only one single way to do that. If you want a deeper dive, please visit our previous session on generally ungrading, unpack. I will pop the link in the chat for us here. One second... Yes. About this session today, you're going to learn one story from our facilitator Claire Hay. So without further delay, I would like to introduce and welcome Claire as a teaching and learning specialist from the University of Fraser Valley and Claire is also a very passionate

educator that leads the ungrading as a critical pedagogy tool. As I said at the beginning, Claire has a very thorough and well-planned session for all of us. Claire, the floor is all yours now. And thanks in advance for guiding us through this exploration.

CLAIRE HAY:

Thank you, Gwen. Thanks so much for the kind introduction and hello everybody. As Gwen mentioned, my name is Claire Hay and I'm currently a teaching and learning specialist in the Teaching and Learning Centre here at the University of the Fraser Valley. I'm a geographer by training. I've taught here at UFV since 2002. I still continue to teach from time to time in my old department, even though I'm now in the Teaching and Learning Centre. It's one of those more recent teaching experiences that I want to share with you today, where I embarked on an ungraded classroom. I'm joining you as I mentioned from Abbotsford on Stó:lō Temexw, the sacred land of the Stó:lō People . And in this region, the Stó:lō People speak Halq'eméylem, the upriver dialect. I'm grateful for the opportunities to work and to learn continuously on this land. I especially acknowledge the Matsqui, the Sumas and the Kwantlen Nations for their stewardship, past, present, and future on this beautiful, beautiful land, although it's a little dreary here today in Abbotsford, as I suspect it is in many places in southern B.C.

What do I have planned for you today? This is the shape of the session. We will be doing an interactive warm-up activity and I ask that you maybe grab your phones because you're going to be using Menti in a few moments. We're going to talk a little bit about ungrading, but the majority of this session is going to talk about my ungrading story and some student insights. There will be a breakout activity towards the end of the session, which will be optional. So you can choose to engage in dialogue with your fellow participants in a breakout room. Or you can stay in the main room with me with our cameras off for some quiet thinking time. We'll end our session with a question-and-answer session. A note about the chat. Feel free to go crazy. I know this can be a really helpful tool for us in our learning. I know I use it when I'm a participant myself. For questions We will have a formal Q & A session at the end, and I ask for you to hold your questions, I know it can be difficult, to that time. But if you do want to pop your questions in the chat as a thought comes to mind, Gwen is going to moderate that for me. But we will come back to those questions at the end and hopefully we can engage in some conversation at that time. But first of all, what this session is not, I know this is a funny way to start, but this is not all things, a comprehensive review of ungrading. It is very much a personal story. What I've done is I've created a resource guide to you, a link to which came with your invite this morning with the link to the session. In that resource guide, I have put together a set of resources, a variety of kinds of information that you can go to for a more deep dive into ungrading. In terms of resources, I've also provided you with an example of one of the assignments that I used in my class. Together with the information that I provided to students around grading and how that was going to look, hopefully going to provide you with some things that will support you moving forward. The student insights that I'm sharing with you today were actually gathered as part of a formal SOTL research project that was conducted with my colleague Victoria Surtees in this course that I'm going to be talking about because I wanted to get a more, what I hoped, a more authentic representation of what students actually thought about the ungrading process.

This project was ethics approved here at UFV, and I'm presenting some of the results of that as part of this session today.

With that in mind, let's dive in. Okay, now's the time to grab your phones. I'm going to leave this up on the screen for a second before I jump to the Menti. There's a QR code there. You can grab your camera and grab a photo. And that will take you to the Menti or the code is there on the slide. And maybe Paula can pop that in the chat for me as well. But it's an opportunity for us to think about grading and our responses to that word and that process. Okay, I'm going to jump to the Menti.

If you're having problems with the Menti, feel free to just write your responses in the chat. That works as well as an opportunity to share. So the question I'm posing to you. Think about a time you were graded and how it made you feel. I'm seeing responses popping in right now. This is what you're seeing on the screen, are the real time responses as you are contributing your ideas. Great, love these words. Thank you for sharing. What we're seeing here, the biggest words are the words that are appearing most commonly in your submissions. I'm seeing "anxious, judged, validated, evaluated, disappointed, pressured, extremely happy, relieved, nervous." There's a mixture of responses here. There are some positive emotions coming out, some positive feelings, but there's also some more negative connections to the experience of being graded. In a few moments, I'm actually going to share the results of the same activity that I did with students at the start of the course that I'm going to be talking about today. The second question, and I'm going to jump to that second question right now, should come up here. Great. How does grading student work make you feel? Thinking about this from the perspective of being an educator. As an instructor, what are your thoughts about that grading process? You have an opportunity to add some words or phrases. This is an open-ended response. I'm just... Sorry, did something wrong? I'm just trying to move the screen. We can see other pieces, but there are a variety of words that are coming up in here in terms of our responses. I'm seeing "exhausted and overworked," but I'm also seeing words such as "uncomfortable, repetitive, anxious." Grading is a process that we all engage in, in a variety of ways with different purposes in mind that really get at the core of what we do as instructors. But it can be what I think of as emotional labour. This is one of the many reasons that brought me to ungrading. I want to thank you for providing those responses in the slide here. I'm going to go back to the presentation here. I'd like you to hold onto that, those thoughts as we go through the presentation.

Because what I'm hoping to do today is spark some personal reflection about what we do in the classroom. Maybe more importantly, not what we do, but why we do it. Because I think part of what we do, we do just because we've always done it in a certain way. Thinking about the intentions behind the decisions we're making around assessment and the way in which we evaluate student learning.

I asked that same first question, or a similar phrased question, to my Geography of Selected Regions course back in fall 2022. This was my opening activity to start bringing ungrading into

the fore. These were the words that the students chose. They chose words such as "stress, challenge, procrastination." Words such as "failure, worry, hard work, perspective, anticipation." I wanted to understand how the students in this particular course felt about the process of grading. Now, this is a 400-level course. These are geography majors. They've been in the program for a long time. They've been graded a lot. I was curious to understand and to see what they felt about that process. I then embarked on the discussion of ungrading. I'll talk in a little bit about what that actually looked like. What I want to do now though, is touch very briefly on what is ungrading. As I said, this is not comprehensive. This is just a quick snapshot to set the context for what it is I actually did in my ungraded classroom.

This is a quote from Jesse Stommel's new book, recently published, called *Undoing the Grade: Why We Grade and How to Stop*. Jesse writes, the word "ungrading" means raising an eyebrow at grades as a systemic practice, distinct from simply 'not grading.' The word is a present participle, an ongoing process, not a static set of practices. Ungrading is a systemic critique, a series of conversations, ideally drawing students into those conversations with the goal of engaging them as full agents in their own education. For me, there isn't a discrete set of best practices for ungrading, because different students learn in different ways at different times with different teachers, in different disciplines, at different institutions. So, the work of teaching, the work of reimagining assessment is necessarily idiosyncratic." When I started on this work, I actually thought of trying to do ungrading in the way that everybody else did it. That best practice approach to ungrading. As I've continued learning about this work, I've recognized it's actually the conversations and tailoring, how to engage in ungrading to the context of the students that's important.

For me, ungrading is a critical pedagogical approach that centres students in the learning process. Critical in the fact that it questions and challenges the status quo, it's a tool for disruption. In itself, it's trying to counter the many inequities that exist in higher education. And there are many, and they often are exacerbated for marginalized students in our classrooms. Grading is just one of those many inequities that can exist. For me, it's a way to challenge and to rethink what is ultimately higher education than the way we engage in the process. It also challenges the idea that grades are a valid measure of learning. I was in a session this morning, and we were talking about holistic assessment with some colleagues. We actually came around to this question of, can we actually say that learning happened just because we assigned a grade? If a student receives a grade, how does that translate to what they actually learned or the situation they find themselves in? It's a very complex, complex place. On one hand, we have Jesse Stommel talking about the conversations that are important. Another approach, Susan Bloom in her book called *Ungrading* and the subsequent blog post sees on grading as an umbrella term for a variety of approaches and practices. And I've listed some of those here. There's a lot of current conversation often in the informal sphere, on the blog sphere, in the social media sphere around ungrading. Still looking to see more published work on ungrading. And I hope to contribute to that moving forward. But really, it is an opportunity to rethink how we evaluate the work that students are doing. I want to share my particular stories with you today/=-.

But why? Why do we have to think about maybe disrupting the status quo? Work by Alfie Kohn in a seminal work called "The Case against Grades," emphasize intrinsic motivation. Learning for learning's sake, not the extrinsic motivation that grades present to students, and an opportunity to really pursue that intrinsic perspective. Jos Eyster in recent work in Inside Higher Ed comments on the connection between grades and student well-being. Ungrading is argued to reduce anxiety over grades and improve student well-being. Arguments are made that ungrading reduces the fixation on grades that lead to cheating and other behaviours, something that we often talk about. It challenges the factory model of education, puts students at the centre, and avoids that process where we actually rank and sort students by the very nature of the letter grade we put on their work. These are some of the reasons people put out, researchers have put out around reasons for ungrading. With all that in mind. And as I said, there is lots of work out there. Check out the resource guide for some more background here. But what I want to do now is share with you my why.

I think this speaks to the conversations that we have with ourselves as instructors. I'm going to tell you a story. It's a story of my own development as a higher ed instructor. I started my teaching career way back in 2002, straight out of grad school. I taught using the same strategies and methods, and I assessed in the same way that I had experienced as a student. I didn't know better. But I realized about 10 years into my teaching practice that it just wasn't working anymore. Something had changed. I had changed, and the students had changed. I went back to school and I learned about how to teach for the very first time. I was never trained in education in my grad program. I think this is often a common experience for many in research-based graduate programs. I came back to the classroom after doing some learning. My teaching practice changed, and I continue to develop my practice through professional development, through reflection in an ongoing way. For me, my ungrading experiences have started with my values, with my teaching philosophy. I think it's important for the strategies related to assessment to align with your teaching values and your teaching philosophy. There should be a continuation of thought in the ways we assess. For me, I value lifelong learning. I value a decolonized approach to learning. And I'm still working on what that looks like in my own practice. I value co-constructed learning. I value feedback that means something and go somewhere. That opportunity for growth. I also value student ownership of their own learning journeys. Having students at the centre and being responsible for their own learning. From there, I've adopted many changes in my practice. I have adopted an unessay approach to the research assignment that we commonly assign to students. I have used learning contracts where students set their own due dates for assignments within some constraints. I co-construct course content with students. I adopt problem-based and active-learning strategies, collaborative learning spaces. Moving on, this is where the ungrading comes in. I suddenly recognized that I needed to do more in the classroom that centred students' ownership of their learning journey. Ungrading was the next logical step in that process. I recognized the need for myself as a facilitator to try and restructure as best I can, the hierarchy of the classroom. That relationship between student and instructor. To attempt to reduce some of the inequities that existed in the classroom around privilege, race, gender, experience in higher ed, for example.



And also do something that was more authentic to the learning process itself. I wanted to do something that wasn't simply students chasing points in the course. This is where we're at today. Here I am with an opportunity to share what actually, how I actually adopted ungrading in the classroom. For me, it wasn't a sudden decision. It comes from a long path of development as an educator.

The context for this particular, well, it's an experiment, I guess, experience. This was an upper level required course in geography. For geography majors at UFV. They are required to take a regional geography course. The region always changes. For me, it just happens. I have an expertise in Scotland. It was a small class, so I had 21 students. The course explored various topics that were student determined. We co-constructed the course content with the learning outcomes in mind. What resulted was a broad survey course on the geography of Scotland that applied a variety of geographic techniques and concepts that students had experienced throughout their programs. They had four assessments to complete, some of which were group based, some were individual. They completed an unessay research assignment, and that's the resource that I provided for you in the resource folder. A weekly discussion forum that they moderated in groups, weekly learning activities that connected to what we were doing in class on a week- to-week basis, and a group video presentation. All of these four assessments were ungraded in the sense that I provided extensive feedback, but no grades on that work. I think that's an important piece here, the emphasis. It's not that I'm not doing anything in the ungrade, the not grading piece. I'm still reviewing student work, I'm still providing extensive feedback. But what I'm not doing is that final step of attaching a mark to that work.

This is what we did. Every assignment came with a self-assessment process letter with a set of guiding questions. Students were asked to reflect on the process and product of a particular assignment. At the end of that set of guiding questions, they were asked to propose a grade for that assignment with self-assessed based on our rubric that I provided to them. Then they had to rationalize that grade based on where they sit in the various categories on the rubric, and examples from their work. They did this for all of the assignments in the course, but I still need to submit a final grade as part of the course requirements, so we consulted. This was a co-negotiated grade. I sat down with every student. We sat in Zoom with every student for a 10-minute final consultation where we talked about the broad learning that had taken place throughout the course. We reviewed the self-assessed grade as an opportunity to discuss whether it met... it was an appropriate representation of the learning that had taken place. Once that had happened, I entered the grades into our system, and that grade then is part of the official record. That's the approach that I took, but for all of the students in the class, this was new.

Nobody had experienced ungrading before we were experiencing this together. As I mentioned, these are fourth year students, they've experienced a lot of evaluation over their time. How did I bring this up? How did I share this idea, this set of practices with them? I did so with intention and by establishing trust, being very clear with the students about the reasons behind the decision I was making, I was very transparent. I also recognized the need to establish trust, not

just on that first day, but throughout the whole semester. I was really concerned that students were going to feel that they were going to have the rug pulled out from under them at the end of the semester. That there was something that I wasn't telling them about how this was going to play out. Anyway, that trust became an important element. I shared resources with the students on the first day of class, it was listed in the syllabus. I gave them a variety of resources to engage with on that first day. There were blog posts and podcasts and more formal reading. And they could choose to read about the topic or explore that topic in ways that they felt was appropriate from there. In the second week, we came back together, and I allowed the class to engage in a group conversation that I was not part of. To share their own thoughts, their own concerns, and to then raise questions that they wanted to bring to my attention. And we did this anonymously on sticky notes. I couldn't connect a question to a particular student. Again, thinking about trust. We talked about those questions. I shared my answers. We further discussed the process. We talked about how the final grade would be assigned. Talking about ungrading, and really explaining the nuances of this to students was a really important step in the process. We then went about the regular business of the semester. This course also was set up with no formal due dates except a final cut-off date right at the end of the semester. I'll talk about how that played out in a little minute. They were also allowed to respond in their process letters in ways that were meaningful to themselves. So that they could choose to write their process letter, or they could use a video or audio post. It was completely up to them, or even something else if they felt inclined. Again, providing ownership to the student in the ways that they talked about their work. I think that was a very important piece of the puzzle.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the session, I completed a research study alongside teaching a course with my colleague Victoria Surtees, who also works here in the Teaching and Learning Centre. I really wanted to provide students with an opportunity to share responses with me in a really anonymous, structured way. I set up a research project that received ethics approval here at UFV. We administered the survey on the last day of class through Survey Monkey, and Victoria was responsible for administering that survey. This was a fall course. I didn't see the results until after the end of January of this year. Well after grades were submitted. It's worth noting that I had 21 students who registered and only 11 completed the survey. This is a tiny set of results. It's not so much the quantitative data, but the qualitative data that has given me food for thought in how this played out and what I might do differently. I want to share these insights with you because I think they actually will tell me a lot about the process and the practices that I adopted. If this is something that you are considering doing in your classrooms, adopting these kinds of practices, I would encourage you to think about ways in which you can capture the student voice here. I did it formally through a research study. There may be other avenues, but an opportunity for students to really share their thoughts with you.

So what did the students think? Research and the body of work on ungrading suggests that learning is enhanced when you take grades out of the picture, when we use ungrading practice. Recognizing that students are learning for learning's sake. In this case, 73% of the respondents in the survey agreed with that statement, that ungrading enhanced their learning. But as I mentioned, it's the qualitative comments that actually are helpful in thinking about how this

went. One student writes, "I really like it. I think it takes the focus of the grade and onto the learning. It made me accountable for my work and enhanced the connection between the effort and the grade." When I looked at the grade distribution for this iteration of this course compared to past iterations, and in this case, the only thing that had changed is the ungrading piece. The grade average was equivalent. Students average an A– in this course. As I mentioned, it's a 400-level course, and the grades ranged from C+ to A+. Often when I'm engaging with faculty in my TLC role around alternative grading practices, or self-assessment more generally, I often hear the concern that students will all give themselves A+s. I've been using self-assessment in other ways for many, many years, and this is not my experience. Anecdotally I'm aware of... I don't have that particular experience to draw on.

Motivation. We talked about intrinsic motivation when we were looking at the reasons for ungrading. A smaller percentage, but 64% of respondents agreed that they were motivated to complete assignments, even when the instructor was not providing a grade. Remember, although I'm not providing a grade, I was providing feedback. What I found from that feedback process was I was able to actually be more open in my feedback. I felt that I wasn't constrained in the way in which I delivered the feedback to students, in the way I felt before when I was assigning grades. It was an interesting difference as I was providing the feedback. A student notes, "It does force you to think about your grade and the effort you put into it, rather than doing it and moving on right away." But what I did think, and I did reflect on, was this piece. And I heard anecdotally from students a few times that they didn't really have a sense of how they were doing in the class. The students who were not motivated to complete the work, many of them just in general conversation in the classroom, were concerned that they didn't have a measure of that part-way performance how they were doing in the course. But linked to that was the fact that I have an open due date policy. Students can complete work right up until the end. Students were actually not completing the work as regularly as I thought they would. Many students received no feedback because they simply hadn't submitted anything prior to the endpoint, so that usefulness of feedback for growth was missing. I think that plays into the motivation piece a little bit here. I need to rationalize that in how I adopt this practice next time I'm in the classroom.

As I mentioned earlier also, student well-being and anxiety. As we saw from the word cloud that students generated at the beginning of the session and some of the words that you chose in that opening activity, anxiety and negative emotional responses are quite common when we think about grading. But in terms of the survey results, 30% of the respondents noted less anxiety, but interestingly the same felt more anxious. Student notes, "In theory it's great, but in actuality, in a system and world that does not operate like this, I felt more anxious about my grades." Another thought. "Often times students feel grades are set in stone and we don't have a say in them. It can become stressful when a student has put a lot of effort, but the teacher is unable to see this because they only see the submitted work." For me the guiding questions for the process letters and the way in which the assignments were set up is designed to... Somebody has their mic on. If you could mute that, please. Thank you. Is designed to try and get a process over just product. Again, to try and reduce that anxiety piece. One thing I



recognize that I didn't do is I didn't engage continuously in this conversation around ungrading. I spent a lot of time setting it up, but I didn't continue the conversation. And I think that would have been really important. Also providing opportunities to meet with students as a midpoint check-in, as a way in which to really provide students with some opportunity to share their thoughts part way through the semester.

Then finally, risk taking. So thinking about the opportunities for students to try new things. Often when grades are involved, students play it safe; they work to their strengths. But maybe there's an opportunity for students to try new things if that pressure of the grade is taken away. In this case, 73% of respondents to the survey reported a strong agreement that Ungrading allowed them to try new things. "This type of feedback and cooperative learning was mind blowing and eye opening... the idea of schooling immediately shifted from What do I need to do to prove I am good enough to How can I showcase my efforts on this topic. The difference turns learning from a pressured experience into a collaborative, fun, and invigorating one." Connected to this was the approach of an unessay and an opportunity for students to demonstrate learning in ways that are meaningful for them. I think this, together with the ungrading approach, provides students with opportunities to try new things and develop new skills and capacities.

That was what the students thought, and my own insights, based on reflecting on those responses. Next time that I ungrade, and I do intend to continue this practice, I would do things differently. I would change the way in which I engage with the ungrading concept. And continue to talk about the relationship between self-assessment and the feedback loop. And it would be an ongoing conversation with students throughout, throughout the semester. I also see the need to conduct that midterm check-in point, even if a student hasn't submitted work, meet with them anyway. Find out what they are experiencing in terms of learning in the class environment and how I can support that learning. Reconsider that due date policy that I have, which is very flexible to support students so that they get feedback along the journey, not only at the end. We want the feedback to go somewhere for it to be valuable. Relook at that expectation that I have for students and maybe require work as a stepping stone part way through the semester. I think it's the midterm check-in if I had to choose one that is the one that I would adopt right away. I plan to keep ungrading, but I think I need to be aware of the context. So depending on the course that I would be teaching. And as I say, I don't teach on a regular basis anymore. The course level, the type of course, the type of students that enroll in that particular course, matter. While I would adopt the philosophy on ungrading, how it actually looks would be context dependent. I think that's something that we really have to consider. It's not one practice. It's many practices that reflect the existing context of the students in our courses. That's my story. That's what I would like to share with you today in terms of recognizing and talking about one experience. It's a very personal story. It wasn't easy. It led to a few sleepless nights in trying to determine whether or not this was the right thing to do. Whether I was supporting students, I thought I was, but maybe I wasn't. A lot of ongoing reflection and it's something I continue to think about in how I would adopt moving forward.

What I'd like to do now is give you an opportunity to talk amongst yourselves or reflect quietly on this particular story that I've shared with you. Some things you might talk about are how this might work in your own practice. If you have embraced ungrading or tried on ungrading, maybe share your experience. Think about maybe some ways that this story could look different, the practices that I engaged in could look different. Really, the opportunity is open to that conversation. You have two options for this activity time. You can join a breakout room and Paula is going to do that for us shortly. We're going to have about 7 minutes to chat in breakout rooms. If you would like to engage in some personal reflection time, you can choose to stay in the main room with me with our cameras off, and be quiet. Just think about what you've talked about. And then when we come back together, we will talk and provide opportunities for questions. I'm going to stop sharing at this point so that we can...oh now I get to see all the squares in this space. And I'm going to ask Paula to work your magic and allow us to either join breakout rooms or stay in the main space. As I say, if you stay in the main room, cameras off and quiet time, please. Thank you and I'll see you all shortly.

Welcome back everybody. Sorry for bringing you back a bit sooner but there are lots of questions in the chat that I want to get to today. Yeah. Gwen, would you maybe pick up a couple of the many questions that are in there that we can maybe start with and then we will open the floor.

GWEN:

Yes. Thank you, Claire, and thanks everyone for coming back from a very quick breakout room activity. The very first question I think, Tyler, pop in the chat is "What Is an Unessay Approach?" And I think Val also put the reference from the resource, but anything else that you would like to provide further information?

CLAIRE:

Sure, just very quickly. It's an opportunity for students to present learning in ways that are meaningful to them. Giving students the choice on how to demonstrate their learning. For example, this is a research assignment. There was a question that I posed to the class. They could then choose to write the paper or create an animated or a narrated PowerPoint presentation, a website, an academic poster, a variety of different options. It's really providing students with choice on the demonstration of learning. There is an example of that unessay assignment in the resource folder, you'll actually see all the details. And it also has the guiding questions for the process letter that are there as well. All right, next one. Do we want to go to the floor or do we want to ask another one from the chat maybe, and then we'll go to the floor.

GWEN:

Fizza actually has three questions. The first question is, taking an ungrading approach could require departmental support, as well as the support from the students. How receptive do you think both our colleagues in academia as well as the students are taking an out of the books approach like ungrading? Well, that's the elephant in the room, Fizza. Thank you. Okay, here at UFV, we have really strong language around academic freedom, so that allows me to choose

the approaches that I want to adopt in the classroom experiences that I have. I didn't hide the ungrading from the department, and it's my old department where I used to teach, so I have relationships with that department. It was never hidden. Students also shared that what they were experiencing with others in the department. People knew that I was adopting this, but I didn't actually formally ask for permission to do this. The important message here is to understand your own context and your own institutional expectations around these things before you jump into this approach. I would also recommend if you are a new instructor, on probation, or a tenure track instructor to seek some guidance. Because there are implications sometimes of this. Then of the student approach, it was a decision that I made that we were going to do this work. I didn't actually ask the students because of the way in which our syllabus requirements are set up. I had to make that decision first. If there had been a major issues around it, we probably would have reconsidered. But I got the sense of support from the group around that. How receptive are others? It's across the board. There are people who are very supportive of the idea and there are people that are not supportive of the idea as well. Thanks for your question, Fizza. I'm going to open it to the floor now. Please raise your hand if you have a question, it's in the reactions button and ask your question.

GWEN:

This. I don't see any hands right now, but is it possible? Because there's one question from Beth. "With the open completion day, do you manage the workload at the end of the term if the student tried to complete a lot of work right at the end?"

CLAIRE:

Work load. Yes, an important question. At UFV, classes are small. This class was smaller than even the maximum class size. In this particular instance, it was not huge. It wasn't every student. It was probably about 50% of the students left everything to the end. I managed the workload, and for me, I was teaching this course as a sessional instructor, not as a permanent faculty member. I also have my regular job at the same time. But any time you engage in some of these alternative types of practices, consider your own well-being first and foremost, and I think that's important. So your own abilities to deal with something like all the work coming out in the end should be something that you consider before you approach that. Take care of yourself first. Yes, I agree. Shirley, leaving the work to the end is a problem. Yes. That's where I need to reconsider that policy. It's something I've noticed even in courses that didn't adopt ungrading when I have that open flexibility, yes, students are not great at regularly submitting work. It's something I have to grapple with.

GWEN:

Thank you. Erica actually has a question. "Can you elaborate on more on your self- assessment process letter?" Because she's being having a hard time getting her LMS not to require a number on the ungrading. Oh, it's complicated. It was work around, We use Blackboard here at UFV. We can set assignments, as I think Michelle commented in the chat also, for a complete/incomplete. When I set up the assignments inside the LMS, I set it up so that there was two things students had to submit. The assignment was one Dropbox that had a

complete/incomplete notation. I would provide feedback. Then they submitted their process letter as a second entry, a second Dropbox. And then based on the grade that they wrote in that process letter, that's the number that I entered into the assignment, a bit of a work around. And then it was only the process letters that contributed to the final score. As with any LMS, they don't necessarily support innovative approaches to teaching as much as I wish they did. Sometimes it's creative work-arounds. In terms of the process letter, if you look in the resource folder, the example assignment, the unessay assignment has the process letter questions that I asked in there. I just see Judy's question right now, so I'm just going to jump to that one. In sharing their final work... No, one of the assignments was shared, so yes and or no and. The final video presentation was a group project. The last day of class was our movie premiere night. We actually present all of the videos that the students have presented, have created with popcorn and pop and we celebrate learning. The other assignments were not shared. I have done portfolios before in another context, and had them shared amongst group so that the learning is shared. But that was not something that I wanted to do in this particular case. I felt the ungrading was enough to bring in. But yes, having opportunities to share learning I think is a valuable experience if you can make it work in there.

GWEN:

Thank you, Claire. I think now there's two more questions from Fizza. question number one is, "During your final grade negotiation with the students, what was your experience? Did students generally assess their grades similarly to how you could assess them? Were there major differences? Were the students' perception of their understanding and knowledge accurate or were they too critical of their performance?"

CLAIRE:

Interesting, I gave them the questions that I would be asking during that conference ahead of time so that they could prepare. Throughout the entire process, as students were evaluating and self-assessing their work, I told the students I would return their process letters to them if there was a really big discrepancy between the feedback I provided and the self-assessed grade. That happened once in the whole class amongst four assignments, so it was not a big deal. For my observations how students were assessing their work reflected the feedback I was providing with some minor details. In some cases, yes, the students were maybe critical of their work. The only thing that I am still pondering about the conferences is the power dynamic. Because I'm still the instructor of record. I can never completely remove that thing that exists, that power, completely. I'm not 100% sure how comfortable the students were in those conferences. In most cases, they seemed perfectly comfortable. But again, I don't know for sure.

FIZZA:

And you said discrepancies, major discrepancies were quite uncommon there weren't too many instances either way. Neither with over-inflating their grade or performance, nor with being too critical.

CLAIRE:

That's right. We're talking about a minor letter, a sub letter grade. I might give it an A–, they gave it an A. Really small. Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

FIZZA:

And I think you've kind of addressed my third question, Claire. That was more related to do you think the approach lends itself more readily to certain disciplines than others? You mentioned how it's group dependent and it's also upper grade, upper level courses students because they've had more experience, they're better at maybe accepting the approach. But is it also discipline dependent, do you think?

CLAIRE:

I think the specific approach is to ungrading, your specific practices are actually dependent on your discipline. There's a new book by Clark and Talbert called *Grading for Growth*. It's in your research guide as well, that talks about alternative grading, not just ungrading. That talks about it in a variety of disciplines as well. I notice we're coming up on the top of the hour. I'm just going to share my contact information with you in the chat. I'd love to continue the conversation. You can find my email is there. I'm also active on social, on what was Twitter, on X, you can find me, also on Bluesky. If you are wanting to continue the conversation, please reach out. I'm happy to carry on the conversation. It has been an interesting experience, a valuable one, and I hope you've taken some insights away today.

GWEN:

Wonderful, Claire. Yeah, thank you very much for guiding us through this exploration. And again, like one session cannot be the answer for all the questions. But it's important that in this generative AI age, when we are trying to explore things together, reimagine the assessment in a way that centres the student learning process. We need to question the equity as well as challenge the ideas of the grade as the only valid measure of learning is very important. And thank you very much, Claire, and thanks everyone for your questions, as well as staying with us till now. I hope that you will enjoy the rest of the day and please stay tuned with all of our learning events at BCcampus. Thanks for coming. Thank you.