RESOURCES FOR FLO Friday – A Story of Ungrading: Reflections from an Ungraded Classroom

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WHAT IS UNGRADING?

Ungrading is an approach where the emphasis is placed on student feedback and not on providing a numerical or letter grade on the work. Ungrading is a conscious effort to move away from grades and back to the learning process. Proponents of ungrading note that the following characteristics of grading interfere with the learning process with students working towards a grade rather than the learning itself. These factors include (compiled from Blum, 2020 and others):

- Grades provide extrinsic motivation to students
- Inconsistent meaning of grades
- A need for substantive communication about learning
- Grades discourage risk taking and critical reflection of tasks at hand
- Grades encourage cheating
- Grades contribute to student mental health concerns

Practitioners employ ungrading in different ways with students often reflecting that they learn more and are under less stress when grades are removed. The emphasis is placed on instructors providing feedback so students can improve their work, make their own assessment, and build into future work. Learning and improving work becomes the goal.

Ungrading is more than simply removing the grade. It is an intentional practice where learning is prioritized and scaffolded through carefully designed assignments and activities. Ungrading should happen in partnership with a thorough review of the content, activities, and assignments in a class so that learning is prioritized. Students should have opportunities to grow from feedback and to reflect on that learning (Stommel, 2021).

Some ungrading and alternative grading models include (compiled from Blum 2020):

- Student self-assessment of work and determination of a final grade
- Portfolios
- Peer Assessment
- Process letters
- Student conferences

If you are interested in learning more I strongly recommend "Ungrading" by Susan Blum who writes:

"The moment is right for critical reflection on what has been assumed to be a core part of schooling. In *Ungrading*, fifteen educators write about their diverse experiences going gradeless. Some contributors are new to the practice, and some have been engaging in it for decades. Some are in humanities and social sciences; some in STEM fields. Some are in higher education, but some are the K–12 pioneers who

led the way. Based on rigorous and replicated research, this is the first book to show why and how faculty who wish to focus on learning, rather than sorting or judging, might proceed. It includes honest reflection on what makes ungrading challenging, and testimonials about what makes it transformative."
(back cover)

UNGRADING RESOURCES

Books:
- Blum, Susan D. (2020) (ed) Ungrading: Why rating students undermines learning (and what to do about it). *West Virginia University Press*
- Stommel, J. (2023). Undoing the Grade. *Hybrid Pedagogy.*
- Clark, D., and Talbert, R. (2023) Grading for Growth: A Guide to Alternative Grading Practices that Promote Authentic Learning and Student Engagement in Higher Education. *Routledge.*
- Feldman, J. (2018) Grading for Equity. *Corwin.*

Blogs and articles:
- Blum, Susan D. Ungrading. Blog post. http://www.susanblum.com/blog/ungrading
- Blum, Susan D. (nd) Collated Ungrading Quick-Start sources – Blum.pdf. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XGAijLIxHuEuqSHq4YNKEqxr4c3p8YzY/view
- Blum, Susan D. (2022) The Ungrading Umbrella. *Teachers Going Gradeless blog.* https://www.teachersgoinggradeless.com/blog/the-ungrading-umbrella
- Buck, D. (2021) Crowdsourcing Ungrading. Open-source book. https://pressbooks.howardcc.edu/ungrading/
- Eyler, Joshua. (2022) Grades are at the centre of the student mental health crisis. Inside Higher Ed, 7 March 2022. https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/grades-are-center-student-mental-health-crisis
- Ferguson, Hadley. (2016) Journey into Ungrading. *Counterpoints*, 492, 207-222. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45157513
- Guberman, D. 2021. Student Perceptions of an Online Ungraded Course. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 9, 1, 8. DOI: https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.9.1.8
- Alfie Kohn, 2011. The Case Against Grades. https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/case-grades/
- Kuepper-Tetzel, Carolina, E. and Gardner, Paul, L. (2021) Effects of Temporary Mark Withholding on Academic Performance. *Psychology Learning and Teaching*, 20(3), 405-419. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1475725721999958
- Jesse Stommel Ungrading blog posts:
  - Ungrading: A Bibliography (March 3 2020) https://www.jessestommel.com/ungrading-a-bibliography/
  - Ungrading: A FAQ (February 6 2020) https://www.jessestommel.com/ungrading-an-faq/
- Yerim Lee: A Student's Perspective on Ungrading. https://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2021/05/a-students-perspective-on-ungrading/

Podcasts:

- Teaching in Higher Ed podcast. "How to Ungrade" with Jesse Stommel
  https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/how-to-ungrade/
- Teaching in Higher Ed podcast. "Ungrading" with Susan D. Blum
  https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/ungrading/