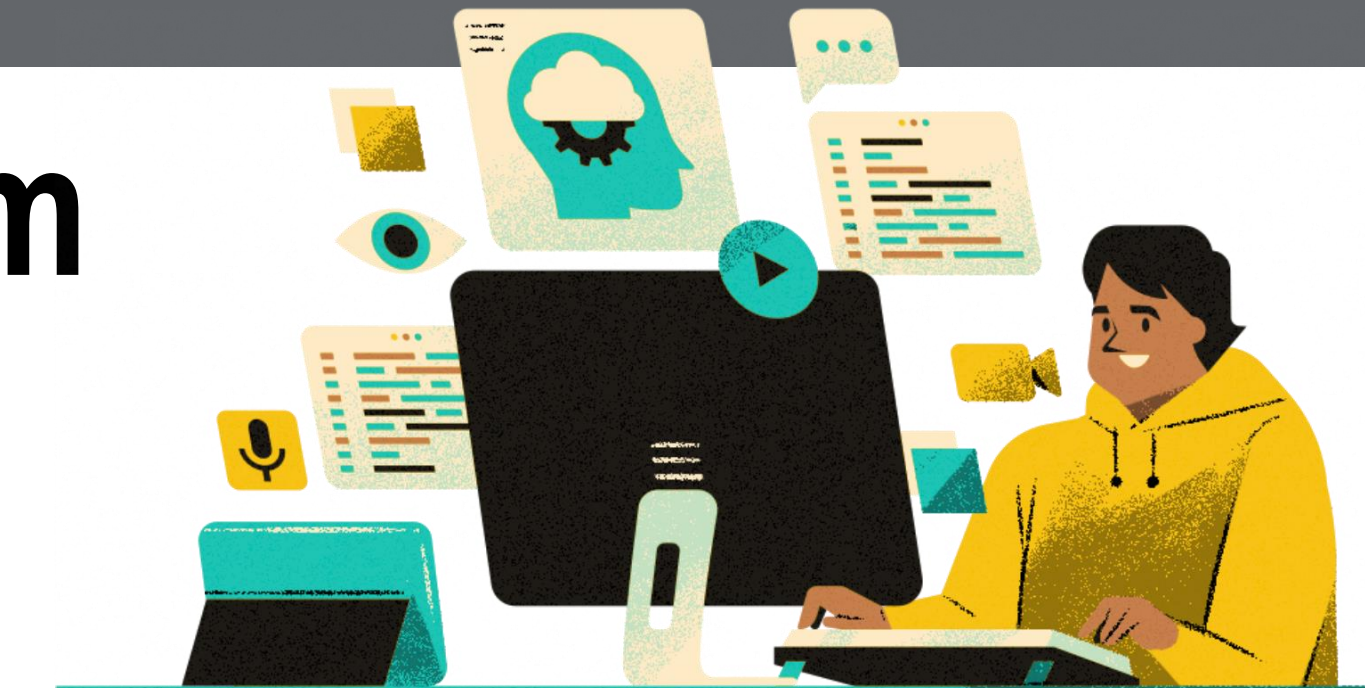


# Ungrading's Effect on Student Agency in the Education Classroom

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Do ungraded evaluation structures influence students' development of a sense of agency for their learning?



## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of ungraded classroom evaluation structures on students' development of agency for learning. Through survey research comparing traditionally graded classes with those employing ungrading practices, student responses are analyzed. Results suggest potential increases in student agency among those in ungraded classes. This challenges prevailing education practices, highlighting the shift towards student-centered, formative learning experiences when agency is actively encouraged.

## Results

### Dispositional Aspects of Agency

**Purpose:** Students have a vision related to their own goals



**Intentionality:** Students are motivated to pursue their goals



### Motivational Aspects of Agency

**Perception:** Students see the value in course activities

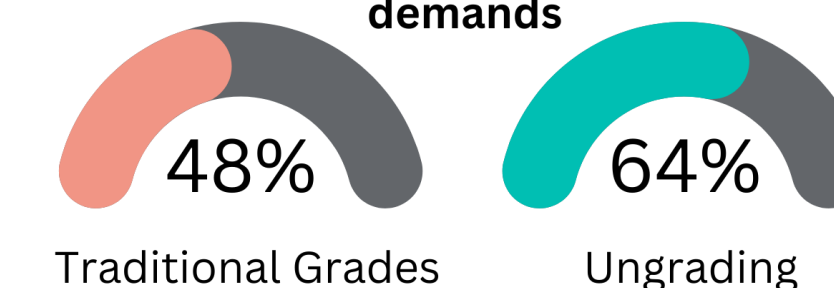


**Persistence:** Students can face challenges

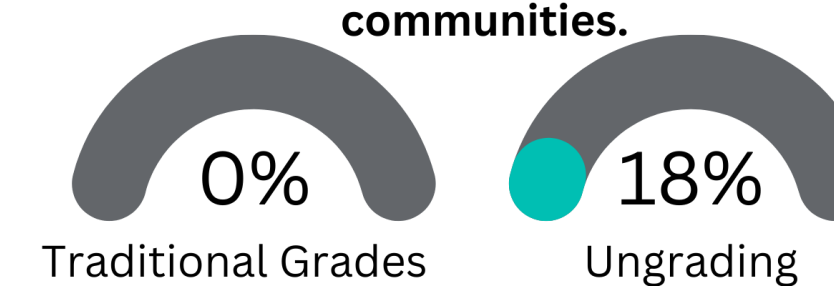


### Positional Aspects of Agency

**Interaction:** Students exist in a complex environment with competing demands

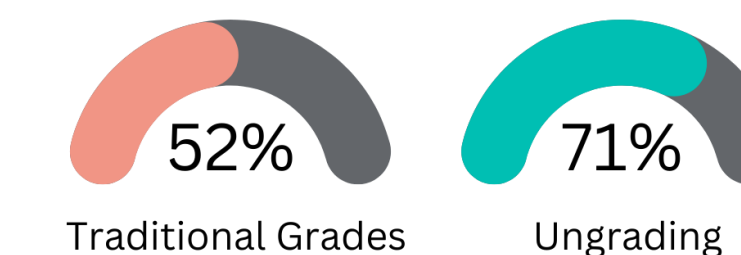


**Negotiation:** Students balance and enact identity in complex social communities.

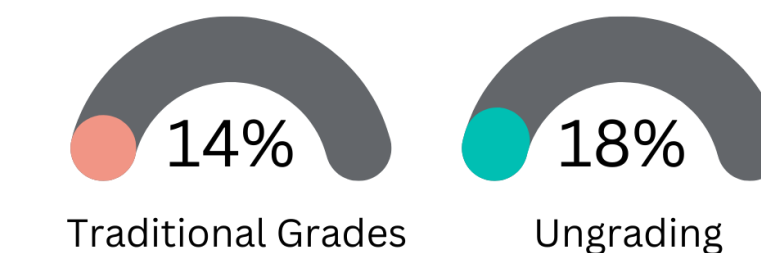


### Other Themes

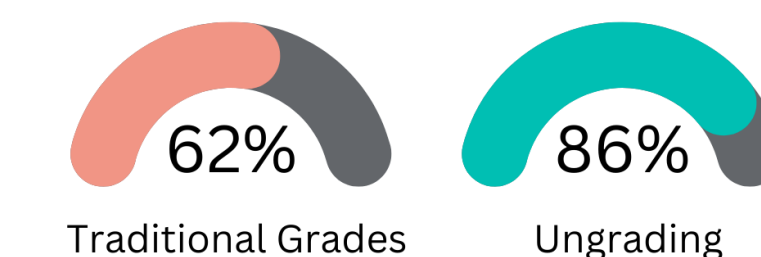
**Comments about Grades**



**Comments about Stress**



**Comments on Instructor Feedback**



## Introduction

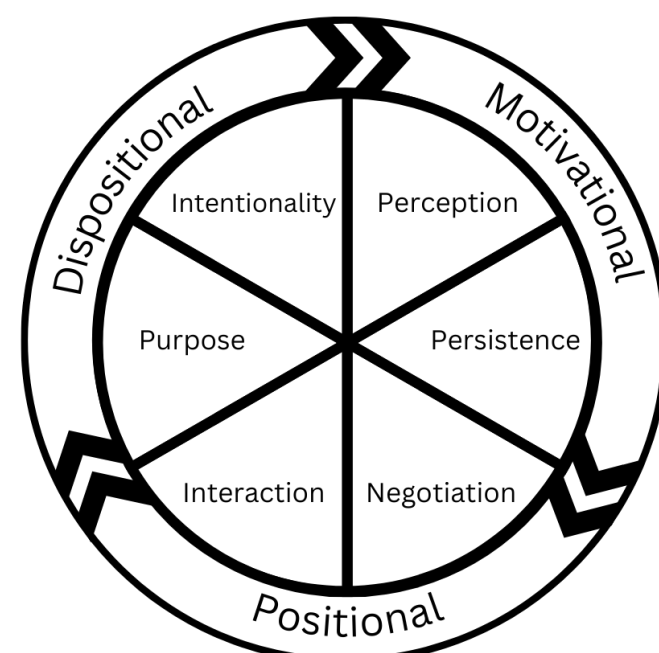
**Ungrading:** The practice of minimizing or eliminating grades to focus on meaningful feedback and student learning. (MacKay, 2021)

**Student Agency:** The ability to set goals, reflect on learning, and act responsibly. (OECD, 2019)

### Ungrading Examples

- Complete/Incomplete Assignments
- Formative Feedback
- Self Evaluation
- 1-10 points Minimal Grading Assignments

Vaughn's Dimensions of Student Agency in Learning Contexts



Ungraded classrooms empower students, fostering intrinsic motivation and purpose, leading to deeper engagement with course content. Unlike traditional grading, ungrading practices offer diverse evaluation methods such as self-assessment and portfolios.

## Student Voices

### On Purpose:

“After experiencing the class without grades, I realize how grades can sometimes encourage students to simply complete assignments without truly understanding the material. I feel like I learned much more by focusing on understanding the content rather than just completing tasks.”

### On Perception:

“At first I felt defeated because all the hard work I put into the assignments and came out as an ungraded assignment. As I progressed, I realized that it was more of a reflection that I could use as an advantage to improve my learning and future teachings.”

### On Interaction:

“I think this course did help my confidence in facing challenges. There were multiple times where I did not fully understand the task at hand. However, I went back to the readings and looked at what my peers were discussing on YellowDig and that helped me solve the challenges.”

## Discussion

Our results challenge conventional beliefs about student evaluation, showing higher levels of task autonomy and motivation in ungraded conditions. This research fills a gap in higher education teaching environments, particularly in online courses, and aligns with the principles of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, emphasizing systematic inquiry into student learning, grounded in scholarly context, methodological rigor, student partnership, and public dissemination of findings. It underscores the importance of reflective teaching practices to enhance educational outcomes for students.

**Ungrading fosters:**

- Goal-setting
- Reflection
- Responsible action
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Formative Feedback
- Continuous Learning
- Autonomy
- Lifelong Learning

## Methods

### Student Agency Survey:

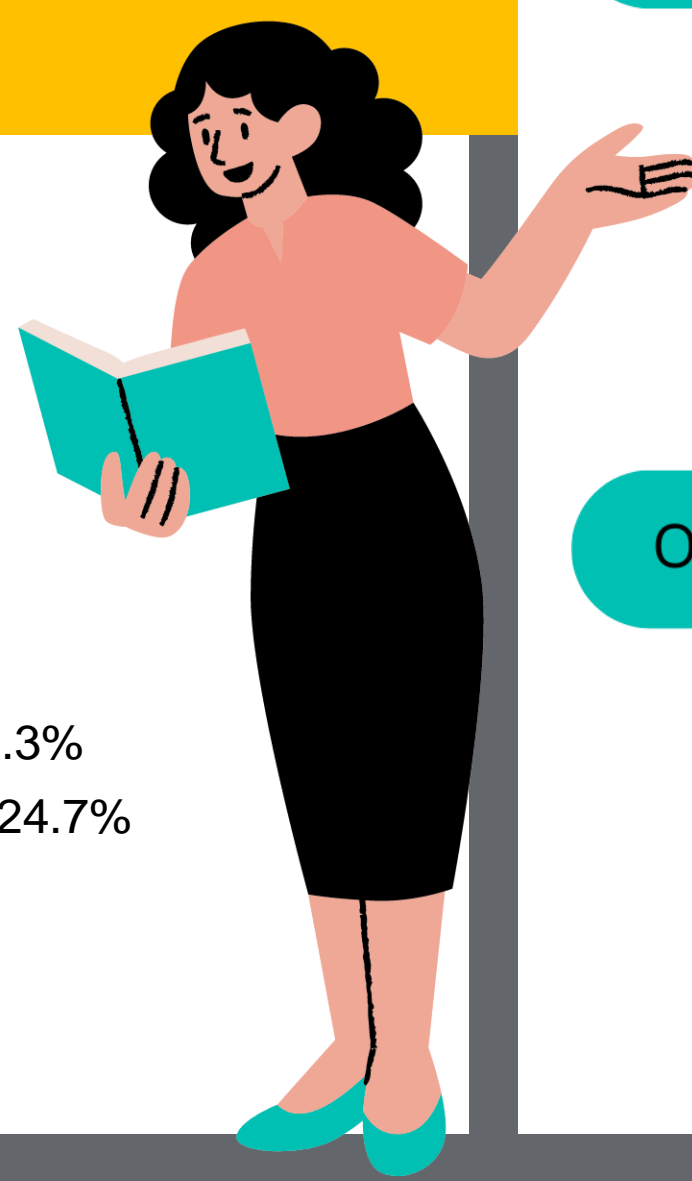
- Developed survey
- Delivered via Qualtrics
- Online, Anonymous
- Voluntary
- Responses coded using Dedoose

### Participants:

- Department of Teacher Education Students
- TEEL 350 and TEEL 360
  - 2 sections traditionally graded
  - 2 sections ungraded

### Class Size and Response Rates:

Fall 2022: 4 classes; N= 99 Response Rate: 32.3%  
 Spring 2023: 4 classes; N=89 Response Rate: 24.7%  
 Total: 8 classes; N=188 Response Rate: 28.7%



## Conclusion

**Educational practitioners can create a more student-centered and agency-driven environment, tailored to specific educational goals, by embracing the ungrading model.**

## References

- MacKay, L. (2021, Feb. 2) Ungrading. Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), Capilano University. <https://cte.capilanou.ca/2021/02/02/ungrading/>  
 OECD, (2019). Conceptual learning framework: Student agency for 2030. <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/>  
 Vaughn, M. (2021). *Student agency in the classroom*. Teachers College Press.