

An Experiment in Ungrading: “MU308 Hearing the Movies” SP2022

Motivations for ungrading:

Alfie Khan. “The Case Against Grades” (2011). <https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/case-grades/>

Schinske and Tanner, “Teaching More by Grading Less (or Differently),” *Life Sciences Education* 13, no. 2 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.cbe-14-03-0054>

Jesse Stommel. “Why I Don’t Grade” (2017). <https://www.jessestommel.com/why-i-dont-grade/>

Susan D. Blum, ed. *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*. Morgantown: West Virginia UP, 2020.

1. Liminal conditions
2. Metacognition
3. Demographics / Concerns about competence
4. Risking-taking in learning
5. Formative vs Summative

Implementation (Syllabus):

Grading:

Self-assessment: 70%

Found Object: 5%

Final paper: 25%

Much of this course will be “ungraded,” meaning that you will be evaluating your own accomplishments. You will undertake a self-assessment at the end of the semester and consider the work you’ve done and judge how successfully you’ve fulfilled the learning aims of this course—taking into consideration any extenuating circumstances (illness, poor work by group member, or other interruptions to learning, for example). You will then assign yourself a grade, which will be worth 70% of the course. I reserve the right to change this grade (up or down) as appropriate, but only in egregious cases and after meeting with you.

The final paper (25%) and the found object grade (5%) will be awarded by me.

Assignments:

I will provide written feedback for course assignments. I will assign a score, which will help inform your self-assessment.

0=not turned in

1=shows weakness of understanding (review lesson and see me for clarification)

2=satisfactory

Implementation (Reflection):

Self-Reflection Instructions:

Before you begin this task, review:

- 1) the syllabus (attached below). Look over the expectations and materials we've covered
- 2) your absences, participation, and work habits
- 3) the work you submitted and the feedback you got

Answer the following open-ended prompts. Honest assessment will not be penalized. I am more interested in the completeness and specificity of your reflection.

Implementation (Reflection):

Self-Reflection Questions:

1a. Consider and describe your personal objectives for taking this course as well as the stated learning aims of the course:

- a) To acquire a technical vocabulary and to develop an analytical eye/ear for describing the interplay between the visual and aural elements of film.
- b) To learn the historical developments of sound in film.
- c) To appreciate the aesthetics of film in a deeper and more meaningful way.

To what extent do you think you've fulfilled **each** of those objectives. Illustrate your answer using work you've done in the course (both in-class and homework, and considering the feedback you've received), and if applicable, describe instances where the course content has affected the way you watch film or TV.

1b. If you don't think you have fully achieved some or all of those aims, explain why.

Implementation:

Self-Reflection Questions:

2. Have there been any unexpected discoveries for you in this course? What sorts of things might you have never thought about or been aware of? Are there new interests that have developed out of this course? What are the skills, knowledge, or experiences you gained from this course that you think will stay with you?

3. In light of the above reflection about the work you've put in and the things you've learned, what letter grade would you give yourself? Highlight one. I will assign the numerical grade within your letter range.

A 90-100 (Achieved all or nearly all objectives successfully; applied maximal effort)

A- 85-89

B+ 80-84

B 75-79 (Achieved some objectives successfully; fair amount of effort)

etc.

Insights:

1. Honesty
2. No discernable impact on motivation
3. Lessened anxiety of being “unprepared”

"I believe in the beginning the terminology and vocabulary was extremely overwhelming. I could tell that most of the people in the class had previous knowledge on many aspects of the class which I thought would hold me back...[B]ut after receiving the [assignment] feedback I was able to learn and understand what I did not understand before. In this case, I think I was able to fully achieve the aims after feedback and more learning of what I may have missed during the initial assignment."

"[E]very day I walked into this class, I felt like everyone else was speaking a foreign language. I was afraid to participate because I constantly thought I would say something wrong, or simply sound ridiculous. It wasn't until we started talking about the historical developments of sound in film...that I felt like I wasn't as behind as I had perceived myself to be... This was honestly the hardest class that I've taken at Loyola (I'm a senior) solely for the amount of work that I had to do outside of class to reread notes and materials... I'm really proud of how much I have learned in this class. The scene analysis that I did for my final paper was one of my favorite assignments ever, and I'm really glad it is a skill I understand better now."

Insights:

4. Unofficial course feedback
5. Mediocre = B+
6. Taking notes = achievement

Future Applications?

- 1) 100% ungrading
- 2) Question of demographics
- 3) Meta-cognition as a component of graded courses