

Issues with Grades as a Basis for Student Success and Validity in Measuring Differences among Faculty and Courses

Issue 1. Statistical validity of comparing averages.

- a) Requires distribution to determine if there are significant differences between population and sample.
- b) Differences in size of units averaged impacts comparability.
- c) Assumes normal distribution but some evidence grades not so distributed.

Issue 2. Studies show grading varies significantly among disciplines and courses, challenging the validity of applying overall averages reported for LCC by Division [1, 2].

Issue 3. Studies show grading varies by instructor even in the same course, although greater variation in some disciplines than others [3, 4].

- a) Partially attributed to different assessment types (multiple choice exams versus essays) [4].
- b) These differences reflect differing approaches to what should be measured, including such issues as counting things like attendance, effort, but are legitimate [5].
- c) At least some evidence that non-tenured faculty give higher grades to receive higher evaluations rather than reflecting student performance [6]. Further, inconsistencies in such evaluations make difficult to relate to grades [7, 8].

Issue 4. Grades have strong component related to student characteristics that are beyond faculty control, so that minor variation in students enrolled in a particular class are likely to have larger impacts than faculty performance. This would be even more a concern in smaller classes.

- a) Persistent effects of high school and more generally fact that adults have already had many years experience in formal education shaping attitudes, habits, skills [9-13].

Issue 5. Some recent empirical evidence about grades suggests we may not fully understand the relationship of grades and teaching performance.

- a) In one study in which students were randomly assigned to instructors, found that grades in an initial course (as well as faculty evaluation) in introductory course were negatively related to grade in follow-on course [14].
- b) Other studies found that in classes where students perceived that grading overall would be higher, the amount of study time and effort were lowered [15, 16]. A second study found positive impacts of "fear appeals." [17]
- c) A number of studies suggest that grades do not reflect student end-of-course evaluations of teaching [18-20].
- d) First-year students may have limited skills for reporting college learning [21]

Issue 6. Persistence and retention are complex, multi-faceted constructs in which no single factor, including instructor, has an overriding contribution. As a result, no one-shot solution is a reasonable approach nor will examination of this in the absence of additional data be a meaningful approach to finding solutions [22-30].

- a) Major component includes student characteristics [31, 32].
- b) Faculty and instruction do matter but must be part of an overall solution [33-36].
- c) Context matters, but must carefully consider what evidence to use in making decisions [37-39]. This is particularly important as most studies have not included community colleges where students and organizational culture vary from 4-year institutions [40].

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