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Instructor Comments on student end-of-semester survey, and about assessment for grade assignment
Fire & Ice, Spring 2015, UNH, C. Bauer instructor

This document contains student comments from the required end-of-semester institutional survey regarding course instruction and course implementation. This opportunity for anonymous individual feedback complements the student focus group interviews. There are two categories of comments (see page heading): (1) "course content, grading, structure" from 17 students and (2) "the instructor" from 14 students. There were 21 students in the class.

These comments are being provided because they are a routine feature of college courses in the United States. The student perceptions are what they are, and I will let their responses about the course and the instructor stand without comment, except for the concern about grading. Students did not receive a specific quantitative estimate from me about what their grade would be before completing this survey.

For visitors unfamiliar with the U.S. system, it is common for grades to consist of several components, each of which is evaluated on its own, throughout the class term. (See the next page for what those components were intended to be. See the Syllabus to see the weighting percentages.) During the *Fire & Ice* course, it was necessary to adjust the grade components (see next page) to adjust for snow cancellations and assignments that did not work out as intended. In the end, about three quarters of the students earned grades in the A/A minus range, and the remainder earned B plus, B, or B minus. The grade components in the Syllabus were heavily weighted toward encouraging class attendance and completing assignments, both important to help students construct knowledge. Given that this group of students was very conscientious (most were in the honors program), these high grades reflect that work commitment.

The concerns in their comments relate to the timeliness of evaluative feedback. Although I provided feedback on each assignment, I did not couple that with "a grade estimate" except for exams. The uncertainty here was exacerbated because I did not maintain grade records in the university Course Management System. Posting results to that database was lower in priority than was getting the next class ready to go. Thus, students were legitimately unable to estimate their grade, and that caused some anxiety. I would address these concerns if the course were to be offered again. I appreciate the fact that students to a large extent were able to segregate their concerns about the grading from their perceptions of the pedagogy and their learning.

Given the purpose of this project (creating a demonstration site for how to support knowledge construction), I will leave it to other visitors to consider how they might improve the mechanics of formative and summative assessment for a course of this type.

Christopher F. Bauer, Principal Investigator

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Grade Component	Used?	Number of chances	Comments
Attendance & participation	yes	27	Students rarely missed class.
Group notes from class	yes	22	Team reports, generally scored for completion and intellectual investment on a 3 point scale.
Group products at class	yes	12	Includes poster production, generally scored for completion and intellectual investment on a 5 point scale.
Individual reading notes	no	7	Stopped after a few weeks. It was intended to incentivize doing the reading and being prepared for class. I discovered this was not an issue for these honors students. All were being thorough about reading and writing. They were often writing in bound notebooks (not part of Fire & Ice records). It was awkward to collect these because it interfered with their personal study routines. Also, I was unable to review and provide meaningful feedback in a timely manner because of my own schedule.
Written reflections or other Assignments	yes	11	Standing weekly assignment, or assignments given by graduate interns for their class day.
Individual project poster	yes	1	
Individual project written paper	no		Not done. Expectation was unreasonable given the timing left in semester. I wanted them to focus on the poster, which was a public, on-your-feet representation of understanding, rather than a private, studied polished manuscript written for me alone.
Group/individual challenges (i.e. tests)	yes		First test (in class, essay) was not a happy outcome for some and came later in semester than I intended. Students had chance to rewrite several of their poorest responses. Second test was a take-home so they could have time to formulate responses to application questions from their notes (rather than be limited by recall).
Cooperation points	yes		No one lost any points.
Collaboration points (bonus)	yes		Students awarded each other 8 to 20 points (max 20). I monitored and adjusted their working groups through the semester every few class days to allow everyone to work with everyone else multiple times.
Surveys and interviews	yes		Part of course assessment

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Please write below any comments or suggestions related to course content, grading, or structure.

A

- The Questions on the tests were extremely subjective. You would remove what appeared to be an indiscriminate amount of points, and then put comments such as: " while true, not what I was looking for" or " the answer was not gritty enough". With such subjectivity, I fail to see how the tests could have been graded fairly. I would wager that if you were to regrade an exact copy of either of my tests, you could not reproduce a similar grade. I enjoyed the class. I thought that it was very educational. I learned alot, but my guess is that my grade will not reflect that.
- I found the course content very interesting and engaging. The structure of the course was also very unique and beneficial. This class was very different than any other class I've taken. The information was presented effectively through group discussion and this interaction allowed a higher level of understanding to be achieved. The grading was slightly confusing and I would've liked to have been able to see my current grade after each assignment or a regular update. Overall, this was one of the best classes I've taken thus far.
- This course structure cannot really be rated based on these questions about objectives because it was more about exploration and discussion. I was never really sure what the objectives were but that doesn't make this course any less well-structured than an objective-based lecture style course.
- The grading system was really bad in my opinion. We didn't know any grades even by the last week of class because the teacher himself did not have a clear system to evaluate our scores. This was very aggrevating as a student because you could not keep tabs on how you were doing in the class. I thought the test were very random questions especially when the last one had a question about a radiator. I answered the question regarding heat like it asked but was told it need a more mechanisitic view which I would have given if it was a class about mechanics maybe. I also thought the question on the first test referring to orgnic chemistry was unfair because we very briefly touched upon the structures so it was kind of hard to work through an answer. That's just to name a few questions. I was told this class was for students who didn't necessarily have a background in chemistry, but I could not diagree with this statement from the syllabus any more. The poster session in my opinion could have been more well organized. I felt like it was very scattered at times and consistency of the average amount of people who saw everyones poster could have been monitored by having people rotate in a sturctured manner. Sometimes I also felt the readings weren't so much irrelevant but kind of random and like too much was trying to be tied together, especially when we would barely spend time discussing some readings if any time at all. Some readings took quite some time, especially the ones that were hard to read do to misformed letters and weirdly structured sentences due to the time the were written in. Although the class was alright and always hands on, I would not take it again after going through it.
- One of the most unique classes I have ever taken, the material was difficult but it was manageable. I thought this was a great class.
- The point system was a bit confusing and for most of the course I wasn't really sure what grade to expect.
- Thought the course was pretty interesting, wish we could have learned more. Hands on stuff was very effective in solidifying my understanding. The only downfall was the not being sure on what my grade was until the end. Also a lot more history than I would have liked.
- I know this is the first time this course has run, but I have been continuously frustrated by it. Throughout the first half of the semester, the instructor did not provide feedback on whether or not we were correct in our conclusions and thoughts regarding experimental work until the last 2 classes before our first test. Yes, this is an inquiry course, but this is not effective. If students had been mistaken, they now only had a few days to figure out where they were wrong. The synthesis of information should be incorporated more frequently into discussions. Grading wasn't really described and I found feedback lacking. I did not know what I was missing in my responses on test questions that did not receive full credit. Particularly when the grad assistant's graded reflections, I thought the grading was unreasonable when compared with the lack of feedback and the format of the questions presented. Furthermore, it is not appropriate to wait until the second to last week of classes to present an estimation of our final grades. I recommend that in the future the instructor use blackboard more fully. For example, we should have been submitting our assignments on blackboard and receiving feedback and grades on blackboard. This way, we would not have to worry about whether the instructor received assignments we turned in and there would be less confusion about grading. I really do want this class to succeed because the experiments and exploratory nature of the learning is fun, but I wish more had been done to reduce the anxiety and ambiguity of certain things (such as grading). As student with a difficult course load and busy schedule, I definitely appreciate the opportunity to partake in hands-on activities in a science course without an additional lab component.
- The objectives should be more clear and grades should be given back to students in a timely manner so they know where they stand and need to improve.
- The course veered off from the original syllabus a lot. I understand the snow days complicated things, but the instructor should have created a new plan for students. Students were in the dark for just about the whole semester in terms of their grade and

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where they stand. I enjoyed the structure of the class (groups, discussion-based, etc). Even though I do not enjoy science, I looked forward to this class and didn't find myself watching the clock waiting for it to end.

- Grading needs to be clearer, or explained better.
- The grading rubric was put in the syllabus, but blackboard was very rarely updated. This meant I didn't know my grade until the last week of school. One of my favorite classes I've taken this semester. I really enjoyed the structure of class. It was nice to have a change from usual classroom settings.
- course content was relating to heat. all tied back to this main component. grading was very unclear, did not follow syllabus. syllabus was not updated at all to tell us accurate grading or our grade currently. I asked for my grade and was told he couldn't give me one. when he gave other people in the class a grade, i did not receive one due to excused absences. however, i submitted all of my work when the rest of the class did. the class lacked structure. too much busy work.
- I did not have many complaints about course content, grading, or structure. I know that you were adjusting to things on the fly, and that teaching this course was a new experience, so it is understandable that things such as grading scales, course content, and structure were all fluid throughout the course. To me, grading was fair, and I felt like I was rewarded appropriately grade-wise for the work I put into class and the work I put into on my tests. Now that you have taught the course, I think if you taught it again you would have a better understanding of all of these things. I guess my only real complaint is we didn't get a more defined "road-map" on the syllabus as to the things we would be learning, and that is the only thing I would change.
- Grading structure was not very clear during semester
- This course was very unique and I did learn a lot. However, I was not a fan of the structure. At times I felt as though I was in a middle school class rather than a college course. I realize that assigned seating, checking reading notes, and having hand signals for "quiet" all had a purpose, but it seemed out of place in a college classroom. In addition, the grading system was not appropriate. None of the grades were entered into Blackboard and we got a "progress report" two weeks before the semester ended. Even with the total number of points given to us, there was no clear scale to identify ia letter grade. This seems unfair to students.
- I feel as though this course met the inquiry course criteria because it was very much based on group work, discussions, asking questions, and searching for answers. I do wish the course agenda was laid out more clearly so that we knew in what direction we were heading. I feel as though I came into class many days not necessarily knowing what we were going to do, which prevented me from being able to connect the dots from where we had gone and where we were headed. The class was largely based on our own understanding of the material we were covering; instead of being lectured to, we were figuring things out for ourselves. While I do think this was beneficial, I constantly felt like I was behind compared to my peers because I lacked a strong science background and had difficulty grasping some concepts. When it came time for the first test, I think this really showed. I had gained my own understanding from our activities, but I struggled to perform well on the test because I did not understand the concepts enough to apply them to different situations. Had we been given more information from Professor Bauer, or even had a textbook to read, I could have had a better idea of what he wanted us to understand. Once the status reports had been implemented, I think this helped to get everyone caught up to speed. As far as grading is concerned, I wish we had been informed earlier about how we were doing. Being honors students, grades are valued, and we did not have a grade benchmark until there were limited assignments remaining. When we received grade updates, I was disappointed with my grade, but there were only a handful of opportunities to bring it up, making it very difficult to obtain the grade I wanted. Had I been informed earlier, I could have identified the areas where I was lacking, and improve them. Knowing two weeks before classes ended did not help me to do this. Overall, I had a positive experience in the class and felt as though I learned a lot, not only about heat, but also about working with teams, and about myself. This class allowed me to gain experience presenting, which is something I can always use practice with. Although there are a few areas that I wish went differently in the course, I am taking a way a lot. It was a nice change to not be lectured to for eighty minutes and to get to know my peers.

Please write below any comments or suggestions related to the instructor of this course.

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- Professor Bauer did an excellent job designing the class structure to allow us to work through problems and come to our own understanding (supported by his direction) allowing us to better understand the material. It definitely took the role of an inquiry class as it wasn't lecture based at all and encourages students to ask questions and "dig" deeper into the problems. Professor Bauer was always open to questions and additional help via email. He encouraged questions of any level without making anyone feel as though it was "a dumb question". Very glad that I had the chance to take a class with Professor Bauer.
- Always encouraged discussion and inquiry. Some confusion when presenting actual concepts but that wasn't really what this course was about.
- Before creating a class(because I know this was almost like a trial run) have a more definite structure and follow the syllabus more with the coursework. I think doing this would have shown better results for the overall video/documentary (although you may have gotten the results you needed). I'm not complaining that some of the assignments were not completed but it is helpful to have a syllabus because it works as a guideline of what to expect and it is not helpful when it is misleading. The grading system was my biggest concern so that's the main thing I wish was more clear in this class.
- I am leaving this class genuinely smarter. I have learned so much from this class. This class should be offered every semester.
- none
- I Professor Bauer is passionate about the course. When he explains concepts, it is engaging and easy to understand.
- His enthusiasm was evident and it was obvious how passionate he was about this material. He presented the material in a way that assumed people had a lot more knowledge on the subject than they may have necessarily had. Considering this is meant for non science majors I think more information on basic ideas and theories should have been provided for better understanding. Oftentimes when asked he had no idea how anyone was doing in the class and that could be really frustrating considering we are all honors students.
- The instructor is a great professor and really knows his stuff. He was very patient with us, as most of us have little to no science background. I never felt stressed or pressured because I am not comfortable with science. However, I would suggest keeping students in-the-know about their grades and reworking the syllabus if it gets off track - especially with honors students!
- Continue to encourage student thinking, but after the thinking has been done leave the student with a definite answer, if there is one, and a clearer understanding.
- Professor Bauer was incredibly passionate and knowledgeable about this subject. He made me really interested in learning
- the instructor did not teach or lecture. why am i paying when he is not lecturing? takes inquiry to the extreme. we can't learn content solely from ourselves. when he was asked questions by students to clarify information, he did not answer the question, and instructed TAs to do the same. he did not provide guidance if students were concluding the wrong information in the groups. how can students do well on an exam if they do not understand the content? we were assigned groups like we were in middle school. very unclear about expectations.
- I don't have much new to say here because of what has already been captured on video in the focus-group sessions. I really enjoyed the class and I think a hands on environment is really the best way to learn science. You were fair and you were adaptable which was really important for a class structured that way that this one was. My only real complaint is that I wish we had better study guide's for the test, or that next time you teach this course you make both tests take home tests. Because this course focuses primarily on self-discovery, I think it is important for us to be able to take the time to think out and then carefully write out ideas and not rush through it during one class period.
- Professor Bauer is very enthusiastic about the subject matter and would like us all to learn about it, but I believe he took the idea of an inquiry course to new level. I would have appreciated being lectured on some background material, or be able to ask the GAs or Professor Bauer for clarification.
- I enjoyed this class with Professor Bauer. I really appreciated his willingness to help us near the end of the semester; he would tell us if we were wrong, rather than let us work through things. I think it was beneficial to work things through with our teams, but at times we would talk ourselves in circles, and leave without resolving an issue, which would lead to a misunderstanding or a lack of clarity. I wish I could have walked away from some experiments knowing what was going on, rather than guessing based on my own understanding. I feel as though Professor Bauer is a very knowledgeable and interesting person, and I wish he was able to share that with us a little more, either through lectures or some other method.