The Un-Final

A new type of final is gaining traction

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Finals season is here. As students prepare for studying, stress, and more studying, a new type of final has emerged; the un-final.

Categorized by a deviation away from the traditional essay or exam format, un-finals are often more abstract. Instead of a purely research based or memorization based final, the un-final has students create something more creative.

But why do some professors prefer these types of finals over others?

Professor Julia Rodriguez, a professor of history, is implementing this un-final for the first time in her Human Rights and Social Justice in Latin America class. She is offering her students the choice of doing a standard research paper, or something different that links to what they have learned in class. While not all of the students have opted for the more creative choice, she has students who have embraced it wholeheartedly, with one writing a song and another creating a digital poster.

According to Rodriguez, students do still have to have some sort of writing component to the project.

“There is the other piece though, which is documentation,” she said. “They have to justify the project.”

Rodriguez chose to include the more creative option for a myriad of reasons, including the rise of AI, specifically Chat GPT, and all of the new issues with plagiarism it has caused. She also said that a more creative final might help balance the stressful workload, allow students to have a break from standard exams and essays, and allow more creative students to shine.

Although Professor Rodriguez has added this option for her class, she stresses that this is not something that is going to completely get rid of the standard essay or exam final.

“This isn't a replacement, it's just putting flexibility in the system,” she said.

Professor Amy Boylan, a professor in the Italian Studies department, is also doing an un-final this year.

For her introduction level Italian course, Professor Boyland described a brochure project instead of a standard exam. For her Italian film class, she is having students create a director’s commentary video for a film they studied in class.

As for why she decided to do an un-final this year, Professor Boylan also brought up concerns about Chat GPT and plagiarism. Beyond that, she said final exams in general are not super productive for language classes.

“Historically, it (final exams) has been a stressful time,” she said, “(students) just tend to not do super well.”

To Professor Boylan, a more creative project allows her students to display their knowledge and skills in a more fun way, taking some stress off of finals week and allowing them to have a little fun. What's more, it makes grading for her much more enjoyable.

“It allows me to enjoy reading, and allows the students to engage with the subject matter in a deeper way,” she said.
While some professors are implementing this new un-final option, it is still a relatively new style of finals in the university system. Some academic articles have garnered attention for their analysis of this new phenomenon. Whatever the case, some UNH students may look forward to a changing finals system.