Reducing Grade Insecurity: Specifications Grading Case Studies

A Roundtable Session
What is Specs Grading?

- An alternative form of assessment directly linked to the learning outcomes of a course
- Grades are determined by how many learning outcomes a student achieves at satisfactory level

For example:

There are four learning outcomes in your course.

- Achieving all four of them satisfactorily earns the student an A grade.
- Achieving three of them satisfactorily earns the student a B grade.
- Achieving two of them satisfactorily earns the student a C grade.
- Achieving one of them satisfactorily earns the student a D grade.
Specs Grading Contd.

- All assignments are pass/fail, credit/no credit
- Three main steps to set up Specs Grading course:
  - Identify learning outcomes and assignments (how to measure them)
  - Set specs for assignments
  - Add flexibility and second chances
Questions

● What motivated you to adopt specs grading in your teaching?

● What challenges have arisen (institutional, practical, personal) as you have implemented specs grading?

● What benefits have you seen as a result of implementing specs grading?

● Please share an example of a specs grading assignment, bundle, or syllabus you have created.
Specs Grading for a Hispanic Linguistics Assignment: A Case Study
Motivation

Benefits

- Upholds high academic standards
- Reflects student learning outcomes
- Motivates students to learn and excel
- Encourages goal setting
- Mimics real world
- Makes students feel responsible for their grades
- Minimizes conflict between faculty and students
- Gives students feedback they will use

Challenges

- Some students complain of stress
- Some students have difficulty setting their own goals
- Some students need more help understanding the grading system
- The teacher needs to invest time to set up course in advance
Example

The Meaningful Linguistics Project (*aka* Final Group Project and Presentation for Introduction to Hispanic Linguistics undergraduate course)

Instructions:

- The final group project and presentation is an all or nothing assignment that is worth 10% of your final grade.
- The final group project and presentation should reflect at least 4 of the 5 learning outcomes of the course.
- The specifications for the final group project and presentation will be created together in class and then adapted to every group project as needed.
- The final group project and presentation should be meaningful to you.
Learning outcomes from the syllabus

“By the end of this course the student should be able to:

● identify the different areas of study within Hispanic linguistics;
● demonstrate a familiarity and understanding of the basic concepts in phonetics, phonology, morphology, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics;
● analyze a simple set of linguistic data in the above areas, speculate, and draw plausible conclusions;
● read short linguistic texts and summarize the main ideas;
● and discuss the importance of language study in the context of current world issues.”
Specs for Final Project

See HO titled:

Specifications for Final Group Project

Page 1

Note: Underlined text was added by students

Specs for Final Presentation

See HO titled:

Specifications for Final Group Presentation

Page 2

Note: Underlined text was added by students
Overall Results and Impressions

- 4 of 5 groups received credit (a full 10%) on the final group project and presentation
  - 1 project did not meet expectations
  - 2 projects exceeded expectations
  - 2 projects met expectations
“I loved that we got to design our own projects and pick what we were interested in. I also enjoyed the all-or-nothing format and how we were rewarded for our hard work throughout the last few weeks.”

“The all or nothing is scary but I think it works for the situation.”

“I think everything went very well. The amount of time we had in class to practice was great and making up our own rubrics was great.”

“I think that the deadlines helped to keep our group on track and made the project easy to complete and organize. It was also nice knowing what we needed to include.”