5 Ways to Build e-Learner Confidence with Low-Stakes Grading

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Presented by:
Scott Warnock, Ph.D.

Scott Warnock, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum at Drexel University. He is the author of Teaching Writing Online: How and Why, and he has contributed chapters to a number of anthologies and published his work in many academic journals. He is co-chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction.

Need tech help?
Please visit: www.magnapubs.com/about/customer_service.html#Web_Seminars
or call Customer Service at (800) 433-0499 ext. 2

© 2012 Magna Publications Inc.
The information contained in this online seminar is for professional development purposes but does not substitute for legal advice. Specific legal advice should be discussed with a professional attorney.

To make this program available to all your faculty and staff, contact Magna’s Customer Service department at 1-800-433-0499 ext. 2 and ask about our Campus Access License.
Thank you for participating in today’s program.

Shouldn’t You Be Reading Faculty Focus?

Faculty Focus is an online resource dedicated to effective teaching strategies for creating a better learning environment — both face-to-face and online.

Start your FREE subscription to Faculty Focus today and get complete access to all of our articles, plus our growing library of special reports on such topics as:

• Building student engagement
• Increasing online student retention
• Designing effective writing assignments
• Teaching large classes
• Promoting academic integrity

If you’re interested in staying current on what works, and what doesn’t, when it comes to teaching, learning, and leading in higher education today, you won’t want to miss a single issue.

Join our nearly 50,000 subscribers, and sign up for this free e-newsletter.

Sign up at www.facultyfocus.com

Join us in the future for our other informative online seminars:

• June 19, 2012: Engage Online Students with Targeted Feedback

Please visit www.magnapubs.com for a complete list of Magna Online Seminars.

Magna Corporate Overview

Magna has been a valued knowledge and information resource within the higher education community for more than 30 years.

We publish five national newsletters:

• The Teaching Professor
• Academic Leader
• Recruitment & Retention in Higher Education
• Distance Education Report
• Online Classroom

In addition, we produce student leadership and faculty development conferences, numerous online seminars, and online courses.

Additional information about Magna is available at www.magnapubs.com.
Magna Commons is a unique new subscription service that brings you the very best of our acclaimed online seminars, at a fraction of what you might expect to pay. Through Magna Commons, your faculty and administrators gain instant, on-demand access to more than 100 presentations on topics including:

**For faculty**
- Grading & feedback
- Syllabus & course design
- Student engagement
- Instructional vitality
- Academic integrity
- Technology in face-to-face and online courses

**For administrators (traditional and online)**
- Managing faculty
- Strategy, policy & budgets
- Leadership
- Program assessment
- Technology – in online and face-to-face courses

Each seminar is presented by one of the most respected names in higher education. And each comes with a host of tools to support learning, including handouts, supplemental materials, a facilitator’s discussion guide and full transcripts.

**Subscribe now!**
Don’t miss this chance to let your entire institution access some of the finest professional-development materials available ... at a simply unbeatable price. Subscribe to Magna Commons today!

**Two ways to order —**
Phone: 800-433-0499 Ext. 2
Online: www.magnacommons.com
Plan
5 methods/techniques for FLS grading
1. Informal writing
2. Technology-facilitated informal writing
3. Rubrics
4. Quizzes
5. Learning technologies for evaluation, response, record-keeping

A culture of assessment/feedback

Plan
• “Culture of assessment/feedback”
• Frequent, low-stakes (FLS) grading
  – Fosters teacher-student communication
  – Develops student confidence
  – Provides more transparent course assessment

Our presenter:
Scott Warnock
Associate Professor of English
Drexel University

Sponsored by:
ONLINE CLASSROOM
A culture of assessment/feedback

What do you think?: Interpreting end-of-course evaluations

Have you ever received a bad/negative comment on your end-of-course evaluations?

Using the chat, write the word or phrase that describes how you felt.
What do you think?

How could that feedback have been more helpful?

Frequent, low-stakes (FLS) grading

• Many grades: Individual grade doesn’t mean much
• Creates dialogue: How am I doing?
• Builds confidence: Many opportunities to succeed
• Increases motivation: Fits students’ expectations of assessment

Assessment/feedback everywhere

• Our assessment-based culture
• Students crave feedback
  – They want to know how they’re doing
  – Grade literature is outdated
• Many fields use evaluation/assessment to develop dialogue & build confidence

Culture of grading in school

• Often infrequent, high-stakes
• Grading to “deploy power” or as “pedagogical whip” (Filene)
• Curves pit students against each other, fostering strategic rather than deep learning (Bain)
• Grade inflation (Rojstaczer and Healy)
• Cheating

Culture of grading in school

Study of high-stakes science testing:
“... the examinations discouraged teachers from using strategies which promoted enquiry and active student learning [...] this impoverishment affected the language of classroom discourse” (Wideen et al.)

Culture of grading in school

“We typically think of assessment as an index of school success rather than as the cause of that success” (Chappuis and Stiggins)
Online: Communication and motivation are keys

• Not privileging onsite teacher-student interactions...
• Meaningful communication: Being present
  —Clear grade data
• Motivation, overcoming procrastination (Schrum & Hong [2002])

Allergic to grades?

• Much "classic" grade literature predates culture of assessment & learning technologies
• In an ideal teaching world...
  —It’s all formative, perhaps even 1-on-1
  —Maybe no grades at all
• How do we administer grades well?

FLS grading

• Assessment can be a feedback tool focused on learning (Stiggins)
• Their doing the work is the important part, not our evaluation
  —Writing across curriculum-type approaches (Fulwiler and Young)
• Learning technologies are a big asset
• Rubrics demystify grading (Arter and McTighe)

A different conception of the function of grading

• FLS grading has a summative micro structure
  —But overall structure is formative
• Intellectual risk
• Discouraging plagiarism/cheating

A different conception of the function of grading

• Discourse between you & students as part of your response strategy
  —Still have major assignments
  —Series of low grades: Intervention
  —FLS grading can result in less work

My experiences: Teaching writing online

• Questions about these courses
  —Integrity, identity
  —Maximizing online writing environment
  —Student communications with me
• Lots of work, lots of grades
  —Simple message board post scales
  —Quizzes
  —Other assignments: Graded simply
  —Mostly conceptual rubrics
• Taking the course for someone else?
New course evaluation structure
Your course might be:
– 3 big papers: 25% each
– Exam: 25%
– 2 exams: 35% each
– Final paper: 30%

With FLS grading:
– 3 big papers: 20% each
– Exam: 10%
– Informal work: 20%
– Quizzes: 10%
– 2 exams: 20% each
– Weekly quizzes: 25%
– 4 short response papers (or posts): 20%
– Final paper: 15%

Online, informal work can be 40%

Methods: Informal writing

• Frequent short writing assignments
• WAC philosophy: What are you trying to accomplish?

Methods: Informal writing

• Free-writes
• End-of-unit notes on most important or confusing points
• Journals (structured, open-ended, blogs, Wikis)
• Annotations of calculations, charts
• Metacognition: Reasoning, thinking, writing processes
• Message boards...

Technology-mediated informal writing

• Simplifies logistics
  – Eases submissions, grading
• Facilitates writing community
• Eases response
  – Rubric creation tools: Rubistar, Waypoint
  – Commenting tools: 11 Trees, GradeMark

Describe clear criteria:
What do you want (and why)?

Rules for “primary” posts:
– Essays. Posts should reflect reasoned thought … beyond a normal email or text…
– Detailed. “Primary” posts at least 125 words…
– Semiformal. Some formality: spell-checked, organized, etc…
– Referenced. Look to build your argument with references…

(Complete guidelines at onlinewritingteacher.blogspot.com)

Message boards

• Versatile asynchronous tool
  – Dialogic
  – “Publishing” student ideas material
  – Writing to multiple audiences
• Community norms change student behavior
• Posts become more sophisticated
• Straightforward grading
• Only imagination limits assignments
Sample weekly thread choices

Week 1
- Contemporary % (75 Messages)
- Newproduct % (75 Messages)
- Research % (75 Messages)
- Popular % (75 Messages)
- Rubrics % (75 Messages)
- Performance % (75 Messages)
- Participation % (75 Messages)
- What do you think % (75 Messages)

Week 2
- Contemporary % (75 Messages)
- Newproduct % (75 Messages)
- Research % (75 Messages)
- Popular % (75 Messages)
- Rubrics % (75 Messages)
- Performance % (75 Messages)
- Participation % (75 Messages)
- What do you think % (75 Messages)

Sample topic/thread

What do you think: Rubric for students?
If students were to provide you with feedback midway through the term, what categories in that “rubric” would be helpful?

Rubrics
- Popular topic
- Provide structure for response
- Demystify grading
  - Student-created rubrics

Quick rubric creation
- What do you want the assignment to accomplish?
  - Based on course/unit/class goals
  - Don’t outsmart yourself
- Simple things to assess
  - One or two clear criteria
  - Relevant to assignment
  - Content-oriented & specific
  - What don’t you want to worry about?

Quick rubric creation
- Performance levels
  - Four or five levels of performance
- Rate/score range of responses: Excellent, good, etc.
- What do you say to examples of a range of student responses?
- Participation, length aren’t great criteria, but they’re something
Rubric for brief, informal response writing

1. Demonstrate understanding of the chapter (1-5 scale)?
2. Quality of writing (1-5 scale) (judged loosely, maybe your readerly response)

Simple, focused criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Full details, major errors, significant off-topic, unengaged/“no”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Minor errors, some detail, on-topic, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good effort, needs some improvement, still on-topic, engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Excellent writing, only minor flaws, very on-topic, engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exceptional writing, perfect, very on-topic, engaged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Applying rubrics

- Share rubric with students, but these can be applied conceptually as you work through student materials
- I give 60 grades some terms; a lot of grades may be different for you

Methods: Quizzes

- Not a pedagogical stick (Warnock)
- Simple quizzes – easy to create, take, and grade
- Questions capturing specific objectives
- Automated grading

My reading quizzes

- Purpose
  - I just want them to read
  - Online they help create a sense of pacing & predictability
- Five questions
- Short (short!) answer
- Online/on-site, less than 5 minutes
- Grading takes seconds
- No tricks!
What do you think?
Survey questions

If you wanted feedback to help you with the rest of the term, what questions would you ask students in a mid-term survey?

Feedback and record-keeping

• How do I do this without breaking my back?
• Simple scale
  – 1 to 3, 1 to 5, 1 to 10 scale
  – √+, √, √-
• Recorded, displayed
  – Spreadsheet, CMS, hard-copy gradebook
• Peer grading?

What do you think?: Feedback and record-keeping

What is your favorite method of keeping grade records and/or of sharing that information with students?

Time repayment

Goal is to create grade-centric feedback

Students do not have to reach out to you about class performance...

...and when there are questions, the conversation is more focused than, “How am I doing in this class?”
Conclusions

“For better or worse, grades matter; the challenge is how to make them work for your purposes” (Filene)

Demystifying course assessment, especially for online students: Help students reach their course goals

Conclusions

FLS can result in less work/stress for teachers, who are pressured with high-stakes grading

How can you deploy an FLS approach that works for you to create a cycle of grades?

Thank you for the conversation

Scott Warnock
sjwarnock@drexel.edu

We’d like to know what you think!

Our evaluation form is located here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/42512