

Imagining a CUNY without Grades Transcript

Saad Shuaib: Ungrading gives you room to experiment, and it lets you learn. It gives you the freedom to learn and not have to be stressed out on the numbers game.

Gisele Regatao: Welcome to “Imagining a CUNY Without Grades,” the podcast. We are four CUNY professors who are part of a program called Transformative Learning in the Humanities. This is basically an initiative that discusses some innovative forms of teaching centered on students. This semester we’ve been practicing ungrading, and we decided to ask our students what they thought of it. First we’re going to introduce ourselves.

Casandra Silva Sibilin: Welcome. My name is Cassandra Silva Sibilin, and I am a lecturer of philosophy in the department of History, Philosophy, and Anthropology at York College, CUNY. The main courses I teach are philosophy major issues and ideas in education and western civilization. I have students today from both of those areas. From my philosophy of education classes, the students joining us are Keijana Greene, Latanya Hewitt and Okelia Holder. And from my western civilization classes, we have Ebonique Brown, Joelle Green, Chiann Matos, Daisha Suggs, and Lisbeth Tatis.

Rebecca Salois (she/her): And I'm Rebecca Salois. I'm an adjunct assistant professor in the Black and Latino Studies department at Baruch College. I also teach in the Modern Languages and Comparative Literature department and the English department. I have some students here with me today. I have Katherine Coello and Annalise Harvey from my Great Works of Literature, part one class. I have Abigail Garcia Vasquez from my Latin America: an institutional and cultural survey class and Vibodha Galage-Donna and Maya Demchak-Gottlieb from my People of New York class.

Gisele Regatao: Hi everyone. I’m Gisele Regatao. I am a professor of Journalism at Baruch College. I teach podcasting, journalistic fiction, and culture reporting. And I'm very happy that I have five students here. From my culture reporting class, I have Radwa Gomaa, May Khin, Alison Namsaran. And from my fiction podcasting class, I have Anesa Feratovic and Saad Shuaib. Welcome.

Michael Greer (she/her): And my name is Michael Greer, and I’m doing my PhD at the Graduate Center in Philosophy. I'm a graduate teaching fellow at Brooklyn College. My pronouns are she/her, and I teach intro to philosophy and ethics classes, but unfortunately, none of my students could make it today.

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Casandra Silva Sibilin: In this section, we asked students for their first reactions on the topic of grading and then went deeper into the function that grades have played in their own lives. This is something students have thought a lot about and have so many perspectives to share, but it’s rare for them to get the opportunity to talk about it in a forum like this with both students and professors. There are so many great things here to reflect on, and, as you’ll see, no one answer. Enjoy.

Cassandra Silva Sibilin: We're going to get the conversation going with one question, for all of you, whatever first comes to mind. So here is the question: when you think about grading, what one word comes to mind?

Ebonique Brown: nervous.

Katherine Coello: I would say effort.

Okelia Holder: I would say evaluation.

Lisbeth Tatis: Stress.

Keijana Greene: same stress.

Latanya Hewitt: I would say potential.

Annaleise Harvey: I would say anxiety.

Joelle Green: I agree, I feel anxiety too when you said grading so that's yeah anxiety.

MAYA DEMCHAK-GOTTLIEB: I would say judgment.

Saad Shuaib: ooh judgment that's the word I was looking for, yes, I agree.

Okelia Holder: Nervous

Alison Namsaran: The word I would pick is procrastination.

Anesa Feratovic: I would pick competition.

Cassandra Silva Sibilin: So many words there. Would anyone like to elaborate on the word they picked a little further?

Katherine Coello: I don't mind elaborating currently. I actually pointed out that I thought of the word effort, because of the fact that I feel as though, when it comes to grades, a lot of students, including myself end up putting a lot of effort into either studying or just trying to get the best grades possible just to pass with like a higher like feeling of achievement and so all that effort does in turn leads to anxiety, stress, and all about this judgment that we're going to feel, not only from our peers, possibly our parents, and other professors as well.

Latanya Hewitt: I said potential, because I feel like even though a grade can be you know, not the best, you do have the potential to be better. You do have like, you have the way to try harder to you know get the grade up, more so. That's why it's kind of like I chose potential because it has a way to boost you up or give you like more, I'm trying to find a word, but I can't find it right now. But it gives you like, a way to like you know, get better at it. Just to like increase your grade or whatever that's why I chose that.

Lisbeth Tatis: I will say stress, because the grade that you receive honestly it really will show up the way that everything is going to happen. A little or a small percentage can either help you or you could go down in the ocean. So it is stressful to know that sometimes maybe you can study as hard as you can, and you might not get the good grade that you need or want, so it's a high stress, sometimes, the grades.

Saad Shuaib: I agree with Lisbeth but, and the reason why I agree with whoever used the word judgment specifically was because even though grading gives you structure, because the terms are made clear at the beginning of the semester when you're given a syllabus, for example. It's just that sometimes parts of grading or parts of the grading structure, some parts are given more priority to others so it's more advantageous to other types of learners or other people that can express themselves in different ways. So, and not only that, but even if you have all students thinking the same way within a classroom and you grade your class a specific way we're going to subconsciously prioritize some assignments over others, so if you want to have a class, like, for example, a professor Regatao's fiction podcasting class, I think it benefits so much from ungrading because it gives you the opportunity to learn, make mistakes, and not have to strive for perfection with every single assignment that you're going to hand in with the fear of "oh, maybe if I try this I might get a C, so let me, let me, let me go the safe route and write things the way that I know it can be written or make a podcast and in the way I know I can make it the correct way." It gives you room to experiment, and it lets you learn. It gives you the freedom to learn and not have to be stressed out on the numbers game.

Rebecca Salois (she/her): Love that. Love that. I'm gonna ask a question that, I'm curious what kind of answer you can come up with, I mean, why do you think that grades exist? Why do we even have them in the first place?

Joelle Green: That's kind of tied into how I feel about grading, because grading gives me anxiety. And that's because the grade, some classes are not open to interpretation and some courses are not open to interpretation, there are set on specific behaviors or specific facts that you're supposed to know for that course so in those courses, for example, accounting. I can understand why you need a grade because it matters. It's, you can't really make mistakes in those cases, but it just makes you feel even more anxious, so I get why it's necessary, but at the same time, for some courses it's just really stressful.

Latanya Hewitt: For me, I feel like it gives you a sense of structure like if you get what I'm saying. It gives a structure like, to me, grading gives a sense of like you know where you're at and where you're supposed to be. And like if you don't meet that like, requirement or criteria, you can either work your way up or just keep going to the bottom, so I understand, like the whole entire concept of grading. Do I

like it, no, but I understand that it gives a sense of structure, and it gives a sense of like, completion basically. So yeah.

Katherine Coello: I would say that—I'm sorry, my name is Katherine. I'm in Professor Salois's class. I would say that I think that grading exists to evaluate the students' academic readiness for the future um although, I would rather be graded, I feel like on the effort that we all put in, I feel like if our professors know that we're putting in effort, even if the grades sometimes do not reflect the— let's say for me personally I'm a terrible test taker. I can study for days and nights and do whatever I could possibly do and, and participate as much as possible in class, but when it comes to test taking I just get really nervous, and I blank out, so maybe a numerical grade might not reflect entirely on, my complete knowledge of it, but I feel like my efforts and the way I participate in class might do something differently.

Okelia Holder: My name is Okelia. I said that the purpose of grading is to have some sort of structure when evaluating a student based on their performance, their learning performance, I feel like it's very important. Especially depending on the route you decide to take in your career. For instance, if you're becoming a doctor it's very crucial to have a grade within that path, you know, you're dealing with lives, and you want to make sure you're doing your job correctly, so I feel like it is important, that's why grades exist to have some sort of structure for certain individuals.

Ebonique Brown: My name is Ebonique Brown-Gibbs and I think that grading is important, but not in all courses like, maybe not for English because it depends on how the professor looked at an assignment in regards to how it portrays to the individual who writes it. But of course in maths, or you know, sociology or psych, I think a grade is important for that purpose. Because overall, you can see where it needs to be improved, or so forth. That's what I think.

Gisele Regatao: I love how deeply you guys are thinking about this and your thoughts are really incredible. So I want this question to be a little bit more personal: what function does grading play for you. So I want you to tell us, like, is it very important to you, is this something that you try to always get better grades, or are you somebody who you're upset if you get a bad grade, like what is your personal relationship with grades?

Lisbeth Tatis: So, my name is Lisbeth Tatis, and I am from the class of Professor Sibilin and for me grading has always been something... I always thought that the meaning of grades is to assess how much you learn in the class, and how much you learn about the subject. But when I was a kid, you know, I figured out that almost all of us passed by this experience, whereas kids we were brilliant, and it became a thing, where it was competitive. Something prideful to have high grades, and through all middle school and a little bit of junior high, we experienced this of having A's and A pluses, and being in this superior, in this superior grading and always having the best of grades and once we had a probably a B minus it used to be something for me that would break me because I could only have A's because this is what the people surrounding me said that I was, I was such a brilliant student, I was an intelligent student and I, and I was always going to have these amazing grades. So when I fall a little lower than that I felt terrifically horrible

with my own self and that started building, since I was a kid and so when I started high school, especially me that I went through different schools in different countries, when I started high school here in the United States, it took me a while to understand how the system worked and for the first time in my life, I saw myself not having the best of grades, I saw myself having more Cs, more Ds, and this honestly broke me, and it made me realize how competitive and how prideful we can get and how stressful and how much stress they put into having amazing grades in kids, since we were kids. So, grades were supposedly made to evaluate how much we learned, but, for me, in all honesty, they are made just to see how much you memorized. It's not any more about learning. We don't learn anymore in school, we are just memorizing things.

Keijana Greene: This is Keijana here. And I agree with Lisbeth. For me, it was the inverse, because when I was younger before I reached high school I had terrible grades. It was almost to the point where I essentially almost got left back in the fifth grade because my grades were that terrible. And as soon as I turned 13, and I entered high school and I saw these classes that I actually liked, my grade shot up. And of course it would seem that I was just putting in more of an effort, but it was just me enjoying what I was learning and with Lisbeth mentioning that we are going to school, just to memorize things I wholeheartedly agree with that, because we're not learning anything. We didn't learn anything in high school. The classes that are supposed to teach us how to live life like how to pay taxes, how to, you know, pay bills, how to manage your own household, how to cook, how to clean. They don't have those anymore, and what is replaced is with classes that are teaching you how to memorize these 20,000 facts and how to take a test perfectly so you can get the perfect grade. So that somehow you can go to a college where you then learned about what you should have learned when you were younger.

Gisele Regatao: Wow, such interesting, very different experiences, go ahead.

Saad Shuaib: Yeah, so my name is Saad Shuaib and I take Professor Rigatao's journalism podcasting class. I feel like the function of a grade is to, it's not necessarily for the student and it's more for everybody around the student. I feel like grades do more to show how competent a teacher is or how competent an education system is and it's basically an easy way out in terms of like judging how students, how students, function in their class because you'll have sometimes have professors, or even teachers saying like even though students are getting bad grades like "Oh, you know, you try so hard and you're and you're such a good student, and this that and the third, and you know what, like maybe you can get some extra credit on the side" right? In a system where sometimes professors or teachers don't necessarily give you extra credit because you're supposed to be judged within the confines of the class right. And those confines are supposed to prove whether you understand the content or not so theoretically you shouldn't necessarily need extra credit, but extra credit is needed in a grading system because there's something wrong with the grading system. So, like, essentially I feel like when you give a grade to a student, that means you have to make a rubric and when you make a rubric and you write your syllabus around that rubric, you kind of have to have ironclad rules that every single student has to follow. Because by association, you can't have a different syllabus for different students, you can't have a different rubric for different students. That's just going to be unfair. So it kind of makes— it gives it that structure, but when you give it that structure you sometimes give advantages to particular students that

others don't have and then you'll kind of have students that are otherwise really good at you know what they do or in— or put effort in a class have worse grades than people that put in the same effort. I'll give you a perfect example. I actually had to drop Japanese this semester because, even though I was able to learn, for example, expressions and how to audibly say things, I wasn't good at writing the characters. Right? Why? Because baked into the syllabus or baked into the grading rubric was “hey for our tests only 10% is going to be auditory and talking and the other like let's say 50, you know 25 or 35% is going to be actually writing it down.” That doesn't necessarily mean that I don't know how to speak the language, I do. And I'm pretty sure that people that learn Japanese are going to speak more than they are going to write more, right? But that's just unfortunately an effect that grading has and if I know that I'm going to get a bad grade anyway in that class, what's the incentive for me to keep on taking it. I might as well drop it right? So there's a lot, a lot of moving parts to the whole like grading thing.

Gisele Regatao: Great points, Saad. I'm sorry you dropped that class, but I want the next podcast in Japanese. We're going to move to the next question.

Michael Greer (she/her): So, I heard a lot of you guys say, things like you think the function grading should play is it that should give you structure, feedback, motivation. It should evaluate knowledge, those are kind of positive things that grades are supposed to get you. Can I ask you whether you think we need our traditional grading structure on the A to F scale to get those things, or can we have structure, feedback, motivation, evaluation of knowledge, without the A to F grading scale?

Latanya Hewitt: Hi, I'm Latanya from Professor Sibilin's class. I think we can't. Mainly, because with the A to F structure it kind of gives, kinda like what I said before, it gives structure, it gives stability, it gives an idea of where you're at, and where you're supposed to be. And kind of like without that that's where procrastination kicks in and that's where people start to— that want to like, have any motivation, or have any willpower to do anything, because if they see— if they don't see where that, if they just let things like you know, stay where they're at, they're going to get lackluster. They're going to get— they're going to do more so procrastination, stuff like that, so I feel like with the grade structure, it gives people an idea of where they're at and where they're supposed to be going rather than just like not having a grade system at all or different one.

Radwa Goma: Hi, my name is Radwa, I'm in Professor Regatao's culture recording class. I also think you can't genuinely motivate students with an A to F system— grading system because, no matter what happens, if they get a bad grade and there's a clear, structured syllabus or grade format that they have to follow as soon as they see the grade and they know that they're not meeting the required grades or the standards, they're not going to care about what they're learning. Or what information they're actually understanding, it's just going to be all about improving the grade and making sure they get that grade up. It doesn't matter how, so I feel like it would be much better if it's more, like feedback and like criticism, but not in like, a negative way, this is what your work reflects your grade. More like this has the potential to reach an A or this has the potential to do this well, but these are the points that need to be changed.

Katherine Coello: I was also going to mention that I know one of our semesters at Baruch, they were doing the— they implemented a credit/no credit option and personally I really love that option, because I feel as though— not that it was easier, but I feel like there was also still pressure to make sure that you are understanding the material and you are making that effort into sending in all your work and understanding it, for the grades that you're going, well not even grades, just to make sure that you pass the class. I personally did really like that rule that they put in for that semester, and I would, I would like to see that, again. I think that would be very good, especially now for these online classes, because I feel like for online classes like personally I like in person classes, because I feel like I'm able to focus more, I'm able to pay more attention and participate, a lot more. Online classes for me don't work because I need a hands-on experience.

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Rebecca Salois (she/her): In this section of the podcast we discussed our own reasons for ungrading. While this part focuses on our voices more so than student voices, it is clear from each of our approaches to ungrading that we have been looking for ways to incorporate student voices into our classes and, in particular, into their own work. We have all taken different approaches to ungrading, and I think that's important to point out because it means that if you or your professors are considering ungrading, there are many different ways to go about it. My biggest takeaways from this section were that we are all open and willing to try new things. And we even enjoy it, to a certain extent. We really want students to be a part of, or even leaders in, their own knowledge and education and mostly, that we are all learning together, professors and students alike.

Alright, so for our second part, we wanted to talk about this concept of ungrading in general, and there's a great scholar Jesse Stommel who, we'll call him a veteran of ungrading, right? He's been doing this for quite a while, and I really liked his definition because it's kind of open ended, and I think it reflects a lot of the different ways that the four of us have approached ungrading in our own classrooms. So he says, "Ungrading means raising an eyebrow at grades as a systemic practice distinct from simply not grading the word is a present participle, an ongoing process, not a static set of practices." So basically, this means that ungrading can be a number of things and so we're going to each take a moment now and explain what ungrading is to us and how we've been implementing it in our classes.

So I'll start out here. Basically, when I decided to do ungrading I wanted to know what students thought about the work that they were doing. I wanted to see their thoughts and their perspectives on the effort that they put into their work and I wanted them to focus on ways to improve themselves rather than on the A. I chose to focus on just one type of assignment for my ungrading practice this semester, and I have these assignments, or in some classes they're called checkpoints, and there's four or five each semester. And they're kind of what I've considered mid-stakes assignments, you know they're not a big project but they're not something that you— that I had ever just like given a check for credit, so it kind of fell somewhere in between. Basically, what happens is when students complete those assignments in my class I review them and I provide detailed feedback on strengths and areas for improvement, you know things I think work things that maybe they could focus on going forward, etc. And then I don't do a full

ungrading yet, but I asked the students to come up with a grade themselves so these assignments are out of 20 points, and I say, "What do you think you earned out of those 20 points and give me a little paragraph explanation saying why you think you've earned that grade." So again, for me, it's not ungrading in its fullest sense of erasing the grade altogether, but it is a step in terms of students engaging in these sort of self evaluative practices, which you know my goal is that it helps them improve rather than focus on what they think I might be looking for, and I think that's something one or two of you addressed, it's like, "Oh, if I know what the Professor wants, then I'm just going to do with the Professor wants and then be done." And I don't want that in my classes, so I want to say, like okay if I look at this and I— if I were gonna grade it I would give it this. But why would you give it a higher grade because you know the effort that you put into it, you know how much that you've improved from the previous assignments, and so on, so that's how I've approached ungrading this semester.

Gisele Regatao: Hi, this is Gisele Regatao again from Baruch College. So when I was in college for journalism, I was a teacher, so I studied to be a teacher, an elementary school teacher in Brazil. And one of the most famous philosophers of student centered education in the world is actually from Brazil, Paulo Freire. So I learned how to be a teacher following his methodology and his thinking. So for me, it has always been important to put the student at the center. When I became a professor, after more than 20 years as a journalist, for me, I went back to that philosophy and I wanted to make sure I always thought of my students as the center. But I wasn't really thinking about ungrading until I started this training, the transformative learning for the humanities. And there were two reasons why I decided to ungrade and I'm doing it for two of my classes this semester. One is because I learned it's the one issue that creates more anxiety for students, more than anything, and I don't want my students to have anxiety. And second because I learned that students will perform better. In different surveys that were done: students will get a grade, a grade and comment, or just comment, the students who perform better are the students who only get comments. And I also want my students to perform the best they can. So that was my motivation and the way I'm doing— there are different ways you can do ungrading. The way I'm doing it is, I give feedback on all of the assignments, and at the end of the semester, the students will do a self assessment. So, I'm not there yet. I don't know how it's going to go, but I feel like so far it's been a good experience for me.

Michael Greer (she/her): My name is Michael, from Brooklyn College and I decided to experiment with ungrading because I become disillusioned with, firstly the idea of academia becoming— being a straightforward meritocracy. I don't believe academia as a straightforward meritocracy. And second I've become disillusioned with the idea that grades incentivize engagement, kind of like what Gisele was talking about. So our traditional grading system of As through Fs is much more recent than some people would think, I recently learned that. I want my students to actually learn and grow as individual critical thinkers and it's not clear to me that the traditional grading system of A to F helps them with that, at least in my discipline which is philosophy. So I've incorporated a couple of alternative grading mechanisms into my syllabus this semester. 53% is contract graded. Which means different kinds of low stakes assignments are basically pass/fail and my students get to decide how many of those they want to turn in depending on what kind of grade they want at the end of the semester. But as long as they give me something they're going to pass. 20% of their overall grade is self-created like what Gisele was talking

about. They tell me what grade they get in that assignment and 27% is graded with the rubric so that's how I'm trying to incorporate ungrading into my pedagogy.

Casandra Silva Sibilin: And I'm Casandra Silva Sibilin from York. I've been teaching at CUNY for a long time, and always trying out new things and think of myself as progressive in terms of content and method. But I never tried exploring, this feels like the final frontier, like really questioning the exercise of power, which is still the grade system that we have in place. And maybe what motivated it indirectly was the experience on online teaching and before hearing about ungrading, I tried out an experiment, where the students had more motivation, I think, more motivation to do the class participation online. Doing less discussion boards, less weekly quizzes, it was a really radical experiment in just one of my classes this semester, where I said no, no weekly quiz. I had built so many details into the weekly quiz because I thought, "Oh, they have open book now you know they can just look at the reading." But I thought, if I really want to teach that this student centered class, then I want to show that through the points, so I know it's still points and it's maybe maybe debatable how ungrading it is, but it shifted more towards the values of the class and a more medium stakes kind of assignment. But they still had criteria and study points to prepare for so that's one class. And then, as I got into ungrading and got into this project and learned about it, I thought, "oh wow wait, am I doing ungrading, am I not doing ungrading? This is—there's so many options out there." And I was inspired for three other of my classes to try out a midway experiment and for those classes, two of which are philosophy of education students, some of whom want to be teachers themselves so very, very exciting. I said, as we were getting deep into progressive education and John Dewey and, later on, we do Freire and hooks, we read a little bit about ungrading from this book that we're all learning from. But imagine them still having a quiz or a test on ungrading, it's a little ironic. So as an option, not by force, I said okay if you want to instead of doing the quiz you can do this module process letter and that's inspired by the chapter by Jesse Stommel where you describe your process this week and the emphasis is more on doing your best effort not necessarily understanding everything, because who understands everything we're going to get to the key points in class. But show me that you were really working through it and preparing your own reactions to the reading and preparing to be there, active in class which I always think is the number one most important thing. And that's and that's been just remarkable reading those letters. I value communication with students and I try to check in with them in person, but there's nothing like really seeing a letter of what went through in a specific week and the struggles that they were facing and all the things that came up. And many of them, they were very, very open in those letters. And so I'm very excited to keep trying it out and more than anything, keep hearing from students and having conversations like this, of what the experience is like for them. Because, just like some students spoke earlier, we all have our own experiences with grading and the more we discuss we can see it from a new perspective. I always thought grades were motivating, but some of my students have been telling me the exact opposite. Just last week a student said "Oh, you get a bad grade, and you, you like what's the point then anymore?" So that's the very opposite of what we're hoping to achieve.

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Michael Greer (she/her): In the final section of the podcast we really dig into imagining a CUNY without grades. Students think about the virtues and potential downsides of ungrading at CUNY, discussing their fears, hopes, joys, and frustrations. Some students even reference their lived experiences being taught by the professors in the room. The professors weigh in on questions students have around the value of ungrading. We end by brainstorming some ways students might participate in creating a CUNY without grades.

Joelle Green: Hi. This is Joelle and I just wanted to touch on what Professor Sibilin said, because that same process letter that she explained is— it's interesting for me with ungrading because I have the opportunity to do that process letter every week and I keep punking out because it requires a level of honesty that I'm not necessarily ready to face yet. Because, for example, you can either do the quiz which you should know about, because we did it in class and we have notes and we have the written material. Or you can do the process letter that explains what your thought process was when you were reading the material and do you think you understand it, and just to give a grade for that particular topic in the module. And for me, I have not been able to do a process letter, yet, because I just keep feeling like I should do more. So there is no point of satisfaction for me where I'm like, "yes, when I put this B, I know I deserve this B because I read all the things that I was supposed to." So it's kind of easier for me to have a grading system, because if I do the quiz, then I can say all right, I can it's worth two points two point two, I can budget, maybe you know 1.4 or five out of it and, maybe, hopefully, I get another point five on you know, whichever parts of it.

Gisele Regatao: Are you saying you prefer the grading, Joelle?

Joelle Green: I— yeah, but I'm wondering if maybe that's a personal problem as a student because I attach myself to grades. So I feel great when I get an A and like if I get a C, I'm like, "Okay, did I deserve this C? Could I have done more? Sometimes I'm honest and I can say well, "You know you really didn't do all that you needed to do so, you deserve this," but, for the most part, I kind of like grades. Ungrading is— it's new. I'm not against it but it's giving me a lot to consider.

Michael Greer (she/her): This is a really great comment Joelle, and actually segues really nicely into the third part of our session. Saad, I see you have your hand up too. The third part is called reflections on ungrading, so quote "Imagining CUNY without Grades," and the questions I was going to ask you guys are, what your experiences are so far ungrading and what fears you might have around ungrading, and what I hear you saying Joelle, or I hear you voicing some fears or things that are keeping you back from ungrading, so does anyone else have something to add to that?

Saad Shuaib: I agree with Joelle. And I get exactly where she's coming from, um but based off of that same information and actually those same experiences, I personally draw a different conclusion. So, like I'll give you an example, so with this— and I'm going to be brutally honest right now but I'm assuming that's what you guys want so with Professor Regatao's class, there have been times where because we agreed at the beginning of the semester that attendance wasn't— was not going to be a part of the grading system um but, honestly, naturally, like there are some days, where I wouldn't show up the class

because I genuinely didn't feel good or I knew that I wasn't gonna necessarily benefit from showing up to the class that particular day because of the particular thing that was going to be taught, so it saved my time, but there would also be times, where I would kind of guilt trip myself into going because I would be like you know, you know, "Saad you didn't show up to class for like almost a week. Why not go to class today and actually offer something, like offer something to the class and give something to the class. So I feel like ungrading takes the gr— takes the standard that you think is the correct standard away. And, and allows the students to be honest with themselves. At least for me personally, it allows me to be honest with myself of gauging how much work do I feel like I'm putting in because, if I feel like I'm not putting in enough work. I'm gonna, I'm, you know, I'm going to put in more work. Or if I feel like I'm putting in too much work, and I can relax a little bit and I'll relax. And you know why I feel like my feelings matter in this case is because, at the end of the semester we're all going to be able to write and explain why we feel like we should be able to get the grades that we should be getting and we're able to have a back and forth conversation with our professors on "Hey, I did X, Y and Z. Maybe I didn't do A, B, and C, but I did X Y and Z so because of that, and because of the, you know, the like how I feel what assignment should have more weight than others, maybe this is the grade that I should be able to get." And I also think that one important thing, is I feel like experiments like this should take place a lot more because, me personally, this is the first time I've ever experienced a class like this, where there is ungrading and I've kind of had to psychologically unlearn or relearn like where to divert my efforts because it's like sort of like a ptsd where it's like, "All right, I need to hand in this assignment and I don't want to get a bad grade," but then, while I'm doing it I'm like, "oh wait I'm not getting, I'm not really getting graded for this so—"

Gisele Regatao: Well, you are, you're just grading yourself.

Saad Shuaib: Yes, yes, exactly exactly, so there's more of that like, again, like that honesty. It's more honest. I don't feel like I have to go via a rubric. I feel like I have to go via effort and what's my learning style and what's the effort that I can personally put into that class. Now the challenge that that kind of system has is, how does this translate into a class that is kind of more logistical and solid and tangible like your maths and your businesses and your sciences, right? I don't know.

Gisele Regatao: That's a good question and we wanted to get into that. And so for the people who want to speak, also think about that. Do you feel there are disciplines where this works better, the ungrading, or there are disciplines where it doesn't work.

May Thu Khin: I just wanted to say that the ungrading process has been such a life changing experience for me, because it takes away that stress and that pressure from the class. I genuinely like Professor Regatao's class, but at the same time, like, wow. Like this semester, like just not grading and then finding out that like we have our own control of the syllabus and how we can reflect on ourselves that has been changing for like my classmates too, I can see that. But I also wanted to touch on the part of the honesty like we are grading ourselves and like we have to be honest with ourselves. There have been times where I got an A in a class and when I didn't learn anything. And there were times, where I'm really proud of the project that I got a C for because I know how much effort I put in. So also, I feel like with this process,

we have a chance to explain ourselves in what part of the semester, in which projects that we worked really hard on. That might not get a good result at the end, which is the grading then numerical number. And also, with that being said, I also really appreciate that we're pushing the feedback and that evaluation reflection process between the professor and the student, rather than just like, "Oh, you got a B," without the feedback. Some professors do that in some classes. So, that has been very, very life changing for me.

Radwa Gomaa: I feel like when you know, like, there's— Like I think that also answers, one of the questions. I feel like knowing you are going to get a grade at the end of the semester is important because you're not just going to say, "Oh, whatever they're not going to matter or that's not going to count. But I feel like the way it happens is very important because you're not just worrying about the grade, you know you're going to assess yourself honestly and you're going to say, "Okay, I put this much work and I learned this I understood this, so I know that I'm going to deserve this." Or, if you have, like people, like, things happen and you're like, "Okay, I did this even through this hard time with my semester, I feel like I deserve this and I still learned this so I feel like the fact that we do grade ourselves at the end, and there is like a conversation that happens between us and the Professor as to our grade is very important, because then even if you get a bad grade you're like, "okay I got it, but it was because of this, or if you get a good grade, you feel even better than just getting it knowing you were just trying to get the grade.

Gisele Regatao: Can I just add something Radwa to what you said? I think it's interesting just seeing when I send comments to your assignments some students reply to me saying, "Thank you for your feedback, can I resubmit the assignment, which I find really satisfying because they understand from my comments that there were shortcomings in their work and they read the comments and they care about the work. There is no letter there but they feel like they could do better.

VIBODHA GALLAGE DONA: Hi my name is V, and I would like to share an experience I had from last semester from the A to F grading scale. This was for my Stat class, and this was like, I was fresh out of high school and they put me in the Stat 2000 honors class and I was very new to that because I always been bad at the probability side. I started doing good in like the homework. I spent like, at least till 12 am trying to keep up with the concepts and I get— I got right on all the answers, but when the quizzes on the test came there were only five questions on the test so each question was five points. And it added up to 100 so it worked so much so, when you get one thing wrong, I get it wrong and it's just very detrimental to the grading. And I found this to be really bad because I know what the concept is about, but the way the test was presented, it was very informal and it was not in a way that the Professor themselves gave us to practice because this very much lacked a feedback system. I tried reaching out to them being like, "Hey, how can I improve? I know I'm not doing good in this way, but I'm doing good on the homework side because you gave me— you've given the class these problems, but I'm not like showing the results on these tests. They didn't really get back to me in a helpful way, so I was devastated when like, it was grading time. But now, with this ungrading system we've been doing with Dr Salois I think it's really nice how she gets back to me with what she thinks about what the works, I did, and I

agree with her like yeah this is lacking or this is very good, and with that I can know how I can do better next time and how I can keep doing well in the certain ones.

Keijana Greene: Honestly, when it comes to ungrading, it's something that's very new since from childhood, we have been ingrained with ourselves, saying if we don't get a grade then we're failures so to be told that you can kind of advocate for the grade that you want, and the grade that you feel that you deserve, it's a whole new world like Jolene, I haven't done the process letter in Professor Sibilin's class mostly because I haven't felt comfortable advocating for whatever grade that I have, which might just be a personal thing, or might just be something that's ingrained but, basically, telling myself that I deserve this grade it's like I guess, I don't know, Stockholm syndrome.

Daisha Suggs: Hi, my name is Daisha and I'm in Professor Sibilin's western civilization course and I want to go back to something that Joelle said of the idea of like feeling like your academic, like your academic achievement is like your equivalent of how you are as a person. And that's something that I've dealt with a lot in my life like, I have been told that I'm a gifted child, since I was in elementary school and that's translated throughout like my entire life. I've been in honors classes for the majority of my life until I got to college and I realized being in honors classes isn't really much of the— I want to say important thing because you're getting a degree, no matter what and that's like— being on that A to F scale consistently being in the like A to B range throughout my entire life and then coming into college and dealing with the kind of imposter syndrome of why I'm not supposed to be here because I've been doing all of this, like work for me to not be learning anything or being— trying to memorize things that don't necessarily help me with my career, or I'm not understanding what's going on and I'm just trying to make a grade when I really should learning. So, the A to F system doesn't really— I feel like it doesn't really work. It's not really helpful, especially for students that have, like, test anxiety or anxiety about their grades in general and the idea behind ungrading actually is helpful because you know that you're learning because you're taking control of what you're actually doing in class and what you're processing on your own, rather than like your Professor is giving you work and you're doing it and then they're like— you're giving it back to them they're grading it for some value that doesn't necessarily matter.

Radwa Gomaa: Yeah, one other thing I wanted to say was I realized the semester after— I never know like ungrading and any of that before Professor Regatao's class, but in one of— in the beginning of the semester I was taken three journalism classes. This one, another one advanced video journalism, and another journalism class that I thought I would really enjoy. But after the first two weeks, I felt like it was going to be very challenging. There were a lot of grades that I saw and I just like, I knew that I was not going to be able to handle it considering all my other classes, considering the things I know that I'm going to be planning for in the summer, so I knew taking this class was going to be a very like, big challenge considering all of the grades that we saw in the syllabus and all of the assignments that we had to do. So, if I had the option to have like ungrading in that class, I feel like I would have still took it because I know I wanted to learn the material. I know the material would have been very interesting. It was interesting and fun class for me. But unfortunately, because that wasn't there I wasn't able to take it, and I feel like seeing how good like this class was with ungrading, I just wish that there were more options for classes like that.

Rebecca Salois (she/her): So we want to leave this last section of the discussion, for your questions. What questions do you have in terms of ungrading whether it's questions around, you know, what subjects it works for and what it doesn't, on things that you've heard being tried in these different classes, whatever questions you, you might have about this whole concept of ungrading. Let's let's dive into a few of those.

Latanya Hewitt: Hi, I'm Latanya. Do you think that ungrading, like as a whole, would make a better student and what I mean by better student, I mean like do you think that will make them like better, um, whatever classes they are taking, like readers, writers, and mathematicians, whatever classes they're taking, to like you know go into further to further their career. Do you think that'd make them better, or will they like, make them worse? And what I mean by worst is like, kind of like not be progressive enough in class or in— yeah, more so in class or stuff like that.

Gisele Regatao: What do you think? We are all trying it for the first time, but I'm curious, what do you think?

Latanya Hewitt: For me it's in between.

Gisele Regatao: What do you mean by in between?

Latanya Hewitt: What I mean by "in between" is that, I know it has the potential to make the students better at what they do, but I do know it also has the potential to make the students, like you know, become lackluster or start to like, you know, try to find like easy— an easy way out to handle certain things. That's kind of why I say in between.

Gisele Regatao: Well, I can say, for me it— I definitely want the students to have more control and more ownership of their education. So in the past students sometimes would say to me, I need to get an A in this class, and I would say to them I'm not the one who gives the A, you're the one that gets the A. But because I am the one giving the grade, I think students sometimes don't think about the learning as their own process so, if that you would— I would call that a better student but I don't want to qualify better or worse, I think, just a student who is more involved and takes ownership of their learning is what I believe.

Cassandra Silva Sibilin: I agree with with that and I would add, also as a philosophy teacher and we're all of us, thinking critically is number one, and even students who haven't tried it out, told me that the experiment got them thinking about their learning in new way and it's very hard to evaluate Latanya's question, because here are just a few of us trying out these experiments and we want to know well, what would the whole system be like if things really changed we don't know. Some of the reading we've been doing for our fellowship is pretty encouraging on the research that's been done on it, but you know, at the end of the day, all we have are our own experiences in these classrooms.

Anesa Feratovic: My name is Anesa and the main question that I have for you guys is that if you– do you think the pandemic kind of spurred this you know sense of ungrading forward because personally for me attending zoom classes, I kind of realized that I can still get work done and pass classes, without attending them, I think I spoke about this in your class Professor, about how attendance and a lot of students felt like they didn't have to be attending zoom meetings to be learning and then it caused a lot of students to realize, why should we even care about grades. You know you just do the readings you go through the motions and you can pass the class very easily. So I feel like they would– because professors are more lenient about grading, maybe this kind of sense of ungrading made them take a step back and say, well, what can we do to change things to get students more involved now coming back to campus.

Rebecca Salois (she/her): When I first moved to online teaching I was like how do I take all these discussion points that we would have in class and make sure that the students are engaging with them? I think the whole ungrading piece, for me, has allowed me to look at like, what do I want– I guess that it's less about what I want from the students and more about what they want to get from the learning process, so when they're creating these assignments for me that i've been doing the ungrading with, it's like, how do *you* look at this assignment that I've created? What would you give back to me to show me that you are engaged with this material? Like I don't want to dictate to you, like the fine tooth comb kind of material that you need to learn and it works in the classes that I teach.

Casandra Silva Sibilin: How do you think students can organize around getting their professors to implement alternative grading schemes, or at least be open to trying out new things, such as the things we've been trying and others? What can students do?

VIBODHA GALLAGE DONA: We can organize petitions or send the professors like a small essays or research papers on why it's a better system and refer the professors to other professors like you who has already implemented this system, so they can like, learn more about it.

Radwa Gomaa: Yeah, like bringing more awareness to this because I really didn't know– I've never heard about this before prior to this semester. So I feel like there could be like a bunch of professors that don't even know that this could exist or if this is an option to have for students, because i'm pretty sure, a lot of professors do want their students to succeed, and they understand that there are all those difficulties that happened along the semester so just bringing more awareness to this.

Gisele Regatao: Well, I want to be mindful of your time, so thank you all so much for being here, for living this experiment with us, for being so thoughtful and engaged. We really, really appreciate it.

Dr. Rebecca Salois (she/her): Yes, thank you all for coming.

Casandra Silva Sibilin: Thanks so much for coming.

Joelle Green: This is Joelle, I just wanted to say thank you to you guys for honestly inviting us to hear some students' opinions, because, for the most part, I feel like professors don't– some professors don't

care. They're just like you know, "you're here to go to school you're here to learn and however, I decide to do this, the way that you're going to learn." So it's really nice to know that, you know, such a variety of different types of students in different types of classes had value to you and that's why you set this up, so thank you so much.

Gisele Regatao: Thank you.

Rebecca Salois (she/her): Thank you

Cassandra Silva-Sibilin: Thank you

Gisele Regatao: Bye Everyone

May Thu Khin: Thank you.

Saad Shuaib: Thank you guys so much, we really feel like we're being heard right now. I really appreciate that.

Daisha Suggs: Thank you.

Radwa Gomaa: I really thank you.

VIBODHA GALLAGE DONA: Thank you very much.

Gisele Regatao: Thank you guys.