

Proposal for Required Grades and Narratives Optional with the Instructor

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I separate the Grades and Narratives issues:

REQUIRED GRADES

In the interest of our future students, who will be directly affected, and past and present students, who will be indirectly affected, we should adopt the almost universal letter-grading system.

Reasons:

- 1) Information presented by the Health Sciences Career Adviser and the New Program Director for Engineering and others shows our system disadvantaging our students in admission for further education and for employment.
- 2) My own anecdotal information strongly confirms the above assessments.
- 3) Students are increasingly opting for letter grades. Those fewer students choosing P/NP will increasingly appear weak to those beyond our campus.
- 4) We call it the "NES," but others see it as a "Pass/Fail system." And taking a course P/F normally means not expecting to work so seriously at it. The NES is largely responsible for our campus' laid-back image. We've worked hard for decades trying to change this perception with little success. Going to letter grades will improve the value of the UCSC degree--for both future and former students.

OPTIONAL NARRATIVES

For each student in the class, a narrative evaluation, in addition to the grade, should be at the option of the instructor, and should not be an official part of the transcript. It should be a written communication from the instructor to the student, which the student could transmit to others at his or her option.

Reasons:

- 1) Comments addressed to the student, rather than an outside distribution, can be more frank, suggestive of areas for improvement, and generally more helpful.
- 2) Such narratives need not be extensively crafted for an external audience thus a much less burdensome task--freeing more time for valuable student interaction.
- 3) With today's grade inflation, a large proportion of students get "As." But instructors are much less free with superlative words like "excellent." Mediocre evaluations hurt more than mediocre grades.