

**CTE 2016:  
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING  
BEST PRACTICES**

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# OVERVIEW

1. Why graded assignments
2. General principles
3. Types of assignments
4. Grading papers and projects
5. Class Participation
6. Exams
7. Grading online
8. Assigning the Course Grade



# MAKE A MODEL OF THE CAPITOL . . . USING MATCHSTICKS



# WHY WE HAVE GRADED ASSESSMENT

1. It motivates serious study  
(For that reason, P/NP is not popular)
2. It gives students feedback on mastery
3. It gives us feedback on  
the efficacy of our teaching
4. It ranks a class of students



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Graded activities should be useful work and related to what is taught
- More graded activities the better
- Transparency and consistency
- Turnaround – managing expectations
- Fairness
  - Different Sections roughly equivalent
  - No “pre-grading”
  - No “do-overs”
- Awarding grades
  - Consistent with Haas policy (Mean GPA by program)
  - No appeals



# TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

- Papers, case briefs
- Projects
- Exams
  - Multiple choice (rare with MBAs)
  - “Written” (i.e. “Blue Book”)
  - Take home
    - Can be uploaded, hence graded online
    - Nicely formatted
- Class Participation



# PLAN FOR AS MANY GRADED ASSIGNMENTS AS POSSIBLE

- For a Undergrad course, 8 is not exceptional:
  - Class Participation
  - 3 individual papers, 1 group paper
  - Group Presentation
  - 2 Exams
- “Tanking” on one exam (or group project) doesn’t “kill” your grade
- Reduces number of appeals – you can do better next time
  - (We do “drop lowest score” of 4 briefs)



# PLAN FOR AS MANY GRADED ASSIGNMENTS AS POSSIBLE

- Even for a short MBA Course
  - 50 percent CP
  - 50 percent Final Exam  
is a recipe for disaster



# CONSIDER THE TIMING (WHEN WORK IS DUE)

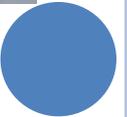
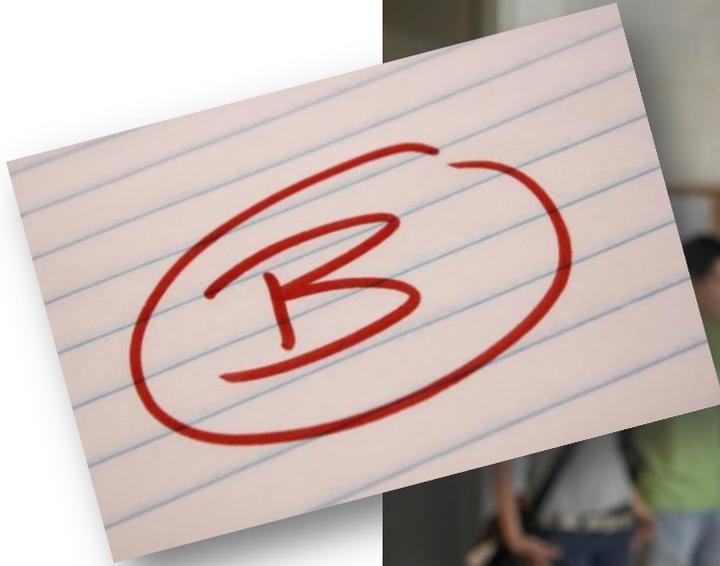
- Remember, graders are students too
  - There are limits on how many hours they can give you in a short time
- Anticipate:
  - Assignment submitted
  - Work graded
  - Reviewed by you
  - Reasonable student appeals
- Therefore e.g. in 14-week Undergrad course: “All written work (except Final Exam) submitted by
  - Thanksgiving
  - Mid-April



# #1 SOURCE OF STUDENT DISSATISFACTION



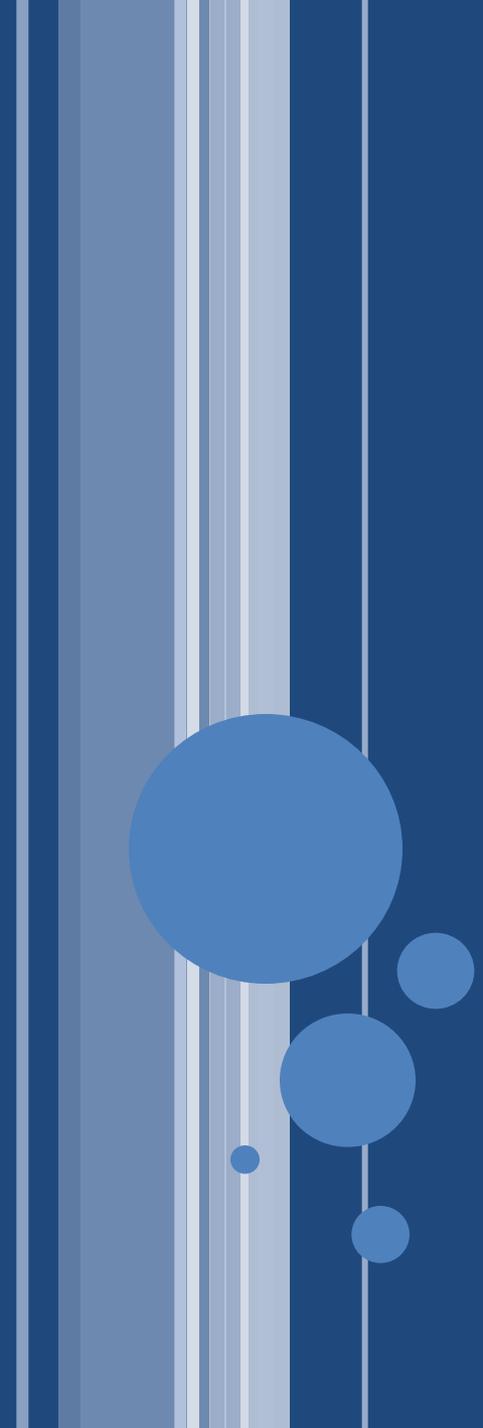
# LESS THAN FULL SCORE WITH NO EXPLANATION



# CARDINAL RULE OF GRADING

- Whenever a student has earned less than full points, the student should be able to see what s/he missed, without a visit to the GSI or Office Hours
- *See:* Exams – answer key (below)





# PAPERS, BRIEFS AND PROJECTS

# REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

- Detailed description in your syllabus
- OK to indicate how many points for each section (online shown on “rubric” – students can see)
- Then, follow the **cardinal rule**
- Set expectations about **turnaround time** (e.g. 1 week in small class, 2 weeks for massive courses)



# FEEDBACK TO THE CLASS

- I wouldn't post "best papers"
  - You need permission (IP) even with name removed
  - Risks "Internet paper" in future
  - There's no 20 point paper that doesn't have some error
  - Encourages line-by-line "litigation"
- *Instead* an e-mail from the grader (or if multiple Readers, edited and from you)

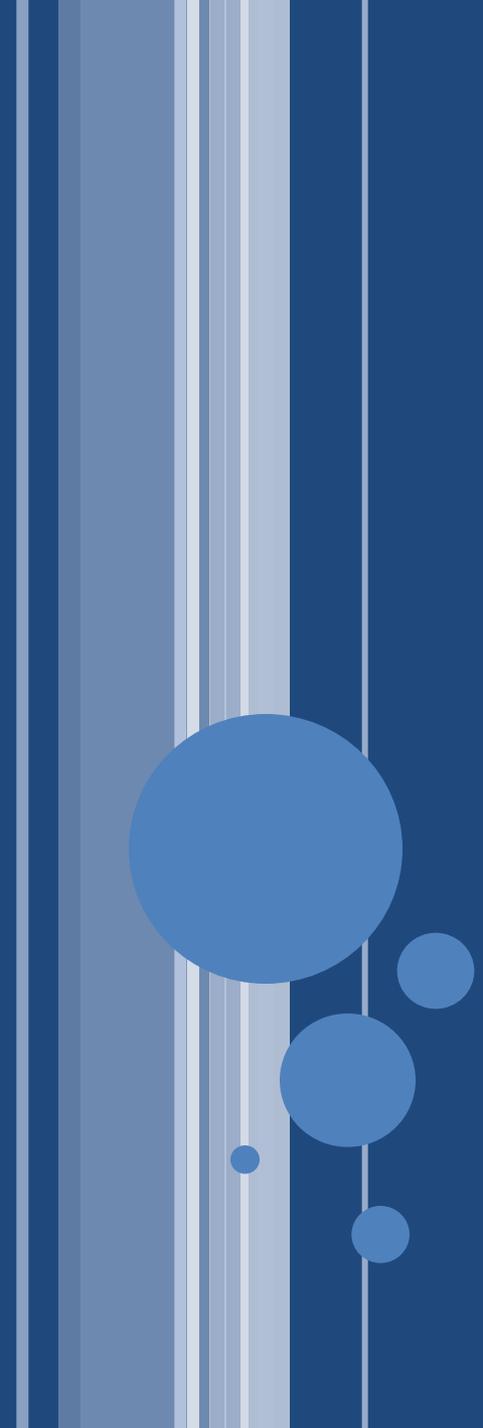
"The best papers were the ones that . . ."

"Many people forgot to include . . ."



These days,  
post an  
"Announcement  
" on bCourses





# CLASS PARTICIPATION

## #2 SOURCE OF DISSATISFACTION

- Class participation
  - Seen as arbitrary and capricious
  - Rewards “teacher’s pet”
  - Swamps other scores



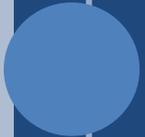
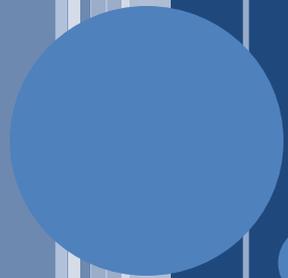
Check previous  
syllabi for  
norms in your  
group/course



# HOW TO MAKE CP FAIR

- Insist on name cards
  - (Assigned seating is a possibility, though I don't favor it)
    - Photos on chart never match real people
    - Students may legit want to sit with friends
- Contemporaneous records
  - Tally-sheet in class
    - Not just air-time – was it any good?
  - Record keeper
    - (I don't like peer recorder)
  - [Harvard] Immediate post-class notation
- Communicate how people are doing
  - I sent out the redacted Excel *every week*
    - Good for catching errors quickly





# EXAMS

# EXAMS

- No need to sandbag people
  - Reasonable expectations of form and content
  - I post last Semester's Exam
    - This neutralizes “test banks”
    - [In contrast, I © my exams and have asked for take-downs]
- Time? Allow for “transaction cost” time, so 2/3 of what you expect to be done in time limit
- For multiple choice, multiple (rotated) versions
  - No “pass this down the row”
- Insist on silence
- Everyone stays seated—and silent—at the end



# EXAM RESULTS

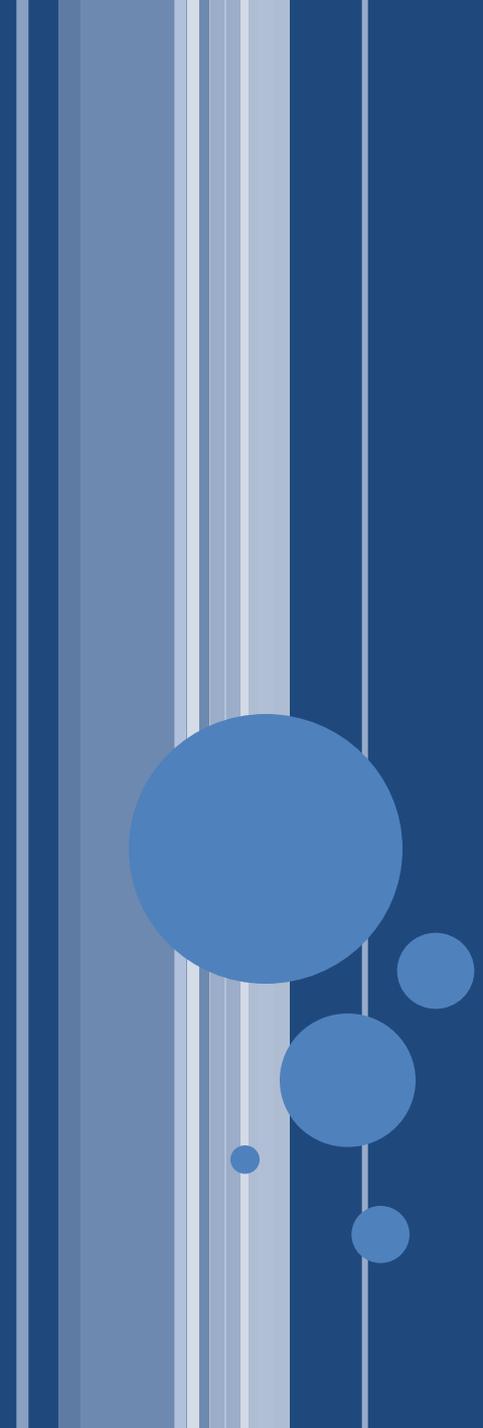
- On bCourses, people can see their scores – and the distribution – once you “release” the assignment
- Think through whether you will distribute the Answer Key
  - May answer 90 percent of appeals
  - Destroys the question for future years
  - May encourage “studying to the test”
  - Encourages “litigation”
- *Alternative:* Have the answer key on your desk and allow GSIs to do the same



# IF THE EXAM DOES NOT GO WELL

- Don't criticize the whole class
- Don't be vague about re-weighting  
("I'll see how you do on the Final")
- One bad question? Throw it out



The slide features a dark blue background. On the left side, there are several vertical stripes of varying shades of blue and white. A vertical line runs down the page, with several blue circles of different sizes positioned to its left. The largest circle is at the top left, and several smaller ones are scattered below it.

# GRADING ONLINE

Using “SpeedGrader” within bCourses

# WE'RE ALL USED TO MARKING UP

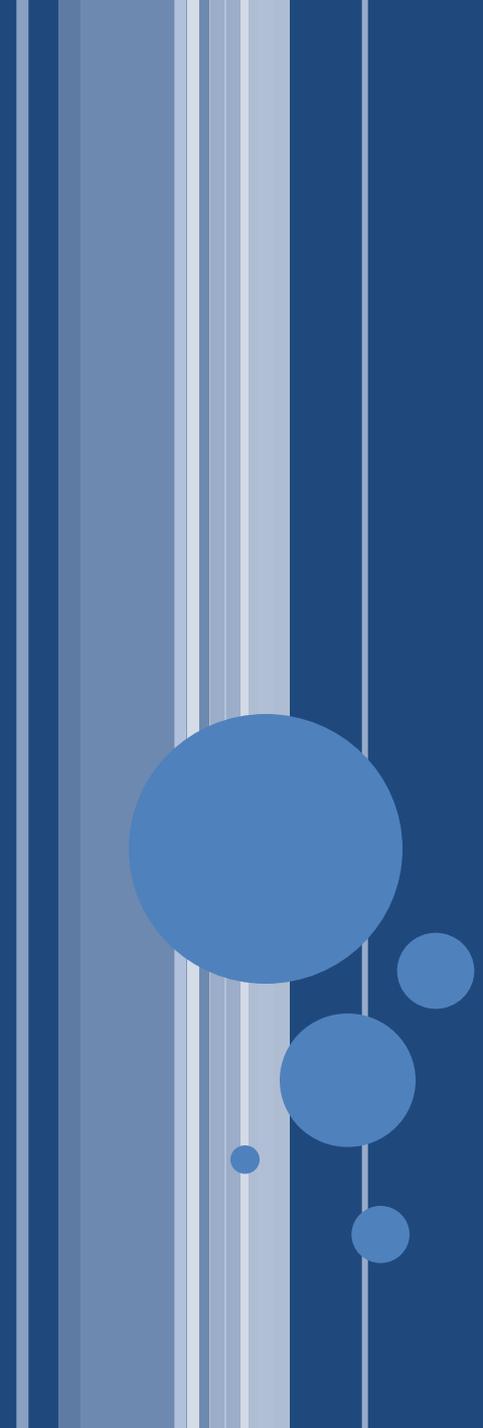
Moving to  
“online” was  
really hard for  
me!



# 100 REASONS TO GRADE ONLINE

1. Students see the weighting (“Rubric”) before they submit
2. Timestamped submission, no lost papers
3. People-pleasing when MBAs are away from School
4. You can quickly take a look before your Reader gets started
  - a. You can make comments too
  - b. You can forewarn Readers of problems
5. Any problem papers – you and your Reader can view together at the same time without a “meet up”
6. You can keep tabs on your Reader’s work habits
7. Students get the work back faster
8. Scores are automatically transcribed to gradebook



The slide features a dark blue background. On the left side, there are several vertical stripes of varying shades of blue and white. A series of blue circles of different sizes are arranged vertically, overlapping the stripes. The largest circle is at the top, and the sizes decrease as they go down. The text 'AWARDING COURSE GRADES' is positioned to the right of these circles.

# AWARDING COURSE GRADES

# HAAS GRADING POLICY

- MBA Core course: 3.45
  - Undergrad 3.4
- MBA Elective: 3.50
  - Undergrad 3.6
- MBA Small elective <18 students, up to 3.65
- You have discretion over:
  - How “tight” the distribution of grades is
  - Whether you come in:
    - at the target,
    - below,
    - substantially below

**Tip:** Ask to see the distributions for several recent Semesters of the same course



# THE PROBLEM OF LETTER GRADES FOR CONSTITUENT SCORES

- The “60 means I’ve failed!” panic
- Erroneous summation: “I got a B on the mid-term and nearly a B+ on the paper so I should have an A”
- Risk that Readers will “hit” the next paper with a “B” if the previous 3 were an “A”
- A, B, C can’t be added
- Much better to give numeric score
  - “Compare with the stats for the class – that’ll tell you how you’re doing”



# FIRST TIME ON A COURSE

- Ask to see the grading statistics from *several* previous offerings of the course
- Check your perceptions after assigning grades with an experienced colleague



# GRADE ASSIGNMENT PROTOCOL

1. Resolve any record-keeping issues
2. Smooth work between different graders
3. Check the weights in your syllabus
4. Make the sum, rank the class
5. (I send out to the class again at this point, without letter grades)
  - a. Smokes out the last few clerical corrections
  - b. Gives people a heads-up on where they stand
  - c. (I resist any changes to Class Participation scores at this point)



# GRADE ASSIGNMENT PROTOCOL

6. Make a *considered* judgment as to
  - Whether this was a “good class”
    - Level of effort
    - Level of engagement with the material
  - Distribution
    - A few bright lights carrying the class, or
    - Broad and equal participation
  - Obviously, discuss with colleagues on team-taught courses, and get input from your GSIs and Readers
7. Assign the grades to the class, top to bottom



# ENTER GRADES

- “You can see your grade on BEARFacts within 24 hours”
- {For Undergrad classes, I also send them out the redacted Excel – it helps them to see where they are}
- There are **no grade appeals no after the fact changes in grades**



# CONCLUSION

- Some of the best-loved professors (and Deans!) in the school are some of the toughest graders
- “Do unto others as you wish you were done to in grad school” will guide you
- Never be afraid to consult with colleagues . . . We really *have* seen everything before
- Any panic or crisis? [robinson@haas.berkeley.edu](mailto:robinson@haas.berkeley.edu)



