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ABSTRACT

A new alternative to awarding "F" grades for course failure was investigated by the psychology department of Los Angeles City College, and initial results are reported in this study. Basically, a "W" grade was given to failing Psychology 1 students in place of "F" during the fall 1969 semester. The "W" could also be selected by students who would otherwise earn a "D." The "W" grade meant no credit for courses, but did not result in a loss of grade points. Conclusions indicated that grading standards were not lowered; and a substantial majority of instructors and students found many positive values in the system, especially a lessening of anxiety about grades. It was subsequently recommended that the procedure be continued. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (JO)

LOS ANGELES CITY COLLEGE

"PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT FACULTY AND STUDENTS ATTITUDES REGARDING A NO "F" GRADE POLICY IN PSYCHOLOGY I"

Research Study #70-5

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"PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT FACULTY AND STUDENTS REGARDING A NO "F" GRADE POLICY IN PSYCHOLOGY I"

INTRODUCTION

The Psychology Department decided to experiment with giving no "F" grades in Psychology I classes for the Fall, 1969 semester. A "W" was to be assigned instead of an "F" in those cases where the student earned an "F" grade. Furthermore, if the student so chose, the instructor would assign a "W" instead of a "D". The students were not made aware of this policy until they were enrolled and the semester had begun.

PROCEDURE

1. The students were informed of this grading policy at about the third week of school during the Fall, 1969 semester.

2. A questionnaire was issued to each Psychology I instructor at the end of the semester to obtain student reactions to the policy. The student responses were obtained on the day of the final examination. Each instructor was asked to administer the questionnaire to <u>one</u> of his Psychology I classes. Nine (9) out of twelve (12) of the instructors were able to administer the student questionnaire to <u>one</u> of their classes. This represents a student N of 275 on the student questionnaire.

3. Eleven (11) out of twelve (12) Psychology instructors completed a questionnaire indicating <u>their</u> reaction to this grading procedure and the grade distribution for all their Psychology I classes. A comparison was made of Fall, 1968 grade distributions in <u>all</u> Psychology I classes (when "D" and "F" was given) against the grade distribution in Fall, 1969 of the 11 out of 12 Psychology I instructors reporting (when "F" was not given, and "D" optional.)

RESULTS

1. Faculty Questionnaire

a. Grade Distribution

Grade (%)		A	B	C	D		F			W	Inc.	N
Semester	Grading Procedure				D	W(D)[1]	F	W(F)[2]	WF			
Fall 1969	No "F" "D" Option	9	21	37	10	2	0	5	0	14	2	1141
Fall 1968	"F" & "D" assigned	10	23	33	9	0	4	0	1	16	4	1561

[1] W(D) - "W" instead of "D"

[2] W(F) - "W" instead of "F"

Each of the alternatives on the questionnaire listed in b through g below is indicated with the number of instructors (out of 11) checking that alternative. Any comments of instructors related to the alternative is shown in "quotes."

b. In your view did more students remain in class that might otherwise drop due to low grades?

7 - yes
1 - not sure, but think so
2 - not sure, but don't think so
1 - no

c. If the instructor marked YES in b above he/she was asked to indicate his/her feelings about those students who stayed. The instructors answered as indicated below:

5 - students found it to be of value even though they didn't raise their grades
2 - students were able to pick up their grades later in the semester (in one class 5/37 did so - "improvements were 1 to 2 grade steps (e.g., F to D or C; D to C or B)"
1 - other comments about those who remained that might otherwise have dropped due to low grades if "F" were given (listed by instructors)
"not sure they learned anything, at least as expressed with symbols"
1 - they did not gain in knowledge or understanding on their part
0 - they hampered learning for other students in the class
0 - they contributed to the learning situation in the class activities

d. Indicate disadvantages to this grading procedure observed in class

7 - none
2 - led to poorer attendance ("possibility, wondering if so?")
1 - interfered with attention to individuals
1 - interfered with positive learning attitudes in the class ("perhaps a reduction in motivation")
1 - interfered with higher level academic classroom activity
0 - interfered with discipline and order in classroom
0 - other disadvantages (none were noted)

e. Indicate advantages to this grading procedure observed in class:

8 - gain from less anxiety and worry regarding grades
2 - gain from less competitiveness and more cooperation in class
2 - other advantages (listed by instructors)
"reduced instructor anxiety over grading"
"removed penalty from taking class"
"made me try harder to reduce concepts to every day level-for more comprehension"
1 - gains from interaction of more heterogeneity in student attitudes, knowledge, skills
0 - gain in greater motivation to achieve on part of students
0 - led to improved attendance

f. Considering the advantages and disadvantages, how would you rate the overall value of this procedure to the educational program in your class?

0 - overall great gain
11 - some overall gain
0 - no apparent difference
0 - some overall loss
0 - great overall loss

g. Should this method be continued?

9 - yes
2 - not sure
"students may feel their presence earns them a C"
"unsure of affect on attendance and motivation to improve"
0 - no

2. Student Questionnaire (checklist section) - Responses are indicated in decreasing order of importance to the students replying.

(a) Your instructor informed you, early in the semester, that if you failed this class you would receive a W rather than an F (W-no credit for the course, but no penalty of lost grade-points). How do you think that knowing this affected your feeling of pressure in this class during the semester?

46% - less pressure
- 26% - a little less
- 8% - moderately less
- 12% - a lot less

44% - made no difference in my feeling of pressure

9% - more pressure
- 4% - a little more
- 2% - moderately more
- 3% - lot more

(b) IN THE SITUATION described above, where a W is given instead of an F -- How do you think knowing this affected your efforts to learn in this class?

59% - made no difference in my efforts to learn

34% - I increased my efforts
- 10% - by a small amount
- 15% - by a moderate amount
- 9% - a great deal

7% I decreased my efforts
- 4% - by a small amount
- 2% - by a moderate amount
- 1% - by a large amount

(c) IN THE SITUATION described above, where a W is given instead of an F -- How do you think knowing this affected your attendance at class meetings?

76% - made no difference in my class attendance

17% - served to increase my class attendance
- 4% - by a small amount
- 4% - by a moderate amount
- 9% - by a large amount

8% - served to decrease my class attendance
- 6% - by a small amount
- 1% - by a moderate amount
- 1% - by a large amount

(d) Should this grading procedure be continued?

91% - yes
2% - no
7% - not sure

(e) Students were asked to indicate what grade they expected at the beginning of the semester and also (on the day of the final) the grade they expected to get at the end of the semester.

44% - expected same grade at END as at BEGINNING
37% - expected lower grade at END than expected at BEGINNING
9% - expected higher grade at END than expected at BEGINNING
9% - ?

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

1. The "Grading Standards" were not lowered, judging by comparing grade distributions under the standard and this experimental procedure, since the distributions were essentially the same.

   a. A slight increase in the percent of "C" and "D" grades in 1969 (over 1968) were offset by a slight decrease in "A" and "B" grades, "W" grades, and "incomplete" grades.

2. Faculty replies indicated:

   a. Of these students remaining in class rather than dropping due to low grades --
      1) no instructor felt that they helped or hurt the learning situation.
      2) there may have been value gained by students by staying even if no grade improvement showed.
      3) some did raise grades over the semester that might otherwise have dropped early.
   b. There were no major disadvantages felt by instructors to the "no F" procedure
      1) some question was raised, but no assertion made, regarding a lowering of attendance, motivation, and level of learning.
   c. There was no indication of order or discipline problems.
   d. A major gain was felt to be less anxiety and worry by students regarding grades.
   e. One instructor felt less anxiety himself about grading and another felt more of a responsibility to do a better job of teaching.
   f. It was unanimous that there was some overall value to this procedure with 9 out of 11 definitely wanting to continue it.

3. Student responses tended to support faculty opinion:

   a. Almost half the students (46%) felt some lessening of pressure, 44% felt no difference in pressure, while a few 9% felt an increase in pressure
   b. About 1/3 found that they increased their efforts, while most (60%) felt no difference in the amount of effort expended, and a few (7%) decreased their effort to learn.
   c. About 3/4 felt this procedure made no difference in their attendance.

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS (continued)

d. Almost all students (92%) were in favor of continuing this grading procedure.
e. The procedure did not seem to lead to students expecting higher grades at the end than they expected at the beginning of the semester. Almost 1/2 (44%) expected the same grade at the end as at the beginning, a little over 1/3 (37%) even expected lower grades at the end, 9% expected higher grades at the end, while another 9% didn't express their expectation at the end.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The data here would suggest that consideration should be given to use of this grading procedure. Both instructors and students find many positive values in it, with few negative aspects. The negative aspects related to motivation and achievement were relatively small and of the nature that could be corrected by improved learning management and motivation in the instructional procedures. In the view of the writer, the positive elements far outweigh the negative aspect of the "F" and "D" grade as used in the academic setting.

2. The double penalty aspect of the "D" and "F" should be reconsidered. No credit for the course is in itself a penalty, but to penalize the student further by saying he must make up grade points is to double the penalty -- a large inequity. A very rough penalty -- particularly when we don't know whether it was the student who "failed to learn" or the instructor who "failed to teach" or perhaps combination [illegible] "failed!"

3. The long term motivational and performance effects of an "F" and "W" should be investigated. "All other factors being equal" -- how do students receiving "F" for failure, contrast with those receiving "W" for failure, perform in such criterion terms as academic persistence, future GPA, vocational choice, self-evaluation, etc.?

   (In this study, SCAT scores of students were not compared; however, general student body scores from 1966 to 1969 are such that there is little reason to assume that the groups are different in academic aptitude.) Further study, however, should be made to determine factors (of a personal, social, or teaching-learning nature) that might result in differential effects in the application of this grading procedure.

4. Conduct studies to gain more understanding of behaviorally defined abilities, attitudes, and expectations of junior college students receiving various grades -- with an eye toward anticipating problem areas; possible intervention; and matching student, instructor, and learning condition. (Further analysis of other data on some of these 1969 classes is underway that may throw light on some of these points.)