

Summary: Grading and Exams (September, 2, 2014)

This week we began by having TAs share experiences about their previous two weeks of teaching and grading. Everyone seems to be settling into a routine and getting more comfortable.

Everyone was supposed to come to class having graded three versions of student answers to a calculus problem. TAs posted the sum of their 3 scores on the board and were put in groups of 3 people who had assigned similar scores. Three people did not have the assignment done because of an email glitch. They were grouped together. Working together, each group created a common rubric for grading the assignment and regarded each problem. There was a lot of discussion within the groups.

Once all groups were done, they each presented their rubric using the document camera. We discussed grading philosophies throughout these presentations. Most groups had a system of adding points based on successful student completion of each step of the problem. Many groups informally adopted the idea that half of the point total was related to conceptual understanding and the other half of the point total was related to successful execution. One group had a system of subtracting points based on errors. We were able to compare different strategies and offer general tips for grading such as being consistent, writing comments, etc.

After a short break we switched to discussing exams. As a group we discussed

- Selecting content: How similar should the problems be to homework and quiz problems? What topics are important moving forward?
- Length: we suggested trying to write an exam that you can complete in 1/3 of the allotted time
- Order and Difficulty: we presented different philosophies that teachers follow

Reflections:

The groups were very engaged in the discussion. It helped to have a written requirement and a very relevant topic. Having smaller groups (3 people) also contributed to the success of the groups. There was a lot of variability in the original scoring of the assignments. However, after discussion, many groups came up with similar rubrics and the scores evened out. The activity really seemed to get people in closer alignment about what would be considered a reasonable score.

There was less discussion about writing exams. This semester, most of the TAs are not writing their own exams. The discussion was more philosophical than practical so people had ideas to consider in their future teaching careers.