WHAT'S UNGRAADING? (PART I)

WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT 'UNGRADING', WITH SO MANY EDUCATORS BEGINNING TO UTILIZE SUCH AN APPROACH IN THEIR TEACHING. SO WHAT IS IT, AND WHAT DOES IT ENTAIL? WELL, LET'S TAKE OUR TIME TO DISCUSS IT AND SEE IF IT IS RIGHT FOR YOU!

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU SEEN A SKILLED STUDENT, ONE THAT YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY SURE HAS MASTERED THE CONCEPTS IN YOUR COURSE...

... WILT UNDER THE PRESSURE, STRESS, AND ANXIETY OF ONE OF YOUR MAIN SOURCES OF ASSESSMENT?

WHAT ARE WE ASSESSING IN THOSE CASES? WHAT THE STUDENTS KNOW? OR HOW WELL THEY PERFORM?

AND WHY ARE THEY STRESSED OR ANXIOUS?

IT MOSTLY COMES DOWN TO THE PRESSURE STUDENTS FEEL BECAUSE OF THEIR GRADES.

I RECENTLY STARTED OFF MY COURSE BY ASKING STUDENTS WHAT THE WORD 'GRADING' BROUGHT TO MIND.

63% SAID "STRESS" OR "ANXIOUS" OR "SCARY". ANOTHER 6% SAID GRADES WEREN'T REPRESENTATIVE.

NOW, THIS DOESN'T MEAN WE NEED TO ENTIRELY READJUST OUR ASSESSMENT TOOLS TO MAKE SURE STUDENTS LIKE THEM!

THEIR HAPPINESS WITH OUR CHOICE OF ASSESSMENT TOOL ISN'T THE KEY CONCERN HERE.

BUT! THE EXTREME FOCUS ON THEIR GRADES MEANS STUDENTS CARE LESS ABOUT WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED...

... AND MORE ABOUT WHAT THEY NEED TO DO TO GET AN "A", NOT CONSIDERING WHAT THEY NEED TO LEARN TO GET THERE.
It's an approach in restructuring assessment - and there are a number of ways to do it!

For example, in a contract grading approach, students are given the opportunity at the beginning of the course to agree to complete a certain number of assignments or meet a determined set of learning outcomes. In return for completing that set by the end of the course, they'll receive a specific grade in return.

So students who want an "A" will prove their mastery over a larger or broader number of outcomes, while students who might be fine with a "C" or want to prioritize their time differently will agree to do less.

And now the focus throughout the semester is on the students working to meet their learning outcomes - not on meeting certain numerical scores.

You now emphasize understanding, not performance.

Ungrading is a really powerful opportunity to structure the focus of the course.

And there are a bunch of ways to do it!

So let's talk more about it next time and see how else we can use this approach!