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INTRICACIES OF DECODING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine the extent of practices on the details of decoding performances of students done by selected faculty members of the Cebu Technological University using a descriptive method of research. It was found out that both the students and the faculty members believed that the different means of informing students, process of recording, grade computation and grade transparency and feedback system were practiced. Still this finding implies the need for improving the activities of decoding performance of students to be very evidently done as grade is the basic currency of educational system. Moreover, faculty members and students have a positive attitude towards the importance of doing the aforementioned tasks of decoding performance of students. Students attitude toward these tasks suggest the need for uniformity of decoding process as well as transparency of its results with less apprehension for any possible feedback about the coded performance.

INTRODUCTION

In general perspective, grades obtained in schooling are not the measure of a person nor are they even the sole measure of academic accomplishment—it is just a form of decoding selected performances. It is only one imperfect reflection of how much you have learned in your various courses. But grades are one of the concrete and particular things society uses to judge what you are likely to accomplish in the future (Gascylogs, 2007). It is the basic currency of the educational system. High grades result in both immediate benefits to students such as intrinsic motivation and approval of family, and long-term consequences such as admission to graduate school and preferred employment (Tata, 2006).

Grades provide information on how well students are learning and the standing of the students in class (Erickson & Strommer, 1991).It predicts success in advance work and for future references, which incorporates the concern of the students in learning (Gascylogs, 2007). It purports to measure learning, and that inseparably links the two. But today, students, parents, society, and faculty focus on grades more than learning for they assumed that grades measure learning precisely.

However, measuring learning turns out to be a complicated process of decoding algorithm of which is quite complex. And this process is further compromised by the fact that teachers do not use the same grading standards (Weimer, 2002). The same reason leads the concern of the students on how they are graded in their various courses, and it is their every right to know the procedures in grading and the percentage of rating in the grading system as per stated in the student's handbook. It is a fact though those students are shy enough to ask this decoding process leaving them at times frustrated or even hopeless to some extent.

Scriven (1995) once said that grading is used to improve the capacity of students to identify good work, that is, to improve their self evaluation or discrimination with respect to work submitted and is also a means of communication for teachers judgment of student's progress. Thus it is empirical to say that the process of grading must be revealed to the students.

Scriven (1995) has also identified other functions of grading, namely:

To describe unambiguously the worth, merit, or value of the work accomplished
To stimulate and encourage good work by students

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To inform the teacher about what students have and haven't learned
To select people for rewards or continued education

Barbara Davis (1999) of University of California said that for student's grades are also a region of approval or disapproval, thus the faculty need to communicate to students a clear rationale and policy on grading. This in turn will make the grading process more efficient and the communication of student's level of knowledge will be much easier. It also lessens students complain.

Students must be informed of their progress throughout the term. For each paper, assignment, project or major exam that had been graded, students must be informed of what their score meant. A point total rather than a letter grade was recommended. Letter grades have emotional associations that point total lack. Point total thus show the range and distribution of point scores, and indicates what level of performance is satisfactory. Such information can motivate students to improve if they are doing poorly or to maintain their performance if they are doing well. By keeping students informed throughout the term, you also prevent the unpleasant surprises at the end (Lowman & Shea, 2001).

Weimer (2002) pointed that when grading system is revealed, students are not denied the opportunity to learn important self-and-peer assessment strategy. When teaching is learner centered the assumption of automatic learning is discarded. In learner centered teaching, faculty evaluates and grades students work and these students are involved in the grading process. Students must be given the chance to learn how to assess their own work and participate in the evaluation of work done by their peers. These self-and-peer assessment activities develop skills that are independent, self-regulating which learners need. Moreover, UBC School of Nursing's Belief s Framework (2003) addresses that faculty is responsible for ensuring that grading practices and standards are consistent with the curriculum and reflect the appropriate level of enactment of the competencies inherent in the professional practice standards. Fair and consistent assessment is crucial to teaching and learning and is a professional responsibility of today's educators. Yet, many teachers would agree that assessment is one of the most challenging aspects of a teacher's role. Furthermore, students are concerned when they perceive issues of inequity in relation to their assessment, and in particular, the grading of their written work. Teachers share these concerns. Inconsistent grading practices amongst faculty, students' unrealistic expectations of grades, and a trend towards grade inflation was believed to be contributing factors to both teacher's and student's concerns. Another potential contributing factor to consider is lack of faculty knowledge about evaluation methods (Shoemaker & DeVos, 1999).

Findings from UBC School of Nursing's Belief s Framework (2003) revealed the following themes related to beliefs about grading as:

Relational Practice- Caring about, sharing power with, and communicating with students.

Good Teaching Practices- Supporting students' ongoing learning and success; the importance and nature of feedback.

Ethical Practice- Standards related to respect for students, equity, confidentiality, and consistency.

Reflective Practice- Influence of faculty assumptions about students' capacity and strengths, and about the process of grading.

Nimmer and Stone (1997) studied the effects of grading practices (strict, lenient) and time of rating (after a lecture, after taking an examination, after receiving feedback on performance on the examination) on student ratings of faculty performance and student learning (performance on an examination) were assessed in two experimental studies. Results of their study indicated that (1) student ratings were directly affected by grading practices and this effect was a function of the time at which ratings were completed, and (2) student learning and students' ratings of faculty were positively correlated, and grading practices had no effect on student learning. Implications of these findings for the administrative use of student ratings are considered.

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Huba and Freed (2000) on the other hand, stressed that to promote learning; assessment must incorporate genuine feedback that learners can employ redirecting their efforts. In other words, assessment information must be revealed to learners for them to give an understanding of how their work compares to a standard of remaining at their current level of skills or knowledge, as well as information about how to improve, if improvement is needed.

A number of researchers stressed that faculty members must reveal to students the grading system as in turn, it will give students a clear idea of their current class standing (Scriven, Davis, Lowman, Shea, Huba and Freed). According to Davis (1999), having students informed about grading policies can make grading process more efficient and communication of student's level of knowledge will be much easier. Therefore, the idea of looking into the details of grading practices must be researched based and not on any other sources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was descriptive in nature. Using the questionnaire, the researchers gathered data to answer questions concerning the study. The study was conducted at Cebu Technological University-Main Campus. It randomly selected 18 teacher-respondents and randomly selected 90 students throughout the three colleges as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents

COLLEGE	TEACHERS		STUDENTS
	Organic	Part-timer	
CoED	4	2	30
CAS	4	2	30
CoT	4	2	30
TOTAL	**12**	**6**	**90**

Among the faculty respondents, 61% were male and 39% were female. Male respondents were aged 20-49 while 6 of the 7 female respondents were aged above 40 years old. Eight (8) of the faculty respondents have obtained masters with doctoral units while another 8 were BS degree holder.

A self-made questionnaire was used to obtain information about the study. It included questions on the extent of teachers' means of informing grade computation, process of recording grades, methods of computing grades, and transparency practices. The second part of the questionnaire includes attitude of teachers and students towards the aforementioned tasks in grading performance. The extent of practices was assessed using a 3-point Likert-scale with 1 Not practiced and 3 very much practiced while a 4-point Likert-scale was used for scoring the level of attitude towards the tasks for grading students with 1 strongly disagree and 4 strongly agree.

The research team computed for the mean scores and standard deviation to answer the specific research questions.

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Table 2
Perception on the Teachers' Means of Informing
Stu d en ts' P erfo r man ce

MEANS OF INFORMING	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. The course syllabus with the school's grading system was presented to the students.	2.28	P	2.20	P
2. Grading components were discussed to the students.	2.50	VMP	2.26	P
3. Grade computation was revealed to the students.	2.50	VMP	2.03	P
4. Grading procedures for the course were clearly understood by the students.	2.50	VMP	2.22	P
5. Grades for major terms (Midterms and Final) were given to the students.	2.61	VMP	2.25	P
Average	**2.48**	**P**	**2.19**	**P**

Legend:
`X – Weighted mean
VD – Verbal Description
VMP – Very much practiced
P – Practiced
NP – Not Practiced

The findings suggest that the average of perception of both teacher and student respondents coincide. The responses of the teachers got an average of 2.48 which is Practiced (P), and student responses got an average of 2.19 which is also Practiced (P). But there is a big difference on the numerical description of the two averages; this is because there are four (4) items on the table that did not coincide. Items number two (2) to five (5) got different responses from the respondents. On the said items, teachers claimed that that particular ways are Very Much Practiced (VMP), but according to the students they are only Practiced (P). And this can be explained from the informal interview conducted, that teacher respondents believed that all faculty members implemented the different means of informing students about the practices in grading, but based on the students' observations; there were teachers who did not implement the said activities.

Item number one (1) on the table shows similar level of perception by both respondents. Both agreed that item number one (1) is only Practiced (P). This means that both teachers and students concur that not all faculty members are practicing the presentation of the course syllabus to the students. And this contradicts the expected practice found out by the study of Davis (1999) that faculty should give or present to the students the course syllabus at the beginning of the term and explain to the students the basis and procedures used in grading.

Process of Recording Students' Performance

Table 3 presents the different ways on recording done by teachers and how the students respond to the said process of recording.

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Table 3
Process of Recording Students' Performance

PROCESS OF RECORDING ECORDING	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. Class record was used as recording material.	2.83	VMP	2.58	VMP
2. Recording of scores for the quizzes done right after checking.	2.33	P	2.24	P
3. Recording of scores for the major exams done right after checking.	2.17	P	2.27	P
4. Student's work was returned after recording.	2.56	VMP	2.50	VMP
5. Student's evaluated works was kept.	2.17	P	2.09	P
Average	**2.41**	**P**	**2.34**	**P**

The results indicate that both teachers and students coincide that the different process of recording are only Practiced (P). This means that both teachers and students are aware that not all faculty members are evidently practicing the different processes of recording. However, teachers and students have observed that teachers have very much practiced the use of class record as recording material and as well as returning their works after recording. The said items, corroborates to the study of Shea (2001), which according to him graded assignment or test should be returned to the students immediately.

Methods of Computing Students' Performance

Table 4 exhibits the different methods on computing done by teachers and how the students respond to the said methods of computing.

Table 4. Method of Computing Students' Performance

METHODS OF COMPUTING	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. The grading procedures set by the office were followed.	2.50	VMP	2.53	VMP
2. 40% rate of passing was adopted.	2.00	P	2.19	P
3. Transmutation in grading was adopted.	2.39	P	2.30	P
4. MSExcel was used in computing students' grades.	1.83	P	2.39	P
5. Students' attendance was part of the teachers grading component.	2.00	P	2.39	P
Average	**2.10**	**P**	**2.36**	**P**

The findings indicate the ways of computing got only a Practiced (P) response on both teacher and student as shown in the averages. Thus, students observe that not all teachers are practicing the said ways and teachers are also aware about this. On item number one (1) both teachers and students' agreed that the said method was being fully practiced. And this result relates to the study of Dowd (2000) which states that institutions are likely to insist on uniform grading practices to avoid students' confusion. He added that students deserved fair and consistent assessment and that the lack of faculty knowledge about evaluation method may seemed unfair to the students. Faculty has the professional responsibilities for ensuring grading standards to be consistent with the curriculum, for students are concerned when they perceive issues of inequity in relation to their assessments, and in particular, the grading of their written work (Shoemaker and DeVos, 1999). Thus, it is apt that teachers follow the grading procedures set by the office for uniformity and fairness of students' assessment.

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Transparency of Students' Performance

Table 5 presents the transparency of the teachers on the grading practices and students response to the said transparency.

Generally, it was found out that both teachers and students perceived teachers have just practiced transparency of grades. This means that most items were also answered as Practiced (P) indicating that not all faculty members are visibly doing such transparencies. Respondents also disagreed on some items. According to the teachers, item three (3) and five (5) are Very Much Practiced (VMP) but for the students, they are only Practiced (P) by their teachers. Teachers believed that they were open for recomputation of grades and to students' feedback. This belief coincides with the study of Huba and Freed (2000), according to them, to promote learning, assessment must incorporate genuine feedbacks not only to the students but also to the teachers. And as we interview some students, they were not aware that teachers were open for recomputation of grades and for students' feedback. Other students were afraid to approach teachers.

Table 5
Transparency of Students' Performance

TEACHERS' TRANSPARENCY	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. Students were given a chance to compute their grades.	1.94	P	2.02	P
2. Discussion was provided during student's questions regarding their grade computation.	2.38	P	2.41	P
3. Teachers were open for recomputation of grades.	2.72	VMP	2.17	P
4. Adequate feedbacks on students' performance were given.	2.33	P	2.19	
5. Teachers were open to students' feedback.	2.67	VMP	2.38	P
Average	**2.41**	**P**	**2.23**	**P**

Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards The Means of Informing Grade of Performance

Table 6 manifests the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the means of informing about the schools' grading system.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS INFORMING	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. The course syllabus with the school's grading system should be presented to the students.	3.28	A	3.33	A
2. Grading components should be discussed to the students.	3.39	A	3.44	A
3. Grade computation must be revealed to the students.	3.11	A	3.37	A
4. Students should clearly understand the grading procedures for the course.	3.28	A	3.42	A
5. Grades for major terms (Midterm and Finals) must be given.	3.44	A	3.41	A
Average	**3.30**	**A**	**3.39**	**A**

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Legend:

`X	–	Weighted mean
VD	–	Verbal Description
SA	-	Strongly Agree
A	-	Agree
D	-	Disagree
SD	-	Strongly Disagree

The finding shows that the two groups of respondents have the same idea regarding the different attitudes towards informing the grading system. Both teachers and students believed that students should know how their performances are to be graded even during the presentation of syllabi. The finding is supportive to the study of Davis (1999) which pointed out that course syllabus explains to the class the meaning and procedures used in grading and that students want to know how their grades will be determined and the weights of each grade components.

Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards The Process of Recording

Table 7 shows the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the process of recording done by teachers.

The result illustrates that teachers and students both Agree (A) on importance of different recording activities as shown in their averages. But item number five (5) as shown, displays opposite responses, for teachers believed that each paper, assignment or project they graded should be given to students immediately as possible, thus, they find it necessary to let students keep their graded works to motivate themselves. It is also one way of letting the students evaluate their own performance (Lowman and Shea, 2001). But students have contradicting response as based on our informal interview; for they thought that keeping their works by themselves have a higher risk of losing them. That is why they believed that it is advantage on their part to have the teachers keep their graded works.

Table 7
Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards The Process of Recording

ATTITUDES TOWARDS RECORDING	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. Class record should be used as recording material.	3.11	A	3.39	A
2. Recording of scores for the quizzes should be done right after checking.	3.00	A	3.30	A
3. The recording of scores for the major exams should be done right after checking.	3.00	A	3.28	A
4. Student's work must be returned after recording.	3.11	A	3.09	A
5. Teachers should keep student's evaluated works.	2.44	D	3.17	A
Average	**2.93**	**A**	**3.25**	**A**

Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards The Methods of Computing

Table 8 displays the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the methods of computing done by teachers.

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Table 8
Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards The Methods of Computing

ATTITUDES TOWARDS COMPUTING	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. Grading procedure set by the office must be followed.	2.89	A	3.26	A
2. 40% rate of passing must be adopted.	2.94	A	2.97	A
3. Transmutation in grading should be adopted.	3.06	A	3.39	A
4. MSExcel should be used in computing student's grade.	2.78	A	3.48	A
5. Student's attendance must be part of the grading component	2.75	A	3.28	A
Average	**2.88**	**A**	**3.28**	**A**

In general perspective, both respondents agreed that the methods of computing grades are important. Teachers revealed that they followed the grading procedures of their offices but it did not mean that they Strongly Agree on the said policies; as Dowd (2000) stressed that institutions likely insist uniform grading practices, that is why teachers are obliged to follow.

Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards Teachers' Transparency

Table 9 displays the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the methods of computing done by teachers.

The findings exhibit identical opinion between the two groups of respondents. Both gained an average response of Agree (A). This means that feedbacks are relevant to them. And this corroborates to the statement of Weimer (2002); according to him, feedbacks should be given to improve one's performance.

Table 9
Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Towards Teachers' Transparency

ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHERS' TRANSPARENCY	Teachers `X	Teachers VD	`X	VD
1. Students should have the chance to compute their grades.	2.83	A	3.31	A
2. A discussion should be provided during student's questions regarding their grade computation	3.22	A	3.48	A
3. Teacher must be open for recomputation of grades.	3.22	A	3.39	A
4. Adequate feedbacks on student's performance ought to be given.	3.22	A	3.47	A
5. Teachers should be open to student's feedbacks.	3.39	A	3.46	A
Average	**3.18**	**A**	**3.42**	**A**

CONCLUSION

The data from this study indicate that the some practices of decoding students' performances were not evidently practiced by teachers and thus the need to improve this process. Students and teachers agreed the importance of informing the grading process, process of recording, methods of grade computation and transparency in decoding performances.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Grade of student determines the overall performance in a certain subject thus the need to come up with apparent grading system that is uniform to any courses offered in the institution. Educational supervision should also be strengthened to ensure fair computation of grades and recording as well as transparency of performance which allows student to feedback of their grade computation.

Multivariate study of the characteristics of teachers doing the tasks for grading should also be done for in depth analysis of the concern of decoding performance.

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