

Q&A responses

If we shouldn't use grades or GPAs, what should we use to evaluate students?

It's fine to use grades and SAT/ACT scores as **one** of the ways to evaluate students. Quantitative and standardized assessment should be used in concert with other factors, so the students is given a wholistic evaluation and not one just based on numbers. Since we know there is many biases in standardized exams, they should not be used as the sole means of evaluation. The numbers cannot describe challenges, obstacles, hard work, effort, and circumstances that may attribute to their academic profile. In fact, many of the traits that we would find most desirable in students cannot be qualified through standardized exams. It is important that we allow space for that. Furthermore, various funds of knowledge are often not assessed on the exams.

How can we get more of our colleagues to care about making our classrooms more inclusive?

This is a justice, fairness, and outcomes issues. Failing to include others creates an environment where everyone cannot flourish. If we want the future to be different, we must start today. Deans, department heads and program directors must hold everyone accountable for their actions. Much research has been done on the benefits of diverse teams and groups. (Page, S. E. (2008). *The difference: How the power of diversity creates better groups, firms, schools, and societies-new edition*. Princeton University Press.) One way to change someone's mind is through the data.

What are some practices while teaching that support the growth rather than fixed mindset?

Dr. Ben Wiggins (University of Washington) talks about the need for various types of assessments. Having multiple types of engagement and assessment help students progress their thinking and mindset. For instance, there are clicker-question, group discussions, zoom rooms, facebook/canvas post, projects, group exams, and essays. These are always and opportunities to push ones thinking to a new dimension. (<https://www.coursehero.com/faculty-club/classroom-tips/benjamin-wiggins/>)

Why would someone not want to be called "smart"? So does "grit" fall in the same category as "smart" — something that someone is born with?

This is Star speaking on her on accord, and I don't believe in smarts or grit. To me all students have potential it is our imperative to provided them with appropriate resources and push them to give 100% effort, so they realize it. Most people are capable of far more than they think and realize. I see grit as a cloaked way of saying the poor and minoritized need to "work harder." Too often success for minoritized students has considerably more challenges than their counterparts. We need to help students develop strategic resilience. Resilience that is considered carefully and allows for strategic adjustments where students can propel themselves forward, but not banding their head up against the wall.

- Here is a useful reflection on the idea of "grit":
<http://mikerosebooks.blogspot.com/2016/06/grit-revisited-reflections-on-our.html>
- http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning_deeply/2015/04/the_problem_with_grit.html

- Great op-ed about grit and anti-black racism:
<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/02/13/grit-is-in-our-dna-why-teaching.html>

I loved the comment that departmental seminars should “present the science for diversifying science”. This is hard when faculty in departments have never done this kind of work, just pure basic science, and we can’t keep inviting BIPOC people as guests. Any suggestions on how to strengthen dept seminars?

Anytime departments seriously want something done they offer small initiation grants. The department could start by presenting “the science of diversity in their departments.” Show where the department sits on the continuum of diversity and work from there. One may find opportunities where the mark is being missed or where general improvement may occur. As a comparison, department can use NSF statistics for baseline comparison. Be sure this work is done by two to three faculty (preferably white male full professors) that can serve as champions. Absolutely, do not ask women, minorities, and assistant professors to do this work, it is unfair, it can be used against them, and this is often unpaid labor that doesn’t contribute to tenure/promotion.

Should universities not evaluate/hold departments accountable in some way that have a high "fail" rate for the PhD qualifier for minority women? Its remarkably skewed in some departments.

Absolutely they should. In fact, if this is a pattern the department should also have a way of deidentifying the exams before they are submitted for evaluation. This sound like more of a method of “weeding out” rather than examining content knowledge. If the exam were anonymous then they could be assessed with not racial, gender, or PI bias. This is a serious issue because of some of the department are working hard to recruit and prepare women and minorities while other are derailing the efforts by weeding good candidates out the department is working itself.

What is negative about homosexual?

The term homosexual is considered offensive to many LGBTQ+ individuals. Here is a recent suite of recommendations for making academic biology more inclusive for LGBTQ+ individuals: <https://www.lifescied.org/doi/full/10.1187/cbe.20-04-0062>. Though some may feel frustrated that names and terminologies change we must remember it is not up to us to decide what other groups should be called. We all need to defer to the members of that community for their preferences and know yes, terminology evolves and so must we. What we have seen in several communities is reclaiming terms (e.g. LGBTQ community reclaiming the term queer).

To what extent is the problem in the word itself, versus the context, intent, and speaker? In some cases there is a huge problem with the word itself. Other cases make me think any word without inclusive intent could become a problem.

Some words are just offensive and should be avoided at all cost. We need not list all those words. Other cases are indeed dependent on the intent and context. It important that words and categories not be used to perpetuate old or start new stereotypes. For instance, often the term “urban” is used as code word for Black students, but in reality “urban” means city.

Painting all Black students as city dwellers is not true. In other words, we need to be careful with our terms and make sure the context is accurate.

Given the demonstrated discriminatory aspects of curved (i.e. competitive or "not all shall pass") grading (documented in Talking about Leaving, why has this practice not already been banned as educational malpractice?

What are the forces opposing its elimination? It may not be a good practice, but departments allow it. It also seems like there is a certain antiquated perverse pride in failing half of the class. If there is no accountability structure forcing faculty to do better so they will continue with their antiquated methods. We need to start holding "bad" teacher accountable for their poor methodology and outcomes. As a matter of economics, it makes no sense for all students to be admitted and then 50% be failed or pushed to the majors. This does not work as an education model or financial model.

Isn't the definition of "success" racialized/gendered?

Success should be within the grasp of all who participate regardless of gender or ethnicity. The 4th box story nicely displays the difference between equality and equity

<https://www.storybasedstrategy.org/the4thbox>

In this virtual learning environment how can we identify students who need help?

Multiple types of assessments, both formative and summative could help decipher this. Offering increased summative assessments help. Also, holding online office hours and reaching out when students have the first sight of distress. Intervene before things snowball out of control and embarrassment becomes an additional obstacle.

I think many people can't keep up with the "right" terms. Are there some words in this cloud that are necessary to use?

Not all words in the cloud were offensive, but we must think about how we are classifying broad groups of people. For instance, "urban," are we referring to all city dwelling people? We just need to be careful and have accurate context for our words.

How can we get funding agencies to reframe language that they use?

We can work with program officers to demonstrate best practices in language and why the current verbiage is problematic and contributes to the problems they are attempting to solve. Remember people that work at funding agencies are no different than people that work at academic institutions.

In many ways, the job market requires us to define excellence. Are we not being fair to students by not being frank about competition in the workplace? We absolutely should be clear and frank about the workplace competition, but we also must let them know if they work hard and do their best there is a place for them. Sometimes to get where we want, we must take the longer road if we are not as accomplished initially. If they know what it takes to succeed and they are willing to put in the work they can make it, likewise if they decide to take another path that suits them better that is fine, but we cannot let them live in dilution.

Can you comment on the term PEER?

See the first seminar in this series by Dr. David Asai. Persons excluded because of ethnicity or race. Here is an article about the term: [https://www.cell.com/cell/pdf/S0092-8674\(20\)30337-8.pdf](https://www.cell.com/cell/pdf/S0092-8674(20)30337-8.pdf)