Comments from the Survey on Grading Papers (June 2012)

1. Grading won't affect what I do but (I disagree with Elbow that it creates more work) but it may affect my students' reactions, their clarity about and understanding of requirements (beyond what is provided by the rubric), and their clarity about their progress. Since I require students to respond directly to my comments in their (mandatory) revisions, I do not think grades will reduce their ability to learn or improve.

2. Grades come to define the class and the students' sense of writing as a process. If we look at writing as having multiple steps, how do we assign a grade. And in the end of the quarter, when we have this set of grades, won't those limit the way we can look at the student's work as a whole? A student who has improved tremendously but is still struggling is doomed. Writing is a combination of so many steps and so many elements--grades I think limit us in the way we can evaluate a student's progress. Even my students who resist not getting a grade on each paper usually come to appreciate the process--they say it frees them as writers to experiment without fear. If I stick a letter or a number on a paper they will stop looking at my comments as carefully. I saw this in other schools where I had to give grades. Though I can see the temptation and understand the desire to give grades, I think I would become a weaker reader of their papers and they will lose that sense of process.

3. Grades on papers is anti-ethical to my pedagogy and undermine my efforts to get students to pay attention to the written feedback.

4. I haven't read the essays - maybe I should wait to respond until i have more time to do so. But my initial thoughts are that it is increasingly difficult to maintain an ideological position about writing as process with endless feedback from the instructor. The result of not giving students grades is that they study for their chem final instead of writing and revising, because they get grades in those classes, and grades are what matter. If we gave them grades on things, then they would value the work more. I hate to say it and I really don't want to give grades, but I also hate spending an hour giving meaningful feedback on a shitty draft, only to later find out that the student, by his own admission, put no time or effort into it because he had a midterm for which he was receiving a concrete grade. Grade drafts, and then grade the revision as well. Initially it would be hard, but in the long run, I think it would make students more accountable. I think it would force us to make grading criteria more transparent -- I think grading criteria should be more uniform across sections as well.

5. I feel strongly that my role/relationship as a coach for my students' writing skill is hampered by switching to an evaluator/judging role. When portfolio assessment and its goals are explained well, students are more likely to continue working on individual skills across multiple papers if they feel credit will be granted in portfolio assessment. Further, grades distract students from the learning outcomes (skills) by focusing them instead on the object-- the individual assignment or paper. Such an assignment-centric focus keeps students from seeing how their writing instruction translates to the real world, or at least their broader academic world.

6. seems kinda complicated and tough to get an assured outcome?

7. While I currently do not assign grades on individual essays, I would like the freedom to do so. At times, I feel that my students would respond more seriously to grades than they do to my comments. A grade, while it is a blunt instrument, provides a simple, easily deciphered indication of success. Considering that many of our students come from high schools that focus on testing and are enrolled in majors in which this is the norm, I don't think that it is always fair
to demand that they learn an entirely new system, no matter how beneficial we might believe it to be. In this sense, students might find grades more, not less, informative than extensive comments. Similarly, a grade, particularly a lower grade, offers me the opportunity to speak to my students more frankly than I might be able to, or willing to, in written comments.

8. I only had time to briefly skim the articles, and I look forward to reading them in more depth soon -- so these are mainly just my initial thoughts. My worry with grading is that my students would simply look for a grade and not look at my comments -- and thus not learn as much from their papers. However, I know that there would be ways to deal with this issue and make a grading system work -- and therefore, this is a conversation that I would like to continue with the WP. I think many students would appreciate a grading system, and I think that it could help to cut down on some of our workload issues.

9. I'd like to keep the essays ungraded, but not un-assessed or unevaluated. I myself use narrative remarks and grids, and I found many of Elbow's suggestions about horizontality and verticality good, too. In particular, I value the way that non-letter evaluation undercuts students' emphasis on grades and tries to direct that interest toward the work they're doing, instead. If we feel pressure to give grades on individual papers, does that pressure come from us?

10. I'm not at all sure how it would work - when i used to grade individual writing assignments (at another institution), students tended to write for the grade and downplay or ignore comments on how to actually improve the writing. So I'd have to spend some time unpacking the grade itself - what criteria are involved and so forth. But even if the Writing Program were to adopt a uniform approach and i was required to begin assigning letter grade on individual assignments, I'd still have students doing lots of group work, writing partnerships, assignment assessments and things like that, which are intended to give substance to both the assignment and to the method of assessment.

11. My "resistance" tot grading essays is based on several beliefs. I believe grades encourage students to "stop" writing rather than continue; that grades distract from actual thinking or discovering what one thinks through writing or through understanding how the essay/formal writing is "reaching" an audience; and that grades often invoke a set of standards/skills we have to measure in order to select the grade as "teacher/assessors" constraint usually disallows risk-taking as one of the measures, even though I believe risk-taking and vulnerability are keys to unlocking "good" writing (and good writing process).

12. I agree with Elbow. I think grading essays would affect the way students approach the writing process. The same thing that happened when the university starting assigning grades would take place on a more frequent basis: students would be more concerned (and aggressive!) about getting a certain grade than understanding the principles of effective college level writing. I'm not sure why, but I suspect that grading essays may promote grade inflation.

13. I already use a grading rubric; so, while I don't put a letter grade on students' papers, students still get a sense of how they did. I, therefore, don't think giving a grade would change my pedagogy all that much. With or without grades, I would have students revise and continue to work on and refine their papers. That is, a grade on a paper would not necessarily be "the final word." While I understand and appreciate the rationale behind not giving grades, I would like to have the ability to give students grades as they so often seem anxious without them. Since students are so grade conscious and driven, I especially think that a really clear D or F could push/motivate those who check out.
14. Grading in a frosh level writing course simply makes no sense to me. Wouldn't it mean "punishing" students for not yet being the writers they can become? What would the criteria be for grading esl folks? Or any non-practised analytical writer?

15. We teach our students that each assignment has its own purpose. Accordingly, I tailor my feedback strategies to fit the purpose and goals of each of my assignments. I meet in group conferences for the foundational or long assignments, and the longer verbal comments are completely necessary. Neither a written comment nor a grade could substitute for all that feedback I give them in conference. And I would like the option to *not* give them a letter grade in these instances so they have to work with my comments. However, having the *option* to give grades on certain assignments could help me meet my pedagogical goal of spending a LOT of time in conferences delivering a LOT of information without burning out on the smaller assignments. I am not one of those people who can just opt out of communication. I always feel obliged to supply long narrative comments on each of our (five required) essays. Having the option to communicate in a universal language on even a couple of those assignments could address the workload issue that, for many of us, has gotten out of hand (because I see SO many writing issues that need to be addressed--more and more, and this situation has changed drastically just in the last few years). I know I could achieve the "excellent" standard as a teacher more easily if I could just get my own work load under hand. My complete exhaustion is not helping them even though it's obvious that some of them need MUCH more than a single Writing 2 class can supply them. I'd like the option to experiment with grades to see if it would help. I can imagine it would help to be able to communicate directly with them within the academic discourse adopted by our entire campus--the letter grade--since they understand it. It *could* help those students who are obviously not even taking the time to read all our "blood, sweat, and tears" comments to perform a chin-up in their writing, since it doesn't take much time to read "C" for example. I would always accompany my grade with comments, but it's another form of communication that I would like to have available to me as needed.