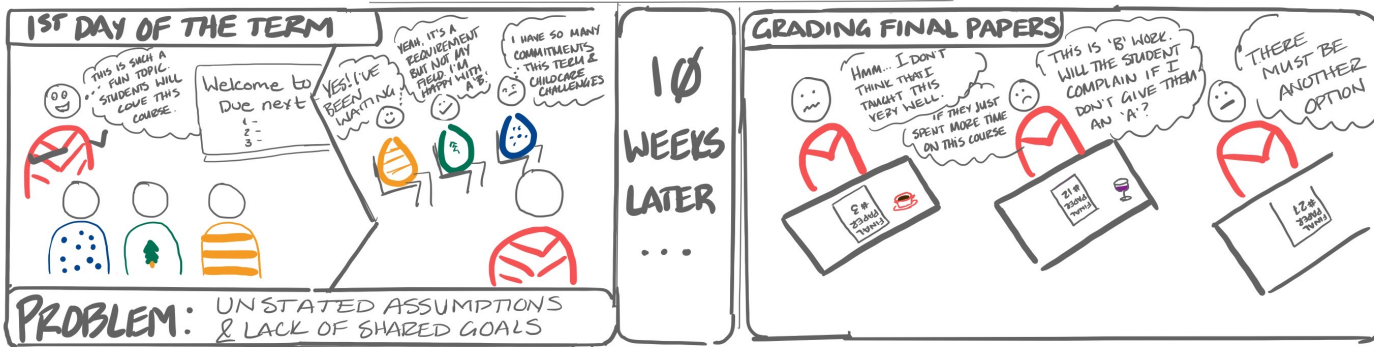


Contract grading allows students choice and creates a shared understanding of success.

Redefining success: Piloting contract grading in graduate courses

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Background

Students and faculty have differing definitions of success in courses. Rarely is there an explicit conversation about this. The default expectation becomes an "A." Contract grading defines students' options to complete their coursework and the consequences. In a nutshell, students can choose to do less work for a lower grade.

Contract grading shifts the conversation between students and faculty. Students can gain a greater sense of agency and control by defining what success looks like to them (Katopodis & Davidson, 2020). Students may have greater internal motivation (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009). While faculty set up a menu of options, students can choose given their personal goals and constraints.

Methods

In Fall 2021, students could contract for their final grade in MGT 522 Influencing Change. Students could opt for a grade of up to a "B," "B+," or "A." Faculty clearly outlined expectations for each grade. Work was graded on quantity and quality. (Scan QR code for more about this.)

Findings

Contract grading was well used and received by students. Of the 24 students enrolled in the course, 11 (46%) chose to contract for a lower grade. Furthermore, it reduced faculty grading load.

Impact

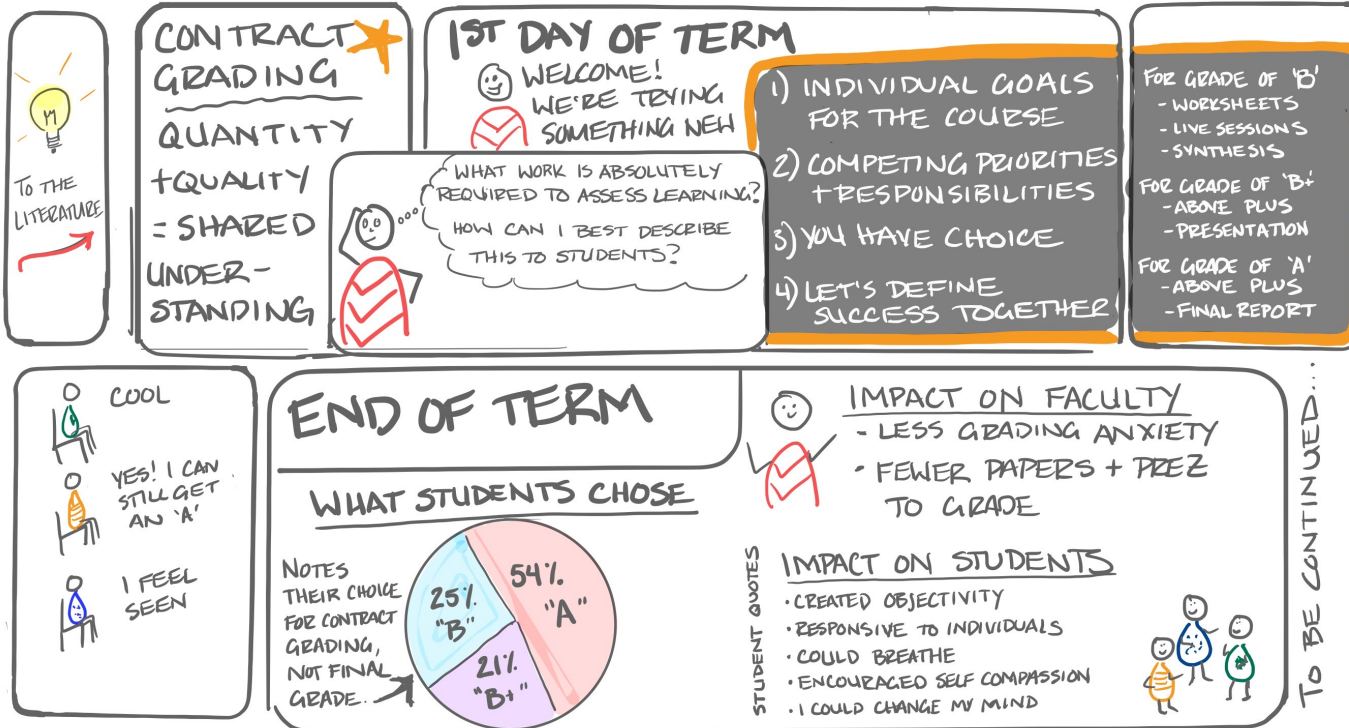
The impact of this pilot was overwhelmingly positive. The students and faculty had shared agreements about expectations. The students expressed positive emotions associated with their choices, this as a student-centered approach and noted that it encouraged self-compassion. From a faculty perspective, grading was reduced while learning objectives were met. A caveat to this approach is that faculty must carefully consider how students demonstrate course learning objects and any programmatic consequences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, students can choose not to complete assignments in most courses and earn lower grades in any course. However, in the absence of contract grading, we often see this as a problem with a negative consequence. Contract grading allows students and faculty to create an alternate, shared assumption that better supports students' learning goals and program goals.

References

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