

Opinion: Participation should not determine grades

By Emily J. Klein and Meg Riordan, Huffington Post

“Stop counting participation as part of a student’s grade.”

As a professor of teacher education at Montclair State University, every time I teach our unit on assessment, I begin class with this statement. Usually, there’s a nervous giggle that spreads around the room, and my students wait for me to say, “Just kidding.” But I’m not, and neither is my colleague Meg Riordan, who for years has been supporting Expeditionary Learning leaders and teachers to implement a clear vision for students’ learning that includes standards-based grading: separating academic achievement from the habits that support it—such as participation, effort, or timeliness.

Imagine two students. They both receive an 80 as their final course grade. Ideally, that number should reveal what each student did or did not understand about the content and demonstrate her ability to perform particular skills. But what happens when the teacher includes “class participation” as 25 percent of the grade? Student A might have received a 90 on the final comprehensive exam or project, which assesses content and skills. Or maybe Student A received a 65 but, due to constant participation in class, benefited from a boost to her grade.

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