

More email responses.

John McCuan

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Perhaps predictably, my last email stating explicitly that it was **not an invitation to send me an email checking on course grades** resulted in a flurry of emails from students checking on course grades. Perhaps my responses will help with understanding what somehow seems to be a very perplexing topic for many students. There are, of course, many aspects of the topic that are extremely perplexing to me as well, but I'm doing the best I can.

The first is a short excerpt from an email I sent some time ago in the middle of the semester. It is on a somewhat different topic, but yet a topic which is also somehow indirectly relevant to the end of the course and the assigning of course grades.

Subject: what constitutes a definition

...my main point is that I only thought about the question for about 5 seconds. You have referred repeatedly to your “professional experience” from an internship, and it may very well be the case that many people who “perform” regression professionally have never spent 5 seconds actually considering and trying to understand what they are doing. That, it seems to me, is definitely something that might be of interest to some people, especially if a person would like to consider the consequences of his actions in life. And I am quite well aware that there may be little interest in thinking about the atrocious consequences of the way people are spending their time and all the havoc that is being wreaked by unthinking individuals, but from my point of view giving students the opportunity to do a little critical thinking is one of the main points of my role in the course. And certainly there is a great deal of (mostly empty) chatter about buzzwords like “solving problems in the world” and “sustainability.” The

fact of the matter, of course, is that most individuals and especially individuals who have been subjected to university indoctrination are at the forefront of creating “the next” big problems in the world rather than solving any of the ones they have previously created. This is seemingly the theme and purpose of institutions like Georgia Tech after all: **Creating the Next** element of an automated unsustainable hell on earth. But that is a somewhat different subject.

Subject: homework assignments & papers 2 and 3

Hi Student Z,

I think almost all of the topics concerning which you have curiosity have been clearly addressed elsewhere. Here are few points of review:

- (1) If an assignment is turned in after the due date, then you should not expect feedback. In particular, you will see no grade for that assignment.
- (2) I read your paper 1, and I tried to take it into account when assigning your course grade.
- (3) The basic requirement to get an “A” is to engage the course material in some way beyond the homework assignments. In most instances an effort beyond the homework assignments is determined by the interest of the student. Completing papers 1, 2, and 3 on topics with given prompts, under normal circumstances, would not constitute engaging the course material beyond the homework assignments. While these papers, like every aspect of the course including the homework assignments, have a certain optional character they might be considered similar to the homework assignments. At least one student did not complete the homework assignments formally and still was assigned an “A,” but this is quite unusual. Turning in written solutions for the homework assignments is usually a good place to **start**. It might be possible to engage the course material beyond the homework assignments within the context of the homework assignments themselves, and it may be possible to engage the course material beyond the homework assignments in the context of the papers, but

neither of these possibilities represent what usually happens. Engaging the course materials beyond the homework assignments usually requires direct interaction with me—at least if I am to be made aware of it, which is something of an evident necessity if I (the one who assigns course grades) am to take account of it.

I am unaware that you have engaged the course material in any way beyond the homework assignments—for example, I do not recall that you have ever discussed any aspects of the course with me in office hours or in email. As you point out, you’ve waited until after the scheduled final exam time to ask about anything, and even now what you are asking about is not really indicative of engaging the subject matter of the course in some manner that could be viewed as “going beyond the homework assignments.”

- (4) Based on everything I see, everything that you are expressing, and what you have expressed in your paper 1, especially about grades being an opportunity to reflect on how you have managed your time during the semester and such things, the appropriate grade seems to be a “B” rather than an “A.”

In addition, I think the course grades were assigned strongly in the spirit of your paper 1 without rigid requirements concerning tests and such things. I think there was a lot of opportunity for learning, and I think you might have taken better advantage of that opportunity. I think this kind of idea is quite consistent with what you wrote in paper 1. Naturally, there is always some possibility that I am not understanding clearly what you were trying to express, but I certainly tried.

John

Subject: final grade

Hello Student *W*,

Thank you for letting me know you can’t see the grades. I didn’t (and don’t) know how that works. Presumably, you will be able to see the course grade at some point. It seems like a student eventually gets to know the course grade that was assigned to him. I can’t see the grade

you were assigned right now either. But I did assign one. From what you are describing, it is likely you were assigned an “A,” though it may also be likely that you didn’t actually stretch yourself to a level that would reasonably be considered “engaging the course material beyond the homework assignments.” What probably happened is that I saw you had done the homework and then looked to see if you had uploaded something to Canvas under the heading “project report” (1 or 2). If I found something there, then I looked at it at least briefly. Here is the problem: Just because something was submitted does not mean that what was submitted actually had much content. And also it is likely that at this late stage of the game I was not going to take the time to evaluate what you had uploaded carefully. Ideally, as I mentioned many times during the semester, you should bring your work to my attention and we should discuss it. I am a very stupid person, but if I can’t understand what you have written or do not get anything out of it, then that is probably not just the consequence of the fact that I am a stupid person. It is probably partially the result the either (1) you do not understand very well (or well enough or as well as you can) some of what you are trying to write about or (2) you are not explaining it very well (or well enough or as well as you can). This will probably lead to some revision. If this revision process does not take place and even if it does, there is no guarantee that you actually have a completed a project, even though you have uploaded something to canvas, made a video, or even made an in-class presentation. In particular, in answer to your question, completing a presentation in class, while a nice thing to do, does not constitute completing a project. I guess fundamentally, “completing a project” means doing something that indicates to a stupid person like myself (who happens to be the person assigning the course grades) that you have understood some topic completely and can explain it in a way that another human being (even a pretty stupid one) can understand. Having said that, it is likely that if you uploaded something, and it didn’t strike me as immediately obviously gibberish, then I said, “Well, this person seems to have done something. I don’t have the time to understand it, and it’s unfortunate that this person didn’t go through the review process and all that. He probably could have learned more. But I guess I’ll have to assume there is something there.” It is possible, I looked and just thought what you had uploaded had no content. If that was clear to me, and all I saw was homework, then I would assign

a “B.” There were a number of instances in which a student had uploaded just some kind of outline of topics. Maybe yours was one of those, and in those instances what was uploaded definitely did not constitute the completion of a project. Honestly, I don’t recognize you or your name. I don’t think you have ever come to office hours or discussed with me anything about the course. All of these things are not a good sign. On the other hand, I definitely would have checked Canvas for something uploaded as a project, and if I thought there was some possibility you had completed something that might be considered a viable project, then I would have likely assigned an “A” for the course grade. I also looked at what you had written for paper 1 (if you uploaded something for that) and tried to take what you had written into account if possible.

John

Subject: question about grades

Hi Student B,

I can’t see your grade either, and I don’t remember what I assigned. If you attended class, then you should have heard my suggestions to have me look at your work and determine if it was appropriate to schedule a presentation. There were also several announcements mentioning this. The bottom line is that just uploading something to Canvas under the heading of “project” does not mean you completed a project. On the other hand, there are many ways to “engage the course material beyond the homework assignments,” but it looks like you have decided to let everything rest on whatever you uploaded to Canvas. All I can say is that if something was there, then I should have looked at it and tried to make some determination. If you had talked to me about it during the semester, then we would likely both know what I thought of it. But you didn’t do that, so we don’t know. Maybe it’s your first “B.” I guess it can be good to experience new things. Most likely, if you didn’t just upload an outline or something that I could immediately identify as gibberish, I went ahead and assigned you an “A.” If you think you could have stretched yourself more during the semester and could have learned more if you had talked to me about that which you were thinking, then you should probably be

assigned a “B.”

John