A Proposal to the Faculty Senate of Stockton University: Encouraging Stockton
Faculty to Embrace Bias-Free Grading

From the Student Senate of Stockton University
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Outline

This proposal outlines a recommendation to the faculty of Stockton University to utilize anonymous grading as a means of reducing the impact of implicit bias in the grading process. Research clearly shows the impact of implicit bias on an individual's decision making, and it may be particularly influential in an educational setting.

The Problem

Current research strongly supports the theory that due to an individual's implicit biases, grading students' performance can be negatively affected by lack of impartiality. Implicit biases may be related to a student's race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, disability, or previous academic performance in the class.

The Research

All humans have biases that results from our need to categorize people and things into groups that are easier for processing (Community Relations Services Toolkit for Policing, n.d). There are different types of biases: implicit biases and explicit biases. Explicit bias refers to when an individual is aware of the biases they have to a specific group of individuals and how this bias affects their decision making. Implicit bias is when an individual is unaware of their biases and the way it affects their decision making. Even though implicit bias is harder to identify, it can be reduced by addressing its presence, and putting measures in place to reduce its impact.

There are various aspects of a student's identity that can lead to them being the victim of implicit bias in academia. Studies find that a student's **migrant background** can affect the way their intelligence is perceived in the classroom. Via the use of the Implicit Association test, Bonefeld & Dickhauser (2018) found that students who were known to graders as having an **immigration history** were assigned lower scores than students who had no immigrant background. Immigrant students are also overrepresented in special education classes due to educators' lowered expectations for students with immigration status and a special education need (SEN) compared to students with just a SEN (Pit-ten Cate & Glock, 2018).

The **gender** of the individual can also lead to bias and can have negative impacts on a student's grades. Studies have found that when the same assignment is submitted twice (one with a male sounding name and the other with a female sounding name) in a male-dominated area of study (e.g., STEM and Computer Science), the person with the traditional female sounding name is more likely to get a lower grade than the person with a male sounding name if the grader scores high in implicit or explicit bias grading scales (Hofer, 2015; Jackson, 2016). These biases are important to address because they cause the disadvantaged individual to receive lower grades, doubt the value they add to the area of study, and might discourage them from pursuing a career in these fields (Mechtenberg, 2009; Shapiro, & Williams, 2012).

Name based bias can also affect the grades of students with **racial/ethnic** sounding names. Students with names that are minority sounding are also subjected to harsher grading practices than students with non-minority sounding names, even when the same assignments were submitted for grading (Nick, 2017; Malouff & Thorsteinsso, 2016; Sprietsma, 2013; Wen, 1979). This is regardless of the classroom type since students with minority sounding names in online classes are also subjected to this type of bias (Conaway & Bethune, 2015). Students with **learning disabilities** can also be undermined when nonrelevant information is being factored into grading and these learning challenges negatively affects the educator's attitude towards the student (Krischler & Pit-ten Cate, 2019).

Bias in grading can also provide some students with an advantage. This phenomenon is known as **halo effect** in grading. Malouff, Emmerton, and Schutte (2013) conducted a study where professors were given the same assignment for two students after they completed an oral presentation, though the oral presentation and the written piece were not related assignments. One student did well in the presentation, the other did not perform as well. Professors gave higher grades to the student who performed well in the oral presentation (even though the assignment was unrelated to the oral presentation). Malouff, Stein, Bothma, Coulter, and Emmerton (2014) later found similar results confirming the impact of the halo effect on grading.

The Vision

In the spirit of being led by research and best practice, this proposal seeks to provide a recommendation for faculty to engage in bias-free grading. For the purpose of this recommendation, bias-free grading is being defined as grading strategies that try to, as much as possible, prevent the implicit bias of the grader from influencing the grading of an individual. There are various ways that this could be done. The objective could be accomplished by double grading, having a second-party grade, or by concealing the identity of the individual whose work is being graded. The objective of this practice is to curb the influence that implicit bias has on grading by removing, where possible, variables that might implicitly affect grading. Another possible unintended positive of this grading practice is that students might view their grades more fairly and professors can be motivated by the fact that they are doing whatever they can to limit the influence of implicit bias in grading (Jae & Cowling, 2009).

How?

The literature presents different strategies that an educator can use to gain this objective. Because of the extensive resource requirement of some strategies (ex. having a second grader), this proposal will recommend only one main suggestion that would not require a professor or Stockton University to make any large investment. This specific strategy is also suggested

because it is likely the least disruptive and the easiest to be incorporated into the grading process. The suggestion made here is to have the student's identity concealed.

Concealing the student's identity:
One way to help prevent bias in grading is to conceal the identity of the student. If an educator knows a student's name, they might also be aware of or be able to assume other characteristics of a student's identity such as their race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other markers of a person's identity. This strategy could help prevent the grader from making any implicit judgement that could either positively or negatively affect their grading process. The professor is protected from giving a higher grade to students that they might have positive opinions of (e.g., the student who participates the most in class, even if that student's participation in class should have no impact on the assignment being graded). It also prevents the grader's implicit biases or stereotypes from affecting the student's grades.

Here are some suggestions of how a professor might conceal the student's identity while grading their assignments:
- Using Z numbers or some other form of ID aside from the name of the student
- Have the student write their name on the back of the assignment instead of the front. That way, the grader does not know the name of the individual until after the grading is complete.
- Using the anonymous grading function available on Blackboard (also available on Turnitin assignments).
    - https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Assignments/Grade_Assignments/Anonymous_Grading
    - https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/blackboard/basic/instructor/anonymous-marking/enabling-anonymous-marking-after-assignment-creation.htm

Stockton Bias Free
The Division of Student Affairs has been working to incorporate bias-free initiatives into Stockton's operation. They have worked to define what a bias-free incident is, how students can spot these incidents, how they should respond to these types of occurrences, and the resources available when bias-incidents occur. Embracing bias free practices is a great initiative for our university that has been meeting the needs of students and helping to curb biases on campus through forward thinking and the creation of a bias response team. In keeping with the spirit of our university to remain bias-free, it is beneficial for Stockton to consider extending the bias free initiative into the Division of Academic Affairs. This is a great opportunity for Stockton to lead other New Jersey state universities in embracing research and efforts to reduce the negative impact of implicit bias in higher education.

Limitations:

There are individual cases in which this strategy of maintaining anonymity might not be feasible and may require more efforts from instructors, however, there are clear benefits for embracing this style of grading, the most important of which, is reducing bias. In cases such as those, professors could try to consider different ways in which they could curb bias. The objective of this recommendation is to reduce the impact that implicit bias has on grading and encourage a bias-free environment at Stockton. Any creative strategy that a professor finds to meet this objective would be very encouraged.

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