

UCLA: Dept. of Economics

To: TAs and Readers

From: Lora Clarke

Subject: Measures to Avoid Alteration of Examinations

It is very important that graders take steps to minimize the ability of a student to alter a graded examination. In particular graders should always use the following procedures.

1. Use colored pens to minimize potential for erasing or altering your grading marks.
2. On multiple choice exams, mark through the incorrect answer, so that if the incorrect answer is altered, the grading mark is discernibly altered. Give the correct answer.
3. In bluebooks and other test papers, if any spaces are left blank, place a red mark through the entire place so that students cannot add on information at a later date. If a substantial part of a bluebook is left blank, write the word END at the end of the student's work.
4. If any question is left unanswered or is missing, make a notation to that effect on the bluebook or answer sheet.
5. If notations are missing from graphs, mark the place the notation should be (ex: missing labels on axes) or fill in exactly what is missing. If the graph is entirely incorrect, mark it in such a way that any change or erasure will involve altering your grading mark.
6. If possible, grade on a question by question basis, shuffling the exams regularly to ensure across student uniformity in grading. You should grade in such a way that if a student's midterm appears to be consistently undergraded then there should be some a priori suspicions of alteration.
7. If you suspect any student of altering his/her exam, keep the original exam copy and bring it to the attention of the instructor or of the Vice Chair, Director of Undergraduate Studies.
8. Additional points can be given to students only if there has been an arithmetical or procedural error. It is not appropriate to "change your mind" about an answer after you have initially graded a set of exams unless each and every examination is regarded.
9. Once final examinations leave departmental custody, regarding should never be permitted unless a Xerox has been made. Note also there are Senate regulations with respect to the treatment of final grades that must be complied with.

Additional comments regarding exam alteration and re-grade requests.

A recommendation regarding the handling of exams is to proceed always in exactly the same way that with finals: they can only be seen with a proctor or TA observing and must be photocopied if the students are allowed to take the exams with them. DO NOT GIVE STUDENTS EXAMS BACK DURING CLASS WITHOUT HAVING A COPY. THIS ONLY GIVES THEM A CHANCE TO CHANGE THE ANSWERS AND THEN ASK FOR REGRADES. IT WILL BE HARD THEN TO ARGUE THAT THE EXAMS WERE ALTERED. Have the students interested in seeing the exams go to office hours.

Another important procedural recommendation is regarding the handling of re-grade requests. No re-grade must be carried out in office hours. Only adding up mistakes should be corrected then. In office hours students can only look at their exams paired with the grading criteria sheet and ask for an explanation if they do not understand what the correct answer is. If they believe there is a mistake in the grading they should submit a written request explaining what they think is wrong. TAs must take the exam home and check for inconsistencies with the grading criteria sheet applied to all the exams. The complete exam must be checked and the grade lowered if enough inconsistencies that go against the student that were not seen before are discovered. If there are no inconsistencies, the grade could stay the same. The recommendation though is a deduction of a fixed amount of points for requesting an unfounded re-grade and wasting the TAs time. If there is a problem with the grading and the exam is corrected, the fixed cost is waived. For absolute clarity regarding these rules of the game should be written in the syllabus that the professor gives to the class on the first day and in particular emphasize the fact that TAs are not allowed to change grades during office hours unless when there are adding up mistakes in the exam.

The rationale for these rules is having re-grades done only when it is absolutely necessary. One would want to have all students come to office hours to check their exams to see what their mistakes were and learn. This is not what happens in practice though. What happens is that the students that did very poorly in the exams are the ones that come to office hours to see exams and their intentions are not precisely learning what they did wrong most of the time. It is very easy for TAs to be influenced in office hours by very skilled students in the art of lobbying for grade changes. The result is that students whose only virtue is a superior lobbying skill get grade increases been completely unfair to the rest of the class. This is not only against university regulations but also against any rational incentive scheme or idea of justice.