**Contract Grading**

**Professor Hurley**

This course uses a form of grading called contract grading. **There are no points or letter grades in this course**, aside from the final letter grade you earn at the end. The premise of contract grading is that if you do the work required to earn a B, you will see enormous gains in your learning. Traditional grading systems encourage you to work for “points,” as if learning were a game whose goal was to get a certain grade. Contract grading redirects your focus on the **process of learning**. Contract grading provides you with reassurance that if you complete all of the assigned work to the best of your abilities, you will earn at least a B. This can free you up to focus on your learning, not your grade.

**To Pass**

There are a few things I expect of everyone who passes my class. I expect you to attend class regularly (no more than 5 absences for the semester), complete all essays and most of your other work, and submit a passing essay at the end of the semester that shows your learning. I expect you to possess enough fluency in English to comprehend college-level texts and to express yourself clearly in writing. I do allow and encourage you to revise essays that are not up to standard, and I’m happy to help you with these revisions. However, if after revising with my help, your work is still not meeting the standards, you will not pass the class.

**To Earn a B**

You will earn a B in the class if you complete all of the work in the class (including the reading) with sincere effort and on time. This means reading and annotating your texts for every class session; submitting all homework, quizzes, and essays; and making revisions to your work if I ask you to. To earn a B, I expect you to come to class regularly (not missing more than 3 classes in a semester) and to be fully present in class without turning your attention to electronic devices.

**To Earn an A**

You will earn an A in the class if you do all of what is required for a B and show excellence in your work. To earn an A, I ask that you put extra effort into your learning process and submit writing that goes above and beyond the minimum requirements. Some features I look for in A work include:

\* Strong critical thinking, including the ability to understand and respond to other views

\* Writing that shows critical reading and careful rereading

\* Ideas that are uniquely your own, not just repeated from class discussions

\* Taking risks in your writing (trying a new technique or a more challenging approach)

\* Clear sentences, careful proofreading, and well-integrated quotes

I also ask that you stretch yourself in class discussions. If participating is hard for you, try to confront that fear with small steps such as asking questions. If participating is easy for you, try to hold back more and listen to others.

To increase your chances of earning an A, I suggest that you meet with me after I give you back your first essay to check in about your goals for learning.

**Early Semester Check-In**

Around Week 5 of the semester, I’ll ask you to complete a written self-evaluation in the form of a letter addressed to me. In this letter, you’ll tell me how you are doing in the class, in terms of your effort, annotations of readings, completion of work, essay writing, and participation. You are also welcome to share any struggles you’re experiencing in the class. I’ll respond with my feedback.

**Final Assessment**

At the end of the course, you’ll have an opportunity to present your argument for what grade your have earned in the class and why, using concrete evidence. I can’t guarantee that I’ll agree with your assessment, but I encourage you to make the best argument you can, based specifically on the criteria set out in the syllabus.

**Student Comments on Contract Grading**

Students shared these thoughts with me in their learning reflections at the end of the semester. I did not ask them to comment on the grading system, but many chose to.

“Throughout the semester, I was not worried about my grade because I believed if I only do my best then the product will be there.”

“Not having to worry about a letter grade on assignments allowed me to enjoy working on them more without the stress, thank you for that.”

“Your grading strategy is something I admire. It gives students a chance to stop being robots and allows us to openly express ourselves without fear of judgment.”

“Even though it did stress me out not to know what my grade was, I did learn a lot and put more effort into my work because it was the quality that mattered, not the points. I noticed that before, I used to do the least amount of work in order to get an A. Taking this class made me realize that this method will get me nowhere.”

“I really do admire your grading system because you made it OK for us to make mistakes in college. That has always been my fear throughout college.”

“What made it easier for me to focus on learning was your grading system. I was more focused on completing my work than doing the minimum and adding up my points when I got my work back.”