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Greater fairness and consistency in grading of final works: what does it cost?

Introduction of second examiners on final works at FASoS, UM, the Netherlands

Dr. Elissavet Radulova, Chair of Exam Board, FASoS
Principles in grading and assessment
Tensions in grading and assessment
The student perspective
Examiners and Faculty Management
Fairness  Transparency
Consistency  Efficiency

External stakeholders and publics
A second grader (the “four eyes” principle):

- Minimizes subjective assessment (↑fairness)
- Greater transparency of the grading decision
- Increases consistency of grading and emergence of common grading standards within the organization

“Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”, p. 17, 2005

All fine, but what does it cost?
Background

- Driven mainly by pressure from Bologna process quality standards (as mediated by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization – NVAO) in the course of 3 academic years (2011-2014) FASoS introduced second graders in all final works of its 10 educational programmes

Aims of the case study

- Evaluation of the introduction of 2\textsuperscript{nd} graders with regard to the 4 main principles of assessment

- Case study of Bologna process implementation in the Netherlands
Research questions

1. What are the tangible costs?
2. What are the intangible costs?
3. What is the effect on grading?
Final works at FASoS

- 2 BA and 8 MA educational programmes
- 1850 students
- 410 BA and 280 MA graduates each year
- 750 final works (predominantly theses)
- Gradual introduction of second graders in the course of 2011-2014 (MA first, then BA)
- In the current year 2013-2014 all final works have 2 graders
Final works assessment at FASoS prior to 2010 (old regime)

- Each student (depending on thematic choice) is coupled to a thesis supervisor
- February – June: meetings with supervisor
- June (1st sit) or August (re-sit): submission of thesis
- The supervisor only assesses the submitted work

Audit in 2013: this regime is prone to subjectivism!!!
A second grader (the “four eyes” principle):

- Minimizes subjective assessment (↑fairness)
- Eliminates ‘supervisor drift’ (process vs product)
- Greater transparency of the grading decision
- Increases consistency of grading and emergence of common grading standards within the organization
Material costs (1)

- BA: 3 hrs x 410 works = 1230
- MA: 5 hrs x 290 works = 1450

\[ 2680 \text{ normhours} \]

- Given teaching load of 60% (1000 hrs/year) -> 3 new positions of at least Assistant professor rank

BUT...
Material costs (2)

BUT...

- Thresholds for 5 MA and 10 MA final works per examiner, whereby for MA level grading PhD is required
  
  \[
  \frac{410}{10} = 41 \text{ examiners} \\
  \frac{290}{5} = 58 \text{ examiners with PhD (!)}
  \]

- MA EPA and MA ES \(\rightarrow\) 60 students \(\rightarrow\) at least 12 experts (with PhD), who do not grade anywhere else

Extra costs (-) and recruitment (-)
Intangible costs

- new working routine -> intervision
- need for more coordination and communication
- overcoming the feeling of ‘being policed’
- increased transparency and **accountability**
- grading workshops (geared toward consistency)

Anxiety (-), adjustments (-), common standards (+)
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<th>Data Collection &amp; Analysis</th>
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4. Data Collection & Analysis

Conceptual insights are well introduced.
The analysis is based on secondary sources. Their limitations are not acknowledged.
The paper is somewhat ‘methodologically-blind’: there is no methodological section where the methods for data collection and analysis are explicitly argued for. For BA paper I this is acceptable, but for BA paper II there needs to be primary research conducted and a proper method selected.

Does the selection of empirical data/primary sources help to answer the research question?
Are the potentials and limitations of available data/primary sources acknowledged?
Does the author (provide insight in) use (of) qualitative and/or quantitative method(s) for data collection and/or analysis?
Does the author make use of theory and/or analytical concepts in data analysis?

**Improved transparency (++)**
Impact on grades

- The average grade decreases (marginally) for all programmes:
  - BA: 7.47 -> 7.24;

- Grade distribution largely the same

- More, and for some selective MA programmes even first ‘fails’

- Main impact = no submission -> study delay

Curbing of grade inflation (+) and study delay (-)
The verdict
Conclusion:

while cumbursome initially, implementation of the “four-eyes” principle (Bologna QA recommendations) yielded various improvements to the assessment practices at FASoS.
Thanks for your attention!