

Assigning Grades is not easy!

Some of the factors that can (or should) affect grade assignment include: the size of the class, the weights assigned to different components, the quality of students in the class, the quality of instructor, the degree of difficulty of the course, the degree of difficulty of the exams and quizzes, etc. It is not surprising, therefore, that a number of grading methods are being used by educational institutions.

Gradebook Support

PeopleSoft Campus Solutions does have extensive Gradebook functionality to setup and capture the course instruments that affect grades. However, its out-of-the-box ability for grade assignment is quite minimal and limited to absolute grading. Many institutions therefore end up with either manual assignment of grades or Excel based grading solutions.

The Grader

The Grader is an application that enables consistent and managed grade assignment across the entire university. It supports multiple grading styles (Absolute, Relative, Percentile and mixes of all three) and is configurable at various levels (university, school, department, course etc). For fine-grained control, Grader can also be configured to allow graphical adjustment of grade assignment curves by faculty within defined tolerance bands. Approval workflows are built-in and the application is fully integrated with PeopleSoft Gradebook as well as the Sakai LMS Gradebook.

Grader works by pulling in instrument-specific grades for all students in a course, running the data through a computation engine and generating grade cut-offs for the faculty member. These cut-offs can be configured to incorporate a number of necessary adjustments including:

- Adjustments for drops:** The ease of dropping courses coupled with a relative grading system can cause some strange anomalies in the grading process. As an extreme example, in a large class of some 150 students, where the grading style is mostly percentile based, the system might fail about 10 students. After the midterm, the students who have not done well will likely withdraw from the course. A strict percentile grading system would now put the next bottom 10 students at risk of an F. Fearing their grades, these students might now drop out triggering an unhealthy and unnecessary exodus.
- Adjustments for course level:** Usually the introductory courses at the 100 and 200 level are required core courses. Many students take these courses, even though they are not very interested in them. As such it is expected that the average performance will not be very high. In contrast, 300 and 400 level courses are usually optional courses that are taken by students who are interested in the subject and should perform well. The same argument applies even more for graduate courses where students usually take courses only in their field of interest.
- Adjustments for unusual class situations:** No automated system can account for all the possible variations that may need to be addressed during grade assignment. If a class has an unusual composition, the overall grades should be correspondingly increased or decreased. Similarly, sometimes the class puts in a lot of extra effort, and deserves to be rewarded. Since large classes tend to be very predictable, the tolerance bands for allowing these manual adjustments are smaller for larger classes. Similarly a very small class depends on the specific individualities of the students, and the laws of large numbers don't apply, so small classes can be setup with more flexible tolerance bands in Grader.

What Grader does for Faculty

Grader provides a first cut suggestion for grade assignment that is aligned with



institute wide practices. For new faculty this provides a way to get a feel for what the grades "ought" to be. For experienced faculty, Grader provides a way to maintain consistency in grading while also allowing for manual adjustments as authorized.

Integrating Grader with PeopleSoft Gradebook

Techlogix has integrated Grader with PeopleSoft Gradebook as well the Sakai Gradebook. The application can be integrated, or interfaced, with other applications as well.

Once implemented, the following grading process is used:

- Instrument specific grades, per course per student, are entered in the GradeBook (Campus Solutions or Learning Management System based)
- The Grader application pulls information from the GradeBook and provides instructors with grade cut-offs after executing the grade computation algorithms built into the system and as configured per university grading standards and methodology
- The instructor has the ability (if so authorized) to modify these grade cut-offs within the specified ranges as defined by the course level and other course parameters
- A grading approval workflow is an integral part of the application: once the instructor has finalized the grade cut-offs for their particular course, they can submit these for approval by the Head of Department / Dean (as configured)
- The respective authority will either approve the grades or re-assign the grades to the Instructor for reconsideration
- The finalized letter grades are then pushed back into PeopleSoft GradeBook

The Grader

The Grader was originally developed as a Client-Server Application at the Lahore University of Management Sciences. A web-based version of the application was developed by Techlogix and fully integrated with PeopleSoft Campus Solutions as well as Sakai.