

Grade changes – ECS 188, Winter 2017 – April 4, 2017

This year, immediately after assigning grades, I became concerned that I might have followed an incorrect procedure by combining Section 1 and Section 2 students and then drawing lines from the merged list, without any regard to who was where. I became concerned about this when I noticed, just after I submitted the grades, that there was a large difference between Section 1 and Section 2 grades. The median Section 2 grade was a B+, and the mean was 3.27. The median Section 1 grade was between a B and a B-, and the mean was 2.75.

There are several factors that could explain the difference in Section 1 and Section 2 grades. One is what every faculty member will tell you: that by the luck of who lands where or by the mysteries of group dynamics, it's actually *routine* for two sections of a class to develop very different "personalities". This was definitely true for term's 188s. And if this is all it is, then it was fine that the grades differed to the extent that they did. But there were other possibilities. One is that the way I strongly penalized people for being absent or late might be considered unfair to students who have to drag themselves to class at 9am instead of 2:10 pm. Another possibility is that there might have been some (disallowed) communication between Section 1 and Section 2 students as to the content of quizzes, or whether or not there was a quiz on a given day.

While I believe that the first explanation is the main factor, given this concern, I did something I have never done in all my years of teaching: I requested to revise a bunch of grades. In fact, I nudged up 13 of 22 grades in Section 1. Those changes were approved today. I wasn't actually certain that they would allow this, for faculty aren't allowed to change a grade just because they reconsider something. They are only allowed to change a grade because of an actual error—either a procedural error in how grades were calculated, or an error in calculation or transcription. I argued that I had made a procedural error by combining Section 1 and Section 2 students in one pot.

The upshot is that, if you are one of 13 students in Section 1 (or one student in Section 2), you now have a new assigned grade. Merry Christmas! Oh wait ...