

Grading Scale

For Hira Classes

Updated: Fall 2005

A+ 97-100

A 94-96

A- 90-93

B+ 87-89

B 84-86

B- 80-83

C+ 77-79

C 74-76

C- 70-73

I grade on 3 trajectories:

- 1- Overall quality (absolute scale- the most important factor)
- 2- Relative quality (compared to rest of class)
- 3- Improvement over the course of the semester (this factor is less important)

What are the elements of a good paper? I can give some general contours of what a good paper has by grade:

F= No knowledge of the topic and/or the writing is overly simplistic or impossible to follow.

D= May use 1 source, but shows no effort at creating an argument and/or organizing thoughts in an original manner.

C= Some attempt to use a few sources, but over-reliance on just 1 or 2 or otherwise demonstrates a clear bias. Moralizing and writing in an editorial style with little citation or use of evidence. Some attempt to organize, but lacks any clear focus or coherence within the essay. Heavy use of cut and paste. Basic errors in writing and/or formatting.

B= Shows competence in writing an original argument and organizing the paper around a clear theme. Demonstrates clear understanding and capability with the material. Uses multiple sources in a balanced, open-minded, and complex fashion without waffling off the thesis. Able to incorporate relevant primary data, including statistics and historical events. Comes with a clear intro and conclusion, and clear and well-organized evidence. Few if any errors in writing.

A= Highly original and insightful essay that shows an ability to analyze the question in a way that moves well-beyond the literature. Organization and writing have very few, if any, errors. Capable and appropriate use of primary data including tables and graphs. Formatting and organization of the paper make the substance and organization clear upon first glance.

My teaching philosophy

I have worked hard to develop as a teacher, and I am always trying to learn new things. What I can say is that after teaching for a number of years and a lot of experimentation, I have been able to develop a series of techniques and approaches that can lead to success with the right kind of student. I have a number of students who have gone on to successful careers in public service, journalism, and placement in top graduate schools. Because my goal is to produce students who will succeed in the long-run, I am always available for advice. It is important to think far enough ahead so that you can plan your classes and how your education will best serve your long-term goals. I am very grateful that some of my relationships with students have turned into long-term friendships and networks of mutual cooperation. But I am proudest of the fact that some students have told me that the approaches and disciplines we cover in my classes are useful not only for professional success but also in terms of general success in life!

The skills I focus on teaching are interdisciplinary, and span theory, practice, and geographic areas. I focus on basic and advanced skills of writing, marrying theory to empirical analysis, practical policy-oriented problem-solving, and careful consideration of and practice with, research design. I teach basic applications of economics to real world problems. At the undergraduate level, I teach students to use basic descriptive statistics from primary data sources to back up an original policy analysis that is embedded in historical context and the literature behind a problem. My experience in the public sector, think tanks, and field research provides many examples of real world problems that I share with my students. I want them not only to have passion, but be able to channel that passion into being in a position to make a real difference, and to live a good life.

I have had regular problems with a few students every semester at SFU who are disrespectful of others' opinions and of the instructor. I am open to students adding any material for classroom discussion with adequate notice if they feel the materials are biased. However, empathy and understanding are part of the mission of education, thus we have to be open-minded and learn to persuade not try to "win" through intimidation. Furthermore, marks should not be the sole focus of a serious student. By definition, students must understand that failure is a necessary path to success, and should not take a less than perfect mark personally. True education requires extremely intensive efforts-stretching oneself both through labour and analytical and research challenges. There is no way around working hard, but results should be measured in individual progress, not unconditional praise. Nor should they confuse a strongly critical mindset with any particular set of opinions. I will give a grading rubric which explains what makes for good academic writing and analysis at the beginning of the semester. I will be open to one written appeal per assignment of a grade, if the student can explain why, according to the rubric, my evaluation is misplaced. Students may also appeal grades to the LAS Programme Director of Political Science Chair, who can assign a neutral party to evaluate the paper.

Here are some general tips on what I think makes for success in academic classes:

1. **Be careful in choosing your classes.** We are confronted throughout life with choosing what we are interested in; what we are good at; and what is pragmatic for us to do. We often find that these conflict in some degree or aspect. We have very limited time, money, and energy, so we must prioritize. I am convinced that to be successful, we need to find the right combination of passion and pragmatism for our priorities. If we are not dedicated to the task at hand and do not have a road map for how it fits into our longer-term plans, it will be difficult for us to really do our best. So, you should look at this period in your life as a unique window to both explore new ideas and to develop a strong skill set useful to you throughout your life. If you approach your classes with dedication, your ability to learn in both the narrow and wider sense will increase phenomenally. Education has to be your first priority, and you have to expect to spend many hours before making progress- no one becomes an expert in any thing until they have put in a good decade or so into education and experience on a particular subject matter. Here is an easy way for you to start.
2. I believe in **doing things the right way.** This is the foundation to success in life in my opinion. Therefore students who do well in my classes are those who are willing to “invest” both time and energy in the effort for long-term payoff. In many senses, doing things the right way is far more important than the actual outcome. I often hear from students that they are disadvantaged by not having the same background and situation as another student. This is part of life, as true for a social science class as it would be for a statistics class in which one student had more background in math in high school or for when you conduct your first professional interview. I try not to measure myself purely on an absolute or relative scale in my own work. A key question should be, how much did I learn or grow from this experience? Thus, I am hoping that students see that an education is as much about learning a disciplined approach to solving problems as it is about substantive knowledge. So, I expect my students to be fully invested in the course, attending and preparing for classes, presenting work on time, and otherwise keeping a constructive and inquisitive attitude while reflecting on their experience.
3. Because I believe that **process is as or more important than outcome,** I take an unconventional approach in my teaching. Over time, I have moved towards more of a student-centred learning process. Instead of assigning text for memorization, I think the key to a liberal arts education is teaching students how to learn and find their own answers. So, I strongly emphasize learning the background knowledge and skills necessary for students to create their own analysis. Students often feel uncomfortable with this aspect of my courses, as they feel inadequate or have never really been asked to create their own solutions. This period of discomfort is an important part of learning. It teaches us to be humble about the complexity of the world, and to recognize the limits of our own knowledge in terms of solving problems pragmatically. At the same time, we recognize that

even amidst this complexity, we must make decisions and take action. Thus, we should not waver from discomfort at not knowing all the answers or having clear-cut tasks. In life, we will constantly face such situations- what career path to choose; which person to make a long-term commitment to, etc. Moreover, employers in the policy realm, which is the nature of the courses I teach, do not want cut and paste answers. These are readily available. The most highly valued person in the policy world is someone who is both highly skilled and innovative in finding solutions to real world problems. This is the kind of person I am trying to train.

4. While I was raised with a more formal instructor-student relationship and generally follow such norms in the classroom, I am dedicated to my profession. I try not to make personal judgments or be dismissive. **My office is always open** for any problems that come up related to academics. **However, I expect you to try to resolve problems on your own first and I can not substitute for the hard work you need to do to learn.** Students who do not try to find answers or solve problems on their own will be lost when they face similar situations in life and as professionals. My major disappointments with students come from two sources. One, students that are unhappy about outcomes but have not put in the necessary preparation and writing time. Two, students who are confused or having a problem but do not come to discuss them with me. I would be willing to spend whatever time is necessary to explain anything to students, so it always baffles me when they come late in the course and state that they have been lost. Oftentimes, I conclude that the student did not really choose the course properly, so that they were not willing to really invest in it, and then when the outcome was predictably negative, felt uncomfortable about. Being to every class prepared and on time is the most essential part of the process.
5. The most common complaint I receive about my teaching is about the **workload**. I am sympathetic to the many varied demands on students' time these days. I am always open to changing assignments or dropping material if the consensus of the class is such. However, for me the learning process in education and in life has always depended upon hard work. My experience has always been that a strong dedication and effort at least gave me a chance to have good results. Without hard work, I do not think real learning (stretching one's bounds) can take place. Learning to me is somewhat like training in this regard. The harder you work, the more "fit" your mind will be, leading to greater ability over the long-run (moving to longer distances at a faster pace). This is always taxing, but it is an inherent part of the process. Usually, students have to have some faith that this is true, since they have not yet seen their own growth. However, you should decide if this course is right for you in terms of your investment, and then drop it if you can not meet the demands.
6. Since I am always learning and adjusting, I am also quite open to any constructive suggestions anyone has. I don't have much tolerance for complaints, but I am always looking to improve. Let me know what you think!

7. In the end, I will measure my success by **how well students do after they graduate**. Do they get jobs? Do they have the skills, experience, and discipline to succeed in extremely competitive fields such as development and international relations? In the end, my goal is to give students the opportunity to learn the things that allowed me to shape a multi-faceted career in international relations and development. So, students who want only positive feedback, do not have a particular interest in spending hours on this subject matter, or see top marks as a reflection of their knowledge are sometimes unhappy with my teaching. Students who are serious about learning, recognize that more learning challenges exist regardless of the mark, who are open to having their opinions challenged, and have the drive and ambition to do whatever they can to try create a career in this area have been extremely positive. You decide- which student are you?

Table 1
Simon Fraser University
Percentage Distribution of Undergraduate Course Grades b Program/Course

Course/ Division	Year	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)	F (%)	Total Course Grades	Average Course Grade
Course: LAS								
Lower	01/02	26.0	53.5	16.5	1.6	2.4	127	2.98
Upper	01/02	27.7	53.2	17.0	-	2.1	47	3.11
Course: POL								
Lower	01/02	21.2	46.9	24.4	2.7	4.8	1,649	2.76
Upper	01/02	31.6	47.0	13.8	1.7	5.9	1,070	2.93
Faculty: Arts								
Lower	01/02	20.6	46.4	25.6	3.0	4.3	38,299	2.76
Upper	01/02	29.5	46.5	18.2	1.8	3.9	25,346	2.95