



## Assessment in Higher Education: A Measure of Learning or a Selection Process?

In higher education, grades have a major **impact on a student's pathway**. Having better grades than one's peers is a prerequisite for standing out in a **selection processes**.

- ✓ Despite the scientific consensus in favour of learning-centred assessment, **normative assessment practices remain very present in higher education**.
- ✓ The race for grades has many **negative effects on learning**.
- ✓ Normative assessment **disadvantages students from under-represented groups**.

### Why Should We Be Concerned About This?

Assessment, especially when it takes the form of a high-stakes summative exam, is often perceived as a **stressful, no-holds-barred ordeal**.

**Reduced to the dimension of grading, assessment is "most often seen as detrimental to learning and motivation".**

(Yerly & Berger, 2022, p. 7)



## 1 What is Normative Assessment?

- Rather than indicating where a person stands in relation to learning targets, **normative assessment positions students in relation to one another.**
- This approach runs **counter to learning-centred assessment**, which is a qualitative, criterion-referenced evaluation designed to support students in their learning process.
- **Selection** for internships, scholarships or prestigious programs is generally based on the normative approach.

## 2 What Impact Does this Have on Learning and Success?

### Normative assessment:

- increases **competition** and discourages collaboration among students
- amplifies grade-related **stress** and **anxiety**
- is a source of **extrinsic motivation**
- encourages **poor learning strategies** and cheating

### In a Nutshell

Reducing the role of **normative assessment in higher education** is a way of improving learning while fostering student well-being and inclusion.



## For further reflection

### For Professors and Teachers

- How can I **foster collaboration** rather than competition in the classroom?
- Are there ways I can **reduce the importance of grades** in my assessment practices?
- Am I fully aware of the **impact of assessments on my students' mental health**?
- How can I promote in-depth learning strategies and discourage **cramming** ("brain dump preparation")?

### For Institution Administrations

- Are our **institutional learning assessment policies** consistent with the principles of criterion-referenced assessment?
- How can we reduce the importance of grades while reinforcing the rigour and fairness of our **selection processes**?
- What **support can we offer professional and teaching teams** to help them improve their learning assessment practices?
- As a higher education institution, how can we **contribute to a collective reflection** on the aims of assessment in education?



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