SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES SEMINAR

Dr. Anna Hiatt

Hastings College

"Alternative grading and assessment strategies in undergraduate biology courses"

Traditional grading systems often emphasize point accumulation rather than providing an accurate representation of what students know and can do. Alternative grading approaches offer opportunities to more explicitly connect assessment with course learning outcomes while encouraging students to take a more active role in evaluating their own learning. This presentation explores an instructor's journey implementing alternative grading practices across many undergraduate biology courses, from introductory biology to upper-level courses such as developmental biology, evolution, and fire ecology. Rather than advocating for a single grading model, the session will examine how competency-based and specifications-based approaches can be adapted to different course structures, learning outcomes, and types of assessment. Examples will illustrate approaches ranging from hybrid systems that retain weighted grades to fully competency-based courses in which grades are determined by demonstrated mastery of course outcomes. Particular attention will be given to rethinking summative assessment and how to re-frame existing exams and assessments to better communicate outcomes and expectations. Traditional exams can be supplemented or replaced by authentic assessments, portfolios, self-evaluations, field and laboratory activities, literature discussions, and other opportunities for students to assemble evidence demonstrating their learning. Participants will leave with practical strategies for identifying meaningful course outcomes, aligning assessments with those outcomes, establishing transparent expectations for proficiency, and designing grading systems that emphasize evidence of learning. In practice, alternative assessment doesn't have to mean adopting an entire system; instructors can customize approaches that fit their students, course, and assessments.

Hosted by

Chad Brassil

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Hamilton Hall 112
Zoom Link: https://unl.zoom.us/j/94081044933
Password: sbsseminar

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