



# Differences Between Course Grades and Learning Outcomes Assessment

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

**Course Grades** focus on *individual students* and what they have learned in a particular class.



**Assessment** focuses on *cohorts of students* and what they have collectively learned in an entire program, across multiple classes and experiences.



Usually, **grades** do not focus exclusively on specific learning outcomes and so do not provide faculty with enough data to determine the level of learning in a particular competency (e.g, written communication). However, course **grades** could be used as learning outcomes **assessment** if they are broken down into the components that are the indicators of learning outcomes. Rating these components would have to be done consistently, based on clearly articulated criteria. And, finally, separate **grades** or subscores would have to be computed for the major components of knowledge and skills so that evidences of students' specific areas of strength and weakness could be identified.

Grading criteria differ across faculty and often include measures that may not be related to learning (e.g., attendance, class participation, submission deadlines). Also, faculty grading standards vary across course and include different syllabi and assignments.

**Assessment** focuses on direct evidence (e.g., capstone projects, presentations) and measures student learning by using agreed upon scoring rubrics aligned to specific learning outcomes for the program.

Course **grades** are assigned by the instructor teaching the class. Usually, learning outcomes **assessment** involves two or more faculty members evaluating student work.

Course **grades** are usually shared with individual students and administrative offices; learning outcomes **assessment** results are usually shared widely across the department, school, college, and even institution and external stakeholders.



Office of Strategic Planning & Institutional Effectiveness (OSPIE)

1020 E. Wendover, Suite 202  
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University  
Greensboro, NC 27405

[ncat.edu/ospie](http://ncat.edu/ospie)