

# Centering Students when Evaluating Impacts of a Departmental Grade Alignment Policy



Catherine D. Rawn Professor of Teaching, Manya Bansal BA Student (Psychology Major), India Pereira BA Student (Psychology Major), Jeanie Woo BA'25 Alumni (Cognitive Systems), Aster Huang BA'25 Alumni (Honours Psychology)

## RESEARCH PURPOSE

To offer insights into how a departmental grading policy is experienced by students, while exemplifying how to centre student voice in policy development.

## DEPARTMENTAL CONTEXT

- Large, research-oriented psychology department
- 8k undergraduate students (20k seats), 150 sections of 50 courses by 70 instructors
- Longstanding departmental grading policy mandates course averages, standard deviations, fail rates; intention to align multi-sections and prevent grade inflation
- Working Group proposed adjusted Policy in 2024 after a qualitative study of perceived impacts
- Concerns raised include impacts on teaching practices and inclusive student success

## STUDENTS-AS-PARTNERS APPROACH

- Past policy reform efforts emphasized aggregate quantitative grades, admin/instructor voice
- This study uses SaP to position students as active shapers, evaluators, researchers alongside instructor (Ashton-Hay, 2025)
- Students co-designed study, led data collection, led qualitative analysis, wrote drafts with initial literature review

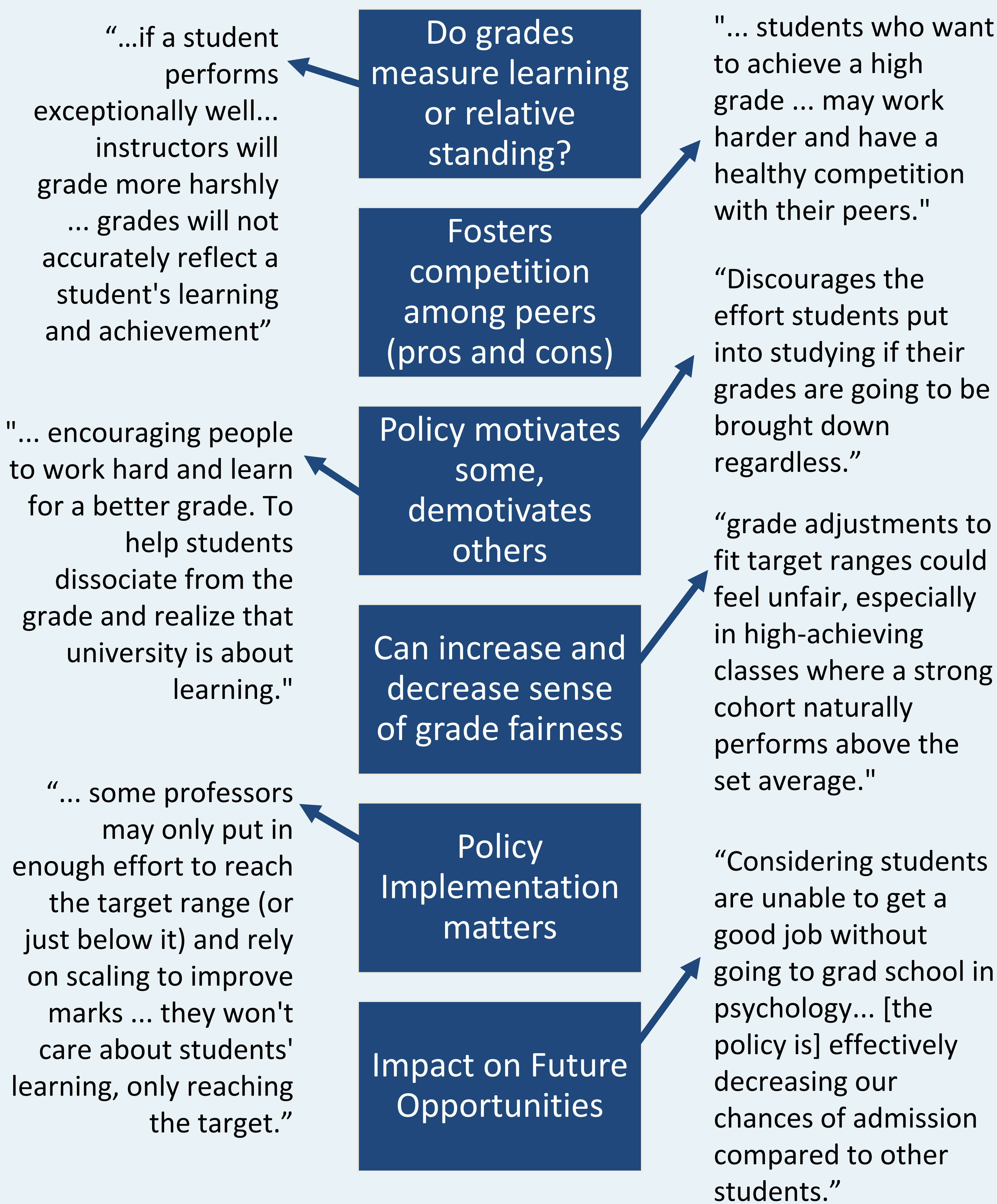
## PARTICIPANTS

1234 undergraduate students; 1023 provided qualitative data. 78% with specialization in psychology; 51% identify as a member of a racialized group.

## KEY EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

1. Old Policy vs. New Policy (either version): No difference on any dependent variable
2. Reading policy (old or new) vs. No Policy: decreased Academic Self-Efficacy and increased Amotivation (apathy) for psychology courses

## KEY QUALITATIVE RESULTS: THEMES & SELECTED QUOTES



## MIXED METHODS VIA ONLINE SURVEY

### EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN (Part 1)

Does the new grading policy improve student psychological responses over the old policy?

- Independent Variable: Random assignment to read Old Policy, Full New Policy, Short New Policy, No Policy (Control Condition)
- Dependent Variables: Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Competition, Belonging
- Analytic Approach: Scale reliability analysis; MANOVAs with Helmert Contrasts, Cohen's *d*

### QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS (Part 2)

How do students perceive the grading policy and its impacts in its current form?

- All participants read new policy, asked to comment on clarity, advantages, disadvantages, and any additional recommendations
- Analytic Approach: student-led Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024) on first 235 students' responses to develop codebook and tentative themes; deductive coding on remaining 788 students' responses

## CONCLUSIONS

- Motivation and Self-Efficacy show clearest effects of policy exposure across datasets
- Qualitative results show nuance, ambivalence; offer future research priorities (e.g., fairness)
- Student involvement in policy evaluation enriches design, analysis, and results; offers experiential learning opportunity

REFERENCES AND MORE AVAILABLE HERE:

