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The student perspective on mastery grading in an entry-level liberal arts mathematics class

Standards-based (or mastery) grading is an assessment strategy wherein students are given a list of goals to demonstrate mastery throughout the course. Students are given extensive feedback on assessments, and a score to match their current level of mastery. Given they have not demonstrated full mastery of a topic, students are offered the chance to re-assess goals and show they have improved their learning and understanding of the topic. Here, we have redesigned an entry-level mathematics course, where most students are arts majors, to utilize this assessment model. By constructing a list of $50-52$ goals (adjusted from one term to the next), students were able to clearly identify where there studying should be focused and how to succeed. At the end of term, a survey was administered to elucidate the student perspective on this assessment model. The results have shown that students found this assessment model rewarding and felt as though this was the "first time they were able to succeed in a math(ematics) course". We share these thoughts to demonstrate the need for a shift of assessment away from the anxiety-inducing examinations of old and posit that to increase student interest and success in mathematics, especially with those already disenfranchised, a new assessment model must be used.