

## FINAL EXAM WEEK

Yes, it is finally upon us. Best week ever. Here are a few comments/suggestions on how to make it less painful for you and your students.

1. Extra Help. Your students will love you even more if you provide one or both of the following:<sup>1</sup>
  - (a) A review session. See the front desk to reserve a room. You can write your own practice final, go over the professors practice final, or review topics more generally. Its usually a good idea to focus on problems, though, since thats what your students have to do during the final.
  - (b) Extra office hours, especially *during* finals week.<sup>2</sup>
2. Proctoring and Grading Final Exams. The strategies are pretty much the same here as for midterms, though there are a few notable differences, primarily due to the fact that final exams are longer and more heavily weighted:
  - (a) Proctoring. Your professor may have a more elaborate proctoring scheme for the final: extra rooms, ID checks, seating charts, rotating proctors, etc. Be sure to check with him or her before the exam so you're not caught off-guard.
  - (b) Grading. Your students will not have the opportunity to see their exams until sometime next quarter.<sup>3</sup> This has two relevant implications for you. First, you should *spend the extra time now making sure the exam is graded accurately*. Clearly, changing a major grading/scoring error next quarter has the potential to be a major headache. Second, and on the other hand, writing comments is much less important, which can save you some time.
3. Old Course Stuff. Remember the policy here: you must keep final exams for one quarter (excluding the summer<sup>4</sup>) following the course. I recommend labelling them well and dumping them in a file cabinet in your office somewhere. Midterms, quizzes, homeworks, and Matlabs can all be canned after the final.
4. Rollin' Out. Also remember that your job isn't necessarily over once the final's been graded. Most likely your professor will want a nice neat spreadsheet with all the final scores weighted and curved. An occasional professor will even want you around to help fill out the official letter-grade report. Just make sure you know what he or she expects before you leave!

---

<sup>1</sup>Of course, these are completely optional and, for the most part, at your discretion.

<sup>2</sup>I like to avoid having office hours the day of the exam, or possibly even the day before, because panic attacks make me nervous.

<sup>3</sup>And it's likely that only a handful of students will actually come to pick up their exams.

<sup>4</sup>I.e., final exams from the spring quarter must be kept until the end of the subsequent fall quarter.

5. Emails. About three days after the final you will be bombarded with emails from students asking you for their final grade. I am careful only to give out grades if the request comes from the student's official UCSD email account. You can also just tell the students that their grades will be available on Tritonlink if you don't want to deal with it.
6. More emails. Once students get their grades, there will be several who are shocked at how low their grade is. They will email you with complaints or requests or excuses. You should respond by explaining their grade firmly and clearly. For example, I recommend replying along the lines of: "Your score on midterm 1 was 24/40, which was 4 points below median. Your score on midterm 2 was 22/40, which was 7 points below median. Your homework scores averaged to 7.4/10 because HW 3 and 7 are missing. Your score on the final was 44/100, 17 points below median. Using the weighting specified in the syllabus, your score was 56 percent, 12 percent below the median, which is why you earned an F." I tend to avoid the phrase "we GAVE you an F," which may give the impression that the grade is negotiable. In every case, make it clear that the professor is the only one who decides the final grades, and any requests for a grade change 1) have to go through the professor and 2) are very unlikely to be successful, as "grades were calculated fairly according to the rubric set out in the syllabus."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>This is one of my favorite phrases to use when responding to grade complaints.