

EXPLORING COMPASSIONATE ASSESSMENT TO FOSTER STUDENT WELLBEING

The Active Participation Exam
Format at CBS

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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY

Definition of compassion

‘Compassion means the **noticing of social or physical** distress to others and the **commitment to reduce or prevent** that distress’.

(Gilbert 2017)

Copenhagen Business School

- **High GPA on entry** (average of >9 in 2024).
- **Low study intensity** (cf. the Danish Student & Graduate Survey 'Uddannelses Zoom' 2023) – 32h
- **High levels of stress**, particularly in relation to 'My own expectations of my academic performance'.



What causes stress in (our) students?

Performativity
culture

Assessment promotes performativity cultures by shifting the main orientation in teaching and learning from education to performance.

(Nieminen & Yang 2024)

A new exam format - Active Participation

- Students are assessed on a **pass/fail basis** through their engagement with **learning activities**.
- The activities must enable the teacher to make an overall assessment of whether the **learning objectives** have been satisfactorily fulfilled.
- Students are provided with **formative feedback** throughout the course.



GRADE-FREE



ASSESSMENT FOR
LEARNING



FORMATIVE
FEEDBACK

EXAMPLES OF COURSES WITH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Annemette Kjærgaard
Personality Psychology



Mandatory course
Bachelor

Liping Jiang,
Shipping Business Analytics



Elective
Bachelor

Letícia Vedolin Sebastião
Applied Mindfulness and
Compassion



Elective
Master's

EXAMPLES OF COURSES WITH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Annemette Kjærgaard
Personality Psychology

- **Written group assignment**, max 10 pages
- **Systematic peer review** in groups. Each group is matched to another group and must give feedback to written assignment. This activity takes place on campus and is supervised by the teacher.

Mandatory course
Bachelor

Liping Jiang
Shipping Business Analytics

- 7 out of 9 **group assignments**
- 1 out of 5 **individual assignments** (typically an open question that builds upon the calculations performed in the group assignment)

Elective
Bachelor

Letícia Vedolin Sebastião
Applied Mindfulness and Compassion

- **Participation** in 80% of the practical sessions
- **Group work activity** to design a mindfulness or compassion intervention for presentation to experts in the field.
- An **individual 3-page reflective paper**.

Elective
Master's

Teacher perspective

- Opportunities for authentic assessment
- Better overview of student progress
- Promotion of assessment literacy
- Higher attendance leads to more vibrant discussions

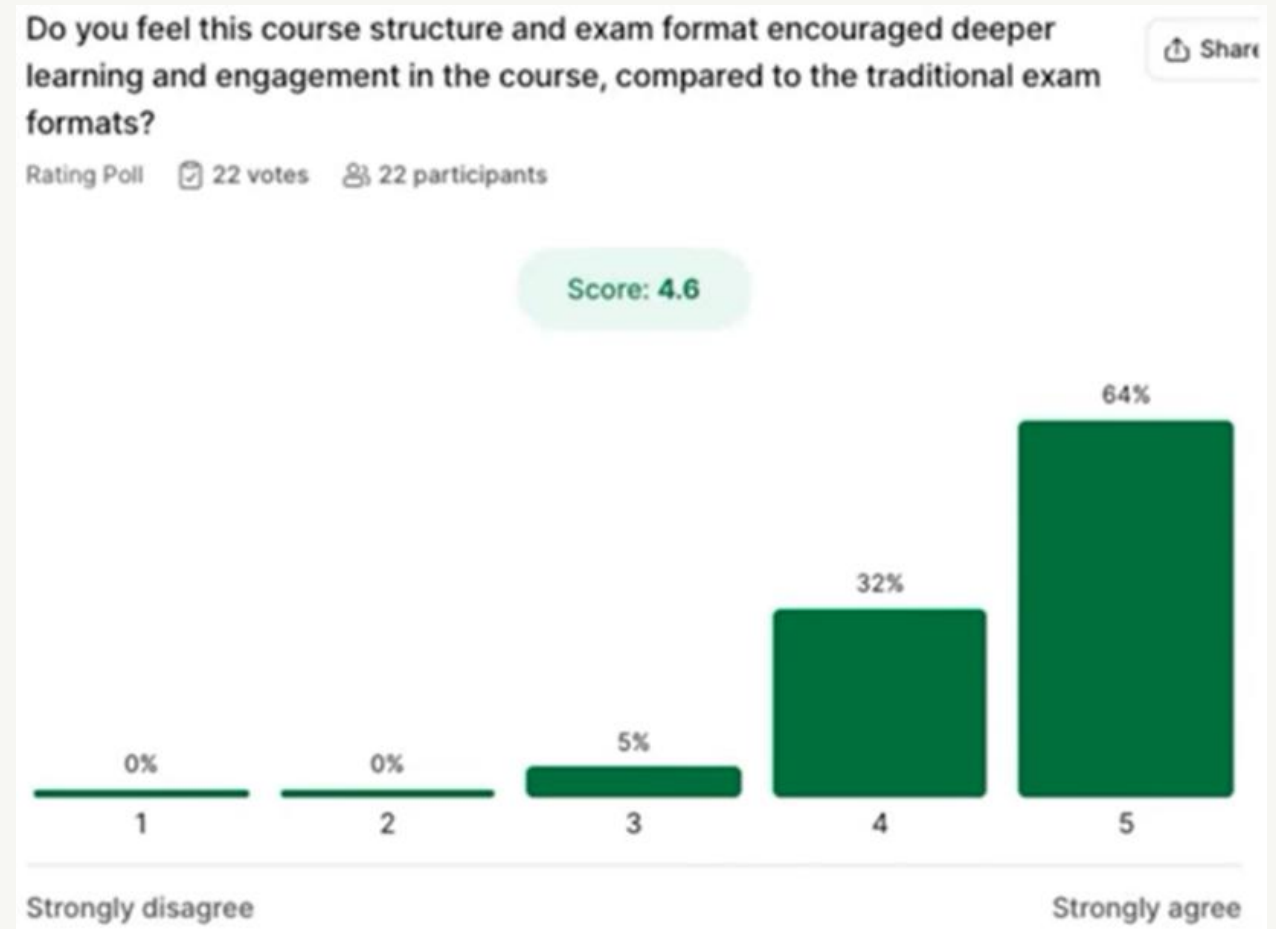
- More creative output (e.g., essays)
- AI-resistant form of assessment

Student perspective

Shipping Business Analytics

Do you feel this course structure and exam format encouraged deeper learning and engagement in the course, compared to the traditional exam formats?

64% strongly agree (overall score 4.6).



Student reflections

“You didn’t feel the pressure of studying for an exam, instead you studied to know more about the course. Making the outcome you get out of it better.”

(Student of *Shipping Business Analytics*)

“I think another aspect that contributed to me enjoying the course was the fact that it is not graded. This allowed me to engage with the meditation practices at my own pace without feeling the pressure to perform, which is usually very present for me.”

(Student of *Applied Mindfulness and Compassion*)

Takeaways

From performance to learning

- Removing the grades
- Chunking up learning effort
- Requiring engagement through assessment design
- Feedback

Grades

Further resources

- Carrant, N., L. Bunting, V. Hill, and E. Salines (2024) “Rethinking assessment? Research into the affective impact of higher education grading”, *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(1), pp. 82–100. doi: 10.21100/compass.v17i1.1496.
- Gilbert, T. (2017). “When Looking is Allowed: What Compassionate Group Work Looks Like in a UK University”. In P. Gibbs (Ed.), *The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education* (1st ed., pp. 189-202). Springer Nature Link. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57783-8>
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- Nieminen, J.H. & L. Yang (2024) “Assessment as a matter of being and becoming: theorising student formation in assessment”, *Studies in Higher Education*, 49:6,1028-1041, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2023.2257740