

BRIDGES CURRICULUM

2019 Core Clerkship Grading

UCSF School of Medicine

What is changing for core clerkships in 2019?

Core clerkships will assign grades of pass/fail. No honors grades will be assigned in core clerkships. There will be greater emphasis on direct observation of students' performance and real-time feedback.

Why is this change being made?

UCSF faculty and students have become progressively concerned about the fairness, accuracy, and effects of clerkship grading, despite over three years of efforts to improve clerkship grading. Concerns address:



Fairness:

Like many schools, UCSF moved the core clerkship year earlier. Judging students' suitability for a future career based on their MS2 performance is fundamentally unfair.



Wellness:

The stress around grading in core clerkships has serious consequences for student wellness, and increases the risk of burnout and serious mental health issues.



Equity:

Group differences in clerkship grades at UCSF exist for under-represented in medicine (UIM) and non-UIM students, always favoring the non-UIM students. Consequences impact our ability to diversify the workforce.



Learning:

Students report that they must focus on performance rather than learning in their clerkships. This manifests in fear of asking questions and focusing on tasks that will help them 'look good' and earn good grades rather than on improving their skills and helping their patients.

Deferring the awarding of honors grades until the subinternships in Career Launch provides core clerkship students a solid year to learn clinical medicine and improve their skills before engaging in high-stakes grading experiences. We know from our past experience of moving to pass/fail in the pre-clerkship courses that removing honors grades encourages teamwork and improves student wellbeing.

FAQs

Will students be motivated for clerkships without opportunities to earn honors?

Our students do not need the external motivation of grades to do their best; the goal of learning to care for patients is a primary motivation. Students will be motivated to receive valuable feedback and have opportunities to learn and improve through their core clerkships and prepare for subinternships. They will need to achieve expected competencies and milestones and pass clerkship exams.

Won't this change place too much emphasis on Step 1?

Step 1 is already a high-stakes, high-stress exam for all students nationally, and at UCSF. UCSF students take Step 1 after their core clerkships, after a two-month study period. We will produce high-quality clerkship narratives for the MSPE (Dean's letter) and continue to support students in their many extracurricular and research endeavors, and Career Launch clerkships, that create a well-rounded application and MSPE.

What about Career Launch?

Honors grades will be awarded in most Career Launch (fourth year) four-week clerkships. Awarding honors grades in subinternships will allow UCSF to present our students' strengths in the residency selection process. Ensuring that students are well positioned for residency is a high priority.

How can we create high-quality Career Launch evaluations? Are these honors grades meaningful?

Faculty leaders and work groups are actively designing procedures for Career Launch evaluations so that students' evaluations will provide useful descriptions of students' performance and abilities. We are committed to raising the bar for all Career Launch evaluations.

Will this change hurt students applying to highly competitive specialties?

Students will be able to distinguish themselves with core clerkship narratives, Career Launch narratives and grades, Step 1 scores, extracurriculars (research, leadership, volunteerism) and letters of recommendation.

What will change immediately in January 2019?

Faculty and residents will be asked to do more direct observation of student performance and provide brief, real-time feedback. Interns will no longer complete evaluation forms for students and will instead serve in a coaching role.

