

Does Relative Grading Help Male Students? Evidence from a Field Experiment in the Classroom

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Abstract

This paper analyzes grade incentives by performing a direct comparison of the two most commonly used grading practices: the absolute and the relative grading schemes in a large-scale field experiment. We test whether relative grading, by creating a rank-order tournament in the classroom, provides stronger incentives for male students than absolute grading. We find only weak support in the data for this hypothesis: preparation effort and exam performance are largely unaffected by the grading schemes, except among marginal students. We attribute this finding to students in our sample being unmotivated by grade incentives (beyond passing).