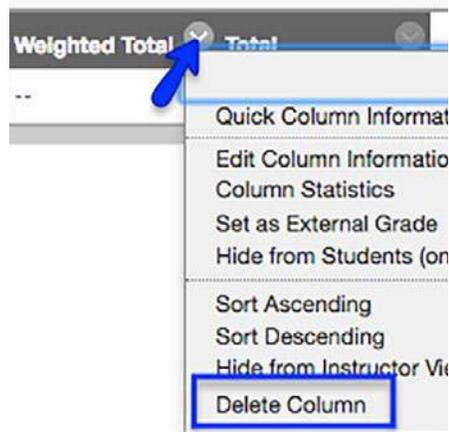# To total or not to total – Blackboard Grade Center

Blackboard Grade Center provides a useful way to manage student grades for your classes. It helps you be FERPA-compliant as well as providing a way to conveniently post grades.

By default your course gets a Total column. It calculates a total sum for any column that is automatically created by the system (e.g., tests, assignments, or discussion forums) or any custom columns that you add. A weighted Total column is also created. If you don't use weighted grades, remove it to clean up My Grades. From the column header, click on the down arrow and select "Delete Column."

CUSTOM TOTAL COLUMN OPTIONS

Average Column

Performs an average

Example: You have four papers and at the end of the semester you give one grade for the average score on those four papers. You also give participation points. You might use the average column to create a total score for the four papers and then add that score to the participation score for an overall total grade.

Minimum/Maximum Column

Shows the lowest (minimum) or highest (maximum) grade

Example: Say you have six tests. You can create a minimum column to see the lowest score for all six tests. This doesn't seem that useful for students since they already have that information. As an instructor get this information on tests by using the Column Statistics tool. Look for it by clicking on the down arrow on the test column header and selecting "Column Statistics."

Total Column

Total Column Options

One of the options for total columns is setting the calculation as a "Running total." Select yes and running total calculates the cells that have data. If a student is missing assignments and there is no grade, it appears as if the total score is higher than real. Select no and the total will assume a value of zero for cells where data is missing. This can make the final grade appear low, especially at the start of the semester. Consider switching from "Yes" to "No" half-way through the semester.

Weighted Column

Based on percentages. Select a group of columns (or categories) that are part of a larger total. Your final grade might include papers (25%), participation (35%) and two exams (40%). Instead of trying to assign points based on this breakdown, all of your assessments could be worth 25 points and by weighing grades, Blackboard takes care of the calculations for you.

Examples:

- Is participation a cumulative score? Create a column for each activity along with a total column that adds up those participation activity points. Add this cumulative score to the rest of your assessment scores to determine a final grade.
- Weight grades? Create a total column for each of the categories that make up the overall score and show totals for each category.
- Create a total column specifically for Early Progress Reports or other reporting and outreach based on only those activities that are required.

The Grade Center can be as detailed or as complicated as you wish to make it. Take a few minutes to consider if one of the options mentioned in this tip might actually be worth exploring and implement in the long run. For more support, go to Blackboard Learn Grading or stop by UAF eLearning's Open Lab to see what's possible.