Review of: "The Positive Impact of Dropping the Lowest Test Score on Academic Performance and Stress Levels in MathBased Graduate Courses"

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The authors of this paper have a worthy goal in mind, but one wonders whether their recruited students are the best fit for a rigorous engineering program. There really isn't enough data provided to make this paper a scholarly study. There really isn't any proof that student stress was actually lowered.

Mathematics, not Math

My first piece of advice would be to use “mathematics” instead of “math.” The authors may be influencing their students to take a lazy approach to the course by using the term “math”. It would also be helpful to understand the mathematics prerequisites for this course, in order to understand student issues. Thirdly, example exam questions with student performance levels should be provided. What kind of mathematical errors are students making? Why?

Lowering Standards is a Slippery Slope

Dropping an exam is almost like telling a student that covered material is unimportant. However, in STEM courses, all of the covered material is essential.

The term “good test-taker” insults those students who are able to perform well on exams. High scoring students score well on exams because they understand the course material, not because of some lucky fluke of being good at taking tests. The high scoring test taker, thinks faster, process more information, and uses logical thinking skills better than poor test takers. Retaking tests in a STEM course is really just a way of lowering standards. However, for those students who actually have a disability, special testing accommodations should be provided. But disability is not mentioned as a student issue in this paper. Perhaps, low scoring students should be told that they should find another occupation.

One strategy that might be useful would be to use an exam wrapper, in which before an exam, students reflect on how they prepared, with a post exam reflective essay also given.