I had noticed what I thought might be a trend of students receiving lower grades on their final exams relative to their overall work in my first semester French 101A classes. Although the final exam counts as 20% of their final course grade, it seemed students might have been counting on their homework, presentation and composition grades more and synthesizing material for the comprehensive final exam less. I therefore tabulated results from my Spring 2013 and Fall 2013 French 101A sections (I had one per term) to determine how many students’ final exams were:

1. Higher than their final grade in the course
2. Lower than their final grade in the course
3. Equal to their final grade in the course.

For Spring 2013 there were 18 students who completed the course:

1. 8 with higher final exam grades than final grades
2. 2 with lower final exams
3. 8 with the same grade on the final exam as in the course

These results seemed reasonable and not too concerning as the final exam requires synthesizing 8 chapters of material (grammar, vocabulary, culture oral/aural competence etc.)

For Fall of 2013 there were also 18 students completing the course:

1. 4 with higher final exams than final course grades
2. 5 with lower final exam grades than course grades
3. 9 with the same grade on the final exam as for the final course grade

The students with lower final exam grades than final course grades had therefore increased from 2 students to 5 students which seemed to be a significant increase for classes with 18 students finishing. For Fall of 2014 I decided to implement a new midterm exam which had the same format as the final exam but covered two chapters less material. I had never given a midterm exam in my French classes before. After the term I compared the results of the midterm exam to those of the final exam and as before, the results of the final exam to the final course grade.

The differences between the midterm and the final exams were as follows. Again 18 final student grades were assessed:

- Two students had a ½ grade drop from the midterm to the final exam (ie. final exam was lower)
- Eight students had a full grade drop (final exam was lower)
- Two students had a two grade drop (final exam was lower)
- One student had a one grade increase
- One student had the same grade
• Two students did not take the final exam
• Two students had ½ grade drops (final exam was lower)

As expected, the majority of students scored higher on the midterm than they did on the final most likely because the midterm covered less material and less complex material. I then compared the final exam grades to the final course grades to determine if forcing the student to synthesize material prior to the final exam in the form of a midterm had been beneficial to their final course grades. The results were as follows:

1. 12 students had higher final exam grades than course grades
2. 0 students had lower final exam grades than course grades
3. 3 students had the same grade
4. 3 other students missed the final exam

I conclude that giving the midterm to force students to synthesize material the month before the final exam was a clear advantage to the students final outcomes. The higher final exam score was beneficial to, rather than detracted from, their final course grades. I will continue to require the midterm in my course.