

RESPONSES TO GRADE INFLATION REPORT

UNIVERSITY SENATE

5/10/06

The University Senate raised several questions following the presentation of the report:

Is there a correlation between the frequency of "As" and kinds of instructors(e.g. rank; tenure-track or not)?? Didn't see this addressed in the report

Is there a correlation between grades and student evaluations?

How can we re-socialize students? This needs to happen. There need to be workshops on grades and expectations.

There needs to be a recognition that grade distribution may mean different things at different levels:

50% "A"s in 1st year Spanish would be surprising, but 50% "A"s in a 400-level course would be reasonable.

Demographics play a role in grading: the percentage of girls enrolled in higher education is higher than boys, and girls get higher grades.

ASUO SENATE

5/03/06

In general, members of the student senate thought grade inflation was problematic and should be addressed. They expressed the following opinions:

- Reducing grade inflation could have a positive effect on UO by raising the stature of the institution and the value of grades earned here.
- If the UO engages in an effort to reduce grade inflation, the University should make it widely known and explain this on each transcript.
- Grade inflation is symptomatic of a "cultural problem" - pressure to demonstrate outstanding performance.
- Professors need to learn how to stand up to pressure from students. Some professors are overwhelmed by the vigorous efforts on the part of students to have their grade raised.
- The report indicates that the University doesn't intend to try to figure out the cause of grade inflation. Determining the cause is important and should be done.

CAS DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

4/10/06

Comments from Department Heads:

Was gender break-down in grading analyzed? Female students earn higher grades than males with matched SAT scores

Non-tenured instructors and small programs receive more pressure to give high grades

Department-level data for departmental discussion is needed; “A+” data should be looked analyzed.

Grades have been increasing for a long time, not just in the interval examined in the UGC Grade Inflation Report.

Summer Session grades should be examined, as well.

If Grade Inflation is a national trend, can we really do anything??

Advising will be impacted by any change in practice; grading and mentoring don't go together. If there is a new grading system, then we need better departmental advising to foster good relationships with students.

Is there any analysis of SAT score reliability ?? – maybe students really are better!
Could Grade Inflation occur because the quality of teaching has improved?

All CAS department chairs concurred that it is important to get individual department data for the current discussion.

One chair noted that Law schools have required grade distributions (national requirement).

Dept of Psychology- 4/20/06

In response to the document from the Undergraduate Council about grade inflation...

Is there data on the relationship between grade inflation and the A+=4.3 practice? The potential for an honorary A+ would communicate a kind of dignity in grading and respect for students.

The most powerful intervention is making information more transparent and available to instructors. One doesn't know he/she is out of line without information about the line.

It would also help a lot to have some policy or recommendations that can be conveyed directly to students, as the students so often exert pressure on instructors.

FEEDBACK AS OF 4/9/07 FROM DEPARTMENT CHAIRS ON GRADE INFLATION

General Data on the Process to Date

25 department chairs were invited to reply, receive, run, and comment on results from the query.

11 department chairs, so far, have agreed to participate.

6 department chairs, so far, have completed the process and sent their responses.

QUESTION #1: Do you or others in your department believe grade inflation is a problem?

All 6 replied, “Yes,” to this question. All were concerned about inflation, while one said grades had actually deflated over the years/terms covered by the query (fall '92, '96, '00, '04).

QUESTION #2: If so, why?

The range of answers to this question included: grade inflation makes grades less meaningful, students lose incentives to achieve more, end users of transcripts (employers, graduate program admissions offices, etc.) have difficulty using grades as a basis for their evaluations, enrollments are skewed (some students flock to easier graders), faculty receive more pressure from students to lower their standards, etc.

QUESTION #3: If not, why not?

All agreed grade inflation is a problem, so none answered this question.

QUESTION #4: If you do believe grade inflation is a problem, what suggestions do you have for departmental and/or university-wide approaches to curbing grade inflation?

The range of answers to this question included: normalize transcripts to show an average class GPA as a context for understanding individual grades, provide assistance to departments to track grading trends over time, create grade reports for every class compared to other classes on an annual basis for 10 years, reward faculty for maintaining standards, avoid punishing faculty who receive lower student evaluations because they grade harder. One department chair commented that publicizing course grade averages did not influence grading behaviors of faculty members within that department and, therefore, that the University would need to go beyond the department unit to effectively address the issue. Another department chair commented that instituting department-wide grading standards appeared to have the effect of lowering the average GPA's given in courses which historically had been viewed as easy while raising GPA's in courses which historically had been viewed as difficult.

QUESTION #5: What kinds of information on grading trends within your department might you like a revised Student Data Warehouse query to generate?

Although not every respondent answered this question, responses included: “Grades broken down by course and by faculty member, percentage of As, Bs, I would like to be able to look at data broken down by GTF instructors, adjuncts, as well as by regular faculty members,”.... “The grade report is actually very useful, although I would rather see it for every individual class, i.e. by CRN number, by level of course....I actually think it is helpful to faculty to see how the grades they assign in their class stack up to other persons in the department teaching a similar level of course.”