

Grade Inflation Executive Summary

How Much Is Grade Inflation and How Much Is More Effective Education?

Overview: *While this generation of students is not significantly more intelligent than ours, they have access to many more tools for success including tutoring and ample online resources. As students leverage their additional resources, they learn more and grade point averages generally rise while DFW rates fall. Being dedicated to student success and learning, we should continue to be vigilant to grade inflation per se, but otherwise embrace the changes in the educational environment and in turn leverage these same changes to raise the bar for our highest grades, commensurate with students' increased learning ability. We might raise this bar through requiring demonstration of skills beyond recitation and application, including possibly: critical thinking, ethics, and professionalism. By raising the bar on B's – A+'s, we would restore the bell shape to the curve (although arguably with a tighter kurtosis than we had) and incidentally increase retention of our better students who feel less challenged than they'd like. By actively communicating such changes to stakeholders, we add value to the Stetson business degree.*

Facts:

- Grade inflation can be defined as “a rise in the average grade assigned to students; especially: the assigning of grades higher than previously assigned for given levels of achievement.”¹
- Grade inflation has been blamed on teachers being softer overtime.
- Higher education has dedicated significant resources to improving teaching and the learning environment, including accessibility to tutors and assistance for students with learning disabilities.
- Electronic access has made access to student learning support more readily available for many class subjects.
- We may want to grade new skillsets. Whereas university libraries filter student academic resources, online resources are not subject to the same expert filtering, and students may not have the skillset to evaluate authorities appropriately. Students may not be able to solve the next generation of problems for posting electronically.
- There is some evidence that students may be marginally more intelligent – about 2% more – than previous generations due to better nutrition, etc.

Issues:

1. Where grades are concentrated at the top of the scale, even if they reflect higher learning by a class on average, the grades lose discriminate validity.
2. Where grades do not reflect higher learning than previously assigned grades for similar levels of achievement (e.g. where they are curved by class, but classes learn more over time), external validity is compromised.
3. Where grades rise overall in part because the teachers that implement these better methods may receive additional pressure of being too soft on students' grades. Teachers who undertake changes before other instructors do, risk being labeled as contributing to grade inflation.

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grade%20inflation>

4. The meaning of grades themselves may have changed. Is a “C” still “average?” If so, what is it the average of? If employers expect at least a 3.0 from employees, are we marking average college students for failure in finding a job? A similar argument could be made for graduate school admission.

Discussion: The answer to resolving the tension between validities may be to re-examine the grades at the very top, A's and B's, while continuing to implement best practices making education more accessible and learning more effective at the lower levels and middle level of the grade scale. It may be time for some institutions to study in more detail what constitutes the proper grading scales for students. It may be that middle passing grades are reflective of the skills that that previously encompassed both middle and upper grade skills. These would be relatively moderate level skills on Blooms Taxonomy. That is, in addition to F's and D's being pushed up because of better tools, perhaps it's time to raise the bar to make A's harder to get. Perhaps, thoughtfully, deliberately, the skills necessary to earn a B in the past may now warrant a C. The skills that warranted an A in the past, may now warrant a B. The A-level might be replaced with higher critical thinking skills and integrative synthesis. By raising the bar, on both teaching and learning, the discriminate validity of the grading scale has been maintained while at the same time students across all levels learn more. We issue a caution though, because students in these classes who were formally at the upper levels and now have dropped down a bit may lose out in job opportunities scholarships and graduate school admissions to competing students whose instructors have not yet adjusted their grading scale.

Some Literature on Grade Inflation

- “There’s Nothing Wrong with Grade Inflation,” *The Washington Post*. Here’s a quote: “A Yale report found that 62 percent of [all Yale grades](#) are A or A-minus. According to a 2013 article in the Harvard Crimson, the median grade [at Harvard](#) was an A-minus , while the most common grade was an A.” https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/03/04/theres-nothing-wrong-with-grade-inflation/?utm_term=.5342e83bd021
- Graphs depicting GPA changes in public and private universities 1983 – 2013: <http://www.gradeinflation.com/>
- “How an Epidemic of Grade Inflation Made As Average, *PBS*, opposing argument. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/making-sense/column-how-an-epidemic-of-grade-inflation-made-as-average/>

Factors That May Present as Grade Inflation, but Are Environmental/Learning Factors

Factor	When Implemented	What Factor Is Designed to Do	How Much Factor Helps	Cite Sources Where Available
Online tutoring like Khan academy		Access to info		
Online lectures		Access to info		
Disabled student access		Access to info		
Dissemination of notes/study guides		Access to info		
Increased instructor support through email/BB/text		Improved Instruction		
Focused syllabi		Improved Instruction		
Drafts returned with more formative than summative feedback		Improved Instruction		
Reminders from instructors		Improved Instruction		
Experiential/interactive lecture styles		Improved Instruction		
Shared ownership for student success		Improved Instruction		
Mastery system of learning		Improved Instruction		
Online access to campus library		Study Efficiency		
Connect/online homework with instant results and feedback		Study Efficiency		
Google online search for papers builds efficiency in searches		Study Efficiency		
Increased peer support through email/BB/text		Peer Support		
Cooperative learning environment w/emphasis on group work		Peer Support		
Online BB templates		Organization		
Early warning systems		Organization		
Free on campus tutoring		Affordability		
Affordable support materials, delivered quickly, including Amazon used books & student loans		Affordability		
Can send grades down:				
Large Class size		Schedule		
Early/late class		Schedule		
Friday class		Schedule		