

University Grading Scale Sub-Committee Report

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The Sub-Committee appointed by the University Curriculum Committee to review the University's grading scale and grading policies met Thursday, January 8. The meeting resulted in agreement on the following matters:

Objective(s) of the Sub-Committee

- Review the current University policies and practices
- Survey the grading policies and practices of the AAU Research I Institutions
- Identify and review articles or other materials which examine and evaluate alternative grading policies
- Informed by the survey and literature, recommend any changes that would improve the existing grading policies.

The attributes associated with improved grading policies would include a perception of enhanced fairness, increased performance motivation, increased preciseness in the performance/grade nexus, administrative feasibility and flexibility, comprehensible and consistent.

Context

- The Law School has proposed a change in the grading system which would increase granularity (add minus grades) and increase the upper grade point to a 4.3 for A+ grades.
- The observations that have led to the notion of "grade inflation" suggest that it may be time for recalibration or a new grading system.

Survey

1. A web-based survey of 59 AAU Research I universities was conducted. In every case the web material was searched to identify the institution's grading policy. In the majority of cases (34 out of 51) the policy was as follows:

<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Grade Points</u>
A+	4.0
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F/E	0

Included in this group were a number of minor variation (17 excludes A+; 8 exclude D-; etc.)

The other major group (9 out of 59) followed the traditional policy:

A	4.0
B	3.0
C	2.0
D	1.0
E/F	0

The variation among the remainder had to do with the letter grade – gpa nexus but in only two cases was the upper-bound exceeded (MIT, A= 5.0; Rice, A = 4.3)

2. A similar survey of law schools was performed and in a majority of cases (28 of 46), the law school's grading policy mimicked that of the university. There were two groups with notable exceptions:

7 schools did not award A+;
7 schools gave more than a 4.0 for A+

They were:

✓ UCLA	4.3
✓ Michigan	4.3
✓ North Carolina	4.3
✓ Missouri	4.2
Cornell	4.3
✓ Duke	4.1 – 4.5
✓ Stanford	4.3

Other Input

The group consulted with the Chair of the Department of Educational Psychology in the College of Education, Dr. David Miller, and made a cursory perusal of relevant literature. These sources indicated:

- a) Particular grading policies appear to have little effect on the important outcomes.
- b) Transitions from holistic to more gradation policies (A → F to A+, A, A- → F) result in a slight reduction in grade point averages.
- c) Faculty and student response to increased gradation is mixed, attendant with their opinions as to the reality of increased precision.
- d) All studies recommend that any change proposed be thoroughly vetted by all interested parties (students, faculty and administration).

Recommendations

The Sub-Committee recommends:

- a) No change in the current University grading policies.
- b) Deviation from University policy by a college/school should be petitionable (UCC).
- c) A broader and more thorough consideration of these policies should be undertaken as part of any renewed consideration of the University's total academic environment.

The basis for these respective recommendations include:

- a) There is a rational bias for maintaining the current policy in the absence of strong evidence that a change would provide substantial benefits. The bias is based on concepts/problems such as continuity, consistency, and feasibility. A change in policy would have negative implications or costs in each of these domains and those costs outweigh any benefits yet discovered.
- b) Colleges are, at times, faced with the dilemma of local practices/policies differing from peer practices/policies. This is especially important in terms of the College's graduates and how this affects their standing in the larger community of graduates where credentials may determine outcomes. Thus if one College is faced with peer grading policies that by their difference puts that College's graduates at a disadvantage, then it should be able to request an appropriate variance from the University policy.

It should be the responsibility of the successful petitioner to resolve any problems that may arise from the use of an authorized non-standard policy.

- c) Grading policies are an important and integral part of the academic structure of a university. Changes in such policies have implications for other policies and should not be made in isolation. Piecemeal consideration can lead to ad hoc solutions that are sub-optimal for the academy.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this review and we are happy to answer questions related to these matters.