

Summary of UGC Grade Inflation Discussion

January 20, 2005

Mark Thoma announced that he was analyzing data on grade patterns at UO.

February 17, 2005

Handout on national data on grade inflation was given to UGC (from gradeinflation.com). UO Grade inflation data not yet available.

March 3, 2005

Mark Thoma presented preliminary data on grade inflation at UO.

April 27, 2005

Grade Inflation Report:

Mark Thoma presented a full report on grade inflation at the University of Oregon, compiled with the assistance of Jim Blick. His initial summary shows evidence of inflation of grades at UO in the period from 1992-2004: 10% more “A”s and 7% more “As + Bs” were given, averaged over all levels and all divisions and schools.

- **Discussion**

- Can the GPAs of students in the courses that were analyzed be compared to overall GPAs at UO during the same period?
- Can the apparent correlation between faculty composition and grade inflation be examined in more detail to determine whether it holds up?
- Some UO faculty are concerned about the large number of “A+”s given at UO; faculty are pressured to “bump up” grades with “+”s. This contributes to increases in the numerical value of GPAs.
- The University of Washington changed its grading system to a “point” system (3.1, 3.2, 3.3, etc) with a cap at “4.0.” This change was said to slow the rate of grade inflation at that institution.
- The UGC will work on developing specific recommendations for reducing grade inflation. It would like to encourage departments to discuss what grades mean within the unit. General recommendations could help individual faculty withstand the pressures that lead to grade inflation.

May 11, 2005

Grade Inflation: + grades

- As a follow-up to previous discussion of UO inflation, Herb Chereck distributed a handout showing grade distributions, including “+” grades, by department from Fall 2000 to the present.
- **Discussion**
- Should independent studies / practicums be graded? Are

disproportionately high grades in courses of this kind contributing to grade inflation?

- Should grades on transcripts be normalized with respect to grade distributions in individual courses?
- The UGC felt that it should not set specific quotas on all grades, but perhaps something should be done regarding the unusually high occurrence of “A+”s.
- It was suggested that a sub-committee be formed to examine the distribution of “A+” grades. Specifically, is the rising proportion of “A+” grades a general phenomenon across many courses, or do a few courses dominate these averages?
- It was also suggested that the UGC recommend that schools and colleges develop guidelines for grades. It was felt that having such guidelines would assist in communicating grading expectations to new faculty. At present, most faculty have little or no guidance as to what a grade of “A”, “B”, “C”, etc. should mean, or the grade distributions expected in different kinds of classes.
- By consensus, the UGC agreed that drafting a recommendation to address the issue of grade inflation should be a major order of business for the future.

May 25, 2005

Previous Discussion of Grade Inflation:

Mark Thoma presented a report on data he gathered regarding the relation between instructor rank and the occurrence of grade inflation. He reported that an initial hypothesis re. grade inflation appeared to be confirmed, i.e. younger, less experienced faculty tend to give higher grades.

• **Discussion**

- Overall, grade inflation may be occurring because of naivete, inexperience, and ignorance of the University’s expectations re. grade distributions.
- Perhaps grade distributions can be made part of the tenure eligibility file.
- Grade distribution is now considered in evaluating candidates for teaching awards.

- It was suggested that the UGC may also want to study the effect of grades awarded by non-academic programs on grade inflation.
- Some units have adopted internal grading policies designed to curb inflation. Samples of such policies from the Lundquist College of Business and the Department of Economics were distributed to council members.
- Recommendations re. the general development of department- or school-based grading policies will likely be considered by the Council next year.

April 10, 2006

Grade Inflation Report presented to campus groups

Karen Sprague reported that there was strong support in the Deans Council for recognizing grade inflation as a problem at UO, especially from President Dave Frohnmayer. Department heads from CAS will discuss the issue within their own departments. They will be collecting more detailed data within their departments. All of the groups to which the report has been presented are listed in the table below:

Group	UGC Presenter	Date
Deans Work Session	Karen Sprague	3/21/06
CAS Departments	Karen Sprague	4/10/06
Academic Requirements Committee	Glenda Utsey	4/2006
Scholastic Review Committee	Mark Thoma	4/2006
Student Senate	Margarita Smith and Karen Sprague	5/03/06
University Senate	Ron Severson and Mark Thoma	5/10/06