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Faculty Views of the Grading System and "Grade Inflation" at the University of Washington

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April of 1995, the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) distributed a survey that solicited the opinions faculty members regarding the University of Washington 4.0 decimal grading system and the perceived problem of "grade inflation." This survey was developed under the aegis of the Faculty Council on Academic Standards and was sent by e-mail to an address list of more than 2,100 supplied by the Faculty Senate. Approximately one month later 617 valid responses had been received, all but 38 by electronic transmission.

Respondents included Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors, and Lecturers in percentages that closely resemble the distribution of these ranks at the UW. In addition, 6.8 % of the respondents were Teaching Assistants, some of whom are involved in assigning grades. A wide range of departments were represented in the survey.

The critical question of the survey was whether or not the respondents were satisfied with the UW current 4.0 grading scheme. Across all respondents, there were equal numbers who were satisfied and dissatisfied. Looking at the responses by rank and teaching level, a majority of the Professors teaching undergraduates or both graduates and undergraduates equally were satisfied with the current system. Professors teaching graduates were equally divided. A majority of Associate Professors of all teaching levels were satisfied, as were Lecturers when considered as a whole. Only the ranks Assistant Professors and Teaching Assistants had a majority that were dissatisfied with the current system. When asked to express the reason for their discontent, many respondents mentioned that the decimal system was "too fine" or that "grade inflation" made the current system untenable. Others expressed a preference for a different grading system. Some faculty found grades themselves meaningless.

When asked what grading procedure they used, a majority of the respondents cited either absolute standards (41.2%), the curve (31.0%), or a combination of both (10.4%). The majority of individual faculty members prefer either the decimal system (40.1%) or letter grades with pluses and minuses (36.5%). Few faculty members had ever had training in grading practices. Although many faculty reported that they had seen comparisons of their grades to others, a majority indicated that this information was either informal or anecdotal. A very large majority (88.7%) of the faculty report that guidelines regarding grades and grading practices would either be welcomed or of some assistance.

The most compelling response came in response to the question of whether or not "grade inflation" was a problem. "Grade inflation" was defined as being an increase in average GPAs unrelated to any real increase in student perfomance. More than 80% of the respondents believed that it was a problem that should be addressed either strongly or in

some manner. Although respondents were divided over the cause of grade inflation, a list of potential sources include student expectations, the present economic climate, a desire to earn students' regard, a lack of administrative support for stringent grading, and the system of student rating of instruction.

Faculty were asked what they thought the average GPA should be for undergraduates (2.68), graduates (3.28) and also for undergraduate classes at the 100, 200, 300, and 400 levels (2.58, 2.62, 2.86, and 2.93 respectively). Predictably these "ideals" were substantially below actual GPA's awarded for these categories.

It is clear from this survey that there is no overwhelming support for changing the current UW grading system. However, faculty respondents were very forthcoming when afforded the opportunity to comment on the current grading system, grade inflation, or actions to be taken in regard to both. In addition to repeating comments about the present system and inflation, many respondents suggested positive action that could be taken. The most common suggestion for change was for the adoption of grading guidelines either on individual unit levels or campus-wide. Additional suggestions included making grade comparison information more readily available to faculty, providing faculty access to education in grading procedures and practices, changing how student evaluations are reported and/or used, educating students about the UW grade system, and changing how grades are reported on transcripts.

The method of survey by e-mail was seen an effective way to receive relatively quick response from faculty.

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INTRODUCTION

During a number of their regular meetings, the Faculty Council on Academic Standards, in response to general faculty concerns, reviewed the present grading system at the University of Washington. Unlike many of its peer institutions, the UW grades its undergraduates on a 4.0 decimal scale with 4.0 being equal to an "A", 3.0 a "B", etc.[1], as awarded at other universities. These deliberations included discussion of whether or not grade inflation exists at the UW and, if so, whether the present 4.0 grading system has contributed to it. "Grade inflation" is characterized as a phenomenon wherein the average grade point average (GPA) increases over time unrelated to any real increase in student performance. The Council was presented with evidence that the average GPA has certainly increased at the UW. It was also noted that grade inflation is a national issue and that the average GPA has increased at other institutions. One result of these preliminary discussions was to commission the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) to survey the faculty concerning their views on two issues: the UW's 4.0 grading system and "grade inflation".

METHOD

In April, 1995 a questionnaire was developed by the Council and OEA to explore faculty views on these two subjects.[2] The survey asked for demographic information followed by eleven questions. Questions 1 through 6 were devoted to grading systems. Questions 7 through 10 explored the issue of grade inflation. The final question asked faculty opinion of the survey method.

The survey was composed so that it could be distributed both by e-mail and by conventional paper copy. On April 12 the survey was sent by e-mail to faculty who were on the Faculty Senate e-mail list. This list included 2,187 addresses of which 2,146 were valid. In addition, an announcement was published in University Week to reach those faculty who either did not use e-mail or who were not on the Faculty Senate list. The announcement described the nature of the survey and gave an address and phone number where copies could be requested. Further, in the cover letter to the survey, the Council invited faculty members to forward copies of the survey to their teaching assistants who assigned grades in

[1] Grades may be awarded at the levels of tenths of points from 0.7 to 4.0. 0.0 is also available.
[2] See Appendix 1

their classes. Some faculty members expanded this call to all their graduate students which made the target survey population somewhat elastic.

E-mail and paper copies of the survey were collected for approximately one month and then the data collection was closed to begin the process of analysis. At the end of this period 617 valid responses were received. This represented 28.7% of the active e-mail addresses. However, it is difficult to determine what percent of the total sample responded because of the expandable nature of the sample pool mentioned above. Only 38 of the surveys received were submitted on paper.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

The demographic information requested of the faculty included name (as an option), academic rank, department, years on the faculty, and the level of students that they most frequently taught: undergraduate, graduate, or both equally. The sample was representative of the campus in that there was a wide range of departments represented[3]. The distribution of the academic rank of the respondents also corresponded closely to the actual distribution of academic ranks at the UW as shown in Table 1. The comparison is based on ranks excluding Teaching Assistants and those respondent who did not indicate rank.

Table 1: Academic Rank of Respondents

Rank	# of Respondents	% of Respondents	% at UW
Professor	265	42.9%	51.8%
Associate Professor	163	26.4%	23.4%
Assistant Professor	108	17.5%	15.4%
Lecturer	33	5.4%	9.4%
Teaching Assistants	42	6.8%	N/A
No Indication	6	1.0%	N/A

Respondents were asked to indicate their length of service at the UW. The average length of service for the 580 respondents who filled in this information by teaching level and rank is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Average Years at UW

Teaching Level	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Lecturer	Teaching Assistant
Undergraduate	21.7	15.8	4.3	12.5	2.5
Graduate	19.2	10.8	5.1	8.8	5.0
Both	20.5	11.9	5.2	12.3	--
All Responses	20.6	12.9	4.8	11.9	2.6

[3] See Appendix 2.

The teaching level of the faculty respondents was well distributed across all the faculty ranks as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Rank By Teaching Level As a Percent of Total Responses

Teaching Level	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Lecturer	Teaching Assistant
Undergraduate	32.2%	36.4%	39.8%	69.7%	97.6%
Graduate	27.3%	35.2%	35.2%	18.2%	2.4%
Both	40.5%	28.4%	28.4%	12.1%	--

Satisfaction with the current grading system

The first critical question of the survey was whether or not the faculty respondents were satisfied with the current 4.0 decimal grading system. Considering all responses to this question, including those of Teaching Assistants, there was a virtual tie (303 vs. 302) between those who were satisfied and those who were dissatisfied with the current system. However, when examined by teaching level and academic rank (see Table 4), the level of support diminished with rank. Professors were slightly more likely to be satisfied than were Associate Professors. Assistant Professors were much more likely to be dissatisfied with decimal grading. Teaching Assistants were the least satisfied.

Table 4: Percent Satisfied/Not Satisfied with 4.0 Decimal Grading System

		Undergrad.	Graduate	Both	TOTAL
Professor	N	83	69	106	258
	Satisfied	68.7%	49.3%	54.7%	57.8%
	Not Satisfied	31.3%	50.7%	45.3%	42.2%
Assoc. Prof.	N	58	54	45	157
	Satisfied	51.7%	61.1%	51.1%	54.8%
	Not Satisfied	48.3%	38.9%	48.9%	45.2%
Asst. Prof.	N	42	38	26	106
	Satisfied	21.4%	50.0%	38.5%	35.8%
	Not Satisfied	78.6%	50.0%	61.5%	64.2%
Lecturer	N	23	6	4	33
	Satisfied	60.9%	33.3%	50.0%	54.5%
	Not Satisfied	39.1%	66.7%	50.0%	45.5%
T. A.	N	40	1	0	41
	Satisfied	17.5%	--	--	17.1%
	Not Satisfied	82.5%	100.0%	--	82.9%
TOTAL	N	246	168	181	595
	Satisfied	47.6%	52.4%	51.4%	50.1%
	Not Satisfied	52.4%	47.6%	48.6%	49.9%

The impact of teaching assistants' responses on the survey tends to reduce the percentage of those satisfied with the present grading system. Based on the comments of teaching assistants, some who responded were not involved in the grading process at all, but were expressing their dissatisfaction with the present system as they saw it being implemented by the faculty with whom they worked.

When one excludes teaching assistant's responses and examines the patterns based on teaching levels, it is interesting to note that a majority of faculty respondents who teach primarily at the graduate level expressed satisfaction with the present system. At the same time, their comments indicate that many of them do not use this system in their own programs. Many who teach in graduate and professional programs use some variation of the high pass, pass, low pass, or no pass system.

Respondents who were not satisfied with the current grading system were asked to comment on why they were dissatisfied. Of the more than 300 people who said that they were not satisfied, 265 included their reasoning. Some respondents had only a single reason for their dissatisfaction while others had multiple, interlocking concerns. The most often cited complaint (73 times) was that the decimal system was too finely detailed to be accurate or useful. Sample comments include:

> *The seeming precision of the decimal system is ridiculous and false. It is impossible to make such fine distinctions.*

and,

> *The implied precision of decimal grading is really a sham since in most classes it is impossible to discriminate to the tenth of a point.*

In some respondents' comments the concern about the excessive precision of the grading system is related to other complaints. "Grade inflation", which is the second most common reason given for dissatisfaction with the grading system (72 times), is closely tied to the fine detail of the decimal system. For example,

> *It's (the grading system's) increments are too small. By marking grades by the tenths of a grade point, it leads students to argue for every 1/2 point on assignment grades. I believe that the grading system contributes to grade inflation and to student obsession with grades.*

The most common rationale expressed for how the level of detail causes inflation was succinctly expressed in one response, "The tiny distinctions mean too much to the students, too little to me." Again and again, faculty admitted to an ambivalence about grading by a tenth of a point. One responded, "Under the old system I could easily distinguish "A" from "B" performance, whereas I find it difficult to discriminate between 3.3, 3.5, 3.7, 4.0. I suspect that, in my case the new system contributes to grade point inflation." Another wrote, ". . . increments that make little sense in terms of performance differences (what *is* the difference between a 3.5 student and one earning 3.6?)", and a third stated, "Neither

students nor faculty can discern the difference, for example, between a 3.7 and a 3.8 in terms of performance on subjective kinds of material like essay exams or research papers."

Besides "grade inflation", the incremental nature of the current grading system is viewed as contributing to other unsatisfactory effects including student argumentativeness (23), and obsession with grades (18). One faculty member commented, "The decimal system makes much too fine distinctions between grades. In addition, it really makes the students whine about every point." A common descriptive phrase used by faculty to describe this behavior is "grade grubbing."

Other associated impacts of the detailed nature of the decimal grading scheme seen as negatives included the difficulty in adequately rewarding truly excellent students (22) and "grade compression" (6). Some faculty respondents expressed concern that when grades for all students are clustered at the top, the truly excellent students cannot be adequately compensated for the quality of their work. These sentiments included statements such as, "Grades are too high, making it difficult to communicate to students how well they are really doing, and making it difficult to reward especially good students". Grade compression was defined by many respondents as a phenomenon in which student expectation and peer pressure decreases the acceptable grade range to between 3.0 and 4.0. One illustrative comment was, "Current practice yields grades for undergrads that, with rare exceptions, range between 3.0 and 4.0. This is too homogeneous given the wide range of performance among students."

Other unpopular facets of the current grading system included the perceived lack of standardization in its implementation (29) and the exercise of peer pressure to increase grades (19). Frustration over the seeming random application of the grading system was variously expressed as caused by a failure to provide adequate definitions, a lack of guidelines, a "nonunified approach", and by its confusing and cumbersome nature. There were some responses that reported ragged administration of the system by departments other than their own. But, within departments, peer pressure was also felt. Examples of this are evident in the following:

> *I am satisfied with the system to the extent that it provides faculty with a finely differentiated mechanism with which to assess student work. When it gets into trouble is this: if I grade students rigorously, I discover that I am virtually alone among my peers.*

and

> *My grades are much lower than my colleagues. I receive criticism as a result. Also, I have reduced my grades over the years as I perceive student quality to have fallen. My teaching ratings have fallen in step. I am a former winner of the UW's Distinguished Teaching Award.*

A sizable number of respondents (21) indicated a desire for a switch to other grading schemes. These included A, B, C, etc. with or without pluses and minuses, percentile

grades, credit/no credit, and high pass/pass/low pass/no pass. Also, some suggested modifying the current system to reduce and simplify the number of acceptable grades. Under these recommendations, grades would be by approximately 1/3 of a point; i.e. 3.0, 3.3, 3.7. 4.0. The section on Preferred Grading Systems addresses this issue in greater detail.

A small number of faculty (14) found grades to be meaningless and any grading system philosophically useless. Other minority reasons for dissatisfaction included unrealistic student expectations (12), the impact of student evaluations on grades (6), system abuse by faculty (2), low student quality, student cheating, lack of detail in the system, and the promotion of grade averaging (1 each).

Systems Used for Grades

Those surveyed were asked what type of system they used to determine grades. Suggested examples included, the curve, absolute standards, and contract. The responses were classified in order to determine reasonable groupings. Some responses defied any categorization although they clearly were intended to communicate some system. Some respondents answered that they used different systems for different types of classes (large lecture vs. seminar) and others said they used all or combinations of the various methods of grading but were unclear whether these were used in a single class or across all classes in a quarter. The distribution of the coded answers is indicated in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Systems Used for Grading Basis by Percent (N=588)

System	Percent
Absolute Standards	41.2%
Curve	31.0%
Curve and Absolute Standards	10.4%
Contracts (Alone or with curve or standards)	3.7%
Subjective / No System	2.2%
Other	2.2%
Large Classes, Curve / Small, Other	1.9%
Mastery of Objectives	1.9%
Set by Professor or Department	1.7%
Curve or Absolute Standards	1.5%
All Systems	1.4%
Pass / Fail / Honors	.5%
Not Applicable	.5%

The vast majority of respondents used either absolute standards, a curve, or a combination of the two. Some created their own subjective system such as demonstrated in this statement,

> *I don't have a "system." That's not really appropriate for disciplines that aren't by nature systematic. I have procedures, involving a weighing of various factors,*

evaluated on the basis of experience and precedent, numerical or quasi-numerical grading of exams followed by informal curving, and regular comparison to maintain what consistency I can.

Preferred Grading Systems

The survey used the term "system" in the previous question to mean the type of procedures used to arrive at grades. In the following question, "system" once again was used to focus on the evaluative rating of individual students. Respondents were asked their preferences from a list that included the current 4.0 decimal system, letter grades with plus and minus, straight letter grades, "no preference", and other. The distribution of responses by academic rank is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Preferred Grading Systems by Percent

Rank	N	4.0 Decimal	Letters +/-	Letters Only	No Preference	Other
Professor	273	46.5%	33.0%	6.2%	6.6%	7.7%
Associate	166	42.2%	38.0%	3.6%	6.6%	9.6%
Assistant	113	23.9%	41.6%	8.9%	9.7%	15.9%
Lecturer	35	42.9%	31.4%	5.7%	2.9%	17.1%
T.A.	43	32.6%	41.9%	9.3%	13.9%	2.3%
N/I	6	33.3%	50.0%	--	16.7%	--
Total	**636**	**40.1%**	**36.5%**	**6.1%**	**7.6%**	**9.7%**

Although a plurality of faculty express their preference for the current grading system, there was also a large number of respondents who preferred letter grades with pluses and minuses. When preferences are examined by rank, there is a correlation between preference and academic position. Professors, Associate Professors, and Lectures are more likely to prefer the current system while Assistant Professors and Teaching Assistants tend to prefer letter grades with pluses and minuses. This difference, in turn, corresponds with the length of time that respondents have been at the University (see Table 2). The longer one has been at the UW, the greater the likelihood that one will prefer the current grading system.

Similarly, those preferring "Other" grading systems, tend to be from the groups most recently associated with the UW. There were thirty eight descriptions of other preferable systems. The most common alternate grading system described was some variation of a Pass/Fail scheme (15). These included simple Credit/No Credit and Pass/Fail suggestions to the more complex High Pass/Pass/Low Pass/ Fail continuum. The next most numerous description was some variation of letter grades (5). These included letters with only pluses or an A, AB, B, BC, C, etc. array. Some suggested percentage or 100 point scale grades (4), or written evaluations for each student (3). A few suggested doing away with grades altogether (3). A couple wanted the decimal system retained but with fewer steps. One suggested something called the Danish Scale of 1 to 13.

Training in Grading Practices

Another purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain whether and to what extent faculty had received formal training in grading practices. The results were telling as shown in Chart 1.

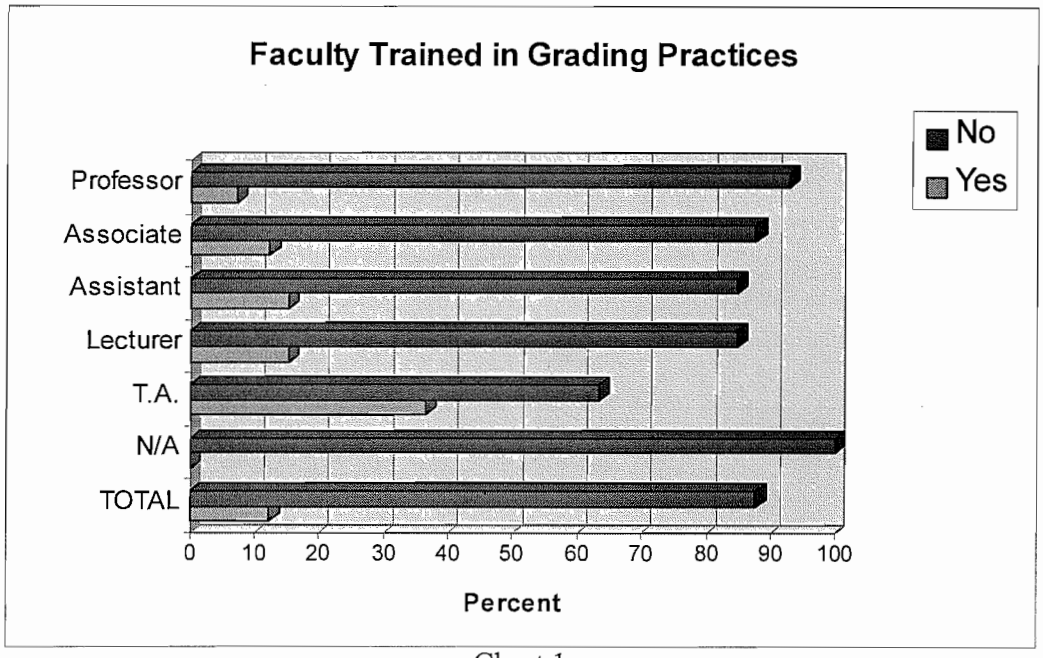

Chart 1

As is readily apparent, training in grading practices is not a very common experience. This lack of training is further evident when the descriptions of the training received are analyzed. Most Professors, Associate Professors, and Assistant Professors received their only formal training during their undergraduate or graduate experience. There appears to be some departmental training or direction given but the penetration is quite minimal. Some respondents cited their only training as being at other universities, some overseas.

Grading Comparisons

Another source of grading information for faculty is comparisons of an individual's grading pattern to that of colleagues in and out of the department. The survey asked faculty whether or not they had access to that information and if so, in what form. The results are displayed in Chart 2.

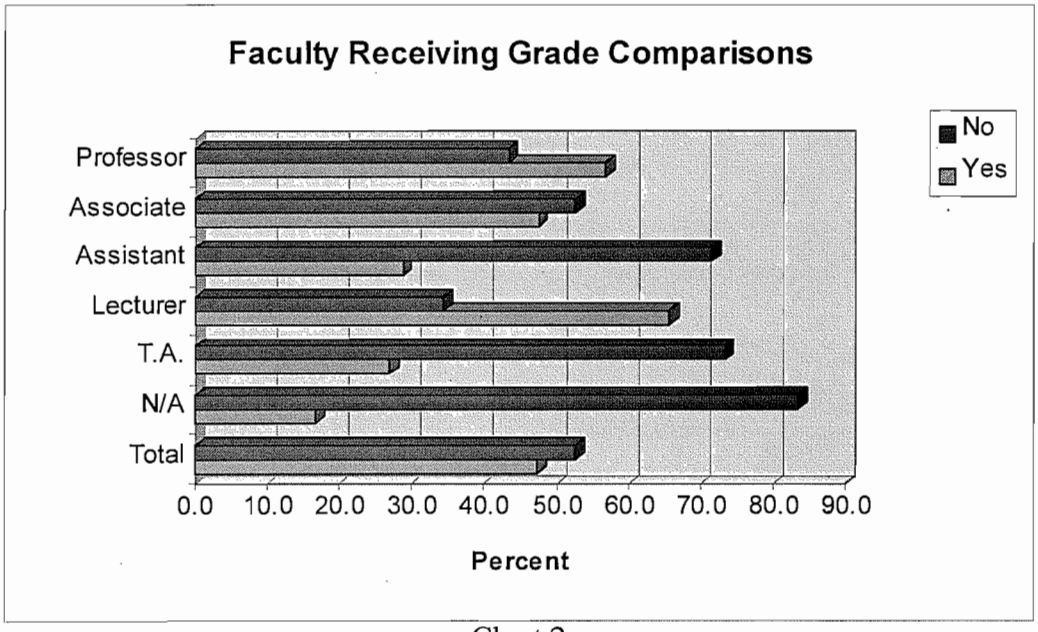

Chart 2

Despite the appearance that comparative grading information is readily available to many of the faculty, a reading of the descriptions of the sources of this information tends to shed some doubt on its credibility. Some departments seem to provide very consistent and detailed data to all the faculty. Business, for example, provides all faculty with the mean grade in all courses offered on a quarterly basis and, in addition, gives the names of the three courses and instructors with the highest and lowest mean grades. Mechanical Engineering also provides a quarterly summary of mean grades and provides an historical tabulation of the previous three years' grade averages on an annual basis. Other departments are more selective in the information distributed. Mathematics provides statistical information on grades for entry level courses on a routine basis, but respondents report the last comprehensive grade distribution being distributed "in the late 1980's." Respondents reported that many other departments have comparison information available but it requires the initiative of the individual faculty member to obtain it.

Some faculty respondents seemed confused by the source of the information they receive. Respondents within the same department variously attributed the data source as "the Dean's Office", academic advisors, "the grade office in Schmitz", or the College of Arts and Sciences. Many received their information from "gossip", informal surveys of colleagues, or discussions at faculty meetings. Some reported they receive packets of mean grades when they are hired and never see the information again.

With few exceptions, the distribution of comparative grade information is sporadic at best. On occasion, the information is available but only on request. In some instances, individual faculty take it upon themselves to provide this information to their colleagues. Sometimes the information is provided in order to direct grade outcomes. For example, one respondent stated that grade data were,

Informational, with the suggestion that we may be a bit harsh in some of our classes and disadvantage our students when they apply for graduate school. We have not changed in response to that information.

and another said,

As a result of complaints about too-low grades, received data on previous years' grading practice.

and, finally, one faculty member reported,

Several years ago, my colleagues united to try to urge one of the senior people in the department to raise his grades to better match the rather inflated grades that the rest of Arts and Sciences seems to favor. I saw at that point that my grades were pretty much par for the course, while the senior colleague's grades were on average several tenths of a point lower. My colleagues exerted considerable pressure to try to have the senior person lower his standards but he refused.

Grade Guidelines

Another possible source of information about grading practices and procedures could come from guidelines issued on an institutional, college or departmental level. A question about the helpfulness of guidelines was included in the survey. Respondents expressed their interest in such guidelines in overwhelming numbers. As shown in Table 7, almost 90% of the respondents would find guidelines either "welcome" or "of some assistance".

Table 7: Faculty Reaction to Grading Guidelines

Rank	N	Guidelines Welcome	Of Some Assistance	Not at all Helpful
Professor	256	47.7%	39.8%	12.5%
Associate	161	47.8%	42.2%	9.9%
Assistant	106	48.1%	41.5%	10.4%
Lecturer	33	51.5%	39.4%	9.1%
T.A.	39	41.0%	46.2%	12.8%
N/I	6	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%
Total	**601**	**47.6%**	**41.1%**	**11.3%**

The congruity of the percentage of the regular teaching faculty who would welcome guidelines is remarkable. Although in response to the previous questions respondents described various informal guidelines and agreements, there remains a desire for a consistently stated set of guiding principles from which they can make judgments. However, suggestions about how these guidelines should be developed and administered varied widely in the general comments section of the survey. Some argued for guidelines about what the average grades should be in various courses. Others insisted that "the only

appropriate place for guidelines is in the context of such large pre-major courses." A few respondents were concerned that guidelines not constrain "academic freedom" while others said the, "University needs to enforce some standardization." However, it seems clear that most who commented on guidelines would like to have grading guidelines that would assist them to apply grades consistently, but feel that these guidelines should not become enforced standards from which deviation would not be possible.

Grade Inflation as a Problem

The second major concern of the survey was the issue of grade inflation. This section of the questionnaire was introduced by the brief definition, "Grade inflation can be defined as an increase in average GPAs unrelated to any real increase in student performance." As a preliminary question, the survey asked the extent to which respondents thought grade inflation was a problem at the University of Washington and if it was, whether it should be addressed. Those responding were given the following choices as answers:

- It is a definite problem and strong measures should be taken to lower average grades;
- It is a problem and some measures should be taken to try to lower average grades;
- It is a problem but little can or should be done about it, and;
- It is not really a problem.

As displayed in Table 8, more than 90% perceived grade inflation as a problem of some magnitude. Even more remarkable is the revelation that more than 80% of the respondents believed that some measures should be taken. Many within that set believe that "strong" measures are necessary.

Table 8: Grade Inflation as a Problem

Rank	N	Strong Measures	Some Measures	Little Done	No Problem
Professor	256	35.2%	47.7%	7.8%	9.4%
Associate	160	33.8%	46.9%	7.5%	11.9%
Assistant	100	33.0%	55.0%	7.0%	5.0%
Lecturer	26	15.4%	61.5%	15.4%	7.7%
T.A.	41	39.0%	48.8%	2.4%	9.8%
TOTAL	**583**	**33.8%**	**49.4%**	**7.5%**	**9.3%**

Causes of Grade Inflation

The survey next asked respondents to speculate on what they believed were the causes of grade inflation. As expected, the resulting comments were diverse, articulate, and frequently went to great lengths to provide perspective. Categorizing the responses was difficult

because of the intricate weave of reasoning that went into many of them. What will be reported are the major themes, currents and countercurrents.

For a great many of the respondents, the driving force behind grade inflation is student expectations. These expectations are linked both to prior experience and to a cultural climate that one faculty member describes as "the Lake Woebegone Syndrome" where all students are "above average." Students come to the UW from high schools, community colleges, or other institutions where they have received excellent grades. In many cases, these students were the best at those other institutions but they are now competing in a much higher "league". Many students have not tuned their expectations accordingly. These students have always received A's for their work and can see no reason why that should change. When the inevitable happens and a grade is received that does not meet their expectations, they believe that they have a legitimate grievance.

A corollary to student expectations is the economic climate. Students have concerns about their futures either in employment or graduate/professional school if they do not get "good" grades. Faculty express their empathy for students in this environment and try to lend support. One respondent explained the crescendo of grade inflation having,

> *. . . many causes, not the least of which is the ultra-competitive atmosphere of the employment scene at the moment. Most students believe that if they get higher grades, they will get preference for a job over someone else. Whether this is true or not is really beside the point; that is the perception. I also think it feeds itself. If we continue to give high grades, the students will continue to badger professors and TA's about every little point. The more of the "little points" are given to the students as a way to get them out of our offices so we can perform the tasks we were hired to perform, the higher is the average grade we give out, and so on.*

Another wrote that the cause of grade inflation was,

> *. . . a concern to reward students fully, and a concern that one's grading does not penalize the student -- e.g. When they come to use their GPA for the purposes of entry to various graduate programs.*

Many faculty respondents reported that the unrealistic expectations of students encourage them to grade more leniently than they believe they should. They want to be liked by their students. Others grade generously because they correlate high grades to increased ratings on their student evaluations. A few faculty reported that they give high grades because they see grades as meaningless as a measure of student learning and as fostering negative competitiveness among students. Further, many faculty reported that they feel pressured to change grades based on student demands because there is little incentive or administrative support for them in cases of student complaints. One respondent summarized these issues by writing,

> *Students do not have a good sense of what constitutes quality work by universalistic standards; they think mediocre work deserves high grades, and complain if they are*

not given such grades, for example by giving professors lower ratings in course evaluations. These ratings are used in promotion and salary reviews. In addition, there is no support from the Administration for less inflated grades. Thus, professors make trouble for themselves if they do NOT inflate grades.

The other most common element mentioned as a cause of grade inflation was student evaluation of instruction. As noted, a large number of respondents felt that faculty gave higher grades to encourage better evaluations. The belief was that these better evaluations would, in turn, lead to promotion and salary increases. One person wrote,

I think grade inflation is currently coupled to some extent with the mandatory student evaluations. If a professor gives high grades his students are going to rate him higher on student evaluations. A great deal of weight is placed on these evaluations at certain times (promotions) and if the evaluations are not high enough (in percentile rankings within the College of A&S) it can have serious consequences for the professor's career.

Whether or not high grades lead inexorably to high student ratings is almost beside the point. If, indeed, faculty in large numbers believe that it is true, some among them will be tempted to push grades ahead to enhance their chances at promotion.

Other faculty desires were identified as causing grade inflation. Some respondents felt that some grades were artificially high to encourage increased enrollments in classes or departments. Others felt that a combination of other burdens (administrative or research) detracted from the rigorous grading practices needed to keep grades down or that pressure from colleagues to increase grades to better match the departmental "norms" also contributed. Some merely attributed higher grades to relaxed or weakened grading standards tied to "faculty laziness."

Confusion and misunderstanding were also identified as contributing factors. Faculty, as noted earlier, lamented the lack of clear grading guidelines and mixed administrative signals. Students, it was reported, rarely understand the decimal system and tend to believe anecdotal information such as that 3.1 is a "bad" grade. One faculty member wrote, "I had a student, who received a perfectly respectable 3.1, comment that the 'teacher graded unfairly.'"

Not all of those responding felt that grade inflation as defined existed. Many believed that grades were better because the quality of the students and the quality of instruction had improved significantly. One faculty member observed, "In some areas (computing), the incoming students really ARE better prepared than their predecessors. The problem is matching their increasing ability with appropriate increases in expectation." Another wrote, "In my case the quality of students in the Pharmacy program where I teach has improved dramatically, hence we have justified grade inflation." Some of those responding attributed this improvement to the increasing selectivity of applicants. One explained that grade "improvement's" cause "might be that the students we now are teaching at the UW come to us better prepared than they did 10 or 15 years ago, and we have not notched up our expectations proportionately."

Other more global causes were offered by a few respondents. These included the Vietnam War when good grades were reportedly given as a matter of course to keep students out of the draft, and the 1970's when many cultural standards and values appeared to be "under attack." The admission of special status students (EOP) and a desire for "political correctness" were pointed to by some as causes. Another group challenged the meaning of grades altogether and thought that the cause of grade inflation may be linked to faculty lack of belief in the grading system.

Average GPA

In order to compare the theoretical to the actual, respondents were asked to speculate as to what should be the average GPA for undergraduates, graduates, and the average GPA for undergraduates in classes at the 100, 200, 300, and 400 levels. A sizable portion of those filling out the questionnaire did not answer this question, and many of these provided commentary on their reasons for not doing so in the general comments section of the survey. Generally, their refusal was based on their perception that a meaningful average cannot be specified or that the question had no relevance to the discussion of grade inflation. As one member of this group wrote,

> *Question 9 is indicative of the problem we have here! If you remember a little about basic mathematics, you'll know that an average is calculated based upon a set of values. This business of setting and predicting means is silly and tends to replace any real assessment of the quality of the work of the students. I absolutely refuse to pre-set my mean in classes. It is a disservice to the students since it implies that no matter how well an individual class does, collectively, I will force their scores to fit a pattern which fits my intended mean.*

Another commented,

> *I don't believe question 9 is really appropriate. Averages are not what we should be focusing on; rather it is the quality of instruction and the student's ability to master the material and be fairly graded on that knowledge.*

The summary of responses to average grades should further be qualified by other general comments. Some, who thought the question was superfluous, answered anyway. For some of these respondents, the mathematical answer of 2.0, the natural scale midpoint, was the appropriate one. Others answered with all 4.0's based on different premises as explained below:

> *Clarification of answers to #9: Since I don't believe in curve grades, if an instructor does an excellent job of teaching and the students do an excellent job of learning, then they should all get 4.0's.*

Consequently, because some skewed their answers to this question low and some high, the responses should be taken with a large measure of "salt". The responses to the questions regarding what respondents think the average grades for undergraduates and graduates

should be are shown in Tables 9 and 10 below. Responses are classified by the teaching level (undergraduate, graduate, or both) reported by respondents.

Table 9: Faculty Ideal Average Undergraduate GPA (N)

Rank	Undergraduate	Graduate	Both	Total
Professor	2.63 (64)	2.68 (54)	2.66 (82)	2.66 (200)
Associate	2.63 (37)	2.78 (35)	2.67 (39)	2.69 (111)
Assistant	2.64 (32)	2.69 (23)	2.82 (20)	2.71 (75)
Lecturer	2.75 (16)	2.75 (4)	2.80 (2)	2.76 (22)
T.A.	2.66 (33)	2.00 (1)	--	2.64 (34)
TOTAL	**2.65 (182)**	**2.70 (117)**	**2.69 (143)**	**2.68 (442)**

Table 10: Faculty Ideal Average Graduate GPA (N)

Rank	Undergraduate	Graduate	Both	Total
Professor	3.28 (66)	3.28 (51)	3.31 (83)	3.30 (200)
Associate	3.35 (39)	3.27 (49)	3.34 (40)	3.32 (128)
Assistant	3.33 (32)	3.09 (29)	3.35 (20)	3.25 (81)
Lecturer	3.27 (14)	3.16 (5)	3.30 (3)	3.25 (22)
T.A.	3.21 (32)	2.00 (1)	--	3.17 (33)
TOTAL	**3.29 (183)**	**3.22 (137)**	**3.32 (148)**	**3.28 (464)**

Needless to say, a disparity exists between the assumptions about average GPA as reported by respondents to the survey and the actual average GPA awarded. The individual assumptions about what the average GPA should be are .44 lower than the actual GPA from Autumn of 1994 for undergraduate students and .40 lower for graduate students. The wide variation of GPA between colleges reported by faculty in their comments does exist. These differences are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Actual Average GPA - Autumn 1994

College	Undergrad. GPA	Graduate GPA	Professional GPA
Arts & Sciences	3.10	3.73	
Business Admin.	3.21	3.59	
Education	3.72	3.78	
Engineering	3.10	3.62	
Forest Resources	3.13	3.82	
Nursing	3.66	3.84	
Ocean & Fishery Sci.	3.10	3.75	
Pharmacy	3.11	3.50	3.59
Social Work	3.34	3.89	
ALL UW	**3.12**	**3.68**	**3.50**

There are some interesting features in Tables 9 and 10. Generally, in regard to what respondents think the GPA "should" be, averages given by respondents from various ranks are very similar. Those who exclusively teach undergraduates are very close to each other in their prediction with only marginal deviation by Lecturers who place the average .12 point higher than the lowest grouping. Those who teach exclusively graduate students are more generous in grade prediction than their equals in rank. Here again the range of responses is narrow with .1 point separating the highest from the lowest. Those who teach both graduates and undergraduates show the greatest breadth in range when viewed by rank with .16 point dividing the highest from the lowest. Again, this is not a major division. When one looks at the total averages, there is very little (.05) variation in the averages of the responses.

The average GPA for graduate students that respondents think "should" exist has a similar tight grouping. Again, Associate and Assistant Professors, and Lecturers who do not teach graduates awarded higher predicted averages for graduate students than did their colleagues who teach graduates exclusively. Professors, Assistant Professors, and Lecturers who teach both graduates and undergraduates predicted higher grades for graduates than did colleagues who teach either group exclusively. Like average grades for undergraduates, the totals are close, within .1 point.

Responses to the average grades for 100 through 400 level classes display the anticipated increase in GPA based on the growing academic competence of the students and the narrowing of their focus toward their majors. However, survey respondents' report of what average GPA by class level should be was below the actual average GPA by class level during Autumn of 1994. The comparisons of the faculty reports of what grades for level of classes should be and actual grades are shown in Chart 3.

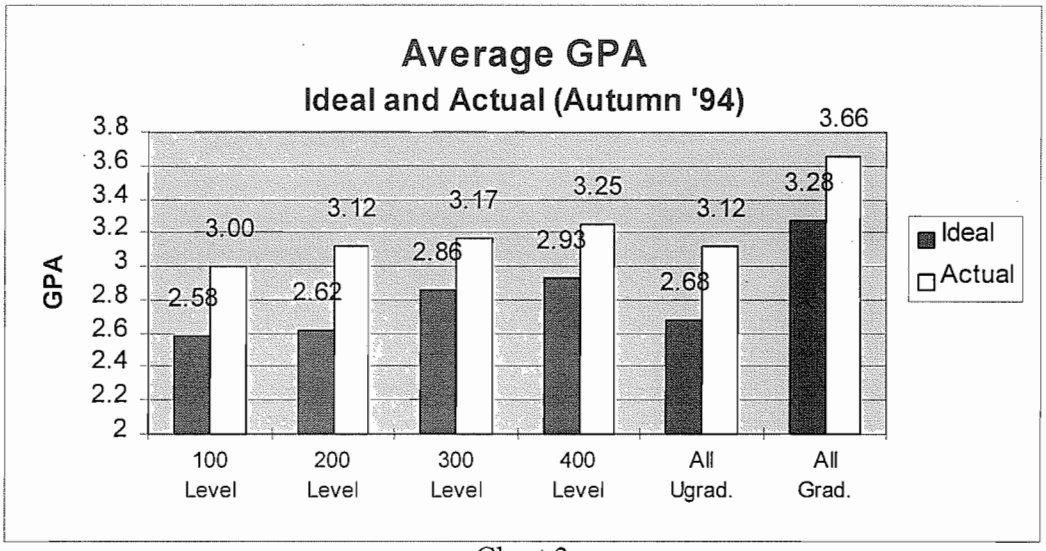

Chart 3

General Comments: Grading System, Grade Inflation, and Actions to be Taken

The penultimate question provided a further opportunity for faculty to express their opinions on the grading system and grade inflation. Many of these comments have already been reflected in the appropriate section of this report, but some remarks are worth reviewing.

With regard to the current grading system, a few faculty took the opportunity to echo their call for a change in the system; some specifically called for changes in the graduate programs in which they teach. These graduate or professional programs use the 4.0 decimal system and the respondents requested a change to either an honors/pass/fail system or a written evaluation system. As for undergraduate programs, some faculty used the question to explain new grading systems that they believed would constitute an improvement over the present 4.0 decimal system. Some of these "new" systems are in place at other institutions including the University of Texas at Austin, Haverford, and University of Virginia. Other suggestions were more complex such as the following example:

> *Rescale grades turned in by instructors. Use the following procedure: 1. compute standardized score z=(grade - mean)/standard deviation where mean is the class mean grade and standard deviation is the class grade standard deviation. 2. Use the following formula: new grade = Min(mu + z*sigma, 4.0), where mu is the assigned school-wide GPA (e.g. 3.0), sigma is the assigned school-wide standard deviation of grades (e.g. 0.6). The new grade might be rounded to the next 0.1. 3. Report the class mean and the standard deviation along with the grade on the transcripts.*

Other generic comments included more about the difficulty of adequately rewarding good students when most students were clustered at the upper end of the grade scale, and the perception of the negative impact of competition on the life of students which leads some to unethical behavior. Several professors pointed out that they sat on review committees for admission to graduate or professional schools and were experiencing increasing difficulty comparing grades of students from different campuses. A few faculty respondents indicated that they believed the system suffered due to a liberal policy on students dropping classes.

Regarding "grade inflation", there were a number of comments from faculty who believed that it is not a problem. One described it as "self-correcting" believing that,

> *Instead of having the traditional 2.0 average GPA, we live with a 3.0 average. This simply means the scale is compressed; a fact that faculty, students, and employers are all aware of.*

Another described the grade situation as follows:

> *Most people who complain about grade inflation seem to also wail about how much worse the students are each year. I think the Professors get smarter each year and the students stay the same so some faculty think the students get worse.*

Others ascribed grade inflation to faculty lack of rigor in grading which was caused by low morale and a perception of no support from the administration. One faculty member described his perception of the situation by writing,

> *In my opinion, low faculty morale has a great deal to do with faculty unwillingness to resist student demands for high grades. . . . It takes a lot of effort to resist student challenges to my grades (my classes are regarded as among the more demanding offered in this department), and it certainly takes a lot of effort to retain one's popularity with students without succumbing to these pressures.*

Several faculty commented that TA's grading practices should be more closely monitored. Others felt that the influx of community college transfers into departmental majors led to inflation because faculty were forced to raise UW students grades to compensate for the lower quality transfer students. A few believed that some of their colleagues were guilty of inflating grades to increase enrollment in their courses.

The most important responses, however, were those that suggested specific actions to improve the overall quality of grading and minimize grade inflation. Here the faculty respondents spared no effort to provide wide ranging solutions to perceived problems.

The most commonly mentioned suggestion was for the creation of grading guidelines and standards. Some suggested that these guidelines should be promulgated at the departmental level and others suggested they should be formulated at the college level. There were a few who recommended a statewide initiative. A smaller number recommended a national guideline. Many who called for guidelines cautioned that these should not constitute directives. One wrote,

> *Most faculty will respond sensitively to information about general trends in the university. You will get much better faculty cooperation if you give them information and ask them to work with it than you will if you introduce standards -- which are just like 'guidelines'. If there are standards, the faculty will feel they are being coerced, and that is the last thing you want to do in this area.*

In conjunction with providing coherent guidelines, respondents asked for more data about grades, grade means, and grade comparisons between departments. For those faculty who were not part of the few departments for which such reporting was routine, a great desire was expressed to have ready access to this information. Some respondents indicated that they had been required to go and seek these data and they strongly felt that this was an undue burden.

In addition to their desire for guidelines and comparative data, many respondents strongly suggested changes in the process or implementation of student ratings. Some wanted student ratings stopped outright. Others felt that the ratings were helpful but should be voluntary and shared only with the individual faculty member. The largest group thought that the major problem with student ratings was with how they were used in promotion,

tenure, and salary decisions. Respondents advocated a general deemphasis of their use as the sole measure of teaching effectiveness. One person wrote,

> *Either drop the use of student ratings as a method of evaluating teaching (but continue to require the yellow sheets, which are very helpful), or insist that such ratings be augmented by realistic surveys of course work by other relevant faculty.*

What many of the respondents who recommended changes in student evaluations wanted was a consideration of these ratings in conjunction with other information. Their primary concern was that in examining student ratings in a vacuum, other critical factors in teaching quality may be ignored. There was strong suspicion that some faculty members softened their grading to increase their own evaluation marks given by students. To balance this type of abuse, some respondents suggested that the student ratings be considered in juxtaposition with collegial evaluations.

The action in relation to student evaluation of teaching most frequently suggested was a change in the reports generated by the ratings. These changes would either report the actual mean class score on the rating sheet or change the rating by factoring in the mean grade. Examples of these suggestions include the following comments:

> *Another way to attack the problem would be to alter the present method of evaluating the quality of teaching of the faculty. A critical part of the evaluation of a faculty member's teaching should include consideration of the grades that they award. Faculty members who continually violate departmental and campus norms on the high side (or low side) without some justification should be considered derelict in an essential component of their duty, and should be denied promotions and pay raises.*

and,

> *We must have some way of taking into account the grades that are given by a professor and the rankings he achieves on student evaluations. One possibility: Mean decile rank on student evaluation divided by the mean grade of the students in the class.*

Many respondents recommended changing the form of transcripts as a method of illuminating grade inflation. These people suggested adding the mean class score or rank to the student's transcript. This information would provide those persons reviewing transcripts some sense of the relative value of the grade earned by students in each of the classes. It would tend to eliminate incongruity in grades earned in many disciplines where grading scales are reputedly significantly different. For example, some respondents felt that a 3.0 earned in the natural sciences was of substantially higher value than a 3.0 earned in a humanities class. As one respondent wrote,

> *Student transcripts should show the student's rank in class and the grade average in that class, otherwise present grade inflation makes the transcript meaningless.*

Another echoed,

> *We could place the mean grade for each course next to the student's grade in his official transcript AND list the student's rank in the class along with the total enrollment.*

One faculty respondent described the dilemma of interpreting the current transcripts as follows:

> *On the transcripts, report both the grade the student received, and the class mean. The pressure to increase the grade grows because there is no standard, either at the UW or nationally. I sit on graduate admissions committees, and I can not tell what it means if a student gets a 3.5 since I have no idea of the standard of that class, of that department, or that school. If the class mean was reported, it would not be in the student's interest to push the grades up. A 3.9 in a class that has a mean of 3.8, means far less than a 3.5 in a class that has a mean of 2.6. I think the students would feel far better getting a "lower" grade in absolute terms, if they knew that the mean was also going to be on their transcript. By the same token, if the students' GPA was reported along with the average class mean of all the classes they took, I think it would put pressure on the school and individual departments to lower their mean if they were out of line, e.g. if the mean for graduating students in department A was 3.6, but for department B, it was 2.7, and the average for all undergraduates was 2.9.*

Many faculty respondents expressed a willingness, and some a strong desire, to have additional training in grading practices and theory. There seems to be a recognition that the present level of their training and experience may not be adequate to meet the challenge of today's consumer oriented student. One person wrote,

> *Faculty need to have their grading and measurement practices reviewed by people who are experts at these things, and then be given counseling if they are not doing their measurement practices in a meaningful way.*

Just as their is recognition that faculty may benefit from increased opportunities in grading practices and procedures, so, too, is there a call for students to have expanded occasions where they can discover the meaning of grades. Some faculty called for better explanation of the UW grading system to students. Others also believed that the students could benefit from training in course evaluation. One commented,

> *Certainly, instructors are usually trained in grading within their disciplines. Perhaps we should require students to learn how to "grade" courses and instructors before asking them to do so. At the very least, I think instructors and students all need to make explicit their expectations surrounding course activity.*

Another major action recommendation was for the UW to work both on the State and national level for standardization in grading. Several comments expressed a concern that if

the UW alone took action to address the issue of grade inflation, it would place our graduates in jeopardy when competing with other institutions which were not as proactive in this arena. As one faculty member wrote,

> *Unfortunately, there is a NATIONAL problem and students perceive that any grade below 3.0 is a black mark that hurts their future prospects. I think that unilateral action by the UW will both be difficult and MUST be accompanied by a PR campaign that includes, for instance, detailed information on transcripts regarding UW grading policy. Failure to do this may truly have the effect that students fear.*

Survey by E-Mail

The final question of the survey asked for people's comments about taking a survey by e-mail. Of the 149 responses to the question, more than 100 characterized the experience as positive with expressions such as "great", "good", "no worries", etc. Many of these respondents indicated that they would not have responded to a paper survey. One wrote,

> *Well, I did it; if I had received a paper survey, it would have been laid to rest on my "good intention" pile.*

A few respondents were very computer literate and would have preferred the survey in a more sophisticated format than Pine. These people were emphatic in their dislike of the Pine utility because it is too simplistic and does not allow "mouse" movement or "tabbing" between responses. Others who were less computer literate didn't like Pine because it is too difficult to use. Still others had difficulty because they were trying to use a modem connection from home. Although many commented that the instructions made the survey easy to complete, a few found them confusing.

There were some respondents who expressed concern about whether anyone would actually read or take action on the survey. Others worried about whether or not the questionnaire was actually confidential. A few respondents were concerned that e-mail surveys may disenfranchise those who are not computer compatible.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey was successful in eliciting response from a wide range of the campus instructional population. The responses by academic rank were a fair representation of the employment profile of the University. There was also wide representation from many different schools, colleges, and departments.

Based on the almost evenly divided opinion over satisfaction with the current 4.0 decimal grading system there seems to be no compelling reason to change it. The cost, both monetary and political, would not seem to be warranted, especially since those who advocate a change are divided over which system should replace the present one.

What is very clear is that the faculty, in substantial numbers, believe that grade inflation is a significant problem. Indeed, fully one-third of those who replied to the survey believe that "strong measures" should be taken to address this problem, and in addition, one-half feel that something should be done. Although this level of response is not a formal mandate, it indicates that "doing something" about grade inflation should be a high institutional priority. A number of positive actions were suggested by the faculty. These measures if initiated in a coordinated fashion hold promise for having an impact on grade inflation.

As a start, one of the most potentially effective measures that might be taken involves demythologizing grade inflation as an issue. Many of the comments made by faculty throughout the survey responses were based on admittedly anecdotal or apocryphal information. There were charges and counter-charges made about whether the humanities or natural science programs were more culpable for the problem. Many of these assertions can be dispelled or confirmed through hard data which are obtainable. The institution could commit to providing relevant and timely information about grades organized by departments, schools, and colleges down to the course level. Indeed, there is some evidence in the survey that this information is already being produced but is not consistently distributed. There seems to be some indication that a good result is achieved in departments where these data are widely communicated. This practice could be extended campus-wide. Every faculty member could receive on at least an annual basis a summary of the mean grades awarded at the University. This information could be provided by hard copy or on-line through the *UWin* system. Further, individual faculty members could receive feedback on the mean and median grades in her/his courses.

It may be necessary to study the University's mean grade distributions for trends and meaning. Perhaps a small group of faculty and administrators could review grade data over the past decade and determine if there are systemic impacts that can be addressed through organizational change. This group could also undertake contact with peer institutions to compare information and to see whether or not other universities have taken any successful measures to address the national problem of grade inflation.

It is also clear that students' expectations and lack of comprehension of the system account for an inordinate amount of pressure being brought to bear on faculty. This pressure is particularly acute in entry level and large lecture format classes. In order to counteract some of the biases students bring from high school and community college, perhaps a grade introduction could be programmed into orientation programs. This relatively short program could explain the unique UW grading system and move to moderate the drive to receive a 4.0 for "effort" and to change the perception that anything less than a 3.0 is a bad grade.

Faculty respondents also expressed a willingness to receive further education regarding grading practices and procedures. When asked whether they had training, barely more than 10% said yes. Workshops and seminars could be made available to faculty to help them explore efficient and effective grading methods. They could be encouraged to publish clear grading standards in course syllabi that indicate what accomplishments are needed to receive various grade levels. Perhaps they need to be reminded that, although the UW grading

scheme is decimal based, there is no obligation for them to use each tenth of a point. In fact, it may relieve some of the pressure of "grade grubbers" to, in advance, establish a more widely dispersed grade range with a distribution, for example, of 2.0 to 2.3 to 2.7 to 3.0. This partial use of the scale would tend to minimize some of the subjective discriminations between .1 grade differences. These and other strategies could be covered in sessions for faculty.

There is a prevailing attitude on the part of a significant number of the respondents that the student rating system plays a role in grade inflation. This contention could be examined in a concerted manner. Some faculty suggest adding the actual mean grade in the class to the student rating reports. Presently students completing the faculty evaluation forms are asked to estimate the grade they will receive and these "expected" grades are averaged. Adding the real mean grade would require linking two databases on two unique platforms. A study could be undertaken to see if the costs of linking these databases would be worth the additional information gained.

There are strong feelings expressed in some respondents' comments that student ratings are being used inappropriately and in isolation. Periodic peer review as a part of promotion, pay, and tenure decisions would contribute to rounding out the picture created by student ratings. Such peer review, which would take into consideration grades and grading practices, may have a good outcome in increasing awareness of faculty of overall grade levels and counteract the supposition that ratings can be inflated in grades are.

Another step in making grades representational of student achievement would be to alter transcript reporting. Many faculty respondents suggested adding the mean or median class grade and/or the student rank in the class to the official transcript. A major change in how the program prints out grades could require significant hours of programming time and should not be undertaken lightly. However, the suggestion may have merit. Perhaps a committee of faculty and administrators could study the feasibility of altering the present transcript to add these contextual data to the form. Some survey comments report institutions who have instituted this type of transcript. Perhaps their experience could be helpful.

Finally, the UW, either individually through its schools, colleges, and departments, or institutionally, might wish to adopt standards and guidelines to assist faculty and students in a realistic approach to grading. As many respondents caution, these guidelines should be advisory in nature and should not be construed or administered as "directives". However, their implementation could go a long way toward providing a context for appropriate grade levels. Some respondents indicated that several departments have working guidelines that could form a basis for discussion by other units which do not presently have written standards.

The following summarizes the actions suggested by this survey:

- Provide faculty ready access to information about their own grades within the context of their department and other departments. Correlate these data for study and discussion with peer institutions.
- Provide students with an explanation of and information about the grading system early in their career at the UW.
- Provide faculty easy access to assistance and education regarding grading practices and procedures through workshops and seminars.
- Reconsider how student ratings are applied to faculty promotion, merit pay increases, and tenure. Consider adding grade distribution information to the student rating reports.
- Investigate the possibility of adding information to students' transcripts which would include the class mean or median grade, and class ranking.
- Initiate a campus-wide effort to establish grading guidelines and standards at the school, college or departmental level.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Grades Survey (Formatted Paper Copy)

Appendix 2 - List of Departments as Indicated by Respondents

Appendix 1 - Grades Survey (Formatted Paper Copy)

Faculty Council on Academic Standards
Grading Survey

The Faculty Council on Academic Standards has, over several months, discussed the issues of grading practices and grade inflation. We have found the median and mean Grade Point Averages (GPA) for our undergraduates (mean=3.09) are among the highest of similar universities. The most common grade given undergraduates is 4.0. Our average GPA has continued to rise despite the change in our grading to a decimal system in 1976, a change which was instituted largely to curb grade inflation. Systems like ours are used by only 3 to 4 percent of the undergraduate institutions. Other groups on campus have expressed concern about the current grading trends. With this information in mind, we ask for your thoughts concerning undergraduate grading at the University of Washington. Please take a few minutes to answer the following survey

Thanks very much in advance.

Jonathan Mayer, Chair
Professor, Geography

When complete, return the survey to:
Tom Taggart, Asst. Dir.
Office of Educational Assessment
453 Schmitz Hall Box 355837

FACULTY SURVEY ON GRADES

Name (Optional): _____

What is your academic rank? _____

In what department is your primary position _____

How long have you been on the UW faculty? _____

What level of students do you teach most frequently? (Indicate your choice with an "X")

_____ Undergraduates
_____ Graduates
_____ Both equally

1. Are you satisfied with the current grading system?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No
   If **no**, why not?

2. On what system do you base grading, e.g. the curve, absolute standards, contract, etc.?

   _____

3. Which of the following grading systems do you prefer?
   _____ The 4.0 decimal system as currently used at UW.
   _____ Letter system with pluses and minuses (A, A-, B+, B, B-, etc.).
   _____ Straight letter grades (A, B, C, D, E)
   _____ No preference.
   _____ Other.
   Please describe:

4. Have you ever received any formal training about grading practices?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No
   If **yes**, please explain.

5. Have you received any information that compared the grades you gave to the grade distribution of other faculty in your department or school?

   _____ Yes
   _____ No
   If **yes**, please describe.

6. Would it be helpful to have guidelines about grading developed by your department or school?

   _____ Not at all helpful.
   _____ They might be of some assistance to me.
   _____ Guidelines would be welcomed.

7. Grade inflation can be defined as an increase in average GPAs unrelated to any real increase in student performance. To what extent do you think "grade inflation" is a problem at UW that should be addressed in some way?

   _____ It is a definite problem and strong measures should be taken to lower average grades.
   _____ It is a problem and some measures should be taken to try to lower average grades.
   _____ It is a problem but little can or should be done about it.
   _____ It is not really a problem.

8. If grade inflation is occurring, what do you think is its cause?

9. To answer the next questions, please assume that grade inflation is not a concern on this campus, and that the quality of students remains the same as in the last few years.

   What should be the average undergraduate GPA? _____

   What should be the average grade given an undergraduate in a:

   _____ 100 level course?
   _____ 200 level course?
   _____ 300 level course?
   _____ 400 level course?

   What should be the average grade given a graduate student in a course for graduate credit? _____

10. Please add any comments about the current grading system, grade inflation, and actions that should be taken.

11. Please add any comments about taking a survey via E-mail.

Return to: OEA, 453 Schmitz, Box 355837

Appendix 2 - List of Departments as Indicated by Respondents

Department	# of Respondents
Accounting	9
Aeronautics & Astronautics	4
Aerospace Studies (AFROTC)	1
Anesthesiology	4
Anthropology	9
Architecture	8
Art, Art History	1
Asian Lang. & Lit.	7
Astronomy	6
Atmospheric Sciences	6
Biochemistry	6
Bioengineering	1
Biological Structure	3
Biology	1
Biostatistics	2
Botany	8
Building Construction	2
Business Administration	1
Business School	5
Chemical Engineering	7
Chemistry	27
Civil Engineering	12
Classics	1
Communications	12
Community Health Care Systems	7
Comparative Literature	1
Comparative Medicine	1
Computer Science and Engineering	8
Dental Public Health Sciences	1
Dentistry	1
Drama	1
Economics	8
Ecosystem Science & Conservation	2
Education	7
Educational Psychology	1
Electrical Engineering	14
English	28
English and Comparative Literature	1
Environmental Health	9
Epidemiology	10
Family Medicine	2
Finance and Business Economics	6
Fisheries	6
Forest Resources	7
Forest Resources, Forest Management and Engineering	2
Forest Resources, PSE	1
Forestry	1
Genetics	3
Geography	7
Geological Sciences	9
Geology	1
Geophysics	4
Germanics	3