

Yale University Inter-Office Correspondence

October 22, 1993

To: Instructors of Courses in Yale College

From: David Mayhew, Chairman, Course of Study Committee

Concerning: Grades

In September of 1992, a Course of Study Committee memorandum called your attention to the fact that in recent years grades in Yale College courses have become uniformly high. The grading of students has, in some cases, shown a tendency to lose discrimination in evaluation of students' performances. The term "grade inflation" seems less descriptive of what is happening than "upward grade homogenization"; instructors tend more and more to give high grades to virtually all of their students. Students who do exceptional work are lumped together with those who have merely done good work, and in some cases with those who have done only adequate work. Instructors who assign grades in this way deprive the truly excellent students of the recognition they deserve and fail to communicate to other students that their work could be better. We urge you to examine your own grading and, if you discover that "upward grade homogenization" has taken place in your courses, to return to more equitable grading practices.

Several of our colleagues responded to last year's memorandum by saying that they shared our concern about grading trends but that appeals such as ours were ineffectual if we did not offer information to give instructors some idea of an appropriate apportioning of grades in Yale College. In order to supply such information, we elicited from some of our colleagues their opinions as to a suitable grade spread. For our inquiry we surveyed all Directors of Undergraduate Studies and Chairmen, who, through their positions, would be among the most informed about teaching and grading practices in Yale College.

The Committee received thirty-three responses to its request. There was of course variation among the answers. The lowest grade spread recommended was 20% A, 30% B, 40% C, and 10% D and F. The highest was 50% A, 40% B, 9% C, and 1% D and F. The *average* of all the recommended grade spreads was as follows:

A	34%
B	43.5%
C	18%
D&F	4.5%

Our respondents sometimes emphasized that grades in advanced courses and especially in small seminars will normally be significantly higher than grades in introductory courses. One person suggested an average of 20% A's in introductory courses but 50% A's in advanced seminars.

We offer these figures not as a prescription for a grading curve but as points of information; determining what grades are given in a course is the prerogative of the instructor teaching the course.