

Grading Scale Change Being Examined by ULM

The ULM Faculty Senate conducted an investigation/survey to find out students and faculty opinion as to the possibility of changing the grading system to include plus and minus letter grades. The main purpose of this change is to increase the accuracy of evaluation of student performance.

Currently, ULM uses the grading system of A, B, C, D, and F, which provide for 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 points, respectively. An alternative grading system would permit a faculty member to assign + (plus) and minus (-) grades, allowing for grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F, which would then provide for 4.3, 4.0, 3.7, 3.3, 3.0, 2.7, 2.3, 2.0, 1.7, 1.3, 1.0, 0.7, and 0.0 points, respectively. The point assignments are negotiable and nothing is final, this was just a survey to see how people felt about a possible change.

LSU was the first Louisiana University to consider this possible change. The LSU Faculty Senate has voted in favor of such a change, while the LSU student Government overwhelmingly opposes the plus-and minus-grading system, based largely on the fear that it would hurt more borderline students than it would help. However, faculty believe that they would be most likely willing to round up a student near a plus grade and actually boost student GPAs in many cases. In addition, the LSU proposal would give faculty the option not to adopt the new plus- and minus system.

The fact is that a ranging scale would play some part in combating grade inflation. As such, this would have a negative effect on the upper level students who would receive an A- instead of an A, and ultimately result in each class having fewer valedictorians graduating with a perfect 4.0 GPA.

At present, along with Louisiana schools (LSU, ULM, etc) that use the traditional system are Auburn, Georgia Tech, Carnegie Mellon, Ohio State, Texas A&M, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, West Virginia, Arizona, Kansas State, Nebraska, and Oregon.

In contrast, a great many more schools use a variant of the plus/minus system and include Clemson, Duke, Emory, Indiana, Johns Hopkins, Mississippi State, New York University, Northwestern, Oregon State, Princeton, UCLA, and the Universities of Alaska at Fairbanks, California at Berkeley, Chicago, Colorado at Boulder, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii at Manoa, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Miami (Florida), Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada at Reno, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Rochester, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Vanderbilt, Virginia Tech, Washington University at St. Louis, Dartmouth, Georgetown, Harvard, Penn State, Buffalo, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Montana at Missoula, New Hampshire, Texas, Vermont, Yale, Arizona State, Columbia, Michigan State, North Carolina State, Alabama, Iowa, New Mexico, William & Mary, Stanford, Minnesota, Delaware, Florida State, Tulane, Southern California, Boston College, Cornell, Cal Tech, and Notre Dame.

In summary, the main advantage of the new ranging scale system is to provide more flexibility to a faculty member, particularly in graduate classes, where there is a large difference in between the highest and lowest A and B grades.

Results of ULM Faculty Student Grading Scale Change Survey as of May 1, 2012.

		Votes	
Faculty	Old System	146	61%
	New System	92	39%
Total		238	
Students	Old System	560	50.2%
	New System	556	49.8%
Total		1116	