Implementation and Evaluation of Grade Modifier Systems

Custom Research Brief

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

**Grading Systems:** What grading systems do other institutions follow? How does this grading system differ for undergraduate and graduate students? How does this grading system differ by department or college? How long has this grading system been in place?

**Transition to Grading System:** How have other institutions transitioned to or from a plus/minus grading system? How long did a transition take? What was the cause for changing grading systems? What feedback or pushback was experienced from students and faculty?

**Impact of Grading System:** How do faculty perceive the grading system in place at other institutions? How do students perceive the grading system? How do plus/minus grading systems impact students who apply for national scholarships or to graduate schools? Does the grading system disproportionately impact any groups of students? What impact does the grading system have on managing grade inflation? How do plus/minus grading systems impact student grade point averages? What is the average grade point average at other institutions?

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board’s internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- Institutional Websites
- Laughlin, Page; Matthews, Rick; and Thomas, Claudia. “Simulation of Plus/Minus Grades.” Presentation to Committee on Academic Affairs at Wake Forest University. [http://www.wfu.edu/~matthews/plus_minus/proposal.htm](http://www.wfu.edu/~matthews/plus_minus/proposal.htm)
- University Newspapers
I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Parameters

The Council interviewed provosts and registrars at institutions that recently transitioned to grade modifier systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Carnegie Classification</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment (Total / Undergraduate)</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
<td>20,500/17,200</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
<td>6,700/5,400</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Doctoral/Research Universities</td>
<td>9,100/7,900</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
<td>34,700/25,900</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
<td>12,600/10,400</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University F</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
<td>6,000/4,900</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definition of Terms

The acronym GPA refers to grade point average. The term grade modifier refers to the plus (+) and minus (-) added to letter grades. The term straight grading system may be used to identify a grading system without pluses or minuses.
II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Observations

- All contact institutions recently changed from straight grading systems to systems with grade modifiers. No contact institutions offer an A+ grade, while some institutions offer a D- grade. Most contact institutions do not mandate that faculty use grade modifiers; as a result, use of grade modifiers may vary across departments and colleges.

- Administrators adopt grade modifiers in order to increase precision and fairness in grading, align practices with peer and aspirant institutions, increase student profiles for graduate school and post-graduate opportunities, and increase student motivation and effort. Administrators at several institutions discussed reducing grade inflation through implementation of grade modifiers but typically did not consider grade inflation as a primary motivation for the change.

- Across contact institutions, faculty generally promoted the adoption of grade modifiers, although some expressed opposition. Provosts and presidents approved transitions after garnering sufficient faculty support. During the discussion and transition period, administrators advertise a potential transition to faculty and students through e-mails, newspaper articles, posters and flyers, and public forums. Marketing efforts educate stakeholders about the potential benefits of grade modifiers.

- Most contact institutions implemented grade modifiers during the fall semester in order to coincide with the new academic year. Administrators typically allow at least one year between approval and implementation. During transition, administrators adjust student record systems, educate students and faculty about the new system, and modify academic policies according to the new grading system.

- Some faculty express concern over reduced autonomy over grading as a result of grade modifiers and resist change from a familiar system. Some students express concern over the potential negative effect of grade modifiers on grade point averages. Administrators may adjust grading systems in order to provide concessions that mitigate faculty and student concerns, such as voluntary use of grade modifiers and exemptions from grade modifiers for groups of students (e.g., currently enrolled students or students enrolled in upper division courses).

- Opposition to grade modifiers typically weakens following one semester or year after the implementation of grade modifiers. Students and faculty accept the change as they become familiar with the system; those who enter the institution after implementation express no concern over the grading system.

- The addition of grade modifiers does not raise or lower overall institutional grade point averages, but some high performing students may experience a decline in their GPAs. High performing students receive lower grades due to some A grades in a straight grading system changing to A- grades in a plus/minus system. Grade modifiers typically do not reduce grade inflation or harm scholarship students.
III. OVERVIEW OF GRADE MODIFIER SYSTEMS

All contact institutions recently transitioned to grading systems that include grade modifiers. Grading systems across contact institutions apply to undergraduate students, and include graduate students at some contact institutions. Individual faculty members, departments, and colleges within the institution may also implement grade modifiers independently.

### Implementation Timeframes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Fall 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Fall 2005 to Fall 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>Fall 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>Summer 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University F</td>
<td>Fall 2007*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Implemented Fall 2011 for graduate students

### Grading Systems across Contact Institution

All contact institutions transitioned from straight grading systems with A, B, C, D, and F grades only. The following table details quality point values under new grading systems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>University A</th>
<th>University B</th>
<th>University C</th>
<th>University D</th>
<th>University E</th>
<th>University F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>No Grade**</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.33*</td>
<td>No Grade**</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>0.67*</td>
<td>No Grade</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Graduate students do not receive these grades.
**Law students may receive an A+.

### Institutions Rarely Offer A+ Grade

No contact institutions offer an A+ grade, despite student interest. Contacts acknowledge drawbacks to providing an A+ grade valued at 4.30 or 4.33 quality points:

- An A+ may not be compatible with a four point grading scale.
- Few institutions offer an A+ grade.
- An A grade provides a sufficient reward for high achievement.

### Offering an A+ within a Four Point Grading Scale

Administrators at University E considered implementing an A+ grade valued at 4.33 points while limiting overall GPAs to 4.0. This system would address student concerns over fairness while maintaining the four point grading scale.
### III. Overview of Grade Modifier Systems

#### Transition to Grade Modifiers Frequently Voluntary for Individual Faculty

Most contact institutions encourage, but do not mandate, faculty use of grade modifiers. As a result of voluntary use, faculty resistance to grade modifiers typically remains low; contacts at University D estimate that only one or two faculty members initially resisted grade modifiers and that mandating use is unnecessary due to currently unanimous use of grade modifiers among faculty. At institutions where use is voluntary, faculty must clearly specify on course syllabi whether or not they intend to use grade modifiers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considerations for Voluntary Grade Modifiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ease faculty concerns and assure faculty of continued autonomy for grading students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduce need for administrators to monitor faculty implementation of grade modifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drawbacks:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create inconsistency across course sections, departments, and colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frustrate and confuse students due to inconsistent use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contacts at University A describe disparity in the use of grade modifiers across schools and departments within the institution. For example, while 84 percent of Political Science faculty and 82.6 percent of English faculty use grade modifiers, no faculty in the Physician Assistant Studies graduate program use grade modifiers. The chart to the left indicates the varied use of grade modifiers across select schools within the institution.

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**Mandatory Grade Modifiers at University E**

Among contact institutions, only University E mandates that faculty adopt grade modifiers; the Faculty Senate issued a statement that stressed the need for compliance with the policy. Contacts estimate that 90 percent of undergraduate courses granted at least one student a grade with a modifier. For the remaining 10 percent of courses, faculty have defined modifiers to represent a narrow range of numerical grades, or courses may enroll only several students who receive grades without modifiers.
Across contact institutions, administrators adopted grade modifiers in order to increase grading precision and fairness, align grading systems with peer and aspirant institutions, increase undergraduate student profiles for graduate school admissions, and to increase student effort and motivation. Some contact institutions also cite the desire to reduce grade inflation as an initial factor in adopting grade modifiers; however, contacts acknowledge that grade modifiers typically did not affect grade inflation once implemented.

1. Increased Precision and Fairness

At all contact institutions, administrators adopted grade modifiers in order to improve grading accuracy and precision; for example, faculty members gain the ability to distinguish between two students who earn an 89 and an 81. Students also receive grades that more accurately demonstrate their accomplishments and provide greater distinction between levels of achievement.

2. Alignment with Peer and Aspirant Institutions

Administrators at all contact institutions considered practices maintained by peer and aspirant institutions and recognized through national benchmarking and reviews of existing literature that many institutions have adopted grade modifiers. Research from the American Association of College Registrar and Admissions Officers found that although 36 percent of two and four year institutions used pluses or minuses in 1992, 56 percent of institutions used pluses or minuses in 2002.1

3. Improved Student Profile for Graduate School

Administrators at University D and University E implemented grade modifiers in order to benefit student applications to graduate school. Administrators at University D believed that the straight grading system created a competitive disadvantage for the institution’s best performing students and that grade modifiers would improve student profiles and academic rigor. Grade modifiers for undergraduate students also help students prepare for similar grading systems implemented at the graduate level.

4. Increased Student Motivation and Effort

Contacts at University B believe that student effort improves with more nuance and distinction between grades. Student effort throughout the semester may increase because of the additional possibilities for final grades; under a straight grading system, a student completing B level work without any possibility of receiving an A grade might opt to work hard enough only to secure a grade of 80. However, limited conclusive research exists to validate the theory that grade modifiers improve student motivation.2


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IV. IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

5 Desire to Reduce Grade Inflation

Administrators at University A, University B, and University F expressed interest in reducing grade inflation during discussions about grade modifiers. However, contacts across institutions note that grade modifiers do not reduce grade inflation once in effect.
V. TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Consideration and Approval Processes

Most contacts describe a faculty-driven process for transitioning to grade modifiers. Contacts at University A note that faculty, rather than administrators, promoted the transition to a plus/minus system. The Provost and President at University E approved the transition only after faculty support had been established. Contacts at University E and University C indicate that discussions about plus/minus systems had occurred regularly for several years prior to implementing the transition process, while contacts at University A note that faculty voted to implement a plus/minus system on several occasions but were unable to address technical difficulties for implementation during previous attempts.

Establish Institutional Support for Grade Modifier System Proposals

In order to gain approval for a new grading system, administrators must obtain faculty support for a transition and gain approval from governing bodies across an institution:

- The Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee at University B approved a proposal for a plus/minus grading system. The Faculty Senate, followed by the Provost and the President, then approved proposals.
- At the request of the University E Faculty Senate, a Faculty Senate subcommittee for academic standards approved a proposal, followed by the Faculty Senate, the Provost, and the President.
- Following the development of a research paper by faculty advocating the adoption of grade modifiers, the Faculty Senate at University C approved a proposal for a new grading system.

Administrators at University D surveyed Dean’s offices and departments to determine faculty support. A Faculty Senate member at University C surveyed faculty by e-mail to gauge early support; over 70 percent of respondents supported grade modifiers.
V. TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Communicate about Transition to Grade Modifiers Prior to Implementation

During the discussion process and following approval, administrators communicate the pending transition to students and faculty and the potential impact of the new system. Methods for advertising include the following:

- Posters and flyers across campuses
- E-mails to students and faculty from senior administrators
- Updates to the course catalogue
- Articles and advertisements in student newspapers
- Dialogue between administrators and student government

Implementing Grade Modifiers

Following approval of grade modifiers, administrators determine the timing of grade modifier implementation, address technical aspects of implementation, and reassess standards for scholarships and prerequisites.

Determining an Appropriate Time to Implement Grade Modifiers

Most contact institutions implemented grade modifiers during the fall semester to avoid a mid-year transition. Contacts at University C and University A indicate that grade modifiers were introduced during fall to coincide with the start of the academic year. Contacts at University E implemented grade modifiers during the fall in order to align implementation with the release of the annual Undergraduate Catalogue which described the new policy.

Providing Sufficient Time for Institutional Adjustment

Contacts at University E recommend that rapid implementation may be effective if an institution already supports the technical infrastructure to transition to grade modifiers. However, University D experienced difficulty transitioning to grade modifiers by the summer of 2006 after approving a transition in the fall 2005, in part due to insufficient time to customize and test registration systems. Several institutions were able to successfully address implementation concerns partially due to longer transition periods, as outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Approval</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Benefit of Transition Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University F</td>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>Fall 2007 (Fall 2011 for graduate students)</td>
<td>At the request of the President, administrators waited an additional year to allow undergraduates to prepare for the new system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>Fall 2007</td>
<td>The transition period allowed sufficient time to customize and test the PeopleSoft student record system prior to implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summer Implementation Not Recommended

Among contact institutions, only University D did not choose to implement grade modifiers during the fall semester. Administrators planned for summer implementation in order to initially transition with a smaller student population. However, contacts do not recommend summer implementation due to short and atypical session length and difficulties processing grades over a short time period.
V. TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Adjusting Prerequisite, Scholarship, and Academic Standing Policies

Administrators must consider the impact of grade modifiers on grade-dependent policies:

- **Academic Standing:** University B opted not to change academic standards or grade requirements for the Dean’s List after implementing grade modifiers.

- **Prerequisites:** Most contact institutions maintained preexisting standards for prerequisites; however, some departments at University A adjusted minimum grade requirements from C to C-.

- **Scholarships:** University A scholarship students who enrolled prior to the implementation of grade modifiers could have their grade point averages recalculated without grade modifiers if it appeared that they would lose their scholarship as a result of receiving grades with pluses or minuses. The subsequent, modifier-free grade would be accepted if it resulted in a grade point average sufficiently high enough to maintain scholarship status. GPAs of students receiving HOPE scholarships at University D continue to be calculated on a straight grading system; any grade received by a student with a plus or minus is subsequently treated only as the corresponding letter grade for scholarship purposes.

Additional Considerations during Transition

- **Develop Online Student Resources during Transition:** University D and University A developed online GPA calculators to help students determine their grades under plus/minus systems.

- **Identify a New Grading System on Student Transcripts:** Transcripts should contain language that identifies the date of implementation and subsequent transition stages or intricacies of grade modifier policies.
Addressing Faculty and Student Concerns

All contact institutions experienced some resistance from faculty and students to a transition to grade modifiers; student opposition was typically more widespread than faculty opposition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Strategy and Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Autonomy over Grading Threatened by Grade Modifiers</td>
<td>Permit Faculty to Opt-in to Use of Grade Modifiers: Optional use of grade modifiers helps faculty to maintain control over grading. Contacts at University E state that some faculty, already concerned with how best to distinguish B and C grade work, expressed concern over making further distinctions in performance if grade modifiers were mandated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and Students Resistant to Systemic Change</td>
<td>Recognize that Institutional Memory and Culture Changes: Contacts at University D and University E note that resistance to policies dissipated once the policy took effect, in part due to rapid shifts in institutional culture. Faculty increasingly apply grade modifiers at University A, as evidence of negative impact fails to appear. Contacts at University C emphasize that current students, familiar only with grade modifiers, do not express resistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and Students Fail to Understand Rationale for Change</td>
<td>Emphasize Benefits of Transition: Administrators at most contact institutions recognize that peer and aspirant institutions have transitioned to grade modifiers. Contacts at University D and University E acknowledge that grade modifiers increase student profiles for graduate school. Several contacts cite external, publicly available research demonstrating that grade modifiers do not harm overall grade point averages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Excluded from Discussion Process</td>
<td>Include Students on Academic Policy Committees: Student representatives on committees at University F and University D provide input on behalf of students to policy changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Express Concern over Potential Impact on Grades</td>
<td>Host Town Halls to Promote Open Discussion: Administrators at University B hosted an open forum for students prior to final presidential approval of grade modifiers, during which students expressed their concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Already Enrolled Feel Punished by Change</td>
<td>Include A+ Grade to Counteract Minus Grades: At University C, students resisted change partially due to the presence of a D- grade and the absence of an A+ grade. Students at several institutions felt that the lack of an A+ grade unfairly affected high performing students because of the implementation of an A- grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide Concessions to Enrolled Students: Enrolled students at University C were exempt from being graded with pluses and minuses. Administrators at University B implemented grade modifiers over three years by course level, initially implementing grade modifiers for introductory classes with limited upperclassmen enrollment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. TRANSITION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Targeting Concessions for Enrolled Students

Administrators at University C and University B opted to implement grade modifiers in phases as a result of student concerns over the impact of the change, but approached these phases differently: Enrolled students at University C were grandfathered into the prior grading system; University B implemented grade modifiers over a three year period, introducing grade modifiers by course level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What constituency do administrators seek to accommodate?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students enrolled prior to the transition to grade modifiers will be exempt from receiving pluses and minuses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University C required that all undergraduate students who began degree programs prior to grade modifiers continue to be graded under the prior system. Students were to be assessed without modifiers for four years. In order to eliminate grading bias, faculty were able to input numerical student grades into an automated system without knowledge of a student’s status; the automated system would then apply a modifier to the student’s grade if appropriate.

University B implemented grade modifiers over three years at the request of the Provost:
- Fall 2005: 1000 level introductory courses and 6000 and 7000 level graduate courses.
- Fall 2006: 2000 level courses.
- Fall 2007: 4000 and 5000 level courses

This model ensured that all students within a course were graded on the same scale, but emphasized grade modifiers for courses with minimal upperclassmen enrollment.

Opposition to Grade Modifiers less Strong among Freshmen and Seniors

Research conducted by Northern Arizona University indicates that freshmen and seniors, while not proponents of proposed transitions to grade modifiers, express less opposition to a transition than sophomores and juniors. Reasons include:

- **Less Familiarity among First Years**: Freshmen are typically less familiar with the existing system than sophomores and juniors, who already have comfort with the existing system and understand how to achieve certain grades within a straight grading system.
- **Senior Indifference**: Seniors recognize that a transition to a plus/minus system will only affect them for a short time period and thus do not express strong concern over a systemic change.

Student and Faculty Resistance Dissipates Over Time

Most contacts indicate that student and faculty resistance to a new grade modifier system is strongest immediately following a transition. However, as students and faculty become familiar with the new system and individuals familiar with the straight grading system leave the institution, a plus/minus system becomes part of the new institutional culture.

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3 Morgan, et al.
VI. IMPACT OF GrADING CHANGE

Although a transition to a plus/minus grading system did not dramatically alter overall GPAs across contact institutions, individual students may be affected by the addition of grade modifiers. Contacts at several institutions note that the introduction of grade modifiers did not reduce grade inflation.

Overall Institutional GPA Typically Unaffected

Grade modifier systems typically do not affect the overall, institution grade point average. Research conducted by Wake Forest University found that a plus/minus grading system would neither harm nor help nearly all student GPAs because the gain provided by plus grades would be offset by the loss provided by minus grades. At University D, administrators evaluating the impact of grade changes determined that the average GPA decreased from 3.172 to 3.160 in the implementation year and increased to 3.170 for the fall semester following the first implementation year. Contacts at University B indicate that the number of students on the Dean’s List (requiring a 3.0 GPA or greater) did not noticeably change following the transition, while administrators at University C did not recognize a change in overall GPA following the transition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negligible Change in Average GPA at University A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two Years Prior to Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High Performing Students May Experience Slight GPA Decline

Grade modifiers may lower the GPAs of high performing students, especially in the absence of an A+ grade weighted above four quality points. Research conducted at Wake Forest University found that students with GPAs near 4.0 may receive a GPA reduction of several hundredths of a point under a standard plus/minus system. Fewer students would receive a 4.0 because an A under a straight grading system may be an A- under a plus/minus system; without an A+, A grades would either remain valued at 4.0 or would lower to 3.70 or 3.67, depending on the method for determining quality points. At University B, the number of students earning a 4.0 in a semester declined by almost half following the introduction of grade modifiers.

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4 Page Laughlin, Rick Matthews, and Claudia Thomas, “Simulation of Plus/Minus Grades,” Presentation to Committee on Academic Affairs at Wake Forest University, http://www.wfu.edu/~matthews/plus_minus/proposal.htm

5 Laughlin, et al.
VI. IMPACT OF GRADING CHANGE

Limited Impact on Scholarship Students

Few contacts believe that grade modifiers have harmed scholarship students. Contacts at University F acknowledge that although a few scholarship students may have been negatively affected by the presence of minus grades, the impact on scholarship students was not significant enough to prevent transition to grade modifiers.

Increase in Modifications to Final Grades at University E

Grade changes increased by over 30 percent in Fall 2010 (189 changes in Fall 2009 to 249 changes in Fall 2010), following implementation of grade modifiers. Prior to the introduction of grade modifiers, the total number of grade changes each semester had remained relatively consistent. This indicates that the addition of grade modifiers resulted in more informal appeals by students to faculty regarding the validity of an initially assigned grade.
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