1. Do you favor or oppose allowing Drake instructors to use plus/minus final grades for all courses (undergraduate and graduate)?

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Overall GPAs are unlikely to change. Difficult to see how this reduces unnecessary grade anxiety or communicates better to students.

I have taught under both types of grading schemes, and strongly favor the current method. The plus and minus systems creates a perception that we can measure with validity to this degree of grade. From a quantitative perspective, the connection between student learning as demonstrated through their classwork and the ultimate grade in the course should be justifiable. When pluses and minuses are added, faculty are pretending that this achievement can be measured to a grain size that is unrealistic. In addition, the plus/minus system places more of an emphasis on how to obtain a grade versus learning the content contained within a course.

An 80% is NOT equivalent to an 89%.

The absence of the +/- grades is particularly problematic at the graduate level, when grade differentiation is naturally reduced.

Without compelling evidence why this would improve evaluations of students, I don’t see the point of changing.

I think that a bunch of A’s on a transcript are fundamentally different that a bunch of A+s and a few A++s. GPAs should reflect that, so not only should faculty be able to put pluses and minuses on records, they should count differently.

I have been in institutions that used a plus/minus system and it seemed to cause more problems than what it was worth.

Please do not add any more complications to what is already a very time-consuming process. This is something that an ISTJ/ESTJ detail-loving administrator has dreamed up because it fits with their world. It doesn’t fit with mine, and I am growing increasingly tired of my workload increasing because of administrivia.

I came from an institution that had plus/minus grades, and I feel the divisions were too small to fairly differentiate between students. It was a relief to come to Drake and have no +/- grades. In many classes at Drake, there are between 15-40 students. I think ranking around 30 students with 12 grade divisions (with +/- grades) puts too fine of a line on small variations of performance. Maybe just two divisions per grade letter would be good (that would be 9 grade slots total), but that would probably be too confusing to have, say, only B and B+, but not B-.

Using plus/minus grading allows a more representative assignment of a grade.

I think this is a very good idea and should have been implemented long ago.

Great differences exist between “A” and “A-“.

Being able to use plus/minus grades would result in far more accurate representations of my students’ performances. Also, I strongly feel that using plus/minus grades would reduce grade inflation.

I feel that by adding +/- students will potentially have an increased motivation to perform well as this provides more opportunities to move up or down. I will be honest that I am not knowledgeable regarding benefits/limitations of each of the options and would like to learn both sides of the argument before committing to a response.

More one thing to cause strife with students

Using +/- is simply employing an instrument with a higher resolution. It will help distinguish between outstanding students (I would allow A+ grades) and those who are just barely making an A-. as well as between students who are “almost a C+” (D+) and those who are “almost an F” (D-). The students’ argument (which I happened to hear about) that the suggestion of introducing +/- grades is a way of addressing grade inflation is, at best, a complete misunderstanding of the issue. Every instructor can prevent grade inflation just fine right now by simply giving a B or an F instead of an A or D when things are borderline. Also, those instructors who don’t want +/- grades can simply say in their syllabus that they will only grade on a 5-grade scale (A,B,C,D,F). There is nothing mathematically special about the 5-grade scale, a 13-grade scale (A+, A, A-, B+, ..., D-, D, F), a 101-grade scale (0%, 1%, 2%, ..., 99%, 100%), a 5001-grade scale (0.00%, 0.02%, 0.04%, ..., 99.98%, 100%) or just a 2-grade scale (A and F, more often called Pass/Fail – which is actually being used in some labs).

The main reasons we aren’t using the 5001-grade scale are: i) we are not confident that we can grade this accurately, ii) nobody else is using it, and iii) nobody sells a computer program that can handle such grades. This brings me back to thinking that this is a complete no-brainer for both those of us who would like to use a finer scale and also for those who don’t. It is totally obvious in my mind that instructors should have the CHOICE. Clearly, the arguments against the 5001-grade scale do not apply to the 13-grade scale – I am confident that I can distinguish between C+, C, and C- (I am sure lots of us do this for individual assignments/tests) many other colleges/universities use this scale; and computer programs can handle it.

I’m generally not in favor of traditional letter grades in either incarnation (with or without +/-) since most of our courses are built on specific standards and objectives. I would favor a 4 point standards-based rubric/system for assessment: i.e. (1) does not yet meet, (2) working toward, (3) meets, (4) exceeds standard. However, while I don’t have strong feelings about the relative merits of straight A-F grades vs. +/- at the graduate level, I suspect allowing the latter would give instructors a greater range of feedback.

Faculty that strongly oppose the +/- system would be able to state in their syllabus that only A, B, C, D, F grades are used for their classes. I feel that a +/- system would allow for a more accurate reflection on a student’s learning over the course of a semester. I feel like the A, B, C, D, F system allows Drake students too large of a target for their final grade, and this allows them to be lazy. A student knows that getting an A- is the same as an 98, so all they have to do is shoot for the 91. For this reason, I can understand why students would be against the +/- system, and this is not a valid reason to not allow faculty who wish a +/- system to be implemented. If passed, faculty (or departments) that don’t wish to adopt the +/- system would not be required to. For those courses with quantitative scores, giving out an A to a student who earned a 90.1 and a B to a student who earned a 89.9 seems unfair. And if you “just round up” this just creates a problem at a different boundary.

I do think it would help refine feedback on student performance. There can often be a strong distinction between low B and high A work. It would be helpful to have a +/- as a way to show and reward this.

A plus/minus system would allow professors to use grades to reflect more nuanced distinctions among students on achievements. A+ could be reserved for truly outstanding work, A for excellent work, and so on. As it stands, we are often in a position of having to choose “bumping up” a student with a high B (or a high C) to the next grade or categorizing them with students who performed at a significantly lower level but are still in the same large grade category. I know it’s splitting hairs for a lot of people, but I think it would be a small tool to push back against grade inflation at the margins.

I’m coming from an R1 institution that had +/- grading. It is helpful (and meaningful) not only to the students, but also to the instructor, in terms of managing performance throughout the semester. If someone can pull himself or herself up from a B or even a B- to a B+ during the semester, it really motivates them to push hard on that final exam and/or project, in the hopes of securing an A. Otherwise, if you’re stuck at a B and have really seen no movement with your grade all semester, you start to feel like you’re branded as a B student, with no point of pushing harder for an A.

I am in favor especially for the graduate programs (MSE and DOC) in the SOE.

I support a measure that would allow faculty to assess students in a more nuanced manner.

I think it would help differentiate out students - with someone who earned a solid A versus someone who barely scraped by.

As a psychologist, I really question the validity of the fine grain judgments necessary for +/- grading. I have very much appreciated the current grading system that Drake has had for decades. It is a system that is not broken and does not need to be fixed.

DEFINITELY favor the change to plus/minus grades!!!

If the purpose of grading is to communicate students’ academic achievement relative to their peers, then a plus/minus system does so with greater sensitivity than the current system.

I’m not sure the benefits about adding the +/- to a grade, but can certainly see the student “debates/arguments” that would occur with adding that suffix to the grade.

I think it allows for greater nuance of distinction and is likely to decrease grade inflation.

I taught at an institution where we had plus/minus final grades for all courses. I along with most faculty there found the grading system to be much better in terms of giving somewhat more accurate grades. Their explanation and mine is that the plus/minus system reduces pressure on faculty to slightly inflate higher grades when a student’s grade is very, very close to, but not at, a higher grade level. While one could argue that the same pressure exists to give slightly higher grades with a minus; for example, giving a D+ instead of an F, my experience using this system before I came to Drake and that of my former colleagues is that pressure to do so on the lower end of the grading continuum is less compelling; in large part because the
grade tends to be more clear cut. There are exceptions to this of course.

From an instructor’s perspective, I have used this approach at another school and, although I didn’t like it at first, I grew to appreciate it. I like being able to differentiate from, say an 89% and an 81%; both would be ‘B+’ under our current approach, but would be a ‘B+’ and a ‘B’ under most +/- systems. I have talked about this with some students who do not like it. The rationale presented was that a student would need to put more time into their courses to make sure that they didn’t fall into the “minus category” of a grade, as opposed to just receiving said grade, thus reducing the amount of time they have to serve in organizations on campus, within the community, internships, etc.

I don’t believe that +/- grades solve anymore problems than they create. They distinguish between high and low grades in the same class (A, B, etc.) but require more decisions and more nuanced decisions on the part of the instructor. I suspect they will also contribute to grade inflation and more appeals by students.

I dread having students battle with me over grades as the number of “on the cusp” situations will multiply. I’m not aware of evidence that students will learn more or better as a result of these changes.

Just adds another layer of debate for students on the boarder between a “B” and a “B+”, “B”, etc.

It would make things a lot more fair, though I imagine it will also make for more work.

This would allow me to make that especially difficult decision between the B and the C. So many students are bunched in the middle; the plus or minus would help make the distinction.

In creative classes a plus/minus system would impose excessively micro nuances of grading.

I’m somewhat ambivalent, but seeing all the universities that use it makes me think it might be worth considering.

I think that plusses and minuses for every grade is cutting it too fine and in some cases is meaningless (e.g. D+ and C- How do you distinguish between these two? Below average and passing defines both.) I taught in a plus/minus system and found the B+ and C+ grades to be useful and would probably use just them if we adopted this system. Right now, I give some A’s and B’s that are really B+ and C+ students. Students may think their grade point average will go up with this system, it is just as likely to go down.

I think faculty should have a choice in whether or not they want to use +/- in their classes.

The +/- change is a positive change and allows me as a faculty member to better represent student work in the classroom.

I have been frustrated when defending the grade difference between the lowest A and the highest B in a class when the highest B student asks.

The difference between a high “B” and low “B” is so great, that I really think that not allowing +/- leads to grade inflation... I’m sometimes tempted to bump that 89.4% to an “A” because I can’t stand that that student looks on paper the same as my 80.2% student.

It is more equitable.

I’ve wanted this option since I got here.

By allowing faculty to use plus and minus, students would have a better read on their actual engagement and involvement in their classes.

A plus/minus system is long overdue.

I see no problem with the current system. I find that by the mid-point of the semester, the grades in my classes indicate the students have split into the existing grade ranges with a pretty clear break between each letter grade. I do grade on a 60%, 70%, 80% and 90% system with students earning points on exams, quizzes and homework problems.

I use a plus minus system in my grading it would be nice to use it for final grades as well.

I favor plus/minus grades because they would allow me to award more accurate grades—for example, making a greater distinction between an 80 and an 89, and a smaller distinction between an 89 and a 90. Also, students would feel that every assignment “counted” (affected their course grade) but not excessively. For example, a few points missed on the final exam could not plunge the student from an A to a B, but only from an A- to a B+.

I note that almost all of Drake’s comparison institutions, almost all liberal arts colleges, and almost all major research universities use plus/minus grades. The holdouts seem to be mostly state teaching universities. I would be open to allowing each student to choose which grading scheme (plus/minus or not) she/he preferred at the beginning of the term. My guess is that most students would prefer the lower risk of a plus/minus grading scheme.

There is a big difference between a B- and a B+. I think having no +/- contributes to grade inflation because it is SOOO hard to take that B+/- and make it same as a low B-.

In the end, this system means more work for professors, and more +/- options for students to complain about or grieve their grades when missing a “+” or “-” by a point or two. What advantage could this possibly offer, except that maybe someone perceives that a more highly ranked university than Drake is going by said grading system, ergo, so should we.

– For many classes it is difficult to make fine distinctions between a B+, B, and B, most likely those that require quite a bit of writing as opposed to the multiple choice exam question courses. – Many universities report an increase in the number of grade changes after grades are completed are there are more ‘borderline’ numerical values. Right now, ‘borderline’ numerical values are typically 89, 79, 69, etc. In plus/minus grading there are 13 borderline values... 96, 93, 89, 86, 83, 79, 76, etc., etc. – If the reason for doing this is because we are worried about grade inflation, then this is not going to solve the issue. There will continue to be grade inflation as long as faculty are not willing to stick to their guns on grading. – In a competitive job market and postgraduate education application surplus, it is possible that plus/minus grading can have a negative influence on student’s ability to be hired or admitted, especially if there is not a corresponding A+ to offset an A-. We have several students who wish to apply to competitive graduate schools who are “A” students. I would not be in favor of anything that would potentially inhibit their ability to be competitive. – If we say that a student must have a 2.0 to graduate, how will a C- affect the minimum standard? In a sense, we are then making a C- not being a passing grade, but only considering favoring plus/minus grading if confusing the option to give an A+ with a numerical value of 4.33 (the University of Iowa provides this option for faculty). A “B” or “C” student would have the option of offsetting a C grade with a “+” so an “A” student should have that option as well.

I not know enough about the pros and cons of this issue to make an informed choice at this time. Therefore I am neutral. I would be interested to hear the rational for support and opposition of this issue.

I believe it would be a more fair representation of what students truly earned in my classes. There is a huge difference between someone receiving a B+ and those with a B-, but they all look alike on the transcript at this point.

This is the first time I have been at an institution that doesn’t have plus/minus. At first I didn’t like it but now I do; it is easier for the professor. I do worry about grade inflation, however. The difference between an A and an A- is important.

I believe it would be helpful in distinguishing at the higher rungs; i.e., I believe there is often significant difference between a 91 and a 98, and that awarding both scores an A, for example, devalues the A.

With overall grade inflation, there is very little way to distinguish among significant differences in performance for students who earn the same letter grade. Plusses and minuses would be one way to add some nuance.

Not really sure why we ever left this system... please bring it back.

I have graded all my class as +, middle, for several years and I think it not only allows important distinctions to be made among the work that comes in but also helps to sustain some integrity in the entire system of grading in this age of so-called “grade inflation.” That is to say, it allows me to recognize and mark to the student truly extraordinary work (which the single letter grade system does not) and at the same time credit and mark student work that is beyond “good” (B) but not extraordinary. At the other end of the scale, a D- is not an F, a distinction that I think is also important to make and that a student also might appreciate.

I have a number of significant concerns with the use of plus/minus final grades. First, I believe this system will increase pressure on faculty to “round up” grades far beyond what is currently experienced at the end of each term. Second, I worry about the ability to objectively measure the difference between a B plus and B student. Certainly, we can set point cutoffs for these various grades, but how am I (and other faculty) to conceptualize these differences in a way that is both reliable and fair. Third, as a student who experienced both types of grading systems, I far preferred the one without plus and minus. A major problem was that A minuses brought down my GPA and as a result I found myself more anxious about my grades (as opposed to what I was learning) that I might have otherwise been. When grades become the sole focus for students, we have lost them.

I am not sure how the plus/minus would not increase anxiety in students and thus pressure on faculty.

Whatever system is used should be uniformly applied across the campus.

I wonder what “allowing” means. If some courses have plus/minus and some don’t, will there be any impact? I would be interested in whether there is any research in the education field (I’m sure there is) on the result of having a plus/minus system or not. Or on combining them in one school.
Please no A+

Unfortunately I don’t think it benefits the student in their job/graduate school search to have plus/minus grades, but I feel pretty strongly about the difference between a B+ and a B—-also A to A- distinctions are also important.

I like the idea of plus grades (+, b+) better than both plus/minus grades

As long as faculty who oppose can opt out of the +/- system if they wish.

At my previous institution we had plus/minus grading. It gave instructors the opportunity to assign grades that much more accurately reflected the student’s performance. There is such a large difference between a B+ and a B- that I would like to have the opportunity to assign a wider range of grades. One implication of plus/minus grading is that there will be a decrease in the number of 4.0 students, but I don’t think this is bad.

I am in favor of A+, A, B+, B, C+, C, D+, D system. I do not believe it is necessary to give minuses!

Pluses and minus grades for final grades are too ripe for grade grubbing. Personally, I give pluses and minuses for assignments and tests throughout the semester to give students an idea of where they are in the spectrum (above and beyond of near to the next highest grade, solid, or just barely making a particular grade level). In the end, an A is an A. Drake has standards; let’s keep them.

I would appreciate the greater flexibility that such a policy would give instructors. It would allow us a more accurate way of recording student performance. We take pains to make fine distinctions in the quality of student work but are forced to use the blunt instrument of grades; at least the plus/minus option moves us in the right direction.

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