



How employers can stanch the hemorrhaging of collegiate GPA credibility

John A. Pearce II

Villanova School of Business, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, PA 19085, U.S.A.

KEYWORDS

College grade inflation;
Grade point average;
Student engagement;
GPA inflation;
Student academic performance;
Employee selection criteria

Abstract Grade inflation is rampant across universities, colleges, academic majors, and certainly in American business schools. Extensive evidence shows that the distribution of college GPAs is skewed sharply toward high grades. Consequently, GPAs often poorly convey students' relative academic achievement, sending a muddled message to prospective employers. This article explores the causes and consequences of grade inflation. It concludes with six recommendations for employers who want to encourage college administrators to control collegiate grade inflation, thereby strengthening the accuracy and value of a GPA in the processes of applicant evaluation and job placement.

© 2016 Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. GPA sends a muddled message

More than 78% of employers use undergraduate grade point average (GPA) to screen job candidates (NACE, n.d.). While collegiate GPA makes the short list of influential factors in the selection process of most employers, there is unfortunately little evidence of its use for any purpose beyond a simple initial screening mechanism for narrowing an applicant pool.

A job candidate's GPA is a problematic metric for prospective employers. The potential of GPA to indicate students' relative academic performance is being negated by the damage done by grade inflation. Grade inflation refers to the ongoing rise in the percentage of high grades assigned to

students, leading directly to higher student GPAs. This rise in grades occurs without evidence of commensurate increases in student learning. The well-documented and avoidable phenomenon of grade inflation limits the ability of employers to distinguish superior academic performers from the majority of their classmates who have also received high grades.

For decades, grade inflation has been reported at a wide range of four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad. Yet, the grade inflation problem is worsening. Grade inflation has been recorded at all schools that were studied and was especially pronounced at 'better' and private colleges and universities where GPAs are habitually the highest (Popov & Bernhardt, 2011; Tucker & Courts, 2010). The resulting compression of grade distribution has led to a hemorrhaging of credibility in the grading process, as students with differing levels of achievement are

E-mail address: john.pearce@villanova.edu

compressed into the upper groupings of the grade distribution.

This article explores the causes and consequences of grade inflation and offers possible explanations for professors' elevated judgments of student performance relative to their classmates. However, it does not evaluate how much students learned as measured against an absolute standard. In collegiate education, absolute standards for gauging student performance very rarely exist.

Non-academics might find it difficult to imagine the extreme variability in course material and pedagogy that exists among colleges, and even among sections of the same course within a college. Especially in non-technical fields, professors whose courses have the same title frequently teach very different topics with inconsistent learning objectives (e.g., [Becker, 2007](#)). They use different materials, instructional methods, student assignments, and performance requirements. Grading standards and grade distributions differ as dramatically as the course sections and are usually determined exclusively by individual professors with very different perspectives on the purpose, value, and intended outcomes from the grades they assign. Therefore, it is nearly impossible for employers to know, without an independent assessment, what a job applicant with a college degree gained from the academic experience.

Employers should explore the idea of confirming what graduates know. Low levels of academic advancement, masked by inflated grades, may distress employers who trust in student GPAs. In a review of the academic progress of more than 2,300 undergraduates at 24 U.S. colleges, [Arum and Roksa \(2011\)](#) found that after two years of college coursework, 45% of college students showed no significant increase in critical thinking, analytic reasoning, or writing abilities. After four years of college education, 36% of students still showed no improvement in developing these same capabilities.

However, by using an applicant's GPA, an employer can gauge the performance of the applicant

acquired relative to his or her classmates. For an employer who wants to hire the best-educated candidate from a specific college, GPA should be a prime indicator. In fact, if an employer prefers a college-based, impersonal, impartial, and objective measure for comparing candidates, GPA may be the superior choice.

Given the prospective usefulness of GPA in evaluating job candidates, this article concludes with six recommendations for employers who want to encourage college administrators to control grade inflation. These changes will add value to the message of GPAs for employers, improve the clarity of performance feedback for students, and enhance the administrative oversight of institutions of higher learning.

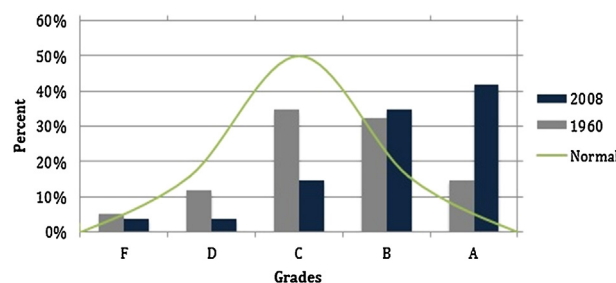
2. The severity of U.S. collegiate grade inflation

The dramatic grade inflation in four-year universities and colleges is depicted in [Figure 1](#), which shows grading patterns at 135 four-year universities and colleges in the U.S. It begins with a bell-shaped curve on the graph to show a theoretically normal grade distribution.

The graph supports widespread suspicions and anecdotal evidence about the extreme extent of grade inflation. The grades received in 1960 roughly resemble an expected normal distribution while the grades received in 2008 show almost no connection to a normal array. The grades from 2008 are very significantly skewed to the right, suggesting that four-year colleges and universities exhibit a nearly 'no fail' grade distribution, coupled with a practice of assigning a B grade to most students who do not receive an A.

The dramatic increase in grades resulted in As (43%) and Bs (35%) becoming the most frequently obtained grades ([Rojstaczer & Healy, 2012](#); [Tucker & Courts, 2010](#)). Under a normal distribution, C would be the most common grade and an A would occur less

Figure 1. Effect of grade inflation on U.S. grade distribution



Source: Adapted from [Rojstaczer and Healy \(2012\)](#)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5108887>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5108887>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)