

Grade inflation: peaking or deflating?

Are students at Oregon colleges and universities getting better grades with less effort?

Not so, say some educators who believe the era of grade inflation has peaked. Others in higher education say soft grading remains a serious problem and must be curtailed.

The Academic Requirements Committee at Portland State University became so alarmed about inflated grading that committee members raised the grade point average (GPA) needed to qualify for honors graduation from 3.5 to 3.6, effective next fall.

A grade of A is 4.0 on a grading scale of 1.0 to 4.0. A grade of C on the scale is 2.0.

The requirements committee said that if honors graduation is to mean anything, the GPA required to attain it must be higher.

Committee spokeswoman Marge Kirrie said more than 15 percent of the Portland State graduates last year qualified for graduation with honors or high honors. At the end of the 1968-69 school year, only 3.16 percent qualified.

The marked increase in As is not because of an increase in student ability and performance, but the product of more lenient grading, the committee said.

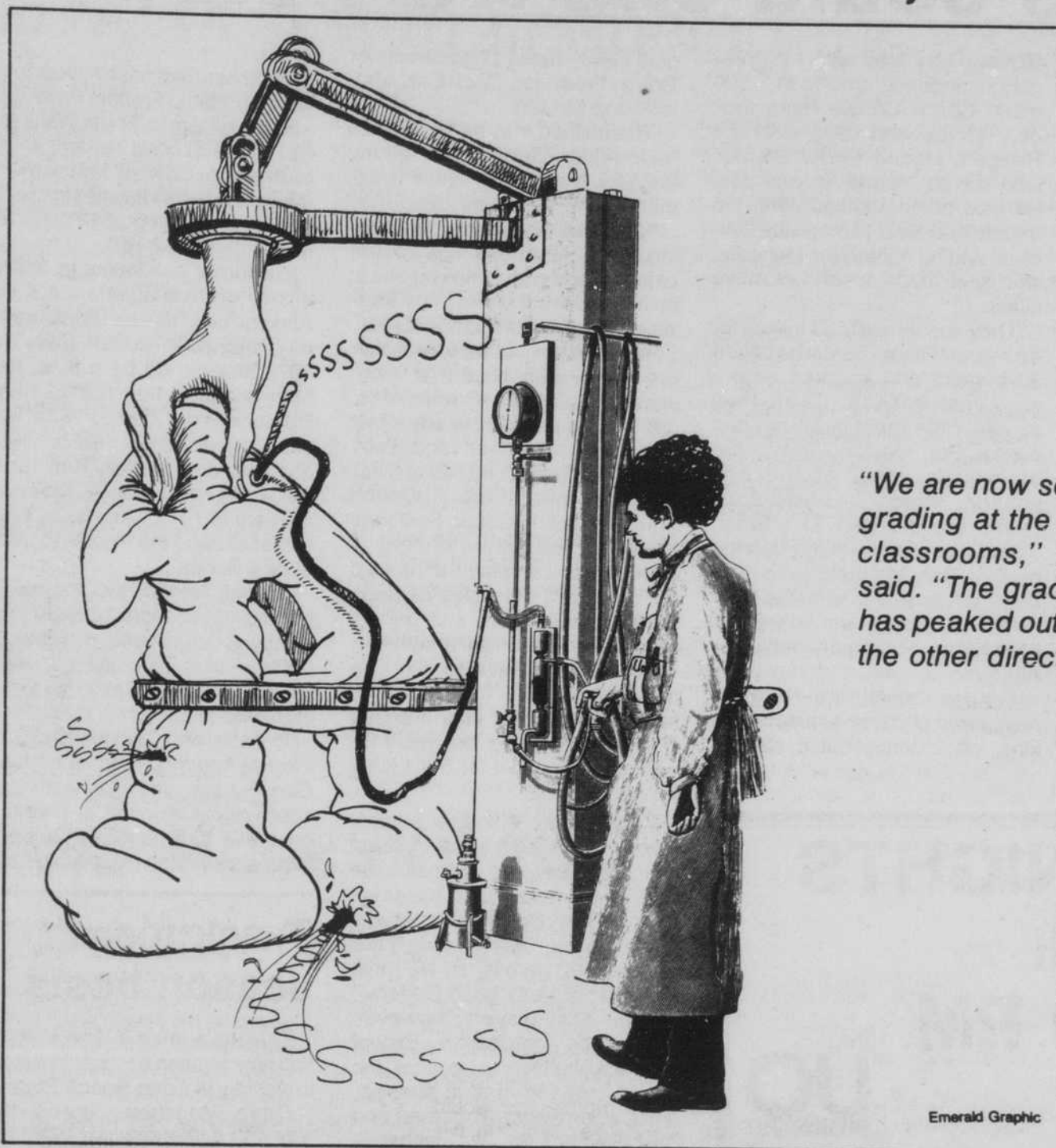
Educators point out the problem is nationwide and is not confined to colleges and universities. They note generally higher grades in high schools even though high school graduates are scoring lower on achievement tests.

The presidents of the University of Oregon and Oregon State University said their schools do not have plans similar to Portland State for raising the requirements for honors graduation.

Both Oregon State Pres. Robert MacVicar and University of Oregon Pres. William Boyd said their schools suffered only a mild rash of inflated grades. They believed tightened grading has taken over.

"We are now seeing greater vigor in grading at the University of Oregon classrooms," Boyd said. "If we were going to raise the requirements for honors graduation, we should have done that three or four years ago. But the grade inflation problem has peaked out and

Oregon educators differ on subject



"We are now seeing greater vigor in grading at the University of Oregon classrooms," Pres. William Boyd said. "The grading inflation problem has peaked out and is now moving in the other direction."

show how well their programs are operating.

"They inflate grades to try to keep their departments or courses from being deleted as part of the budget-cutting process," he said.

"A big debate on the Ashland campus is about admissions standards," Sours said. "I'm sure that if we went to a 3.5 GPA for admissions, the kids would show up with 3.5s. The high schools inflate grades to qualify their graduates for college admission."

He said Oregon's methods of funding colleges and universities so many dollars per student also adds to the problem.

"The institutions give the grades to attract and keep the students as

a means of qualifying for money," he said.

Johnson, a longtime member of the State Board of Higher Education, said she and others believe grade inflation received a big boost during the the Vietnam War when many instructors refused to flunk students because of opposition to the military draft and the war.

"The campuses today have more pass-fail courses and more withdrawal courses where students can withdraw from a course they are failing and not get an F," she said. "These practices result in fewer lower grades."

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Nationwide, educators have cited several factors leading to grade inflation, including:

- Students on many campuses publish evaluation of faculty members, causing some to curry favor with grades.

- Some colleges are competing for students with grading policies because of a leveling off of enrollment in higher education.

- Students now tend to chal-

lenge instructors if they disagree with their grades, and some faculty members give higher grades to avoid the possibility of having to justify lower grades.

Grade information shows the overall GPA for Oregon State students in the fall of 1966 was 2.57; in the fall of 1976 it was 2.80.

MacVicar thinks grade inflation reached its highest level about 1973-74 at Oregon State and has since moved in the opposite direction.

"And the grading is tightening up on a national level," he said.

Among those who believe grade inflation still is a major problem are Becky Johnson of the Oregon Education Coordinating Council and James Sours, president of Southern Oregon State College, Ashland.

Sours said that because of shrinking budgets in higher education, faculty members in less popular departments inflate grades to attract students and

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