

Teaching: Some question whether grade inflation exists at UO

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Zachary Kelton said grade inflation is "a rampant problem on campus" and is caused by a combination of problems: faculty members' concern for the well-being of students, a desire to avoid potential problems resulting from giving students low grades and the subconscious desire of professors to validate their own teaching.

"A majority, or at least a strong minority of faculty members, are guilty of participating in grade inflation during their careers," Kelton said.

Although there are no formal agendas or meetings to address grade inflation, the University administration is taking steps to heighten the level of department and faculty member awareness, Hubin said.

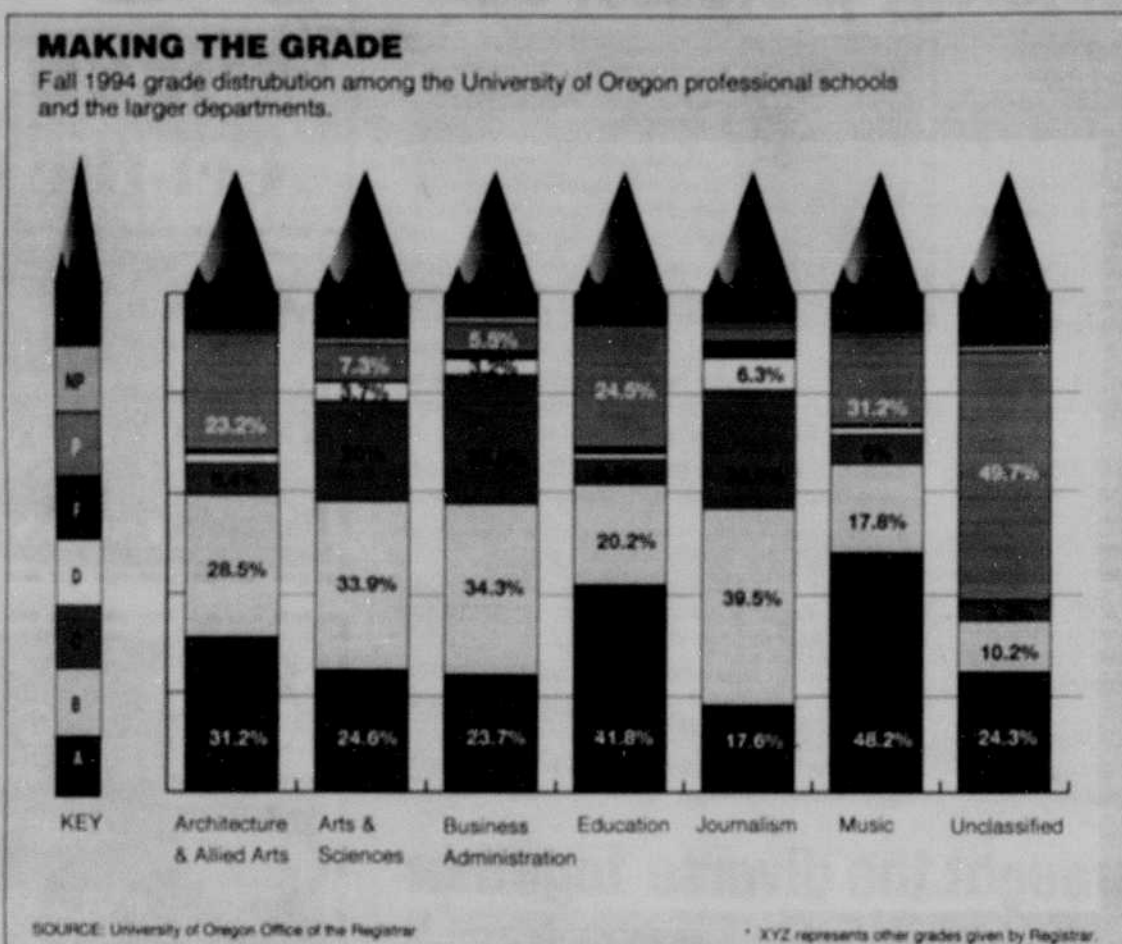
"When we send out grade distribution reports to departments for review, all we are saying is, 'Hey, take a look. Is this a good reflection of your department?'" Hubin said.

Some students are concerned that distributing grade reports may place heavy pressure on professors.

"If faculty members feel the need to bow down to such pressure, will professors give students the grades he or she deserves, or a grade that conveniently fits in with the department's wishes?" asked University student Mark Jefferis. He also wondered what grade generosity says about the validity of grades awarded.

Borin seconded Jefferis' concerns.

"If you receive an A from the physics department, you can be



suitably impressed," Borin said. "But what does an A or a B from the English department mean? Does it mean a student is in the top 5 percent? The top 10, 20 or 30 percent?"

Davis said it is up to individual faculty members and departments to determine how they are going to grade — not up to administrators. "The meat-fisted approach of imposing uniform

grading standards wouldn't do justice to the difference in disciplines or expectations," Davis said.

Kelton believes students need to be aware of the implications that grade inflation could have on their futures and the future of their University.

"Grade inflation has the potential of weakening the overall academic integrity of the University," Kelton said.

"If graduate schools, employers and the state recognize grade inflation exists, they may no longer recognize the quality of a University degree, nor be as willing to help fund such an institution."

Kelton said grade inflation is a nationwide problem that directly involves universities, departments, faculty members and students.

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— Zachary Kelton
ASUO Vice President

"At some universities, including Ivy League schools, students have the option of dropping a class right up to finals week and therefore not have anything but their top grades on their transcripts," Kelton said. He said this was yet another form of grade inflation and caused a decrease in individual and institutional integrity.

University officials agree that the subjective nature of grading makes it hard to pinpoint a solution to grade inflation. Departmental grade distributions, graduate school entrance exams and pre-employment testing may correct the problem — "if indeed there is a problem," Boren said.

Kelton's answer to grade inflation entails changing the structure of current grade transcripts to include both class averages and individual grades. Students would have a clearer picture of how they ranked in comparison to others and be able to determine whether grade inflation did indeed exist, Kelton said.

"It's frustrating for me, and a lot of students I'm sure, to see grade inflation," Kelton said. "I don't want to finish school and have to face the fact that because of the inability to control grade inflation, I received a watered-down degree."

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