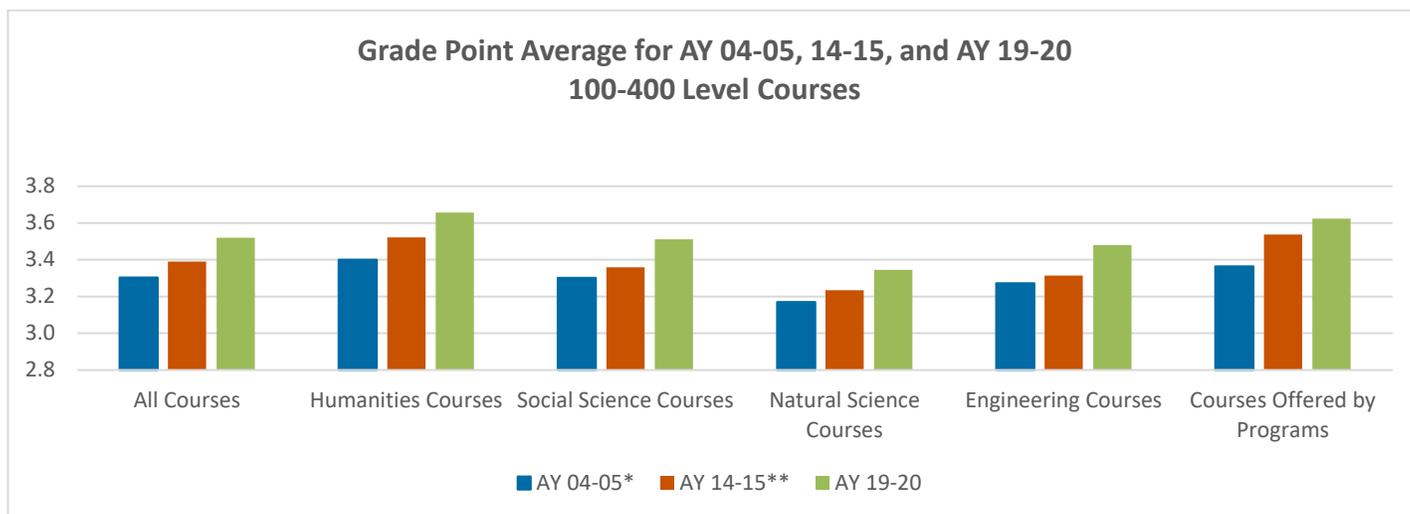


For release September 14, 2020

### Grading Results for AY 2019-20

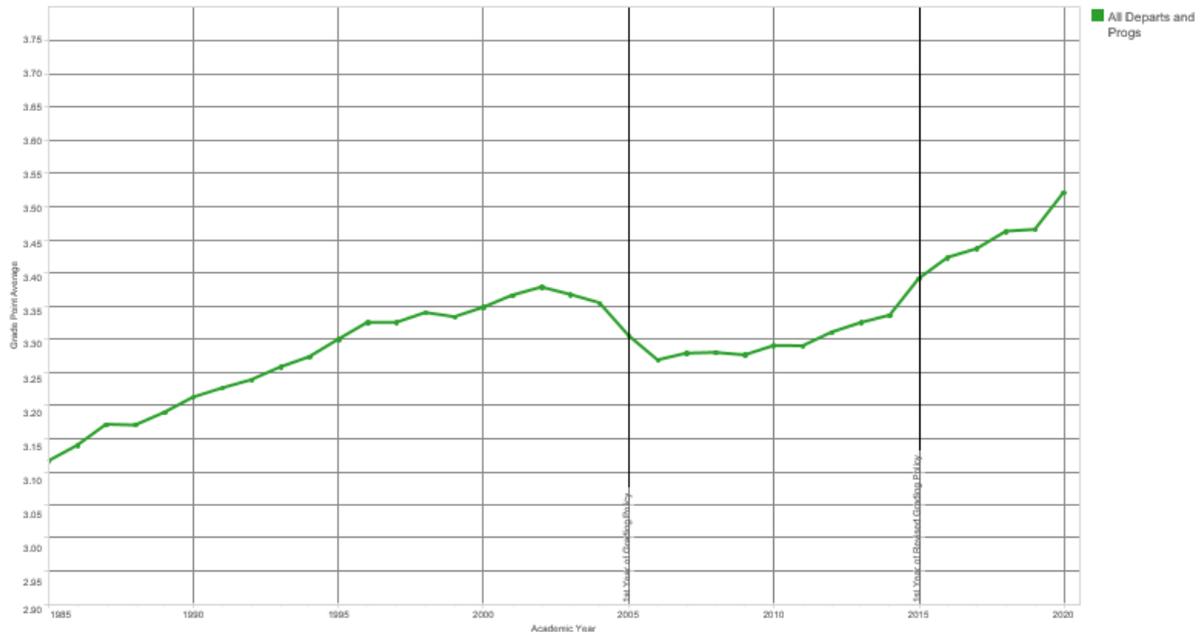
To promote fairness and transparency in the assessment of students' work, the University grading policy, approved by the faculty in October 2014, charges each department to articulate and uphold its own well-defined, meaningful grading standards for work within its discipline. This policy calls for the Faculty Committee on Examinations and Standing to report to the faculty each fall on the grading record of the previous year.

The Committee has reviewed the data for AY 2019-20. We note the continued upward trend in average undergraduate course grades. The mean course grades across all departments and programs increased from 3.464 in AY 18-19 to 3.520 in AY 19-20, an increase of .056 points. The course grade point average for the University as a whole is now .13 higher than it was in AY 2015, the first year the revised grading policy was in effect, and .22 higher than in AY 2005, the first year following the previous grading policy, which actively sought to curb grade inflation.



Last year's grading memo noted that the inflationary trend of the last five years appeared to be levelling off. The .056 increase in course GPA for AY 2019-20, however, is the largest one-year increase since the current grading policy went into effect.

Academic Years: 1985-2020  
 Grade Point Average  
 All Departments and  
 Programs  
 100-400 Level Courses



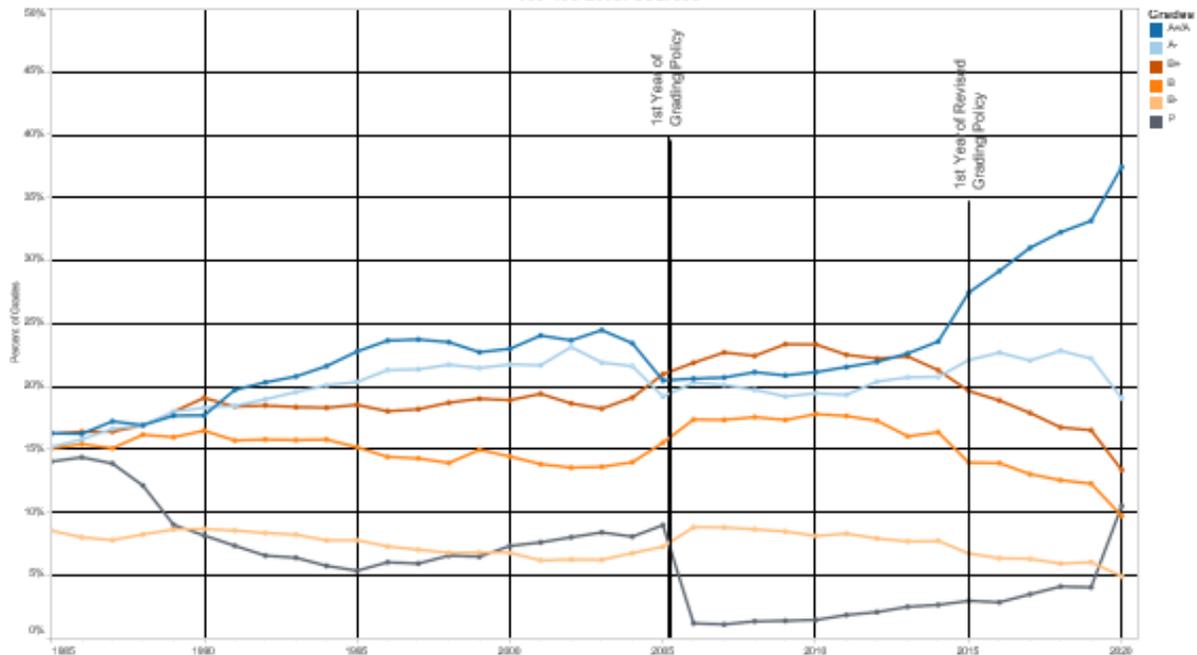
Notes:

This significant rise in course GPA (across all divisions) is almost certainly a consequence of changes to the regular grading policy, enacted by the Faculty Committee on Examinations and Standing last spring, in recognition that students might experience unequal access to the curriculum because of the abrupt switch to remote learning caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

The revised grading policy for spring 2020 added the P/D/F option to all undergraduate courses and postponed the P/D/F election deadline until Dean’s Date. It also allowed the “P” grade to satisfy prerequisites and departmental requirements, as well as for independent work at each department’s discretion. In addition, many more faculty elected to teach their courses on a P/D/F-only basis.

Grading last spring was generous, as the chart below indicates. The number of A and A+ grades instructors assigned increased significantly, as did the number of courses in which only “P” grades were assigned. All other assigned grades declined in number.

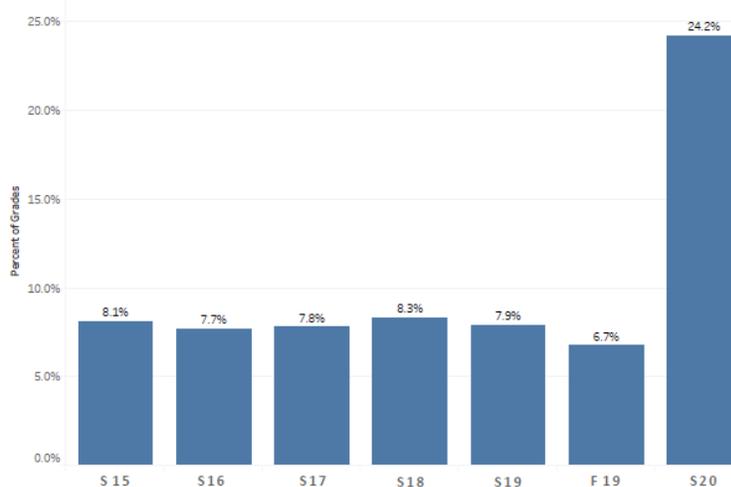
Academic Years: 1985-2020  
 Distribution of A-Range, B-Range, and P Grades  
 All Departments & Programs  
 100-400 Level Courses



The graph above records grades assigned and thus captures only the P grades assigned by faculty in P/D/F only courses.

In addition, students made liberal use of the unlimited P/D/F option, electing to use it for almost a quarter of all course enrollments taught last spring (as opposed to the 8% average for the previous spring).

% of Student-Elected P/D/F  
 100-400 Level Courses



Some faculty reported that it was difficult to navigate the degree of individual and departmental latitude permitted by the spring 2020 grading policy. The lack of grading and deadlines consistency within and across departments allowed some students to perceive inequitable standards. Some departments expressed concern that “P” is not an adequate threshold for core requirements.

In response to faculty feedback, the Committee on Examinations and Standing revised the grading policy for fall 2020 to reflect more uniform standards while allowing some flexibility, given the continued

challenges of remote learning. For the most part, the grading policy for the fall returns to normal practices and deadlines, while still allowing students to select the P/D/F option for any undergraduate course without prejudicing their typical four course P/D/F limit.

The increased compression at the top of the grading scale remains a challenge when we award honors and prizes at both University and department levels. (This past year, for example, 123 students in the sophomore year earned a 4.0, as compared to 36 such students in AY 2015.) The Committee on Examinations and Standing plans to discuss the vexed question of how we define academic excellence this academic year, given the current challenges of remote access and grade inflation. These discussions might have implications for the future, given the ongoing and escalating challenge of grade inflation.

Chairs and program directors should schedule ongoing discussion of assessment standards and grading practices among their faculty. Departments and programs should meet periodically to review and refine their approaches to assessment. In particular, the Committee encourages departments to:

- Review consistency of grading standards and practices across department courses
- Ensure consistency of grading standards within courses with multiple sections
- Develop a consistent response to student requests for grade changes

More detailed grading data for all divisions, departments, and programs will be made available shortly to all faculty through a secure server on the Office of the Dean of the College website:

<https://odoc.princeton.edu/faculty-staff/grading-princeton>.

Individual faculty members will also receive a report on their own grading data from the Registrar. Chairs will receive department summary reports. We recommend that departments review their grading results to ensure they are consistent with articulated local standards. The Office of the Dean of the College has also informed new faculty of Princeton's grading policies.

*The Faculty Committee on Examinations and Standing is chaired by Jill Dolan, Dean of the College, and includes the following elected faculty members, representing all four divisions: Wendy Belcher, Comparative Literature and African American Studies; Rebecca D. Burdine, Molecular Biology; Brandice Canes-Wrone, Public & International Affairs and Politics; Ralph E. Kleiner, Chemistry; Yair Mintzker, History; Michael E. Mueller, Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering; and Dan-El Padilla Peralta, Classics. Karen Richardson, Dean of Admission; Polly Winfrey Griffin, Registrar; W. Rochelle Calhoun, Vice President for Campus Life; and Claire Fowler, Senior Associate Dean of the College, serve ex officio. The committee's charge from the faculty is to administer academic regulations concerning the program of study and scholastic standing of undergraduate students.*