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 grading standards for work within its discipline. The 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 2021-22 report follows.

**Undergraduate Grading Results for AY 2021-22**

In AY 18-19, the Committee reported that the inflationary trend of the previous five years appeared to be leveling off, but the more generous grading policies and practices instituted in response to COVID-19 pandemic conditions led to a steep increase in GPA during academic years 19-20 and 20-21.

In AY 21-22, as the University returned to normal grading practices, the mean course grades across all departments and programs decreased slightly (0.03 points) from 3.56 in AY 20-21 to 3.53 in AY 21-22. However, the course grade point average for all courses remains 0.07 points higher than in the last pre-COVID year (3.46 in AY 18-19). The course GPA is 0.14 higher than it was in AY 2015, the first year the revised grading policy was in effect, and 0.23 higher than in AY 2005, the first year following the previous grading policy, which actively sought to curb grade inflation.

Grading practices and standards differ across divisions and departments and, as you know, grading policies are not centralized at the University. We encourage you to continue department-level conversations about grading and to carefully consider your own rubrics in each of your individual courses. In an era of
widespread, national grade inflation, how might we best assess Princeton students’ intellectual growth and academic engagement? How might our campus community shift the conversation away from grades and GPA and towards teaching and learning?

Students arrive at Princeton expecting high grades because they’ve come from high schools in which they sat at the top of their class, and competition for high grades seems endemic to Princeton’s culture. But such attitudes often don’t promote the most productive learning environments. How might we refocus students’ energies on the joys of learning, discovery, and intellectual growth rather than final grade? How might we reconsider our assessment practices to emphasize synthesis and engagement with knowledge in ways that could alleviate student stress about grades while preserving academic rigor?

We recommend being clear and specific with students about your department’s and your own grading and assessment practices and about what you expect from them in your courses. Let them know that letters of recommendation reveal much more about a student’s performance and potential than their transcript alone, and that a disappointing grade is rarely an insuperable obstacle to achieving a life ambition. The Committee encourages you to be transparent about how and why you grade; about any student’s standing in your course or your department; and about what grades mean in the arc of a person’s life and career.

We hope such frank and open conversations might begin to propagate a different kind of cultural norm about grading at Princeton, one more focused on teaching and learning than on the reductive metric of GPA achievement. With so many students here and at other universities receiving very high grades, the 4.0 scale means much less than it once did as a measure of excellence. While such conversations are unlikely to transform a culture overnight, gentle reinforcement from faculty may, in time, encourage a shift in perception.

Finally, we note that grades for independent work in some divisions trend significantly lower than the corresponding course grade averages. We thought it worth calling your attention to this trend so that you might contemplate its implications for your own department.

We encourage you to review more detailed grading data for all divisions, departments, and programs that will be made available shortly to all faculty through a secure server: https://princetonu.sharepoint.com/sites/odoc/gradingdata/. Additional information may be found 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 and that you continue to stage faculty and instructor discussions about the best grading and assessment practices.

--Dean Jill Dolan, for the Faculty Committee on Examinations and Standing

The Faculty Committee on Examinations and Standing is chaired by Jill Dolan, Dean of the College, and includes the following elected faculty members for AY 22-23, representing all four divisions: David August, Computer Science; Faruk Gul, Economics; Peter R. Jaffe, Civil & Environmental Engineering; Michael E. Mueller, Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering; Paul Nadal, English & American Studies; Dan-El Padilla Peralta, Classics; Robert Pringle, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology; Laure Resplandy, Geosciences; and Wendy Warren, History. Karen Richardson, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid; Emily Shandley, 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.