



COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM (CIRP)

ENMU has a rather longstanding history for participating in the CIRP dating back to the 1980s. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program is an annual survey designed and administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. The survey instrument compiles data on an institution's entering freshmen class, as well as national normative data for students in similar types of institutions. The profiles created through this survey together with the national normative data provide important information that can help an institution in the following program and policy areas as reported by the Higher Education Research institute:

- admission and recruitment;
- academic program development and review;
- institutional self-study and accreditation activities;
- public relations and development;
- institutional research and assessment;
- retention studies; and
- longitudinal research about the impacts of campus policies and programs.

Usually over 800 institutions nationwide take part in this annual survey event attempting to collect data that can be compared to other schools. The sample targeted with this questionnaire are first-time, full-time freshmen. The four-page instrument assesses a broad array of issues among which are the following:

- demographic characteristics
- expectations of the college experience
- secondary school experiences
- degree goals and career plans
- college finances
- attitudes, values, and life goals
- reasons for attending college

This freshman survey repeats most items employed in previous years to enable CIRP-using institutions to run trend analyses on freshman characteristics, values, and aspirations. Furthermore, it provides room for schools to add their own set off questions to the instrument.

The Eastern CIRP data revealed that some disturbing trends have emerged over the past five years within ENMU's incoming freshman community. The data presented in the following charts is based on three observations within the last five years spanning from 1999 to 2003. The first data set examines the percentage of high school seniors who enter ENMU with a B-average. Overall, the percentage of freshmen entering ENMU with B-average did increase over the last five years more than the national average.

The Assessment Resource Office, Station 9, Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico 88130 publishes the DATAWave.

Voice: 505-562-4313

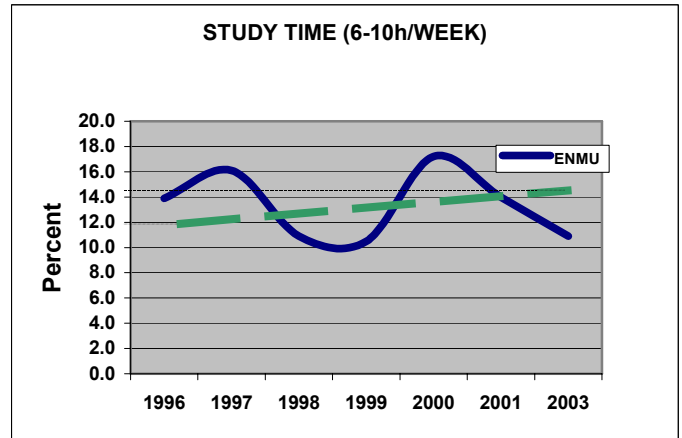
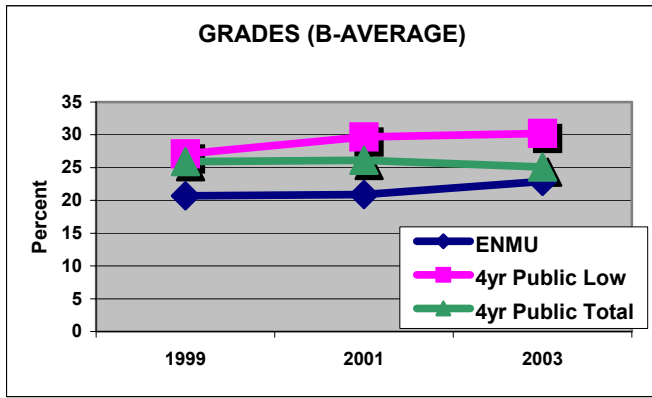
Fax: 505-562-4326

Email: Larry.Smith@enmu.edu

Editor: Larry N Smith
Assessment Coordinator

Contributions: Christian Gilde
ARO Researcher

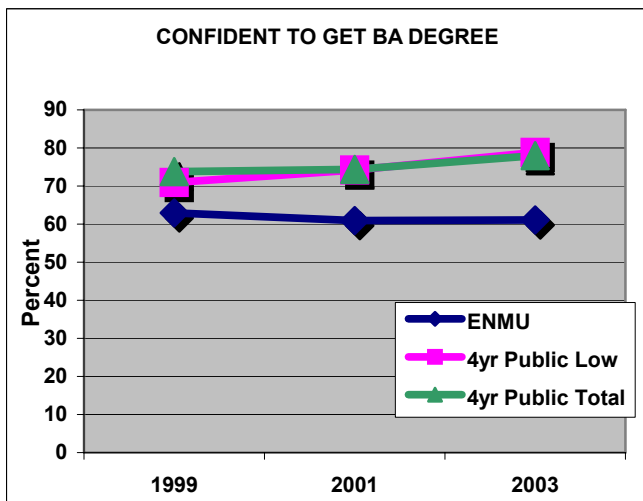
Production: Tammy Garcia
Secretary



However, one alarming trend that emerged over the last semi decade concerns the confidence of students of being successful in earning a bachelors degree. Whereas nationwide approximately 80% of the students asked are confident to attain a bachelors, only approximately 60% of Eastern's freshman population is confident to successfully complete their undergraduate work.

All these data have to be viewed with a grain of salt since the numbers and figures compiled through CIRP are self-reported by the students.

Editorially Speaking: Grade Inflation By Larry Smith



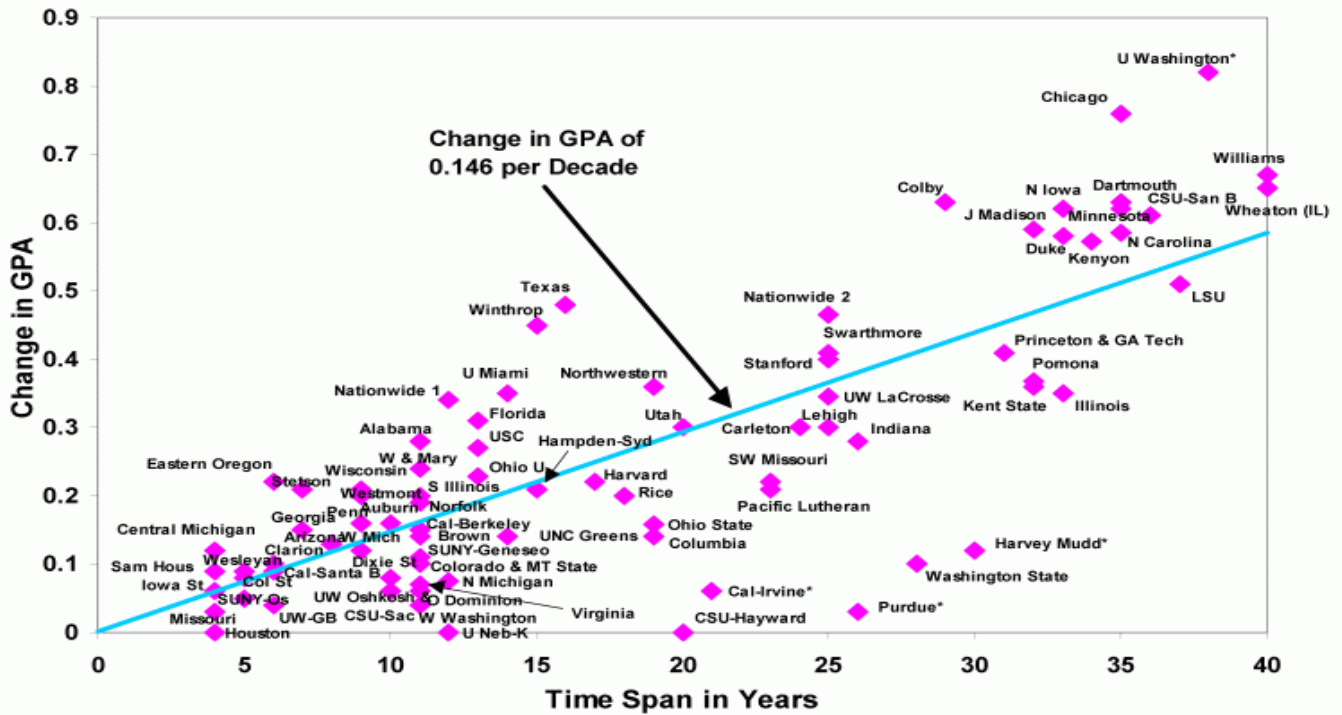
Grade inflation has become, to say the least, a major concern for educators all around the country. Since WW II grades have been inflated on an ongoing basis. Why did academia go down this path? Is it because contemporary teachings want to balance for the exorbitant amount of (peripheral) information thrust upon students? Is it because instructors loosened their grading stranglehold on learners? Or is it simply because times and society have changed in a way that perceives more liberal grading as acceptable?

The percentage of incoming high school seniors that spend 6 to 10 hours studying per week experienced a slight increase. Only a small percentage of high school seniors studies more than 10 hours a week. The question that arises is if this is enough time devoted to studying to, literally, "make the grade" in high school as well as college?

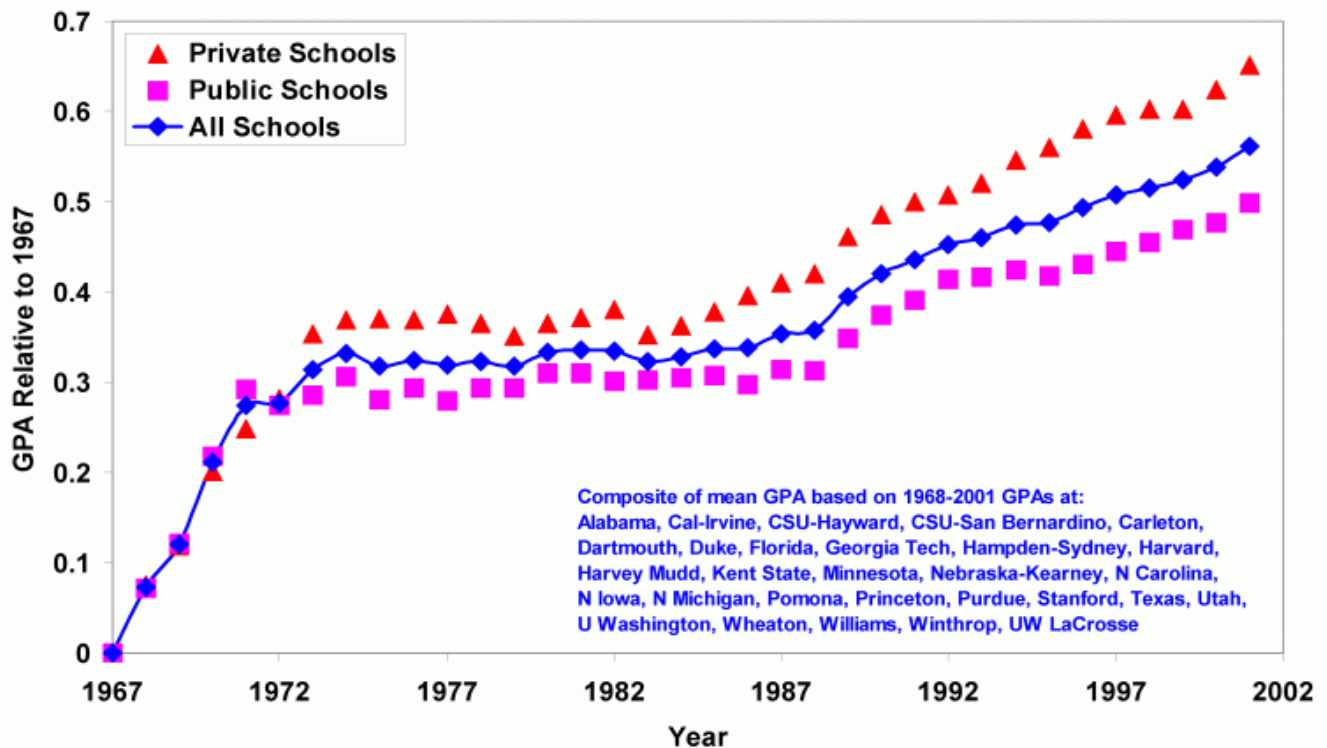
A paper written by Alice Cho and supported by Caltech—Cho was a former student of the University of Michigan--depicts this plight and examines the gradual ascension of grades over the past four decades. She reports that, in fact, grade inflation has gotten so much out of hand that the level of employers that felt grades on college transcripts should be included with an applicant's resume fell from 37.5% to 20% from 1978 to 1995, respectively. Barndt defines grade inflation as a student receiving a grade for coursework unwarranted by the level of work or achievement demonstrated (Barndt 2001). The following graph illustrates the national grade inflation experienced at different institutions over a time span of 40 years, starting in the early 1960s.



National Grade Inflation Trends



Detailed Trends in Grade Inflation Nationwide





The regression line shows an increase of .146 grade average points per decade, thus, assuming a total increase of .6 points over the four decades examined. Caution has to be observed when interpreting the charts since for many institutions observational data was only available for less than 40 years. At this point, no reliable source can provide a reasonable explanation for the discrepancy of the inflationary development between private and public institutions.

Alice Cho attributes grade inflation to the following factors that are, sad to say, based mostly on anecdotal evidence rather than hard facts:

- If students don't receive grades that are to their liking, enrollment in a particular class will decrease, thus, jeopardizing a faculty member's potential tenure.
- Our educational system subscribes to the somewhat skewed notion of making students feel capable and self-esteemed almost every time, all the time.
- Another factor are overly concerned activist groups or parents that put grade pressure on schools and instructors to preserve the emotional well-being of their offspring.

On the contrary, Sho introduces several methods to combat that deterioration of academic standards:

- One methodology is to use a more finely tuned grading scale that incorporates A+, A, A-, B+, B, and so forth, to distinguish misplaced from real A students. For instance, UCLA is one of the many institutions using this grading system.

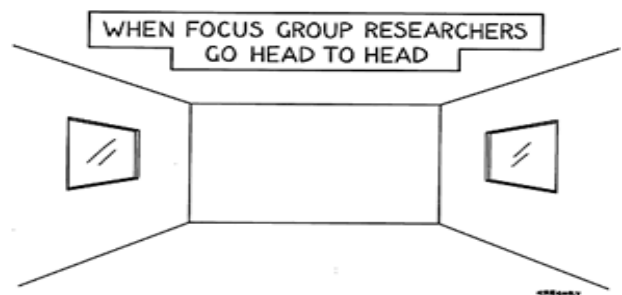
- Another method would be the Dartmouth approach where each student receives two grades per course on the transcript: the earned one and the median grade in the class. If a student receives an A in a class with a median A-average, people can know that the A stands for average (Honors 2001).

Sooner or later the problem of grade inflation will have to be addressed by the institutions and local and national authorities in order stop the free-fall of educational quality.

New Mexico Higher Education And Retention Conference (NMHEAR)

At the last NMHEAR conference, held in February of this year, participants expressed an unusually high level of interest for the focus groups the ARO undertook on "The Quality of Education at ENMU."

© Cartoonbank.com



When Focus Group Researchers Go Head To Head (An empty room with one-way mirrors on facing walls)

Published in *The New Yorker* November 4, 2002



Eastern New Mexico University is an affirmative action and equal opportunity employer. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or handicap in its programs, activities, or employment. Persons seeking additional information about the University's policy should contact the Director of Human Relations/Affirmative Action Office, ENMU Station #2, Portales, NM 88130.

