

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Plusses outweigh minuses in new grad grading system

By:

Posted: 5/29/07

Graduate students recently found out that their grading system will switch from the A,B,C system to a plus/minus system, and by and large, they aren't happy about it.

In a survey sent out to graduate students via e-mail, students largely opposed the change, citing reasons such as A-plusses not rewarding students for excelling and A-minuses hurting their grade.

Students need not worry.

According to Murray J. Leaf, professor of anthropology and political economy and the speaker for the faculty in regards to the decision to change to the new system, A-plus won't ever actually be used.

Students who receive an A in a class will be given a 4.0.

This system is a positive change for professors, it allows them to give students a much more accurate representation of their performance. The difference between an A and a B can be quite large, and by adding B+ and A- to the available representations of student work, a professor has much greater discretion in assigning a value to a student's work.

More importantly, students should consider the potential gulf between the traditional B and C grades. Formerly, a student who was producing borderline B work might have ended up with a C in the class, giving them a 2.0 calculated into their GPA. While students may be disappointed in receiving a B-minus or C-plus, both grades produce a better and easier to deal with grade than a straight 2.0 for a C.

Another potential benefit is the sliding scale between A-minus, B-plus and B. While allowing professors to reward students who perform at a high B level, this new system can also more accurately represent the GPA of a student who is performing at almost, but not quite, A level.

All grading systems are, by their very nature, arbitrary. The benefit of allowing professors to create finer distinctions between work they consider excellent (A) and good (B) is students who produce work that is good-but-not-excellent can expect to have a more accurate representation of their grade.

Any student that has been in college long enough knows the pain of having an 89.4 and a professor who's unwilling to round up. A B-plus covers the gap between nearly A work and a 3.0.

One issue of concern, however, is the B-minus as it affects students who consistently perform at that level. Although worth less than a 3.0, and not nearly as bad as the 2.0 a C would bring, a student who receives too many B-minuses will find their GPA slipping below 3.0.

This could be a problem for many students, especially those attempting to juggle their education with work and possibly a family. B-minuses should be used sparingly, and only when a student absolutely does not deserve a B. Professors have been granted a great amount of discretion, and they should use it wisely.

Another issue is the seeming lack of communication regarding this change. There was little prior notice that this change would be taking effect. Students may feel slighted that such a change occurred seemingly overnight, and professors may want to be tactful when assigning minus grades to students until the shock wears off.

No grading system will ever be perfect, but overall this change will have a positive effect. Grad students should think about the possible benefits of this system, and professors should be aware that with a new amount of control comes the responsibility to grade more carefully than they ever have before.

The Mercury Editorial Board voted 3-0 in favor of this editorial. The board consists of the newspaper's editor-in-chief, managing editor and advertising manager. The board will discuss, debate and develop editorial positions on issues affecting the UTD community. We welcome your responses at mercury@utd.edu

© Copyright 2007 The UTD Mercury