

At its meeting on October 20, the Faculty Senate agreed that the issue of a plus/minus grading system should be submitted to the faculty for consideration. The University has used a plus/minus system for the past four years. Data are now available on the effects of this system, and various groups have requested that the University reconsider the system.

Our plans are to provide a ballot to the faculty on this issue early in the spring semester. In the mean time, we encourage faculty to consider this matter carefully and examine data about the system. Data collected by the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate are provided below. We encourage you to examine these data and discuss them with your colleagues before reaching a decision about this issue. The Faculty Senate will discuss the matter in more detail at forthcoming meetings and welcomes any questions, feedback, or concerns. We will not proceed with a vote until faculty have had time to consider the matter carefully. We recommend that you avoid responding to other groups on this issue until a reasoned discussion of the issues has taken place. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

The following information has been compiled from data made available by The University of Alabama Office of Institutional Research (some tables may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding):

1. From 1981 until 1998 in the Spring Semester the percentages of grades awarded in each letter-grade category were as follows:

	A	B	C	D	F	Other	GPA	
1981	23.2	30.7	25.3	6.2	6.2	6.4	1.58	(3PTs)
1982	22.8	32.1	25.3	7.9	6.3	6.6	1.58	"
1983	22.8	30.8	25.0	6.1	6.7	6.6	1.57	"
1984	22.6	30.3	23.8	6.2	6.6	6.5	2.55	(4PTs)
1985	23.1	28.6	22.6	7.5	6.2	12.0	2.58	"
1986	24.1	29.6	22.0	7.9	6.4	10.0	2.59	"
1987	23.7	29.3	22.0	8.1	6.2	10.2	2.58	etc.
1988	24.6	29.3	22.2	8.0	6.3	9.6	2.58	
1989	25.2	29.3	22.1	7.9	6.5	9.0	2.61	
1990	25.9	29.8	21.6	7.2	5.8	9.7	2.66	
1991	27.6	30.3	20.4	6.8	5.5	9.2	2.72	
1992	28.5	29.9	19.6	6.5	5.6	9.1	2.72	
1993	29.3	29.4	19.8	6.6	5.6	9.3	2.74	
1994	28.3	28.7	19.4	6.4	6.4	10.6	2.71	
1995	28.6	28.0	18.6	5.9	6.5	12.4	2.72	
1996	29.8	27.4	18.5	5.9	6.3	12.0	2.73	
1997	29.7	28.3	18.1	6.1	6.1	11.7	2.74	
1998	30.0	26.9	18.3	6.4	6.3	12.1	2.72	

The plus/minus grading system was instituted in the Fall of 1994; however, students who enrolled prior to that time were graded on the old system. The class of 1997/98 was the first to be evaluated for eight semesters under the plus/minus system.

2. The mean GPA at Alabama from the Fall Semester of 1994 until the Fall Semester of 1997 was:

2.540

The mean GPA during that same period without the plus/minus system would have been:

3. Under plus/minus (Fall of 1994 to Fall of 1997) the percentages of grades given in each category were as follows:

A+	A	A-	/	B+	B	B-	/	C+	C	C-	/	D+	D	D-	/	F	/	other
4.8	18.2	8.9		8.0	15.6	8.4		6.1	11.1	5.1		2.0	3.8	1.6		5.3		.9
totals		31.9		32.0				22.3				7.4				5.3		.9

4. The following percentages represent letter grades (and their associated quality points) which were lowered, raised, or not changed respectively by the plus/minus grading system. Since no extra quality points are awarded for an A+, that category was included with grades not changed.

Lowered ----- 24.0%

Raised ----- 16.1%

Not Changed ----- 59.7%

5. From the Fall Semester of 1994 until the Fall Semester of 1997 the plus/minus grading system affected students in the following ways:

- a) 125 students of the 396 who would have achieved a cumulative GPA of exactly 2.00 under the old system failed to achieve a cumulative GPA of 2.00 under the plus minus system;

191 students of the 565 who would have achieved a cumulative GPA of exactly 3.00 under the old system failed to achieve a cumulative GPA of 3.00 under the plus/minus system;

245 students of the 783 who would have achieved a cumulative GPA of 4.00 under the old system failed to achieve a cumulative GPA of 4.00 under the plus/minus system

- b) 104 students of the 396 who would have achieved a cumulative GPA of exactly 2.00 under the old system achieved a cumulative GPA higher than a 2.00 under the plus/minus system;

145 students of the 565 who would have achieved a cumulative GPA of exactly 3.00 under the old system achieved a cumulative GPA higher than a 3.00 under the plus/minus system.

In 1997 in the Fall Semester, 9471 undergraduate students were evaluated under the plus/minus system.

6. The following universities use a plus/minus system like the one at Alabama: (these universities do not award extra credit for an A+)

The University of Virginia

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Duke University  
Emory University  
Vanderbilt University  
Tulane University

The following flagship state universities in the SEC use the following grading system:

A	B+	B	C+	C	D+	D	F
4.0	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.0	1.5	1.0	0

The University of Tennessee (does not award extra credit for a D+)  
The University of South Carolina  
The University of Florida

The following flagship state universities in the SEC do not use any form of plus/minus:

The University of Kentucky  
The University of Georgia  
The University of Mississippi  
The University of Arkansas  
Louisiana State University

The following additional universities use some form of plus/minus:

The University of Houston  
(same plus/minus as Alabama)

North Carolina State University  
(same plus/minus as Alabama but does award extra credit [4.33] for an A+)

Florida State University  
(plus/minus with a slightly different scale for quality points)

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	, etc.
4.0	3.75	3.25	3.0	2.75	2.25	, etc. )

Texas Tech University  
(uses plus/minus letter grades like Alabama but assigns  
4.0 for all varieties of A, 3.0 for all varieties of B, etc.)

Other universities which do not use any form of plus/minus are:

Auburn University  
Clemson University  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
Mississippi State University  
The University of Alabama in Birmingham

--- Rob Ingram  
--- Vice President, Faculty Senate