

Letters to the Editor
P.O. Box 2389
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35403

I appreciate the attention given by the Crimson White to the reevaluation of our undergraduate grading system and the opportunity to discuss some of the data collected by Institutional Research with Marie Yarbrough prior to the publication of her article of 11/13/98 titled "Plus/minus gets failing grade from students." I would like to clarify one important point which was presented as a paraphrase or quote by me. In paragraph fourteen Ms. Yarbrough wrote: "Those who support the plus/minus system argue it is a more articulate grading system and allows for more distinction in the inconsistencies of faculty grading. This, Johnson said, is the principle reason why the faculty supported the system in 1994."

While faculty have supported the system because it allows them to distinguish more precisely the various levels of accomplishment within the student body; none, as far as I know, have argued that the plus/minus system "allows for more distinction in the inconsistencies of faculty grading."

Variation in grading practices among individual faculty members is not a condition which the plus/minus system or any university grading system can address; unless it is a great deal more prescriptive than those which have been considered or adopted by the faculty so far.

I do regret that Ms. Yarbrough and the Crimson White have declined to publish, intact, data collected by Institutional Research and compiled by members of the Faculty Senate.

It is the desire of the Faculty Senate that deliberations by faculty, students, and administrators about the university grading system be as well informed as possible. Polls, ballots, and newspaper articles may well influence the course of events; but can never serve the best interests of our community if they ignore, obscure, or distort information vital to understanding the issues.

I regret, as well, that the position taken by the SGA seems to assume that the relationship between faculty and students is necessarily adversarial, and that the plus/minus issue must be resolved by a campaign based on a political model rather than an informed debate within our academic community.

I appeal to the Crimson White, the SGA, and all students to adopt as thoughtful, and reflective an attitude as possible in considering this issue. We must all remember that this decision affects the entire institution, its fundamental academic posture, and future generations of students and faculty, as well as those who are currently involved and have responsibility for making this decision.

---Marvin Johnson
---Academic Affairs Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate