



YALE COLLEGE COUNCIL

March 31, 2013

Dear Yale Faculty Members,

Since the release of the Preliminary Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Grading, the Yale College Council (YCC) has been working on assessing student response to the findings and recommendations made in this report. Due to the lack of consideration of student opinion, flawed working process of the Ad Hoc Committee, and student concerns that require attention before moving forward, we ask that you reject the proposal or postpone the vote on the new grading policy. Below we outline the reasons why.

1. The timeline and methods in which student opinion was solicited were ineffective.

There is no student representation on the Ad Hoc Committee on Grading, which consists of only nine faculty members. Members of the general student body were not solicited to participate. Though the Ad Hoc Committee met with the Dean's Advisory Committee, (which consists of several students) the meeting was confidential, and thus the general student body and student government were unable to effectively give their opinions. After the publication of the preliminary report in February, there was no active attempt on the part of the administration or the Ad Hoc Committee to solicit general student opinion. The Ad Hoc Committee only agreed to hold an open forum with the Yale College Council a week before the vote on the proposal. At this point, there has not been a sufficient amount of time to incorporate new ideas from students or even address the concerns that were raised in the survey sent out by the YCC and during the open forum held on Wednesday, March 27th.

The YCC is appreciative of Professor Ray Fair and Professor Tina Lu's time and patience during the open forum. However, if the purpose of the open forum was for the Ad Hoc Committee to hear student opinion, we would have also hoped to see a broader representation of committee members.

2. The working process of the committee was deeply flawed.

- a) There was no representation of faculty from the large humanities and social science departments, such as History, English, Philosophy, and Political Science. It is important

to have members from those departments participate in all of the discussions, and not just to solicit their opinion separately.

- b) In evaluating grading practices at Yale, there should have been a broader discussion on grading philosophy and an in-depth evaluation within each department of existing grading mechanisms and methodologies.
- c) It appears from the report that no attention was paid to evaluating policies that directly correlate to grading practices, such as the percentage of students eligible for Latin Honors, the current Credit/D/Fail system, or any additional means to differentiate between students, such as qualitative feedback.
- d) The preliminary report should have outlined in greater detail the implementation of the proposed changes and how it would affect students post-graduation (e.g. work opportunities, graduate schools). More details about conversations with deans of admissions for graduate schools around the country and with a sample of employers need to be included in the report.
- e) There is little evidence of consultation with educational specialists and current literature on grading methodology.

3. There are several student concerns that need to be addressed before the proposal can be voted on.

On March 20th, the YCC distributed a survey to the student body concerning the proposed changes. Over 1750 students responded to the survey, writing nearly 450 questions to the committee.

79% of the students who participated in the survey indicated that they are against the proposed change to a numerical grading system. Further results in the survey are located in the addendum below.

The following are the most prevalent issues mentioned by students in the survey and open forum:

- a) A vast majority of students believe that the proposed changes will increase stress and competitiveness among the student body (due to higher differentiation, as well as the existence of a more absolute criteria for perfection). The desire of many students to obtain the absolute 100% will lead them to dedicate time to achieving this 100 in evaluations at the cost of in-depth reading of material, academic exploration,

participating in academic and scientific research, and other academic pursuits that cannot be quantified.

- b) This cultural change at Yale might have an impact on college admissions, as prospective students consider whether to apply to a school with a more competitive or collaborative atmosphere. Many students choose Yale over other peer institutions because they prefer our academic culture. The cultural change that will arise as a result of the grading policy changes will lead students to consider other universities with more collaborative academic environments.
- c) Many students commented that professors currently give very little feedback on papers, and thus were perplexed as to how these policy changes will improve feedback (e.g. how will a professor explain the difference between an 88 and an 89 on a paper when he or she currently gives very limited qualitative feedback on such assignments).
- d) Many students are concerned about the implications of a transition period. Graduate programs and future employers could delay in understanding Yale's new grading policy.
- e) In the proposal, the committee recommends university-wide grade guidelines to departments to address grade inflation and grading discrepancies between departments. In the YCC survey, only 25% of participants indicated that they believe changes should be made to Yale's grading system. Many students noted that the committee did not consider the changes in Yale's admission pool as well as societal changes that resulted in a gradual increase in grades over the past four decades.
- f) Grades for a class based on a numerical system takes less into account the natural discrepancy and subjectivity of grading.

Conclusion

The YCC asks the faculty to reject the proposal or postpone their vote until the Ad Hoc Committee on Grading considers student opinion and addresses the concerns we have outlined above. The cultural changes that will come as a result of changing the grading system are vast, taking away from Yale's collaborative and explorative academic culture, and must receive more consideration before any final decisions are made.





Sincerely,

The Yale College Council
ycc@yale.edu


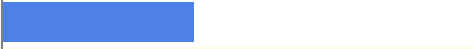


Addendum

Below are the results of our campus-wide survey sent out on March 20, 2013, which 1760 students completed. The Qualtrics survey was also shared with Professor Ray Fair, the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Grading, for analysis.



1. Class year

#	Answer		Response	%
1	2016		553	31%
2	2015		513	29%
3	2014		412	23%
4	2013		282	16%
	Total		1,760	100%

2. Major (if you double major or have an interdisciplinary major please select the two appropriate boxes)

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Humanities		548	31%
2	Social Sciences		700	40%
3	STEM		654	37%
4	Unknown		147	8%

3. Are you currently a pre-med student?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		315	18%
2	No		1,445	82%
	Total		1,760	100%

4. Residence

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Off Campus		132	8%
2	BK		141	8%
3	BR		156	9%
4	CC		110	6%
5	DC		164	9%
6	ES		134	8%
7	JE		127	7%
8	MC		138	8%
9	PC		138	8%
10	SM		134	8%
11	SY		163	9%
12	TC		103	6%
13	TD		120	7%
	Total		1,760	100%




5. Have you read the preliminary report on grading?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		736	42%
2	Partially		730	41%
3	No		294	17%
	Total		1,760	100%




6. Do you believe Yale has "grade inflation?"

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		659	44%
2	No		540	36%
3	Uncertain		309	20%
	Total		1,508	100%


7. Do you believe any changes need to be made to address the current grading system?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		378	25%
2	No		899	59%
3	Uncertain		235	16%
	Total		1,512	100%

8. Are you in favor of a 0-100 grading scale instead of letter grades?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		163	11%
2	No		1,195	79%
3	Uncertain		149	10%
	Total		1,507	100%

9. On the whole I believe the effects of the proposed changes to grading will be

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Negative		1,186	79%
2	Positive		113	8%
3	Uncertain		204	14%
	Total		1,503	100%

10. On Wednesday, March 27th, the YCC will host an open forum with the ad-hoc Committee on Grading. Please write any questions you would like to ask the committee during this forum (Q₁ - top preference, Q₃₊ - lowest preference):

Students submitted hundreds of questions, which the YCC narrowed down to the 12 most prevalent. Professor Ray Fair spent the first part of the forum answering those questions.

11. Please write any additional comments or suggestions regarding grading.

Students submitted hundreds of comments, which the YCC synthesized into the above student response to the Ad Hoc Committee on Grading Report.