



University Senate TRANSMITTAL FORM

Senate Document #:	10-11-11
PCC ID #:	N/A
Title:	Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average
Presenter:	Charles Delwiche, Chair, Senate APAS Committee
Date of SEC Review:	April 8, 2011
Date of Senate Review:	n/a
Voting (highlight one):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On resolutions or recommendations one by one, or 2. In a single vote 3. To endorse entire report
Statement of Issue:	<p>At the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year, the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee with reviewing the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcript and Calculation of Grade Point (GPA) Average. The SEC asked APAS to make a recommendation concerning whether or not the University should reconsider its grading system. While the University Senate voted in December 2005 to adopt a +/- grading system, and the President approved the policy, implementation of the system was delayed by the Office of the Provost in 2006. The +/- grading system has not yet been implemented. Currently, the University gives faculty the option of issuing +/- grades, but they are not included in the calculation of GPA.</p>
Relevant Policy # & URL:	III-6.00(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE, http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii600a.html
Recommendation:	<p>The APAS Committee recommends that the Office of the Provost develop an implementation plan for the transition to +/- grading as described in the attached report. The elements of such a plan should include: 1) reevaluation of the likely impact on the current student population of changing to +/- grading, 2) identification of criteria for readiness for transition to +/-</p>

	<p>grading, and 3) a timeline for implementation, including contingency plans in case the necessary conditions are not yet present.</p> <p>Given the potential complexity of implementing +/- grading, it would be advisable to formulate a joint Provost/Senate oversight committee to help define and discuss the issues, and to identify the best way to handle them. In the course of crafting this report, APAS discussed recommending that representatives from the Office of the Registrar, the Graduate Council, the Office of the Provost, the APAS Committee, the Office of Information Technology, and others who broadly represent the academic community be appointed to such a committee.</p> <p>APAS also requests by September 1, 2011, from the Office of the Provost, an implementation plan with a timetable that includes a date for full implementation.</p>
<p>Committee Work:</p>	<p>The APAS Committee began discussing this issue in September 2010. During the course of its review, the committee researched grading systems at peer institutions and reviewed the history of the topic within the Senate. The Chair of APAS also met with Provosts Favardin and Wylie to discuss considerations involved in the policy.</p> <p>Following research and deliberation, the committee determined that the current grading system is not in the best interest of the University of Maryland or its students. APAS continues to support the resolution passed by the Senate in 2005, with one change to the recommended value for an A+. On March 10, 2011, the APAS Committee voted unanimously to put forward the recommendations contained in the attached report.</p>
<p>Alternatives:</p>	<p>The University could continue to prolong the implement of a +/- grading system at the risk of remaining far behind our peers on this fundamental issue.</p>
<p>Risks:</p>	<p>There are no associated risks.</p>
<p>Financial Implications:</p>	<p>There are no related financial implications.</p>
<p>Further Approvals Required: <i>(*Important for PCC Items)</i></p>	<p>Senate Executive Committee Approval, Provost Approval</p>

Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee

Report on the “Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average”

Senate Document # 10-11-11

March 2011

Background

The University Senate voted in December 2005 to adopt a +/- grading system (“Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values,” Senate Document 99-00-56), with broad support from all constituencies, and the President approved the policy. The Office of the Provost decided in 2006 to delay implementation of +/- grading at that time because of concerns over the potential impact of such a change on academic resources, student retention, and time to degree. Since then, the Senate has received occasional queries from both students and faculty concerning the status of +/- grading at Maryland, including a formal proposal received in 2010 (Appendix 7). The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the Academic Procedures and Standards committee (APAS) with revisiting the matter of +/- grading and making a recommendation concerning whether or not the University should reconsider the Maryland grading system. The SEC requested that the APAS Committee review the entire history and past reviews of this topic. The SEC specifically asked APAS to comment on whether the current process is appropriate, compare the University’s existing practice to those at our peer institutions, and recommend changes to the current policy as appropriate.

APAS investigated grading systems at our peer institutions, and discussed the existing policy as a committee. APAS also reviewed the history of this topic (Appendix 5). The Chair of the APAS Committee also met with Provosts Favardin and Wylie to discuss considerations involved in this policy.

Grading policy at the University of Maryland currently gives faculty the option of issuing +/- grades, but these are not included in the calculation of the GPA (Grade Point Average), such that A+, A, and A- all contribute 4.0 grade points to the GPA, and similarly B+, B, and B- 3.0, C+, C, and C- 2.0, D+, D, and D- 1.0, and F 0. This is a strikingly different grading system from that used at any of the Maryland Peer Institutions (Appendix 3), all of which differentiate between + and – grades in the GPA, most with an offset of 0.3 grade point units (except for A+, which is calculated as 4.0, the same as an A, at most peer institutions). Another important observation is that graduate and professional programs often recalculate GPA from the transcript, so a student’s GPA as calculated by the University of Maryland is often at variance with how it appears to other institutions.

It is also important to recognize that the transition from one system of calculating GPA to another may be expected to have a variety of effects, some of which may be difficult to anticipate. One important effect would be on program requirements. Many programs

define acceptable performance in terms of a calculation of overall GPA, or GPA for courses that are required for the program. Consequently, changing the way in which GPA is calculated will change the *de facto* requirements of many individual programs, while those programs that define their grade requirements in terms of specific grades may be unaffected. Thus a change in grading systems would be expected to have a heterogeneous effect on different programs.

This is not simply a matter of technical qualifications. If the boundary between satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance is changed, then it may be necessary to add instructional resources to permit students to repeat courses in a way that would not have been necessary before the change. Furthermore, because there are demographic differences in overall grade performance, this effect would not be uniformly distributed across the University community.

Committee Findings

APAS is in unanimous agreement that the current hybrid grading system is not in the best interest of the University of Maryland or its students. Grades are intended to be comparative measures, and using a fundamentally different grading system than is in use at most other institutions is intrinsically problematic. The comparative use of grades includes, but is not limited to: students' own use in monitoring their performance over time and among different subjects; the institution's use in comparing performance within and among students, programs, and cohorts; and other institutions use in assigning transfer credits, determining admissions, and assessing other aspects of student performance over time. The difference between the way in which GPA is calculated at Maryland and how it is calculated elsewhere can produce confusion, and is probably disadvantageous to graduates. Although it recognized the potential complications described above, the committee felt strongly that it is important to bring the University's grading system in line with those used at other institutions.

The primary matter of concern is the transition from one grading system to another; +/- grade systems are in nearly universal use and are well accepted elsewhere, so there is no reason to believe that there would be long-term adverse consequences of adopting +/- grading. It is vital to develop a mechanism to permit individual programs to adjust their requirements to minimize adverse effects of the transition.

In anticipation of possible difficulties, APAS discussed the interpretation of specific grades. In particular, APAS noted that at most peer institutions a C- appears to be regarded as satisfactory for individual courses required by a given program (including general programs), and that D- is generally required as satisfactory for credit toward degree in fully elective courses. A requirement to maintain an overall GPA of 2.0 for graduation is typical for undergraduate degrees, and 3.0 typical for graduate degrees. Furthermore, APAS noted that although the 2005 Senate bill recommended that an A+ be calculated at a grade point value of 4.3, this would be unusual among our peer institutions. APAS also noted that not all aspects of +/- grading have to be implemented simultaneously. The committee recommends that students graduating within five years

of admission have their programmatic requirements be calculated according to the system in use at the time of their matriculation. This may mean that during the implementation period the transcript should show the GPA calculated in two different ways.

Recommendations

Consequently, it is the recommendation of APAS that the Office of the Provost develop an implementation plan for the transition to +/- grading. The elements of such a plan should include: 1) reevaluation of the likely impact on the current student population of changing to +/- grading, 2) identification of criteria for readiness for transition to +/- grading, and 3) a timeline for implementation, including contingency plans in case the necessary conditions are not yet present. Given the potential complexity of implementing +/- grading, it would be advisable to formulate a joint Provost/Senate oversight committee to help define and discuss the issues, and to identify the best way to handle them. APAS also requests by September 1, 2011, from the Office of the Provost, an implementation plan with a timetable that includes a date for full implementation.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Current University Policy

Appendix 2 – Recommended University Policy (pending implementation review)

Appendix 3 – Peer Institutions' Grading Scales

Appendix 4 – References to Current Policy in the Undergraduate Catalog and the Graduate Catalog

Appendix 5 – History and Past Review of +/- Grading

Appendix 6 – Charge from Senate Executive Committee (SEC)

Appendix 7 – Proposal from Graduate Student, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix 1 – Current University Policy

III-6.00(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING
ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE
POINT AVERAGE

APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT 1 AUGUST 1991; updated
June 8, 2001 Effective Fall 2001; amended April
14, 2010

I. Policy

For the policy on resident credit, see III-7.00(A)
University of Maryland Degree Requirements.

Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F, but not P and S, shall be used in computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values of 4.00 (A+,A,A-), 3.00 (B+,B,B-), 2.00(C+,C,C-), 1.00 (D+,D,D-) and 0.00 respectively. A grade of XF shall be computed in the same manner as a grade of F. Marks of I, P, S, W and NGR will not be used in the computation of semester and cumulative GPA.

Appendix 2 – Recommended University Policy (pending implementation review)

Changes Listed in Blue/Bold Font

III-6.00(A) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING
ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE
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I. Policy

For the policy on resident credit, see III-7.00(A)
University of Maryland Degree Requirements.

Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C,
C-, D+, D, D- and F, but not P and S, shall be used in
computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values
of:

A+ = 4.0	A = 4.0	A- = 3.7
B+ = 3.3	B = 3.0	B- = 2.7
C+ = 2.3	C = 2.0	C- = 1.7
D+ = 1.3	D = 1.0	D- = 0.7
	F = 0	

~~4.00 (A+, A, A-), 3.00 (B+, B, B-), 2.00 (C+, C, C-), 1.00
(D+, D, D-) and 0.00 respectively.~~ A grade of XF shall be
computed in the same manner as a grade of F. Marks of I, P,
S, W and NGR will not be used in the computation of
semester and cumulative GPA.

Appendix 3 – Peer Institutions' Grading Scales

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.00	C+	2.33
A	4.00	C	2.00
A-	3.67	C-	1.67
B+	3.33	D+	1.33
B	3.00	D	1.00
B-	2.67	D-	.67
		F	0.00

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	<i>Not used (except by Law School)</i>	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	<i>Not used</i>
		F	0.0

University of California, Berkeley

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.0	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
		F	0.0

University of California, Los Angeles

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.0	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
		F	0.0

University of Michigan

Grade	Grade Points	Grade	Grade Points
A+	4.0	C+	2.3
A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
		F	0.0

Appendix 4 – References to Current Policy in the Undergraduate Catalog and the Graduate Catalog

Undergraduate Catalog, 2010-2011:

Registration, Academic Requirements, and Regulations

Grade Point Average, Computation of

GPA is computed by dividing the total number of quality points accumulated in courses for which a grade of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or F has been assigned by the total number of credits attempted in those courses. Courses for which a mark of P, S, I, NGR or W has been assigned are not included in computing the GPA. Each letter grade has a numerical value: A+, A, A- = 4; B+, B, B- = 3; C+, C, C- = 2; D+, D, D- = 1; F = 0. Multiplying this value by the number of credits for a particular course gives the number of quality points earned for that course.

See Repeat Policy to determine the effect of repeated courses in the calculation of GPA.

The Graduate Catalog, University of Maryland, Fall 2010-Spring 2011:

Academic Policies: General Policies and The Academic Record

Grade Point Average Computation

The A is calculated at 4 quality points, B at 3 quality points and C at 2 quality points. The grades of D, F and I receive no quality points. Students do not earn credit toward the degree for courses in which they receive a grade of D or F. For graduate students, all courses taken that are numbered 400 and above (except 500-level courses, those numbered 799, 898, or 899, and those graded with an S) will be used in the calculation of the grade point average. A student may repeat a course in an effort to earn a better grade. Whether higher or lower, the most recent grade will be used in computing the grade point average. Grades for graduate students remain as part of the student's permanent record. Changes in previously recorded grades may be made if timely (within one semester) and if the original instructor certifies that an actual mistake was made in determining or recording the grade. The change must be approved by the department chair and the Dean of the Graduate School. Graduate credit transferred from another institution will not be included in the calculation of the grade point average.

Appendix 5 – History and Past Reviews of +/- Grading

In July 1999, Provost Geoffroy assembled a ten-member Task Force on Grading to examine the current grading system and weigh the pros and cons of changing to a plus/minus system. The Task Force included faculty, staff, and students. The Task Force conducted a thorough and thoughtful review of the University's current grading system, the grading system of our peers, the effects of adopting a plus-minus system, and the projected costs of such a change. In the course of their study, the Task Force also canvassed large numbers of students and faculty for their opinions. The report concludes that the University would benefit from including plus and minus symbols in its grading.

The Task Force on Grading gave a report (as an informational item) at the Senate Meeting on February 3, 2000.

The SEC met on March 28, 2000 and reviewed amendments to the report.

The report was approved (as amended) on April 6, 2000.

In April 2000, Dean Hampton sent a memo to the faculty explaining that pluses and minuses will be visible on the official student transcript, but not factored into the overall GPA. Implementation of this phase will be in Fall 2001. (*The University's current policy "III-6.20(A) University of Maryland Grading Symbols and Notations Used on Academic Transcripts became effective Fall 2001*).

An ad hoc group from Undergraduate Studies, headed by the Registrar's Office, met to set guidelines for reviewing the data during the 2000-2001 academic year to determine the possible impact of plus-minus grading if the pluses and minuses were given full weight.

In November 2003, the Registrar issued a report on the impact and implications of plus-minus grading. The SEC discussed the report at its meeting on December 18, 2003.

The Educational Affairs Committee passed a proposal for plus-minus grading with numerical values at its October 31, 2005 meeting. The committee developed a list of FAQs to be presented with the report to the Senate on December 12, 2005.

The Senate approved the Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values from the Senate Educational Affairs Committee (Chaired by John Newhagen) on December 12, 2005.

President Mote approved the Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values (99-00-56) on April 26, 2006.

Implementation was delayed until issues with respect to the application of the policy to academic requirements of undergraduate and graduate programs could be resolved. On April 26, 2006, the President asked the Provost and the Senate to appoint a task

force charged with completing a detailed analysis of the issues, drafting an implementation plan, and, if necessary, proposing revisions to the policy. In the interim, the current grading policy remained in effect.

In May 2006, Associate Provost Phyllis Peres sent an email to the Campus Community about the delay in implementation of the new plus-minus grading policy. The email explained that Provost Destler appointed an implementation team to plan the fine points of putting the policy into effect. She stated that based on new data that emerged during their review, the President, the Provost, and the Chair of the Senate recommend that implementation of the policy be postponed pending completion of a thorough analysis of the policy's short- and long-term effects on all students.

On May 2, 2006, the Senate Executive Committee nominated members for the Task Force on Plus-Minus Grading. The nominees were submitted to the Provost's Office.

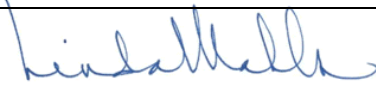
The first meeting of the Task Force was proposed for Fall 2006. Provost Destler was scheduled to attend the February 1, 2007 SEC meeting to discuss problems of implementation.

On February 1, 2007 Destler referred to a study that impacted a decision on plus-minus grading. It showed that if the policy were implemented, the overall graduation rate would go down by 2%. For minorities, the graduation rate would go down by 5%. He proposed an alternate approach. Students could log on to Testudo and request an unofficial record of the GPA with quality points for the pluses and minuses. This recalculation would not be official, and it would not appear on the transcript. The SGA and the Provost's Student Advisory Committee endorsed this proposal as an interim solution. It could be implemented in the Fall 2007. The SEC agreed unanimously for this to be used temporarily. A Task Force would not be formed.

On March 12, 2007, Provost Destler reported to the Senate about the issues he expressed to the SEC. He announced a delay of two years in the implementation of plus-minus grading.



**University Senate
CHARGE**

Date:	September 28, 2010
To:	Charles Delwiche Chair, Academic Procedures & Standards Committee
From:	Linda Mabbs Chair, University Senate 
Subject:	Proposal to Review the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculations of Grade Point Average
Senate Document #:	10-11-11
Deadline:	March 1, 2011

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) requests that the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee review the attached proposal regarding revisions to the University of Maryland Policies Concerning Academic Transcripts and Calculation of Grade Point Average (GPA) (III-6.00(A)). This proposal raises concerns about the fairness of flat-grade GPA calculations.

The Senate approved the proposal entitled, "Proposal for Plus-Minus Grading with Numerical Values" (Senate Document # 99-00-56) at its December 12, 2005 meeting. President Mote approved the proposal but subsequently raised several concerns about implementation. There was discussion of a Joint Provost/Senate Task Force to review these concerns, however, Provost Destler reported to both the SEC and the Senate that plus-minus grading would negatively impact minorities and the disadvantaged. He proposed an alternative approach where students could log on to Testudo and request an unofficial record of the GPA with quality points for pluses and minuses. This recalculation would not be official, and it would not appear on the transcript. The Provost's Student Advisory Committee and the Student Government Association endorsed Destler's proposal as an interim solution to the problem.

The SEC requests that the committee review the entire history and past reviews of this topic. It has been five years since the initial approval of the proposal. The interim solution was intended to be temporary, and the SEC feels that a review of the current policy is warranted. Therefore, we ask that the APAS Committee review the implementation of the approved proposal and the interim solution.

Specifically, we ask that you:

1. Comment on whether the current process is appropriate.

2. Compare our existing practice to those at our peer institutions.
3. Recommend changes to the existing policy if appropriate.

We ask that you submit your report and recommendations to the Senate Office no later than March 1, 2011. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office, extension 5-5804.



**University Senate
PROPOSAL FORM**

Name:	Jamison Kantor
Date:	8/8/10
Title of Proposal:	Reform to policy III-6.00(A): UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE
Phone Number:	585-355-2989
Email Address:	jkantor@umd.edu
Campus Address:	Tawes 2200
Unit/Department/College:	English/ARHU
Constituency (faculty, staff, undergraduate, graduate):	Graduate Student – Doctoral Candidate
Description of issue/concern/policy in question:	Fairness of flat-grade GPA calculations. Pernicious academic culture created by such calculations. See supporting material.
Description of action/changes you would like to see implemented and why:	Implementation of a more nuanced calculations (taking account of “+” and “-” reflected in 1/3 point increments). Would be more accurate and fair, and could promote a healthier academic environment. See supporting material.
Suggestions for how your proposal could be put into practice:	Simply revise the policy to calculate student’s grade accounting for 1/3 point increments. The calculation method is widely practiced. See supporting material.

Additional Information:	If possible, would love to discuss this issue at a University Senate hearing.
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Please send your completed form and any supporting documents to senate-admin@umd.edu or University of Maryland Senate Office, 1100 Marie Mount Hall, College Park, MD 20742-7541. Thank you!

Proposal to Reform Policy

III-6.00(A): UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICIES CONCERNING ACADEMIC
TRANSCRIPTS AND CALCULATION OF GRADE POINT AVERAGE

APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT 1 AUGUST 1991; updated June 8, 2001. Effective Fall
2001; amended April 14, 2010

I. Policy

...

Credits completed with grades of A+, A, A!, B+, B, B!, C+, C, C!, D+, D, D! and F, but not P and S, shall be used in computation of the semester and cumulative GPA with values of 4.00 (A+,A,A-), 3.00 (B+,B,B-!), 2.00(C+,C,C-!), 1.00 (D+,D,D-!) and 0.00 respectively. A grade of XF shall be computed in the same manner as a grade of F. Marks of I, P, S, W and NGR will not be used in the computation of semester and cumulative GPA.

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The University of Maryland at College Park has implemented many transcript methods that fairly account for student performance in the classroom. For instance, the recent adoption of the “XF” grade has allowed faculty to firmly censure academic dishonesty, whereas a single-sanction policy can often be ruthless or discordant with the offense. The University has also given first-year students one opportunity to erase a bad grade from their transcripts. I would argue that this policy does less to encourage apathy, than it does to retain potentially good students who simply need a wake-up call to prioritize their studies. Both of these policies strike a delicate balance between fairly accounting for student lapses, and allowing these students an opportunity to learn from these lapses in-house.

However, the University’s flat-grading implemented on GPA calculations—where an “A+, A, and A-” gets “4.0,” a “B+, B, B-” gets “3.0,” and so on—is a transcript policy that is in serious need of revision.

To begin, the policy is clunky. It fails to account for major differences between “+” work and “-” work. And there are undeniable qualitative distinctions between “89” work “80” work. Oftentimes that difference is a mark of sustained effort and engagement. The student who begins with an 80 gains that 89 by focusing more deeply on the material, and by raising her effort throughout the semester. But short-term, the policy levels all students into a single evaluative category that erases growing competence in a subject. The opposite is also true. For instance, a student whose continued participation lapses in a discussion section results in a drop from an 87 to an 80, needs to be assigned an accurate measure of these lapses. It might be unsavory to say, but grades must also be coercive.

However, one could argue that long-term, the flat-grade policy produces negligible differences to a policy accounting for the “+” and “-”. Over time, the 90 with which I squeaked by makes up for the 89 that fell just short. Additionally, GPA’s are often recalculated by other post-graduate institutions, which use their own rules to measure candidate’s undergraduate performance. Thus,

short-term discrepancies seem to be mitigated by long-term results. We must only clearly inform our students of this fact to ensure them that their GPA is an accurate aggregate of their performance. And yet, these claims—the arithmetic defense of a flat-grading system—are easily countered by the pernicious academic culture created by such a system.

Flat-grading undoubtedly promotes a culture of “extrinsic rewards,” where students are more fixated on achieving a number (sometimes by any means necessary), than by internalizing course material. A flat-grading system encourages this fixation by giving students an all-or-nothing mentality: those on the cusp of a better grade will obsessively attempt to achieve it, those in the middle of a solid grade are perfectly content to rest there. Thus, grades begin to feel like peaks to be conquered or camped upon, not precise scales of evaluation. Beyond the detrimental extrinsic-focus it encourages in the student, flat grading undoubtedly leads to an increased practice of “grade-grubbing,” where students pressure instructors and faculty to bump grades without adequate reason. Mostly, this results in the growth of benign, irritating emails. The majority of teachers respond professionally and equitably to each one. *But some will not.* Rather than deal with the hassle of inordinate complaints, a less dedicated teacher will assign requested grades rather than earned ones. Even a *more* dedicated teacher could fall prey to the system, feeling that a student’s 88 is far more deserving of 4.0 full GPA points than the modest 3.0 an 88 confers. Finally, if the flat-grade system can be seen to encourage an all-or-nothing mentality in students, then we can be sure that it also encourages academic dishonesty. The less scrupulous student who knows that even a slight edge on their average (1%) remunerates a bigger grade is much more likely to plagiarize, cheat, and generally forego academic honor. I should note that I do not believe that the system *causes* academic dishonesty, it simply makes it more appealing.

For goals both short-term (fair evaluation) and long term (promoting a healthy academic culture), the University of Maryland needs to adopt a more nuanced system of grading. As in many institutions, grades should reflect student performance by adding or subtracting third points based on the “+” or “-”. An A- would no longer be 4.0, but a 3.66. But a B+ would no longer be a 3.0 but a 3.33. This system favorably replicates a sliding scale of assessment, and avoids the peak-and-plateau culture promoted by flat-grades. Of course, the system would offer better evaluative accuracy and fairness. But it could also result in happier teachers, less dishonesty, and students more attuned to the content of their education than the “rewards” associated with it.