

CAS Grading Report (April 2007)

CAS received responses to our grading survey from 12 department Chairs representing all academic divisions: Anthropology, Art, Art History, Biology, Chemistry, Classics, Economics, History, Math, MLL, Philosophy, and Political Science.

In our effort to summarize the results, a few things should be said at the outset: not all departments answered all of the suggested questions; answers to the same question varied in strength and nuance; many departments offered additional comments. We've tried our best to capture the sense of the faculty.

1. Grade Inflation/Compression: in what is perhaps the most striking result of our survey, the overwhelming majority of departments responding think grade inflation/compression **is a problem** at Kenyon. While some departments were more emphatic than others, and while a few departments preferred to characterize the problem in terms of grade compression rather than inflation, 7 departments responded that we do have a problem at Kenyon, 2 disagreed, and 3 didn't respond to this particular question.

Few departments expressed dissatisfaction with their own grading standards, though some worried about compression in the B/B+ range. On the Inflation v. Compression emphasis, CAS notes that since all of the compression occurs in the A-B range, decompression should result in lowering the GPA: there's nowhere to grade but down. Many departments noted that grade inflation isn't just a Kenyon but a national problem, and many of the same departments who think we have a problem at Kenyon, worried about the effect unilateral action toward rigor might have on our students. We will say a bit more about this below.

2. Causes of Grade Inflation: Several departments wondered if an increasing emphasis on course evaluations, which are used in tenure and promotion decisions, might explain some of the upward movement in grades over the years. More specifically, some departments wondered if untenured junior faculty were more likely than tenured senior faculty to worry about the connection between grades and student evaluations. But when surveying GPA by rank for the Fall 2006 semester, CAS found that both the GPA and the median grade were higher for Full and Associate Professors than they were for Assistant Professors. A number of departments thought the Mulligan/Late Drop could be partly to blame for grade inflation. CAS notes that 7,000 grades are typically given in a semester, compared to around 100 mulligans. Even if we changed all mulligans to F's and included them in the college GPA, the change is not significant (for Fall 2006, the college GPA would fall from 3.31 to 3.259; under a more likely scenario, changing all mulligans to C's, the GPA would fall from 3.31 to 3.29). While elimination of the mulligan might be desirable for other reasons, it does not appear as though it would have much of an effect on the college GPA. A few departments pointed to the improving quality of Kenyon students, evidenced by higher high school grades and SAT scores, to explain improving

grades at Kenyon. But CAS notes that recent studies have raised the possibility that grade inflation is occurring in high schools as well as colleges (*NYTimes*, 2/23/07), so it's hard to say for sure that improvements in high school GPA's demonstrates improvement in the quality of the students we admit. Also, numerous studies have contended that SAT scores are a poor predictor of grade performance in college (even the ETS makes no claims to a connection between SAT scores and college performance), so it's difficult to see one as the cause of the other. Finally, while CAS didn't receive any comments about the effect Music ensembles and lessons might have in boosting the College GPA, many of us find that it does come up in casual conversation. In the grade distribution graphs below, CAS records recent grades with and without Music lessons and ensembles included. As you'll see, the pattern of grades is pretty much the same in both cases.

3. Specific Reforms: if there is a consensus about the existence of a problem at Kenyon, there is less agreement about reform. 4 departments thought sharing more grade information (even, some agreed, individual GPA's) a good idea; 5 disagreed. 5 departments thought some GPA information should be included in Review Dossiers; 4 disagreed. 4 departments would welcome public statements from the Administration on grading rigor; 3 departments would not. 3 departments thought it might be a good idea to include class GPA's on student transcripts; 4 disagreed. One department commented that it might be useful to include students in any discussion of grading reform. CAS concurs. We wonder, for example, if students are as concerned about grades as we tend to think they are.

4. General Reform: whether or not they thought grade inflation a problem at Kenyon, many respondents worried about the negative effect unilateral action might have on our students as they compete with students from other elite schools for admission to graduate and professional schools or try to secure internships and employment. On the other hand, individuals in some departments worried that grade inflation might put us at risk of graduating students whose records would be viewed with suspicion by schools and employers. Some departments with relatively low GPA's also worried about disadvantaging their students in competition for college-wide prizes and honors. As noted above, CAS wonders what students think about this. Do they worry about how varying grading standards at Kenyon affect their chances of being admitted to Phi Beta Kappa or receiving other honors? Do they wonder if Kenyon grading standards are the same as those at other schools? CAS would also like to know a bit more about how grades are viewed by graduate schools and employers. We often hear that grades have become so uninformative that schools and employers are looking to test scores, recommendations, and interviews to help them make accurate judgments about students. Is this true?

5. Data: In our Committee discussions, in conversations with colleagues, and in response to concerns raised in some department reports, CAS detects both surprise and concern among Kenyon faculty at the typical distribution of grades. Over the last three semesters, the modal grade at Kenyon has been an A. Faculty award A more often than A-, A- more often than B+, B+ more often than B, B more often than B-, and so on down the line. As many professors have noted, there's a marked fall off in grades below B.

The Registrar now regularly supplies faculty with this information in numerical form. In our opinion, bar graphs express it in a more immediate and impressive way, so we've included several below. In addition, we've included a graph that tracks Kenyon GPA from 1975 to the present. For a longer view, please see the P: drive, CAS folder, where Kenyon GPA is tracked from 1956 to the present.

To the grade data already collected on the P: drive (CAS folder), we've added some new items:

--GPA comparisons for over 20 liberal arts schools for the past five years.

--GPA by rank for Fall 2006.

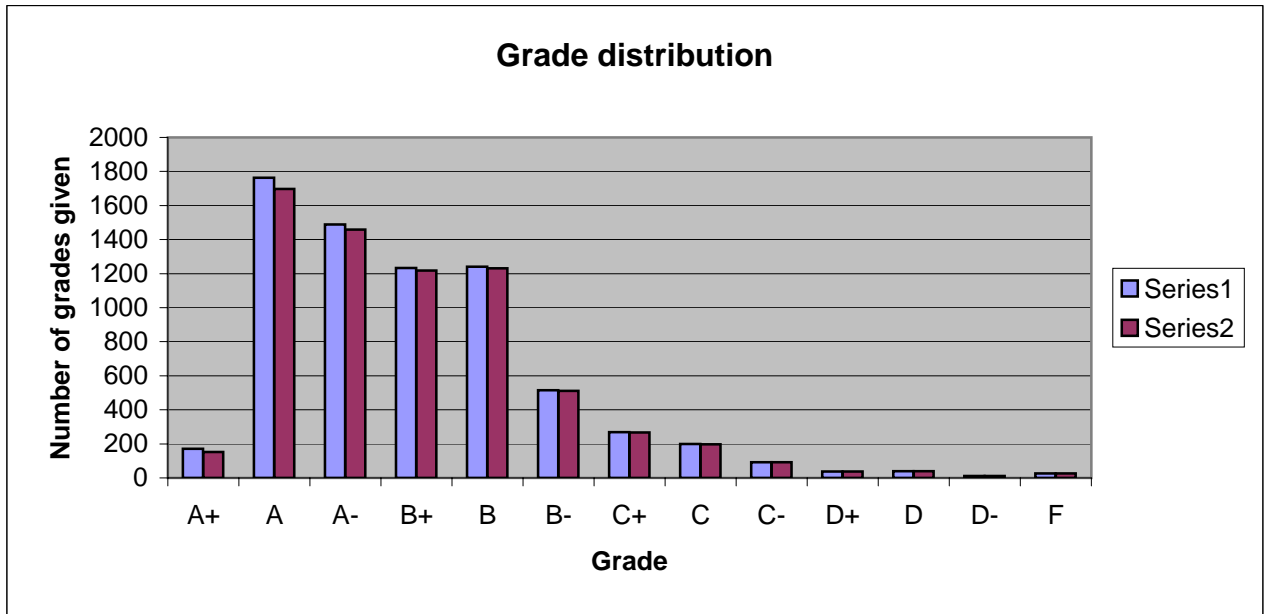
--Data on how Late Drops or Mulligans affect GPA.

Respectfully Submitted

Tim Spiekerman, CAS

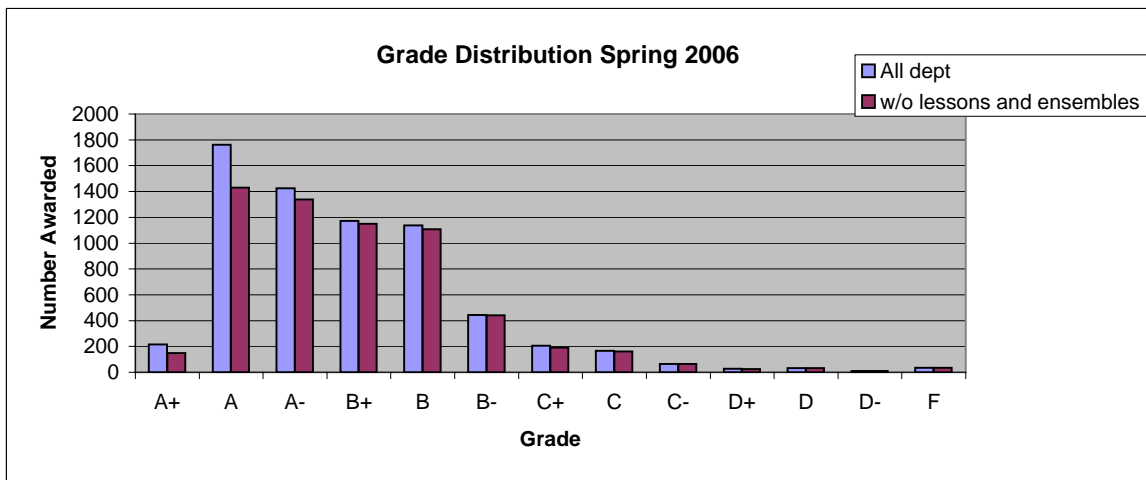
Fall 2005

Grade	all grades	without lessons and ensembles	
A+	171	18	153
A	1763	66	1697
A-	1489	31	1458
B+	1234	16	1218
B	1240	8	1232
B-	515	4	511
C+	268	2	266
C	199	2	197
C-	93	0	93
D+	37	0	37
D	40	0	40
D-	12	0	12
F	27	0	27



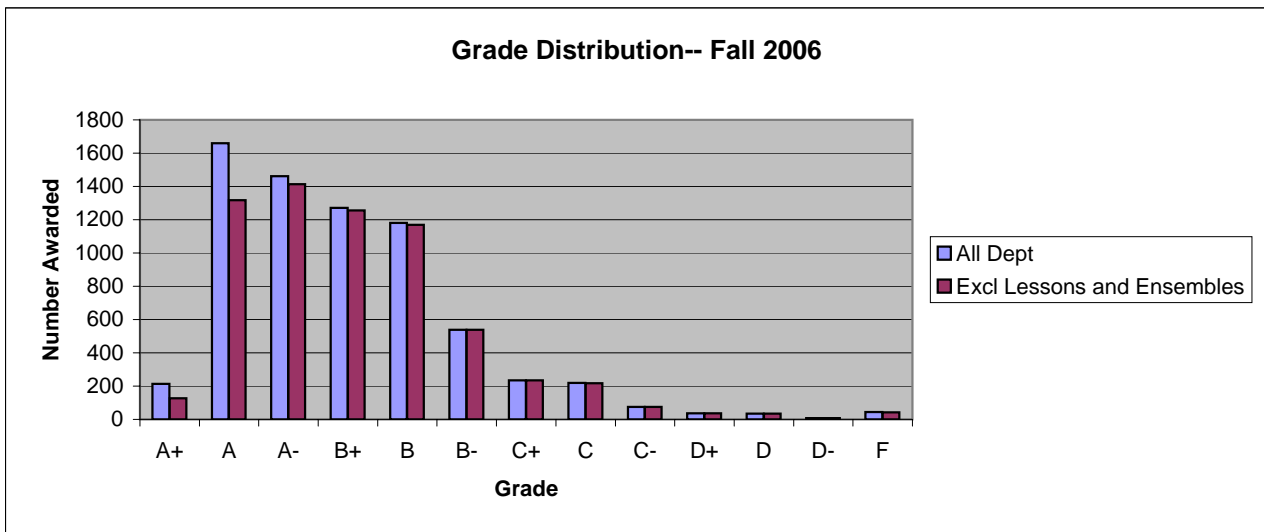
Spring 2006

Grade	All dept	Music Ensembles and Lessons	w/o lessons and ensembles
A+	216	68	148
A	1763	332	1431
A-	1425	86	1339
B+	1172	23	1149
B	1138	30	1108
B-	444	4	440
C+	206	15	191
C	165	4	161
C-	64	0	64
D+	27	1	26
D	31		31
D-	10	1	9
F	34	0	34



Fall grades 2006

Grade	All Dept	Music Ensembles & lessons	Excl Lessons and Ensembles
A+	214	87	127
A	1659	341	1318
A-	1461	47	1414
B+	1272	16	1256
B	1181	11	1170
B-	539	1	538
C+	235	0	235
C	220	2	218
C-	75	0	75
D+	37	0	37
D	35	0	35
D-	7	0	7
F	44	2	42



KENYON GPA HISTORY FROM 1975 – 2006: THREE DECADES (THIRTY PLUS YEARS)
 (from data published by the Registrars and Associate Provosts)

1975	2.96	1986	2.93	1997	3.16
1976	2.88	1987	2.96	1998	3.17
1977	2.90	1988	2.98	1999	3.17
1978	2.93	1989	3.08	2000	3.20
1979	2.82	1990	3.07	2001	3.19
1980	2.85	1991	3.12	2002	3.21
1981	2.86	1992	3.16	2003	3.25
1982	2.91	1993	3.13	2004	3.32
1983	2.96	1994	3.13	2005	3.32
1984	2.96	1995	3.13	2006	3.35
1985	2.89	1996	3.11		

Kenyon GPA History

