

Grade Inflation

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Grade Inflation

A Crisis in College Education

Valen E. Johnson



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Acknowledgments

This book examines the phenomenon of grade inflation and its impact on postsecondary education. Much of this investigation is based on research conducted by others, but a substantial portion originates from data collected at Duke University during the 1998–99 academic year. As a consequence, one might be tempted to conclude that grade inflation is a more serious problem at Duke than it is elsewhere. This is, of course, not true.

Grade inflation is a national, if not international, problem. Recent scandals over grading practices at Ivy League colleges and other top universities illustrate this point all too well. That this book was written using data collected at Duke University should therefore not be regarded as an indictment of Duke, but should instead be viewed as an indication that many professors and administrators at Duke were concerned with this problem and were willing to confront it. This book would not have been possible without their support, and probably would not have been written at many other universities.

Many individuals deserve credit for their role in facilitating campus-wide discussions of grading at Duke and for making the DUET experiment a reality. Among these are Professor Daniel Graham, who chaired a committee that focused attention on the need to reform grading practices, and Professor Daniel Gauthier, who also served on this committee and later helped implement the DUET experiment. Professors Angela O’Rand and John Richards, former chairs of the Arts and Sciences Council and Academic

Affairs Committee, respectively, also played pivotal roles in this process. Angela was an ardent supporter of the DUET experiment and managed to delay its demise for at least one semester longer than I thought possible. John's support was essential in gaining approval for the experiment from the Academic Affairs Committee. Support from Provost John Strohbehn and his successor, Peter Lange, was also critical. Deans Richard White, Robert Thompson, and Mary Nijhout helped guide the project during its nascent stage and assisted in the construction of the DUET survey instrument. Harry DeMik provided important advice regarding the availability and limitations of data from the registrar's office. Ben Kennedy, a student government leader at Duke, along with fellow students Jeff Horowitz and Tammy Katz, was instrumental in encouraging students to participate in the DUET experiment and, in so doing, greatly enhanced the value of data collected. I also thank my colleagues in the Institute of Statistics and Decision Sciences, and in particular its former director Mike West, for their support of the project. Finally, I would like to thank Dalene Stangl, Peter Mueller, Daniel Gauthier, John Kimmel, and my wife Pamela Johnson for many helpful comments that improved the presentation of material in this book.

Contents

Acknowledgments v

1	Introduction	1
	Summary 13	
2	The DUET Experiment	15
	DUET Survey Items 19	
	Appendix: Issues of Nonresponse 27	
3	Grades and Student Evaluations of Teaching	47
	Observational Studies 51	
	Experimental Studies 73	
	Summary 81	
4	DUET Analysis of Grades and SETs	83
	Intervening Variables and Student Evaluations of Teaching 85	
	Implications for Grading Theories 94	
	Causal Effects of Student Grades on SETs 101	
	Summary 114	
	Appendix 118	
	Standardization Procedures for Analyses of “Intervening Variables and SETs” 118	
	Effects of Nonresponse in Analyses of “Intervening Variables and SETs” 120	

	Regression Coefficients for Analyses of Causal Effects of Grades on SETs	125
5	Validity of SETs	133
	SET Development	139
	Toward Product Measures of Student Achievement	150
	Conclusions	164
	Appendix	166
6	Grades and Student Course Selection	167
	Analysis of the DUET Course Selection Data	172
	Effects of Sample Selection	179
	Extension to Selection Decisions Between Academic Fields	188
	Conclusions	193
7	Grading Equity	195
	Differential Grading Standards	197
	Methods for Grade Adjustment	209
	Discussion	224
	Appendix	226
	Pairwise Differences in Grades at Duke University (a la Goldman and Widawski [GW76])	226
	Explanation of Achievement Index Adjustment Scheme	226
8	Conclusions	233
	Reform	239
	 Bibliography	 247
	Index	259