

Proposed Resolution on Transcripts

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Educational Policy
FROM: Chris Cramer, Chair, Faculty Consultative Committee

In order better to inform students, and other recipients of transcripts, of the *meaning* of letter grades earned in courses, I propose, and ask SCEP to endorse, that the U of M transcript be modified to report two additional pieces of information for each grade, namely, the number of students in the course, and the percentile range of students in the course earning the grade reported.

Thus, imagine that Jane Doe takes Phys 1065, Subluminary Neutrinos, and she is awarded an A-. Further imagine that 100 students were enrolled, and that the numbers of each grade awarded in the course were F (5), D (2), C- (6), C (10), C+ (4), B- (9), B (25), B+ (10), A- (9), A (20). Jane's transcript would read:

Dept	Course	Name	Grade	Enroll	%ile Range
Phys	1065	Subluminary Neutrinos	A-	100	72-80

Rationale: The U of M has very non-uniform grade distributions across colleges, levels of courses, and campuses (see attached most recent report to University Senate). In many instances, there has been severe grade compression (e.g., of 7246 1xxx level grades awarded in EHD on the Twin Cities campus, 62.42% were A grades and the average GPA at that level was 3.36). As a result, consumers of transcripts face a considerable challenge in assessing what a particular grade on a transcript "means". However, a percentile range provides very clear context. Thus, if I see on Jane's transcript

Dept	Course	Name	Grade	Enroll	%ile Range
Biol	3065	Weevil Anatomy	A	26	0-100

then I know that every single student in the class received an A. I may be less impressed with that grade than, say, her next class

Dept	Course	Name	Grade	Enroll	%ile Range
Span	5111	Cervantes Deconstructed	B	20	95-100

where I can see that, while Jane got a B, that was in fact the highest grade awarded in the course, and, moreover, Jane was the only one to receive it (reflecting, no doubt, one extraordinarily crotchety professor).

Note that faculty need do nothing more than they already do, i.e., simply enter a grade for every student. The number enrolled is, obviously, equal to the total

number of grades, and the percentile rank is trivially determined by dividing the number of grades at each level by the total number.

I submit that, in general, our best students are disadvantaged by grade compression; they receive grades that do not distinguish them from their peers who did less well but nevertheless earned the same grade because, given an average GPA of 3.3+ (common for many campus/college/levels at the U), *most* students are receiving A grades. When faculty see the new transcripts, they *may* think about using a wider range of grades, which I submit would be a positive outcome.

But, perhaps more importantly, for campuses/colleges/campuses that have *not* succumbed to runaway grade compression, good students will be *advantaged* since their seemingly “low” B grades, for example, may place them in percentile ranges that merit substantially more appreciation.

I note that other schools across the United States, including Research I universities like Cornell and the University of North Carolina, have recently begun to include in their transcripts additional information designed to set individual student grades “in context”. For instance, Cornell reports median grades awarded in a course, and UNC provides extensive information about the percentage of students receiving various grades. (See, for additional background, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/measuring/qa-the-uncertain-future-of-transcript-reform/27456> and <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/May11/FacGrades.html>)

I note that one potential modification to my proposal would be *not* to report the percentile range for courses with an enrollment below, say, 10 students. I personally see no problem with reporting percentile ranges for every course, since it’s obvious when there are very few students that ranges will be wide, but if we assume that many consumers of transcripts are too innumerate to recognize that, I suppose that we might make that choice.

SCEP Grading Distribution

Fall 2010

Data as of 1/28/2011

Campus	1000Level			2000Level			3000Level			4000Level			5000Level		
	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's
UMNCR	3876	2.89	41.05%	846	2.79	36.41%	2344	3	45.39%	296	3.13	47.97%			
UMNDL	21897	2.81	36.81%	7445	2.82	32.05%	11031	3.01	37.60%	4684	3.23	48.61%	763	3.22	48.10%
UMNMO	4124	2.98	42.87%	1297	2.91	35.31%	1639	3.06	40.09%	547	3.35	53.38%			
UMNTC	55655	3.07	42.60%	11226	2.96	35.21%	48257	3.2	44.90%	17332	3.21	44.21%	6175	3.32	53.60%

University of Minnesota, Crookston

Academic Group	1000Level			2000Level			3000Level			4000Level			5000Level		
	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's
Acad Aff	3876	2.89	41.05%	846	2.79	36.41%	2344	3	45.39%	296	3.13	47.97%			

University of Minnesota, Duluth

Academic Group	1000Level			2000Level			3000Level			4000Level			5000Level		
	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's
Accad Supp	1514	3.44	61.23%				120	3.9	95.83%						
Bus/Econ	898	2.5	21.49%	1447	2.68	24.12%	2935	2.76	22.79%	933	2.96	28.51%			
Cont Ed				58	3.33	70.69%	23	3.43	65.22%						
Ed/Hum Srv	3018	3.08	48.31%	1550	3.03	43.23%	2964	3.16	48.62%	1307	3.55	60.98%	99	3.56	69.70%
Fine Arts	3614	3.13	51.99%	725	3.1	41.79%	494	3.13	49.39%	558	3.67	80.47%	17	3.35	76.47%
Lib Arts	7332	2.86	31.59%	1106	2.85	28.30%	2767	3.08	39.14%	703	3.03	38.98%	258	3.3	51.55%
Medicine													39	2.7	23.08%
Pharmacy	46	2.9	34.78%							12	3.92	91.67%			
Sci/Eng	5369	2.52	22.54%	2550	2.66	27.73%	1681	2.97	33.61%	1163	3.1	41.10%	344	3.12	41.28%
UMD-Acad A	100	3.3	56.00%				46	3.45	32.61%						

University of Minnesota, Morris

Academic Group	1000Level			2000Level			3000Level			4000Level			5000Level		
	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's
Acad Aff	181	3.23	45.30%	66	2.92	34.85%	79	3.59	32.91%	27	3.68	81.48%			
Div Educ	472	3.7	43.64%	215	3.01	34.42%	115	3.37	35.65%	239	3.61	53.97%			
Humanities	1679	3.25	57.77%	339	3.21	47.20%	428	3.25	52.34%	70	3.43	62.86%			
Sci/Math	896	2.74	26.56%	502	2.8	32.27%	255	2.83	30.59%	138	3.24	43.48%			
Social Sci	896	2.75	30.36%	175	2.62	22.29%	762	2.99	37.80%	73	2.85	50.68%			

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Academic Group	1000Level			2000Level			3000Level			4000Level			5000Level		
	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's	Grades	GPA	Pct A's
AHCS	126	3.29	46.03%				43	3.69	55.81%	570	3.12	24.91%	245	3.69	45.71%
Bell Mus															
CBS	2526	2.86	25.10%	1193	3.31	44.76%	1519	2.93	27.91%	1390	3	34.96%	53	3.34	43.40%
CCE	30	3.24	50.00%	31	3.85	29.03%	570	3.31	45.26%	550	3.27	51.45%	76	3.16	48.68%
CDES	1217	3.1	38.37%	571	3.26	40.98%	1249	3.22	45.64%	1042	3.28	38.39%	47	3.63	55.32%
CFANS	2779	3.07	39.40%	525	3.2	49.90%	2264	3.21	49.29%	1086	3.31	47.33%	151	3.33	57.62%
CLA	24057	3.19	46.27%	323	3.56	69.04%	24425	3.22	47.40%	3921	3.26	47.74%	1977	3.38	59.79%
CSE	13760	2.74	27.78%	5837	2.79	28.61%	4127	2.83	31.72%	4052	3.01	38.20%	1647	3.17	42.08%
CSOM	472	3.18	25.64%	1510	2.97	29.40%	5433	3.17	29.95%	1812	3.41	44.76%	670	3.15	35.52%
Dent				72	3.1	26.39%	150	3.05	39.33%	74	4	1.35%			
EHD	7246	3.36	62.42%	568	3.28	52.46%	4377	3.41	54.76%	1604	3.18	46.20%	1142	3.57	71.02%
Grad Schl															
Health Sci	397	3.67	82.62%	30	3.85	90.00%									
HSPA	328	3.07	39.94%				76	3.65	78.95%	98	3.54	58.16%	31	3.08	25.81%
Med	84	0	0.00%				1801	3.1	45.14%	182	3.47	56.59%	51	3.48	52.94%
Nursing	93	4	36.56%	84	3.54	70.24%	537	3.66	79.33%	666	3.63	72.52%	40	3.91	90.00%
Pharmacy	839	3.32	56.02%				81	3.46	60.49%	34	3.62	79.41%	35	3.52	62.86%
Pub Health	725	3.54	67.86%				657	3.08	45.51%						
SRVPAA				116	3.86	88.79%	89	3.77	84.27%						
Ugrd Ed Ad	246	3.77	57.72%	53	3.42	30.19%	191	3.51	63.35%	57	3.49	40.35%			
UMR Chance	670	2.99	30.45%	142	2.91	27.46%									
VMed				171	2.15	9.36%				33	3.03	33.33%			
VP Sys Adm	60	3.56	68.33%				659	3.64	69.95%	159	3.88	100.00%			

Note: Measures (GPA, Pct A's and Grades) for subjects with fewer than ten enrolled students are not displayed.