

Grade Distributions An Aid

Grade Inconsistencies Exist At NU

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article by University Registrar Floyd Hoover first appeared in the COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY, The Journal of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Winter 1964. It appeared under the title of "Some Effects of Mailing Grade Distributions to Faculties."

By Floyd Hoover

Over a period of years it was observed that some courses, especially on the freshmen - sophomore level had consistently high rates of failure. Conversely, the grades in some other courses were consistently much higher than others.

In an attempt to bring these discrepancies to light, grade distributions were set up by department and by individual classes within each department. A copy was always mailed to the department chairman and to their respective deans. Whether or not the information was used by departments to any great extent is not known. It is definitely known, however, that there was little or no exchange of information across college lines. It is probably, too, that there was little exchange of information among departments within the same college. The net effect was, therefore, less than had been hoped for.

The distribution of grades of service courses such as mathematics and English is a matter of importance to the colleges they serve. If grades, particularly in specific service courses, are used as one criterion for admission into a college, they become extremely important. Because of excessively low grades, one department can cause a decrease in the enrollment in the college. This actually happened at the University of Nebraska until the facts were brought to light.

During the past five years grade distributions have been mailed to each faculty member at the end of each semester showing the distributions of grades in all freshman and sophomore courses enrolling 70 or more students. These distributions have been set up in terms of courses and not individual classes. Mention should be made that distributions of grades by individual class

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA																						
2 SEM 1962																						
ANALYSIS OF FINAL GRADES																						
Prepared By																						
DATA PROCESSING DEPARTMENT																						
*FOR AVERAGE GRADE, DIVIDE HONOR POINTS BY CREDIT HOURS:																						
COMPUTATIONAL DATA														DESCRIPTIVE								
Dept. No.	DEPT. NAME	Mean	Fail	DISTRIBUTION OF QUANTITATIVE GRADES										No. of Grades	Credit Hours	Honor Points	GRADES			SUMMARY		
				9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0				P	X	Hours Passed	Hours Failed	Hours Failed	
ENGLIS	004	5.536	3%	37	104	187	273	248	152	69	24	35	1129	3387	18750	5	37	3282	15	105		
ENGLIS	007	5.132	6%	7	8	23	24	18	1	4	5	90	265	1360		13	252		13			
ENGLIS	011	5.270	3%	2	5	15	52	45	27	8	1	4	159	318	1676	2	6	310	4	8		
ENGLIS	021	5.152	2%	4	31	42	100	89	83	36	12	10	407	1221	6291	4	33	1191	12	30		
ENGLIS	022	5.394	2%	2	13	50	72	44	34	21	7	6	249	747	4029		12	729		18		
ENGLIS	026	5.923	1%	3	9	29	19	31	9	2	1	1	104	312	1848		7	309	6	3		
GERMAN	002	5.733	7%	7	23	27	25	21	11	7	4	10	135	675	3870		7	625		50		
GERMAN	004	5.813	3%	6	19	14	26	24	11	6	3	3	112	336	1953		6	327		9		
HISTOR	002	4.896	8%	4	13	22	47	47	31	20	11	16	211	633	3099	3	23	585	9	48		
HISTOR	092	5.360	1%	7	27	65	110	125	80	27	9	6	456	1368	7332	1	18	1350	3	18		
HOME E	191C	6.533	%	2	20	42	41	11	6				122	366	2391		3	366				
MICRBI	051F	5.923	%	8	9	25	31	11	13	1	2		91	273	1617		3	273				
MICRBI	100	5.956	%	8	9	17	24	14	11	5	3		91	273	1626		3	273				
MATH	011	4.586	16%	5	8	14	14	10	12	9	11	16	99	297	1362		16	249		48		
MATH	014	3.704	25%	9	7	22	28	22	30	27	39	62	246	982	3637		32	735		247		
MATH	018	4.650	15%	14	37	36	46	57	44	41	22	54	351	1755	8160	1	23	1485	5	270		
MATH	042	4.321	16%	3	12	32	21	14	21	12	17	22	134	402	1737	1	32	336	3	66		
MATH	115	4.028	18%	4	8	10	22	31	33	24	16	32	180	720	2900		12	592		128		
MATH	116	4.640	9%	9	8	19	23	23	23	27	14	15	161	805	3735		14	730		75		
MUSIC	092	8.488	%	261	70	18	7	5	2	1		3	367	365	3098		99	461		3		
				1011	1796	9150	4474	3944	2748	1432	915	850	20320	56284	298148	163	101	1122	53662	399	2727	
				5%	9%	16%	22%	19%	14%	7%	5%	4%										
				Mean = 5.297																		

This chart is a part of a set of grade distributions mailed to faculty members.

sections are still being mailed out to department chairmen and to the appropriate college deans.

By definition of the University Senate, grades of A and B approximate 9; grades of C and D approximate 7; grades of E and F approximate 5; and 1 equals failure. The distribution of grades in the aggregate do not bear this out, but the definition still stands.

Three symbols which are

somewhat unique to the University of Nebraska are O, P, and X. The symbol O indicates Passed but not Graded (used only on the Graduate level); and X indicates dropped or withdrawn in good standing.

If grade distributions show decided skew to either the right or left, distributions of individual class sections can easily be

checked to determine if the pattern of skewing is uniform in the course or is caused by one or more instructors teaching the same course. Should the latter be the case, the Undergraduate Council of Deans always asks for explanations.

Sometimes an instructor's teaching load is shifted if his grading appears to be excessively high or excessively low.

As one direct result of mailing grade distributions to all faculty members, a course which has been open to freshmen was upgraded to sophomore level. It was discovered that even top quarter freshmen were earning low grades in competition with students who had had a year or more of background.

Another course was re-examined in the light of the

grades earned by able freshmen who had met the prerequisites. In effect, it was discovered that teaching techniques were at fault. Re-testing the students showed that learnings had not been acquired. Subsequently, different instructors were assigned and the mean grade in the course moved upward a full grade point.

A few years ago one of the undergraduate colleges established a rule that all of its students must complete one course with a grade of C or better to be eligible for graduation. The inevitable happened. The grade distributions in the course have been heavily

skewed toward the high end of the grading scale. Some semesters no grades below C have been given. Because every faculty member in all colleges receive copies of the grade distributions, this marked skew has been causing some embarrassment and may eventually lead to a modification of the rule.

Drop outs reflect a variety of things: inability of the student to keep up with the class, the course content is not what was expected, dissatisfaction with the presentation, personality conflict, and sometimes, discovery that the course had been completed satisfactorily previously. This last may seem incredible, but it happens, nevertheless.

At the University of Nebraska students are allowed to drop a course in good standing until the end of the fourth week of school. However, students sometimes drop out of class even if they are in bad standing and receive a failure at the end of the semester. Thus, there is no way of knowing the total drop out in a given course on the basis of the grade distributions. Notwithstanding, most shifts out of classes are clearly shown.

To faculty members who like to keep reports over a period of years grade distributions serve well to indicate enrollment fluctuations. There are other and more complete sources of information concerning this point, but the distributions do enable one to tell at a glance which departments are growing faster than others.

Grade distributions ought never be looked upon as absolute measures. They are, after all, largely subjective and probably honest judgments of student progress. Insistence upon conformity to the normal surface of frequencies can lead to a cynical disregard of learnings actually acquired. If grades fail to reflect honest judgments of learnings, they become completely meaningless.

However, in the absence of anything better, freely circulated grade distributions have been beneficial and they do tend to cause instructors to examine themselves a little more closely than might otherwise be the case.

More Students Beginning College During Summer

More students are beginning college this summer and more are continuing their education during the summer.

According to the Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges:

At Pennsylvania State University, nearly one-fourth of the 1964 entering freshmen over 1,000—began their studies this summer. And Louisiana State University found that 27 per cent more freshmen began academic life this summer than last summer.

The University of Minnesota offered a complete orientation program for the first time for freshmen entering the university in either of the two summer terms. "The expanded orientation program," says a University official, "is designed to meet a recognized need for providing the substantial number of students who do start the University in summer the same opportunity to become introduced to university life as those who en-

roll during the regular academic year."

Last year, just under 200 Minnesota freshmen entered in the summer and the increased number of this year's high school graduates has swelled the group of entering freshmen.

Studies at both Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin found that the performance of freshmen who entered in the summer compared favorably with that of those who entered in the fall. At Wisconsin, the men grade-point average for freshmen "in a typical summer" was 2.43, compared to 2.19 in a first semester. The Wisconsin study also found that freshman who entered in the summer "continued to do at least as well as their classmates the next semester."

The Minnesota study, although not specifying grade-point average, found that freshmen entering in the summer of 1963 "performed as well or better from the standpoint of grades earned" than freshmen entering in Fall 1962. "It would appear from this study that these students were not disadvantaged by the rapid pace of the summer session," the Minnesota official commented.

A sampling of six state and land-grant institutions shows a considerable overall increase in summer enrollments. At Wisconsin, enrollment in the new 12-week Summer Session hit an unexpected high of 1,143. Total summer enrollment on the Madison campus was expected to go over 10,000 and at the Milwaukee campus, over 4,000.

At Clemson College, summer enrollment reached a ten-year peak—1,532 this year, compared with 1,347 last summer.

At Louisiana State University, the total summer enrollment of 10,000 equalled the total fall enrollment on the campus seven years ago. The University of Arkansas found a five per cent increase in summer enrollment and the University of North Carolina summer enrollment is expected to equal the 10,415 enrolled in the Spring semester just completed.

Almost two-thirds of the country's college and university full-time undergraduate students — 64 per cent or 1,727,849 — were enrolled in public institutions in Fall 1963, according to an analysis of U.S. Office of Education figures made by the Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

Fifty-seven per cent, or 1,533,684, were attending public institutions in their home state, while seven per cent—194,165—were in out-of-state public institutions.

The breakdown of in-state and out-of-state enrollment in public institutions has particular significance now, at a time when rising enrollments are forcing many state legislatures to ask state and land-grant institutions to consider limiting admission of out-of-state students in order to assure space to qualified residents.

The Association's analysis indicates that almost 200,000 full-time undergraduate students now attend public colleges and universities in states other than their own.

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