

Appendix: Transcript Statement

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY GRADING POLICIES IN UNDERGRADUATE COURSES AND INDEPENDENT WORK

Beginning with fall term 2004–05, grades awarded at Princeton University reflect new institutional grading expectations for undergraduate courses and independent work. These expectations result from the determination of the Princeton faculty to address locally the persistent national problem of grade inflation. This statement explains the new expectations so that the academic records of Princeton students can be properly understood both in their own context and in relation to the records of students in other institutions where grading practices are different from those we have adopted.

Princeton's new expectations posit a common grading standard for every academic department and program, under which A's (A+, A, A-) shall account for less than 35 percent of the grades given in undergraduate courses and less than 55 percent of the grades given in junior and senior independent work. These percentages are consistent with historical grading patterns at Princeton for the two decades between the early 1970s and the early 1990s. For departments that have maintained these patterns over the last decade, the new policy will affirm established practice. For other departments, the new policy will mark a significant break with recent practice. Overall, implementing the new expectations across the University will, at least at present, set Princeton's grade distribution well apart from those of its closest peers.

As the Princeton transcript explains in greater detail, the University faculty has agreed that grades in the A range signify work that is exceptional (A+), outstanding (A), or excellent (A-). Grades in the B range signify work that is very good (B+), good (B), or more than adequate (B-). Grades in the C range signify work that is acceptable in varying degrees. The new policy sets expectations for academic departments and programs rather than individual faculty members. It does not mean that only 35 percent of students in each course will receive a grade in the A range, nor does it mean that a student who does A range work will receive anything other than an A range grade. What it does mean is that if faculty make rigorous evaluative judgments about the quality of student work, we expect that over time, on average, across the University, about 35 percent of undergraduate students will be doing course work of the highest quality, and 55 percent will be doing independent work of the highest quality.

Princeton enrolls a select group of unusually accomplished—indeed, increasingly accomplished—students, whose credentials and achievements place them in the front rank of undergraduates in all American colleges and universities. The new grading policy reflects the commitment of the Princeton faculty to hold these students to the highest standards and to make very careful distinctions in evaluating their work. Princeton grades should be understood, therefore, as rigorous markers of academic performance in an extremely challenging program of undergraduate study.