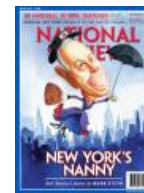


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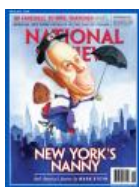
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APRIL 22, 2013, ISSUE

### Higher Education Revalued

Texas considers a proposal to reverse grade inflation

By Thomas K. Lindsay

Grade inflation is real, rampant, and ravaging a university near you. It would be a scandal if more people knew about it.

A bill filed in March in the Texas legislature looks to ensure that more do. Called “Honest Transcript,” it is a model of brevity, at only a little more than 300 words. Yet its sponsors expect it to shake up higher education in the state and beyond. They believe that when the public gets wind of higher education’s widespread grade-inflating practices, it will put a stop to them. Others, less hopeful, think that public transparency will merely reveal public indifference.

The bill would require all public colleges and universities to include on student transcripts, alongside the individual student’s grade, the average grade for the entire class. This would help potential employers determine whether a high grade-point average signified talent and achievement or merely revealed that the student had

Comments 27

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taken easy courses.

The Honest Transcript bill was introduced in the Texas house by Republican Scott Turner, a freshman representative and former NFL cornerback (Redskins, Chargers, Broncos), and in the state senate by veteran Republican Dan Patrick. Supporters argue that its modest transparency requirement would show how grade inflation has severely degraded the significance of college degrees.

A half-century of grade inflation has been demonstrated repeatedly by national studies. Today, an A is the most common grade given in college — 43 percent of all grades, as opposed to 15 percent in the 1960s, according to Stuart Rojstaczer, formerly of Duke, and Christopher Healy, of Furman, who conducted a 50-year survey of grading. Arthur Levine, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, has also studied the trajectory of college grades. He finds that in 1969, 7 percent of two- and four-year college students said their GPA was an A-minus or higher; by 2009, 41 percent of students did. Having been either a college student, a professor, or an administrator for nearly 30 years, I am not surprised by such findings. Nor, I suspect, is anyone else in the academy. And neither are employers. People who make hiring decisions here in Texas complain to me that grade inflation makes it virtually impossible to rank job applicants accurately, because nearly all have A or B averages.

It gets worse. A 2011 national study published as the book *Academically Adrift*, by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, found that our puffed-up prodigies are learning much too little. Thirty-six percent of the students it surveyed show little or no increase in their ability for critical thinking, complex reasoning, and clear writing after four years of college. Small wonder that employers are frustrated, with the annual parade of impressive transcripts hiding empty heads.

Employer concerns notwithstanding, universities have a higher calling than simply preparing future workers. Almost all of them proclaim in their mission statements that they seek to enhance their students' capacity for independent thought. In undermining this, their noblest calling (which harkens back to Socrates' declaration that "the unexamined life is not worth living"), grade inflation is especially harmful: It eats away at the essence and morale of an academic institution. For Rojstaczer and Healy, "when college students perceive that the average grade in a class will be an A, they do not try to excel. It is likely that the decline in student study hours, student engagement, and literacy are partly the result of diminished academic expectations."

This, then, is the academic reality whose veil the bill would lift: Too many students are learning too little, yet their grades have never been so high.

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Roger • 2 days ago

One reason for this is that large research universities care very little for teaching. Good teaching doesn't get rewarded within the tenure and promotion process. Why, therefore, should faculty devote much time to it?

5 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

Matthew Kilburn • 2 days ago

Employers have no right to complain. Job training was never the intended purpose of higher education, yet companies now expect to be served the "creme of the crop" on a silver platter, after forcing them through anywhere from 4-6 years of frequently irrelevant and unrelated to their career coursework.

When you can't even get an interview unless you have a GPA above a 3.5, there is your problem. Employers created the demand, colleges filled the supply. What is the point for a student to go to college and pay a fortune if it won't help them?

Employers don't like it? Tough. Do your own d\*\*\* job, and actually interview the candidates to find out how well suited you think they might be. Stop pawning it off on universities, at the cost of many tens of thousands of dollars to the students.

4 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

Joel → Matthew Kilburn • 2 days ago

Do we really think employers have been fooled by grade inflation?

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

RenegadeScholar • 2 days ago

*Too many students are learning too little, yet their grades have never been so high.*

That explains why university-degreed leftists think they are so educated, when in truth they know so little.

4 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

Ekienitz • 2 days ago

Universities are selling degrees, and they are no doubt easier to sell when enhanced marketed, no matter how subtly, with higher a higher GPA.

4 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

demcbt • 2 days ago

If an instructor gives an A to all students who attend with some regularity and a B to those who do not, no one will criticize him. Otherwise, he'll have have students, parents (yes,even at the college level), and administrators in his face.

Pathetic.

3 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

Rodger Bartlett • 2 days ago

Some suggestions

**SOME SUGGESTIONS**

- Allow employers to perform testing on job candidates - IQ tests, reading comprehension and writing skills. You'll find out the kid with the 4.0 GPA stopped learning anything of consequence after 6th grade.
- Get rid of black/women/gay studies degrees which support and produce political agitators. The parasite academics who teach this garbage add negative value to society.
- While your at it, get rid of EEOP.
- Get rid of tenure.
- Get rid of public research, it's brought crisis after expensive crisis as well as public fear mongering. Academics care more about their positions than telling the truth as well as feed off issues - see global warming, near earth asteroids and all the social sciences. Academia's interest is money and politics. We are effectively funding the demise of the country.

These universities are expensive, wasteful luxuries the economy will take care of sooner or later. There are fewer kids today and still fewer still able to hack college in a way that's productive. Stick em all in a vocational school, they'll have a chance to survive.

2 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**Kurt NY** • 2 days ago

Another aspect of this well-intentioned bill is that it may very well hurt the employment opportunities of Texas' students relative to those of other states which do not adopt similar practices. Since it provides a standard of comparison not necessarily apparent on the transcripts of other states' institutions, Texas students' achievements would seem devalued while those of other states' students would not be so questioned.

This is actually a good reform but one unlikely to be adopted by too many states unless almost all of them participate.

2 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**Dinger** → Kurt NY • 2 days ago

Because so many people are leaving Texas to find work. ;)

2 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**demcbt** → Kurt NY • 2 days ago

If the people of Texas realize that their students' achievements are already devalued, why should they give a whit what the people in say, New York, think? That's the essence of federalism.

However, as the author hints(?) in his concluding paragraphs, I don't think the citizens of Texas, or anywhere else, will want to see fewer of their students getting "A"s. This would be a good "patch," though.

0 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**fabiusthedelayer** → Kurt NY • 2 days ago

I think for that reason alone, this won't pass.

0 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**TexasMom2012** → Kurt NY • 2 days ago

Actually, I think this would definitely help the STEM degrees over the "Studies" type degree!

0 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**MMGG in NC** • 2 days ago

It all begins in early school years. High school grades are inflated; don't show

what students really now. Students retake assessments until they pass. Where in the world, in what job, will they be allowed to do that?

1 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**JohnnyB** • 2 days ago

In a time when every kid gets a trophy these kids all expect an A. The sad part is that their liberal professors are the ones responsible for that policy and are only too happy to oblige their expectations. What's even more sad is that the increase in higher grades doesn't extend to the sciences and mathematics where there are right answers as opposed to the liberal arts where a right answer depends on the vagaries of the professor. That's why fewer kids are majoring in the sciences. Something has to change and these Texas legislature should be commended for trying to do so.

1 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**Dismalist** → JohnnyB • 18 hours ago

It is not sad that "the increase in higher grades doesn't extend to the sciences and mathematics". Every employer is able to sort students by major!

0 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**science professor** • 2 days ago

I am in a research department (STEM field) in a large middle-tier state university.

We care a lot about teaching. Two comments:

- 1) temporary faculty in my department grade are much more concerned with student evaluations and grade much easier than the tenure-track faculty
- 2) our provost is extremely concerned with "retention" and sanctions departments with too high a "DFW rate" (that is D, F or withdraw, not Dallas-Fort Worth).

1 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**science professor** → science professor • 2 days ago

and, yes, I am strongly in favor of grade transparency

1 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**mrhuehls** • 21 hours ago

In the early 80's as an engineering manager, I found most of the graduates I interviewed did not have adequate language skills or grounding in the application of mathematics to real world problems, even though they had very good GPA's. I had to find the ones that knew how to accomplish tasks, and frequently they were not among the higher GPA's. I was doing something right, because my group was largely a self directed work group. They learned what the work was and did the things they knew needed to be done without me assigning tasks. I'd like to be back there again.

0 ^ | | v • Reply • Share ›

**Draft Therich** • 2 days ago

Not quite good enough. What's to stop persons whose native language is X from taking "Introduction to X" for an easy A, when the average grade is much lower? Yes, it DOES happen, often. There's also the tennis team taking "Introductory Tennis" as P.E., and so forth. And what about the more daring students who want to challenge themselves by taking courses where they just barely can make the prerequisites (maybe not even), and get a C like the average -- except that the average student is much farther along in the program.

A more relevant measure, for courses that are not specific to employment performance,

would be to compare similar students. I'm much more impressed by the Lit major who takes calculus and gets C (average grade B-), than a Lit major who takes Math for Lit Majors and gets a B (average grade C).

Doesn't really matter. Frankly, it's a scam, a game. Among well-educated students, what will end up counting will be factors other than grades, including references never seen.

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**demcbt** • 2 days ago

"... universities are defined by the pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination to students and the larger society."

How naive.

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**HenryC** • 2 days ago

Colleges now need standardized tests. It is shameful, but it has become necessary. When I was in college I always looked forward to them as they were then easier than the ones my professor gave. Alas, that has changed.

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**demcbt** → HenryC • 2 days ago

Henry, you could NOT have spent the last 20 -30 years in public school Hell, where standardized tests, poorly written by obtuse educrats far away, have become the primary basis of every teaching decision. Well, along with athletics.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**David** → HenryC • 2 days ago

The GRE was originally created as a test taken upon graduation from college (thus "graduate record examination"), but was determined to be too difficult for that purpose. History may not repeat itself, but it apparently rhymes...

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Jon** • 2 days ago

My worry is that the Honest Transcript will incentivize professors, eager to avoid a reputation as "easy," to adopt tier grading, by which they assign a designated amount of As, Bs, Cs, etc. Under such a system, a traditionally A-level grade has the potential to earn a B or C. This bill has the potential to actually detract from its ultimate goal of increasing merit in higher education.

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**demcbt** → Jon • 2 days ago

Depends on what you call "A-level work." There's so little at the undergraduate level that I'd say your possibility is improbable.

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**David** → Jon • 2 days ago

What do you mean by "a traditionally A-level grade has the potential to earn a B or C"?

Do you mean "Work that would traditionally be A-level work..." or do you mean "a student who is accustomed to receiving As for his or her work"? In either of those cases, my response would be that perhaps a little competition would be good for the spirit here, and could be a useful lesson about the world outside the university walls.

Is there a different meaning I'm missing?

