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## The Muñoz Plan to Combat Grade Inflation

Originally drafted in 1998

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### 1) Grade Distinction Points

For every class in which a student enrolls, in addition to his/her regular grade, a student will earn Grade Distinction Points (GDP).

- The regular mark (i.e. A, A-, B+, etc.) is determined by the student’s instructor. This grade will factor into the student’s GPA.
- GDP points are calculated by taking the difference between the student’s regular grade and the average grade for the class in which the student is enrolled.
- Example: John enrolls in Introduction to American History and receives a B (3.0) grade. The average grade in that class is a B- (2.7). John would receive a B for the class and 0.3 GDP points.

### 2) Honors are Determined by Grade Distinction Points

Academic honors and distinctions (e.g. class rank, Dean’s list, graduation honors, valedictorian, etc.) are based on accumulated GDP points, not on GPA. For example, the top 2.5% of a class, measured by GDP points, graduate *summa cum laude*; the next 5% graduate *magna cum laude*; the next 12.5%, *cum laude*.

### 3) Average GPAs for each professor and each professor’s classes are published

The average grade given by each professor for all of his or her classes is published. The average grade for each specific class is published.

**Advantages:** This plan has three advantages:

#### A. It’s Driven by Healthy Incentives

Because academic honors are driven by Grade Distinction Points, ambitious students will be drawn to classes that offer the possibility of significant GDP points. Take the following example. Suzy, a bright ND sophomore who seeks to graduate with honors, is thinking about taking Intro to Organic Chemistry. Two professors are teaching it next semester. Professor A is known as an easy grader and, in fact, gives an average of an A- (3.7). Professor B is a bit tougher; she gives an average of a B (3.0). As things stand right now, ambitious Suzy has an incentive to take Professor A, as it will likely result in an A grade for her. Under the GDP system, her incentives are different. In Professor A’s class, Suzy can earn 0.3 GDP at most. In Professor B’s class, however, she can earn up to 1.0 GDP points. An A- grade in Professor B’s class is worth more towards honors than an A in Professor A’s class. Ambitious students, accordingly, will be encouraged to take classes with tougher graders.

Now think of the incentives for faculty. Right now, there is no incentive to be a tough grader. None. But what if it was known that the hardest working students were known to look for classes with lower average GPAs? That, I suspect, would motivate some faculty to toughen their grading. Moreover, and perhaps

more importantly, faculty want to reward their best students. The lower a faculty member's average class GPA, the more they can do so through GDP points.

For students, the use of GDP points rewards taking tough classes. For faculty, the use of GDP points rewards being a tougher grader.

**B. It's a Fairer System by which to Award Academic Honors**

Class ranks, graduation honors, etc., are by definition comparative. Everyone knows that all class grades are not equal. An A from an easy grader is not the same as an A from a tough grader. In the current system, they are treated the same. That is not a good way to grant honors. It awards taking easy classes and punishes taking hard classes.

**C. It's Relatively Easy to Implement**

For understandable reasons, students are against policies that explicitly attempt to lower GPAs. They think they benefit from grade inflation. The same is true for faculty. Why be a tough grader? Ambitious students avoid you and you will probably get hurt on teaching evaluations.

The proposed plan does not target GPAs – at least, not directly. It does not tell students that their grades are going to be lowered. It does not mandate to faculty that they give a certain percent of B or C grades. But it does create incentives for students (at least some students) to favor tougher grading and for faculty to lower their grades.