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GRADING PATTERNS AT ALBION COLLEGE 1998-2003

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For the five years since the student records system was changed, there have been no analyses or reports about grading patterns. Based on various conversations, three aspects of the grades issued seemed to be of interest: number of grades issued, average numerical grade, and percent of withdrawals. Each of these aspects is presented with breakdowns by year and term and by division and course level. It is my intention to issue similar reports regularly from now on.

There are three points of clarification. First, all student work that is graded (i.e., regular classes, directed studies, tutorials, internships, other individualized work) is included. In the following discussion, the term “course” is used to represent all such work. Secondly, the division structure is according to the distribution requirement in the catalog. Therefore, an “Other” category was added to include all honors, first-year seminars, and interdisciplinary courses, as well as the Departments of Education and Physical Education. Finally, course level was determined by the course number, not by the class level of the students. Thus, the grade for a senior taking xxxx101 would count as a 100-level grade.

NUMBER OF GRADES ISSUED

In terms of the number of grades issued, we can first see that there was a drop of 7% from the first year of this period to the third year and then an increase of 12% from the third year to the most recent year. There are always more grades in the fall and very few in the summer, as would be expected.

	Fall	Spring	Summer	Total
1998-99	6725	6468	221	13414
1999-00	6410	6219	227	12856
2000-01	6179	6108	196	12483
2001-02	6496	6345	172	13013
2002-03	6924	6898	180	14002
Total	32734	32038	996	65768

Because Albion’s course numbering system has more 100-level courses and relatively few 400-level courses, the grading pattern over levels is likely to be untypical when compared with other colleges and universities. Some differences can be attributed to the larger number of first-year students and subsequent departure of some students, but since very few students leave between the third and fourth years, the low number of 400-level grades is due largely to the course numbering system. Also, since Albion has relatively few transfer students, there are few

additional upper-level students. Therefore, Albion’s overall GPA should be comparable to similar colleges and universities, but course-level comparisons are likely to be misleading.

Obviously, some divisions assign more grades than others. The most striking differences are in Social Sciences, where the total number is not only considerably higher but actually increases from the 100-level to the 200-level. The substantial drops from the 100-level to the 200-level in Fine Arts and Other are attributable partly to 100-level “activity” courses (e.g., music ensembles, physical activities) in those divisions.

	100-level	200-level	300-level	400-level	Total
Fine Arts	5188	1658	587	174	7607
Humanities	4525	3475	2742	377	11119
Sciences	7659	2803	2030	464	12956
Social Sciences	6899	7389	6733	854	21875
Other	6930	2738	2039	504	12211
Total	31201	18063	14131	2373	65768

AVERAGE NUMERICAL GRADES

The pattern for the average numerical grade has changed very little over the five years of this study. The average for each year has varied less than 1%, and the differences across terms have been very consistent and predictable.

	Fall	Spring	Summer	Total
1998-99	3.26	3.29	3.64	3.28
1999-00	3.26	3.31	3.49	3.29
2000-01	3.28	3.29	3.51	3.29
2001-02	3.26	3.25	3.41	3.26
2002-03	3.27	3.24	3.56	3.26
Total	3.27	3.28	3.52	3.28

The differences in average grades across divisions and course levels are very similar to the patterns found at most colleges and universities. Once again, the drops from the 100-level to the 200-level in Fine Arts and Other are attributable partly to 100-level “activity” courses (e.g., music ensembles, physical activities) in those divisions. Otherwise, students’ grades tend to increase with more advanced work.

	100-level	200-level	300-level	400-level	Total
Fine Arts	3.50	3.38	3.45	3.76	3.47
Humanities	3.15	3.31	3.39	3.70	3.28
Sciences	2.94	3.01	3.34	3.85	3.04
Social Sciences	3.09	3.28	3.35	3.70	3.25
Other	3.55	3.41	3.63	3.84	3.54
Total	3.19	3.27	3.39	3.75	3.28

PERCENT OF WITHDRAWALS

As you can see, the percent of withdrawals is very consistent, except for the fewer withdrawals from the relatively few summer courses.

	Fall	Spring	Summer	Total
1998-99	3%	3%	0%	3%
1999-00	3%	3%	0%	3%
2000-01	3%	3%	1%	3%
2001-02	3%	3%	0%	3%
2002-03	2%	3%	0%	3%
Total	3%	3%	0%	3%

The pattern of withdrawals across course levels is very expected. The only substantial difference across divisions is the doubled rate in 100-level and 200-level Sciences courses.

	100-level	200-level	300-level	400-level	Total
Fine Arts	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%
Humanities	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%
Sciences	6%	6%	2%	1%	5%
Social Sciences	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Other	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Total	4%	3%	2%	2%	3%

Because these data on withdrawals are relatively uninteresting, they will not be included in the future reports. If anyone has a particular interest in them, please let me know.

FINAL COMMENTS

Analyses using inferential statistics were performed and are available to anyone who is interested. Because of the large amount of data and the fact that no sampling was done, almost all differences, even as small as 1%, show statistical significance. However, the readers of this report must determine meaningful differences for themselves.

For a general discussion of grading, you might want to read Alfie Kohn's article, "The Dangerous Myth of Grade Inflation," from the November 8, 2002 edition of The Chronicle of Higher Education. The author reviews various studies of grades and the reasons why grade inflation should not be a concern. A copy will be sent to you via the email.

Since this report is intended to be useful to the Albion College faculty, any feedback would be appreciated. If you would like to see other aspects or breakdowns examined for these years or in the future, please let me know. If you would like to discuss the data and their implications, please include me whenever possible. **Unless there is approval from the Faculty Steering Committee or another appropriate group, the data in this report should not be shared with anyone outside the Albion College faculty and staff.**