

GPC item: Law School Grading Scale

Date: October 1, 2021

The Graduate Policy Committee supports the Law School's request to adjust the points associated with letter grades for Law School majors. Three arguments were critical in our decision.

- 1) An evenly spaced point distribution is disciplinary practice in Law.
- 2) The Law School has a mandatory curve that determines how many students can earn a "B," "B-," etc.
- 3) Students who are taking law courses but are not law majors are not graded on the Law grading scale but on the typical grading scale used by all majors (other than Law and Medicine).

Detailed arguments are available in Dean Bayern's letter below.

To: Members of the GPC

From: Shawn Bayern, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Law

Date: September 1, 2021

Re: Request to change grade-point weighting for curved College of Law grades

This proposal outlines a request from the College of Law to change the grade-points assigned to its grades.

Throughout the university, the points associated with letter grades are grouped so that there is a relatively large gap between A, B, and C, with the "plus" and "minus" modifiers having a smaller effect. Thus, for example, a grade of A earns 4 points and a grade of A- earns 3.75 points, whereas a grade of B+ earns 3.25 points. Accordingly, the difference in points between an A and A- is relatively small (1/4 of a point) whereas the difference between an A- and a B+ is relatively large (half a point). Instructors have knowledge of these weightings, and they may take that knowledge into account when assigning grades.

The College of Law, however, has a mandatory grading curve that now uses letter grades but replaces a continuous, number-graded system. As is typical at law schools, the curve is designed with evenly spaced gaps between grades in mind. For example, our curve and several of our academic rules envision that the difference between a grade of A and a grade of A- is the same as the difference between a grade of A- and a grade of B+. That is, the underlying "letter" does not get specially weighted compared to the "plus" and "minus" modifiers. Many modern university grading systems achieve this more even distribution by separating all "steps" of grades by 1/3 of a point uniformly, instead of separating some steps by 1/4 of a point and others by 1/2 of a point.

The College of Law requests that our own grade points be adjusted accordingly, according to the following table. (Please note that the College of Law, and only that College, uses A+ grades in order to mark special excellence on our mandatory curve.)

A+	4.33
A	4.00

A–	3.67
B+	3.33
B	3.00
B–	2.67
C+	2.33
C	2.00
C–	1.67
D+	1.33
D	1.00
D–	0.67
F	0.00

We are informed that a similar college-specific adjustment has been made by the College of Law at FAMU, even though FAMU’s university-wide assignments of grade points matches that of FSU.

The change will have another positive effect, which is that it will more clearly mark College of Law grades as different from other university grades because of our mandatory curve. Thus, for example, the table above can appear in a separate table within the Graduate Bulletin which will make it clearer that the A+ grade is reserved only for the College of Law. The difference will also serve as a convenient indication, in the relatively rare case where students from other departments enroll in College of Law courses, that grades should not translate unmodified between a mandatory curve and another system without modification; for example, it suggests what we generally regard as a best practice anyway, which is that graduate students in other departments should have College of Law grades translated to an S/U grading basis. (The College of Law similarly converts grades taken for LAW credit in other colleges to an S/U basis.)

This change will not complicate grading for joint-degree students. The university’s back-end registration and reporting system already calculates and exposes separate GPAs by “career” (e.g., graduate vs. law), so no changes would be needed to isolate College of Law grades. For example, a joint-pathway student selected as an example to demonstrate this point had a “GRAD” GPA of 4.000 but a “LAW” GPA of 3.371 as reported by Student Central. The College of Law uses only the law GPA for College of Law purposes (e.g., retention, ranking, honors, incoming GPAs for curved classes). To put it differently, while this change would be difficult to implement for a single department within (say) the College of Arts and Sciences, the system and human processes already do what we need to separate College of Law grades from other grades. Of course, it wasn’t too long ago that the College of Law was on an entirely different grading basis from graduate departments, using a numeric scale from 60 to 100.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I’m more than happy to answer any questions that you have.

Sincerely,

Shawn Bayern