

To: MET1010 class, sections 3 and 6  
From: Dr. Jon Ahlquist  
Re: Course grades  
Date: 11 October 2006

A MET1010 student asked: Are you going to curve the test scores?

Answer: Instructors at FSU are required to explain their grading system in the course syllabus, because FSU does not have an official grading system. Therefore, you can see how grades will be computed if you refer to our course syllabus. Anyone who has lost the course syllabus can get another from the course Web site: <http://ahlquist.met.fsu.edu/courses/met1010/index.html>

As it says in the syllabus, I will let you know after each test whether I will shift the grade distribution to put about 15% of the class into the A- or A category and about half the class in the B- or better range.

Scores were high on the first exam, which is common because we don't cover much in the first two weeks. 1/3 of the class scored 90% or higher, so no adjustment was needed. On the second exam, scores were lower for most students, although a number of students scored higher. Adding the first two exam scores and using 90/80/70/60% as the cut-off points for A-, B-, C-, and D-, the grade distribution was not too low relative to the standards in the syllabus, so no adjustment was needed.

Beginning with the third exam, I will examine the grade distribution by dropping the lowest of the test scores so far.

I can say that my desire to ease the grading scale is not great when class attendance is poor. I certainly won't reward people for skipping class, but past experience indicates that most people who skip class are in the bottom half of the point distribution. Grade adjustments are made relative to the upper half of the class, though, which recognizes those who tend to have better attendance.

I expect to reach home Sunday night at about 11:00 pm, so I doubt I'll have time to compute and review the grade distribution in time for class on Monday. By next Wednesday, 18 October, I should know whether any adjustment is needed at this point in the course.

When I make adjustments in the grading scale, it is always on a total point basis. I never "curve" scores for individual exams; I never make large adjustments in the grade cut-off points; and I never raise the grading standard at a later date if I have lowered it. The goal is for you to have a good idea what your grade will be at any point in the course.

For now, add your best 2 out of 3 exam scores, figure the percent you answered correctly, and use 90/80/70/60 as the tentative cut-off points for A-, B-, etc. The bottom 2 points of each 10 point range are for "minus" grades and the top two points are for "plus" grades. So 90.0 to 91.99 is (for now) the A- range, and 92 and up is an A. 80 to 81.99 is a B-, 82 to 87.99 is a B, and 88.0 to 89.99 is a B+.

With 160 students in the class, it is extremely unlikely that there will be any gaps in the grade distribution that would provide nice places to draw dividing lines for grades. Chances are, students' scores at the end of the semester will vary continuously from nearly 100% to some low percentages. I have no choice but to draw grade lines where no gaps exist. That means that there will be various people at the top of each grade category who will just miss the next higher grade by the smallest of margins. I regret that, but it is absolutely unavoidable. I can only do my best to draw the dividing lines

for grades fairly, even though I know you'll be kicking yourself for not answering just one more question correctly.

I'll post this reply at the course Web site. Thank you for your question!

Jon Ahlquist