

Quantitative Results of Faculty Survey on Grade Inflation
1 April 2006
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Summary

A random sample of RIT teaching faculty was surveyed from March 24th through March 30th, 2006. Most faculty inflate some grades, but they inflate a very small minority of grades (about 5%) on average, and the extent of the inflation appears also to be very small (less than “a little”). Deflation rarely occurs and appears to affect a negligible portion of grades.

Methods

Sample

Ninety-nine faculty were randomly selected from all teaching faculty at RIT; this included adjunct or part-time teaching faculty. The sample was stratified according to college to ensure proportionate representation from each college. The initial sample therefore consisted of 12 faculty from CAST, 16 from CIAS, 5 from COB, 18 from COLA, 13 from COS, 8 from GCCIS, 8 from KGCOE, and 19 from NTID. Three email addresses were faulty leaving a real initial sample of 96. Of these, 84 responded resulting in a response rate of 87.5%.

Procedure and Instrument

The survey was conducted from March 24th through March 30th, 2006. The sample was contacted by email and requested to conduct a web questionnaire on grade inflation using the RIT “Clipboard” program. The survey may be viewed at <http://clipboard.rit.edu/takeSurvey.cfm?id=37t38o>. It was anonymous and all respondents were asked not to identify themselves, other faculty, or students. Faculty were required to sign into their DCE account in order to complete the survey; this ensured no more than one response from each member of the sample.

We first defined “grade inflation” as: “the assigning of a higher grade to a student than is warranted by his/her performance. ‘Grade deflation’ is, of course, just the reverse.” Respondents were asked the following questions regarding their grading practices:

1. What percentage of grades did you assign to RIT students over the past year that were higher than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):
2. What percentage of grades did you assign to RIT students over the past year that were lower than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):
3. Overall, to what extent did you inflate or deflate your grades over the past year? (check one option): Deflated greatly, Deflated somewhat, Deflated a little, Neither Deflated nor Inflated, Inflated a little, Inflated somewhat, Inflated greatly. [These options were subsequently assigned numeric values -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, and 3, respectively, so that negative ratings indicated deflation; positive, inflation].

Finally, participants were asked the open-ended question:

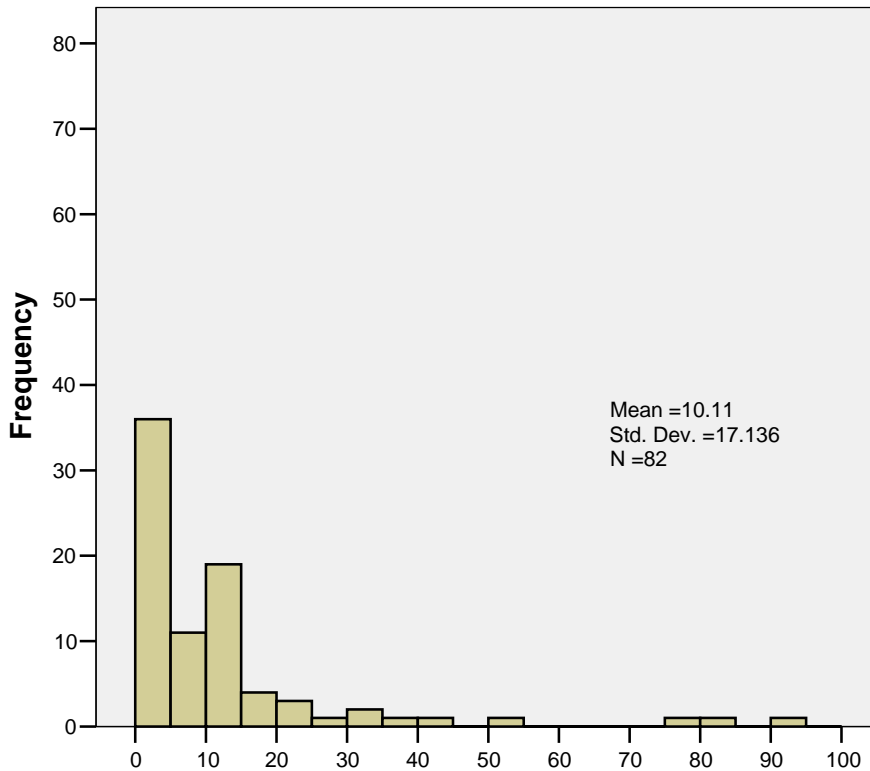
4. If you have inflated grades at all, please tell us what factors led you to do this. Again, please do not identify yourself, other faculty, or students.

Results

1. Percentage of Grades that were Inflated.

Eighty-two faculty responded to this question. The practice of grade inflation is widespread: A majority ($n = 52$, or 63.4%) of respondents stated that they inflated grades over the past year. Though the practice is widespread, however, the percentage of grades that are inflated is very small: The median percentage of grades that were inflated over the past year was 5% (because the distribution is highly skewed, the median is the appropriate statistic to characterize central tendency). Though most faculty inflate grades, overall they appear to do it to a small minority of grades (though there are some spectacular exceptions). The distribution of inflated percentages is presented in this histogram (see also the appended frequency distribution):

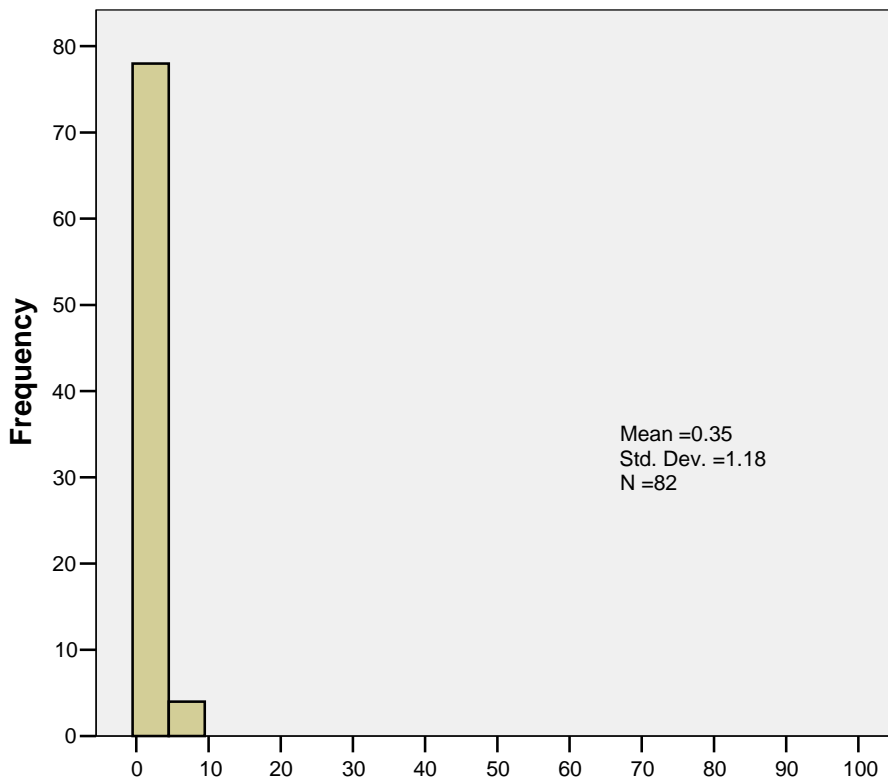
What percentage of grades did you assign to RIT students over the past year that were higher than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):



2. Percentage of Grades that were Deflated

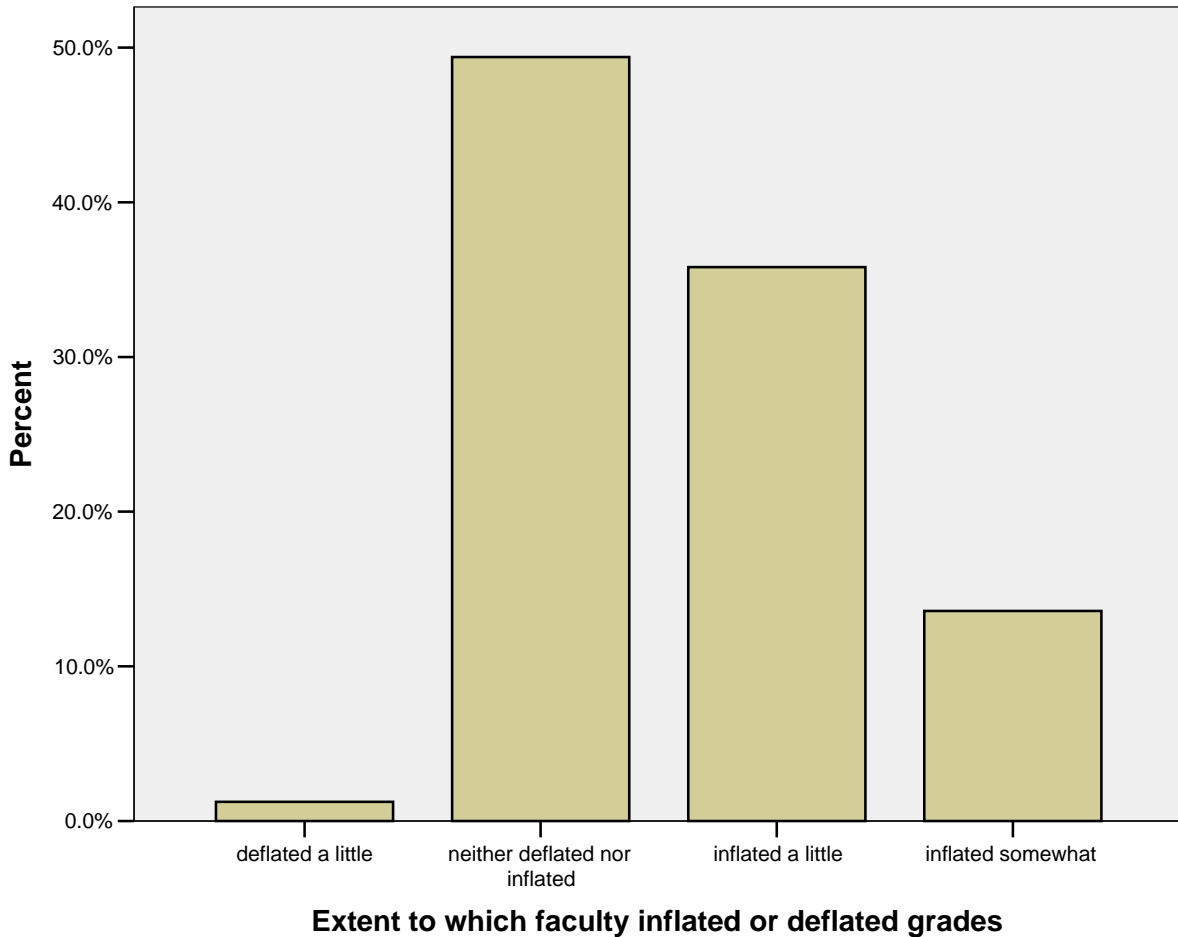
Eighty-two faculty responded to this question. The practice of grade deflation is not widespread: A small minority ($n = 8$, or 9.8%) of respondents stated that they deflated grades over the past year. Similarly, the median percentage of grades that were deflated over the past year was 0%. Grade deflation is thus neither widespread nor does it affect many grades. The distribution of deflated percentages is presented in this histogram (see also the appended frequency distribution):

What percentage of grades did you assign to RIT students over the past year that were lower than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):



3. Overall extent of inflation versus deflation.

Eighty-one faculty responded to this question. 49.38% ($n = 40$) of the faculty sample stated that, overall, they had inflated grades “a little” or “somewhat” over the past year, and only 1.23% ($n = 1$) that they had deflated them “a little”; the remainder (also 49.38%, $n = 40$) neither deflated nor inflated grades. These results are similar to—and extend—those obtained in questions 1 and 2 above. The extent to which faculty inflated grades is presented here in a bar graph:



To assess the overall degree of inflation in the population, each option—Deflated greatly, Deflated somewhat, Deflated a little, Neither Deflated nor Inflated, Inflated a little, Inflated somewhat, Inflated greatly—was assigned the numeric values -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, and 3, respectively, so that negative ratings indicated deflation; positive, inflation (see frequency distribution in appendix). The average rating for all 81 respondents was 0.62 ($SD = .73$). To assess whether this average differed significantly from zero, a 95% confidence interval was calculated (95% confidence interval: 0.45 to 0.78) and a one-sample t -test was performed ($t(80) = 7.57, p < .0005$). Both statistics indicated that while faculty as a whole did indeed inflate grades, the degree of inflation was, overall, quite minimal (6/10ths of “a little”).

Appendix 1: Frequency distributions

What percentage of grades did you assign to RIT students over the past year that were higher than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	30	35.7	36.6	36.6
	1	3	3.6	3.7	40.2
	2	3	3.6	3.7	43.9
	5	11	13.1	13.4	57.3
	10	19	22.6	23.2	80.5
	15	4	4.8	4.9	85.4
	20	3	3.6	3.7	89.0
	25	1	1.2	1.2	90.2
	30	2	2.4	2.4	92.7
	35	1	1.2	1.2	93.9
	40	1	1.2	1.2	95.1
	50	1	1.2	1.2	96.3
	75	1	1.2	1.2	97.6
	80	1	1.2	1.2	98.8
	90	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	82	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.4		
Total		84	100.0		

What percentage of grades did you assign to RIT students over the past year that were lower than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	74	88.1	90.2	90.2
	1	1	1.2	1.2	91.5
	2	1	1.2	1.2	92.7
	3	2	2.4	2.4	95.1
	5	4	4.8	4.9	100.0
	Total	82	97.6	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.4		
Total		84	100.0		

Extent to which they inflated or deflated grades

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	-1	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
	0	40	47.6	49.4	50.6
	1	29	34.5	35.8	86.4
	2	11	13.1	13.6	100.0
	Total	81	96.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	3.6		
Total		84	100.0		