

Quantitative Results of Student Survey on Grade Inflation

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**Nicholas DiFonzo, Department of Psychology
Academic Affairs Committee**

Summary

A random sample of RIT students was surveyed from March 21st through March 25th, 2006. Many students did perceive some of their grades to have been inflated, but only by a negligible amount. The perceived extent of grade deflation was also negligible. Students, overall, perceived their grades to be just slightly lower than deserved, but the effect is miniscule.

Methods

Sample

Five-hundred students were randomly selected from all students at RIT. One email addresses was faulty leaving a real initial sample of 499. Of these, 229 responded resulting in a response rate of 45.89%.

Procedure and Instrument

The survey was conducted from March 21st through March 25th, 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=37y38x>. It was anonymous and all respondents were asked not to identify themselves, other students, or faculty. Students 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 the grades they had been assigned in the past year:

1. What percentage of grades did you receive from RIT faculty over the past year that were higher than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):
2. What percentage of grades did you receive from RIT faculty over the past year that were lower than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):
3. Overall, to what extent did you think the grades you received over the past year were inflated or deflated? (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:

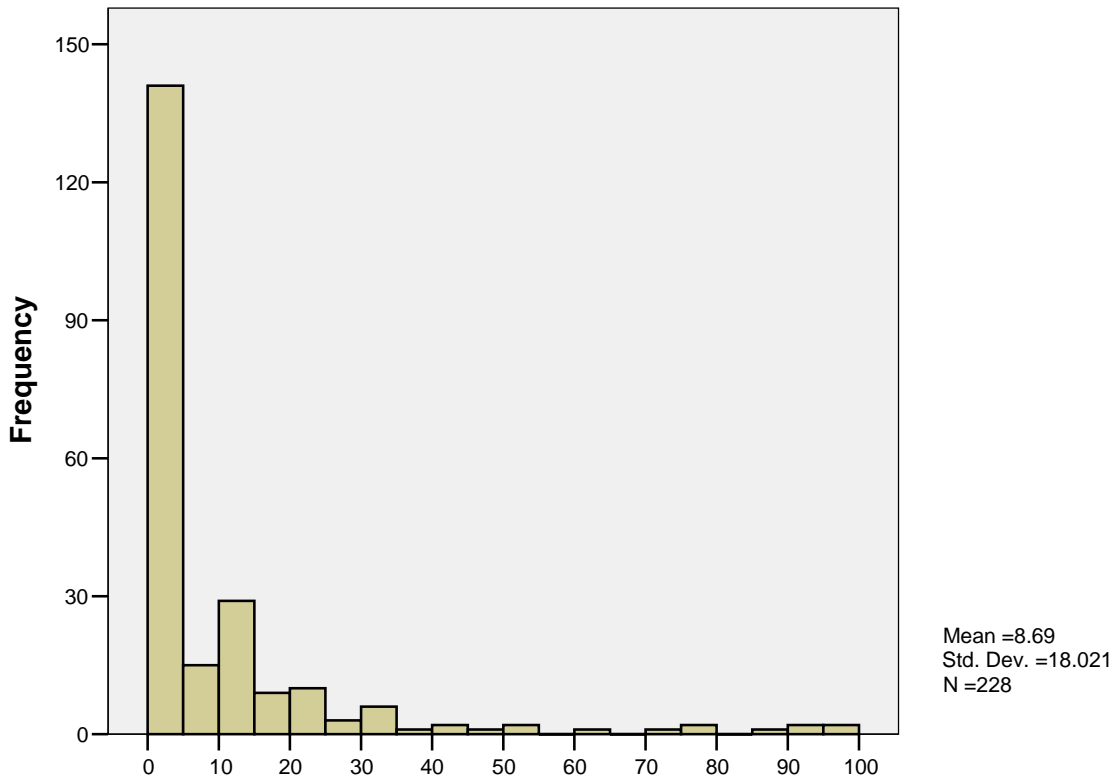
4. If you think that you have received inflated grades at all, please tell us what factors you think led your professors to do this. Again, please do not identify yourself or professors.

Results

1. Percentage of Grades that were Inflated.

Two-hundred and twenty-eight students responded to this question. Most students did not perceive their grades to be inflated: A minority ($n = 99$, or 43.4%) of respondents stated that they had received inflated grades over the past year. Though many students perceived that they had received inflated grades, however, the overall percentage of grades that were inflated was negligible: The median percentage of grades received that were perceived as inflated over the past year was 0% (because the distribution is highly skewed, the median is the appropriate statistic to characterize central tendency). The distribution of perceived percentages of inflated grades is presented in this histogram (see also the appended frequency distribution):

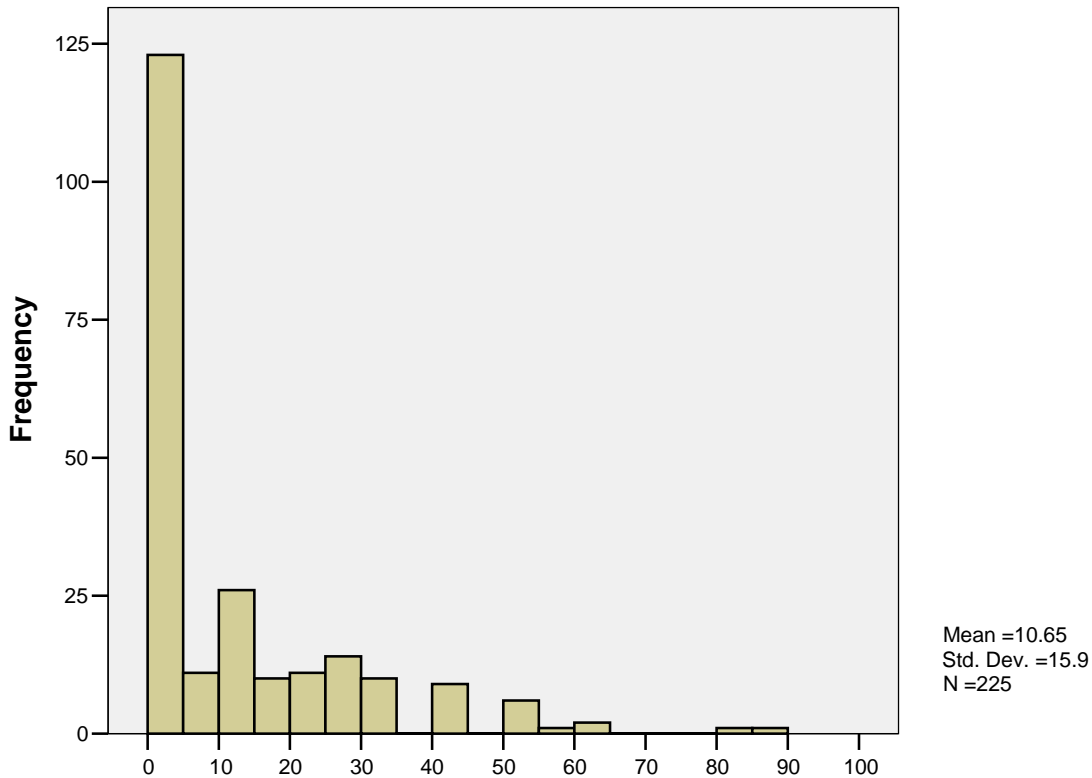
What percentage of grades did you receive from RIT faculty over the past year that were higher than deserved? (write a number between 0 and 100):



2. Percentage of Grades that were Deflated

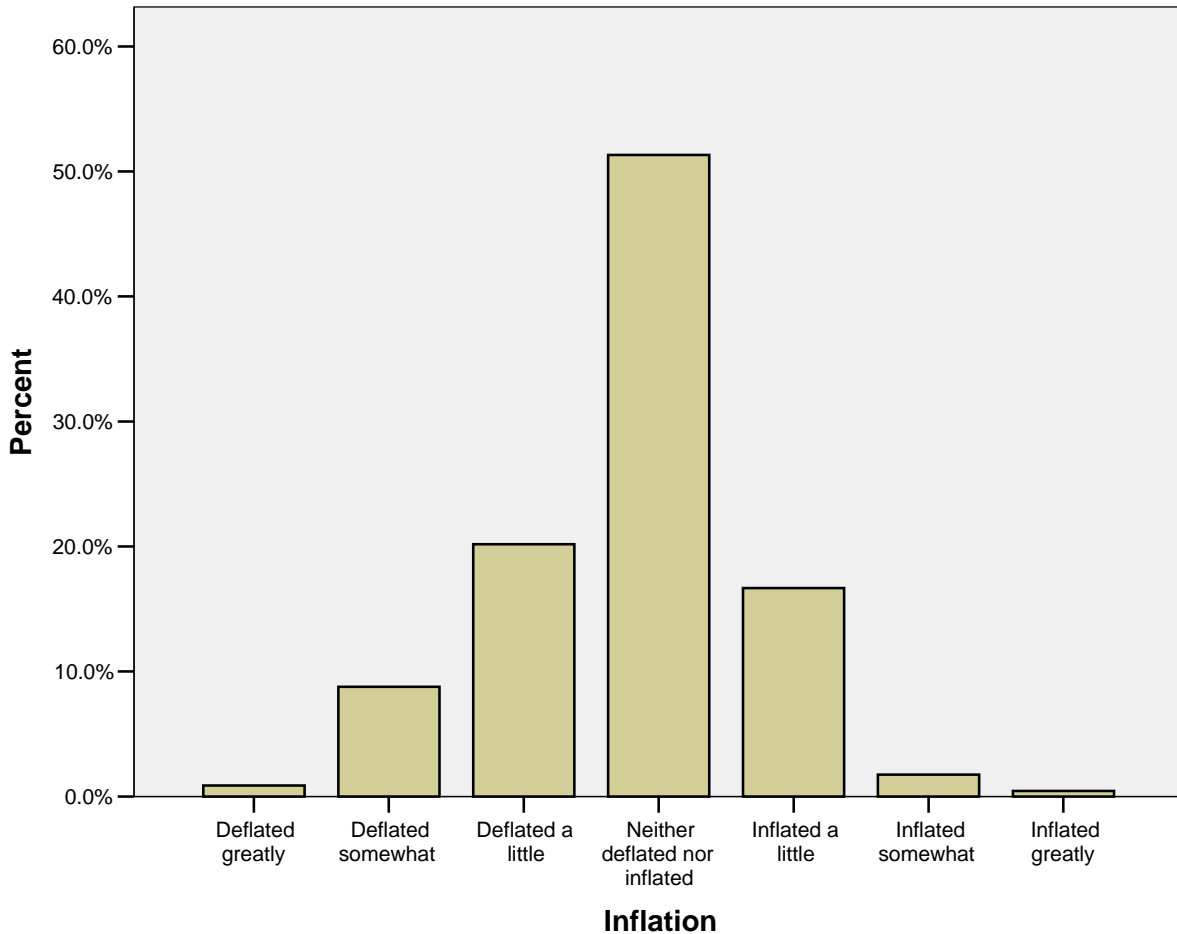
Two-hundred and twenty-five students responded to this question. The perceived receipt of deflated grades is somewhat common: A majority ($n = 126$, or 56.00%) of respondents stated that they had received deflated grades over the past year. However, the perceived percentage of deflated grades overall was very small: The median percentage of grades that were perceived to have been deflated over the past year was 2%. The perception of receipt of deflated grades is thus somewhat common but its effect on these grades is negligible. The distribution of perceived percentages of deflated grades is presented in this histogram (see also the appended frequency distribution):

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



3. Overall extent of inflation versus deflation.

Two-hundred and twenty-eight students responded to this question. Overall, students do not perceive their grades to be either inflated or deflated. A majority (51.3%, $n = 117$) of the student sample stated that, overall, they had received neither inflated nor deflated grades over the past year; the remainder were distributed normally about this modal response. The extent to which students received inflated grades is presented here in a bar graph:



To assess the overall degree of receipt of inflated grades 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 228 respondents was -0.19 ($SD = .94$). To assess whether this average differed significantly from zero, a 95% confidence interval was calculated (95% confidence interval: -0.31 to -0.07) and a one-sample t -test was performed ($t(227) = -3.04, p = .003$). Although both statistics indicated that overall, students do perceive that their grades are deflated, the size of the perception is miniscule. (2/10ths of “a little”); Statistical significance in this case is due to the great power afforded by the large sample size.

Appendix 1: Frequency distributions

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

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 0 | 129 | 56.3 | 56.6 | 56.6 |
| | 1 | 8 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 60.1 |
| | 2 | 2 | .9 | .9 | 61.0 |
| | 3 | 2 | .9 | .9 | 61.8 |
| | 5 | 13 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 67.5 |
| | 6 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 68.0 |
| | 8 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 68.4 |
| | 10 | 29 | 12.7 | 12.7 | 81.1 |
| | 15 | 8 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 84.6 |
| | 17 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 85.1 |
| | 20 | 10 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 89.5 |
| | 25 | 3 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 90.8 |
| | 30 | 6 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 93.4 |
| | 35 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 93.9 |
| | 40 | 2 | .9 | .9 | 94.7 |
| | 45 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 95.2 |
| | 50 | 2 | .9 | .9 | 96.1 |
| | 60 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 96.5 |
| | 70 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 96.9 |
| | 75 | 2 | .9 | .9 | 97.8 |
| 85 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 98.2 | |
| 90 | 2 | .9 | .9 | 99.1 | |
| 98 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 99.6 | |
| 100 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 100.0 | |
| | Total | 228 | 99.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 1 | .4 | | |
| Total | | 229 | 100.0 | | |

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

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 0 | 99 | 43.2 | 44.0 | 44.0 |
| | 1 | 9 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 48.0 |
| | 2 | 9 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 52.0 |
| | 3 | 6 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 54.7 |
| | 5 | 11 | 4.8 | 4.9 | 59.6 |
| | 10 | 26 | 11.4 | 11.6 | 71.1 |
| | 15 | 9 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 75.1 |
| | 18 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 75.6 |
| | 20 | 11 | 4.8 | 4.9 | 80.4 |
| | 25 | 14 | 6.1 | 6.2 | 86.7 |
| | 30 | 7 | 3.1 | 3.1 | 89.8 |
| | 33 | 3 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 91.1 |
| | 40 | 9 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 95.1 |
| | 50 | 6 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 97.8 |
| | 55 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 98.2 |
| | 60 | 2 | .9 | .9 | 99.1 |
| | 80 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 99.6 |
| | 90 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 225 | 98.3 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 4 | 1.7 | | |
| Total | | 229 | 100.0 | | |

Inflation

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | -3 | 2 | .9 | .9 | .9 |
| | -2 | 20 | 8.7 | 8.8 | 9.6 |
| | -1 | 46 | 20.1 | 20.2 | 29.8 |
| | 0 | 117 | 51.1 | 51.3 | 81.1 |
| | 1 | 38 | 16.6 | 16.7 | 97.8 |
| | 2 | 4 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 99.6 |
| | 3 | 1 | .4 | .4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 228 | 99.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 1 | .4 | | |
| Total | | 229 | 100.0 | | |