Is more data always better? We attempt to answer this question in the context of post-secondary education by examining the effect of instructor grading leniency on student perceptions. Does releasing GPA distributions for classes encourage instructors to give higher grades to win larger enrollments? An answer to this question in regards to grade inflation has been a big topic of debate.

We use GPA Distribution data (obtained via FOIA request or freely available) for 3 major US universities separated >1000 miles and RateMyProfessor.com ratings. Over 150 instructors and professors were included in the analysis, with GPA distribution averaged over 3-4 years. We use regression techniques and a correlation measure to summarize overall results, then explore some results obtained by normalizing data by major and school. We also examine correlations between overall professor rating average and campus average GPA for a wider sample of schools to generalize results.

Results indicate much weaker correlation between rating and average GPA then assumed (<.40) and even weaker correlations when normalized by major. This suggests the release of GPA distribution would most likely not give instructors an incentive to grade more leniently. Separation of data by school yields significant difference between results, suggesting that an even higher sample size is necessary for robust results.