

EDUCATION

The Rise of College ‘Grade Forgiveness’


Universities are letting students take classes over again—a consequence of the pressure schools feel to ensure their “customers” are satisfied.

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GERRY BROOME / AP

Over the course of the past three decades, the A has become the most common grade given out on American college campuses. In 2015, 42 percent of grades were top marks, compared to 31 percent in 1988.

This trend of 

001 **grade inflation—the gradual increase in average GPAs over the past few decades—is often considered a product of a consumer era in higher education, in which students are treated like customers to be pleased. But another, related force—a policy often buried deep in course catalogs called “grade forgiveness”—is helping raise grade-point averages.**

Different schools' policies can work in slightly different ways, but in general,

002 **grade forgiveness allows students to retake a course in which they received a low grade, and the most recent grade or the highest grade is the only one that counts in calculating a student's overall GPA.**

(Both grades still appear on the student's transcript.)

003 **The use of this little-known practice has accelerated in recent years, as colleges continue to do their utmost to keep students in school (and paying tuition) and improve their graduation rates. According to a forthcoming survey by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, a trade group, some 91 percent of undergraduate colleges and 80 percent of graduate and professional schools permit students to repeat courses to improve a grade. When this practice first started decades ago, it was usually limited to freshmen, to give them a second chance to take a class in their first year if they struggled in their transition to college-level courses. But now most colleges, save for many selective campuses, allow all undergraduates, and even graduate students, to get their low grades forgiven.**

The rise of grade forgiveness scans as yet another instance of colleges treating students as customers to be satisfied—similar to campus amenities such as luxurious dorms, palatial recreational facilities, and cornucopian dining halls. Indeed, there seems to be demand for do-overs. "Students are asking for it," said Jack Miner, Ohio State University's registrar and executive director of enrollment services. "We're attracting and retaining stronger students and there's more competition to get into majors and graduate schools, and a small change in their GPA can help."

Ohio State expanded its grade-forgiveness policy three years ago to cover all undergraduates instead of just freshmen. Miner says that about 4,500 students—roughly 10 percent of Ohio State's undergraduate population—take advantage of the policy in any given year. Most students see their grades rise in the second attempt, usually a full letter grade or a full letter and a half, Miner

said. Still, about 15 percent of students who receive a failing grade in the first attempt have the same outcome in the second. "That's a wake-up call for those students that maybe they need to reconsider their major," Miner said.

Miner is generally optimistic about the promise of grade forgiveness, but others are concerned about what it could do to academic dynamics. "It teaches students that their work in a course doesn't matter because there's always another chance," said Jonathan Marx, a professor of sociology at Winthrop University, in South Carolina.

Marx and his colleague David Meeler, an associate professor of philosophy, have studied grade-forgiveness programs at eight public institutions in an unnamed southern state. What they found in a study published in 2013 is that 5 percent of the seniors they polled at one of the institutions used grade-forgiveness policies to keep anywhere from a quarter to half of all of their coursework from counting toward their GPA. One student highlighted in the study repeated five different courses for better grades, including a math class in which she was eventually able to raise her grade from a D to an A-minus.

"Everyone knows about grade inflation, but this is GPA distortion, and few people looking at a student's GPA know it happens," Meeler said. He and Marx told me they have nothing against giving students second chances, but their issue is with the colleges that, say, allow a student to repeat five courses as they please. "Institutions are allowing students to manage their grades to get the highest reward," Meeler said, as opposed to requiring students to work with faculty members to master the material.

At the University of Colorado Boulder, such concerns led faculty members to eliminate grade forgiveness in 2010. Professors at the time were worried about the fairness of the policy—they noticed that students in some majors were using it more than those in others, and that a freshman-oriented rule was being used regularly by upperclassmen. But now, as other colleges adopt or expand such policies, Colorado is considering reinstating the practice. "We're weighing how to foster student success to help them achieve their

goals,” said Kristi Wold-McCormick, the university’s registrar. “We are not trying to alter academic history. It gives the student a chance to tell their story, about how they overcame a mistake or a struggle.”

004 College officials also tend to emphasize that the goal of grade forgiveness is less about the grade itself and more about encouraging students to retake courses critical to their degree program and graduation without incurring a big penalty.

“Ultimately,” Ohio State’s Miner said, “we see students achieve more success because they retake a course and do better in subsequent courses or master the content that allows them to graduate on time.”

005 That said, there is a way in which grade forgiveness satisfies colleges’ own needs as well. For public institutions, state appropriations are sometimes tied partly to their success on metrics such as graduation rates and student retention—so better grades can, by boosting figures like those, mean more money. And anything that raises GPAs will likely make students—who, at the end of the day, are paying the bill—feel they’ve gotten a better value for their tuition dollars, which is another big concern for colleges.

006 Indeed, grade forgiveness is just another way that universities are responding to consumers’ expectations for higher education. Since students and parents expect a college degree to lead to a job, it is in the best interest of a school to churn out graduates who are as qualified as possible—or at least appear to be. On this, students’ and colleges’ incentives seem to be aligned.

说明

选自2019年考研英语一阅读二。出题人对原文进行了大幅度的删减，红字是真题部分。

原文标题是《绩点谅解的抬头》(The Rise of College ‘Grade Forgiveness’), 讲的是学生在今天这个时代被看成“客户”, 那么客户就是上帝, 是要让他们满意的。简单来说, 就是

一门课绩点不好（不是不及格），学生可以再学一遍，来刷绩点。

思考题

26. What is commonly regarded as the cause of grade inflation?

- A. The change of course catalogs.
- B. Students' indifference to GPAS.
- C. Colleges' neglect of GPAS.
- D. The influence of consumer culture.

27. What was the original purpose of grade forgiveness?

- A. To help freshmen adapt to college learning.
- B. To maintain colleges' graduation rates.
- C. To prepare graduates for a challenging future.
- D. To increase universities' income from tuition.

28. According to Paragraph 5, grade forgiveness enable colleges to_____.

- A. obtain more financial support
- B. boost their student enrollments
- C. improve their teaching quality
- D. meet local governments' needs

29. What does the phrase "to be aligned"(Line 5, Para.6) most probably mean?

- A. To counterbalance each other.
- B. To complement each other.
- C. To be identical with each other.

D. To be contradictory to each other.

30. The author examines the practice of grade forgiveness by_____.

A. assessing its feasibility

B. analyzing the causes behind it

C. comparing different views on it

D. listing its long-run effects