To: Professor From: Pedagogical Consultant Date: May 22, 2024 Subject: Pedagogical Audit of Proposed Grade Distributions (Target Mean: 3.3)

This audit evaluates the qualitative signaling and student-facing impact of three potential grade distributions. While all three scenarios successfully meet the primary mathematical mandate of a ~3.3 mean, they offer distinct "messages" regarding rigor, meritocracy, and the safety net provided to lower-performing students.

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## Scenario 1

**Mean:** 3.3014 | **A Cutoff:** 90 | **C Cutoff:** 51

### Positive Features

- **Intuitive "A" Threshold:** The 90.0 cutoff for an 'A' aligns with traditional academic expectations. Students often perceive a 90 as a "natural" boundary for excellence, which can reduce complaints regarding the "arbitrariness" of the curve.
- **Granular Bottom End:** By including both a C+ and a C, the distribution acknowledges a spectrum of

performance at the lower end. This prevents a "clumping" effect where students with significantly different raw scores receive the same low grade.

**Anomalies**

- **The "B- to C+" Gap:** There is a significant 14-point drop between the B- (69) and the C+ (55). This creates a "cliff" effect. While it protects the vast majority of the class (the "B" range), the few students who fall into the C- range may feel mathematically "distanced" from their peers.
- **Compliance Signal:** The A/A+ range (10.53%) is flagged as non-compliant (likely too low for the specific institutional curve). This may signal to high-achieving students that the "ceiling" for top honors is exceptionally restrictive.

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## Scenario 2

**Mean:** 3.3014 | **A Cutoff:** 91 | **C Cutoff:** N/A (Ends at C+)

**Positive Features**

- **Protective Floor:** This is the most "compassionate" distribution for the bottom of the class. By stopping the distribution at a C+ (55), the professor signals that even the lowest-performing students demonstrated a level of

competency that avoids the "C" or "C-" stigma often associated with law school transcript "red flags."

- **B-Range Stability:** The middle-of-the-curve students (B- through B+) enjoy a very stable environment here, as the distribution is less stretched toward the lower tail.

**Anomalies**

- **The "90" Frustration:** Increasing the 'A' cutoff to 91 (up from 90 in Scenario 1) may create psychological friction for students who earn a 90.5 and are relegated to an A-.
- **Elite Scarcity:** Similar to Scenario 1, the 10.53% A/A+ rate remains a point of potential contention during faculty review if the institutional norm expects a more generous allocation of top marks.

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## Scenario 3

**Mean:** 3.2979 | **A Cutoff:** 91 | **C Cutoff:** 51

**Positive Features**

- **Mathematical Precision:** This scenario hits the 3.3 target most aggressively from the "low side" (3.29). Pedagogically, this signals a rigorous adherence to the curve, which can be useful in large-section courses where consistency across different professors is a primary concern.

primary concern.

- **Differentiated Merit:** By combining a high bar for an 'A' (91) with a low floor (C at 51), this distribution creates the widest "spread." It signals a high degree of confidence in the exam's ability to distinguish between varying levels of student mastery.

**Anomalies**

- **"Squeeze" Perception:** This distribution feels the most "stretched." Students may feel they are being squeezed from both ends—it is harder to get an 'A' and the "floor" is lower.
- **Morale Risks:** Of the three scenarios, this one carries the highest risk for student morale. The combination of a high 'A' threshold and a low 'C' tail may result in a "winner-take-all" atmosphere, even if the mean is identical to the other scenarios.

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## Consultant's Summary

- **For Transcript Safety: Scenario 2** is the strongest choice. It avoids the 'C' grade entirely, providing a safer "floor" for students while maintaining the required mean.
- **For Traditional Rigor: Scenario 1** is the most defensible to students due to the "90 = A" cutoff, which

feels fair and culturally familiar.

- **For High-Level Differentiation: Scenario 3** is best if the goal is to emphasize that the highest grades are reserved for the absolute top tier, while acknowledging a wide range of performance.