Analysis of UCSB Undergraduate Grade Trends

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Data

UC Santa Barbara students' grade data from Fall 2009 to Spring 2024 were obtained through Public Records Act requests facilitated by the Daily Nexus. The dataset includes detailed information on course grades across various departments and academic levels, encompassing both graduate and undergraduate courses. It provides a breakdown of letter grades, Pass/No Pass enrollments, and other grade-related metrics.

Findings

Figure 1 shows the average GPA for undergraduate courses across the College of Engineering, College of Letters & Science, Gervitz School of Education, and the three divisions within Letters & Science, spanning the 2009-2010 to 2023-2024 academic years (excluding Summer 2024). Over this period, a general upward trend in average GPA is evident across all colleges and divisions, with the most significant increases observed in the Humanities & Fine Arts division of Letters & Science and the Gervitz School of Education.

Figure 2 complements this analysis by showing the percentage of A's awarded in undergraduate courses across the same colleges and divisions over the same period. This percentage includes A plus and minus grades and mirrors the overall trend in average GPA. The most notable increase in the percentage of A's is in the Mathematical, Life, & Physical Sciences division of Letters & Science, which has approximately doubled since the 2009-2010 academic year.

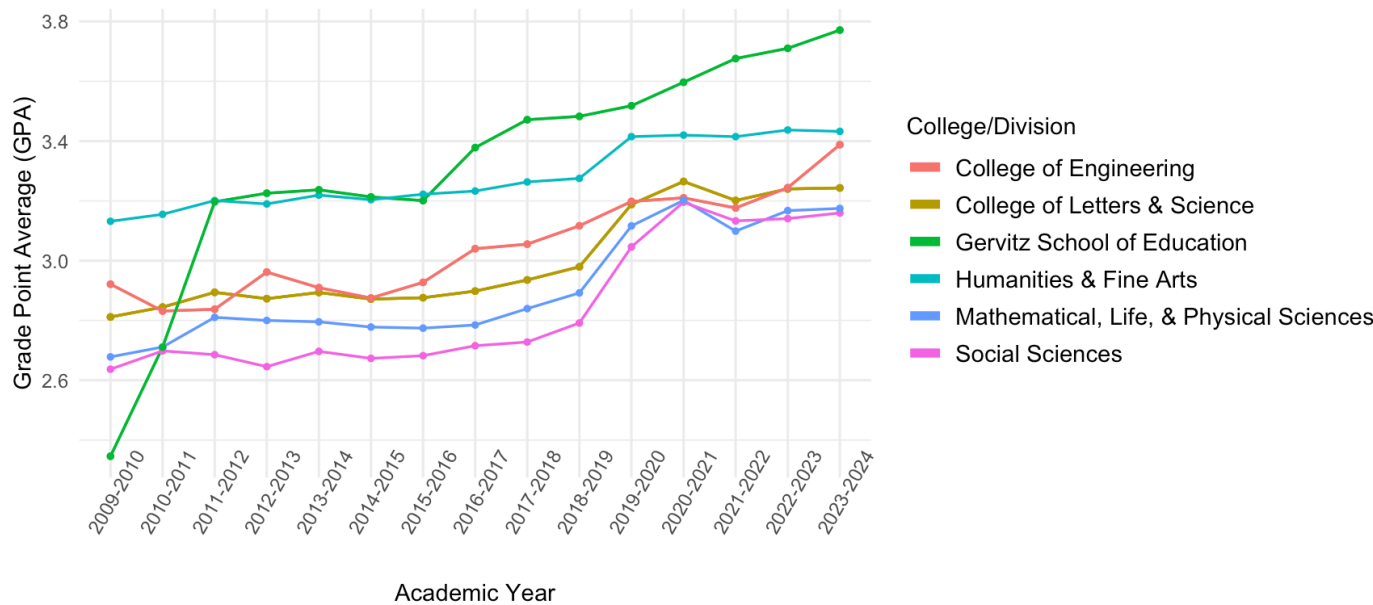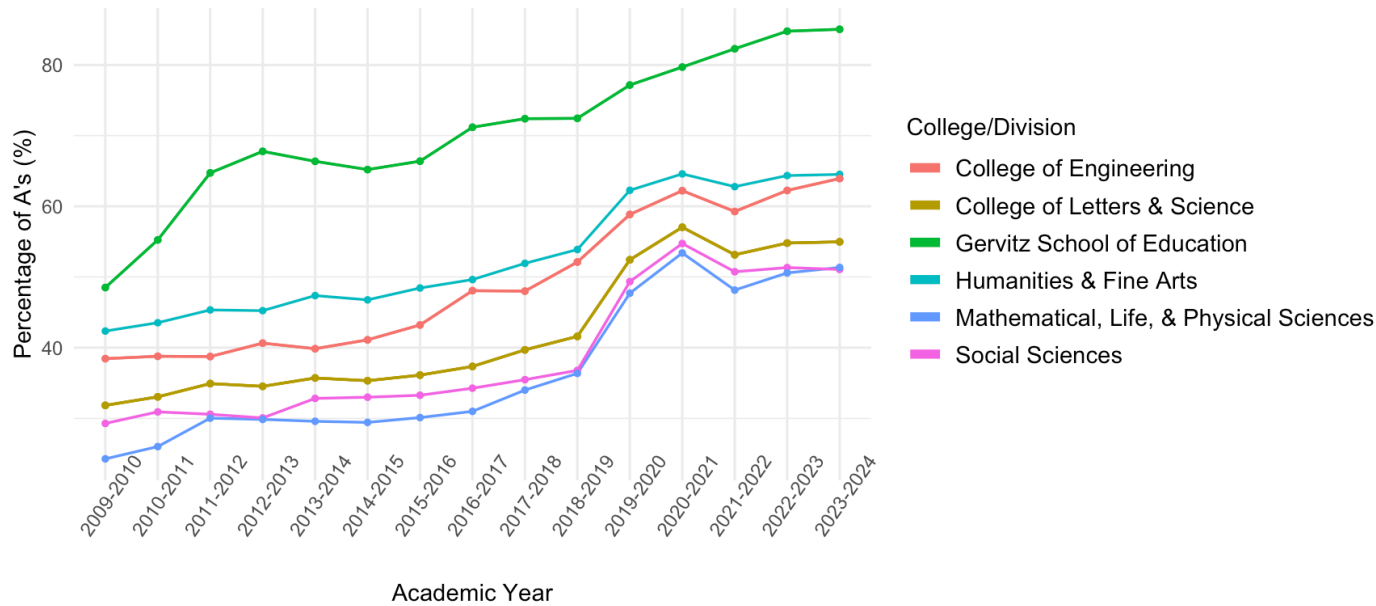Figure 1: Average GPA Over Time for UCSB Colleges and Divisions

Figure 2: Percentage of A's Over Time for UCSB Colleges and Divisions

The percentage of A grades awarded in undergraduate courses in the 2023-2024 academic year for each department is presented on the last page.

Methods

Each department in the dataset was manually categorized into its respective division and college, as this information was not available in the original dataset. The division and college assignments were based on existing academic classifications at UC Santa Barbara, with departments categorized according to their field of study. This categorization was essential for the subsequent analysis of grading trends across different academic units. To facilitate analysis of undergraduate course grades, courses with course numbers 200 or higher were excluded to remove graduate-level courses.

To analyze grade trends across colleges and academic divisions, data was aggregated in two stages: first at the course level and then at the college and division levels. For courses taught by multiple instructors or offered across multiple quarters within an academic year, the course-level average GPA was calculated as a weighted mean, with weights based on the total number of students enrolled in each course. Additionally, the total enrollment and the total number of A's (including plus and minus grades) for each course were summed across all quarters in the academic year.

Using these course-level metrics, data was then aggregated at the college and division levels for each academic year. For both colleges and divisions, the average GPA was calculated as a weighted mean of the course-level GPAs, with weights derived from yearly course enrollments. The total enrollment for each college and division was determined by summing the enrollments of all courses within the respective grouping. The percentage of A grades awarded was calculated by dividing the total number of A grades by the total enrollment for each college or division. This approach ensured a consistent methodology for examining grading patterns while accounting for variability in course sizes, grading distributions, and enrollment trends across academic groupings.

Percentage of A's in 2023-2024

Data from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024

College of Letters & Science

Department	Percentage of A's	Department	Percentage of A's
Chemistry & Biochemistry	31.66%	Psychological & Brain Sciences	60.56%
Political Science	35.09%	History	62.10%
Economics	39.82%	Anthropology	63.05%
Molecular, Cellular & Developmental Biology	44.25%	East Asian Cultural Studies	63.95%
Earth Science	45.44%	Religious Studies	64.22%
Statistics & Applied Probability	46.86%	Black Studies	65.05%
Communication	48.54%	Latin American & Iberian Studies	66.44%
Philosophy	49.82%	Classics	68.07%
Film & Media Studies	50.30%	Comparative Literature	71.30%
Spanish & Portuguese	52.03%	Linguistics	71.32%
English	52.30%	Writing Program	73.86%
History of Art & Architecture	53.19%	Exercise & Sport Studies	74.14%
Sociology	54.15%	Art	75.29%
French & Italian	55.42%	Environmental Studies	77.26%
Global Studies	55.81%	Chicana & Chicano Studies	82.01%
Physics	56.11%	Theater & Dance	82.23%
Geography	57.19%	Feminist Studies	84.27%
Asian American Studies	58.77%	Germanic & Slavic Studies	86.45%
Ecology, Evolution & Marine Biology	59.36%	Music	87.85%
Mathematics	59.90%	Military Science	99.58%

	Department	Percentage of A's
College of Engineering	Chemical Engineering	52.28%
	Computer Science	62.82%
	Electrical & Computer Engineering	65.05%
	Materials	65.90%
	Bioengineering	66.67%
	Mechanical Engineering	67.79%
	Technology Management	77.82%
	Engineering Sciences	85.74%
Gervitz School of Education	Education	82.94%
	Counseling, Clinical & School Psychology	87.63%
Interdisciplinary	Media Arts & Technology	45.80%
	Interdisciplinary Studies	93.61%