

“Grade Inflation Harming Oregon College Students”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Grade inflation at leading colleges and universities in Oregon continues its relentless rise, undermining educational aims in the state, the Oregon Association of Scholars said today.

“Far from being a trendsetter in higher education, Oregon has been following the national trend towards higher and higher grades for undergraduate students across all disciplines,” said Dr. Bruce Gilley, Professor of Political Science at Portland State University and chapter president of the Oregon Association of Scholars.

Gilley was commenting on new data released by the Oregon Association of Scholars documenting grade inflation trends at four public universities – University of Oregon, Oregon State University, Portland State University, and Southern Oregon University – and at two private colleges – Reed College and Lewis & Clark College. (The data is summarized in the charts below and is available [here](#)).

Among public universities, the data shows that the University of Oregon and Portland State University have the most serious grade inflation problems when compared to public universities nationally, while Southern Oregon University is about average, and Oregon State University is slightly better. Among private colleges, where grade inflation is the worst nationally, Lewis & Clark College has a more serious grade inflation problem, while Reed College is only slightly better than the national average.

“The average college student in Oregon today is receiving a B+ grade, which means that there is little meaningful distinction between excellent and average students,” Dr. Gilley noted. “This compression of grades prevents employers, parents, graduate schools, and public agencies from acquiring meaningful information on a student’s attainments in college.”

Grade inflation in Oregon has been driven by the same factors that have caused the problem nationwide since the 1960s: an emphasis on “student success” rather than student learning; a customer-service approach to student satisfaction; and disincentives for instructors to provide honest grades to students. (For a recent summary of this research see: Kostal, Kuncel, and Sackett, “Grade Inflation Marches On: Grade Increases from the 1990s to 2000s,” *Educational Measurement: Issues & Practice*, Spring 2016, p.11-20)

“A full 40% of all grades given to undergraduate students at the University of Oregon in the fall 2016 quarter were A’s,” noted Dr. Gilley. “Mediocre student performance is being evaluated with better and better grades.”

He added: “Grade inflation is particularly harmful to students from traditionally underperforming groups. In the absence of meaningful information and given campus emphasis on ‘student success’ and ‘diversity,’ employers will logically assume that grades are not a reflection of actual performance. Education is the great social equalizer, but grade inflation undermines that benefit.”

The Oregon Association of Scholars calls upon university and college faculty and administrators to take seriously their role in educational rigor and meaningful feedback to students about their performance.

“One easy solution to this is to require that all student transcripts must include the average class grade alongside each grade that a student earns,” noted Dr. Gilley. “This would allow students and outsiders alike to judge their performance relative to their peers.”

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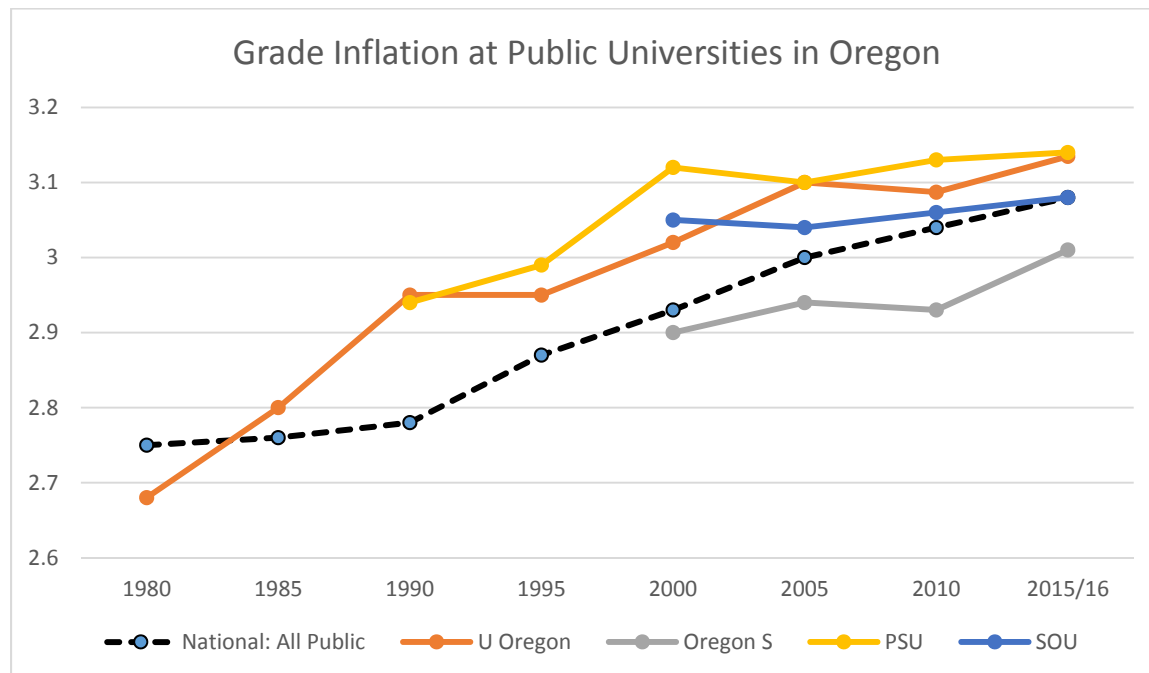
Dr. Bruce Gilley

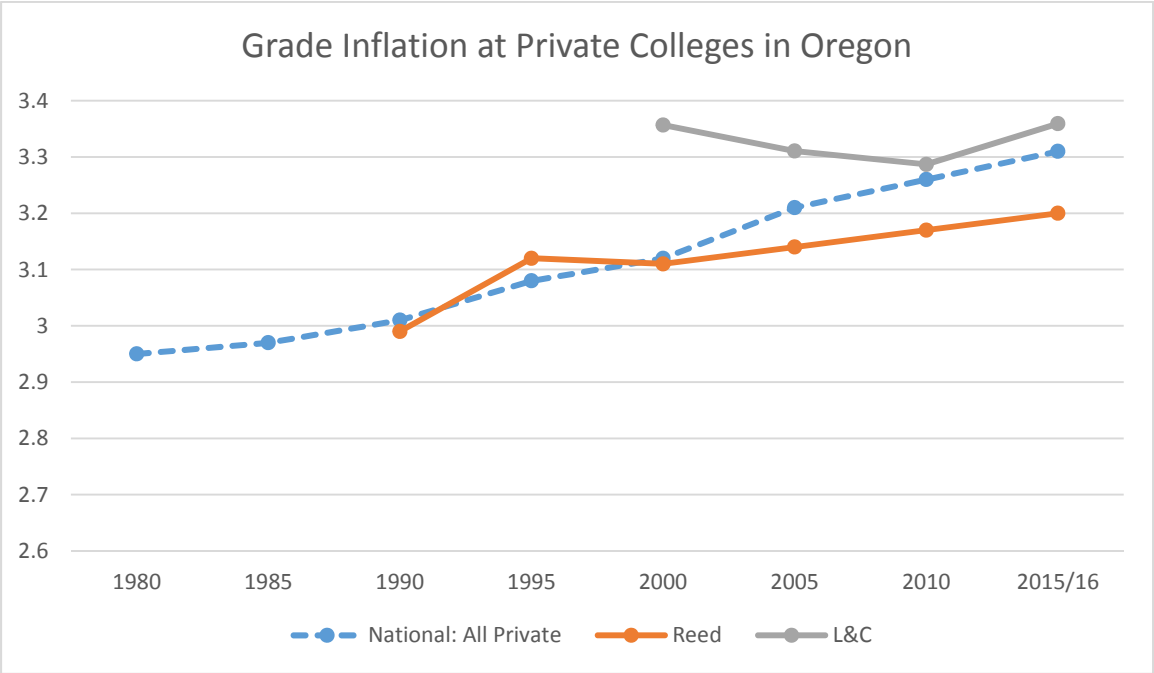
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Full dataset is available [here](#).