

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

September 5, 2003

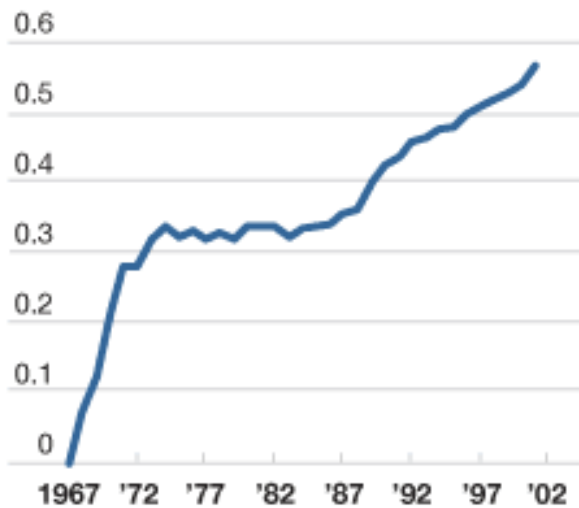
## Review & Outlook

### Low Marks for High Marks

George W. Bush, Yale '68, was kidding when he addressed the Class of 2001 at his alma mater. "To those of you who received awards and distinctions," he told the new graduates, "I say well done. And to the C students, I say, you too can be president of the United States." That's the good news.

#### UP, UP AND AWAY

Trends in grade inflation nationwide  
GPA relative to 1967



Source: [www.gradeinflation.com](http://www.gradeinflation.com)

The reality today, however, is that the C student is a vanishing breed. A few weeks back, the Princeton Review created a publicity nightmare for the University of Colorado at Boulder when it named that campus America's No. 1 party school. Manifestly those kinds of rankings are good for some naughty headlines and a few yucks. But the real scandal in college life today is something far more insidious: a grading system that has made the C student a rarity -- and not just at the Ivies.

The latest salvo comes in the form of a new report from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) called "Degraded Currency: The Problem of Grade Inflation." The council links today's grade inflation to a general watering down of standards (e.g., the elimination of required courses). Worse, professors are reluctant to give lower grades because that both

requires more work (more students complain about C's and D's than about A's) and risks an unfavorable response on student evaluations. ACTA is far from alone here: Duke University's Stuart Rojstaczer runs a whole Web site called [gradeinflation.com](http://gradeinflation.com), from which is taken the accompanying chart, a composite of mean GPAs from 29 universities relative to a 1967 baseline.

Still, no one has done more to concentrate attention on this issue than Harvey Mansfield. Two years ago, the eminent Harvard professor of political philosophy launched a one-man effort to protest an environment where more than half the students were getting A's or A-minuses and 91% were graduating with honors. Prof. Mansfield's revolt took the form of giving two grades to his students: the (inflated) grade for the official transcript and the (real) grade that the students had actually earned.

According to the student newspaper, a recent report from Princeton University's Faculty Committee on Examinations and Standing expresses the same concern. "Who could ever have imagined," it asks in bold-faced type, "that we would reach a point where a student with a straight B average would rank 923 out of a graduating class of 1,079 -- or where a student with a C average would rank 1,078?"

In short, we'll know that universities are really doing their jobs when they start giving us more C students. We recall that one of Mr. Bush's more famous predecessors was not only a C student but a B actor. That sure didn't stop him from becoming an A president.