

# FRACTIONAL GRADING AT NMSU

DR. JEFF AMATO, GEOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Universities use one of two grading systems:

1) +/- grading or fractional grading

B-, B, and B+ count for 2.7, 3.0, and 3.3 grade points

OR

2) Straight letter grades

A=4.0, B=3.0, etc.

# NMSU system was unusual

- ⦿ Uses +/- grades that have no impact on GPA
  - B-, B, and B+ all count for 3.0 GPA points
- ⦿ +/- grades not mentioned in the Catalog under “University Grading System” or the policy manual. *We were not following official policy.*

# Why did we change?

- Faculty recognized these inconsistencies for years.
- Our proposal has received input from many campus groups including students
- Fractional grading is used by the majority of universities in the U.S.
- It was voted into policy by Faculty Senate and approved by the Regents.

# 60% of our PEER INSTITUTIONS use fractional grading:

These schools assign points to C-, D+, D-:

Iowa State, Montana State, Oregon State, Utah State, UNR, Wyoming

This school assigns points to C- and D+ but not D-:

Washington State

This school has no C-, thus is similar to NMSU: Colorado State

UNM gives 4.3 points to A+, and thus they use a 4.3 grading scale, not a 4.0 scale. Thus it is not comparable to NMSU.

**A 4.0 at UNM is equivalent to a 3.72 at NMSU!**

# These schools do not use fractional grading

- ⦿ Kansas State
- ⦿ OK State
- ⦿ Texas Tech
- ⦿ U. Arizona
- ⦿ UTEP
- ⦿ U. Idaho

**NONE** of these schools use +/- with no points, which is what is being proposed.

# Why should we keep fractional grading?

## Reason #1

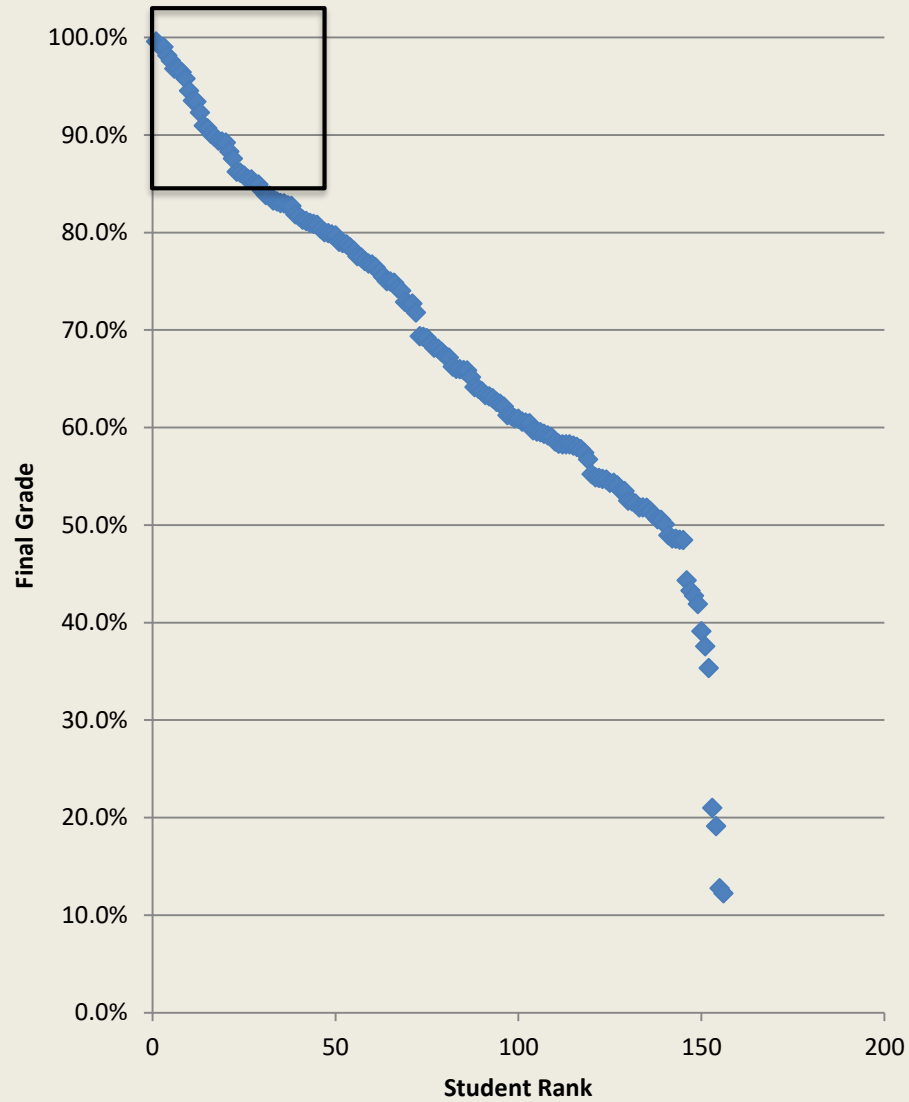
- The difference in *performance* between a student getting an 89.4% (high B) and another getting 79.6% (low B) is large
- The difference in *GPA* between these two students is currently “0”

## Reason #2:

- ⦿ The consequences of missing a major grade cut-off are lower
- ⦿ It's not fair to students with 0.01% difference in class grade to get a whole grade point difference in GPA.

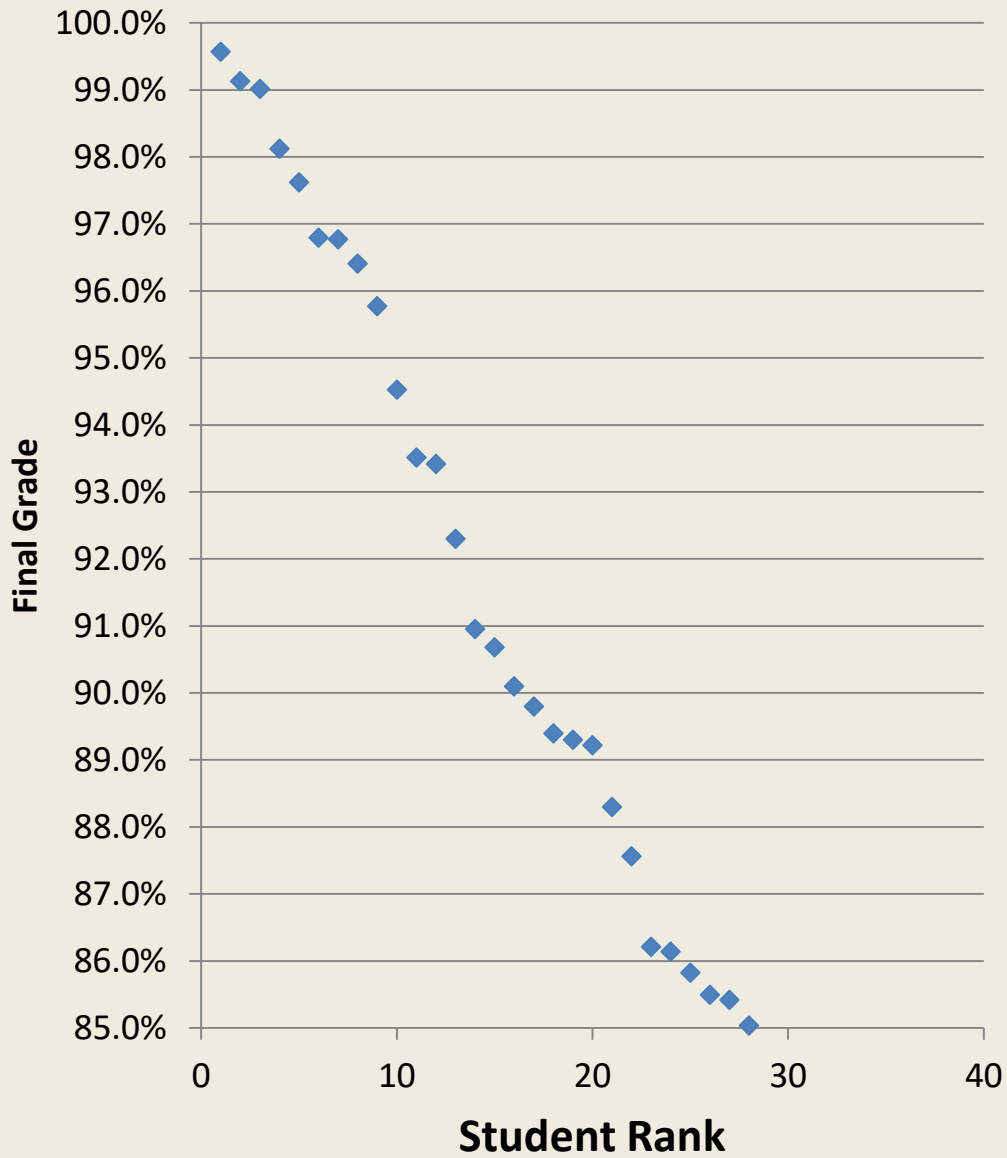


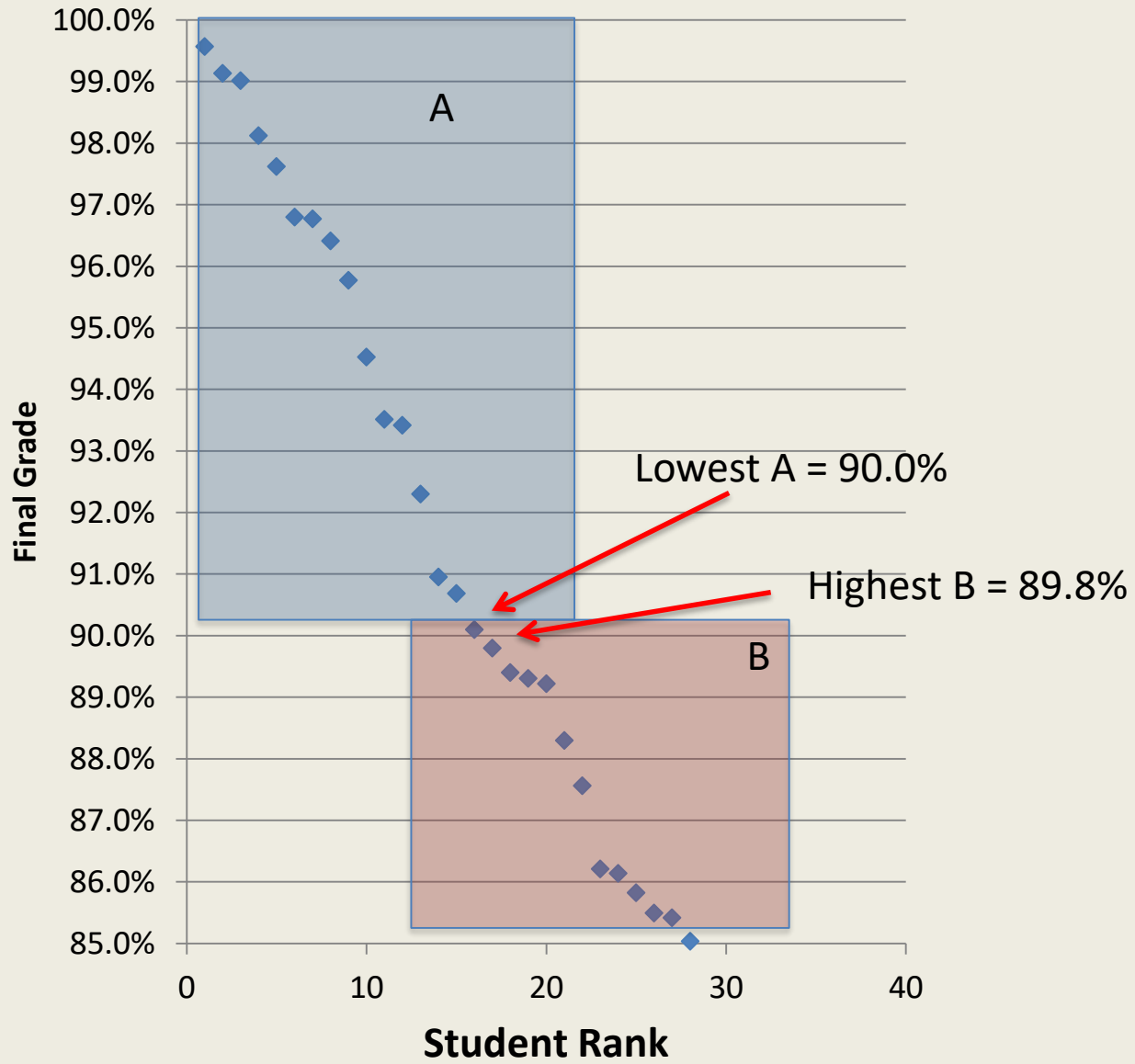
Final grades in my  
Spring 2011  
Geology 111G  
Class

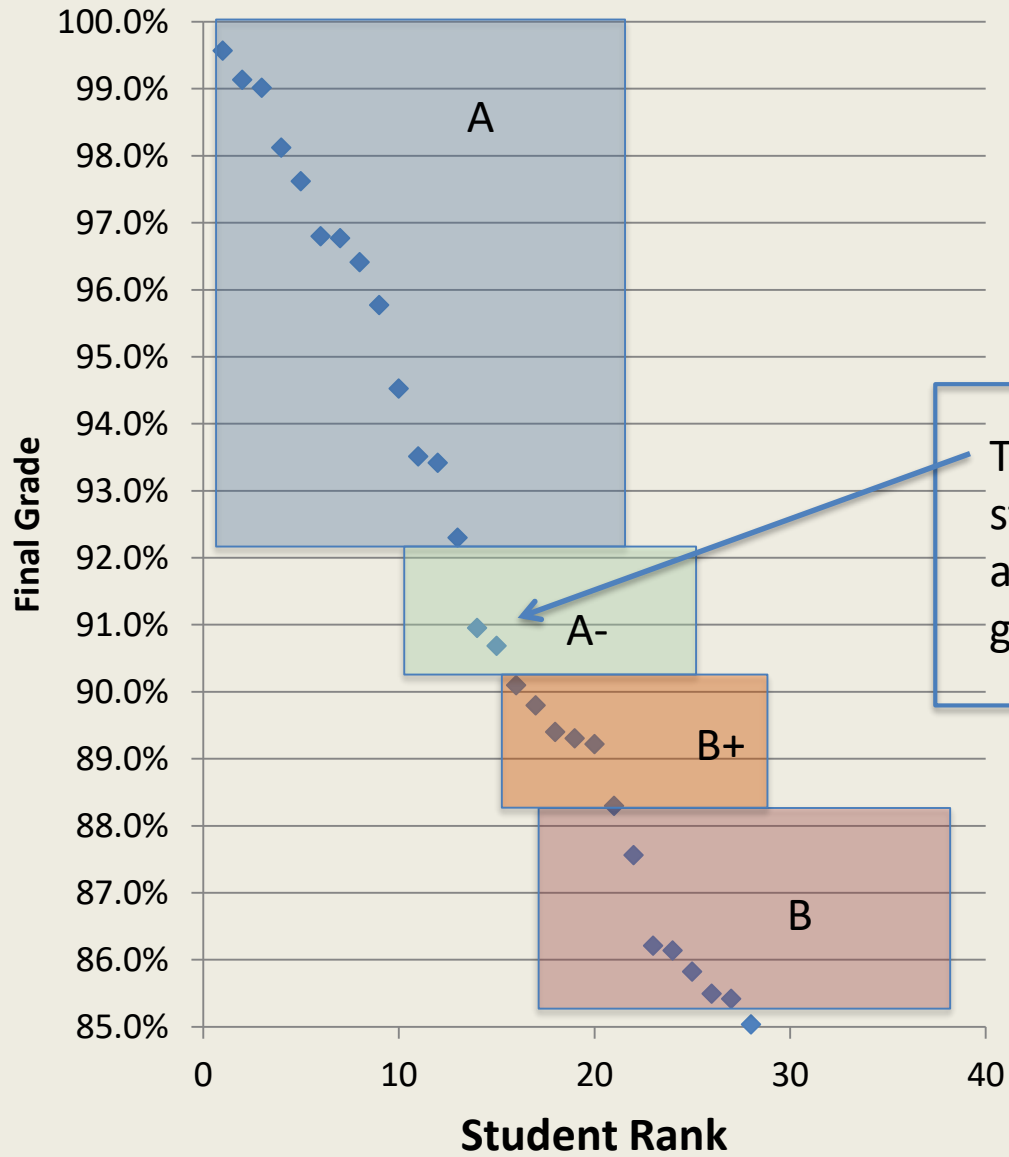


These are the students who have 85-100%

I need to decide where the grade cutoff is between A and B



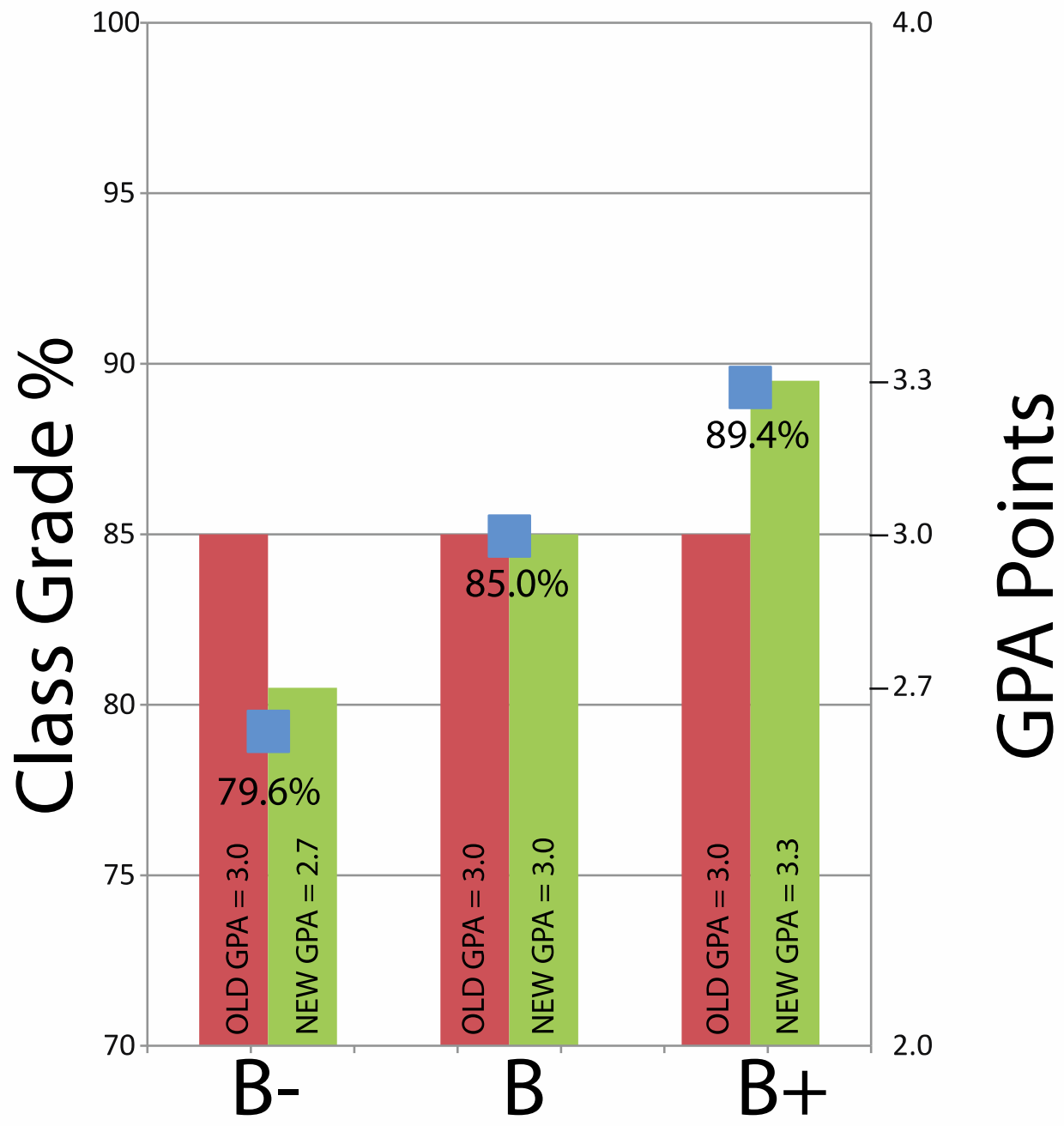




Fractional grades with point values are more **accurate** and more **fair**.

These are the students typically against fractional grading!

Grade vs. GPA

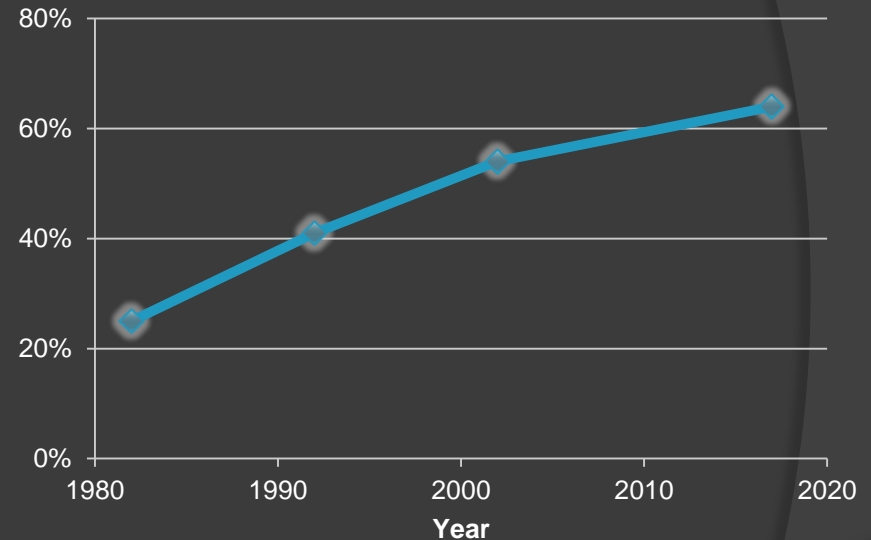


# National Trend is towards Fractional Grading

## Percentage of Universities with +/- grading

- 1982\*: 25%
- 1992\*: 41%
- 2002\*\*: 54%
- 2017\*\*\*: 64%

Schools with Fractional Grading



\*American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Grades and Grading Practices: Results of the 1992 AACRAO Survey (Washington, D.C., 1994).

\*\*American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Grading Practices Report (Washington, D.C., 2004).

\*\*\*\*\*American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Grading Practices Report (Washington, D.C., 2017).

# How many faculty use fractional grading?

- ◎ Faculty can opt out.
- ◎ No data was presented on what % of faculty use fractional grading.
- ◎ This is an important measure of the popularity of the system

# Concern #1: Fractional grades “harm” students

Grading systems are not in place to harm or help students

They are in place to accurately reflect student performance



# Concern #2

Students have to maintain a certain GPA to retain Federal and State Financial Aid

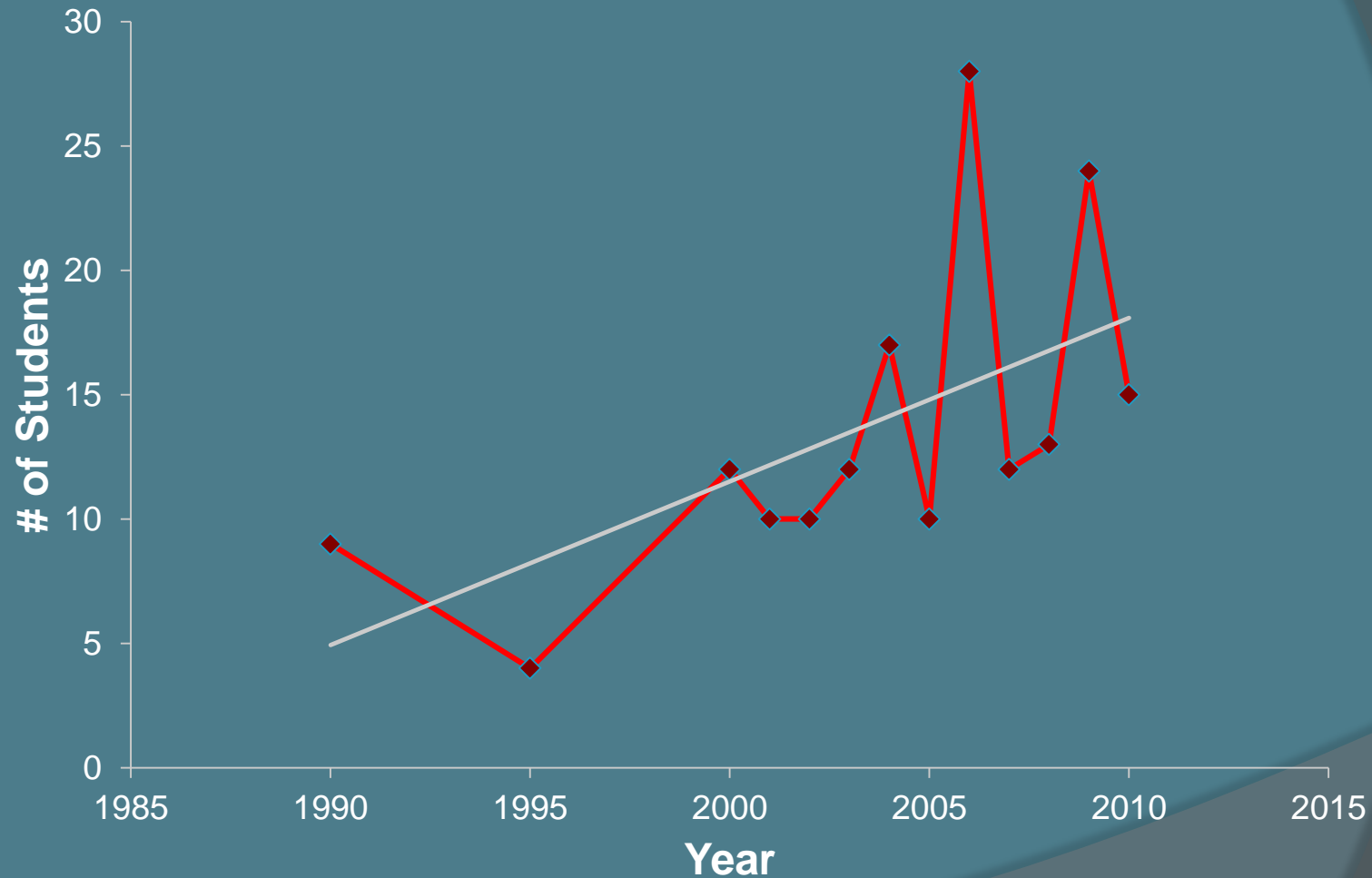
- ⦿ Unlike peer institutions, NMSU helps students by not penalizing C- students with a 1.7 instead of 2.0

# Concern #3

A- students are worried about losing their 4.0 avg.

- ⦿ The 4.0 grade should be reserved for the best students
- ⦿ There is an ever increasing number of students graduating with top honors
- ⦿ The sponsors did not present any information about how fractional grading affected the number of students graduating with a 4.0

# Students Graduating with 4.0



Data Source: NMSU Registrar's Office

# One aspect of the proposition worth considering:

- ⦿ They give a **hypothetical** of students with the same performance in different sections of the same class, but the faculty picked different grading systems
- ⦿ If a student got an 89%, the fractional graded student would get 3.3, the whole graded student would only get 3.0
- ⦿ Departments could be encouraged to pick one grading scheme for all sections of the same class.

# Summary

- It is the job of the faculty to evaluate the performance of the students
- The faculty have decided that this is their preferred grading system
- Fractional grading is more common, more accurate, and more fair