

Friday, October 20, 2000

**SCAPA Report to Senate
on the Distribution of Grades
1998-99**

Eighteen months ago SCAPA made its first report to Senate on the distribution of grades in the University, based on data for the academic years 1993-94 through 1997-98. Senate requested at that time that SCAPA do an annual audit of these matters. The present report reflects the additional data from the academic year 1998-99.

This present report looks only at undergraduate grades in the first-entry Faculties, and it includes, at Senate's explicit request, some data about the entering OAC averages of students. Senators will perhaps be surprised to see separate results, within the Faculty of Health Sciences, for the Schools of Kinesiology and of Nursing, as well as for the BHSc Program. This was to some extent an arbitrary decision based on the fact that the historical data reflects a time when those two schools were separate Faculties; on the other hand the patterns in Nursing and Kinesiology are so very different that it seems, in retrospect, useful that this report should have continued to separate them.

The first five slides show, for various Faculties, the percentage of course grades awarded in each grade category (F, D, C, B, A, A+) in 1998-99. These data do not separate the five different course-levels (0-, 1-, 2-, 3-, 4-). The graph for the Faculty of Science is presented as a benchmark in each graph, since it has what appears to be the most desirable shape – representing the fullest use of all the grade categories. Arts and Social Science show more bunching of grades in the B-range, and less use of the categories F and A+; this bunching in the B range is even more pronounced in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, in the BHSc Program, and in the School of Kinesiology. The graph for the Faculty of Engineering is like that for Science. In two units, Music and Nursing, there is a notable bunching, but it is in the A range, not the B range.

The next slide shows the average grade in each of the units, running from a low of about 69 in Social Science, to a high of 81 in Nursing.

The next slide is perhaps of particular interest, for it gives a measure of grade inflation in the University in the period 1993-94 to 1998-99. It shows that while there has been some inflation in that six-year period, it is very modest indeed, amounting to about one percentage point. When set against the data about the University's increasing entrance average – data which Senate has often seen – this modest inflation is perhaps not surprising. The next slide gives another measure of grade inflation by comparing the average grades given in the units in 1993-94 and 1998-99, the first and last years of the six-year period in question. This shows that there has been a modest increase in the average grade in all the units, though in Social Science that increase is vanishingly small.

Where the first five slides graphed the distribution of all the grade categories, the next slide looks closely at only one end of those graphs, the A+ end. It shows the % of all course grades that were A+ in each of the units. Here there is striking disparity, running from a low of 2% in IMS to a high of 12% in Nursing.

The next seven slides are SCAPA's attempt to respond to Senate's request that some information about entering OAC averages be factored into this report. The first two of these slides compare the units as to the OAC averages of their entering classes. Interesting disparities emerge from the second of these slides (the last slide on p. 2); it shows that over 20% of the entering class of the Faculty of Science had OAC averages of 90% or above, whereas only 12% of the Arts entering class, and only 2% of the entering class in Nursing had OAC averages in that range.

The first slide on p. 3 is an attempt to glimpse how the units have fared over the last six years in the percent of their entering class with OAC averages over 90%. There has been a healthy increase here in all units but Nursing, where there has been a drop.

The next slide looks at the percentage of the entering class in each Faculty that have OAC marks in the very highest range, the range that earns the most valuable entrance scholarships at Western. Here Arts heads the list at 4.5%, followed by Health Sciences and Science. Kinesiology and Nursing do not figure. The total number of students entering the University with marks in this range was 74 – a small number, but not an insignificant one.

The next slide (the third on p. 3) considers those 74 top entering students, and shows what percentage of them go to each of the units. Here Science heads the list by a long shot: 42% of those top entering students enroll in the Faculty of Science.

The next two slides are an attempt to give a picture, from a certain angle, of the phenomenon known as 'grade drop' – the drop in marks that most students experience when they move from secondary school to university. These slides compare, in the various units, the OAC averages of the entering class with the course grades awarded in those units. In particular they look at the percentage of these grades which are in the A+ range. Perhaps these comparisons are of limited utility especially in the case of 'porous' Faculties like Arts, Science and Social Science – Faculties whose students take courses in other Faculties, and which teach a good many students who are registered elsewhere. However that may be, the one striking anomaly on these charts is that where all other units show a drop in the percentage of A+s, Nursing shows an increase.

The final slide shows a diachronic picture of the percentage of students in each unit who have achieved the Dean's Honor Roll. This percentage has approximately doubled in the six year period under study. It is striking that, against a background of very little inflation in *average* marks in this period, the percentage of very high marks should have grown so markedly.

One final observation. In presenting these numbers SCAPA is not in any way implying any interpretation of them. Does, for example, a situation in which a very high percentage of grades given are in the A+ range mean that the unit has a lot of excellent students, or does it mean that the unit's standards are a bit lax? Or does it mean something quite different from either of these? The layers of interpretive possibilities are deep and complex and SCAPA is not here attempting to enter into them. We do however believe that the University community should be aware of these numbers, if only to nourish its reflection on these matters.

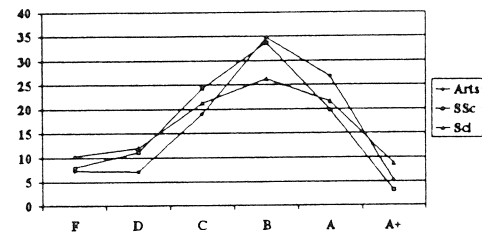
Respectfully submitted,

John Thorp,
Chair of SCAPA

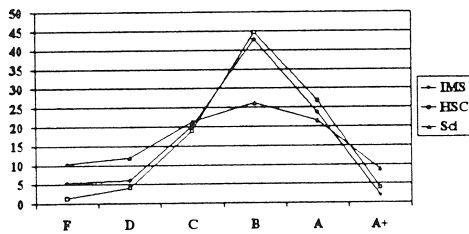
SCAPA Report to Senate

Grade Distributions for 1998-99

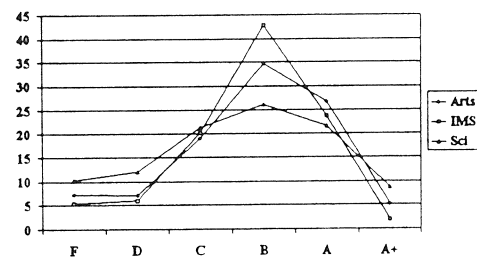
Grade Distribution 98-99 Selected Faculties



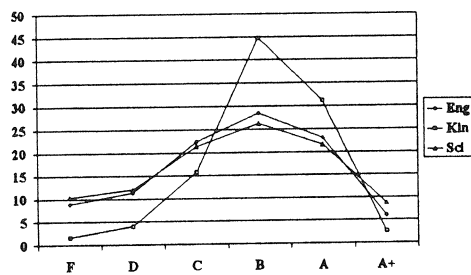
Grade Distribution 1998-99 Selected Faculties



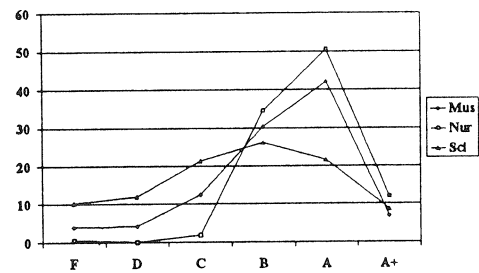
Grade Distribution 98-99 Selected Faculties



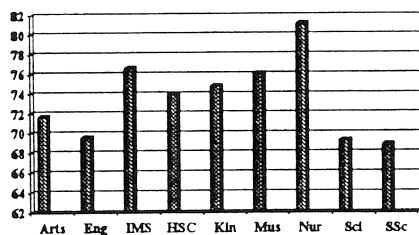
Grade Distribution 98-99 Selected Faculties



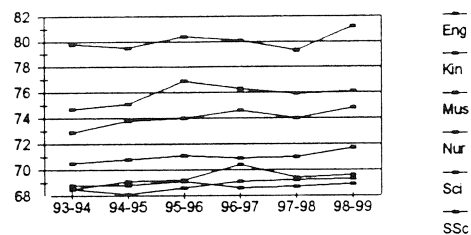
Grade Distribution 1998-99 Selected Faculties



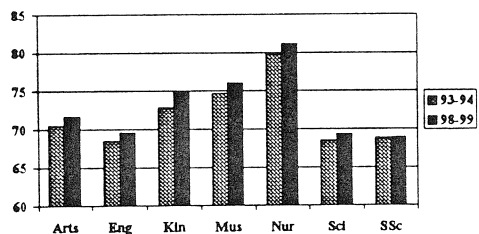
Average Grades by Faculty
1998-99



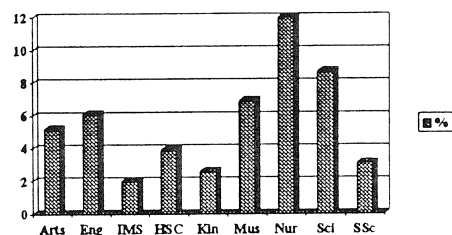
Average Grades
1993-94 to 1998-99



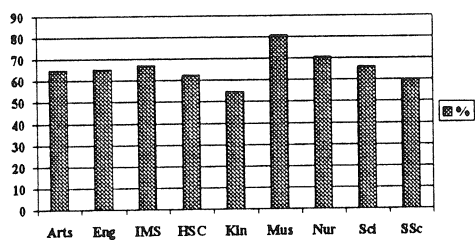
Average Grades by Faculty
93-94 & 98-99



%A+ by Faculty 98-99



% OAC >80 by Faculty



% OAC A+ by Faculty 98-99

