

FAST FACTS

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research

May 23, 2019

Welcome to the world of Fast Facts!

This is an occasional newsletter that we will be publishing from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research. We'll be presenting various types of data in a simple, easily digestible format (no Tums needed!) that hopefully will be of some interest to the campus community.

For our first installment we'll focus on some grade trends, a timely topic as the spring semester comes to a close.

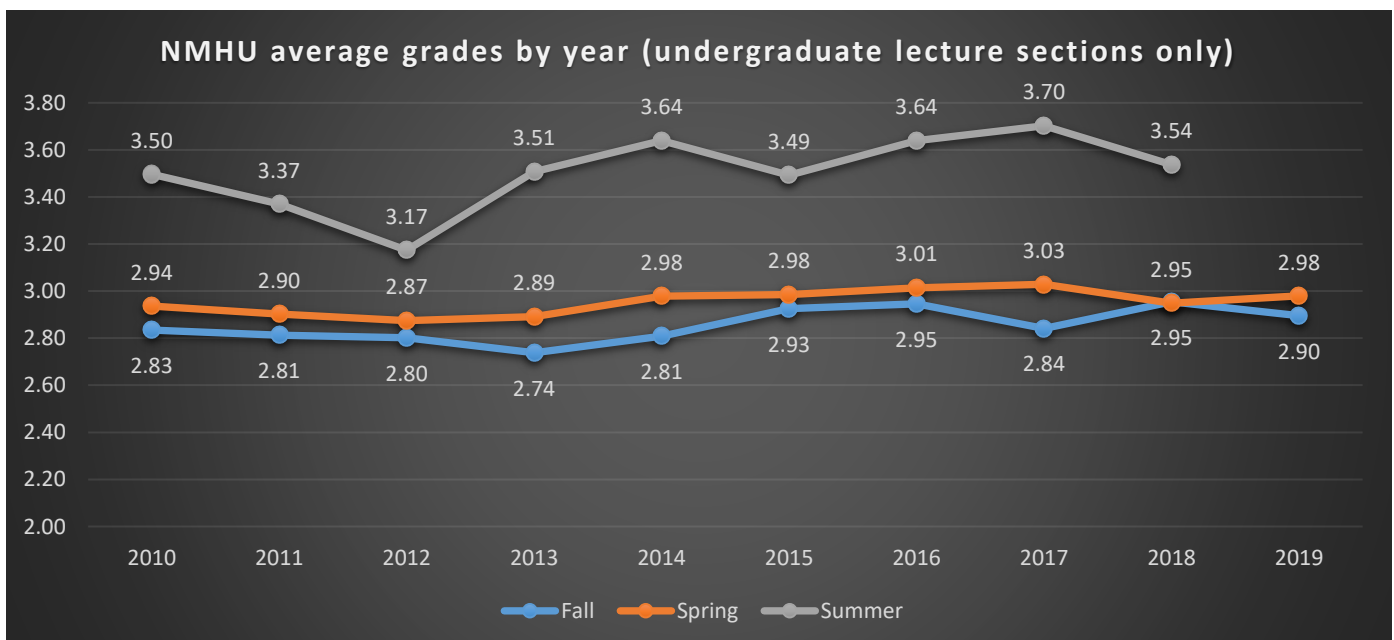
Please let us know if you have any comments or any suggestions for future *Fast Facts* topics. You can send an email to Lee Allard at lallard@nmhu.edu.

What's in a grade?

Here at Highlands University, we have recently completed the spring grading process, to the delight of some of our students and, unfortunately, to the consternation of others.

Have our average grades changed across time? The answer to this question can inform discussions about possible grade inflation (or deflation), level of student preparation, etc.

The chart below shows average grades for all undergraduate lecture courses for the past 10 years, broken down by term. (For this analysis letter grades were converted to numeric grades using the standard conversion values, e.g. A=4.0, B=3.0, etc. The year in the chart axis refers to the academic year, e.g. 2018 is the 2017-18 academic year.)

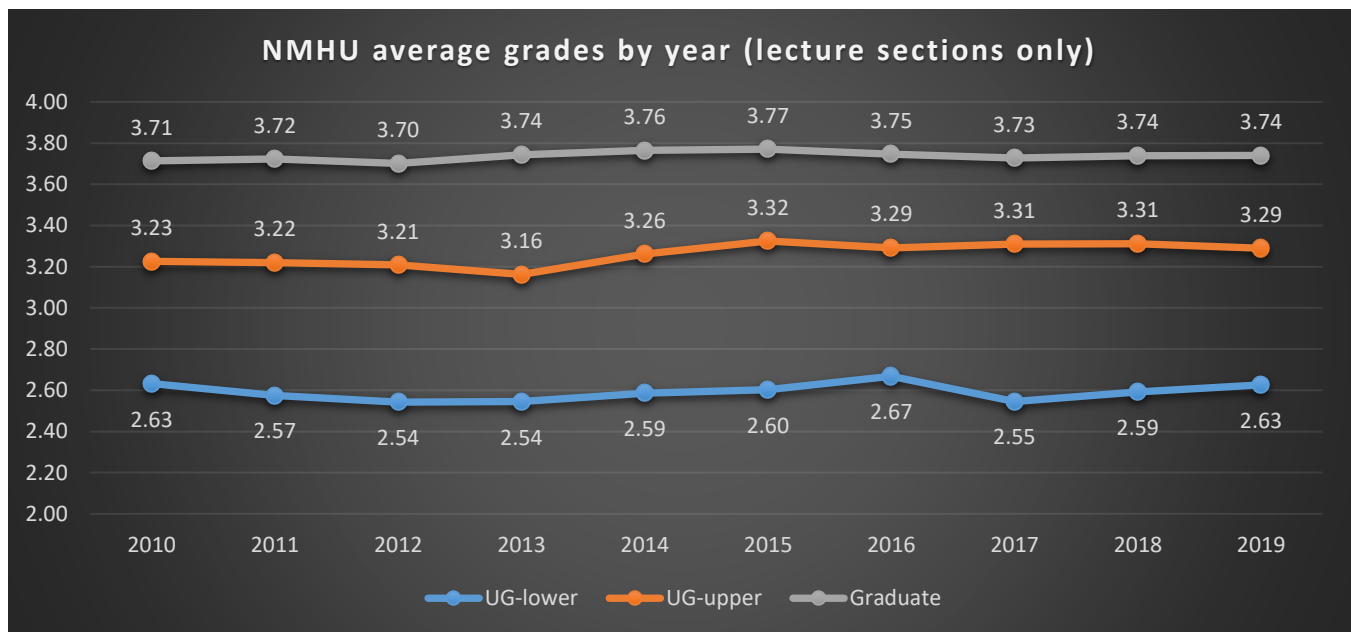


The average grades are pretty stable across time, at least for the past ten years, so there is no obvious evidence of either grade inflation, or marked changes in student performance.

Not surprisingly, spring grades are slightly higher than fall grades. This probably reflects in part the fact that some academically weaker students are not retained to the spring term, and may also reflect a higher level of academic maturity of students in the spring term (e.g. they know what to expect and have more classroom experience).

Average grades for the summer term are much higher than average grades for fall or spring. This difference has shown up everywhere I've worked, so it isn't anything surprising or unusual, and probably reflects a number of factors. First, students taking summer classes are likely to be experienced and motivated students. Second, students typically don't take heavy course loads in the summer. Third, summer classes tend to be smaller and may be pedagogically more effective. And finally, maybe everyone is just in a slightly better mood in the summer.

Digging a bit deeper into the data, the chart below shows average grades broken down by level, namely undergraduate lower division (100 and 200 level courses), undergraduate upper division (300 and 400 level courses), and graduate (500 and above courses). These distinctions are somewhat artificial, but give some idea of how the grades shake out at different levels.



Average grades are quite a bit higher for upper division UG courses compared to lower division UG courses. This is not surprising, partly because we tend to have academically stronger students in upper division courses, and partly because the students taking upper division courses tend to be more motivated and more focused.

Average grades have remained very steady for our graduate level courses, but are quite high with about an A-average.