An important part of a college student’s life is the final grade made in a college course. For most students, throughout high-school, an A grade equaled 4 quality points, a B grade equaled 3 quality points, and so on. Many colleges and state universities use this standard grading system; however, LaGrange College uses the plus/minus grading system. The claim for the use of this system is that it looks better, meaning the grading system makes the school look more prestigious, and it pushes the students to work harder.

In a study by Frank & Feeney (2006) at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, students were shown to prefer the standard grading system because it was thought that the plus/minus grading system did not help their GPA as a whole. Frank & Feeney found, however, that there was no effect on the average grades assigned by the faculty and there was no grade inflation or deflation. The simple fact that faculty members felt they could better pinpoint a student’s final grade standing made the faculty overall accept the system. In another study, Dixon (2004) looked at whether the plus/minus system helps or hurts students GPA. Students were given a choice between the two grading systems. Overwhelmingly, students chose the standard grading system. However, in the final grades, students who had chosen the plus/minus grading system had a better overall GPA, than those who chose the standard grading system. Faculty members seem to be generally supportive of the plus/minus grading system, and believe it better motivates students; however, students look at the plus/minus system overwhelmingly negatively. Baker and Bates (1999) showed that 59.7% of students surveyed rated the plus/minus system value as “negative”. Does that mean that students feel they have to work harder in the plus/minus system to earn a better grade than in the regular system?

This study attempts to determine the attitude of LaGrange College faculty nd students toward plus/minus grading.

Method

Participants
LaGrange College students and faculty were randomly selected to participate in this study. There were 69 students (29 female, 40 male) and 13 faculty members (7 associate professors, 4 professors, and 2 chair of department). Participants were selected by a simple random sample of faculty members and student organizations. All participants were treated in accordance with the “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” (American Psychological Association, 1992).

Materials
Two different questionnaires were used in this study: One for students (13 questions) and one for faculty members (7 questions). See Appendix A. A manila envelope was available for students to place their surveys, and an unmarked single letter size envelope was available for each faculty member to ensure anonymity.

Procedure
Each participant was given the questionnaire either by the president of their student organization or by me. After completing the questionnaire, he or she placed it in the manila envelope to ensure anonymity. Faculty members completed their questionnaires and placed them in a blank envelope that was provided and left them in the box outside of his or her office door.

Results
On a 5 point Likert scale, the faculty has a more positive attitude toward the question whether or not the plus/minus system is effective (m=3.88 p <.01). The students on the other hand, have a more negative feeling toward the effectiveness of the plus/minus system (m=2.09 p <.01). In the question regarding an A minus should be worth more than 3.75 quality points, the faculty and the students both have a strong positive view that it should be worth more (faculty m=3.88, student m=4.51 Sig. <.01). Another finding that was common throughout the faculty was the importance of distinguishing between a higher end grading student (97, 88, 79) and a lower end grading student (91, 82, 70) mean=4.08. Table 1 shows the comparison between the faculty and student attitudes regarding the survey questions.

Discussion
The data are very much similar to what was found in other studies. The faculty seem to prefer the plus/minus grading system much more than the students. One reason may be because the faculty members prefer to distinguish between the higher end grading student and the lower end grading student. Students may prefer the standard grading system, because of the hope scholarship requirements, the fact that making an A- is worth 3.75 quality points rather than 4 points, or that if a C- is made athletes are not eligible to participate in their sport. Some students had very strong opinions regarding the plus/
minus system, but in fact, many prestigious schools are switching to this system. Professors prefer it because it shows that the school is a part of this more elite group. If this study was to be replicated, a larger sample size would help the numbers to have a more distinct difference between the groups.

References


Questionnaire on Attitudes Regarding the Plus/Minus Grading System at LaGrange College

As a student in Dr. Kraemer's Special Topics in Psychology class, I am conducting a survey to analyze student and faculty attitudes regarding the plus and minus grading system at LaGrange College. I am requesting only a few minutes of your time to help make this effort a success. Due to the small population of the LaGrange College community, your response is very important. Be assured that your responses are strictly confidential. You are not being asked to provide your name on the survey, so all responses are anonymous. By completing the questionnaire, you are giving consent for your answers to be used anonymously in this study. You have the right to not participate if you so choose. Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Becky Johnson

Students: When you are finished, please place the completed, or blank, questionnaire in the unmarked envelope.

Faculty/Staff/Administration: When you are finished, please seal your completed, or blank, questionnaire in the unmarked envelope provided and I will pick it up from you.

Questions 1-4 will be used anonymously to analyze results regarding the plus and minus system. Please answer to the best of your ability.

1) According to Semester hours, what is your class rank? (Select one)
   o Freshman (less than 30 hours)
   o Sophomore (31-60 hours)
   o Junior (61-90 hours)
   o Senior (91+ hours)

2) What is your gender?
   o Female
   o Male

3) Are you a student athlete here at LaGrange College? (Select one)
   o Yes
   o No

4) If you are a student athlete here at LaGrange College, have you ever not been eligible, because of grade issues?
   o Yes
   o No

Questions 5-13 will assess your attitude regarding the plus and minus system at LaGrange College. Please read each question carefully and answer to the best of your ability.

5) Have you ever received a minus grade while at LaGrange College? (A-, B-, C-, D-)
   o Yes
   o No

6) Have you ever received a plus grade while at LaGrange College? (A+, B+, C+, D+)
   o Yes
   o No
7) On average, what final grade do you receive the most in your classes at LaGrange College?
   o Plus (A+, B+, C+, D+)
   o Regular (A, B, C, D)
   o Minus (A-, B-, C-, D-)

8) If given a choice between the regular grading system (A, B, C, D) or plus/minus system, which would you choose?
   o Regular Grading System (A,B,C,D)
   o Plus/Minus System (A+, B-, etc.)

9) Receiving a final grade with a plus (+) helps my GPA.
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Neutral
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree

10) The A+ grade should be worth more than 4 quality points.
    o Strongly Agree
    o Agree
    o Neutral
    o Disagree
    o Strongly Disagree

11) Receiving a final grade with a minus (-) hurts my GPA.
    o Strongly Agree
    o Agree
    o Neutral
    o Disagree
    o Strongly Disagree

12) The A- grade should be worth 4 quality points, rather than 3.75 quality points.
    o Strongly Agree
    o Agree
    o Neutral
    o Disagree
    o Strongly Disagree

13) Overall, I think the plus/minus system is effective.
    o Strongly Agree
    o Agree
    o Neutral
    o Disagree
    o Strongly Disagree

If you have any comments you would like to make regarding anything about this survey, please feel free to do so on the bottom of this page. Thank you again for your participation.

Question 1 will be used in the results section of the plus/minus system. Please answer to the best of your ability.
1) What is your faculty rank here at LaGrange College? (Select one)
   o Associate Professor
   o Assistant Professor
   o Professor
   o Chair of Department and Professor

Questions 2-7 focus on attitudes regarding the plus/minus grading system. Please answer each question to the best of your ability.
2) On average, which grading system do you use the most? (Select one)
   o Plus/Minus system (A+, A-, B+, B-, etc.)
   o Regular grading system (A, B, C, D)
3) Given a choice between the two grading systems, which do you feel is more helpful (as far as grade point average) to students? (Select one)
   o Plus/Minus system
   o Regular grading system

4) The A+ grade should be worth more than 4 quality points. (Select one)
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Neutral
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree

5) The A- grade should be worth 4 quality points rather than 3.75 quality points. (Select one)
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Neutral
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree

6) Overall, I think the plus/minus system is effective. (Select one)
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Neutral
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree

7) It is important for me to distinguish between the higher end grading student (97, 87, 77) and the lower end grading student (91, 81, 71). (Select one)
   o Strongly Agree
   o Agree
   o Neutral
   o Disagree
   o Strongly Disagree

If you have any comments you would like to make regarding anything about this survey, please feel free to do so on the bottom of this page. Thank you again for your participation.

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Faculty Mean</th>
<th>Student Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+ worth more than 4</td>
<td>3.88 (question 4)</td>
<td>4.15 (question 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A- worth more than 3.75</td>
<td>3.88 (question 5)</td>
<td>4.51 (question 12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of +/- system</td>
<td>3.88 (question 6)</td>
<td>2.09 (question 13)</td>
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