Leaked! Harvard’s Grading Rubric
By NATHANIEL STEIN

A longtime government professor at Harvard lashed out Tuesday at what he deemed a system of rampant grade inflation after learning that students are receiving mainly A’s.

— The Boston Globe, Dec. 4

From: The Dean of Harvard College

To: The Faculty

In light of the controversy regarding so-called grade inflation, please take a moment to review the grading guidelines rubric, reproduced below:

¶ The A+ grade is used only in very rare instances for the recognition of truly exceptional achievement.

For example: A term paper receiving the A+ is virtually indistinguishable from the work of a professional, both in its choice of paper stock and its font. The student’s command of the topic is expert, or at the very least intermediate, or beginner. Nearly every single word in the paper is spelled correctly; those that are not can be reasoned out phonetically within minutes. Content from Wikipedia is integrated with precision. The paper contains few, if any, death threats.

A few things can disqualify an otherwise worthy paper from this exceptional honor: 1) Plagiarism, unless committed with extraordinary reluctance. 2) The paper has been doused in blood or another liquid, unless dousing was requested by the instructor. 3) The paper was submitted late (with reasonable leeway — but certainly by no more than one or two years).

An overall course grade of A+ is reserved for those students who have not only demonstrated outstanding achievement in coursework but have also asked very nicely.

Finally, the A+ grade is awarded to all collages, dioramas and other art projects.

¶ The instructor may at her discretion supplement the A+ with one or two additional pluses (A++ or A+++). This grade is known as the A+ with garlands. Garlands are generally awarded for no reason.
¶ The **A grade**, still exceptional, is reserved for work that is nearly as excellent as that receiving the A+ and that would receive the higher grade if not for some minor and easily excused flaw, such as that the student is not enrolled at Harvard.

¶ The **A– grade** is awarded to work that, while very good, is nevertheless diminished by a significant flaw that cannot be completely overlooked. For example, a *final examination* receiving the A– might be impeccable, except for having been left blank. Or the student filled in the test, but did so according to no discernible pattern, while screaming like a maniac. An A– *term paper* might offer an original analysis of a complex topic, but exist only within the imagination of the instructor or the student, or, in some rare instances, both.

In cases where an assignment falls precisely on the border between A and A–, the instructor should err on the side of awarding an A+ with garlands.

¶ The **B+ grade** is reserved for students who have committed assault.

¶ The **B grade** may be awarded as a joke, before being replaced with a higher grade, so long as the instructor has checked with the registrar that the student’s psychological profile permits practical jokes of a cruel nature.

¶ Contrary to “urban legend,” **grades lower than B** do exist, and should be awarded without hesitation to any and all work submitted by farm animals.

*As practice, try giving this memo a grade! (The correct grade is A+ with garlands.)*

*Nathaniel Stein is a writer for magazines and television.*