

# opinion

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## The Athens Messenger

### The Messenger

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## Trying to take hot air out of grade inflation

By BRIAN MANHIRE

Thank you for publishing the Associated Press article "Prof fights grade inflation with double standard" in last Sunday's Messenger. Grade inflation is a debilitating national problem; it is beneath the dignity of reputable universities yet it is a longstanding commonplace. To its credit, Ohio University has, through the provost's Teacher Evaluation of Learning Committee initiative, recently studied grade inflation locally.

Having served on the TELC, I can say that it has been one of the most interesting experiences I've had in over 25 years of service to the university. The committee thoughtfully studied the difficult, emotional, awkward and delicate (and to some, embarrassing) phenomenon of grade inflation on our campus. I fully support the TELC report (available at <http://www.ohiou.edu/apaa/>) and I hope its recommendations, which I believe are intended to be more a tentative means for promoting further discussion rather than ironclad, will ultimately foster action leading to improvements.

Grade inflation negatively impacts the entire university community and all stakeholders, e.g., students and their parents, alumni, faculty, administrators, staff, Ohio citizens (taxpayers), etc., including Governor Taft, should be fully aware of it and concerned about it.

The "bully pulpit" (Athens News, 7 December 7, 2000) provided through the good offices of Provost Brehm is intended to help "... bring the university community together to talk about this issue." (The Post, Jan. 22, 2001). Concrete examples so far include the TELC report itself and the follow-up Winter Symposium held at OU on Jan. 19.

President Glidden affirmed that grade inflation is a complex and delicate issue (especially for faculty) when he said

"Whatever we do, the faculty need to be comfortable with it. If we try to force something on them, I guarantee it won't work." In addition, Professor Gary Pfeiffer, OU Faculty Senate chair, has said "... this is something that Faculty Senate should be interested in looking at more closely, since grading standards are very much a concern of faculty, more so than the administration."

Given all of this, I think the Ohio University community is off to a good start in considering the current status of academic standards on our campus. But further involvement by more of the university community will be needed if the TELC initiative is to have any lasting benefit.

Also, as the university community continues to consider this issue, it would be helpful to seek the opinions and guidance of others, especially those responsible for the overall welfare of public higher education in Ohio, such as university boards of trustees and the Ohio Board of Regents. For although grade inflation should be of local (OU) concern, because we are a state-supported university, it may also be perceived as an important quality issue by the Ohio taxpayers who support us. If it is, that should be respectfully taken into account by everyone. By knowing from a statewide perspective the relative importance of grade inflation as compared to other problems confronting higher education in Ohio (e.g., raising the tuition cap at Ohio State, the regent's Success Challenge effort to improve graduation rates, etc.), the Ohio University community will be in a better position to make appropriate decisions about grade inflation on our own campus.

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**Brian Manhire is a professor of electrical engineering at Ohio University.**

### other voices