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Report: Harvard dean says A- is median grade at university, raising concern over lenient grading

Posted by Matt Rocheleau December 3, 2013 07:52 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The median grade for undergraduates studying at Harvard University is an A- while most commonly-awarded grade is an A, campus officials told the [Harvard Crimson](#) student newspaper Tuesday, raising concern that the university is more lenient in grading students than many rival schools.

The Crimson reported that dean of undergraduate education Jay M. Harris released the grade statistics Tuesday afternoon during a monthly meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Harvard government professor Harvey Mansfield reportedly told Harris during the meeting: "A little bird has told me that the most frequently given grade at Harvard College right now is an A-. If this is true or nearly true, it represents a failure on the part of this faculty and its leadership to maintain our academic standards."

Harris stood, hesitated and looked toward fellow dean Michael D. Smith before answering.

"The median grade in Harvard College is indeed an A-," Harris said, according to the Crimson. "The most frequently awarded grade in Harvard College is actually a straight A."

The student newspaper reported that after the meeting, Harris said that the grading data came from fall 2012 and several prior semesters.

Mark Schiefsky chair of Harvard's classics department told the Crimson he was concerned about how high the grade stats were.

"I don't know what should be done about it, but it seems to me troubling," Schiefsky told the publication. "One has a range of grades to give and one would presumably expect a wider distribution."

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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