

THE CASE FOR ALBERTA GRADE ADJUSTMENTS

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ALBERTA SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADING PRACTICES

One province from which UBC has admitted a significant number of first year students is Alberta. UBC has received anecdotal information that Alberta grading practices differ from BC grading practices, and that adjustments should be made in order to account for these differences in the interest of fairness and of admitting top students to the University. This issue was taken up by the Working Group that is examining comparative standards for admission to UBC Vancouver.

In order to consider admission average adjustments for applicants from Alberta on evidence, a number of factors were taken into consideration. First, research from Dave Miller, PhD, a secondary school counsellor at St. Mary's Secondary School in Calgary, AB. Second, analysis of the relative performance of BC and Alberta students, admitted on common admission averages, was conducted. Finally, the findings from these were compared to discipline-specific findings produced by the Mathematics Department on the UBC Vancouver campus.

David Miller's discussion paper, titled "Comparison of Alberta and BC Grade Twelve Examinable Subjects", notes that an "A" is achieved in Alberta Secondary Schools at 80%, whereas in BC, an "A" is achieved at 86%. Analysis of grade distribution, obtained from the BC Ministry of Education and the Government of Alberta Education websites, shows that roughly the same proportion of graduates fall within the "A" band in both educational jurisdictions. For example, in 2003, 27.6% of Alberta students who took Math 30 (senior year mathematics) achieved an "A" in the course (final grade between 80% and 100%); in BC, 27.1% of the students who wrote Principles of Math 12 achieved an A (final grade between 86% and 100%). Therefore, we can argue that approximately the same percentile of students achieve an A in math in Alberta as in BC, although the Alberta students will present lower percentage grades in the course. Such similarities are also observed among other senior year courses presented by Alberta and BC students for admission to UBC.

These findings suggest that because we do not consider the details of the indigenous grading scale, UBC may be losing a number of strong Alberta students. However, it would be unfair to simply boost Alberta grades by 6% as this would present an unfair advantage for Alberta students in the higher end of the scale (and would therefore have a large impact on awarding UBC entrance scholarships). It was decided that an approach used to calibrate grades for IB applicants to UBC would be appropriate in the Alberta situation as well.

COMPARING UBC STUDENT PERFORMANCE TO ALBERTA ADMISSION AVERAGES

In order to determine how to properly calibrate BC and Alberta grades, linear regressions were performed to determine how secondary school grades from both jurisdictions predict first-year performance at UBC. The average admission average and the sessional average were computed for incoming BC high school students from 2003 to 2007. This determined the average grade drop (expressed as x%). The same computation was applied to incoming Alberta students for that period to obtain an average grade drop of y%.

This analysis revealed that a BC student admitted with an admission average of 86% can be projected to obtain a first year sessional average of 73.9% at UBC. An Alberta student with the same admission average (86%) can be expected to obtain a first year sessional average of 75.3%. These results show that Alberta students can be expected to do as well at UBC (in terms of first year sessional average) as BC students with an admission average

