



# WPI

## Finding the Balance Between Providing Academic Flexibility and Maintaining Academic Standards

Committee on Academic Policy

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# Trends in student behavior

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- In the last three years
  - Increased requests to extend deadlines
  - Increased requests for additional assignments and make-up exams
  - Reasons provided:
    - Feeling overwhelmed
    - Mental health reasons
    - Sometimes no reason given
  - Increased claims of deserving better grades

Are these requests reasonable?

How should faculty respond to these requests?

# Impacts on Faculty

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- Increased faculty anxiety and workload
  - Trying to preserve course objectives
  - Struggling to respond to student requests
  - Cannot request health reports (privacy reasons)

# Mental Health Crises

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NEA NEWS

## The Mental Health Crisis on College Campuses

Rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation on college campuses have never been higher. Meanwhile, faculty and staff are overwhelmed.

- WPI's actions:
  - Mental Health and Well Being Task Force
  - Mental Health Implementation Teams (MHIT 1.0 and MHIT 2.0)
  - Campus Wellness Coalition
  - Center of Well-Being (Director Paula Fitzpatrick)

# Academic Flexibility Guidelines

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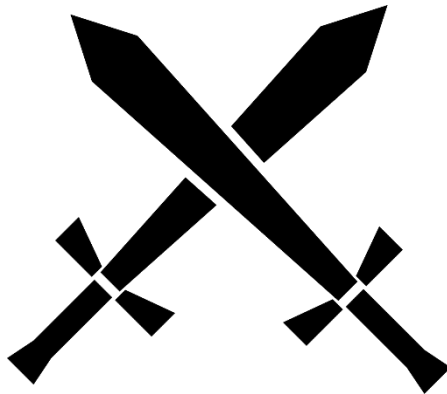
- Preparing Academic Flexibility Guidelines for Faculty
  - Paula Fitzpatrick, Director of the Center for Well-Being
  - Charles Morse, Dean of Student Wellness

The goal: to find a policy that compassionately balances the need for structure and flexibility, that is transparent and accessible to all students, and that allows all students some flexibility without negative consequences.

- Not arguing for infinite flexibility

**Student  
Wellbeing**

**Faculty  
Wellbeing**



**Academic  
Standards  
and  
Course  
Objectives**

**Student  
Wellbeing**

**Faculty  
Wellbeing**



**Academic  
Standards  
and  
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# Flexibility Guidelines

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- CAP is seeking your input
  - Your recommendations:
    - what works
    - what does not
  - Problems you are facing
- CAP will send online forms to [dl-faculty@wpi.edu](mailto:dl-faculty@wpi.edu).
- You can also email us [gr-cap2023@wpi.edu](mailto:gr-cap2023@wpi.edu).



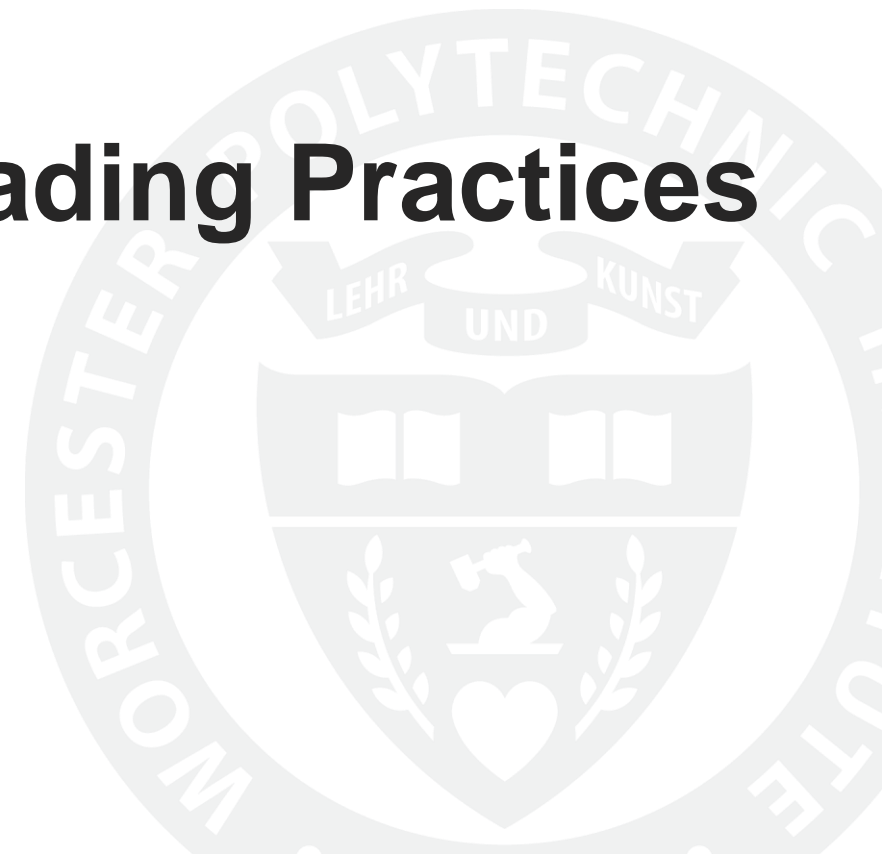


# WPI

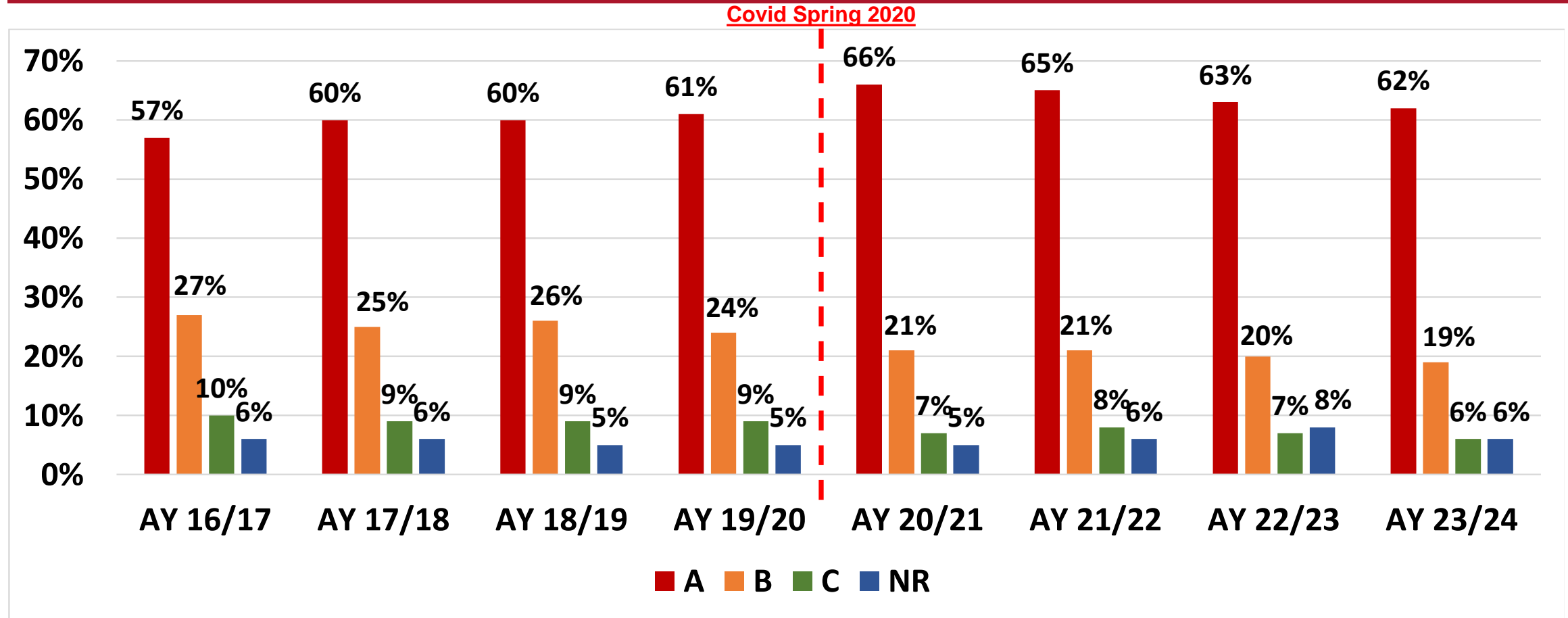
## **CAP is Seeking Your Input: Grading Practices**

Committee on Academic Policy

Members:



# Grade Distribution Fall Semester (all courses)\*



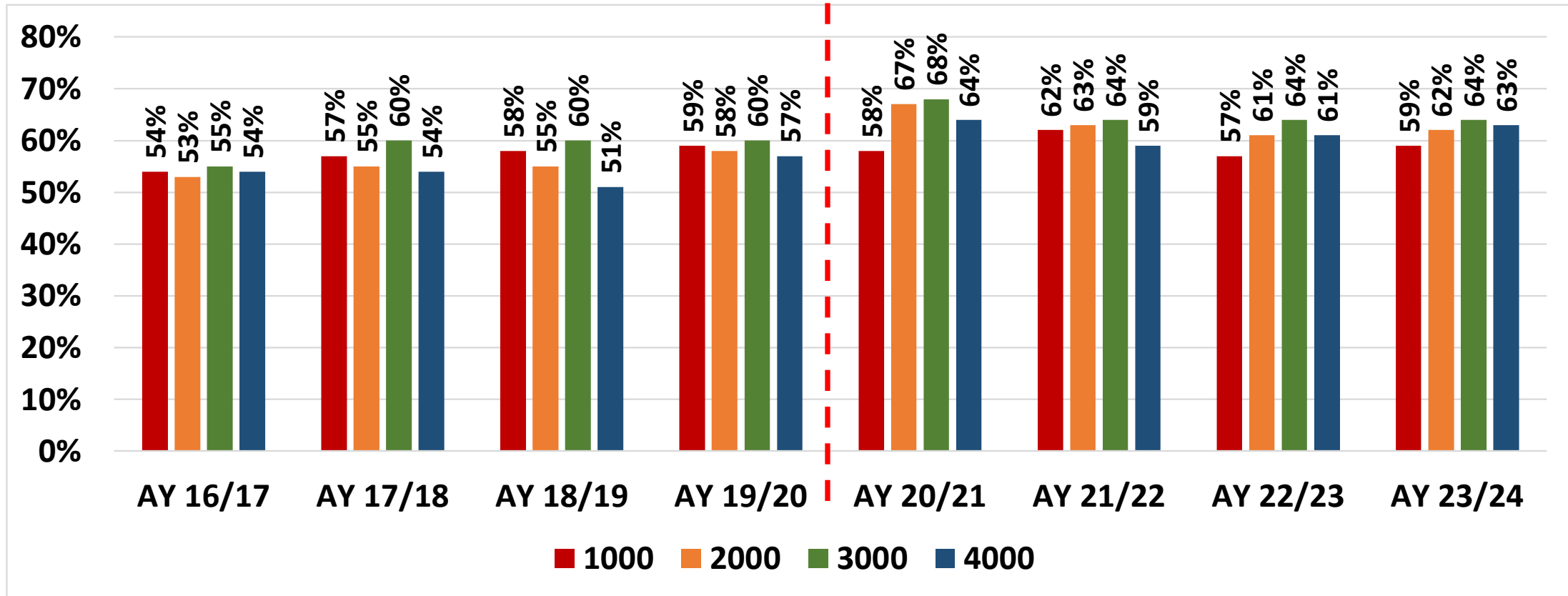
\* I, P and SP grades not shown; P grade < 1% except Fall '22 (2.6%)

- **Steady increase of “A” grades (even before Covid) but ...**
- **NR rate remains constant (or even increases), i.e., gap is widening**



# Percentage of “A” grades in 1000 – 4000 level courses (Fall)

Covid Spring 2020



# Faculty approved grading principles for projects

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The following are some characteristics that faculty should use in communicating expectations and evaluating the quality of each student's project work.

The degree to which the student:

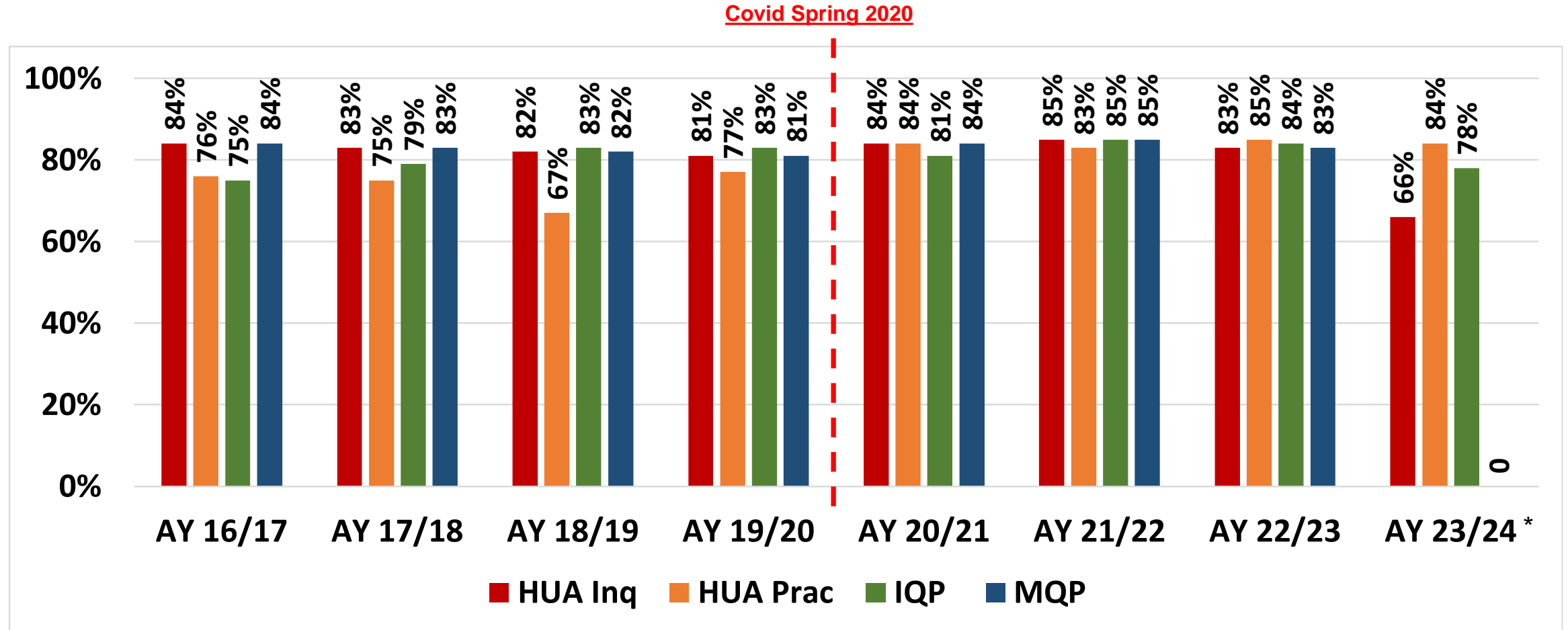
- developed effective or creative goals or approaches,
- demonstrated initiative and originality,
- showed depth and critical thought in analysis,
- produced high quality results,
- took the lead in discussion, planning, and analysis,
- produced a clear, professional-level report with excellent drafts along the way,
- anticipated work that needed to be done and completed it in a timely manner, and
- worked to advance the success of the team.

**A:** This grade denotes *excellent work* that attains all of the project goals and learning outcomes. **The product and process of this work meet all of the expectations and exceed them in several areas.**

**B:** This grade denotes *consistently good work* that attains the project goals and learning outcomes. **The product and process of this work meet but generally do not exceed all of the expectations.**

**C:** This grade denotes *acceptable work* that partially attains project goals and learning outcomes. The product and process of this work meet some but not all expectations.

# Percentage of "A" grades in HUA Requirement & Projects (Fall)



\* AY 23/24: MQP not reported because of high percentage of SP grades; IQP: 13% "SP"; Inq. Sem. 5% "I"; HUA Prac. 4% "I"

# Not only WPI

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*The New York Times*

## *Nearly Everyone Gets A's at Yale. Does That Cheapen the Grade?*

A report found that close to 80 percent of grades were in the A range last academic year. A pandemic-era bump has stuck.

# Dean's List

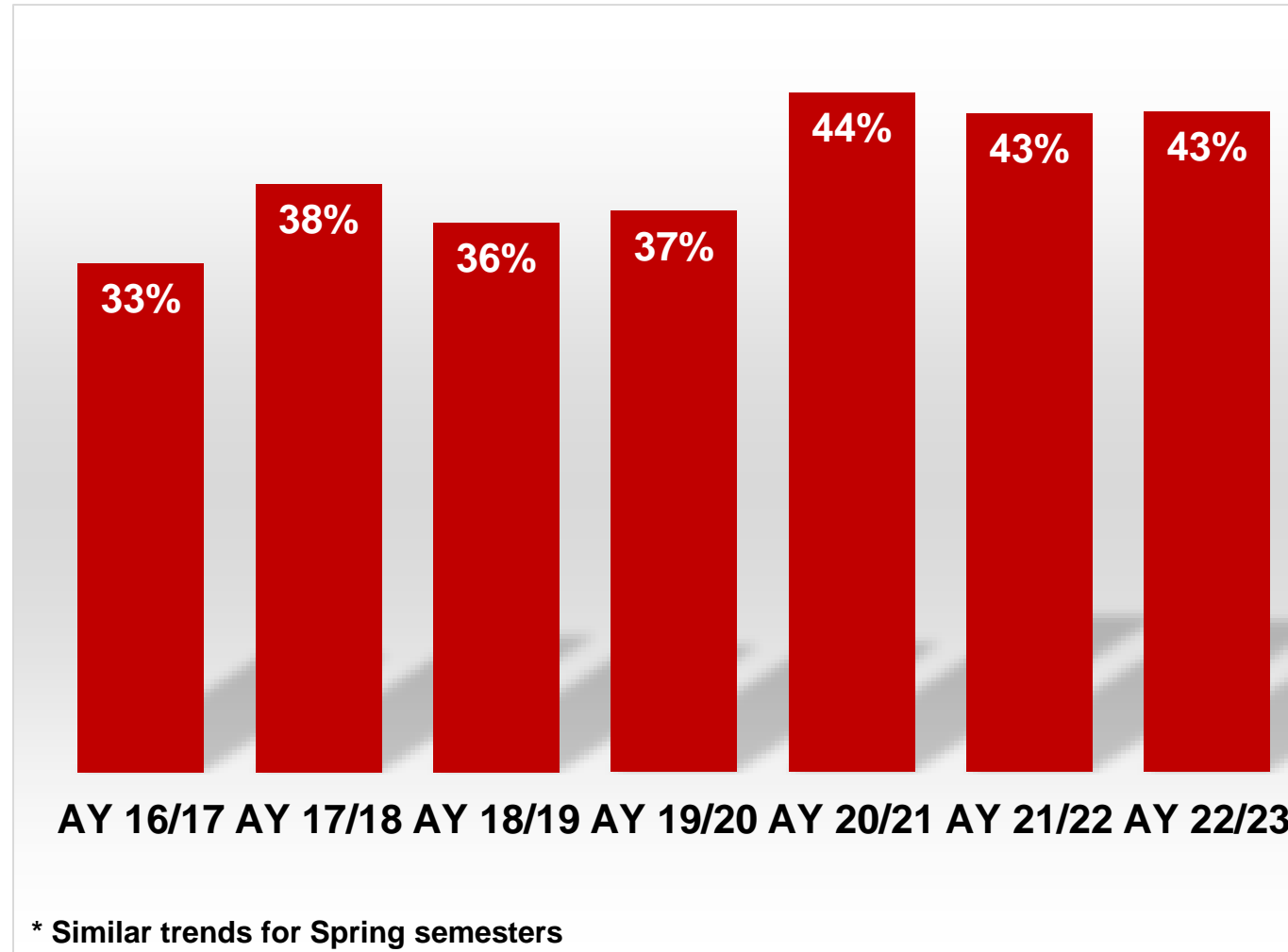
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- >40% of the students are on the Dean's list.
  - Higher number than initially anticipated (25% initially targeted).
- A similar problem exist for the Charles Thompson list (significant higher numbers of students qualify than originally intended)



# Percentage of Students on Dean's List (Fall\*)

*Original Goal (when Dean's List was created): 25%*



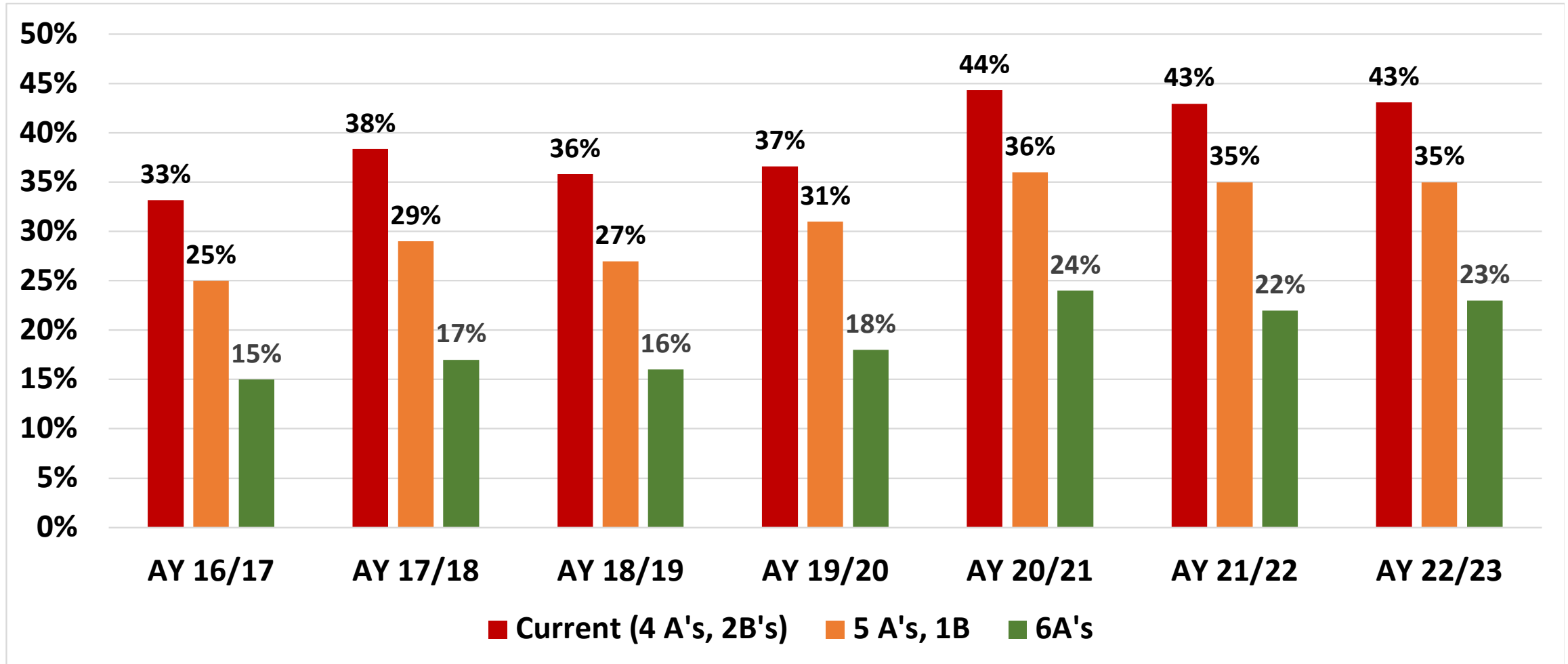
# Dean's List

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## CAP is discussing the following options

- Taking no action
- Changing the criteria of the Dean's list
- Removing Dean's list
- Encouraging faculty to follow A, B, C descriptions in the faculty handbook

# Different scenarios for Dean's list (Fall data): Current (4A/2B) vs. 5A/1B vs. 6A



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- Ungrading practices
  - Every class is different
    - Class type
    - Class size
    - Objectives

# CAP SEEKS YOUR INPUT

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