



SCHOLARS
STRATEGY NETWORK

The Managed University

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Harvard University faculty voted recently to [cap the number of A's the instructor of any course](#) may award. Under the new "20 plus four" formula, 20 percent of students per course, plus four additional students (a concession to small seminars), can receive the top grade. For everyone else, it becomes a scarce resource, rationed like water in a dry year.

The policy was faculty-approved, which gives it a democratic gloss. Writing in *The New York Times*, [two Harvard economists defended it](#) as the least bad solution to a genuine collective action problem: Faculty who wanted to grade more rigorously couldn't do so unilaterally without putting their own students at a competitive disadvantage. Grade inflation, they argued, is what happens when individual incentives pull against collective good, like fisheries being depleted or rivers polluted. The formula has unfair cases, they conceded. But it is workable. So, they chose it.