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Harvard making it harder to make the grade

BOSTON (AP) — Addressing concerns about grade inflation, Harvard University faculty voted to sharply reduce the number of honors given to graduating students.

The school is also changing its grading scale.

Last June, a record 91% of Harvard seniors graduated with some kind of honors, and about half of Harvard's grades last year were A's and A minuses.

The new system, passed on Tuesday, creates a quota for honors awards, limiting the percentage of graduating students receiving the awards to 60%. It goes into effect when the class of 2005 graduates.

The faculty also changed Harvard's 15-point grading scale to the more standard 4.0-scale and made differences between grade tiers uniform, so that the point difference between a B and a B plus is the same as the difference between a B plus and an A minus, for example.

That change is intended to encourage professors not to round up when assigning grades, hopefully resulting in more B pluses and fewer A minuses, said Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education Jeffrey Wolcowitz. The change goes into effect in the fall of 2003.

In November, university President Lawrence H. Summers asked faculty members to review their grading standards after a Boston Globe report on grade inflation.

"I welcome the faculty's adoption of higher standards for honors, more transparent grading and sounder grading practices in the future," Summers said in a statement.

Most Ivy League schools and other top U.S. universities award honors only for outstanding work in a student's major. Some, like Yale and Princeton, cap total honors at about one-third of a graduating class.