

# Partisan Grading\*

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## Abstract

A well known fact is that at any university there could be large differences in grading practices across disciplines, departments, and individual instructors. We argue that such grading differences may be associated with the political orientation of faculty members and test this hypothesis using a large and detailed dataset which merges student grades awarded at an elite research university in the United States with voter registration records from the county where the university is located. Our main findings are consistent with the existence of partisan grading preferences: at the discipline, department, and instructor levels conservatism is associated with a less egalitarian assignment of grades and with lower grades awarded to Black students relative to Whites.

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# 1 Introduction

Debates over grading practices at institutions of higher education in the United States tend to center on the phenomenon of grade inflation. There is disagreement about the proper definition of the term, how widespread the phenomenon is, and about its causes and consequences. Underlying these debates lies the fact that there is no consensus in the academic world about the purposes of grading: to inform and motivate students, to assist graduate schools and prospective employers in making admission and hiring decisions, or some other purposes. Given this lack of consensus and the fact that faculty members typically enjoy wide latitude in the way they grade, it is not surprising that within any given university there could be large differences in grading practices across disciplines and departments and even across faculty members within the same discipline and department.

Probably the most widely recognized difference in grading practices is across disciplines, particularly, between the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The focus of attention is typically on differences in the mean grade or the share of top grades across disciplines. Thus according to a 2004 report in the *Harvard Crimson* (Krug, 2004) “Of the three major College divisions, humanities students trumped their counterparts in the social sciences and natural sciences, posting [in 2002-03] an average GPA [Grade Point Average] of 13.05 on the old 15-point grading scale, compared with averages of 12.52 and 12.33, respectively... This set of disparities is similar to that of 1990-1991... as well as to 1995-1996.” Similar differences have been reported for Princeton University (Quinones, 2008). In 2001-04 A’s accounted for 55.6 percent of student grades in the humanities, 43.3 percent in the social sciences, and 37.2 percent in the natural sciences. In its attempt to curb grade inflation and minimize grading disparities, in 2004 Princeton adopted a policy of capping the share of A’s. Even after the policy change, however, inter-disciplinary grading differences persisted: in 2005-08 (years in which the new grading policy was in effect) A’s accounted for 45.5 percent of student grades in the humanities, 37.4 percent

in the social sciences, and 35.3 percent in the natural sciences. Although the two examples given here pertain to two elite universities, differences in grading practices between disciplines are a widespread phenomenon in institutions of higher education across the United States (Rosovsky and Hartley, 2002).

Why are grading practices in the humanities different than those that prevail in the social and especially the natural sciences? Interestingly, despite the fact that grading disparities across disciplines are widespread, this question has received very little attention. A relatively detailed discussion of the sources of inter-disciplinary grading disparities is contained in the book *Excellence without a Soul* by Harry Lewis, former dean of Harvard College. Lewis (2006, pp. 121-2) argues that with respect to grading “humanities are... in a bit of a mess” and offers several explanations for the difference in grading practices. The main explanation has to do with the fact that in the humanities there is no standard of objective truth. Thus, according to Lewis, “the combination of subjective judgment and human empathy of teacher for student may well result in a systematic upward bias in grades in the humanities.”

Other explanations for differences in grading practices across departments and disciplines have been offered by Dickson (1984) and Freeman (1999). Dickson argues that departments inflate grades in order to maintain high student enrollment and thus, indirectly, avoid reduction in their size and in the resources available for their faculty members. In his analysis Dickson does not refer specifically to the humanities. However, to the extent that the relative demand for taking humanities courses declines over time this would explain the stronger tendency of humanities departments to inflate student grades.<sup>1</sup> In a related article, Freeman argues that high grades in humanities departments are a compensating differential for lower post-graduation salaries that humanities majors receive.

In line with the arguments made by Lewis and Dickson, Achen and Courant (2009) – who examine differences in average grades across fields of study in the University of Michigan from 1992 to 2008

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<sup>1</sup>Data compiled by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences show that the humanities’ share of college degrees is today less than half of what it was during the heyday in the mid- to late 1960s. See Cohen (2009).

– argue that two conditions are necessary to sustain a regime of relatively low average grades: (1) students’ enrollment demand is high and inelastic and (2) the cost for professors of assigning low grades is relatively low, which is the case when there are objective assessment methods. Both these conditions are likely to hold more often in the natural sciences than in the humanities.

In this paper we offer a novel explanation for difference in grading practices, not only across disciplines and departments but also across instructors within disciplines and departments. We argue that grading practices may be associated with the political orientation of faculty members. The link between political orientation and grading could operate at the level of the instructor – determining individual grading preferences – and at the level of the department and discipline – aggregate political orientation determining grading norms. As we explain in detail in the next section, partisanship may manifest itself in several aspects of grading. Unlike the previous literature, which attempts to explain differences in mean grades across fields of study, we focus our investigation on the issues of egalitarianism and the treatment of traditionally disadvantaged minorities.

We test our hypotheses using a new unique dataset of student grades awarded at an elite research university in the United States during 2000-2004. Each observation in the dataset has information on an individual student taking a specific course and her final grade in the course. The dataset contains a large number of student, course, and instructor characteristics, including the instructor’s political affiliation which was obtained from voter registration records of the county where the university is located.

Our main empirical finding is that at the discipline, department, and individual instructor levels conservatism is strongly associated with a less egalitarian assignment of grades, i.e. lower grades for low ability (SAT) students and higher grades for high ability students. An additional robust result is that at all levels conservatism is associated with lower grades awarded to Black students relative to Whites. We find weaker and less consistent partisan differences in grading with respect to female and Hispanic students.

Why should we care about partisan grading? One obvious reason is that it seems unfair. The political orientation of faculty members should have no effect on their grading practices and through them on the chance that a student will receive academic awards and honors, obtain admission to better graduate schools and find more lucrative jobs.

Another important reason to worry about partisan grading, and especially about the differences in grading practices across disciplines, is that grading disparities bias students' course and major choices [Sabot and Wakeman-Linn (1991) and Johnson (2003)]. The bias may be large: Johnson (2003) estimated that if differences in grading practices between disciplines were eliminated, the average undergraduate student at Duke University would probably take fifty percent more natural science and mathematics electives as they actually did. To put the same point in more colorful terms, "The rigors of Chem 101 create almost as many English majors per year as do the splendors of Shakespeare."<sup>2</sup>

Based on his findings, Johnson (2003, p. 194) goes as far as claiming that "the general level of scientific competence in America has been diminished simply because universities have not adopted more consistent grading policies." Johnson's conclusion is echoed by growth economist Paul Romer who in a 2002 op-ed piece in the *Stanford Business Magazine* argued that too few college students receive undergraduate degrees in science and engineering and that this shortage is one factor adversely affecting economic growth in the United States. A major reason for this shortage, according to Romer, is grades: "The grades assigned in science courses are systematically lower than grades in other disciplines, and students rely heavily on grades as signals about the fields for which they are best suited."<sup>3</sup>

In sum, inter-disciplinary disparities in grading practices may have direct adverse effects on the United States system of higher education and indirect adverse effects on the country's economy. These

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<sup>2</sup>Wilson (1999), quoting University of Virginia professor Mark Edmundson.

<sup>3</sup>See also Epstein (2006), who reports that in an interview with him, Ronald Ehrenberg, the director of Cornell University's Higher Education Research Institute, argued that unequal grading practices drive students away from the natural sciences and toward the humanities and the less quantitative social sciences and Lewis (2006, p. 144), who writes that "if large numbers of students are avoiding science and engineering fields simply because the grades in those fields are somewhat harsher, it is possible that a large social cost will be paid in the long run for the varying grading standards."

adverse affects could be far greater than those posed by a uniform rise in grades across disciplines.<sup>4</sup>

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section we explain why and how conservatives and liberals may differ in their grading practices. In section 3 we detail how we constructed the dataset and in section 4 we present the main results of the empirical analysis. Section 5 provides additional tests and section 6 offers concluding remarks.

## 2 Incentives, Political Ideology and Grading Practices

In most universities faculty members have a large degree of autonomy when it comes to grading. This implies that their grading practices could be affected by various incentives but also by ideology. The role of incentives in influencing grading practices has received a considerable amount of attention. For example, it is widely believed that student evaluations of instructors affect grading practices.<sup>5</sup> Another type of incentive that probably plays a role in affecting grading practices is the competition, between universities and across departments within the same university, for student enrollment and in the placement of graduating students.<sup>6</sup>

We claim that political ideology may also play a role in influencing grades. In other words, grading practices may depend not only on incentives but also on tastes. The academic freedom faculty members enjoy in grading allows them to indulge on these tastes. Why and how would conservatives differ from liberals when it comes to grading practices? We start with the observation that there is a large body of research that shows that conservatives differ from liberals along many dimensions.<sup>7</sup> Thus we can turn

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<sup>4</sup>Conventional wisdom holds that the major harm caused by grade inflation is that it lowers the information content of grades. This is because over time grades tend to cluster more and more at the top of the scale. However, using methods from information theory Ellenberg (2002) and Felten (2004) demonstrate that in a typical scenario this loss may be quite modest.

<sup>5</sup>For a survey of research on this issue, see Johnson, 2003, ch. 4.

<sup>6</sup>For empirical research on the relationship between enrollment and expected grades see Sabot and Wakeman-Linn (1991), Johnson (2003), and Bar, Kadiyali and Zussman (2009).

<sup>7</sup>Such differences have been explored by political scientists (e.g. Conover and Feldman, 1981) and political psychologists (e.g. Carney et al., 2008). Sunstein et al. (2006) provide fascinating evidence on partisanship in judicial decision making in federal courts in the United States.

the question on its head and ask why should we expect conservatives to behave like liberals when it comes to something that, within the university context, the two groups do routinely and in a relatively unconstrained fashion?

Conservatism is a political philosophy that emphasizes the value of traditional institutions and practices. Since most available research demonstrates that university grades were significantly lower in the past, it is not surprising that the most vocal critics of grade inflation have been conservatives (e.g. Will, 1976 and Mansfield, 2001). Conversely, those who believe that grade inflation is an unimportant or even a non-existent problem typically view it as a sort of a conservative obsession. Thus, Kohn (2002) argues that “to understand grade inflation in its proper context, we must acknowledge a truth that is rarely named: The crusade against it is led by conservative individuals and organizations...”

Conservatives believe more strongly than liberals that institutions and incentives can and should be used to shape human behavior. Thus it is likely that conservative faculty members would be more willing than their liberal colleagues to use the grading system to shape student behavior by both assigning low grades for poor academic work and by assigning high grades for excellent academic work.

Liberal grading practices may be influenced the link between (some variants of) liberalism and a willingness to use the power of government to correct inequities. In the grading context this implies that, for a given distribution of student abilities, liberal faculty members would aim to produce a more egalitarian distribution of grades, with relatively few low grades but also relatively few very high grades. In a 1976 *Newsweek* article conservative writer George Will made the following observation regarding the connection between grading practices and egalitarianism: “Let us clear our minds of cant. Surely a just society is one in which people deserve their positions, and in which inequalities are reasonably related to reasonable social goals. Justice requires a hierarchy of achievement – unless all achievements are of equal social value, in which case all inequalities are arbitrary and illegitimate ‘privileges.’ Something like that extreme egalitarianism enjoys a vogue in academic circles, and helps produce grade inflation.”

Liberal political philosophy is concerned with the abuse of power and with individual self-development. To the extent that low grades may be viewed as oppressive and as hurting the self-development (or self-esteem) of students, liberal faculty members may be more averse than conservatives to assigning such grades. Thus it is possible that partisanship in grading will be more pronounced at the bottom of the grading scale than at its top.

A related manifestation of the ideological divide between liberals and conservatives has to do with the question of ‘affirmative action’, i.e. whether or not women and traditionally disadvantaged ethnic minorities should receive preferential treatment. In the grading context this implies that the political orientation of instructors may be associated with their grading practices towards these groups. In his 1976 *Newsweek* article Will already raised this possibility by arguing that “Some of the minority students pulled into universities by ‘affirmative action’ programs would be swept right out if teachers did not relax standards, and this relaxation tends to raise the ‘floor’ under all grades.”

Along the same lines conservative Harvard political scientist Harvey Mansfield argued in a provocative 2001 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article that “at colleges, self-esteem often goes hand in hand with multiculturalism or sensitivity to people of diverse races and ethnicities – meaning that professors must avoid offending the identities (still another name for self-esteem) of victimized groups... When I was interviewed by The Boston Globe... I said that when grade inflation got started, in the late 60’s and early 70’s, White professors, imbibing the spirit of affirmative action, stopped giving low or average grades to Black students and, to justify or conceal it, stopped giving those grades to White students as well... Because I have no access to the figures, I have to rely on what I saw and heard at the time. Although it is not so now, it was then utterly commonplace for White professors to overgrade Black students.”<sup>8</sup> In response, Rosovsky and Hartley (2002), Lewis (2006) and others have argued that Mansfield’s conjecture regarding the emergence of grade inflation is likely incorrect since the share of Black

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<sup>8</sup>Similar arguments were raised earlier by Allan Bloom (1988) in the context of Cornell University. Bloom additionally argued that these patterns were limited to the humanities and the social sciences.

students at Harvard and other institutions of higher education (excluding historically Black colleges and universities) was miniscule in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

To summarize, there is ample reason to believe that liberal and conservative faculty members may have different views about grading. Since instructors enjoy a large degree of freedom in deciding on grades these ideological differences can easily translate into differential grading practices.

### **3 Construction of the Dataset**

In order to study the association between political orientation and grading practices we utilize a large dataset of undergraduate level course grades awarded at the College of Arts and Sciences of an elite research university in the United States between the Spring Semester of 2000 and the Spring semester of 2004. Each observation in the dataset has information on an individual student taking a specific course and her final grade in the course. The dataset contains characteristics of the student, the course and the instructor.

The dataset was built in several stages. In the first stage the university administration provided us with two datasets, one with student grades and the other with course characteristics. The second dataset contained, among other things, the name of the instructor/s of each course. We focus on cases where a single instructor taught the course, since only in these cases the instructor has complete control over grading outcomes.

In the next step we obtained voter registration data from the board of elections of the county where the university is located. In the United States citizens who wish to vote need to register with the authorities. In some states, including the state where the university we examine is located, when registering, a voter may declare an affiliation with a political party (this enables voting in primary elections of that party). We obtained the voter registration data (as of November 2008), which are

publicly available for a small fee.

We next matched the names of the instructors from the course dataset with those that appear in the voter registration records. Naturally, we could not match all of the instructors since some of them were not United States citizens while others were United States citizens but were either not registered or were registered in a different county.<sup>9</sup> We were able to match 511 out of 1,167 instructors, i.e. about 44 percent of the total. In the final stage we used a unique course identifier to merge the course/instructor/political affiliation dataset with the student grades dataset.

## 4 Partisan Grading: The Evidence

### 4.1 The Big Picture

Only five percent of the faculty members in our merged dataset have a conservative affiliation (all Republicans), while about eighty percent have a liberal affiliation (mostly Democrats), see Table 1.<sup>10</sup> There is a clear difference in political orientation between the three disciplines: the share of conservatives is lowest in the humanities and highest in the natural sciences. Such differences are not unique to the university we examine. Figure 1 compares the share of Republicans in different disciplines at the university we examine (“Elite U”) with those at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Stanford University (Klein and Western, 2005). In all three institutions the humanities have a significantly lower share of Republicans than the natural sciences.

[Table 1 and Figure 1]

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<sup>9</sup>The matching process was aided by the fact that the university we study is located in a relatively remote area and thus most faculty members reside in a single county.

<sup>10</sup>As mentioned above, overall we identified the political affiliation of 511 instructors. The total number of instructors displayed in Table 1 (551) is larger because some instructors teach across disciplinary lines.

How is this difference in political orientation across disciplines associated with grading? In Table 2 we provide some illustrative statistics. The figures in this table and in all the tables below are based solely on grades assigned by instructors we identified as either conservative or liberal. The share of conservatives is displayed in column 1.<sup>11</sup>

### [Table 2]

The mean grade is clearly negatively associated with the share of conservatives in a discipline (column 2): as in Harvard and Princeton, grades are lowest in the natural sciences and highest in the humanities. The difference in the average grade between the humanities and the natural sciences is slightly smaller than the difference between two typical consecutive grade categories (e.g. B and B+), which is 0.3. Since grades are bounded from above by A+, it is not surprising to also find that the dispersion in grades is positively associated with the share of conservatives in a discipline (column 3). The ratio of the mean grade of female students to the mean grade of male students and the ratios of the mean grades of Black and Hispanic students to the mean grade of White students are all negatively associated with conservatism at the discipline level (columns 4-6). Of course, such differences in grading outcomes could result from various other factors. We next turn to a more rigorous empirical investigation that takes into account such factors.

## 4.2 Partisanship and the Student Grade

We use regression analysis to examine the determinants of individual student grades. The dataset we use has about 74,000 observations. This reflects the grades of more than 23,000 students taking approximately 4,000 undergraduate level courses over 9 semesters. The Appendix provides summary statistics for the main variables included in the analysis.

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<sup>11</sup>The share of conservatives is defined as (number of conservatives)/(number of conservatives and liberals). This definition is slightly different from the “share of Republicans” in Figure 1 where, for the sake of comparability with the data for the other two universities, we counted only Democrats instead of all liberals in the denominator.

Grades in the social sciences and the natural sciences are, respectively, 0.16 and 0.24 points lower on average than grades in the humanities (Table 3, column 1). We next add to the basic specification a long list of instructor, course, and student characteristics.

**[Table 3]**

Student grades are associated with instructor characteristics. Female instructors grade more leniently than their male colleagues (column 2). In contrast, older instructors grade more harshly than younger ones, but this effect is statistically insignificant. Grades are strongly associated with course characteristics (column 3). One set of differences is between introductory courses (level 1 - the excluded group) and higher level courses: grades are lower in level 2 courses (which are also introductory in nature) but higher in advanced – levels 3 and 4 – courses. Course credits (number of academic hours per week) are negatively associated with course grades. Larger course enrollment is associated with lower grades. Finally, we find a robust positive time trend in grades, which reflects grade inflation.

Naturally, student grades are strongly associated with their own characteristics (column 4). SAT scores have a very strong positive association with grades. Female students receive significantly higher grades than males. We find that older students receive lower grades than their younger peers. Ethnicity is strongly associated with grades: relative to White students, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native-American students receive significantly lower grades. Relative to freshman students, sophomores, juniors, seniors and graduate students receive significantly higher grades.

Not surprisingly, the inclusion of student fixed effects greatly improves the explanatory power of the regression: the R-squared rises from 0.11 in column 4 to 0.61 in column 5. An interesting finding is that the addition of student fixed effects makes the difference between freshman, sophomore, and junior grades disappear. The only remaining significant difference of this nature is between freshman and senior grades, but in contrast to the results in column 4, now the senior grades are lower. This

finding may reflect the well-known “senioritis” effect – students in their last year of studies tend to slack off.

The coefficients on the indicator variables for social sciences and natural sciences are negative and highly significant throughout. Controlling for a large number of instructor, course, and student characteristics grades in the social sciences and natural sciences are, respectively, about 0.14 and 0.19 points lower on average than in the humanities.

What drives these interdisciplinary (residual) differences in student grades? One possibility is that political orientation may matter, as we already know that the share of conservatives is highest in the natural sciences, where grading is strict, and lowest in the humanities, where grading is lenient. To further explore the relationship between conservatism and grades we now shift our focus to the level of the department.<sup>12</sup> Figure 2 plots the mean grade against the share of conservatives in fourteen departments, which include all the natural and social science ones and the five humanities departments with the largest number of instructors. There is a clear negative association between the share of conservatives in a department and the mean grade (the simple correlation coefficient between the two variables is -0.65). More surprisingly, there seems to be a negative correlation even within disciplines. The most conservative natural science department (chemistry) has the lowest mean grade within the natural sciences. A negative relationship between the two variables appears to hold in the humanities too, but not in the social sciences.

**[Figure 2]**

For a closer look at grading practices in the three disciplines, in Figure 3 we plot the distribution of letter grades. Compared to the Humanities, natural sciences courses have higher shares of student grades in each of the low grade categories F to B- as well as a higher share of A+ grades. In the

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<sup>12</sup>Overall there are 71 departments/programs but many of them (especially in the humanities) are very specialized and small. The average number of instructors per department/program is 12.

humanities we observe the highest concentration of students grades in the categories B+ to A. These observations could be related to partisan differences: the most liberal discipline – humanities – has the most egalitarian grade distribution. However, there could be other explanations for the differences in grade distributions across disciplines. For example, one could build on Lewis (2006) and argue that because in the humanities there is no standard of objective truth, humanities grades would naturally tend to cluster together (although it is not clear why they should cluster near the top of the grade scale). It is also possible that the distribution of abilities is different across disciplines, departments, and instructors. If, for example, there was less variation in the abilities of students in the humanities than in the natural sciences, then the lower variation in grades in the former discipline would be expected.<sup>13</sup>

[Figure 3]

In the following sections we further focus our empirical investigation of the relationship between political orientation and grading practices. Our main hypotheses are that partisanship would be reflected in differences in grading egalitarianism (or the rewards to student ability) and in the grading practices applied toward female students and students from disadvantaged ethnic minorities.

### 4.3 Egalitarianism

Based on the discussion in Section 2 we expect to see conservatism associated with less egalitarianism (or, alternatively, more meritocracy) in grading. In practical terms this implies a steeper grade profile with respect to student ability. In the empirical analysis we proxy for ability with the best available measure which is independent of instructors' grading practices, the student's SAT score, and construct interaction variables between this score and variables that reflect political conservatism at the discipline, department, and individual instructor levels. We find a strong positive relationship between

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<sup>13</sup>In the data we indeed find a small difference in the dispersion of SAT scores between the two disciplines. The standard deviation of scores is 116 in the humanities and 121 in the natural sciences.

conservatism and the returns to ability at the discipline level (Table 4, column 1). This result is consistent with our partisan grading hypothesis, but does not rule out some of the alternative explanations discussed above for the differences in grading practices across disciplines.

Our results imply that in the humanities, the least conservative discipline, low ability students can expect relatively higher grades. This, of course, may have some potentially adverse consequences. For example, it may lead low ability students to take more courses in humanities departments and major in them. It may also lower the amount of effort exerted by students. At the same time the highest ability students may avoid taking humanities courses since the return to their ability is lower.<sup>14</sup>

The strong positive relationship between conservatism and the returns to ability is also found at the department level, even after controlling for discipline fixed effects (columns 2 and 3).<sup>15</sup>

#### [Table 4]

Turning to the analysis at the individual instructor level, we again find that conservatism is strongly and positively associated with the returns to ability (columns 4-6). In Figure 4 we use the coefficients in column 6 to illustrate our main result of partisan differences in egalitarianism. The horizontal axis displays students' SAT scores. In principle these vary from 0 to 1,600, but in practice the lowest SAT score in the regression sample is 700. The vertical axis displays the difference in expected grade for a student when the instructor is conservative rather than liberal. The regression results imply that a student with the lowest possible SAT score (0) can expect a 1.03 units lower grade from a conservative instructor than from a liberal one while for a student with a SAT score of 700 the difference is only

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<sup>14</sup>Some basic patterns in our data are consistent with the last argument: in the humanities the shares of students with SAT scores of at least 1,450, 1,500, and 1,550 are, respectively, 24.9%, 11.8%, and 2.9%. In the natural sciences the corresponding shares are significantly higher: 32.3%, 16.3%, and 5.2%, respectively. This evidence should be viewed as only suggestive. A rigorous analysis of the question of students' selection into disciplines is outside the scope of the current paper.

<sup>15</sup>The results of the analyses in columns 1-3 are robust to a change in the definition of the share of conservatives in different departments and disciplines. When instead of treating the share variables as constant over time we allowed them to vary by semester the relevant coefficients decreased in size (in absolute value) but in all cases maintained their signs and statistical significance. In the analyses below we continue to use the original definition of the share variables because we view them as being associated with relatively constant grading norms.

0.45 grade units. In contrast, a student with a perfect SAT score of 1,600 can expect a 0.3 units higher grade from a conservative instructor than from a liberal one.

[Figure 4]

The analysis in Table 4 ignores the possibility that conservative and liberal instructors may face different distributions of student abilities. In order to address this concern we constructed a proxy for the student’s relative ability by first calculating the difference between the student’s own SAT score and the mean score in the class, and then dividing the difference by the standard deviation of the scores in the class. We find that our results are robust to the replacement of the absolute ability measure with the relative one (Table 5).<sup>16</sup>

[Table 5]

In sum, the evidence provided in this section is consistent overall with our hypothesis that conservatism would be associated with a less egalitarian, or a more meritocratic, grade assignment and with a higher return to student ability.

#### 4.4 Gender and Ethnicity

We next examine whether conservatism is associated with the application of differential grading standards with respect to female students and to students from disadvantaged ethnic minorities – Blacks and Hispanics. The application of differential grading standards towards these groups obviously requires that the instructor knows the gender and ethnicity of the students. In fact, at the university we examine (as in many other institutions of higher education in the United States) instructors know the identity of their students when they award grades. The name of the student not only appears on

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<sup>16</sup>Note that in Table 4 the coefficient for the variable “conservative instructor” relates to the expected grade of the *lowest possible ability* student (SAT=0) while in Table 5 the same coefficient relates to the expected grade of the *average ability* student in the class (SAT=mean SAT in class).

written assignments (such as problem sets and term papers) but also on exams. Moreover, during each semester instructors are supplied with the photographs of the students enrolled in their classes. Thus it is plausible that grading will be influenced by student characteristics such as gender and ethnicity.

In order to carry out the investigation we constructed a set of interactions between the political orientation variables and indicator variables for women and ethnic minorities. We find that at the level of the discipline and the department conservatism is strongly associated with lower grades for female students (Table 6, columns 1 to 3). However, within disciplines and departments conservative instructors do not differ from their liberal colleagues when it comes to grading female students (columns 4 to 6). A plausible interpretation of the results is that women happen to possess special talents in the fields of study which attract liberal instructors. This could happen, for example, if women have better language skills than men and if such skills are relatively important in liberally oriented disciplines and departments.

**[Table 6]**

To investigate whether there is partisanship in the grading of Black students we restrict our sample to Black and White students only (Table 7). We find that conservatism is strongly associated with lower grades for Black students at all levels: discipline (column 1), department (columns 2 and 3), and individual instructor (columns 4-6). The differences are large in magnitude. For example, the coefficient on the interaction variable in column 6 measures the difference in the expected grade for a Black student, relative to a White student, when taking (within the same department) a course with a conservative instructor instead of a liberal one. The absolute size of the coefficient, 0.38, is roughly half the standard deviation of grades in our sample (see the Appendix) and more than the difference between two typical consecutive grade categories.

**[Table 7]**

Shifting our focus to Hispanic students (Table 8) we find that conservatism is also associated at all levels with lower grades for Hispanic students relative to White ones. However, the magnitude of the differential is in all cases smaller for Hispanics than for Blacks. For example, the coefficient on the interaction variable in column 6 is only 0.15 grade points, less than half the size of the coefficient estimated for Black students in Table 7.

### [Table 8]

Differences across disciplines and departments in the grading of traditionally disadvantaged ethnic minorities may not necessarily reflect partisan biases. Instead, one can claim, for example, that Black and Hispanic students possess skills that are more highly appreciated in the fields of study which attract liberal instructors. However, it is more difficult to use the same line of argument to account for differences in grades within disciplines and departments. The results suggest the possibility that the ethnicities of students are taken into consideration by instructors when they assign grades. An obvious question that arises from our finding is whether and to what extent liberals discriminate in favor of minorities or conservatives discriminate against them. However, given the nature of the data at our disposal we cannot make such a judgement.<sup>17</sup>

## 4.5 Ability, Gender and Ethnicity

The analyses presented in Tables 4-8 ignores the possibility that student ability, gender, and ethnicity may be correlated. Moreover, in each of these tables the sample is somewhat different. In Table 9, which contains our preferred set of regression results, we address these two potential concerns by

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<sup>17</sup>We note that in additional analysis we conducted we found no partisan differences in the grading of Asian students. To the extent that discrimination may be targeted against any non-White population, while affirmative action is typically applied towards Blacks and Hispanics, the result for Asian students provides some support for the affirmative action interpretation of the results for Black and Hispanics. A more natural way to test the discrimination against the affirmative action hypotheses would be to use an experiment of the sort conducted by Hanna and Linden (2009).

simultaneously including all the variables of interest and restricting the sample throughout to Black, Hispanic and White students. Although the size (in absolute value) of the coefficients is smaller and their statistical significance is in some cases lower, in all cases but one the results are qualitatively identical to those obtained when each variable was entered separately. The only exception is that at the individual instructor level the female interaction variable is now positive when in Table 6 it was negative (but insignificant).

[Table 9]

## 5 Additional Tests

### 5.1 Partisanship and Extreme grades

Based on the discussion in section 2, we argue that it is likely that partisanship in grading will be pronounced at the very top of the grade scale, and even more so at its bottom. We next investigate this issue (using the same uniform sample used in Table 9). In the university we examine the highest grade possible is A+ (4.3 points). A+ grades account for 4.14 percent of the total in our sample. On the bottom of the distribution we focus on grades of less than C (2 points). Grades in this category include F, D-, D, D+, and C-. Together these grades account for 4.18 percent of the total in our sample. Interestingly, we find relatively weak partisan influences in the assignment of A+ grades at the level of the discipline and the department (Table 10A, columns 1-3). We find stronger partisan influences in the assignment of the top grade at the level of the instructor (columns 4-6). Low ability students are relatively less likely, and high ability students are relatively more likely, to be awarded this grade from a conservative instructor. We also find that Blacks are relatively less likely than Whites to be awarded the A+ grade when taking a course with a conservative instructor rather than with a liberal one. In

contrast, female students are relatively more likely than males to be awarded the A+ grade when taking a course with a conservative instructor rather than with a liberal one.

[Table 10A]

Shifting our focus to the lowest grades, we find much stronger partisan effects (Table 10B). At all levels conservatism is associated with a higher probability that such grades will be assigned to low ability students and a lower probability that these grades will be assigned to high ability students. We also find that at all levels conservatism is associated with a higher probability that low grades will be assigned to Black students. Partisan differences are generally weaker and less consistent for female students and for Hispanic students.

[Table 10B]

Overall the results presented in Tables 10A and 10B suggest that partisanship in grading is more pronounced at the bottom of the grade scale than at its top. This is consistent with the argument, raised in Section 2, that to the extent that low grades may be viewed as oppressive, liberal faculty members may be more averse than conservatives to assigning them.

## 5.2 The Role of Instructor’s Race and Gender

One may be concerned that our partisan grading results are driven, at least in part, by race and gender differences among instructors. Moreover, race and gender differences in grading preferences are interesting in their own right. In this subsection we explore these issues.

The voter registration data we use contain information about gender but not about race. In order to determine the race of the instructors in our dataset we conducted online searches for their photographs. We were able to locate the photographs of 453 instructors and identified twelve of them (three percent) as Black. Eleven of the twelve are Democrats and one is unaffiliated. Of the 511 instructors in our

dataset, 178 (35 percent) are female. Five of the female instructors are Republicans while 142 are Democrats.

Controlling for the race and gender of the instructors does not affect our main partisanship results (top panel of Table 11). We find that Black instructors do not differ from their non-Black colleagues in their grading practices (middle panel). However, this result may simply reflect lack of power since the number of Black instructors is so small.

Interestingly, we find evidence that female instructors grade in a more egalitarian manner than males (bottom panel, column 4). This result fits well with the existing literature which finds that women have more egalitarian preferences than men (see Croson and Gneezy, 2009). We additionally find that the gender differential in grading egalitarianism is much stronger at the bottom of the grade distribution (column 6) than at its top (column 5).

[Table 11]

### 5.3 Shades of Partisanship

An interesting question worth exploring is whether one can find differences in grading practices within camps: do “hard-core” liberals differ from “soft-core” ones and likewise for conservatives? We attempt to answer this question by differentiating among Democrats and Republicans in two ways. First, we use the voter registration records to categorize individuals into those who voted in primary elections and those who did not. Second, we use data on political campaign contributions to categorize individuals into contributors and non-contributors, and, within the latter group, according to the number and size of the contributions.

The voter registration records report for each voter up to twelve voter history entries. These allow us to find out whether a given individual voted in primary elections. We argue that it is plausible that an individual who is affiliated with a given party and participates in the party’s primary elections

may be more partisan than another individual who is affiliated with that party but did not vote in the primaries. We thus define as a primary voter an individual who was affiliated with a party (Democratic or Republican) and, according to the available voter history records, ever voted in primary elections of that party. By this definition, 87 percent of the Democrats and 59 percent of the Republicans are primary voters.

To construct our second measure of “hard core” partisanship we searched for the names of the instructors we identified as Democrats or Republicans in the website [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org) and found out whether these instructors made political campaign contributions. The information in that website is based on data from the United States Federal Elections Commission. We labeled an individual as a contributor if he or she ever contributed money to the respective party or party candidates from 2000 to 2008. We were able to find 60 registered Democrats but only 2 registered Republicans who contributed to their party or party candidates. We therefore decided to limit the analysis of contributions to the registered Democrats. We further differentiate between the contributors according to the number and size of the contributions they made. In terms of the number of contributions, we label as “heavy” contributors those who contributed more than once from 2000 to 2008. In terms of the size of contributions we label as “heavy” contributors those whose contributions in 2000-2008 totaled more than \$500. According to both definitions there are 36 “heavy” contributors, but the two lists are not identical. Our analysis will ask to what extent the contribution status and the further difference between “light” and “heavy” contributors matter for grading.

Before analyzing the differences in grading practices within camps, we first replicate our baseline regression for a sample that is restricted to Republicans and Democrats only (Table 12A, column 1). The results are practically identical to those obtained with the unrestricted sample (Table 9, column 6), which is expected given that almost all the liberal instructors are Democrats.

We find no difference as far as egalitarianism is concerned but some differences in the treatment of mi-

norities between primary-voting Democrats and non-primary voting ones: female students receive higher grades while Hispanic students receive lower grades from instructors who belong to the former, presumably more “hard-core”, group of Democrats (column 2, middle panel). Comparing primary-voting Republicans to non-voting ones we find, in line with expectations, that the “hard-core” Republicans are much less egalitarian than the “soft-core” ones (bottom panel). In contrast, we find no significant differences between the two groups of Republicans in the treatment of minorities. Interestingly, we find that non-primary voting (“soft-core”) Republicans do not differ in their grading practices from non-primary voting (“soft-core”) Democrats (top panel). Given the small number of Republican instructors in our dataset, this result, as well as the results that pertain to differences within the Republican camp, should be interpreted with caution.

[Table 12A]

Shifting the focus to the difference in grading behavior between campaign contributors and non-contributors among the Democratic instructors, our analysis yields some surprising results. We find that the contributors, supposedly more “hard-core” Democrats, are less egalitarian than the non-contributors (Table 12B, column 1). This may reflect a tendency of the contributors to come from the more “centrist” wing of the Democratic party. When we further differentiate between “heavy” and “light” contributors we find that the metric used to classify the contributors along these lines matters, as there are differences in the sign, size, and statistical significance of the coefficients in columns 2 and 3. For example, the “heavy” contributors seem to be less egalitarian than the “light” ones, but the difference is only significant when using the number of contributions as the metric for classification. In contrast, using both metrics we find that Black students receive a higher grade from “heavy” contributors than from “light” ones.

[Table 12B]

The results presented in Tables 12A and 12B provide an interesting perspective on intra-camp differences in grading practices. However, given the data limitations and the difficulty of constructing reliable proxies for the location of the instructors along a “left-right” spectrum of views, the results should be viewed as suggestive rather than conclusive.

## 6 Conclusion

Differences in political ideology between individuals manifest themselves in many ways. We demonstrate, within the context of an elite research university in the United States, that political ideology is also associated with grading: conservative instructors differ in their grading practices from their liberal peers. While links between political orientation and grading practices have been suggested before, to the best of our knowledge this study provides the first large scale empirical examination of partisan grading.

Our main empirical finding is that conservatism is associated with a less egalitarian assignment of grades: at the discipline, department, and individual instructor level conservatism is associated with lower grades for low ability students and higher grades for high ability students. An additional robust result is that at all levels conservatism is associated with lower grades for Black students relative to Whites.

Partisan grading matters. Our study suggests that the political orientation of faculty members may have an indirect effect, through grades, on the chance that a student will receive academic awards and honors, obtain admission to better graduate schools and find more lucrative jobs. To the extent that grades influence students’ course selection and career choice, partisan grading may affect resource allocation within and outside the boundaries of the university. Our results call for further investigation and discussion of the partisan grading phenomenon.

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**APPENDIX: SUMMARY STATISTICS**

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Grade	Grade	74,201	3.319	0.748
	Grade is less than C	74,201	0.044	0.204
	Grade is A+	74,201	0.043	0.202
Instructor	Republican	74,201	0.122	0.328
	Primary-voting	74,201	0.102	0.302
	Democratic	74,201	0.864	0.343
	Primary-voting	74,201	0.792	0.406
	Campaign-contributing	74,201	0.146	0.353
	Heavy contributor (by number)	74,201	0.088	0.283
	Heavy contributor (by amount)	74,201	0.085	0.278
	Green	74,201	0.010	0.100
	Working Families	74,201	0.003	0.053
	Liberal	74,201	0.001	0.024
	Female	74,201	0.271	0.444
	Age (/100)	74,201	0.533	0.108
	Black	67,128	0.018	0.133
	Course	Level 1	74,201	0.237
Level 2		74,201	0.371	0.483
Level 3		74,201	0.286	0.452
Level 4		74,201	0.106	0.307
Credits		74,201	3.527	0.804
Enrollment (/100)		74,201	1.620	3.232
Student	SAT (/1,000)	60,685	1.364	0.116
	Female	74,201	0.526	0.499
	Age (/100)	74,201	0.206	0.022
	White	74,201	0.604	0.489
	Asian	74,201	0.140	0.347
	Black	74,201	0.054	0.225
	Hispanic	74,201	0.063	0.242
	Native American	74,201	0.005	0.068
	Foreigner	74,201	0.050	0.218
	Refused to answer	74,201	0.003	0.057
	Missing ethnicity	74,201	0.082	0.274
	Freshman	74,201	0.210	0.407
	Sophomore	74,201	0.271	0.444
	Junior	74,201	0.236	0.425
	Senior	74,201	0.254	0.435
	Fifth year	74,201	0.001	0.030
	Graduate	74,201	0.029	0.167
Discipline/Department	Humanities	74,201	0.501	0.500
	Social Sciences	74,201	0.355	0.478
	Natural Sciences	74,201	0.144	0.352
	Share of conservatives in discipline	74,201	0.057	0.032
	Share of conservatives in department	74,201	0.064	0.067

*Notes:* All statistics pertain to grades awarded in courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal.

**TABLE 1: PARTY AFFILIATION SHARES ACROSS DISCIPLINES**

	Conservative	Liberal				Other		
	Republican	Democratic	Green	Working Families	Liberal	Independence	Unaffiliated	
Humanities	0.034	0.801	0.015	0.006	0.000	0.006	0.138	N=327
Social sciences	0.041	0.746	0.025	0.008	0.000	0.000	0.180	N=122
Natural sciences	0.108	0.686	0.000	0.000	0.010	0.000	0.196	N=102
Overall	0.049	0.768	0.015	0.005	0.002	0.004	0.158	N=551

*Notes:* see text for data sources.

**TABLE 2: SHARE OF CONSERVATIVES AND GRADE PATTERNS**

	Share of conservatives	Grades		Relative mean grade		
		Mean	Standard deviation	Females	Blacks	Hispanics
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Humanities	0.040	3.41	0.67	1.03	0.91	0.95
Social sciences	0.052	3.25	0.78	1.03	0.85	0.89
Natural sciences	0.136	3.17	0.86	0.98	0.82	0.85

*Notes:* The share of conservatives is defined as the number of conservatives divided by the number of conservatives and liberals. All statistics pertain to grades awarded in courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. Column 4 reports the mean grade of female students divided by the mean grade of male students. Columns 5 and 6 report the mean grade of Black and Hispanic students, respectively, divided by the mean grade of White students.

**TABLE 3: GRADING DIFFERENCES ACROSS DISCIPLINES**

<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>					
	No Additional Controls	Adding Instructor Controls	Adding Course Controls	Adding Student Controls	Student Fixed Effects
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Social Sciences	-0.159*** (0.024)	-0.141*** (0.021)	-0.135*** (0.018)	-0.138*** (0.019)	-0.141*** (0.022)
Natural Sciences	-0.240*** (0.032)	-0.214*** (0.031)	-0.187*** (0.027)	-0.164*** (0.029)	-0.186*** (0.031)
Instructor is female		0.079*** (0.015)	0.067*** (0.014)	0.087*** (0.015)	0.069*** (0.015)
Instructor's age (/100)		-0.103 (0.083)	-0.079 (0.072)	-0.019 (0.071)	-0.088 (0.070)
Course level 2			-0.078*** (0.026)	-0.085*** (0.027)	-0.076*** (0.027)
Course level 3			0.027 (0.026)	0.008 (0.027)	-0.031 (0.027)
Course level 4			0.218*** (0.026)	0.166*** (0.028)	0.071*** (0.027)
Course credits			-0.078*** (0.012)	-0.109*** (0.013)	-0.099*** (0.013)
Course enrollment (/100)			-0.014** (0.007)	-0.015** (0.006)	-0.012** (0.006)
Time trend			0.008*** (0.003)	0.007** (0.003)	0.035*** (0.010)
Student's SAT score (/1,000)				1.297*** (0.080)	
Student is female				0.154*** (0.008)	
Student's age (/100)				-1.968*** (0.677)	
Student is Asian				-0.102*** (0.009)	
Student is Black				-0.248*** (0.018)	
Student is Hispanic				-0.157*** (0.017)	
Student is Native-American				-0.287*** (0.054)	
Student is a Foreigner				-0.038 (0.036)	
Student refused to state ethnicity				-0.100* (0.056)	
Student's ethnicity missing				-0.063*** (0.015)	
Student is in sophomore year				0.067*** (0.014)	-0.018 (0.022)
Student is in junior year				0.084*** (0.019)	-0.048 (0.039)
Student is in senior year				0.093*** (0.023)	-0.122** (0.056)
Student is in fifth year				0.004 (0.136)	-0.292 (0.208)

**TABLE 3 (CONT.): GRADING DIFFERENCES ACROSS DISCIPLINES**

<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>					
	No Additional Controls	Adding Instructor Controls	Adding Course Controls	Adding Student Controls	Student Fixed Effects
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Student is in graduate school				0.111 <sup>***</sup> (0.071)	0.081 (0.082)
Observations	74,201	74,201	74,201	60,685	74,201
R-squared	0.016	0.019	0.040	0.106	0.605

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 4: PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN THE RETURNS TO STUDENT ABILITY**

	<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	-10.492 <sup>***</sup>					
	(3.404)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * SAT score (/1,000)	6.412 <sup>***</sup>					
	(2.327)					
Share of conservatives in department		-5.279 <sup>***</sup>	-4.997 <sup>***</sup>			
		(1.210)	(1.156)			
Share of conservatives in department * SAT score (/1,000)		3.481 <sup>***</sup>	3.450 <sup>***</sup>			
		(0.842)	(0.819)			
Conservative instructor				-1.209 <sup>***</sup>	-1.240 <sup>***</sup>	-1.200 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.418)	(0.413)	(0.382)
Conservative instructor * SAT score (/1,000)				0.943 <sup>***</sup>	0.958 <sup>***</sup>	0.939 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.302)	(0.298)	(0.274)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	60,685	60,685	60,685	60,685	60,685	60,685
R-squared	0.587	0.586	0.590	0.586	0.591	0.606

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 5: PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN THE RETURNS TO STUDENT ABILITY  
USING STANDARDIZED SAT SCORES**

<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	-1.800 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.331)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * standardized SAT score	1.858 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.122)					
Share of conservatives in department		-0.541 <sup>***</sup>	-0.299 <sup>**</sup>			
		(0.124)	(0.134)			
Share of conservatives in department * standardized SAT score		0.635 <sup>***</sup>	0.634 <sup>***</sup>			
		(0.075)	(0.075)			
Conservative instructor				0.092 <sup>***</sup>	0.083 <sup>**</sup>	0.096 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.035)
Conservative instructor * standardized SAT score				0.119 <sup>***</sup>	0.119 <sup>***</sup>	0.107 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.029)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	60,326	60,326	60,326	60,326	60,326	60,326
R-squared	0.593	0.588	0.593	0.588	0.593	0.608

*Notes:* Standardized SAT score is equal to (student's SAT score - course mean SAT score)/course standard deviation of SAT scores. The sample includes grades awarded in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 6: PARTISANSHIP AND GENDER**

	<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	-1.021 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.296)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * female student	-1.633 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.313)					
Share of conservatives in department		-0.294 <sup>***</sup>	-0.012			
		(0.107)	(0.132)			
Share of conservatives in department * female student		-0.439 <sup>***</sup>	-0.513 <sup>***</sup>			
		(0.124)	(0.120)			
Conservative instructor				0.109 <sup>***</sup>	0.098 <sup>***</sup>	0.107 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.037)	(0.034)	(0.035)
Conservative instructor * female student				-0.019	-0.019	-0.008
				(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.023)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	74,201	74,201	74,201	74,201	74,201	74,201
R-squared	0.604	0.602	0.606	0.601	0.606	0.621

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 7: PARTISANSHIP AND ETHNICITY – BLACK STUDENTS**

<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	-1.510 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.321)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Black student	-2.019 <sup>**</sup>					
	(0.865)					
Share of conservatives in department		-0.407 <sup>***</sup>	-0.237 <sup>**</sup>			
		(0.107)	(0.117)			
Share of conservatives in department * Black student		-1.742 <sup>***</sup>	-1.479 <sup>***</sup>			
		(0.324)	(0.324)			
Conservative instructor				0.125 <sup>***</sup>	0.115 <sup>***</sup>	0.129 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Conservative instructor * Black student				-0.410 <sup>***</sup>	-0.405 <sup>***</sup>	-0.381 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.090)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	48,783	48,783	48,783	48,783	48,783	48,783
R-squared	0.597	0.596	0.599	0.596	0.600	0.615

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Black and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 8: PARTISANSHIP AND ETHNICITY – HISPANIC STUDENTS**

<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	-1.504 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.321)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Hispanic student	-2.400 <sup>**</sup>					
	(0.784)					
Share of conservatives in department		-0.412 <sup>***</sup>	-0.219 <sup>*</sup>			
		(0.106)	(0.117)			
Share of conservatives in department * Hispanic student		-1.315 <sup>***</sup>	-1.150 <sup>***</sup>			
		(0.315)	(0.305)			
Conservative instructor				0.124 <sup>***</sup>	0.114 <sup>***</sup>	0.124 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.037)
Conservative instructor * Hispanic student				-0.187 <sup>***</sup>	-0.184 <sup>***</sup>	-0.147 <sup>**</sup>
				(0.064)	(0.065)	(0.062)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	49,449	49,449	49,449	49,449	49,449	49,449
R-squared	0.595	0.593	0.597	0.593	0.597	0.612

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Hispanic and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 9: PARTISANSHIP – ABILITY, GENDER AND ETHNICITY**

	<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	-5.146*					
	(2.877)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * SAT score (/1,000)	3.116					
	(1.995)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * female student	-1.377***					
	(0.287)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Black student	-0.989					
	(0.673)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Hispanic student	-2.016***					
	(0.690)					
Share of conservatives in department		-1.891*	-1.929*			
		(1.118)	(1.072)			
Share of conservatives in department * SAT score (/1,000)		1.214	1.428*			
		(0.782)	(0.759)			
Share of conservatives in department * female student		-0.263**	-0.364***			
		(0.127)	(0.123)			
Share of conservatives in department * Black student		-1.390***	-1.060***			
		(0.321)	(0.317)			
Share of conservatives in department * Hispanic student		-1.181***	-0.974***			
		(0.298)	(0.287)			
Conservative instructor				-0.978**	-1.014***	-1.035***
				(0.393)	(0.387)	(0.362)
Conservative instructor * SAT score (/1,000)				0.794***	0.813***	0.832***
				(0.288)	(0.282)	(0.261)
Conservative instructor * female student				0.033*	0.033*	0.039**
				(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Conservative instructor * Black student				-0.269***	-0.260***	-0.233***
				(0.067)	(0.070)	(0.070)
Conservative instructor * Hispanic student				-0.099**	-0.093**	-0.054
				(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.044)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286
R-squared	0.586	0.584	0.588	0.584	0.590	0.605

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Black, Hispanic and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 10A: PARTISANSHIP AT THE TOP OF THE GRADE SCALE**

	<i>Dependent variable: student grade is A+</i>					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	-0.637 (0.709)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * SAT score (/1,000)	0.743 (0.511)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * female student	-0.194* (0.108)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Black student	-0.038 (0.116)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Hispanic student	-0.081 (0.140)					
Share of conservatives in department		-0.199 (0.307)	-0.266 (0.317)			
Share of conservatives in department * SAT score (/1,000)		0.196 (0.233)	0.180 (0.241)			
Share of conservatives in department * female student		-0.101** (0.044)	-0.072 (0.047)			
Share of conservatives in department * Black student		-0.033 (0.062)	-0.091 (0.063)			
Share of conservatives in department * Hispanic student		-0.045 (0.058)	-0.077 (0.060)			
Conservative instructor				-0.266** (0.120)	-0.262** (0.121)	-0.265** (0.124)
Conservative instructor * SAT score (/1,000)				0.209** (0.087)	0.207** (0.087)	0.208** (0.089)
Conservative instructor * female student				0.016** (0.008)	0.016** (0.008)	0.014* (0.008)
Conservative instructor * Black student				-0.018* (0.011)	-0.020* (0.010)	-0.021** (0.010)
Conservative instructor * Hispanic student				-0.010 (0.012)	-0.011 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.011)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286
R-squared	0.359	0.358	0.359	0.360	0.361	0.371

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Black, Hispanic and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 10B: PARTISANSHIP AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GRADE SCALE**

<i>Dependent variable: student grade is less than C</i>						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share of conservatives in discipline	2.458 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.813)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * SAT score (/1,000)	-1.534 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.571)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * female student	0.035					
	(0.080)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Black student	0.530 <sup>**</sup>					
	(0.238)					
Share of conservatives in discipline * Hispanic student	0.777 <sup>***</sup>					
	(0.273)					
Share of conservatives in department		0.792 <sup>**</sup>	0.755 <sup>**</sup>			
		(0.386)	(0.378)			
Share of conservatives in department * SAT score (/1,000)		-0.493 <sup>*</sup>	-0.526 <sup>**</sup>			
		(0.271)	(0.264)			
Share of conservatives in department * female student		-0.015	0.013			
		(0.040)	(0.039)			
Share of conservatives in department * Black student		0.533 <sup>***</sup>	0.462 <sup>***</sup>			
		(0.119)	(0.118)			
Share of conservatives in department * Hispanic student		0.307 <sup>***</sup>	0.265 <sup>**</sup>			
		(0.108)	(0.106)			
Conservative instructor				0.280 <sup>**</sup>	0.288 <sup>***</sup>	0.287 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.112)	(0.111)	(0.106)
Conservative instructor * SAT score (/1,000)				-0.215 <sup>***</sup>	-0.218 <sup>***</sup>	-0.221 <sup>***</sup>
				(0.081)	(0.081)	(0.077)
Conservative instructor * female student				-0.011	-0.011	-0.013 <sup>*</sup>
				(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Conservative instructor * Black student				0.083 <sup>***</sup>	0.081 <sup>**</sup>	0.076 <sup>**</sup>
				(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Conservative instructor * Hispanic student				0.014	0.013	0.009
				(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Discipline fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Department fixed effects	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286	46,286
R-squared	0.435	0.434	0.436	0.433	0.436	0.445

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Black, Hispanic and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either conservative or liberal. Grades of less than C include the following categories: F, D-, D, D+, and C-. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 11: THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTOR'S RACE AND GENDER**

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	<i>Grade is less</i>			<i>Grade is less</i>		
	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Grade is A+</i>	<i>than C</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Grade is A+</i>	<i>than C</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Conservative instructor	-1.133*** (0.354)	-0.261** (0.128)	0.308*** (0.102)	-1.084*** (0.354)	-0.273** (0.129)	0.289*** (0.101)
Conservative instructor * SAT score (/1,000)	0.911*** (0.255)	0.205** (0.092)	-0.237*** (0.074)	0.871*** (0.254)	0.213** (0.092)	-0.223*** (0.073)
Conservative instructor * female student	0.040** (0.019)	0.012 (0.008)	-0.010 (0.008)	0.046** (0.020)	0.016 <sup>†</sup> (0.008)	-0.009 (0.008)
Conservative instructor * Black student	-0.228*** (0.073)	-0.019* (0.011)	0.074** (0.033)	-0.227*** (0.071)	-0.019* (0.011)	0.072** (0.032)
Conservative instructor * Hispanic student	-0.044 (0.047)	-0.011 (0.012)	0.009 (0.021)	-0.029 (0.049)	-0.008 (0.012)	0.002 (0.021)
Black instructor	0.201 (0.582)	0.082 (0.072)	-0.012 (0.193)	0.208 (0.576)	0.082 (0.073)	-0.012 (0.194)
Black instructor * SAT score (/1,000)	-0.221 (0.395)	-0.072 (0.054)	0.030 (0.136)	-0.228 (0.393)	-0.071 (0.054)	0.031 (0.138)
Black instructor * female student	-0.023 (0.060)	0.007 (0.013)	0.011 (0.026)	-0.021 (0.060)	0.008 (0.013)	0.011 (0.026)
Black instructor * Black student	0.077 (0.089)	0.011 (0.016)	-0.022 (0.032)	0.074 (0.088)	0.011 (0.016)	-0.022 (0.032)
Black instructor * Hispanic student	-0.192 (0.140)	-0.014 (0.025)	0.044 (0.049)	-0.181 (0.138)	-0.012 (0.025)	0.040 (0.048)
Female instructor				0.344** (0.147)	-0.054 (0.048)	-0.121*** (0.046)
Female instructor * SAT score (/1,000)				-0.239** (0.102)	0.041 (0.035)	0.088*** (0.032)
Female instructor * female student				0.031 (0.019)	0.018** (0.008)	0.004 (0.005)
Female instructor * Black student				0.022 (0.042)	-0.006 (0.007)	-0.017 (0.014)
Female instructor * Hispanic student				0.066 <sup>†</sup> (0.037)	0.013 (0.011)	-0.030** (0.012)
Department fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	42,055	42,055	42,055	42,055	42,055	42,055
R-squared	0.619	0.392	0.445	0.619	0.393	0.465

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Black, Hispanic and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified (1) as either conservative or liberal and (2) as either Black or non-Black. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols <sup>†</sup>, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 12A: DIFFERENT SHADES OF PARTISANSHIP  
PRIMARY VOTING**

<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>		
	(1)	(2)
Republican instructor	-1.025 <sup>***</sup>	0.244
	(0.362)	(0.475)
Republican instructor * SAT score (/1,000)	0.824 <sup>***</sup>	-0.248
	(0.261)	(0.327)
Republican instructor * female student	0.036 <sup>*</sup>	0.091
	(0.019)	(0.064)
Republican instructor * Black student	-0.222 <sup>***</sup>	-0.010
	(0.070)	(0.157)
Republican instructor * Hispanic student	-0.054	-0.097
	(0.044)	(0.115)
Primary-voting Democratic instructor		0.018
		(0.207)
Primary-voting Democratic instructor * SAT score (/1,000)		-0.064
		(0.144)
Primary-voting Democratic instructor * female student		0.064 <sup>**</sup>
		(0.031)
Primary-voting Democratic instructor * Black student		0.102
		(0.064)
Primary-voting Democratic instructor * Hispanic student		-0.089 <sup>*</sup>
		(0.051)
Primary-voting Republican instructor		-1.476 <sup>***</sup>
		(0.552)
Primary-voting Republican instructor * SAT score (/1,000)		1.223 <sup>***</sup>
		(0.386)
Primary-voting Republican instructor * female student		0.007
		(0.059)
Primary-voting Republican instructor * Black student		-0.125
		(0.164)
Primary-voting Republican instructor * Hispanic student		-0.044
		(0.111)
Department fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	45,637	45,637
R-squared	0.608	0.609

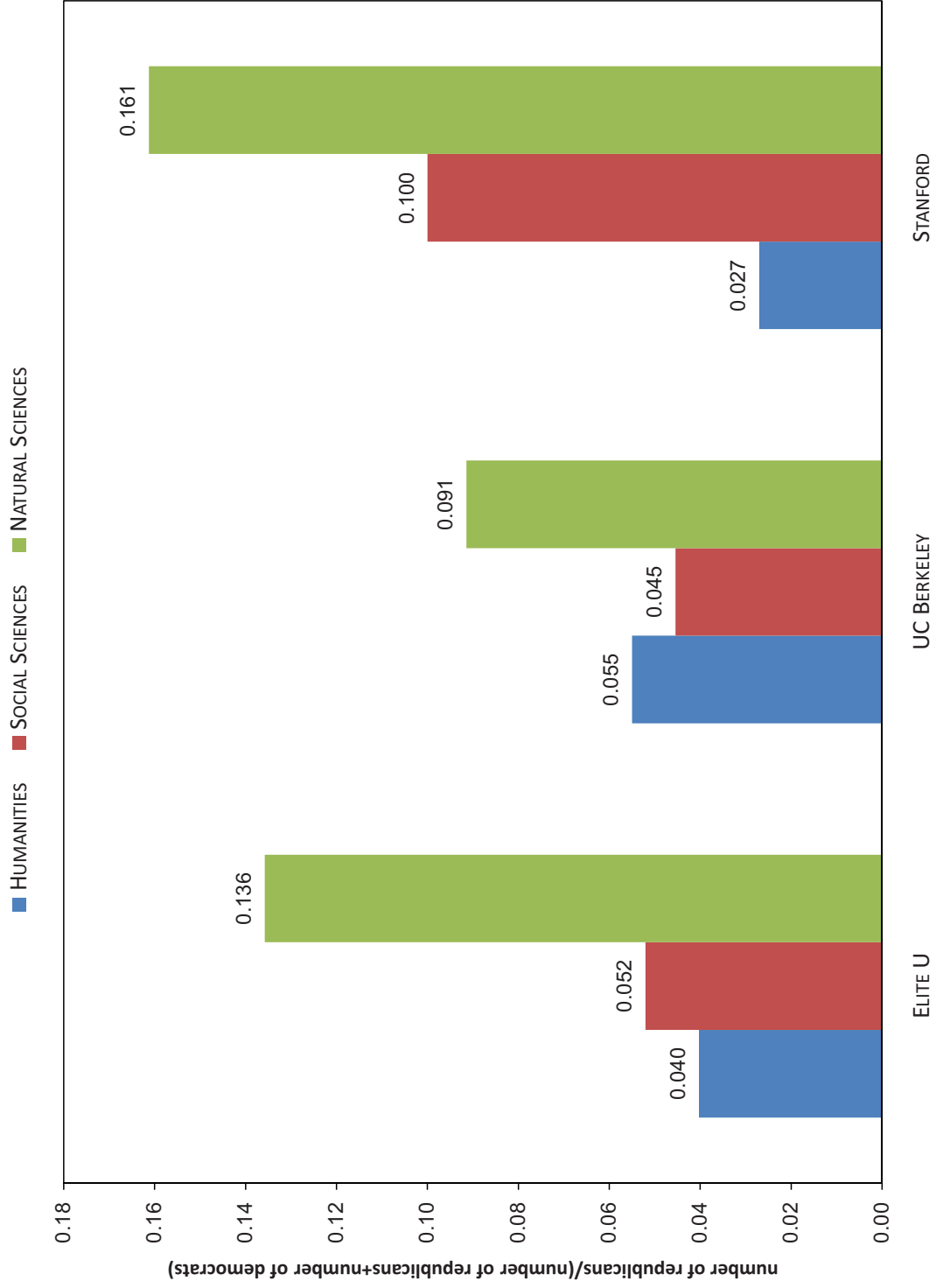
*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Black, Hispanic and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as either a Democrat or a Republican. An individual is considered primary voting if according to the voter registration records he or she voted in at least one primary election. The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

**TABLE 12B: DIFFERENT SHADES OF PARTISANSHIP  
CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS AMONG DEMOCRATIC INSTRUCTORS**

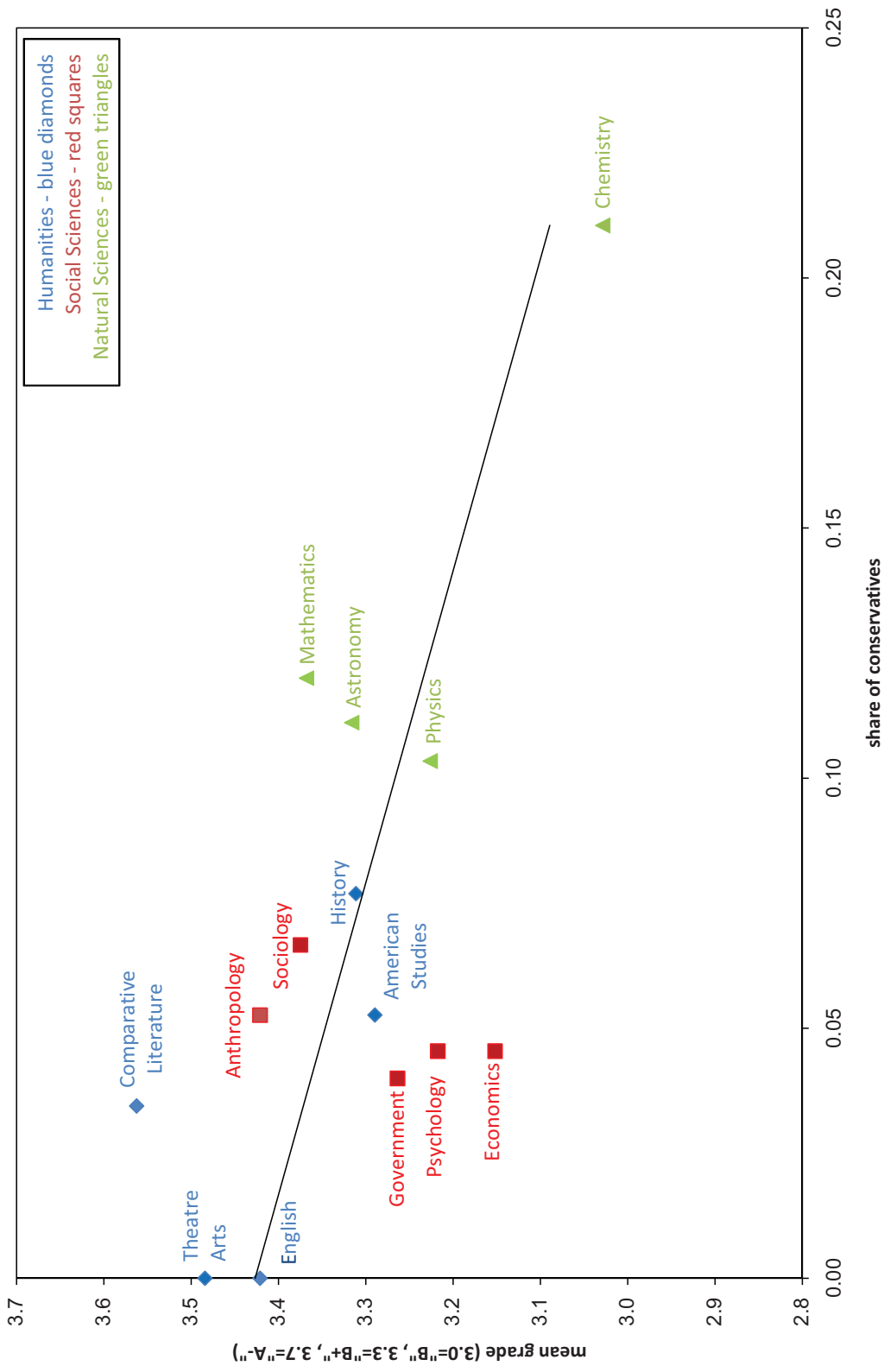
	<i>Dependent variable: student grade</i>		
	Classification of contributors to "heavy" and "light" by-		
		Number of contributions	Amount of contributions
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Contributor	-0.561** (0.226)	-0.072 (0.229)	-0.354 (0.286)
Contributor * SAT score (/1,000)	0.353** (0.156)	0.012 (0.158)	0.201 (0.192)
Contributor * female student	0.002 (0.025)	0.003 (0.033)	-0.012 (0.034)
Contributor * Black student	-0.006 (0.050)	-0.125* (0.072)	-0.109 (0.082)
Contributor * Hispanic student	-0.076* (0.040)	-0.095* (0.056)	-0.091 (0.071)
Heavy contributor		-0.882** (0.383)	-0.378 (0.424)
Heavy contributor * SAT score (/1,000)		0.613** (0.263)	0.276 (0.290)
Heavy contributor * female student		-0.006 (0.045)	0.031 (0.046)
Heavy contributor * Black student		0.209** (0.086)	0.173* (0.094)
Heavy contributor * Hispanic student		0.039 (0.076)	0.027 (0.080)
Department fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instructor controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	39,940	39,940	39,940
R-squared	0.616	0.617	0.617

*Notes:* The sample includes grades awarded to Black, Hispanic and White students in undergraduate level courses with a single instructor who was identified as a Democrat. An individual is considered a campaign contributor if according to campaign contribution records (<http://www.opensecrets.org/indivs/index.php>) he or she contributed money to the Democratic party/party candidates from 2000 to 2008. Heavy contributors are those who contributed more than once (column 2) or contributed more than \$500 over the period under consideration (column 3). The regressions were estimated by Ordinary Least Squares. Standard errors, clustered by course, are reported in brackets. The symbols \*, \*\*, \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level in a two-tailed t-test.

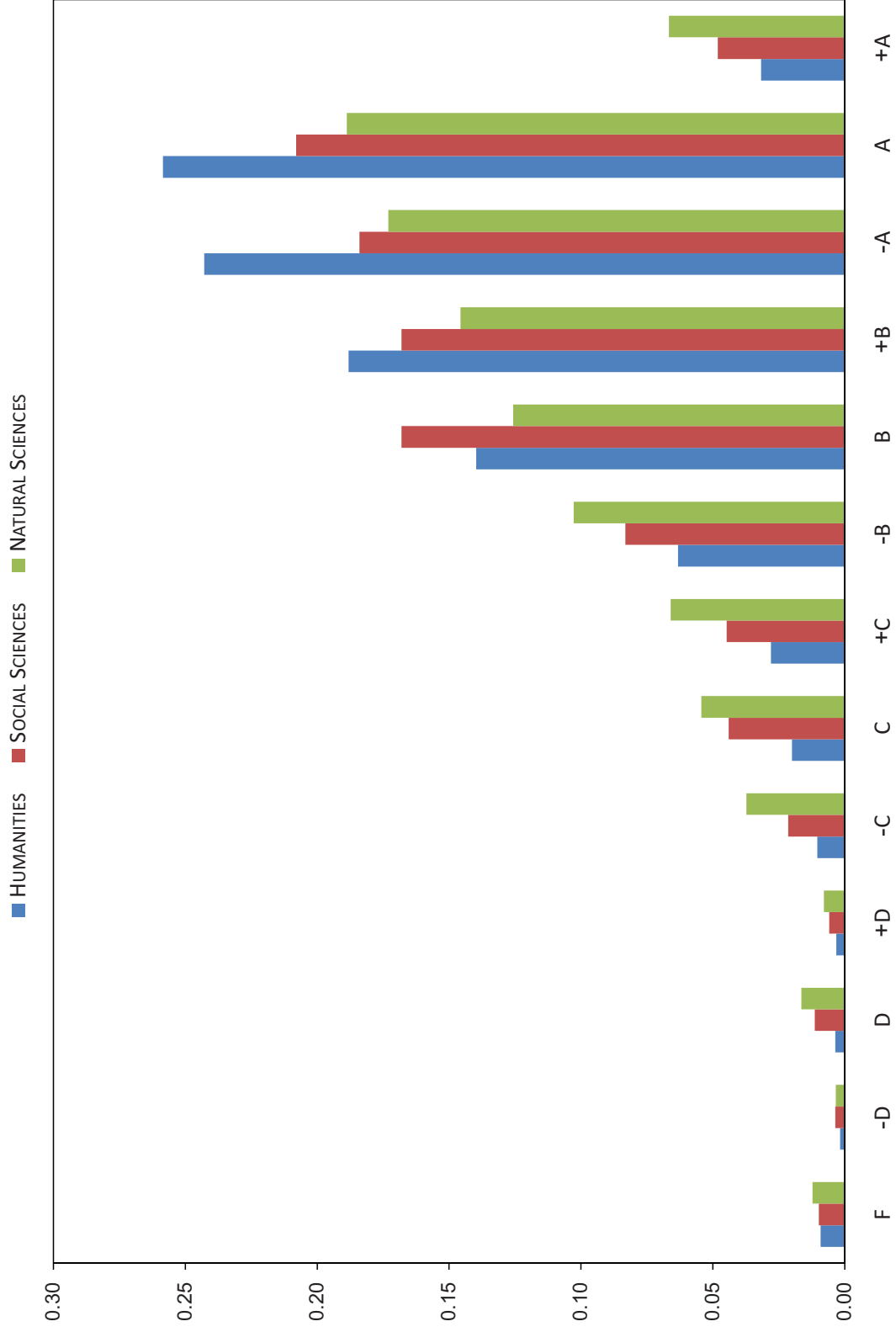
**FIGURE 1: SHARE OF REPUBLICANS ACROSS DISCIPLINES**



**FIGURE 2: CONSERVATISM AND THE MEAN GRADE ACROSS DEPARTMENTS**  
 (all natural and social science departments + five largest humanities departments)



**FIGURE 3: DIFFERENCES IN GRADE DISTRIBUTIONS ACROSS DISCIPLINES**



**FIGURE 4: PARTISANSHIP AND EGALITARIANISM IN GRADING**

