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A new explanation for grade inflation the long-term development of German university grades /

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Abstract

This article analyses a number of trends in final exam results at selected German universities. Our research covers 12 prominent fields of study from 1960 to 2010. Data prior to 1997 were collected from eight university archives. The first part of the article descriptively presents long-term stable differences between fields of study as well as between universities offering courses in the same fields of study, portraying how grade improvement and cyclical dynamics appear. Using time-series methods, part two analytically reveals a relationship between the numbers of examinations and the level of grades. This relationship differs for two different categories of fields of study: those with a strong dependence on a common nationwide job market and those which are not related to a specific job market. For both groups, grade inflation can be explained by the observation that the cyclic dynamics of grading tends to be stronger for improvement than for worsening. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)