

**CROSS CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS: STUDENT-INSTRUCTOR
NEGOTIATIONS IN THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA**

by

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Introduction

This capstone research was done to find out whether there is a difference between Armenian and foreign students' negotiation with instructors and whether it has a link with culture and nationality or not. My research is made of three parts, which are: overall negotiation (cross-cultural), student-instructor negotiation (AUA) and differences between Armenian and foreign students' and instructors' communication style. We all know that negotiation is a broad concept and it has a certain link with various other concepts connected with communication. In this research I found out about the cultural differences that can occur while negotiating with each other. In other words, culture and nationality play a big role in peoples' communication and negotiation style. Millions of reasons exist which create a necessity to negotiate. When it comes to negotiate with people who do not share the same culture as you, there often occur problems during negotiation process. For instance this happens in every educational institution where student-instructor negotiations exist. In this context, this study will look at Armenian negotiations style in daily communication especially in student-instructor relationships mainly at the American University of Armenia and the difference between Armenian and foreign students' negotiation. As Armenians have their specific characteristics in negotiations; the aim of this study is to find out those characteristics and find out the differences between other nations' negotiation characteristics. There might be things which can help negotiation process go well while there can also be things which can make it worse. I found the most common things in Armenian student-instructor negotiations. The main objective of this research is to explore student-instructor negotiations in the American University of Armenia (AUA). My sources mostly cover international perspective and present other countries cultural variables. They guided me how to do my own research. As there are various negotiation types and strategies, I

found out which ones are the most common ones that exist in Armenian society, especially among student-instructor communications. This study will not only present how the student-instructor negotiations in AUA happen, but also show whether it comes from cultural variables or not. There is an opinion that Armenian students tend to be bargaining for grades and that they always try to find an easy way to get higher grades, rather than just studying and making effort. Another opinion says that Armenian students have problems with attending classes and they often negotiate about their absences. And finally, there is a problem with students who show like they care but in reality; they do not pay attention to the classes at all. These problems sum up together and lead to various misunderstandings among students and instructors. So in order to understand how true these statements are, I found the answers to those questions by this research.

The overall structure of my research covers general information about negotiation (mainly cross-cultural), differences between Armenian and foreign students' attitude towards studies and grades, instructors' attitude towards Armenian and foreign students' and overall student-instructor negotiations at AUA.

First of all, during my observations I found lots of differences between Armenian and foreign students' attitude towards studying and grades. Almost all foreign students try to pay more attention to the knowledge they gain from studying rather than to grades they receive. While Armenian students pay more attention to their grades even when they know that they aren't prepared well enough. These kinds of differences occur between Armenian students and foreign students, and I made it a big part of my research because with the help of the survey conducted among students, I found lots of important answers to my questions.

The most important thing which leads to negotiation is conflict. It exists everywhere and requires

different strategies to solve various conflicts. The factors influencing a conflict between students and instructors can have a great harm on educational process. According to various psychological studies, the conflicts occurring in universities can cause students depression and thus have negative influence on their education. So specifically when it comes to bargaining for good grades, students may demand higher grades and the misunderstanding between student and instructor may create pressure in their relationships. Once their relationship spoils, it will never be as good as before. Some students are ready to risk their relationship with the instructor and go argue with them, demanding higher grades while others value those relationships higher than their grades. This comes from different cultural views and values.

The one factor which is included among cultural values is the family factor. Family plays a big role in child's life and way of thinking. Sometimes parents become a reason why students have conflict with instructors because some parents may put pressure on their children and demand only high grades. When this happens, and a student once gets lower grade than she/he expected, the parents' pressure becomes so strong that student decides to go and argue about his/her grade. So this example shows us that family values are also a part of our cultural values, because children often act by the pressure of their parents and unfortunately not all parents put their children on the right way.

Another important thing which can be a reason for conflict among students and instructors is that they both need to be more specific in their demands and behavior. Of course this also depends on culture because one way thinking can include high responsibility towards their academic activities while other way of thinking can include ignorance towards it. The Armenian culture is very different from other countries culture and several examples can prove it. A good friend of mine (he didn't want his name to be mentioned) who is a great instructor with experience of

teaching of almost 10 years, travelled to various universities and taught there most of the nations in the world. He compares his experience and says that he felt those cultural differences during each period teaching abroad. For instance in Finland, students called instructors by names which seemed that their relationships might not be official but friendlier. He says that it only seems because despite the fact that they call instructors by names, their relationships and communication stays official. While teaching in Amsterdam, he noticed that the official part of student-instructor relationship does not exist. They are so friendly that they even go to drink beer/coffee together. And finally, most of European countries students showed huge respect towards instructors because they stand up when instructor enter the classroom, and they also stand up when they ask questions to the instructor. These are manners that nations differ from each other because if we compare to Armenian students, we can say that those manners do not exist in our country. If we talk mainly about AUAs' students and instructors, we can say that AUA instructors are very open to students. Some of them even can drink a cup of coffee with students. The overall image of AUA student-instructor relationships can be a little bit confusing because there are both foreign and Armenian students and instructors. The cross-cultural factor exists there a lot which makes those communications quite complicated.

Literature Review

Negotiation (definition and strategies): Negotiation is a very broad topic and it has various explanations and strategies. However every nation has its own interpretation and behavior. In order to discuss it we need to know what does it actually mean and what the most common methods of negotiating are. In order to have a successful cross-cultural communication in any kind of negotiation, people need knowledge. As there often occur problems during cross-cultural

communications the negotiators must find out those problems and solve them. It is one of the important parts of the cross-cultural negotiation. Also it is important to understand that it is not always possible to solve those problems and that in any case there might remain some misunderstanding. So overall, both sides must respect each other's cultural values- (Huang, 2010). There exist various strategies and hints, for people to use during negotiation. From this source, I found those explanations of how people can negotiate in order to succeed.

The influence of culture on negotiation: We all know that during negotiation, almost always some misunderstanding occurs between negotiators, especially when it comes to negotiating with people who are from completely different country. As people live in different countries, they have different cultures and thus their way of thinking and behavior depends on their cultural values. So in order to understand what kind of behaviors are possible during negotiation process, there can be used cross-cultural studies (Chang, 2006). This can be similar to the preparation before negotiations, because the same anticipation is needed to understand what the opponent might do or say. Cultural influence is very big, because our culture is almost who we are, and it mostly creates some reflexes which we develop unconsciously and use in our further steps of life. In a world of globalization, we live in societies full of various nations, thus we need to interact with each other in a right way.

Examples of cross cultural negotiation differences: The cross cultural negotiation differences exist in every country because people always communicate with each other and they cannot communicate or negotiate only with their natives. This causes the problem of cross cultural negotiation and it has specific characteristics, depending on the countries. Various studies have

been done, in order to understand the main differences between different countries, and see whether there are common things or not. The objectives of this study are twofold, because firstly they test the utility of the ten dimensions while finding out country differences and secondly they specify the dimensions on which country differences can be found (Metcalf, Bird, Shankarmahesh, Aycan, Larimo and Valdelamar, n.d.). They conducted a study of five countries: Finland, Mexico, India, Turkey and US, thus showing the cultural differences of negotiation of these countries. This is a great example of comparison between different cultural variables, and it is really helpful for others who want to do similar work. By this example, I compared my study with the research that they have done, and found lots of useful ways to answer my question. They chose more questions to answer and that is why they have such a big study done.

Armenian cultural variables: As other nations, Armenians also have their cultural variables which make them different while negotiating with other country representatives. There have not been any studies done concerning this topic but one. Professors Samuelian and Khzrtian (n.d.) provided a little study about Armenian negotiation style and culture. In their study they give the definition of “negotiation culture” with the set of common values and norms that have been encountered while negotiating. Also this research includes some striking characteristics of Armenian negotiation culture, by the help of Geert Hofstede (Dutch social psychologist, author of the Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory) dimensions of culture in order to find out those factors which may have influenced the mental models of the Armenian negotiation culture. The Armenian negotiation culture developed not only from new models but also from old post-Soviet transition period models, because they provide a way to study the whole cultural factors (Khzrtian, Samuelian, n.d.). I used this study to see what specific things Armenians have while

negotiating and communicating with people. The fact that Armenia is considered one of the oldest countries in the world, it has a lot more differences in lifestyle and communication style.

The link between these studies and my research: As I am going to show the difference between Armenian students' negotiation style and foreign students' negotiation style, it is helpful for me to use these studies as a guideline. In order to understand what the main aspects are which I need to pay attention to. I organized my research in a way on how the authors of these studies did, because they managed to find out the answers to their questions with correct research and methods. The problem concerning bargaining of a grade may exist everywhere, but the Armenian style includes some extra points which I think have certain uniqueness. The aim of this study is to show those unique characteristics of the Armenian negotiation style and how it does affect student-teacher negotiations specifically in AUA. There have not been done any kind of a study concerning student-teacher negotiations at AUA and this capstone aims to fill that gap.

Research Questions and Methodology

Research question:

“Is there a difference between Armenian and Foreign students' negotiation with instructors which has a link with culture and nationality?”

Methodology:

The methods used in this research include the following

- **Scholarly Research/Collection of Data**
- **Survey**
- **Interviews**

First of all, has been done a thorough research on seven scholarly studies. Every statement that had a link with this study was used as a guide for this research. The data collected from all sources was interpreted into different parts, such as charts, comparisons and examples. The data includes multimedia (video, presentation etc.) sources which cover important points for the study. The main part of the study is based on surveys and interviews that have been conducted. I conducted a survey for AUA's 130 students of different grades. The survey includes questions which are linked to the attitudes towards student-instructor negotiations. There were asked some provocative questions to them such as "Do you think your instructor grades right?" thus understanding their inner attitude towards it. According to psychologist Khachatur Gasparyan when people are asked provocative questions, they always tend to tell the truth, but when it comes to action, they might behave as if they have a completely different opinion concerning it. Survey includes also questions such as "Your nationality" in order to see what cultural variety we have among students. The survey was done online and by Google Forms, which in the end provides the responses both individually and summarized. Also the more precise collection of data is done with the help of data collecting tool- SPSS. For more detailed presentation, the results of the surveys are represented by charts and diagrams, which are considered more interactive and creative way of representing the data collected. The final and important method is the interviews with instructors. Five interviews conducted with completely different subject instructors which include a little bit psychological questions concerning the topic. Unfortunately none of them agreed to record their talk. For this reason, those all interviews were done by taking

notes. The answers to the questions provide more information about their own experience and behavior. Combining all these interviews, surveys and researched material together, the thorough analysis of the topic is ready to present. The final content analysis has been done concerning whole gathered material. Various professionals had their input in the collection of data.

Research Findings and Analysis

Recently the higher education has become international. Many young people go abroad to get a better education. Many universities become international and cross-cultural instructors and classes appear. Nowadays most universities have practice to invite instructors from different countries. Cross-cultural instructors can misunderstand some national or cultural peculiarities of students' behavior. They should take into consideration the construction of cultural identity. The relationship between an instructor and a student is an essential part of educational process. Different types of relationship cause different approaches and behavior. The dialogue between an instructor or a supervisor and a student is based on the social and cultural level. The dominant aspect is students' attitude to professional status of instructors and negotiating over their grades. According to the survey, research and different interviews among students we can conclude that the conflict between an instructor and a student is unavoidable. Conflict is considered as one of the characteristics of market and democracy. Conflicts between an instructor and a student have their own peculiarities. There are different roles in educational process, different cultures upbringing. The main reasons for conflict of a student are the low level of professional qualification of instructors and low esteem of their knowledge. The students express the negative attitude to instructors showing unethical conduct. They begin to negotiate or bargain hard to get good grades. In this way there is tension in the relationship of an instructor and a student. In

some cases instructors feel uncomfortable or they can be manipulated by students. In other cases such situations can make an instructor lose his temper and will lead to big problems. On the other hand, instructors are not satisfied by the unwillingness of students to study, low level of education and culture and high self-esteem. In Armenia there are the same reasons for bargaining over the grades. We can mention that in Armenia it is very popular such aspect as nepotism. It means that somebody powerful or authoritarian asks or makes an instructor put a high grade. There is a tendency among Armenian students to have high grades but not a good knowledge. In our questionnaire we put some questions about possible conflicts between instructors and students and the most spread conflict is negotiating over grades, especially among graduates. They think more about their grades than their qualification, knowledge or skills. It is specific to Armenian students. In other countries the main reasons for conflict and further negotiating are negative attitude of instructors to students and unprofessional teaching. .. It is essential to learn the nature of conflict in order to explain the situation. Depending on some facts and conclusions we can say that it is easier to prevent conflict. The first measure is to inform students about control and criteria of grades. Instructors play a main role in creating a friendly atmosphere in order to pass students professional and ethical norms. From time to time it is better to give out a list of dos and don'ts about teaching process. Cultural and national characteristics are important to understand why Armenian students negotiate more than any other students. First of all instructor should be objective and honest. It is a long term process that be built on trust, patience and respect for students. Office hours or meetings, appointments for discussions by telephone, e-mail or skype can build the bridge of trust between instructors and students. If instructors want to have desirable results; they should motivate students to be more willing in the study. The other finding is that instructors should teach students negotiate about other things - proper teaching,

using up-to-date equipment and professional level of instructors. If we compare students from Armenian universities with students from AUA, we can see a difference in their attitude to education, university and instructor's staff. There is a lot of information about cross cultural negotiations because of the globalization and expanding the borders of education. A great amount of research attempts to prove that culture and identity is the most important aspect in teaching foreign students by foreign instructors. The main benefit of cross-cultural students is learning cultural differences and experience culture and national features. There are a lot of courses and trainings on cross-cultural teaching or negotiating in different situations, but there is very little information about negotiating or bargaining over grades.

My research is based on the survey that I conducted among 130 undergraduate students of AUA and interviews of five instructors (both Armenian and foreign). In the survey, I included various questions concerning studying ways and attitude towards grades. The results of the survey are quite complicated because the answer to my question is a little bit controversial. However, with the help of some questions I managed to get reliable answers. The results of the survey were good enough to make conclusions, to see whether there are any differences among Armenian and foreign students or not. Both survey and interview lead to understanding student-instructor relationships at AUA right. The answers of students were not like the answers of instructors. I must say that instructors seemed to me more honest than students because they told things that they might have not want to share with me. Of course the fact that I did survey and interviews anonymously also made them feel relaxed and don't worry about what they talk. Instructors were very open to any kind of question. They even talked about each nationality separately and described those specific things which they noticed in students' attitude and behavior towards studying. Overall, both interviews and survey gave me a bunch of information which I will

present in the following paragraphs. I included charts in order to support my survey results representation visually. All the graphs and charts above will show the percentage of each answer of the questions, thus showing their attitude towards all those questions.

I started my survey with general questions such as “your nationality, age, sex and major/faculty” in order to get general background of students. The question of nationality includes 92.2% Armenians and 7.8% foreign students (chart #1). As we do not have more undergraduate foreign students at AUA, I could not manage to gain more foreign students’ answers. The largest percent among age groups were 20 year old students, who were the 28.9% of students answered (chart #2). My survey has 75.8% female respondents and 24.2% male respondents (chart #3), so we can say that most of the questions were answered by female students. And finally the large amount of percentage among faculties has Business faculty- 44.5% and then comes English & Communications- 38.3% and Computer Sciences- 17.2% (chart #4). These are the most common data which shows the overall background information about students. The most important thing is the nationality which shows that the survey questions were answered mostly by Armenian students.

Chart #1

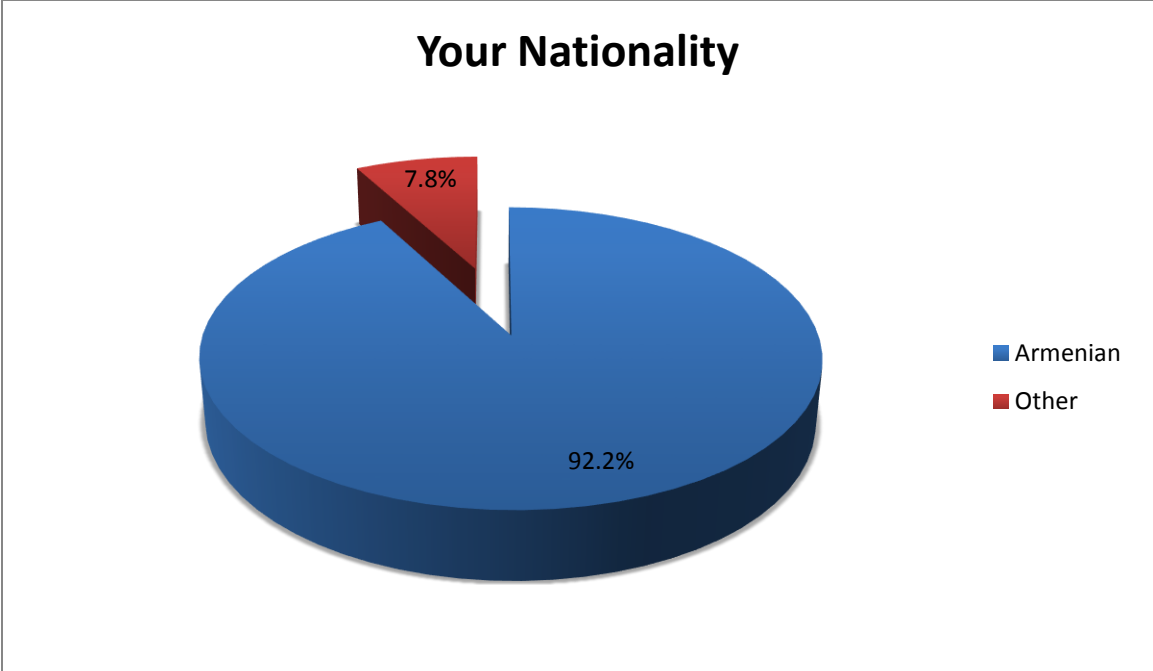


Chart #2

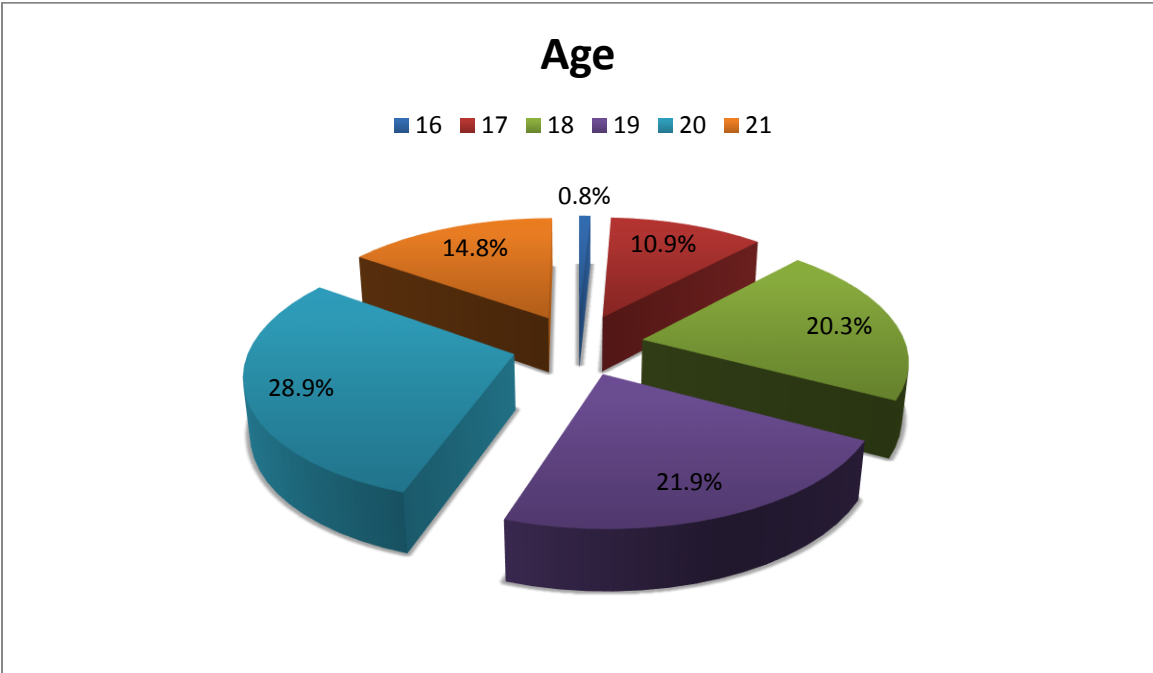


Chart #3

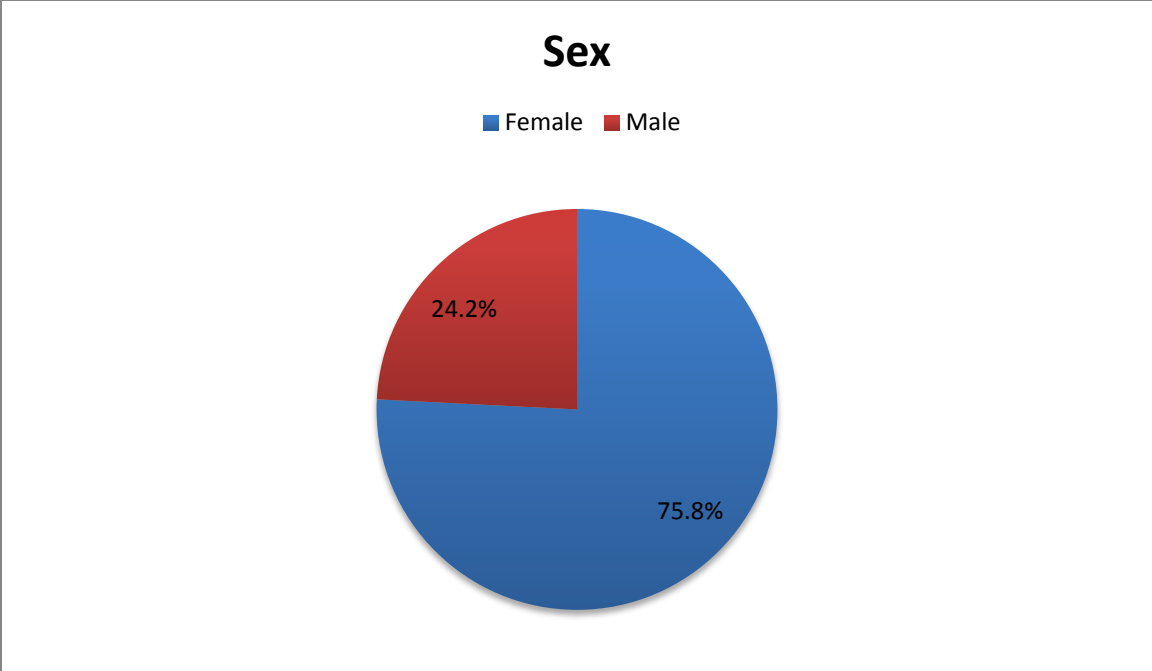
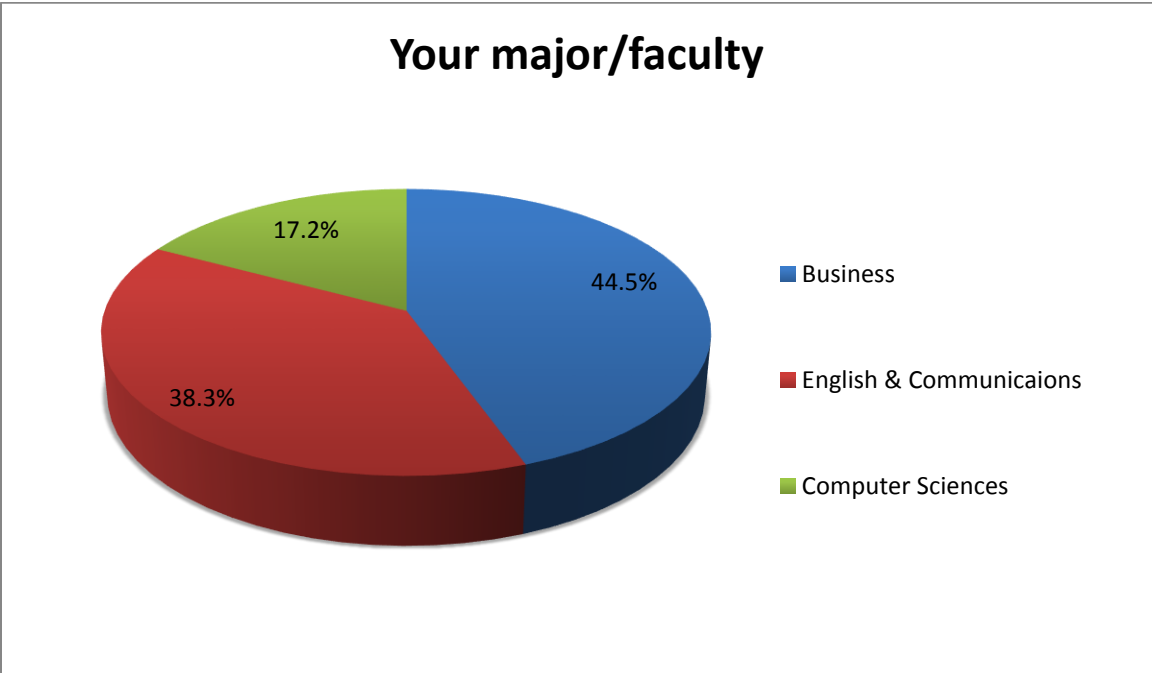


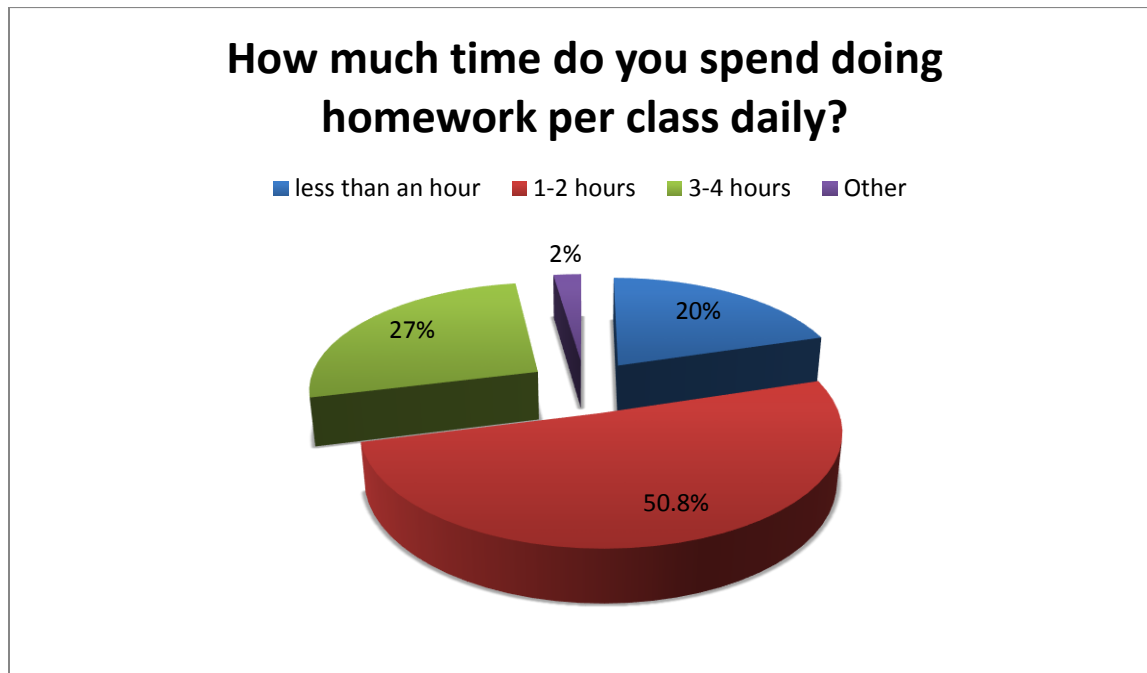
Chart #4



According to the results of how much time students spend on doing homework per class lots of things come up to me. For instance, most part of the students (50.8%) answered (chart #5) 1-2

hours which is obviously not enough to prepare all study material for each course properly. The 27% answered 3-4 hours and the 20% answered less than an hour.

Chart#5



Following questions are linked to each other because they all require almost the same answer. I did that trick in order to understand students' psychology, because they may answer one of those questions not saying the truth, but the other one by saying the truth. To the question how often they agree with the grades they receive 61.7% said that they mostly agree with the grades they receive (chart #6). The 17.2% said that they almost always agree with the grades they receive. The 16.4% answered that they often disagree with the grades they receive and the other 4.7% answered that they almost always disagree with the grade they receive. To the question whether they think that their efforts are valued by the instructors, 53.1% thinks that their efforts are often valued by the instructors (chart #7). The 28.9% answered sometimes. The 15.6% answered always. To the question how fair they think instructors grade them the 75% of students thinks

that instructors' grade fair (chart #8). The 12.5% thinks that instructors grade very fair. The 10.9% answered unfair and the 1.6% answered very unfair. To the question if they think they deserve highest grades the 54.7% thinks that they deserve highest (A+) grades (chart #9). The 35.2% answered maybe and the 7.8% answered no. This data represents the link between these questions. In order to agree with the grades that they receive, they must trust instructors and the answers showed that they really trust them. Also, another link is that the fair grading of the instructor somehow depends on the efforts students put in their studies, and by this way they receive higher grades. The question about highest grades was actually the one psychological, which shows that no matter what, all students think that they deserve highest grades (A+).

Chart #6

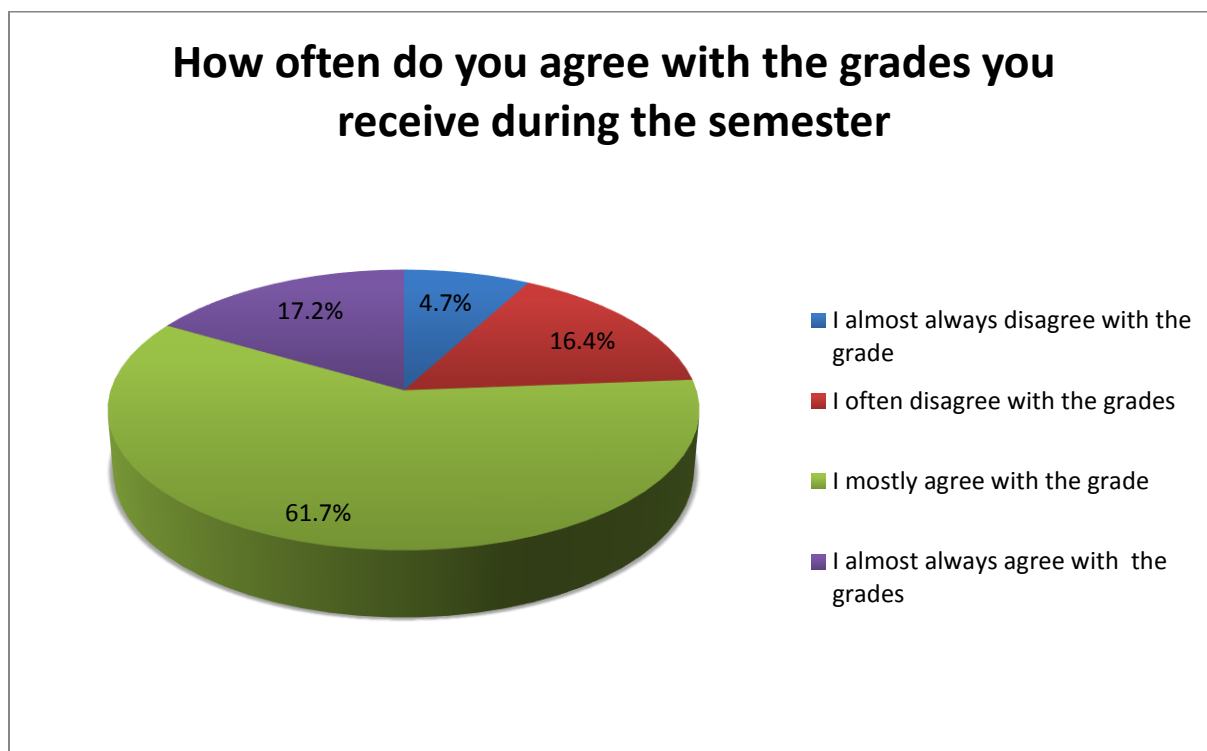


Chart #7

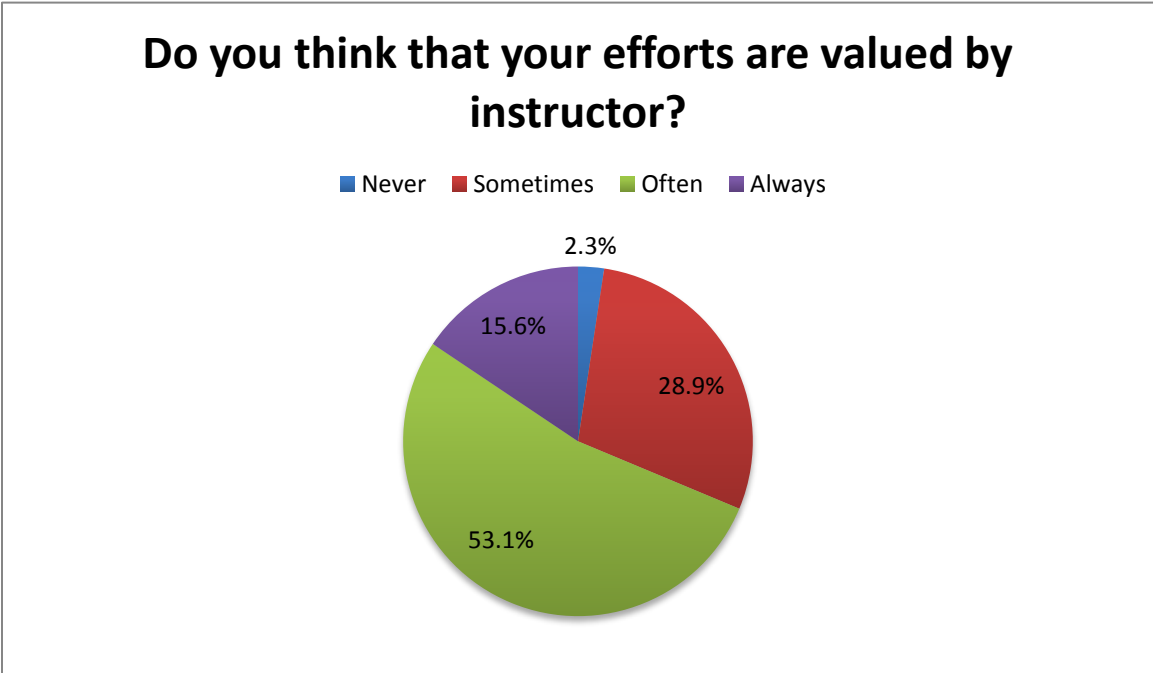


Chart #8

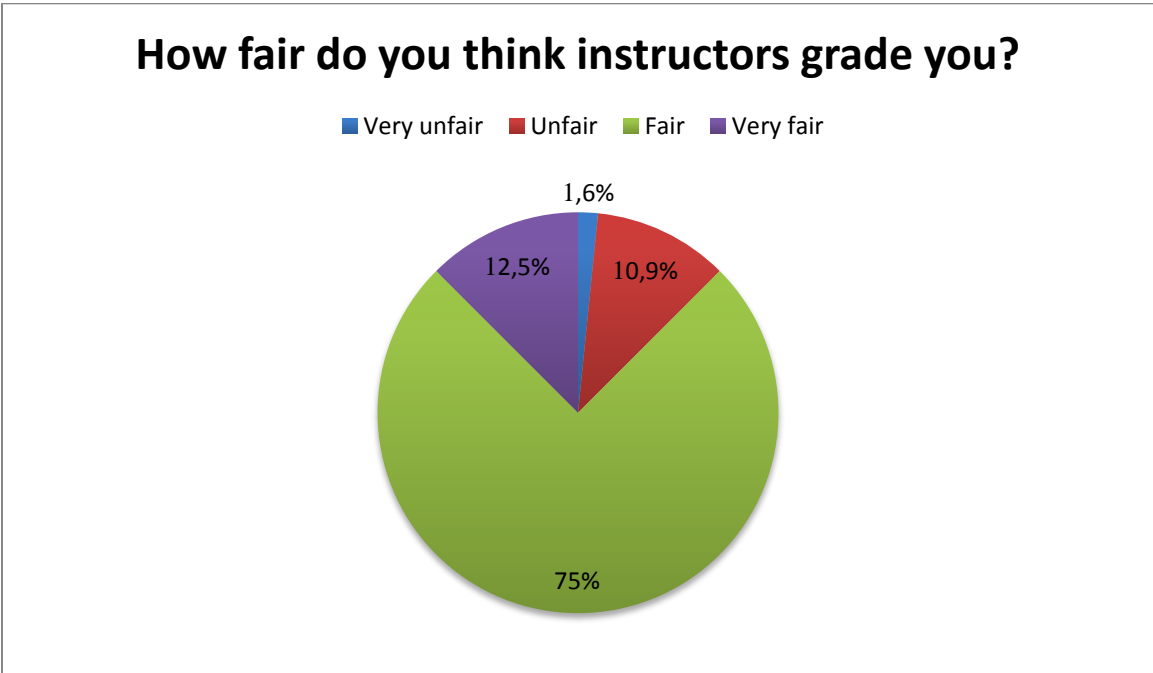
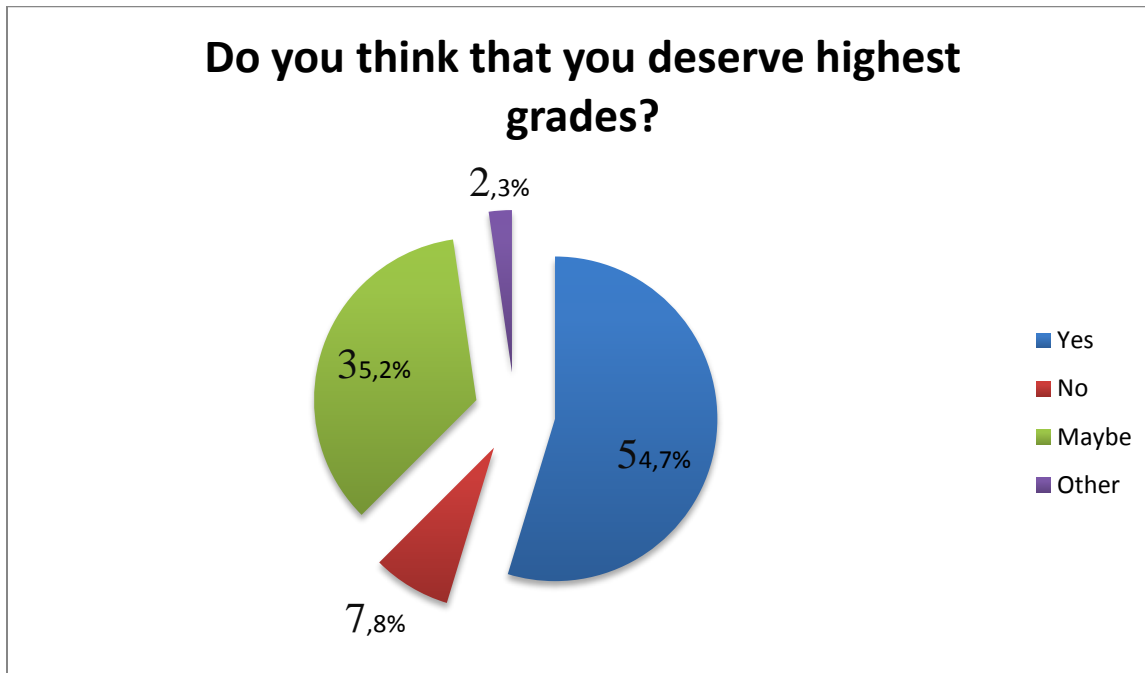


Chart #9



Following questions are based on grades and students' attitude towards grades. The most important part of it is the two questions which are also considered psychological because in the first question I asked how likely an average AUA student to get a good grade without studying (chart #10) the 47.7% answered unlikely, the 39.8% answered likely and the two equal 6.3% answered very likely and very unlikely. The other question says how likely for them to get a good grade without studying (chart #11). The 46.1% answered that it is unlikely for them to get a good grade without studying hard. However the 35.9% answered that it is likely for them to get a good grade without studying hard. The 14.1% said that it is very unlikely and the 3.9% said that it is very likely. Of course there is a question asking how often they argue about their grades (chart #12) in which the 53% answered that they never argue with the instructor about their grade. The 38.30% answered sometimes. The 3.1% answered very often and the 2.3% answered often. There are the final two questions concerning the grades they receive (chart #13 & chart

#14). First question asked whether they get upset when they get B+, B or B- and the 39.1% said yes. The 29.7% answered no and the 24.2% answered maybe. The last question which asked whether they get upset when they get C+ or lower (except failing), the majority (81.3%) answered yes. The 7.8% answered maybe and the 6.3% answered no.

Chart #10

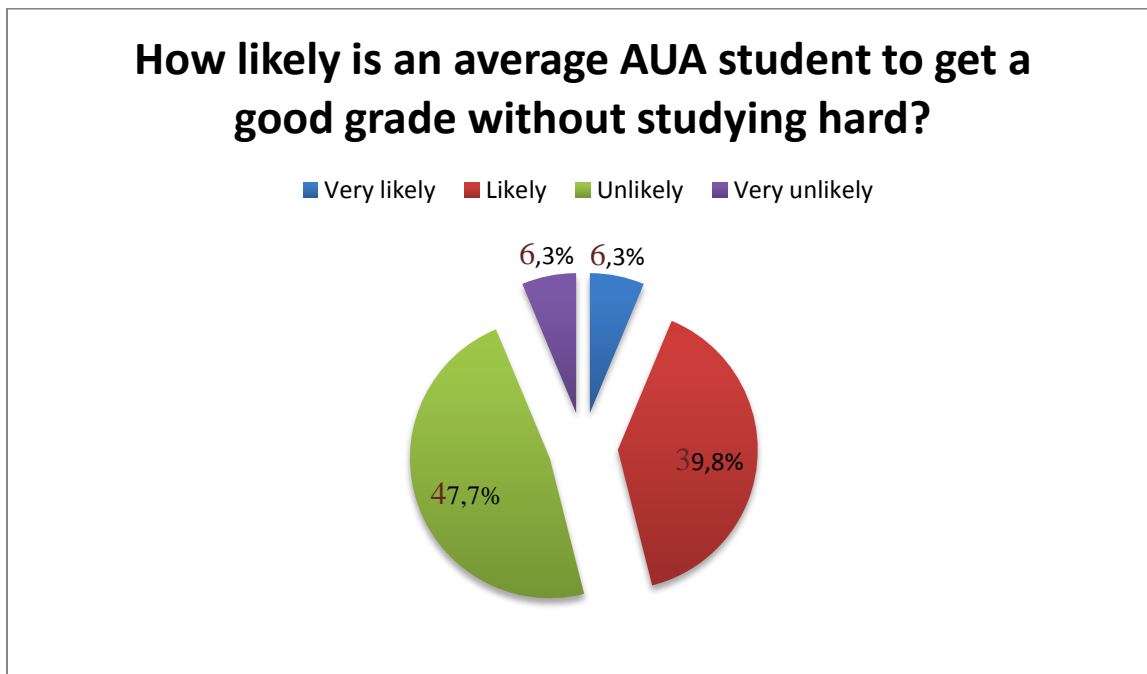


Chart #11

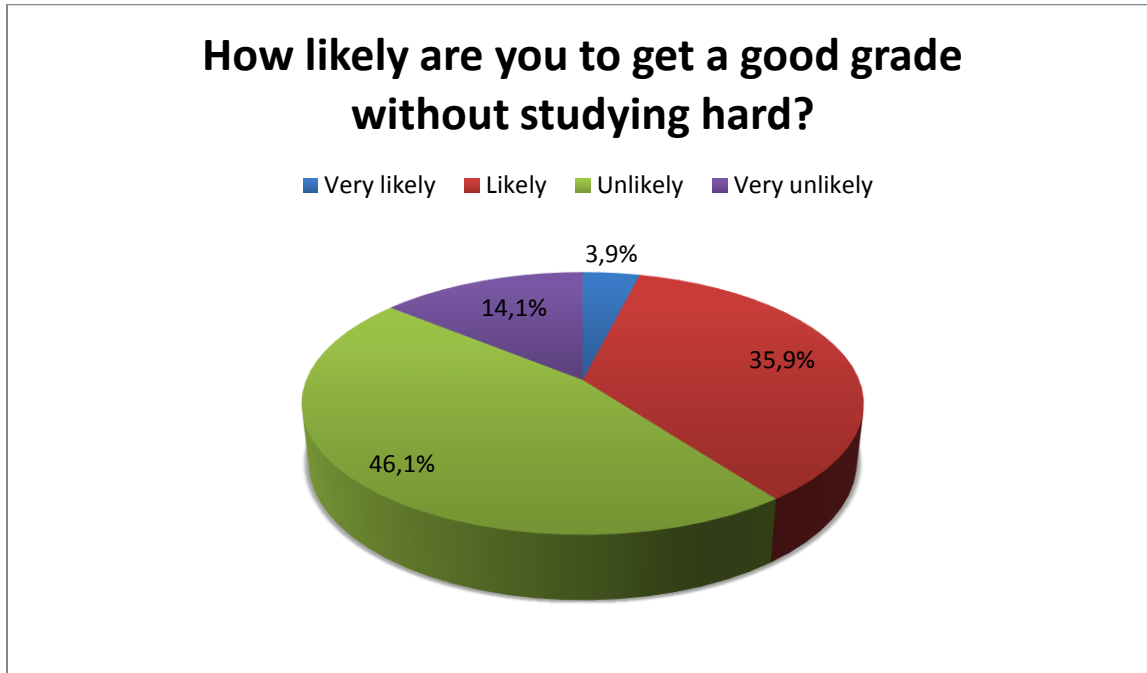


Chart #12

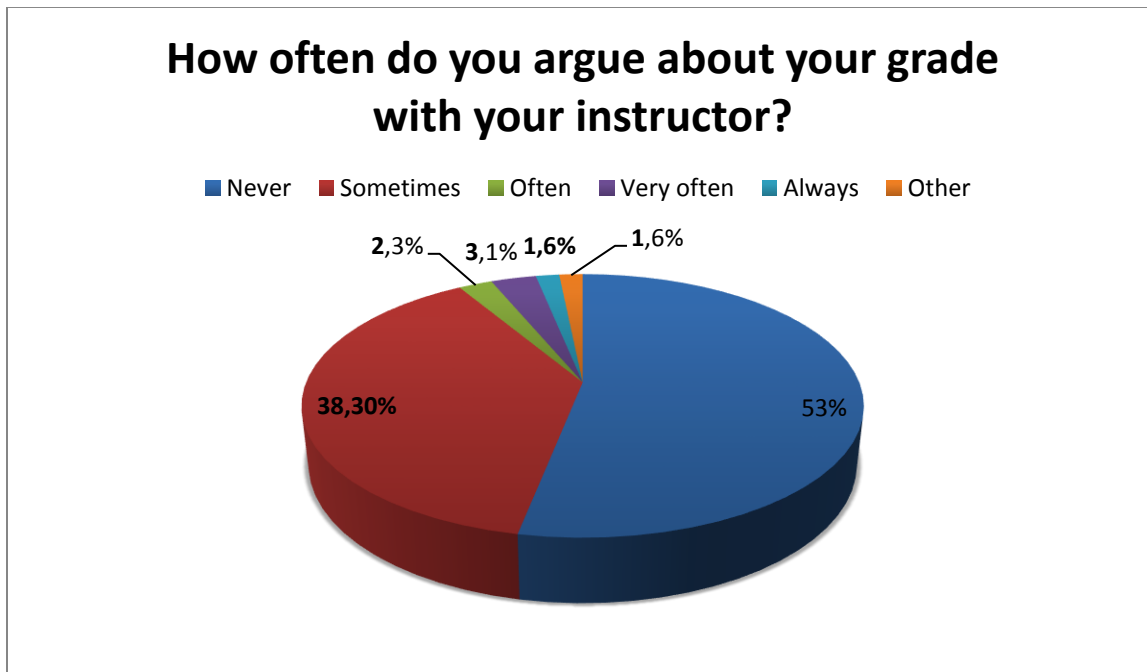


Chart #13

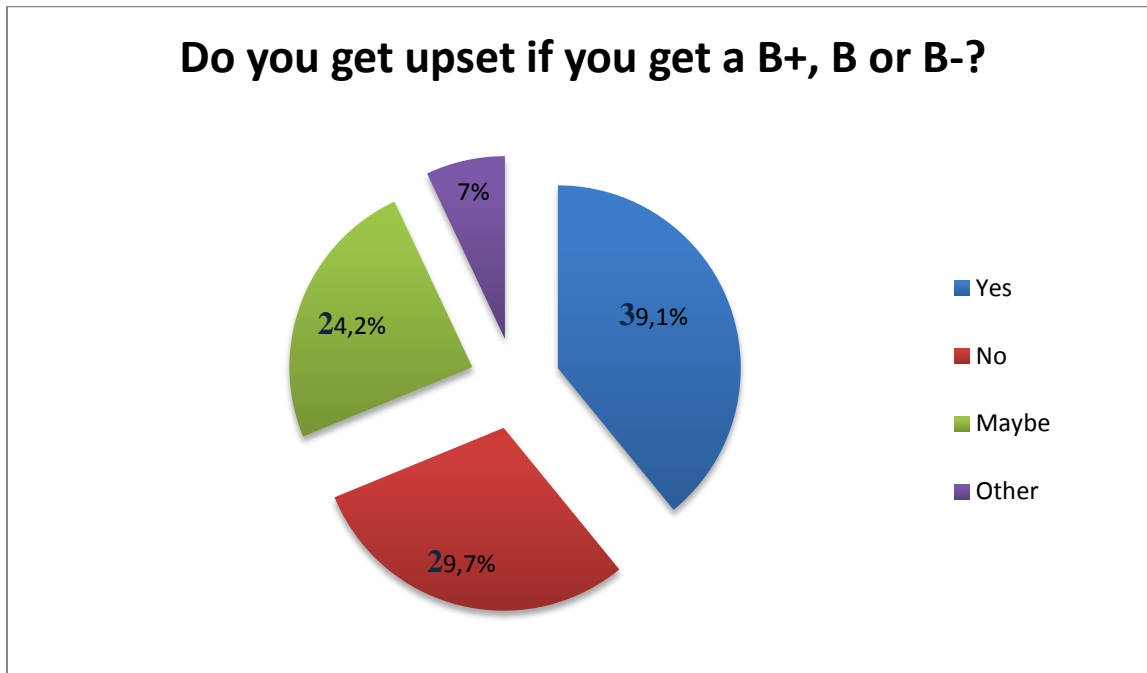
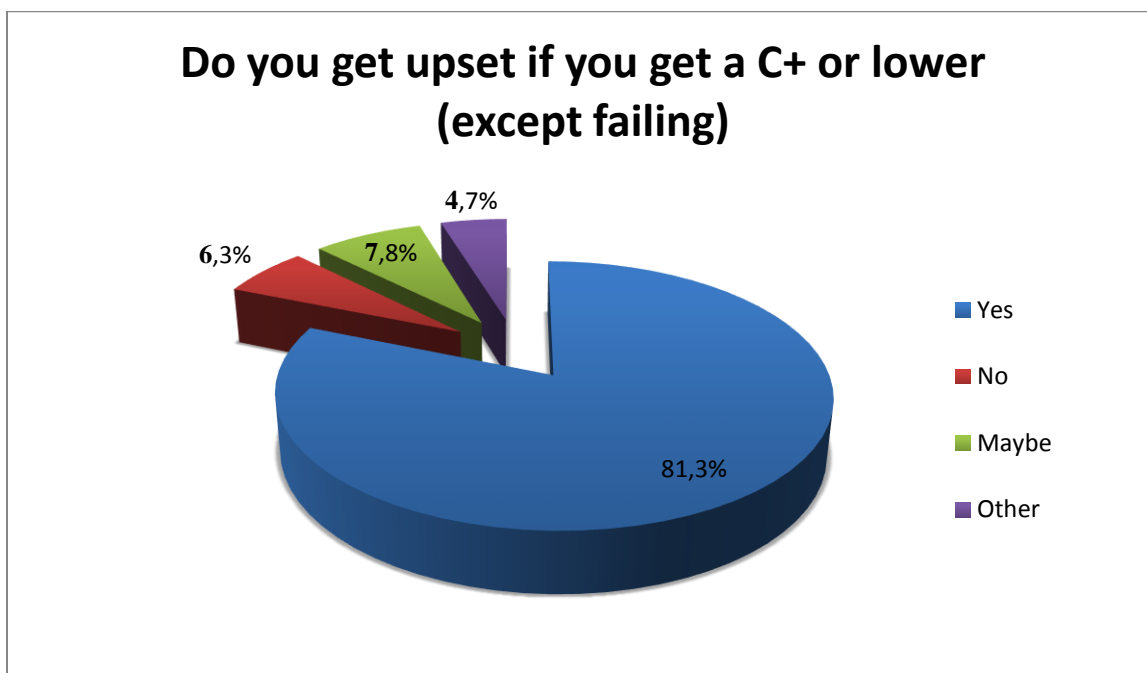


Chart #14



Summarizing survey results, I can say that maybe students did not answer with 100% honesty because their answers contradict to what instructors said about them. Of course this is only a part of the students of AUA but anyway it is considered a reliable amount to make appropriate conclusions.

When it comes to interviews, the overall results approved the fact that cultural differences have a certain influence on student-instructor negotiations because all of the interviewed instructors told that Armenian students like to come and start bargaining, not only for grades but also for several other reasons. They mentioned very important things which are specific to Armenian students, such as not preparing well but asking high grades, missing classes and asking not to count absences etc. They said that these kind of conversations cause conflict between them and lead to spoiled relationship. Also they noted that Armenian students think about it a little bit in a childish way, like they might feel aggrieved from instructors because of declining their requests. This is a way of thinking which depends on cultural values, family and nationality.

While comparing with foreign students, instructors said that foreign students are calmer. They do not like conflicts and negotiations with instructors. They said that foreign students come to see them only when they want to see what mistakes they have made, in order to learn not to repeat them again. They also think that instructors are always right no matter what and that they do not have the right to argue for their grade. In other words, foreign students always admit the grades that they receive and they do not think about bargaining for grades or anything else. And finally, instructors mentioned that foreign students are more responsible and are keener on studying well. They think that good grades must be received with hard work.

To conclude, the overall research has shown that nowadays students tend to protect their rights and negotiate about everything that is connected with their grades. They pay more attention to their grades and GPA's rather than what knowledge they will gain. The cultural influence is very big because all conclusions gained from survey and interviews lead to think that each student and instructor has different approach towards it. And those differences are linked with the fact of sharing different cultural values. Another important thing which came out after the research, is that Armenian students tend to act like they do not agree for grades or do not think that instructors grade them unfair, but in reality they might do that a lot. This also creates useless conflicts among Armenian students and foreign instructors because almost all of the instructors said that Armenian students are keen on bargaining for their grades. The controversy between survey results and interview results makes us think that Armenian students pretend to be agreeing with their grades but in reality they do not always agree and behave right. Combining all together approves the cultural influence on student-instructor negotiations at AUA.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

In order to do same kind of research appropriately, one needs to separate time right. My study was done by organizing each step and managing the requirements of successful fulfillment of the paper. The most important thing is to decide what you want to observe and ask the right question. Then the following steps are all linked with the research question. This topic is very broad and also it can be very helpful tool in order to continue researching it. There are lots of perspectives that can be used with this topic, because the conflict of instructor-student has various branches rather than only grade bargaining. Also the important thing is that all those

other branches may show the cultural differences more than grade bargaining. So the main thing which I want to explain is that it may be awesome to do a future research and find out what other conflicts can occur among instructors and students who have different nationality and culture. There are various studies about cross cultural education but there are not any studies concerning mainly student-instructor conflicts from different perspectives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

1. Your nationality
 - a) Armenian
 - b) Other-
2. Your age (Please write the number) _____
3. Sex
 - a) male
 - b) female
4. Your major/faculty
 - a) Business
 - b) English & Communications
 - c) Computer Sciences
5. How much time do you spend doing homework per class daily?
 - a) less than an hour
 - b) 1-2 hours
 - c) 3-5 hours
 - d) Other-
6. How often do you agree with the grades you receive during the semester?
 - a) I almost always disagree with the grade
 - b) I often disagree with the grade

c) I mostly agree with the grade

d) I almost always agree with the grade

7. Do you think that your efforts are valued by instructors?

Please think of your overall experience at AUA so far

a) Never

b) Sometimes

c) Often

d) Always

8. How fair do you think instructors grade you?

Please think of your overall experience so far, rather than specific instructors

a) Very unfair

b) Unfair

c) Fair

d) Very fair

9. Do you think that you deserve highest grades?

By highest we mean A or A+.

a) Yes

b) No

c) Maybe

Other-

10. How likely is an average AUA student to get a good grade without studying hard?

a) Very likely

b) Likely

- c) Unlikely
- d) Very unlikely

11. How likely are you to a get a good grade without studying hard?

- a) Very likely
- b) Likely
- c) Unlikely
- d) Very unlikely

12. How often do you argue about your grade with your instructor?

By arguing we do not mean asking for feedback or clarifications. We mean asking why the grade was lower than you expected and trying to convince the instructor to raise the grade

- a) Never
- b) Sometimes
- c) Often
- d) Very often
- e) always
- Other-

13. Do you get upset if you get a B+, B or B-?

- a) yes
- b) no
- c) maybe
- Other-

Do you get upset if you get a C+ or lower (except failing)?

- a) yes

b) no

c) maybe

Other-