
Date: 3/13/2009

To: Dr. Sonya Hardin, FEC Chair

From: Faculty Academic Policy and Standards Committee:

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| Jeff Barto | KNES |
| Cheryl Brown | POLS |
| Lee Gray | ARCH |
| Chuck Hamaker | LIB |
| Adam Harbaugh | MDSK |
| Dolly King | FINN |
| Mehdi Miri | Chair |
| Patrick Moyer | PHYS |
| Gregory Starrett | ANTH |
| Ed Stokes | ECE |
| Yuliang Zheng | SIS |
| Andrew Besmer | Graduate & Professional Student Gov. |
| Brittany Bernado | Student Government Association |

RE: Motion to adopt a Plus/Minus Grading System

The Faculty Academic Policy and Standards Committee (FAPSC) met on Feb. 10, 2009, to discuss the FEC concerns and disapproval of the FAPSC's earlier motion to adopt a plus/minus grading system as described in a FAPSC report dated 10/29/2008. Faculty members present were Cheryl Brown, Lee Gray, Chuck Hamaker, Adam Harbaugh, Martin Kane (alternate Engineering rep), Dolly King, Mehdi Miri, and Gregory Starrett. Graduate student representative present was Andrew Besmer. Members who were not present were given the opportunity to vote via email.

Concerns Raised by FEC

The FEC concerns, as communicated to FAPSC by Dr. Sonya Hardin in an email dated 12/17/2008, are repeated in *Italic* below for convenience:

The FEC did not approve the +/- proposal. The feeling was that the proposal did not have compelling reasons to make a change. Also, concern was voiced that the proposal left many questions unanswered such as:

- 1. How would progression of students be impacted, given that many programs require a C or better?*
- 2. How would graduate education be impacted?*
- 3. Would +/- be mandatory? How could it be enforced?*
- 4. What resources would need to be increased to provide services for the potential increase in C-?*

FEC would be happy to review a revised policy if your committee feels that this item should be brought before FEC.

FAPSC's Response to the Concerns Raised by FEC

We have addressed each of the specific concerns raised by FEC as explained below:

Whether or not we adopt a +/- grading system is a matter of preference and not of critical importance. Every few years since the 1980's, faculty members who prefer a grading scale with a higher resolution bring the subject to our attention. In several past initiatives to adopt a +/- system, students opposed it every time and the initiatives failed. This time around, the undergraduate Student Government Association (SGA) still opposes the adoption of a +/- grading system but the Graduate & Professional Student Government supports it. There will never be a compelling reason to adopt a +/- grading system because there will never be a critical need for it. However, now is a good time to give faculty the opportunity to vote their preferences on a grading system. Proposing an alternative to the existing grading system will give the faculty this opportunity through their representatives in the Faculty Council. We have addressed the FEC's numbered concerns below.

1. Programs set their own prerequisite requirements. If a new grading system is adopted, programs that require a C or better in prerequisite courses will need to decide how to accommodate the new system to manage its impact. FAPSC does not have the authority to set prerequisite requirements but several options exist. Programs may continue using the C or better requirement as a way to strengthen their academics. They may change it to C- or better, or they may drop any reference to grade requirements in prerequisite courses to reduce grade inflation. The effective date of any new grading system should be far in the future to give the programs enough time to update their requirements.
2. FAPSC does not have the authority to recommend grading policy for graduate students. If a new grading system is adopted by the University, then the Graduate Council will need to decide how to update the grading policy for graduate students. Again, the effective date of any new grading system should be far in the future to give the Graduate Council enough time to update its policies.
3. FAPSC does not have the authority to mandate any specific grading scale under the existing grading system, and does not have the authority to do so under any other grading system.
4. Studies (please see Sarah Brew's report attached and Page 4 of this report) support the assumption that there will be as many C-'s as there will be C+'s, and that the students' overall GPAs will not be affected. Therefore, the number of academic suspensions will not increase. If this FEC concern is referring to prerequisite requirements, then it has already been addressed in (1) above.

FAPSC's Reasons for Supporting a Plus/Minus Grading System

1. To provide the faculty with greater flexibility in grading.
2. To address the fairness issue raised by Sarah Brew, SGA's 2007-08 Secretary for Academic Affairs, that *"It is unfair to reward students equally when there are large disparities in their accomplishments. For example, under the current grading system, both 81 and 89 yield grades of B, while a 91 earns an A and a 79 a C."* With the higher resolution provided by the +/- grading scale, we can reward students' work more appropriately.

3. Under a plus/minus system, a student with a class average in the lower end of a grade range will have more encouragement to study harder for his/her final to make the higher grade because she/he will see the higher grade in reach.
4. Faculty and students have been considering the adoption of a +/- grading system since the 1980's, spending valuable time on an issue that is not critically important. We believe that this time around the odds are in favor of success which would end the seemingly endless debate on this issue possibly forever, saving many future hours of valuable faculty and student time.

FAPSC's Motion to Adopt a Plus/Minus Grading System

With the above discussions in mind, we ask that FEC bring the motion stated in the next paragraph before the Faculty Council to provide the faculty with the opportunity to choose their preferred grading system. We ask FEC to forward this report to all members of the Faculty Council well in advance of the meeting in which the motion is to be considered in order to give unit representatives time for consultation with their constituents. If FEC has further concerns, we will be happy to address them but we ask FEC not to veto this motion and deny the faculty the opportunity to vote its preference. Specifically, we ask FEC to put the following motion on Faculty Council's agenda whether or not FEC supports the motion.

The Motion:

The UNC Charlotte Faculty Academic Policy and Standards Committee moves that we adopt the plus/minus grading system described in the subsequent paragraphs with the effective date of Fall 2011.

The Proposed Plus/Minus Grading System:

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|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| A (4.00) | B+ (3.33) | C+ (2.33) | D+ (1.33) | F (0.00) |
| A- (3.67) | B (3.00) | C (2.00) | D (1.00) | |
| | B- (2.67) | C- (1.67) | D- (0.67) | |

A possible application of this system to a course grading scale could be as follows:

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|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| 100 – 95 A | 89 – 87 B+ | 79 – 77 C+ | 69 – 67 D+ | 59 – 0 F |
| 94 – 90 A- | 86 – 83 B | 76 – 73 C | 66 – 64 D | |
| | 82 – 80 B- | 72 – 70 C- | 63 – 60 D- | |

The investigation into the question of plus/minus grading identified a comprehensive study of this matter undertaken by Arizona State University in 2002. This study reported on a number plus/minus grading systems and the impact of these grading systems on students and faculty. The above recommended plus/minus grading system is the product of review of the Arizona State study, a 1996 NC State study on the impact of plus/minus grading on students' GPAs, and consultation with the Registrar's Office, the Athletic Academic Office, the Student Government Association, the Dean of Student's Office, and the Associate Provost's Office for Academic Services (Honors College).

The following issues have been identified with regard to plus/minus grading systems:

- The 1996 NC State study indicated that a plus/minus grading scale does impact student grades. Undergraduates: approximately 22% received higher grades, 34% received lower grades, and 42% experienced no change in their GPA. Graduates: approximately 10% received higher grades, 20% received lower grades, and 70% experienced no change in their GPA. However, the actual change – up or down – was quite small. When the Mean GPA was calculated from fall 1994 to spring 1997, with and without plus/minus grades, the difference per semester (for both undergraduate and graduate students) was that the plus/minus grades were between 0.03 and 0.01 lower.
- Anecdotal evidence exists that a plus/minus grading system will result in an increase of grade appeals, possibly because of increased clerical errors.
- GPA values used in processes such as probation, suspension, and graduation should not change. However, it should be noted that a student who earned 3 Cs and one C- could be placed on probation or suspended from the university, or find their NCAA eligibility in jeopardy.
- Where a minimum grade is used to define a requirement, such as the grade in a prerequisite course, the numerical equivalent of that grade should be used and not the grade. For example, a grade of B-(2.67) would not meet the requirement of B or higher.
- Standards for major requirements or graduation with academic recognition should not change as a result of the plus/minus grade scale implementation.

Attachment:

“Plus/Minus Grading Research”, Sarah Brew, Secretary for Academic Affairs, UNC Charlotte Student Government Association, January 2008.

It is important to note that on February 26, 2009, this year’s SGA Senate overwhelmingly voted against the proposed +/- grading system.