

Report and Motion Re the Grading System

Report:

The subcommittee reviewed a large set of data on the effects of three changes to the grading system: plus/minus grading (Fall 2006), the limit on the number of Ws a student may take (Fall 2006) and the elimination of student-initiated WFs (Fall 2008). (This data is available for anyone who wishes to see it.)

Plus/Minus Grades

Mean GPA was 3.02 in Fall 2005 (the fall term before plus/minus went into effect). It fell to 3.01 in Fall 2006, rose to 3.03 in Fall 2007 and to 3.04 in Fall 2008. It is not likely that any of these changes are statistically significant. Between Fall 2005 and Fall 2008, the percentage of A, B, and F grades rose slightly. The percentage of C and D grades fell slightly.

	Fall 2005	Fall 2008
As	35.2%	38.04%
Bs	31%	32%
Cs	14.5%	13.4%
Ds	3.7%	3.2%
Fs	3.6%	4.5%

Source: Office of Institutional Research. Numbers do not sum to 100% due to other grades (W, WFs, etc.)

However, it is hard to know if any of this is attributable to the plus/minus changes because the changes in the W and WF policy might have had effects on the grades and there may have been other factors at work (such as changes in the composition of the student body). The data indicate that the vast majority of professors are now using the plus/minus grading system. In Fall 2008, faculty gave more than 30,000 grades with a plus or a minus, approximately a third of all letter grades given. (Because the A+ grade will be used for the first time this semester, it is not included in the plus/minus system examined here.)

The committee also requested the plus/minus grading policies of all Departments and asked department chairs to comment on any problems in the implementation of plus/minus grading. The response rate was good. Forty-three departments responded to the request. Four departments decided to prohibit their faculty from using plus/minus grades. One department decided to use pluses but not minuses. The other thirty-eight departments adopted the plus/minus system. Some departments set 0-100 equivalents for the letter grades but most did not. No department that implemented plus/minus grading reported any problems. One college adopted a policy that allows all professors in the college to use plus/minus grading. One college adopted a policy requiring that multiple sections of the same course in a given semester use the same grading system.

The subcommittee did not do a survey of students. Some students have complained about this policy. Other students have indicated support for it.

There were anecdotal reports of students and faculty wishing that there were more uniform policies regarding plus/minus grading. In particular, several students requested that all faculty be required to grade on a 0-100 scale and use a fixed correspondence between the number and the letter grades.

In 2005, the Board of Regents authorized Georgia State to use plus/minus grading as a three-year pilot. They have now authorized Georgia State, the University of Georgia, and Georgia Tech to use plus/minus grading on a permanent basis.

The subcommittee concludes that, overall, the shift to plus/minus grading has been well received by the faculty and that implementation was smooth. It believes that no major changes are warranted. While it considered the student request for more uniformity of grading, the subcommittee felt that requiring faculty to grade on a 0-100 scale with a fixed correspondence between numbers and letter grades would be an unwarranted intrusion into the professional judgment of faculty. However, the subcommittee did feel some additional uniformity was justified. It believes that, as a general rule, multiple sections of the same course in a given semester should use the same grading system and that the same policy should be extended to cross-listed courses. There may be justified exceptions to this rule and the subcommittee thinks that the Deans are well-placed to make judgments about exceptions. In addition, it recommends that all faculty be allowed to use plus/minus grading if they wish to do so. If adopted this recommendation would overturn the policies of the four departments that, in Fall 2007, did not allow faculty to use plus/minus grading. Finally, it suggests that departments may be allowed to require faculty to use plus/minus grades.

W and WF Polices

The W and WF polices appear to have had their intended effect. The number of Ws and WFs fell sharply even as the total number of grades given rose.

	Fall 2005	Fall 2008
Ws	7,016	5,421
WFs	339	75
Total Grades	87,422	96,991

However, the drop off in Ws did not occur until Fall 2008. It is possible that students keep taking Ws until they reached their limit of six. In addition, the policy was phased in such that current students had the same limit (six) as new students. Thus a senior in Fall 2006 was unlikely to run up against the limit of six before graduating. Because there are so many possible factors, definite conclusions are hard to draw but it is possible that some of the increase in Fs noted above is due to the W policy. On the other hand, the increase in Fs occurred in Fall 2006 and Fall 2007 but

the drop in Ws did not occur until Fall 2008. Members of the subcommittee also serve on the Hardship Withdraw committees and they reported an increase in hardship petitions this year. It is possible that the WFs are moving to hardship withdrawals. If this is the case, it is a good effect because the hardship withdrawal process (unlike the WF process) puts the student in contact with student support services.

The subcommittee concludes that the W and WF policies are working well and no changes are necessary.

Motion:

The *additions* below are effective Fall 2009.

The following table indicates the academic letter grades used at Georgia State University and their numerical value used to calculate grade point averages:

A+	4.30	B+	3.30	C+	2.30	D	1.00
A	4.00	B	3.00	C	2.00	F	0.00
A-	3.70	B-	2.70	C-	1.70	WF	0.00

The symbols I (Incomplete), IP (In Progress), W (Withdrawal), S (Satisfactory), U (Unsatisfactory), V (Audit), K (Credit-by-examination), and NR (Not Reported) do not have numerical equivalents and are not used in calculating grade point averages.

Colleges, Departments and other academic units are encouraged to establish grading guidelines. However, except as noted below, no College, Department, or other academic unit may prohibit the use of plus/minus grades or any particular plus or minus grade. Colleges, Departments, and other academic units may choose to require the use of plus/minus grades.

If multiple sections of a course are offered in the same semester, they must either all use plus/minus grading or all use grades without plus/minus. However, the Dean of the relevant college may approve a waiver of this rule.

Cross-listed courses at the same level must either all use plus/minus grading or all use grades without plus/minus. However, the Dean of the relevant college may approve a waiver of this rule.