

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Vancouver Senate Teaching and Learning Committee
c/o
Enrolment Services | Senate & Curriculum Services
Brock Hall 2016 – 1874 East Mall
Vancouver BC V6T 1Z1

5 May 2008

To: Vancouver Senate

From: Vancouver Senate Teaching and Learning Committee

RE: Preliminary Report on Credit/D/Fail Grading Practices

Motion: *That the Vancouver Senate Teaching and Learning Committee's Preliminary Report on Credit/D/Fail Grading Practices be received.*

Summary

At the March 26, 2008 meeting of the Vancouver Senate, the following motion to refer the Student Senators' proposal regarding Pass/Fail (Credit/D/Fail) grading practices was proposed and passed:

Ms. Khangura, Dr. R. Harrison

That the Senate refer the proposal to expand UBC's Pass/Fail system, as described by Student Senator Ms. Jaspreet Khangura, to the Teaching and Learning Committee for further study and consultation with other individuals and committees as appropriate, and

That the Senate direct the Committee to provide a preliminary report back to the Senate in regard to its progress not later than the May 2008 meeting of the Senate, and

That the Senate direct the Teaching and Learning Committee to provide in its preliminary report specific recommendations regarding continuity of Senate inquiry on this matter (in consideration of the August, 31 2008 end-of-term for Senate committees).

The Teaching and Learning Committee met on April 16, 2008, to discuss the various issues associated with fulfilling its mandate in relation to the Pass/Fail proposal, and in its deliberations, has decided on a plan of action that is reported here, along with a brief summary of relevant background matters, and an Appendix that includes a list of documents circulated to the committee regarding research on related issues, Pass/Fail policies in other major North American Universities, and other documents archived thus far.

The committee will continue, until the end of July, to:

- Conduct its deliberations on these matters
- Meet and consult with relevant groups and individuals
- Collect and analyze relevant archival materials (e.g., reports from other universities)
- Prepare a literature review of related research concerning grading practices and student engagement
- Prepare a policy document



- Prepare a backgrounder document that presents the issues, contextual factors, logistical issues, and an analysis of ancillary materials

Why Address Pass/Fail at Senate?

To Imagine the University: Senate Policy, UBC's Commitments, and Teaching and Learning

Trek 2010 (and other key University mission statements) highlights the twin commitments of the University of British Columbia to be (1) a site for innovative practices that enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and (2) a community that nurtures and supports students' meaningful engagement as fully participating citizens in a global learning community. Senate policy regarding matters that might impact student engagement can play a key role in providing informed academic oversight that enhances our institutional capacity for sustainable innovation. President Toope has argued, in fact, that the Senate plays a key role in "imagining the University". Senate policy is, then, an appropriate location for the articulation of academic oversight regarding innovative teaching practices like the alternatives to standard letter grades outlined in the Student Senators' Pass/Fail proposal.

What does the Pass/Fail Proposal Encompass?

The Pass/Fail proposal considers the relationship between grading practices and student engagement, and presents an argument for enabling undergraduates to choose a Pass/Fail grading option for elective courses. A key assumption of the proposal is that Pass/Fail grading practices will encourage and support optimal student engagement in learning by encouraging a level of exploration with lower risk to grade-point averages. This would result in enhanced options for academic interdisciplinarity achieved by means of breadth of enrollment in courses.

- Goal is improvement of undergraduate learning experience, by encouraging academic exploration and in so doing, enhancing interdisciplinarity in breadth of course enrollment.
- Focus is student engagement, and specifically, the role of grading practices in limiting undergraduate students' course enrollment options, as well as the quality of learning and interdisciplinary scope of course enrollment as it is affected by risk-taking, competition and so on.
- Undergraduate students would be free to enroll in a limited number of elective courses (8 total, and 2/semester max) as pass/d/fail.
- Individual programs would have flexibility in identifying courses that can be taken, or not, as Pass/Fail.
- Students would choose their grading option which would not be known by the instructor, and which could not be changed after the add/drop date.

Considerations of the Pass/Fail Proposal To-Be Addressed by Teaching and Learning Committee

Why (Not)?

Any serious consideration of Pass/Fail grading practices has to contend effectively, and sensitively, with a possible existing instructor bias vis a vis this assessment practice, even where that bias is not grounded in empirical evidence, or even a rational argument. It is critical then, for the Teaching and Learning Committee to assess relevant research and to compile a review of the literature. What does scholarly research indicate concerning the relationship between grading practices, academic achievement and motivation? The relationship between level of interest (motivation) and the provision of extrinsic rewards (e.g., letter grades) is complex and the focus



of a great deal of research. That the findings run contrary to ordinary folks' preconceived ideas about rewards, effort and achievement signals how important it is to examine relevant research in providing a reasoned backdrop to a policy on grading practices in post-secondary educational settings.

Action Item

The Teaching and Learning committee will oversee the production of a literature review of related research and reports of Pass/Fail innovation projects at other universities (see Appendix). A doctoral student from the Faculty of Education has been hired from May 15-Aug 15 to support this task (see Appendix). The literature review will address frequently cited concerns and critiques of Pass/Fail grading practices (e.g., students will expend less effort, contribute less to group work and so on).

Who?

The Pass/Fail proposal posits that all undergraduate students at UBC-V be enabled "to take an elective course on a credit/d/fail basis".

Action Item

The Teaching and Learning committee will collect data regarding which programs include electives, and consider variables that might affect optimal timing for providing a pass/fail option.

What?

The Pass/Fail proposal provides specific suggestions regarding options for pass/fail grading practices that need to be carefully considered, such as expanding pass/fail to credit/D/Fail, determining which programs include "electives" and how an "elective" is defined.

Action Item

- The Teaching and Learning committee will consider the range of pass/fail models in use at other major universities, consult colleagues at those institutions and locate institutional reports regarding implementation of Pass/Fail grading practices.
- The Teaching and Learning committee will consult with colleagues at UBC faculties where Pass/Fail grading practices are already in use, such as the Faculty of Education, and where studies of the impact of these practices have already been conducted.

When?

There may be significant developmental or programmatic arguments for restricting Cr/D/Fail enrollment to upper year courses. It could also be argued that exploration of electives is of maximal benefit in a student's early years. Decisions regarding the optimal timing of the Cr/D/Fail option might vary from one context to the next, depending upon such pragmatic considerations as the placement of eligible courses within a program.

Action Item

In our study of electives, determine when these are most commonly offered within programs. In our consideration of models employed at other universities, pay attention to the timing of the option regarding lower and upper division courses.

How?

There are logistical issues regarding Pass/Fail grading practices that need to be carefully considered. For example, how will the Student Service Center online recognize that a given course in which a student wants to enroll on a Credit/D/Fail basis, is an elective course? How will students doing both a Major and a Minor be affected vis a vis P/F enrollment?

Action Item

The Teaching and Learning committee will conduct consultations and compile a list of logistical challenges and potential solutions that will be taken up by the next iteration of the committee when it recommences meetings in October.



Timeline

April

- Introductory working meeting on pass-fail proposal and articulation of material for May 14 preliminary Senate report

May

- Preparation of preliminary report
- Presentation of report at Senate May 14 - get feedback on task-at-hand

June/July

- Research on relevant issues in academic literature and reports regarding grading practices at other universities by Senate Teaching and Learning Committee GAA,
- Work on policy document and a backgrounder document
- Consult with other relevant Senate committees, the Committee of Deans, and any other relevant and interested groups and/or individuals

August

- Senate terms come to an end, committees suspend meetings, chairs selected when Senate committees meet again in October



Appendix I

Documents Archived by Teaching and Learning Committee as part of Pass/Fail deliberations

Title	Author(s)
Research on Grading Practices	
Accountability: Teaching Through Assessment and Feedback, Not Grading	Rick WORMELI
Does Grading Undermine Intrinsic Interest in a College Course?	Edward P. SARAFINO and Patrick A. DIMATTIA
A Developmental Perspective on Standardized Achievement	Scott G. PARIS, Theresa A. LAWTON, Julianne C. TURNER, and Jodie L. ROTH
The Benefits of Pass-Fail Grading on Stress, Mood, and Group Cohesion in Medical Students	Daniel E. ROHE, PhD; Patricia A. BARRIER, MD; Matthew M. CLARK, PhD; David A. COOK, MD; Kristin S. VICKERS, PhD; AND Paul A. DECKER, MS
Students' Motivation for Standardized Math Exams	Katherine E. RYAN, Allison M. RYAN, Keena ARBUTHNOT, and Maurice SAMUELS
Correspondence with Vancouver Senate regarding Student Senators' Proposal	
Proposal to expand UBC's pass/fail system for Undergraduate courses	March 12, 2008 memo to Vancouver Senate Agenda Committee, Jaspreet Khangura, Student Senator, On behalf of the Student Senate Caucus, Brendon Goodmurphy, Jeff Friedrich on behalf of the Alma Mater Society
Proposal to expand UBC's pass/fail system for Undergraduate courses	March 12, 2008 memo to Vancouver Senate, Jaspreet Khangura, Student Senator, On behalf of the Student Senate Caucus
Frequently asked questions about the proposed Credit/D/Fail Proposal	Provided by Jaspreet Khangura, Student Senator, On behalf of the Student Senate Caucus
Calendar Excerpts describing the Cr/D/F Option at American Universities	Provided by Jaspreet Khangura, Student Senator, On behalf of the Student Senate Caucus
Institutional Reports on Grading Practices	
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT - FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT - CURRICULUM 2010	Cheryl ASPY, PhD; Robert BLAIR, PhD; Sheila CROW, PhD (Chair); Molly HILL, PhD; John HOLLIMAN, PhD; Sarah PASSMORE, DO; Ronald SAIZOW, MD; Rhonda SPARKS, MD; and Phebe TUCKER, MD
Pass/Fail Assessment in Teacher Education	no author listed



APPENDIX II. CALENDAR EXCERPTS DESCRIBING CR/D/F OPTION AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

Summary of pass/fail options in Calendars at a select few American universities.

University	Enrolment * (2007/08)	P/F or Cr/D/F	Max / Semester	Max / undergrad degree	Other	Transcript
Harvard	6 715 Undergrad <u>12 424</u> Grad/Prof ~20 000 total	P/F – may be changed to grading status until a month after enrolling	No max, but students must take at least one letter- graded course	No max To satisfy degree: 10.5/16 full courses 12/16 full courses (honours)	Student must obtain instructor's signature to declare P/F	
Yale	5 316 Undergrad 11 398 Total	Cr/F in 1975 Cr/D/F in 1993/4	2	4 towards degree	Cr/D/F courses cannot be included as part of distributional requirements	
Princeton	4 923 Undergrad 1 975 Postgrad	P/D/F	1	4		
U. Penn	9 710 Undergrad 10 103 Postgrad	P/F	2	12 credits	Courses taken through the satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading option are considered part of a student's credit load when qualifying for financial aid.	
Dartmouth	4 164 Undergrad <u>1 685</u> Grad 5 849 tota	NRO (non- recording option) Students set minimum grade	1	3 NR grades	NRO cannot be included as part of distributional requirements	
Columbia	6 923 Undergrad	P/D/F	1 / semester 1 may be deferred to summer	No max	'passed" courses cannot be used to satisfy core curriculum or major requirements. Some departments allow introductory courses to be taken under pass/d/fail.	



University	Enrolment * (2007/08)	P/F or Cr/D/F	Max / Semester	Max / undergrad degree	Other	Transcript
Indiana University (calendar details vary between campus')	78 493 Undergrad 17 105 Grad <u>3 524 Prof</u> 99 122 Total (Fall '07)	P/F		8 elective courses, unless otherwise restricted by school/division	Registration on pass/fail basis requires signature of advisor and dean.	Grade is reported by professor as a letter/number, registrar's office converts grades to P/F. Professors do not know students registration choice/status.
U of Chicago	4 901 Undergrad 9 829 Postgrad	Pass/NC or P/F NC = no credit			For <i>P/N</i> grading, students must register with their College advisers during the first three weeks of the quarter. For <i>P/F</i> grading, the student and instructor reach an informal agreement, at the discretion of the instructor and according to departmental policy, before the instructor submits a grade for the course	<i>N</i> confers no credit and is not included in the calculation of the GPA <i>F</i> counts as a zero in the calculation of the GPA
Bowdoin College, (Brunswick, Maine)**	1 710 Undergrad	Cr/D/F	1/4 or 2/5	4/32 No max for extra courses	Declare a course grade/credit/fail three weeks into semester, then set a lowest acceptable grade by wk 6 Can change the lowest acceptable grade for a course at any point before the last full week of classes Starting with class year 2012, first-year seminars and courses taken to satisfy division or distribution requirements may NOT be taken on a Credit/D/Fail basis	A grade of CR will not count toward a student's GPA. A grade of D or F will count toward a student's GPA. A grade of D or F received in a Credit/D/Fail course will count toward academic standing (probation, suspension, dismissal)

* for comparison, UBC-V has an enrolment of ~34 900 undergraduates (Sept 07) and ~8 700 graduates (Sept/07) → total student body population ~ 43 542

** private liberal arts college



Comparison table for Credit/Fail option

School	Cr/F first offered	# / % credits or courses allowable	Eligibility/ Requirements	Opt-in/Opt-out criteria	Marginal Measures	Notes
UBC			Select courses are p/f	N/A	N/A	Select courses in some faculties
Waterloo		3/15%	Courses outside major	Within 2-week add period	None apparent	Details were for the Faculty of Arts. No comparable information was located for Science
Queens		6/30%*	Limited courses (Theology) and on appeal retroactively	Achieved retroactively within 2 months of course completion	None	Offered in a highly limited way here Appears more geared to students whose grade in a course suffers because of unforeseen circumstances
Memorial			Limited courses (music and fine arts)		None	Offered in a highly limited way here
U Penn		8/25%	Outside Major/Minor & required courses	Within first 5 weeks	None	To encourage experimentation
U New Hampshire		16/13%	Courses outside major/minor		None	To encourage experimentation
Yale	1975	4/10%	Courses outside major		D grade eligible to be given for marginal perform (1993)	Recently reduced from 20% of courses to 10% 1 st & 4 th year take more in the spring semester than fall
Stanford	1970s	36/20%	All courses with some restrictions within Major	End of Week 3	None	General Stanford philosophy is geared more towards accomplishment over measurement (pre 1994 especially)
Harvard		5.5/34%	No restrictions At least one graded course/semester	Week 5	None	Permission of instructor required
Princeton		4/12.5%	Courses outside Major Certain required courses and courses identified as "No Cr/D/Fail"	Week 5 to opt for Credit/D/Fail Week 9 to opt out of Credit/D/Fail	D	To encourage exploration and experimentation



Appendix III

Advertisement for Graduate Student GRA to work with the Committee (Note: Ph.D. student hired 05/04/08)

Spring/Summer Research Assistantship

The UBC-Vancouver Senate Teaching and Learning Committee is considering background material (to support policy development) regarding the complex issues pertaining to Pass/Fail Grading Practices, and Student Engagement (achievement and motivation). We would like to hire a PhD student to conduct and write up a literature review in this area, as well as to survey models of a range of grading practices at other post-secondary institutions. It is expected that the work will take up about 10 hours a week, for 12 weeks, from about May 15 to August 15, at \$24/hour. Actual number of hours worked in any given week is flexible, with the work being distributed across the 12 weeks as a function of the availability and workload of the GRA and the needs of the committee. The work will be supervised by the Committee Chair, Dr. Mary Bryson. It is expected that applicants for this GRA position will be PhD students in ECPS who possess familiarity with the major relevant topics, including cognitive and socio-cultural approaches to achievement and motivation, and related teaching practices, including classroom-based assessment. MA students with a high degree of knowledge in this area, and documented capacity to conduct literature reviews can also apply. Interested applicants please provide a copy of your cv and the names of two references (one local to UBC) to Peter Sun, Graduate Programs Assistant, CCFI, Faculty of Education. Hard copies only, please. No electronic submissions. Deadline for applications is April 24th, 2008. Interested applicants, please contact Dr. Mary Bryson if you have any questions or concerns, mary.bryson@ubc.ca