

Proposed Plus-minus Grading System (Senate Bill 320)

Warrie Means, Incoming FS Chair 2011-2012

Cindy Price, Outgoing FS Chair 2010-2011

Jay Puckett, Former FS 2009-2010

UW Trustees' Meeting

May 2011

Overview

- Background and history
- Define and compare the present and proposed systems
- Illustrate grading system for comparators
- Outline primary elements for supporting the change
- Address issues raised by the UW BOT, Academics and Research Subcommittee
- Q & A

What is a plus-minus grading System?

Current GPA System		Proposed GPA System	
A	4.0	A	4.000
		A-	3.666
B	3.0	B+	3.333
		B	3.000
		B-	2.666
C	2.0	C+	2.333
		C	2.000
		C-	1.666
D	1.0	D+	1.333
		D	1.000
F	0.0	F	0.000

Comparators

Mountain West	+/-?		Regional/Comparator	+/-?
Texas Christian	Yes		University of Montana	Yes
University of Utah	Yes		University of South Dakota	No
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Yes		University of Colorado—Boulder*	Yes
Colorado State*	Yes		University of Nebraska—Lincoln	Yes
Brigham Young	Yes		University of Phoenix	No
University of New Mexico*	Yes		Indiana University/Purdue Indianapolis	Yes
San Diego State University	No		Iowa State*	Yes
Air Force Academy	Yes		North Carolina State*	Yes
Boise State University	Yes		North Dakota State*	No
Fresno State University	No		University of North Dakota*	No
University of Nevada—Reno	Yes		University of Oregon*	No
University of Hawaii	Yes		University of Washington*	Yes
<p>“*” refers to nine comparator institutions for the National Survey of Student Engagement. These schools are chosen because they carry the most relevant similarities with UW in student population, size, degree programs, etc.</p>				

Primary Elements

- **General**
- **Assessment and Evaluation**
- **Students**
- **Administration**
- **Summary**

Primary Elements - General

- No system of assessment is perfect; however, assessment is part of our academic culture. This bill is not about the philosophy of grading or whether grades are necessary.
- Three quarters of the faculty senate supported the bill (Senators polled their constituents).
- Supported by faculty within the arts, sciences, and professional programs.

Primary Elements - Assessment and Evaluation

- A tool to help professors/instructors to better evaluate achievement
- An optional system because the current grading system is a subset of the proposed (also S/U is available)
- Provides a better resolution
- Does not address assessment methods, philosophical or pedagogical issues traditionally associated with academic freedom or course management
- In aggregate, studies show that a move to the plus/minus system does not lead to grade inflation or deflation
- Faculty will continue to develop and use refined rubrics with appropriate resolution for their disciplines

Primary Elements - Administration

- Costs are minimal as Banner has +/- features (used by UW College of Law)
- Timeline is flexible

Primary Elements - Summary

Our charge:

- Curricula
- course development
- course content
- Delivery
- Assessment and evaluation

Faculty wish to have a different tool that provides more resolution

Issues raised by UW Board of Trustees, Academics and Research Subcommittee meeting (May 2010 and May 2011)

WWAMI—Wyoming	WWAMI—Washington
University of Washington	Washington State University
University of Nebraska--Lincoln	Simmons College
University of Idaho	University of Michigan
Penn State	University of Texas—Austin
UC—Irvine	UC —San Diego
University of Colorado	Colorado State University
University of Wisconsin—Madison	University of Montana
University of Utah	Utah State University
Florida State University	Denver University
University of Arizona	Arizona State University
Vanderbilt University	University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill
Teacher’s College--Columbia University	

Issues raised by UW Board of Trustees, Academics and Research
Subcommittee meeting
(May 2010 and May 2011)

Question #1: Does your program receive applications from students who come from institutions that use straight grading as well as plus-minus grading? If so, approximately how many/what percentages come from each?

All said yes. None knew how many from each.

Issues raised by UW Board of Trustees, Academics and Research
Subcommittee meeting
(May 2010 and May 2011)

Question #2: If so, is there a difference in how students from those institutions are handled in terms of entrance/application? If so, what are those differences? If not, how do you handle the grade discrepancy?

All said no difference—take grades as they come in OR just use overall GPA.

Issues raised by UW Board of Trustees, Academics and Research
Subcommittee meeting
(May 2010 and May 2011)

Question #3: Do you think there is a difference in admission rates between students from straight-graded institutions and those from plus-minus graded institutions? If so, what might account for this?

All said no; one mentioned unless case is border line when course by course grades are examined. Medical school admissions: different conversion tables for different grade systems, GPA is only part (several other factors are important)

Issues raised by UW Board of Trustees, Academics and Research
Subcommittee meeting
(May 2010 and May 2011)

Question #4: Do you think there would be a perceived difference in admissions (i.e. a "red flag", etc) if a student's transcript showed an institutional change from straight grading to plus-minus? If so, what might that/those difference(s) be?

All said no. One said would impact conversion, but just informational, neither beneficial nor harmful.

Issues raised by UW Board of Trustees, Academics and Research
Subcommittee meeting
(May 2010 and May 2011)

Question #5: Other University Regulations and policies reference performance levels; how will this be addressed?

Regulations and policies that reference a grade point average can remain the same and/or be revisited by the unit involved

Regulations and policies that reference a letter grade will be addressed by the cognizant unit prior to implementation

Systematically addressed and published

Issues raised by UW Board of Trustees, Academics and Research
Subcommittee meeting
(May 2010 and May 2011)

Additional Comments:

When one institution switched over, students rose to the new system in spite of their resistance—no noticeable change in overall GPA's

*“I have always been in favor of the +/- system.”—Dr. Matthew McEchron,
Assistant Dean (First-year regional campuses), WWAMI*

“any [+/-]change will have absolutely no effect. I think that you should do whatever is best for the university.” ... “there is no effect on the admissions process, they readily translate among various grading systems.” – Dr. Richard Hillman, Assistant Dean (Assistant Dean for Clinical Programs).

ASUW Discussion (2010-2011)

ASUW looking to compromise on:

- In agreement that straight grading “is not an accurate representation of student’s academic performance and progress”
- Met with subcommittee who presented a grade/plus option in order to provide “an extra level of evaluation to be placed on top of current straight system of grading” (A+, A, B+, B, C+, C, D, F)

Chronological Events:

See memo to BOT

Summary

- Assessment and Evaluation
- Tool
- Resolution
- Optional (present system is a subset)
- A lot of effort goes into students' work and assessment
- Supported by faculty in all areas

Questions?

Memo page: n/a