

Queen's University  
Senate Committee on Academic Procedures

REPORT ON GRADING PRACTICES

February 2012

Background

In May 2009, Queen's Senate approved a new grading system comprised of letter grades, with pluses and minuses, grade points, and grade descriptors. In April 2010, Senate approved the specific grading scale, with a 4.3 grade point being deemed equivalent to an A+ letter grade.

Prior to the approval of Senate proposals and research were presented by the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP) to all units' Faculty Boards and Academic Councils for discussion. Extensive consultation of stakeholder groups was completed by the Chair of SCAP and the University Registrar, and feedback was brought to SCAP for discussion at several meetings in 2009 and 2010. The Chair and Registrar attended meetings with the following bodies in addition to one-on-one or small group consultations with faculty, staff, and students:

- Vice-Principal (Academic) and Deans
- Faculty of Arts and Science Undergraduate Chairs
- Faculty of Arts and Science Faculty Board
- School of Business Faculty Forum and Faculty Board
- School of Graduate Studies Graduate Council
- Faculty of Applied Science Operations Committee
- Faculty of Applied Science Faculty Board
- School of Nursing Academic Council
- School of Medicine Associate Dean
- School of Theology Faculty Board
- Student Senate Caucus
- Queen's Career Services and the School of Business Career Centre

On May 1, 2011, Queen's University's new grading scheme became effective.

Analysis and Discussion

On November 22, 2011, Queen's University Senate passed the following motion:

That Senate ask the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP) to require all Faculties and Schools to report to SCAP about the provisions they have implemented concerning grading practices and to confirm that the necessary corrective action has been taken to eliminate any disadvantage; and that SCAP report back to Senate in February with its findings.

Faculty/School Arts and Science	Provisions Implemented Concerning Grading Practices
	<p>To prepare for the transition to the new grading scheme, the Associate [ (Studies) reviewed over 20,000 past and current student academic records. The relevant academic thresholds and progression requirements were reassessed with the objectives of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) translating percent averages to the new GPA system for making academic progress decisions,</li></ul>

Business

withdraw. After this spike, the number should return to a steady state. The number of students required to withdraw for three years is significantly less than last year (compared to 78) and is due to the change in regulations that require a student to have first been required to withdraw for one year before they can be required to withdraw for three. It is expected the number will increase back to its original level.

The Fall 2011 graduation was the first in which student academic records were assessed for graduation eligibility under the new academic regulations. The Fall graduation is small (200 students) compared to Spring (2,000). In Fall 2011, approximately five students did not meet the minimum 1.60 GPA standard for a General degree, but did meet the old 60% cumulative average standard. These students were allowed to graduate. It is anticipated that a similarly small number of students will be in this situation for Spring 2012. While each case will be reviewed individually, it is anticipated that if students were maintaining a cumulative average of 60% on the courses completed before May 1, 2011 and a GPA of 1.60 (1.90 for Honours degrees) on those completed after May 1, 2011, they will be allowed to graduate.

The School of Business has implemented a number of changes related to the new grading system in each of its programs – Commerce, Full-Queen's MBA, Queen's Executive MBA, Cornell/Queen's Executive MBA, and Accelerated MBA. The new grading system had the largest effect on the four-year Commerce program, as the MBA programs are shorter in duration and at a professional, versus undergraduate, level.

Faculty Board approved a GPA of 3.7 for the Dean's Designation, and a GPA of 4.0 for the Dean's List with Distinction Designation. Reporting is currently being undertaken to determine whether the number of Commerce students who would have qualified for the designations in the old system is higher or lower than the number who qualify for the designations in the new system. In general, since the Dean's List and the Dean's List with Distinction are generated from the grades received in one academic year and there is no combination of grading systems in the evaluation, the impact on students is very low. The one exception to this is third year students who go on an exchange in the Fall or Winter term, of which approximately 85% do. These students have typically had their second year Winter term grades combined with the one term of grades for which the student was at Queen's in third year. When this results in using both percentage and grade points for students, a detailed analysis will be done to ensure that those who would have received a Dean's List designation will receive it.

Students with a cumulative GPA of 3.7 or higher will receive the designation and enter

the analysis of grades from the past several years to determine if studen

	<p>probation will have his/her academic record examined as it would have been under the old system and will be under the new system.</p> <p>In the Faculty, a GPA above 1.60 results in a student progressing to the subsequent academic year. A GPA below 1.60 would normally result in a student being placed on academic probation being required to withdraw for one year; however, with a view to not disadvantaging students, those with a GPA between 1.30-1.59 were not placed on probation for the 11/12 academic year.</p> <p>The Faculty is currently planning for a large scale analysis of the academic records of students who will be included on the 2012 and 2013 degree lists for students who have had two or three years assessment with the previous grading system. Records will be assessed with a view to providing leniency to students and eliminating any disadvantage where it applies to students at the thresholds for First and Second Class Honours where it applies to the minimum requirements for satisfying degree requirements.</p> <p>Approximately 15% of the students who would have previously been on the Dean's Honours List in the old system will not receive the designation in the new system. The problem for this group of students is that they require a Cumulative GPA of 3.7 to apply to the top universities in the US. The Faculty can decide to award these students a First Class Honours degree, but their GPA cannot be changed. The Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science has offered to write a letter explaining how these students have been affected by the changeover from one system to another, however it is not clear whether these letters would be considered in the highly competitive environment of these top schools. In addition, an explanation of the grading system and conversion scale is printed on the back of an official transcript.</p>
Graduate Studies	<p>The School of Graduate Studies does not employ standards such as the Dean's Honours List or First Class Standing. Likewise, there is no process to place graduate students on academic probation based on grades received. The grading of graduate courses is a distributed process handled by graduate faculty members and the students' department and program.</p> <p>The School has purview over the regulation concerning failure of a primary (required) course. In December 2009, the Graduate Studies Executive Council determined that a grade of B minus be established as the minimum passing grade as of May 1, 2011. There does not seem to be a significant difference between the number of students who met the minimum passing grade in the old grading scheme and the number who are meeting it in the new grading scheme.</p> <p>The School examined many current Queen's transcripts throughout Fall 2011 via applications to external scholarship competitions for OGS, NSERC, and SSHRC and noted no disadvantaging of students in terms of their eligibility to apply for these scholarships. The School is certain that Queen's students remain highly competitive for these prestigious scholarships. For students on the borderline of eligibility to apply, SGS staff calculated the relevant averages as both a GPA and percentage and, if the relevant eligibility requirement was met by either method, the student was included in the School's internal review and adjudication.</p>

## Health Sciences

### Medicine

Historically, the School of Medicine had a grading scheme of Honours/Pass/Fail; however, the majority of medical schools in Canada use a Pass/Fail system. After extensive discussion, it was decided that the School would alter its system to that of Pass/Fail.

The Medical School transcript is primarily used as a record of medical school completion. Being accepted into the next phase of medical education is based on performance in interviews and by letters of reference.

### Nursing

The School of Nursing's Undergraduate Progress and Graduation Committee undertook an audit of all undergraduate academic files and found that there are 31 students across the four years of the program who would have shown a

well as letters of reference and standardized tests such as the GRE, since they receive applications from postsecondary institutions that each have their own system and scale.

SCAP recommends that Faculties and Schools:

Regularly review the thresholds in place for both academic distinction and academic progress to ensure they accurately reflect student performance; and

Clearly communicate with students regarding the grading system and the provisions implemented concerning grading practices.

#### Summary

The following motion was passed on February 14, 2012: