

MEMORANDUM

Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)

To: Teri Shearer, Chair, Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP)
From: Alan Harrison, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)
Copy: Bo Wandschneider, Vice-Principal (IT Services)
Date: November 1, 2012
Subject: GPA Review Committee: Final Report

In May 2009, Senate approved the implementation of the Grade Point Average (GPA) system at Queen's, and this implementation has been proceeding since that date. More recently, a number of concerns about the GPA system were raised by a number of Queen's Senators. In April 2012, I therefore requested that Bo Wandschneider, the University's Chief Information Officer, convene a small group to conduct a review of the implementation of the GPA system at Queen's in light of these concerns.

Please find attached the group's final report, which I am sending to you in your capacity as Chair of the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP), the committee that originally recommended to Senate the implementation of the GPA system. I have carefully reviewed the report, which provides context for decisions made at the time of the implementation of the GPA system. The report does make a number of recommendations, but does not propose changes to the method of grade submission.

I accept both the group's recommendations and its view that no changes should be made to the method of grade submission. I should appreciate receiving the views of SCAP with respect to the recommendations prior to proceeding toward implementation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "A. Harrison", with a horizontal line underneath.

GPA Review Committee: Final Report

Membership

Bo Wandschneider(CIO), Teresa Alm (Registrar), Shannon Goodspeed (Staff - QSB), Isabelle Duchaine (AMS Academic Affairs Commissioner), Matthew Scribner (SGPS), David Hanes (Faculty - Physics).

Resource - Richard Palmer (Director - PeopleSoft Sustainment)

Mandate:

- What information can be put on the transcript that is supplemental to the GPA?
- What would be the options for adding a percentage grade, or other information that would supplement the GPA?
- What are the associated costs and conditions for including percentage grade on transcript and how would we go about implementing it?
- How do we address the cumulative GPA when it is continued into two degrees (e.g., Education Students who go from BA/Sc to BEd)?

Recommendations:

1. **Given that Departments have already adapted to the GPA and that Faculties, such as Arts and Science, have already put into place extensive policies and best practices on the use of the GPA, we do not envisage making any changes in how grades are submitted.**
 - a. **If the input grade is submitted as a percentage, we recommend ensuring that this information is preserved and that all departments are made aware of how to access this information.**¹
 - i. This would be helpful for ranking purposes and could be used by those departments that want to ensure a finer granularity in their rankings, specifically at the higher end.²
 - b. **Percentage Input grades will not be passed forward to the student transcript.**³
 - i. The cost to do this is prohibitive. Our best guess on this would be a minimum \$300k and six months.
 - ii. Given that many departments have already transitioned to the GPA and do not submit a percentage grade, it was felt that it would be confusing to have letter

¹ There is a potential concern that if grades are appealed, only the GPA (Official Grade) will be changed. Linkages to the percentage grade may be lost. It was generally felt that this was an acceptable compromise as the numbers of these requests are likely small.

² As part of the due diligence for the implementation of People Soft, extensive simulations were run in the FAS using all student grades between 2006 and 2009. These were shared with various groups on campus, including Faculty Board, SCAP and the QUASR Executive Steering Committee. They showed no measurable difference in ranking between using Career GPA or Average Percentage. They also showed a high correlation between Career GPA and percentage averages, when correcting for failed classes. The Department of Physics looked at their student results specifically, under the GPA, and found significant compression at the higher end and there was concern about the ability to rank these students unless we preserve the percentage grades.

³ It should be noted that the current cohort of students feel strongly that more information on the transcript is better, and that if there is percentage information this should be included on the transcript. This is a consistent theme from the students.

grades for all classes, with percentages for only some classes. It was felt the transcript would be “cleaner” if it were consistent for each class.

2. **An education program should be put in place to ensure there is a common understanding of how to grade using GPA.**
 - a. The FAS has set up an extensive program for this that could be re-communicated and shared more broadly.⁴
3. **Consideration should be given to adopting a 3.5 for Dean’s list,**⁵ similar to what was done in the FAS.⁶
 - a. Through the analysis done in the FAS new cut-offs were set for Dean’s list and Probation that resulted in similar results using the Career GPA or percent average.
4. **It is recommended that we no longer place the cumulative GPA on transcripts.**^{7,8}
 - a. This is to ensure that students who switch between degrees (for example Engineering to Arts) can separate out their cumulative GPA’s for each program.⁹
5. **The Faculty of Education should be asked to consider adjusting to the 4.3 scale.**¹⁰
 - a. This request is to ensure more consistency in calculating term averages for concurrent education students.
6. **The committee feels that there is not a need to create new careers.**
 - a. This is a very complex undertaking at this stage of implementation.
 - b. As long as we implement 4 and 5 there would be no benefit.
7. **We should review the information on the back of the transcript and look to improve the explanation of the GPA.**
 - a. Given the limited space on the back of the transcript we should also add more information on our website, similar to what was done at McGill. We could direct other schools to this information.
 - b. This would be done in an attempt to ensure we are not disadvantaging our graduating students through use of the GPA.

⁴ It was generally felt that grading with a GPA was different and adjustments were possible.

⁵ This has already been done across the board now. We thought it was important to mention it, because it alleviates some of the concerns being raised. Since it was not dealt with proactively, across the board, the perceptions may be that there is still a problem.

⁶ One of the outcomes from the FAS simulations was the recommendation to move from a 4.0 GPA to a 4.3 GPA in order to better correlate the results from the two simulations (GPA vs. percent average)

⁷ If Recommendation 5 is adopted then we should re-evaluate the need for this recommendation. Most of the concerns in Education would be alleviated in the move to 4.3 and the student preference is to have the cumulative GPA. It makes for a more informative transcript. If we remove this, it does not address the situation where individuals have two UG degrees.

⁸ This was done at other Schools, such as the University of Calgary.

⁹ It was noted that the FAS use cumulative GPA and it would cause problems if it were not stored for internal purposes. We should ensure this is preserved. There is an internal ability to ‘reset’ the cumulative GPA, but there are some complications related to resetting the level.

¹⁰ In the transition to the GPA, Education moved from a P/F to less than full gradation (A,B,C...). Students would prefer they moved to a 4.3 scale, consistent with their Arts and Science courses. Another alternative would be to move to A+, B+, C+ which would not require distinguishing further between students. There would be a small grade inflation on the cumulative GPA.

Appendix A:

The following is an outline of the issues/concerns that have been raised in the community, as discussed by the committee. It is intended as background information only.

The main concerns being expressed by students and some faculty:

1. The move to a GPA has been impactful for some students. It has been most challenging for those bridging both the old and the new system.
2. There is no longer the ability to rank students. The granularity is lower, particularly at the high end.
3. There is an issue with cumulative GPA when students change degree programs. Should the cumulative GPA include all courses or do we need more careers?
4. Education uses a 4.0 scale instead of a 4.3 scale and this complicates the calculation of cumulative GPA's.

Questions the committee explored:

1. Did we fully understand the ramifications of the GPA and careers?
 - a. There was extensive discussion and research by various committees in 2008 and 2009 before reaching a decision on careers and GPA.
 - b. SCAP and Faculty Board made these decisions. They are documented and the process was transparent and consultative. There was also a Town Hall held on the use of GPA.
 - c. Real data were analysed to look at the impacts of moving to a GPA. Adjustments were made to items such as the 4.0 scale in response to the results.
 - d. Several questions and concerns have been raised, post go live, that are documented in Senate records.
2. Is there a flaw in the use of the GPA so that grades come out lower?
 - a. There is a non-linearity in the mapping at the higher end. The simulations run in Physics highlighted this.
 - b. There is less granularity than with percentage grades.
 - c. In review for SCAP and Faculty Board a number of "simulations" were run with real data from the FAS between 2006 and 2009, to see if there were any detrimental effects.
 - i. The career GPA compared to percentage average was highly correlated, suggesting a good comparator.
 1. There was bias introduced for those with failed courses.
 2. At the higher end, the correlation was improved by moving from the 4.0 to the 4.3 scale. This was a recommendation that was adopted.
 - ii. Ranking was not significantly impacted by the GPA.
 - iii. Data were analyzed and it was determined in the FAS that making the Honours cutoff at 3.5 would leave the same number on the list.

- d. In their Grading Policy, in FAS, they set out clear expectations around the grade points. This does not necessarily equate to a straight conversion from the % scale to GP. There was an education piece around this.
 - e. The grading culture varied a great deal between departments. Some departments were considered 'harder' markers than others and grade distributions varied considerably across departments. The GPA offers an opportunity that may be more equitable. It was noted that this was an opportunity that may not be realized across the board.
3. Is a GPA harmful to our graduating students?
- a. We are used to seeing and interpreting GPA from other schools.
 - b. Our GPA is consistent with many other schools.
 - c. There is an explanation on the back of the transcript – we discussed whether this could be better explained.
 - d. When looking at applicants for NSERC scholarships (which has explicitly been brought up as a concern), the following was noted.
 - i. For the **general pool** of applications, Academics are scored at 50% (this includes grades and other scholarly work). The other two criteria deal with research potential and leadership.
 - ii. For **Doctorates** applications, the Academic drops to 30% of their score.
 - iii. For **Post Docs** applications, grades are not considered.
 - iv. There is a potential issue in that the pre-screening process sets a cut-off at 3.7 and some of our students at the margin may fall below that with our new system. It was noted by a faculty member who has sat on the applicant review process that the competition is so fierce that people at the lower end will not qualify for an award, so cut-off really does not come into play.
 - e. The SGS has monitored OGS applications and appropriate adjustments were made.
 - f. OGS and SSHRC awards heavily weight marks, so any changes have the potential to be impactful.
4. What are other schools doing?
- a. Most schools use a GPA, particularly in the U.S.
 - b. Only 2.5% of NA schools report GPA and %.
 - c. In U15 only UoT reports both.
 - d. Some schools do not report a cumulative GPA (e.g., Calgary).
5. What is the current lay of the land at Queen's?
- a. GPA and CAREER are foundational pieces in PeopleSoft. It would be difficult to change the foundation now. It is not impossible, just costly. We do not have the capacity given other requirements (e.g., many government-imposed regulatory requirements). It is estimated to be a \$300k+, 6 month undertaking.
 - b. People Soft maintains an 'input' Grade and 'official' Grade. The Input Grade is not passed through the system like the official grade. This is the complex piece that would cost time and dollars to change.

- c. Significant numbers have already made the switch to submitting Letter Grades (over 50%). We can't determine how many of these letter grades are based on percentages or how many have been reserved.
- d. The 'new' transcripts are easier to read and more consistent. This was an objective from the outset. Transcripts during the transition (i.e., those that bridge new and old) have not been easier to read.
- e. Departments, such as Physics, rely on ranking their students and percentage grads offer more granularity at the higher ends.
- f. The FAS relies on a cumulative GPA.