

Open letter to the Queen's instructors on credit Standing (CR) as a student-centred response in disrupted courses

March 31, 2025

Colleagues,

As we continue to navigate the impacts of the current labour disruption, I want to offer context on the guidance provided to academic units by the Academic Operations Committee regarding the use of Credit Standing (CR) in a small number of exceptional cases—rather than Grade Deferred (GD)—and how that guidance reflects a collective responsibility to support students and uphold academic integrity.

Instructors continue to assign grades wherever possible

The expectation remains that instructors will assign final letter grades as per normal. In the large majority of cases, this continues to be possible, and I want to acknowledge the significant efforts being made to adapt assessments and meet that responsibility.

Why not Grade Deferred (GD)?

In practice at Queen's, the use of GD is circumscribed. In the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS), for example, of approximately 65,000 grades submitted each term, fewer than five are assigned GD—and almost exclusively in cases where a student is under investigation for a departure from academic integrity.

GD is not intended for widespread use and is not a fit-for-purpose designation in the current context. Most importantly:

- GD freezes a student's academic record, leaving them without a grade or GPA update—often for an extended period.
- This creates serious barriers to registration, plan selection, graduation, and admission to further study.
- There is no clear pathway or timeline for resolving a GD when assessment cannot be completed due to withdrawn labour or other disruption-related limitations. Even after a new agreement is reached, there is no certainty that grading can resume promptly in all affected courses.

- In some academic units, including the Faculty of Arts and Science, a GD notation restricts student progress in specific ways. For example, under FAS academic regulations, students with a GD are prohibited from graduating (Acad Reg 10.3.3), from being eligible for the Dean's Honour List (Acad Reg 12.1), and from enrolling in future courses (Acad Reg 11.4).

For these reasons, assigning GD in the current context will prolong disruption rather than resolve it—and may result in academic harm to students.

Why Credit Standing (CR)?

CR is being advised to be used only in limited and specific cases—typically in courses taught by Teaching Fellows or where faculty have exercised their right under Article 12.3(c) of the collective agreement. In these situations, a fair and reliable grade cannot be assigned, and CR offers a timely, final academic outcome that enables students to progress.

This is not an instructor-level decision alone. CR will only be applied with approval from the Associate Dean, ensuring appropriate academic oversight and alignment with Faculty-level regulations.

Coordinated, Cross-Faculty academic leadership

As Chair of the ad hoc Academic Operations Committee convened during the disruption, I've worked with Associate Deans from all Faculties and Schools, and colleagues from the University Registrar, Student Affairs, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and the University Libraries. This group was formed to share information, coordinate responses, and ensure a clear and consistent approach to academic operations across the University.

The guidance on the use of CR comes from this coordinated effort. The planning framework the committee provided to Faculties and Schools is not a directive, but a tool to support local decision-making. Academic units have localized this guidance through their own operational and governance structures as needed—recognising that, while academic regulations are Faculty-specific, students frequently take courses across Faculties, and coherence across units is essential.

A Shared Responsibility

While each Faculty maintains authority over its academic regulations, we are not fully autonomous in practice. Students move across our programs and classrooms. A patchwork response—where the same disruption leads to different outcomes depending on the Faculty—risks inequity and confusion.

This pan-institutional, shared approach to using CR when a letter or numerical grade cannot be calculated reflects a measured, collaborative, and student-centred response to an exceptional situation. It protects academic standards while minimizing academic harm to students.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to student learning and to maintaining academic rigour through this disruption.

Sincerely,

Gavan Watson, PhD
Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning

Update, April 2025:

In the letter above, I refer to FAS Academic Regulation 11.4, which states that students with a Grade Deferred (GD) notation are prohibited from enrolling in future courses. Since the publication of the letter, I have learned that this regulation was approved for removal by the Faculty of Arts and Science Faculty Board, with the change expected to take effect by the end of April 2025. Regulations 10.3.3 and 12.1, concerning graduation eligibility and the Dean's Honour List, remain in effect.