

Senate Committee on Academic Procedures
Queen's Grading System
Submission to Senate – April 2010

Last May, Senate approved an official grading system comprising letter grades, with pluses and minuses, grade points, and grade descriptors, to be implemented in May 2011.

- The specific grading scale included in the Senate submission was selected essentially because it was the most common in use in North America
- SCAP wanted to examine the choice of specific grading scale more carefully once the letter grade/GPA framework had been approved.

Over the Summer and Fall terms of 2009, the Office of the University Registrar completed an extensive review of grading scales in place across schools in Canada and the United States, as well as modeling of various grade point scales. Five grading scale options were selected that were thought to be most appropriate to Queen's. Before making a decision to convey to Senate, SCAP requested feedback on the options from the University community.

At its November 2009 meeting, SCAP expressed a preference for the first of the five scale options (the option reflected in the May 2009 submission to Senate) and on November 26 sent out a memo entitled "Queen's New Grading System" to Faculties, Schools, and Faculty Boards at Queen's to generate feedback and debate. The memo set out the preferred grading scale and gave brief reasons for its choice, noting the system met the objectives of not promoting grade inflation, ensuring the academic achievement of Queen's students would be fairly and competitively presented for external review and progression, and was the most common scale in use across North America. In late January 2010, substantial concern was voiced within the Faculty of Arts and Science Faculty Board and a further, more detailed, memo was circulated that provided more details on both the alternative grading scale options analyzed and the reasons for the preferred option.

Since that time, the University Registrar and Chair of SCAP attended several meetings of various Faculties and Schools to better understand the concerns and to help focus attention on adjusting to, and changing, academic decision rules that will be required in the shift to a new grading scheme. The raw data relating to student grades were also provided so that Faculties and Schools could conduct their own empirical analyses of the consequences of adopting alternative grading scale options.

At its March 23, 2010 meeting, SCAP welcomed senior representatives from several Faculties and Schools, who explained their various concerns and preferences related to the grading scale options that had been proposed. While some concerns raised were about the specific wording of descriptors for some grade categories, about dealing with the transition period and ensuring that students are not negatively impacted by the conversion, and about the large "bin" at the lower end of the scale, which needed to be further analyzed to see that students in academic difficulty would not be unfairly penalized, the single most pressing concern was the compression or lack of differentiation of grades at the top end of the scale. The issues related to the adjudication of academic awards (internally), the relative evaluation of students (externally) for further studies and employment, and general fairness (i.e., if an A+ performance is better than an A performance, it should be reflected in the GPA).

SCAP solicited final feedback by March 29 and held a special meeting on March 30, 2010, in order to submit a final decision on the grading scale for the April meeting of Senate. The Committee discussed at length the issue of the top grade point in the scale (i.e., A+ at 4.0 or 4.3), and weighed the balance of greater delineation in the scale to facilitate internal distinctions among students versus the comparative value and consistency of Queen's grading system relative to universities across North America. The final decision in favour of internal considerations is consistent with the original objectives, and Queen's students and graduates will not be disadvantaged competitively relative to their peers from other institutions.

The decision is provided to Senate for information only, for two reasons: (i) because the matter is one of implementation of a grading system framework previously approved by the Senate, and (ii) to avoid putting the Senate in a position of having a contentious and time-consuming debate in which some views are quite strong and often discipline-specific, and may not be solved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The motion passed by SCAP on March 30, 2010 was as follows:

That Queen's adopt the grading scale and set of non-evaluative grades set out in the memo from the Senate Committee on Academic Procedures (SCAP) to Faculty Boards on November 26, 2009, with the following changes and provisions:

- i. The grade for the top of the scale is an A+ at a 4.3 grade point, with a percentage conversion scale of 90 to 100.*
- ii. An additional failure grade of FR (Failure with Review) is added, indicating that the failing grade is being reviewed and/or the student has the opportunity to write a supplemental exam to improve the grade.*
- iii. Faculties and Schools may use only a subset of the full set of grades and non-evaluative grades available if they wish, but need to inform SCAP of any change in the set of grades that they use.*
- iv. Grade descriptors will be established at the Faculty/School level. Faculties and Schools should submit the rubrics that they are using as descriptors to SCAP for information and keep SCAP informed if the descriptors are changed.*

It is recognized that there may be transition issues as the grading system changes at Queen's, particularly for students who are in-progress during the change. SCAP urges instructors, departments, and Faculties/Schools to be sensitive to any potential impact from the grading change and to strive to ensure that continuing students are not disadvantaged by the changes.

Queen's Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Grade Points	Percentage	Notes
A+	4.3	90 – 100	
A	4.0	85 – 89.9	
A-	3.7	80 – 84.9	
B+	3.3	77 – 79.9	
B	3.0	73 – 76.9	
B-	2.7	70 – 72.9	Minimally acceptable passing grade in Graduate Studies
C+	2.3	67 – 69.9	
C	2.0	63 – 66.9	
C-	1.7	60 – 62.9	Minimally acceptable passing grade in Medicine
D+	1.3	57 – 59.9	
D	1.0	53 – 56.9	
D-	0.7	50 – 52.9	
F	0.0	0 – 49.9	Failure
P	-	-	Pass; no grade assigned
FR	-	-	Failure with review
CR	-	-	Credit
IN	-	-	Incomplete
GD	-	-	Grade deferred
NG	-	-	Not graded
AUD	-	-	Audit
TR	-	-	Transfer Credit

Charles Beach, Chair, SCAP