

SPECIAL REPORT

of the

ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL

and the

GRADUATE COUNCIL

concerning

**CHANGES IN THE GRADING SYSTEMS FOR
UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Presented at the
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COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

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BACKGROUND:

1. Students in high schools, in addition to receiving written comments from their instructors, are graded using a +/- system that clearly groups the students' efforts into categories of excellent (A & A-), good (B+, B, & B-), acceptable (C+, C, & C-), or passing (D+ & D). At UMass, in addition to lacking the written comments by instructors, our current grading system provides broader categories that are unfamiliar to our entering students.
2. Our current grading system (based on a random Internet survey) is embraced by fewer than 10 institutions, out of the 125 Research I and Research II universities. In addition, we are in a unique position within the UMass system and the Five College Consortium, since none of the other campuses use our grading system. That creates difficulty for our current students taking courses within the consortium and for those transferring out from our campus or into it.
3. Graduating seniors and alumni applying to Graduate/Professional Schools are often handicapped by a system that gives them AB's and BC's for work that would have earned A-'s or B-'s at other institutions. The difference might seem subtle but, for an employer or an admission officer not familiar with our system, the impact of that difference can create a disadvantage for our graduates.
4. A grade of B+ gives a clear indication to the student that to earn a grade that contains the letter A in it (A or A-) a much stronger effort is needed. The same applies to a C+ or a D+ relative to a B- or C-, respectively. In the absence of written comments by the instructors, such a message would provide the students a stronger motivation to heighten their efforts and with better assessment of their academic progress than the current system.
5. There are three Grading Systems used on this campus for:
 - A. Undergraduate students in all courses
 - A, AB, B, BC, C, CD, D, and F
 - INC, converts to F at the end of the following semester
 - P/F
 - Y (year-long course in progress)
 - NR (no grades submitted by instructor for the entire class)
 - Audit
 - B. Graduate students in graduate courses numbered 500 and above
 - A, AB, B, BC, C, F
 - SAT/F
 - INC, converts to IF one year after enrollment in the course
 - IP (for thesis 699, 799 & 899 only)
 - Audit
 - C. Graduate students in undergraduate courses (below 500) – in these courses, the instructor might submit a grade below "C", but it is recorded as an "F" on the student's record

The Academic Matters Council and the Graduate Council joined in examining all aspects of the current grading systems, which are different for graduate than for undergraduate students, in order to amend it into a streamlined system.

Therefore :

- To structure our grading system in a format more familiar to matriculating students,
- To simplify the undergraduate/graduate grading distinctions in our current system,
- To make our student's transcripts more easily understood by Professional Schools, Graduate Schools, and potential employers,
- To make our grading system conform to that used by the majority of American universities and colleges, thus, facilitating the process for students transferring into or from our campus,
- To bring our grading system into greater conformance with those of the Five College Consortium,

- To bring the campus' grading system into greater conformance with those of most other campuses of the University of Massachusetts system, and
- To provide the faculty with uniform guidelines for recording the grades for each course.

We recommend the following changes:

1. Changing the A, AB, etc. system to: **A = 4.0; A- = 3.7; B+ = 3.3; B = 3.0; B- = 2.7; C+ = 2.3; C = 2.0; C- = 1.7; D+ = 1.3; D = 1.0; and F or IF = 0**
2. Regarding Undergraduate/Graduate differences, grading practices should be based on the level of the course rather than the status of the student. Hence:
 - In undergraduate courses numbered **below 500**, the P/F option will function as it does now. The instructor submits a letter grade that is converted by the Registrar to P/F, including for graduate students. Grades for graduate students will include the spectrum of A to D and F. The SAT grade will not be available to graduate students in these courses.
 - In courses numbered **600 or above**, the instructors may submit SAT grades for any student enrolled in the class, including undergraduates. The P/F option will not be available to undergraduate students in these courses.
 - In courses numbered **500-599**, the P/F option will exist for undergraduates, the SAT/F option for graduate students.
3. Incomplete grades for undergraduate students would be converted to "IF", instead of "F", at the end of the following semester.
4. "Y" grades should be limited to the first semester of a two-semester sequence, and that both parts of the sequence should, in the end, get the same grade. If no grade is submitted at the end of the series, the grades for all parts converts to "F" at the end of the following semester.
5. That the language in the UGR&R, the Graduate Student Handbook, and other policy statements appearing in Bulletins and other publications, be changed to reflect and clarify the above recommendations.

MOVED: That the Faculty Senate approve the Changes in the Grading Systems for the Amherst Campus, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 03-026A.
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