SPECIAL REPORT
OF THE
GRADUATE COUNCIL
concerning

ADDITION OF THE “Y” GRADE
FOR GRADUATE COURSES
(#6283)

GRADUATE COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

GRADUATE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
The Graduate Council recommends approval of this proposal.

Please explain your proposal:

This is a proposal to add the 'Y' grade (year-long course in progress) currently used for undergraduate level courses to the grading system for graduate level courses (numbered 500 and above).

The only in-progress grade option currently available for graduate level courses (the ‘IP’ grade) is restricted to thesis and dissertation credits. Many non-thesis master's programs require projects or practicums carried out over the course of a year. Departments handle the registration and grading for these year-long projects/practicums in various ways, but often they have their students register for the credits in one semester and record an ‘INC’ grade until the project/practicum is complete. This front-loading of credits in the first semester of a year-long project/practicum misrepresents a student’s enrollment status, leading to an apparent over- and under-enrollment.
Adding the ‘Y’ grade option will allow departments to offer a year-long course in a two-semester sequence and, at the end of the first semester, record a grade that accurately reflects a student’s in-progress status in the course.

This change was discussed and supported by the Graduate Council at its meeting on April 17, 2019.

Attached is a memo from Eliot Moss, the Graduate Program Director of CICS, which describes how the ‘Y’ grade would be especially useful for their MS-only students.

MOTION: That the Faculty Senate approve the Addition of the “Y” Grade for 03-20 Graduate Courses as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 20-002.
To: Prof. John Lopes, Chair, Graduate Council  
From: Eliot Moss, Professor and Director of Graduate Programs, CICS  
Date: January 9, 2019  
Subject: Grading and Credit for Year-Long MS Projects

Background

The College of Information and Computer Sciences (CICS) has long had a course in its MS program, Comp Sci 701, Masters Project. 701 is designed to be a two-semester, six-credit course, supervised by two readers. While it falls just short of being an MS thesis, it is expected that in most cases sustained effort for a year is necessary to meet its goals.

Since its inception, students would enroll for the six credits in one semester, receive a grade of INC, and usually complete the project the following semester. Then the INC would be converted to their grade and they would receive the credits.

The Problem

Our MS program has grown tremendously in recent years, to over 300 students, the bulk of whom are international students here on F-1 visas. The oversight and scrutiny of students while on these visas seems to have increased, so we believe it to be increasingly important to follow guidelines from the International Programs Office (etc.) scrupulously. One of these requirements is that students be enrolled full-time, except possibly for their last semester. For MS-only students, full-time means nine credits per semester. The current grading approach to 701 distorts the reality that students are doing three credits of work in two separate semesters. It leads to apparent over- and under-enrollment. Further, the INC grade does not look good on their transcript, even though there is a good explanation.

A particularly difficult situation is when the final three credits of work on 701 is all that remains for the student. The visa rules disallow registering only for Continuous Enrollment in order to finish an incomplete. The student is not full-time, and thus is not allowed to under Curricular Practical Training, and has not completed their degree, so cannot undertake Occupational Practical Training. It would appear their only option is to return to their home country and finish the project from there—which is In the past, the issue would have come up only rarely, since we had few MS-only students (almost all were MS/PhD), even fewer of which were international. Now we have hundreds of MS-only international students flowing through our program.

Our Request

We seek approval for a solution to this problem. Here are some alternative approaches the Council could approve:
1. Preferred option: Allow year-long project courses to proceed similarly to theses. In particular, the student could register for three credits in each of two semesters, and would receive the IP grade until the project is complete.

Differences from theses would include: requirement of exactly six credits, and a final grade that is a letter, not SAT. Perhaps a better way of thinking of this is allowing a different use of the grade IP, for non-thesis multiple-semester courses. One could also use the grade Y, currently used for year-long undergraduate courses. This course might be called 701P (for project) or 701Y (for year-long).

2. Less convenient option: Create a two-course sequence, say 701A and 701B, each receiving three credits. 701A would receive a grade of IP or Y, or some new grade notation indicating the situation with a sequence. When 701B is completed a grade would be entered for both 701A and 701B.

Discussion

What about the occasional student who prefers to attempt the whole six credits in one semester? The first alternative would work nicely: the student would register for six project credits rather than three. We could also simply retain the current six credit 701 as an option, alongside 701P/701Y. The option that a student selects will document their intent as to one semester of six credits versus two semesters of three credits. While the distinction may seem a fine point, it affects determination of full-time status for international students, as previously described.

We consulted the Graduate School, who indicated that they could not act unilaterally to approve this sort of change to grading schemes. We also consulted the Secretary of the Faculty Senate, who agreed that while this is a minor change to our program—really just better documenting intent and reality—any change requires Graduate Council approval, as does the change to grading schemes. The matter may further need to be advanced to the Faculty Senate, though we would hope that it would be a consent agenda item. We observe that other programs may be in a similar situation. We believe the first alternative above could meet their needs, too.

I would be happy to attend a meeting of the Council if I can and if it would be helpful to your consideration. I also welcome consultation with the Council chair or members as you might suggest.